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Russia's Football Team Draws With Sweden in Euro 2016 Qualifier

By The Moscow Times

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Sweden's Sebastian Larsson (back) fights for the ball with Russia's Viktor Fryzulin during their Euro 2016 qualifying soccer match at Friends Arena in Stockholm, Oct. 9, 2014

STOCKHOLM — Ola Toivonen's goal crowned a gutsy Sweden fight back in a 1-1 draw with Russia but, ever the tough taskmaster, Fabio Capello thought the visitors should have easily won the Euro 2016 qualifier.

Russia took the lead in the 10th minute of Thursday's match at Stockholm's Friends Arena when Alexander Kokorin surged through before cutting back onto his right foot and rolling the ball through the legs of Mikael Antonsson and past the despairing dive of Andreas Isaksson.

Sweden wasted the perfect opportunity to equalize three minutes later when Jimmy Durmaz was upended in the box by Igor Smolnikov, but keeper Igor Akinfeyev threw himself to his right to push away Sebastian Larsson's well-struck penalty.

In for the injured Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Toivonen pulled Sweden level in the 49th minute, turning home Durmaz's low cross before being replaced by Johan Elmander eight minutes later after injuring a hamstring.

With four points from their first two games, Russia lead Group G on goal difference from Montenegro and Austria, with the Swedes in fourth place on two points. Russia next host Moldova on Sunday when Sweden welcome Liechtenstein.

"I am happy for the performance of the team, but not happy for the result," Russia coach Capello told a news conference.

"We had a lot of chances to score the [winning] goal. There were two saves from the keeper, one mistake from our forward and some moments that were really, really dangerous for Sweden."

Sweden coach Erik Hamren declared himself content with his side's showing, despite dropping two points at home.

"I'm very happy with our attitude again. We started the game well, until their goal we played well. It felt like a punch in the stomach when they went 1-0 up," he said.

"We missed a penalty, and yet we came back. The last 20 minutes we were on our knees, but we sorted it out and took an important point."

Ibrahimovic was not the only injury absentee for the home side, with coach Hamren forced to reshuffle his pack in midfield as Albin Ekdal missed the game due to a toe infection.

Centre back Antonsson was also struck down by a stomach bug earlier in the week and was kept away from training as a precautionary measure but played.

There were chances for both sides to find a winner.

Russia remained dangerous on the counter attack and Oleg Shatov should have put his side back in front when he rounded Isaksson but fired his shot over the empty goal as Antonsson raced back to cover.

The Swedes pushed on looking for a second but could not break the deadlock, despite a number of good chances from free kicks and corners with Olympiakos' Durmaz pulling the strings from his position on the left of a midfield three.

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