

Hiddink hails his 'unbelievable' heroes

Contributed by Administrator
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Russia coach Guus Hiddink once again stressed the pride he felt in his players after they ousted the Netherlands from UEFA EURO 2008 with a 3-1 extra-time win in Saturday's quarter-final in Basel. "We were better in all parts of the game," said the Dutchman, whose opposite number Marco van Basten thought nerves had been a factor in the Oranje not rediscovering their form from the group stage.

Guus Hiddink, Russia coach

I'm extremely proud of every member of the team. If you consider the preparation time we had after the tough games against Greece and Sweden – when we had two days to recover – we didn't complain a lot. We [prepared tactically] for ten minutes yesterday and had a few meetings at the team hotel. After 90 minutes and then going into extra time, what they did was a tremendous and unbelievable achievement. I haven't experienced this very much in my career. The team was superior technically, in their control and in their passing. Tactically and physically, in particular, we were superior to the Dutch team. I don't want to sound arrogant but we were better in all parts of the game. It was a blow when they got back to 1-1, especially using the only weapon they had which was free-kicks. There are some points of criticism. We committed too many fouls and were too passive in our reaction to their free-kicks. Also, we can easily make good combinations between midfield and defence but we can't finish off our chances. I'm proud of all the players. These players are very coachable. We saw in the Sweden game that [Arshavin] wasn't match-fit because of his suspension but he's got tremendous skill and he's one of those players who knows his game. Mentally he could have a bad attitude but he's not like that at all. I knew from the time we qualified for the quarter-finals that Red Square and other parts of Russia were filled with people. I have seen tremendous joy all over Russia and that gives more responsibility to the team – to give joy to many millions of Russians.

Marco van Basten, Netherlands coach

We didn't start well or play like we did in the first three games. I don't know why that was, maybe it was nerves. We tried something different in the second half with [Robin] van Persie playing further forward instead of having [Dirk] Kuyt playing a bit deeper. Russia played well – their attackers, Arshavin and [Roman] Pavlyuchenko, were always threatening and that was the reason we didn't come into the game. We tried everything and we got to 1-1 which gave us hope. We had to change Khalid Boulahrouz because he wasn't good enough physically. We had problems physically. The players couldn't give any more and the Russians in the final moments were stronger. In the end we couldn't hold on any more and they scored two goals and deserved their victory.

I wish them good luck in the last part of the tournament. I told them that they played very well. They are in the last four so they have a great chance. The way they play is good and they have good strikers and defenders. [Looking back on the tournament] we played good football in the group stage but we went into this game and didn't play. It's amazing we were able to keep it at 0-0 for such a long time. In the end you always take part to win and the group stage is important, but today we didn't have a good day. They played last Wednesday while most of our players have had a week to prepare, so you think physically we are more in shape than the Russians but we didn't see that today.