

2021 RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP QUALIFIER POOL A – ITALY 34 SPAIN 4 - Report

Despite being down to 12 men for most of the second half, after centre Ethan Napoli was sent off for a high tackle, and 11 for a spell when his winger Emanuele Passera was sin binned for a similar offence, Italy duly qualified for the 2021 World Cup with a six-try performance.

In difficult conditions at the Stadio Comunale Teghil in Lignano, two touchdowns in three minutes around the hour mark saw the Italians home.

“I’m very proud of the boys, they played tough,” said Azzurri head coach Leo Epifania. “Spain threw quite a bit at us, especially when we were down to 12 men for most of the second half. The boys rallied and defended well all night – we’re grateful to get another shot at a World Cup for Italy and looking forward to preparing for that.

“Thank you to Spain, it wasn’t easy, and the wet, slippery night changes the whole aspect of your attack.”

Italy skipper Brendan Santi powered over to open the scoring, Jack Campagnolo goaling, Spain generally scrambling well in defence to hold the early home onslaught.

They gained their reward when Gaetan Estruga made ground and a kick on the last ricocheted back to Luc Franco who won the race the ball; Romain Pallares wide with the conversion attempt.

Italy looked to spread the ball from the restart but the Spanish defence held, the hosts then kicking deep but the visitor’s defence twice holding out scoots from Joseph Tramontana and then Campagnolo.

Natoli sliced through on the right and the Italians gained a drop out and from it a penalty, their decision to tap rewarded thanks to a blind side overlap from a resulting scrum, after the Spaniards had attempted an interception in desperation, Campagnolo darting over and adding the extras.

On the final play of the first half, after Spain had again lost the ball cheaply, Italy were awarded a penalty 30 metres in front and Campagnolo made it 14-4 at the break.

The second period started in dramatic fashion, Spain were forced into touch on their own 30 but forced a turnover from the scrum, Natoli seeing red for a challenge that caused pushing and shoving in the aftermath, and then Julien Agullo following him for 10 minutes after a shoulder charge in response.

Passera went over in the corner soon after, Italy creating an overlap despite being a man down, but Spain - who struggled to complete a set – could not capitalise on their advantage.

Passera claimed his second when Italy again swept the ball left and another orthodox passing move freed hooker Joseph Tramontana, backing up on the inside, who sped to the posts, Campagnolo converting both efforts.

Spain tried a grubber and hack on to break the Italian last line but the Azzurri regathered and went up the other end, forcing a goal line drop out from which Ryan King scored after Campagnolo chipped towards the corner.

Spain head coach Darren Fisher was disappointed his side had gone out of the qualification process but refused to allow his players to bow their heads.

“It’s a pretty tough one but it’s been a long journey. We have to keep improving and these are the games we want to be playing in,” he said. “Much credit to the guys, they’ve stuck in there and I

think we've done a decent job over the past two weeks.”

ITALY 34

Samuel Doleres, Emanuele Passera, Ethan Natoli, Rinaldo Palumbo, Richard Lepori, Gus Garzaniti, Jack Campagnolo, Alec Susino, Joseph Tramontana, Brenden Santi, Ryan King, Alexander Myles, Gioele Celerino

Subs: Daniel Petralia, Anton Iaria, Rhys Sciglitano, John Trimboli

Tries: Santi (10), Campagnolo (26), Passera (46, 58), Tramontana (61), King (78)

Goals: Campagnolo 5

Sent off: Natoli (43 – high tackle)

Sin bin: Passera (65 – high tackle)

SPAIN 4

Romain Franco, Alexis Escamilla, Daniel Garcia, Alex Doutres, Ludovic Renu, Luc Franco, Romain Palleres, Gaetan Estruga, Miguel Blanco-Charters, Kevin Aparicho, Antonio Puerta, Raphael Garcia, Julien Agullo

Subs: Miquel Tomas, Maxime Garcia, Emir-Walid Bouregba, Anthony Delgado

Try: L. Franco (17)

Sin bin: Agullo (45 – shoulder charge)

Half time: 14-4

Referee: Benjamin Casty (France)

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