

Everybody do the Hopp Holland

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There may have been nothing at stake for the Netherlands against Romania tonight but that did not stop their fans descending in their tens of thousands on their team's group stage home of Berne today.

Swiss support

The compact and quiet Swiss federal capital has resembled Rotterdam over the last week or so whenever the fleet have been in town, and only one corner of the Stade de Suisse was Romanian yellow rather than orange.

Maybe even some locals joined in, as a poll taken a few days ago revealed that the Netherlands had pipped Portugal as the team the Swiss wished to see triumph following their own nation's exit. From "Hopp Schwiiz" to "Hopp Holland".

Understudies star

The result tonight most mattered to Romania, of course, which is why if anyone in the stadium had shut their eyes early on, they would have guessed from the chants that the Tricolorii fans were in the majority. A chant of "Sta op als je voor Holland bent" (Stand up if you support Holland) did rouse the Dutch support on 20 minutes, no doubt buoyed by the realisation that their second string, including Arjen Robben, Robin van Persie and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, were just as capable as producing flowing, attacking play as the first-choice lineup that blew away Italy and France here.

Romanian concerns

The first twist, as it happened, came 100km away in Zurich when Italy took the lead against ten-man France. There was no initial reaction from the Romania fans, but soon whistles ran out, followed by silence. They soon picked up the noise, realising their team needed a lift more than ever, as the Netherlands continued to dominate. After all, a Romania win would make any efforts Italy or France could manage superfluous, although desperation was certainly creeping in; when Paul Codrea came mighty close before the break there was a distinct note of deflation in the regulation "oooo".

Van Persie return

Half-time did not change much. The Romanian support were still bouncing off the pitch and the Netherlands team producing great football on it. Certainly, it was plain to see why Marco van Basten had been so keen for Van Persie to return from his pre-tournament injury as his pace and skill were proving a real handful for Romania, though the opening goal when it came was made by Ibrahim Afellay and scored by Huntelaar.

Conga line

With that, and the second Italy goal, for the first time the Dutch were the noisiest, though their goal celebrations had been appreciative rather than the frenzy of their seven explosions of joy in the two previous matches. When Van Persie did find the target near the end, that was the cue for some Romanians to leave, the Dutch to form a conga line and manufacturers of orange dye to count their profits. (uefa.com)