

LEADING ASIAN CUP SCORERS

BEIRUT, Oct. 30 (AFP) — Leading Asian Cup scorers following Sunday's final matches: 6-Lee Dong-Gook (Kor); 5-Naohiro Takahara (Jpn), Akira Nishizawa (Jpn), 3-Ali Daei (Iran), Mohammed Al-Shibhoob (Ksa), Hirashi Nanami (Jpn), Yang Chen (Chn), Qi Hong (Chn), Nawaf Al-Temari (Ksa), Talal Meshal (Ksa), 2-Hamidreza Estili (Iran), Sabah Jadir (Iraq), Sakasani Piturata (Tha), Karim Bagheri (Iran), Li Ming (Chn), Jasssem Al-Jouwaifi (Kuwait).

AWARDS

BEIRUT, Oct. 30 (AFP) — Following are the awards of the 12th Asian Cup announced by the Asian Football Confederation on Sunday:

MVP of the Tournament: Hiroshi Nanami (Japan).

Tournament's Top Scorer: Lee Dong Gook (South Korea).

Best Goalkeeper: Jiang Jin (China).

Best Defender: Ryuzo Morioka (Japan).

Fair Play Award: Saudi Arabia.

Star Eagles promise big

LAGOS, Oct. 30: Nigeria will beat arch-rivals Ghana and qualify for the World Cup finals, the country's top stars have assured Dutch coach Jo Bonfrere, reports AFP.

"After the Sydney Olympics I spoke to Sunday Olseli and Austin Okocha and they told me 'coach this will be our last World Cup and nobody, not even Ghana, will stop us from qualifying'."

"They said they want to finally put to rest their poor outing in France and the only place to do so is at another World Cup," Bonfrere said here.

The Dutch coach added: "Next year we have two difficult games at home against Sudan and Ghana. But we have all agreed that the key to our qualification would still be the two matches against Ghana."

"We all want to be at the next World Cup. How we get there is not important."

Bonfrere said at the weekend that Nigerian football is dying and there is an urgent need to bring in new players to the national team.

Ghana Black Stars lead Nigeria's World Cup group with three points from their comprehensive 5-0 win over Sierra Leone at home. Nigeria are also on three points but surprisingly lost in Monrovia to Liberia to give Ghana an added advantage.

Japan conquer

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"We had a big emotional charge throughout the tournament," Troussier said. "It was not so easy to play with this emotion but I am very proud... it was very important for the development of Japanese football that we win tonight."

Japan's triumph was the first time a side from the Far East has ever won the Asian Cup when it has been staged in the Middle East.

Troussier's side -- who had bounced in 20 goals in five matches going into the final -- had begun smoothly, their neat inter-passing stretching the Saudi defence in the opening minutes.

But the Japanese were stunned on 10 minutes when Saudi Arabia broke forward to earn a penalty. Ryuzo Morioka being adjudged to have tugged down Talal Al-Meshal as the two chased a long ball from midfield.

Idris stepped up -- but scuffed a weak spot-kick low and wide of the right-hand post to the relief of the Japanese and groans from the partisan capacity crowd.

Japan continued to press forward and with their slick passing and movement off the ball looked by far the more creative of the two sides in the first half.

But Troussier's youngsters spent the second-half well and truly on the backfoot, as the Saudis -- Asian Cup winners in 1984, 1988 and 1996 -- launched wave after wave of furious attacks on the opposition goal.

Substitute Mohammed Al-Shloob, midfielder Al-Temari and Fouzi Al-Shehri all went close with shots from distance.

The Saudis were given a lucky break on 58 minutes when Ahmed Khalfi blundered over Akinori Nishizawa for what looked a dead-cert penalty. Mystifyingly, United Arab Emirates referee Ali Bysami waved play on.

The defending champions continued to pour forward but Japan preserved their lead thanks to the brilliance of Kawaguchi.

Two saves in particular were firmly in the blinding category. The athletic stopper first leapt acrobatically to punch away a dipping 30-yarder from Al-Jaber on 60 minutes before pulling off a breath-taking reflex save from a close-range Al-Meshal header moments later.

"Our keeper played really well. He is one of the reasons we won," Troussier said.

Japan also had the satisfaction of seeing playmaker Hiroshi Nanami, who filled the void left by the absent AS Roma Hideshi Nakata, named player of the tournament.

South Korean striker Lee Dong-Gook finished topscorer with six goals after netting in his team's 1-0 victory in the third-place playoff win over China earlier on Sunday.



TROUSSIER TRIUMPHS: A delighted Japan coach Philippe Troussier holds aloft the Asian Cup during the presentation ceremony. — AFP photo

What next for 'white witch doc'?

BEIRUT, Oct. 30 (AFP) — Philippe Troussier earned the nickname of the white witch doctor for his successful coaching spell in Africa -- but now newly crowned Asian Cup champions Japan await to see whether his next trick will be to disappear.

The 45-year-old, who on Sunday saw the achievement of a personal dream in winning an international trophy for the first time, had suggested that he would not be the man capable of taking the team on from the level of being Asian champions.

The witty and urbane son of a butcher, who like compatriots Gerard Houllier and Arsene Wenger has disproved the theory that you cannot be a successful coach if you did not have a distinguished playing career, appeared to have also regretted his comments when he sat beside the trophy on Sunday.

"This win has given us petrol as we build towards the next World Cup," he said.

Troussier, whose frustrations with the behind the scenes machinations of the Japanese Football Association (JFA) had led him to suggest he would quit, also used the 'we' word when it came to assessing what winning his first international tournament as a coach meant to him.

"It is very important for my career and for my confidence and to share this trophy with Japan is also important for the

World Cup," he said.

However, while the JFA chiefs may breathe a sigh of relief that Troussier seems to have calmed down and was already looking ahead to their European tour next year, they would be wise to watch their guard.

For Troussier has shown before that success does not guarantee he sticks around as when he quit Nigeria -- for Burkina Faso -- after they qualified for the 1998 World Cup.

"They did not pay me and I regarded that as a total lack of respect so I demanded that FIFA permit me to break my contract with them," he said.

Troussier, who is married and has houses in Paris and Morocco, is a man who regards himself as very much guided by destiny and as he told AFP his obsession with Africa and football both came about because of that.

As he related aged five he made a bizarre request of his mother -- pregnant with his younger brother -- that was to set him on his path to becoming one of modern day African football's most treasured sons.

"I said 'please mum, make him be black'."

"I don't know why I said that because I had never seen a black person at that stage."

"Once I lived in Africa it was like a marriage and I will never consider a divorce even though I am in Japan," he added.

For him too the fact he discovered a pair of football boots

in the unlikely setting of the garage of his Jesuit school aged eight, where the only sport was 'walking' meant that he is marked by destiny.

"I remember too forcing my grandfather during the 1970 World Cup to turn on the black and white television at three in the morning so I could watch every match of that tournament and that would be the only time it was on because it cost a lot of money," he said.

Similarly he remarked that for him his ties to Japan were linked from an early age as the Tokyo Olympics were his first exposure to a great sporting event.

"It was the Japanese flag that got to me -- this extraordinary white background with the red circle in the middle it had quite an impact on me," he said.

Now that link is ever stronger forged through two years of comradeship, hard labour and, some unpopular personnel decisions.

"Like for the Japanese team I believe that winning the trophy is imperative for me to be regarded as a coach who can break through the barrier between being just run of the mill and being among one of the top coaches in the world," he said.

On Sunday he achieved that but a man who believes he is marked by destiny is an unpredictable entity and the JFA will have to hope that Troussier believes Japan for the 2002 World Cup is where it lies.

From Asia with class

BEIRUT, Oct. 30 (AFP) — Newly crowned Asian Cup winners Japan have revolutionized standards of football in the continent -- and left traditionally strong nations from the Middle East scrambling to catch up.

French coach Philippe Troussier's free-scoring young side completed a dazzling Asian Cup campaign on Sunday with a 1-0 victory against Saudi Arabia at Beirut's Sports City Stadium.

Fielding a squad with an average age of just 24, Troussier's team were a class apart throughout the tournament, averaging more than three goals per game with their attack-driven brand of total football.

And ominously for the rest of Asia, Troussier -- dubbed the 'white witch doctor' during a magical coaching career in Africa -- is determined to prove that his side can get better as the 2002 World Cup looms.

"We have played beautiful football in Lebanon and I'm very proud of my team," he said after the Asian Cup triumph.

"This victory is important for Japanese football -- it will accelerate the development of the players in this squad."

"For our team winning here is the key to moving on to a new and higher level. It means the team has confidence and belief... it's having the winning mentality," Troussier said.



THAT DID IT: Shigeyoshi Mochizuki (on the ground) watches his effort entering the net. — AFP photo

Bonfrere won't budge

LAGOS, Oct. 30: Nigeria's Dutch coach Jo Bonfrere said he will not resign in the face of media pressure that he be sacked after Nigeria failed to defend its Olympic gold in Sydney, reports AFP.

"I'm not going to resign. If my employers tell me to go, I will go, of course. But I will not resign because I still have big assignments ahead of me. There is the 2002 African Nations Cup as well as the next World Cup," Bonfrere told a radio station. The Dutchman has come under heavy fire following Nigeria's failure to retain the Olympic soccer title.

"Nigerians should realise that they cannot win all the time," Bonfrere said. "I was not expecting any miracles in Sydney. The key players were not available and our problems were getting worse with every match. Against Chile, we had only 11 fit players. Others were either injured or suspended."

"Also, there's no way you can compare the Atlanta team with that of Sydney."

Bonfrere has been on a collision course with the Nigeria Football Association (NFA). He said he is owed four months pay while the NFA has accused him of flouting its orders and relying too much on foreign-based players several of whom were not committed to the national team.

The Dutchman has also said that Nigerian football is dying and there is an urgent need to bring in new players to the national team ahead of important qualifying matches in both the World Cup and the Nations Cup next year.

Bonfrere was named Nigeria's coach last November. He still has a year to run of his contract.

Cascarino never an Irish!

DUBLIN, Oct. 30: Former Republic of Ireland international Tony Cascarino admitted Sunday that he was never eligible to play for the country, reports AFP.

The former Chelsea, Aston Villa, Celtic, Marseille and Nancy striker won 88 caps for the Republic on the strength of a maternal grandfather, Michael O'Malley from Westport, County Mayo, west Ireland.

However, in his autobiography 'Full Time: The Secret Life of Tony Cascarino', he now admits that O'Malley was not his mother's natural father, rendering him 'ineligible' under international rules.

Cascarino's mother had been aware of the fact throughout his career, but only told him after he had retired from international football.

"I didn't qualify for Ireland," writes Cascarino. "I was a fraud. A fake Irishman."

Cascarino also reveals that he was turned down for an Irish passport in 1985, but carried on playing regardless.

"It seemed odd but I didn't follow it up," said Cascarino. "I didn't need it. I had already won three international caps and for the next 12 years I continued playing for Ireland with my British passport."

Cascarino made his confession in Dublin's Sunday Independent newspaper, who have serialisation rights to the player's book.

Scotland friendly Bosnich recalled

SYDNEY, Oct. 30: Out-of-favour Manchester United goalkeeper Mark Bosnich has been called up for Australia's international with Scotland on November 15 in Glasgow, reports AFP.

Bosnich, who withdrew from the recent three-nation tournament against Dubai for personal reasons, has been shunned by United who are trying to offload him on loan to other clubs.

However, Australia coach Frank Farina said he understood why Bosnich did not play in Dubai and wanted the goalkeeper to replace Middlesbrough's Mark Schwarzer who is recovering from a broken thumb.

Farina intends to play more quality opposition in the lead up to the World Cup qualifiers. "We can play lesser teams and win comfortably but we don't learn anything from that," he said.

He expects a tough outing against Scotland. "They drew with Croatia the other week and they really look very good at the moment and these are the type of teams we should be playing," he added.

PSG against violence

PARIS, Oct. 30: Paris Saint Germain and Bordeaux filed out on to the Parc des Princes pitch before their French league match on Sunday wearing white shirts with the words 'Stop violence' written on them, reports AFP.

The action came after an 18-year-old Marseille fan was seriously injured two weeks ago when he was hit on the head by a seat ripped up from the same stadium during a match against Marseille.

EUROPEAN SOCCER SCENE

PARIS, Oct. 30: Valencia retained its spot in the Spanish championship on Sunday with a 2-1 away victory at Osasuna the day after Deportivo had claimed pole position with a 2-1 win at Numancia, reports AFP.

Hector Cuper's men extended their lead at the top from one to two points in relation to last week's table and, having qualified for the European Champions League second phase, are on the crest of a wave.

Paris Saint Germain were beaten 2-1 by Bordeaux to lose their unbeaten home French League record this season but managed to remain top of the table.

Philippe Bergeroo's men had this sudden setback just five days after their routing 7-2 European Champions League win over Norwegian club Rosenborg on the same Parc des Princes pitch.

Hertja Berlin's Eyjolfur Sveinsson scored in the final seconds for a 1-0 victory at 1860 Munich to propel them into top spot in the German First Division on Sunday.

Stefan Beuthig hit a cross and Icelandic international Sveinsson outplayed the rest of the 1860 defence to head home and ensure the win.

It has been Berlin's best ever start to the Bundesliga in 30 years and their first victory at 1860 for 20 years.

Real Madrid, who qualified for the second phase of the Champions League in midweek, thrashed Real Sociedad 4-1 and are in second spot in Spain.

PRIMERA LIGA

Valencia conceded a sixth-minute goal to Jose Manuel Mateo after an error in wall placement by keeper Santiago Canizares but they managed to go on and take the victory.

They equalized through a Cesar Cruchaga own goal in the 18th minute before Norway's John Carew finished off the job, with help from Didier Deschamps and Ruben Baraja, on 85 minutes.

At St Sebastian, new Real Sociedad coach Periko Alonso could do nothing against a cavalier Real Madrid. Guti opened the scoring with his fifth league goal of the season and Fernando Hierro, Luis Figo and Saviola also got on the scoresheet.

Barcelona, who were within a whisker of Champions League elimination on Tuesday before a last-gasp equalizer against Leeds, were beaten 2-0 on their own pitch by Real Mallorca.

Barcelona, who would have been on top had they won, had to settle for fourth place. Samuel Eto'o opened the scoring for Mallorca and Argentina's Ariel Ibagaza hit the second after the break.

Veteran Donato and Fernando earned the goals for Deportivo though Numancia replied with a goal from Ruben Navarro and would have equalized had they not had a goal disallowed.

FRENCH FIRST DIVISION

Against a well-organized Bordeaux side, PSG missed keeper Lionel Letizi, who got injured on Saturday, skipper and defender Eric Rabesan.

After 22 minutes with a contender for goal of the season, Italian Benito Carbone got to the by-line and swung over a cross which Collymore met with a powerful overhead kick which went beyond the reach of Leeds keeper Paul Robinson.

Australian international Viduka levelled for Leeds with 10 minutes to go, heading in Dominic Matteo's left-wing cross.

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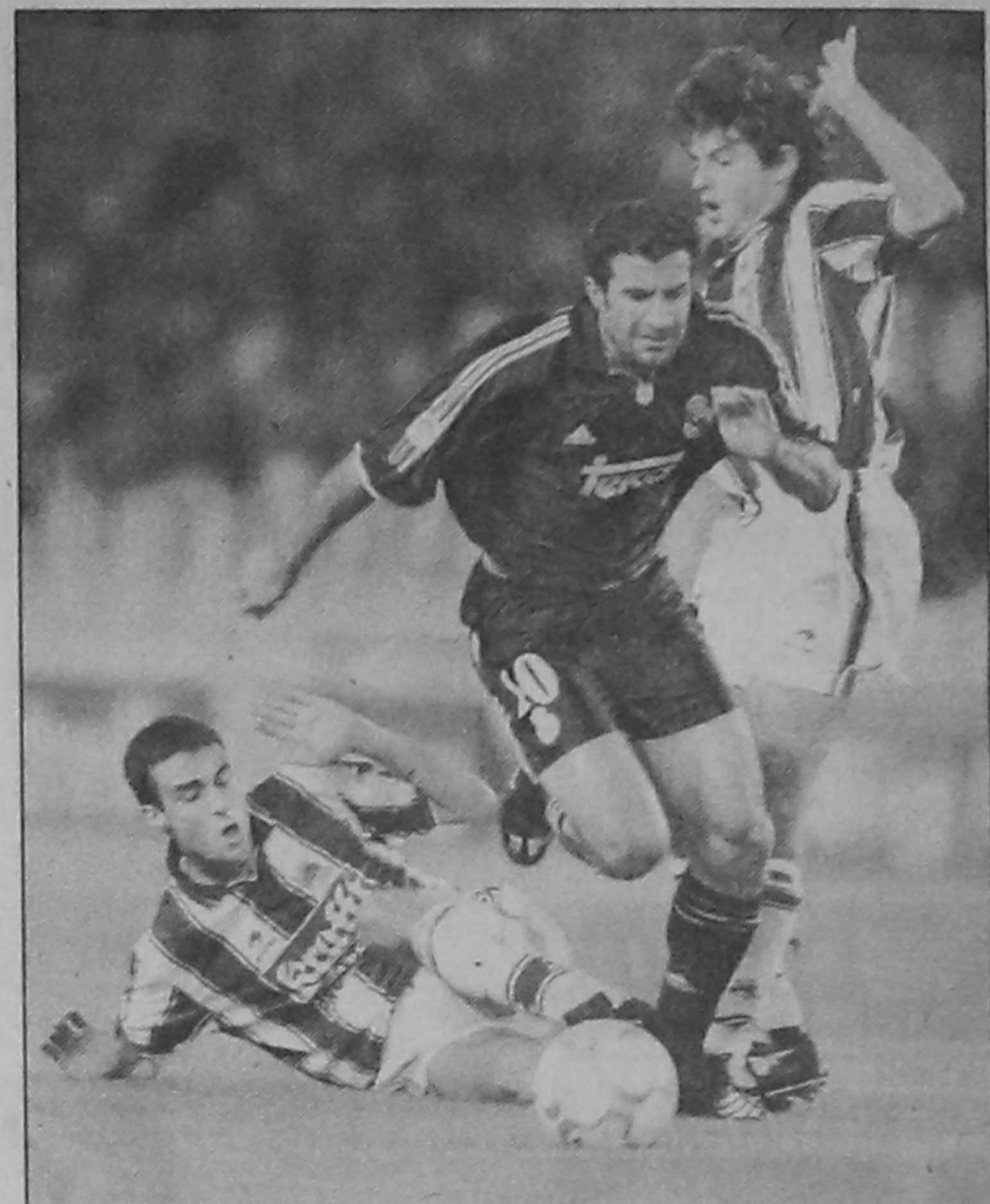
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Luis Figo (C) of Real Madrid going past the challenges of two Real Sociedad defenders during their Primera Liga clash on October 29. — AFP photo

keeper Ulrich Rame off a corner by Robert.

Lilles were in second spot following their 1-0 victory at home to Toulouse thanks to a Laurent Peyrelade goal in the 84th minute.

Leeds were