

Socceroos stun Mexico



AFP, Suwon, South Korea

Mexico's hopes of retaining their Confederations Cup trophy were dealt a severe blow Wednesday as they were given a masterclass in finishing from rank outsiders Australia.

A thunderous 25 metre (yard) shot from Josip Skoko in the 54th minute put the seal on a fine display by the Aussies who were rarely threatened by a Mexican team which had enjoyed more possession.

A 20th minute header from central defender Shaun Murphy had given the Socceroos a first-half lead.

The Mexicans, who won the trophy in front of their home supporters in 1999, were left rueing a host of wasted opportunities and were unable to resist the temptation to shoot from long-distance when they had both time and space.

Mexico made a bright start to the game with both Juan Pablo Rodriguez and Jose Manuel Abundis unsettling the Australian defence with their strong running. But Schwarzer made a number of fine saves, notably from a Rodriguez shot which was heading for the bottom right-hand corner of his goal.

However the Mexican defence gave the Australians far too much space, allowing Steve Corica and Stan Lazaridis to whip in a series of crosses.

It was from a Corica cross in the 20th minute that the Australians took the lead, when 30-year-old Murphy headed home on the edge of the six-yard box.

The Australians should have made it 2-0 on the stroke of half-time when Tony Popovic scooped the ball over the bar under pressure from Mexican keeper Oswaldo Sanchez.

Midfielder Skoko, who plays his club football for Belgian club Racing Genk, unleashed his powerful drive into the left-hand corner of Sanchez's goal after fine work on the right wing by captain Paul Okon. It was the 25-year-old's second international goal.

Mexico's best chance in the second half fell to Daniel Orson on the 55th minute when he volleyed wide from the left-hand side of the



PHOTO: AFP

Josip Skoko (R) of Australia jumps on to teammate Stan Lazaridis after scoring his side's second goal against Mexico at Suwon on May 30.

box.

Mexico are now due to meet South Korea on Friday when Australia take on world champions France.

TEAMS

**Mexico:** Oswaldo Sanchez, Claudio Suarez (capt), David Oteo, Dullio Marco, Antonio Ruiz, Juan Pablo Rodriguez, Jose Manuel

Abundis, Jared Borgetti, Pavel Pardo, Alberto Coyote, Victor Ruiz.

**Australia:** Mark Schwarzer, Kevin Muscat, Paul Okon (capt), Tony Vidmar, Tony Popovic, Josip Skoko, Stan Lazaridis, David Zdrilic, Shaun Murphy, Steve Corica, Clayton Zane.

**Referee:** Felix Onias Tangawarima

GROUP A STANDINGS

Group A standings in the Confederations Cup after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

France	1	1	0	0	5	0	3
Australia	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Mexico	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
South Korea	1	0	0	1	0	5	0

Lauren pull-out irks Lions

AFP, Kashima, Japan

Arsenal midfielder Lauren Etame Mayer came under fire here on Wednesday after pulling out of Cameroon's Confederations Cup squad a day before their opening match against Brazil.

Cameroon's French coach Pierre Lechantre said Mayer had cited fatigue at the end of a long, hard season as the reason for his late pullout, which gave Cameroon team bosses no time to call up a replacement.

"What I would have wished is that, if it was his intention not to come that he let us know in time to call up another player -- it is especially that which disappoints me," Lechantre said.

But the coach played down suggestions the African champions would badly miss the midfielder. "Nobody is indispensable and we have some very good players to replace him," he said.

The Indomitable Lions, who beat Brazil on their way to Olympic gold last year, will also be without defenders Michel Pensee Bilong, who was arrested on theft charges last week in South Korea, and Patrice Abanda, who has been replaced by Pius Ndiefi.

Pensee travelled to Japan with the rest of the squad. But with the case against him still outstanding, team management had decided to send him home, Lechantre said.

De Boer fails second test

AFP, Barcelona

Dutch international captain and Barcelona defender Frank De Boer faces a playing ban of up to 24 months after failing a second doping test, his club said on Tuesday.

De Boer, 30, tested positive for the banned anabolic steroid nandrolone after the UEFA Cup quarter-final second leg against Celta Vigo on March 15, when his sample showed four times the legal limit of the drug.

A second sample subsequently examined at laboratories in Lausanne was also positive, Barcelona announced.

De Boer is the second Dutch international to test positive for nandrolone after Juventus midfielder Edgar Davids, who failed a test after an Italian league match against Udinese on March 4.

Despite the risk of a ban, De Boer is in negotiations with Barcelona to extend his contract.



PHOTO: AFP

CONTRASTING MOODS: ( L ) The under pressure Brazilian squad doing some serious stretching during training while ( R ) some Cameroon players fool around before the start of their practice at the Kashima Stadium on May 30.

Samba longing for the beat



AFP, Kashima, Japan

Brazil kick off their Confederations Cup campaign against Cameroon on Thursday aiming to erase a bitter memory from the Sydney Olympics.

Widely seen as runaway favourites for the gold, the Brazilians were sent home at the quarter-final stage after losing in extra time to a Cameroon side that had been reduced to nine men.

It might only have been an under-23 tournament, but the defeat was still a traumatic blow to the pride of a country that was already struggling to come to terms with the ignominy of unprecedented World Cup qualifying defeats at the hands of Paraguay and Chile.

"I wasn't in the team that lost in Brisbane but I am a Brazilian," said Vampeta, the Paris St Germain midfielder who is both captain and one of the few internationally-known players in the Brazilian squad for the World Cup warm-up tournament here.

"There is a feeling that we want revenge.

Wanderley Luxemburgo, Brazil's head coach at the time of the Olympic debacle, was barely off the plane before he was sacked and his successor Emerson Leao knows another defeat at the hands of the Indomitable Lions could also seal his fate.

Since taking over, Leao has seen his side beaten by Ecuador and struggle to secure a home draw with Peru. The one-time aristocrats of the South American game have been left roughing it in fourth spot in the region's qualifying group.

Any more slip-ups and the

Brazilians could find themselves having to play off against the Oceania winners to avoid the unthinkable -- failure to qualify for the first time in the country's history. As if all this were not bad enough, the crisis on the field has been mirrored by an equally serious one in the national game's corridors of power.

Two Congressional commissions carrying out ongoing investigations into the way football is run in Brazil have lifted the lid on a malaise of corruption and mismanagement at every level of the sport.

Even junior football has not escaped the taint of corruption -- the forging of birth certificates seems to have been as widespread as the

remaining World Cup qualifiers, which include tough away matches in Buenos Aires and in the thin Andean air of La Paz, Bolivia.

"Our recent games have not been fantastic but I'm confident we can pick ourselves up," Leao said. "Victory here would be a major confidence boost."

Leao's task of getting the Brazilian show back on the road has not been helped by the loss of his Italy and Spain-based players, who are still involved in their clubs' battle for domestic honours.

Barcelona's Rivaldo and Real Madrid's Roberto Carlos are among those not in Japan. Cameroon, in contrast, has managed to secure most of their top players, including

ment.

Cameroon's French coach Pierre Lechantre said Mayer had cited fatigue at the end of a long hard season as the reason for his late pullout, and made his frustration clear.

"What I would have wished is that, if it was his intention not to come that he let us know in time to call up another player -- it is especially that which disappoints me," Lechantre said.

Cameroon will also have to do without defender Michel Pensee Bilong. He was sent home after being arrested last week in South Korea on charges of stealing from his former club.

"I'm sure that the issues sur-



PHOTO: AFP

JAPAN LOVES BRAZIL! The Brazilian national flag flying in front of a souvenir shop at Kashima on May 30.

production of dubious passports for players requiring visas to play in Europe's lucrative leagues.

The crisis has helped to sap confidence and Leao is well aware that he needs a good performance here to bolster morale for the six

Parma's African player of the year Patrick Mboma.

The Africans however suffered a blow on the eve of Thursday's match when Arsenal midfielder Lauren Mayer pulled out of the squad too late for them to call up a replace-

rounding his case will be resolved very quickly but pending that, the decision was taken that it would be better for him to go home," Lechantre said.

Big Canadians worry Japan



AFP, Niigata, Japan

Co-hosts and Asian Cup champions Japan warned Wednesday they might be too small to play their normal game against Canada in the nation's opening Confederations Cup match.

However Canada's coach Holger Osieck praised Japan for having a "lot of technical players" the day before the Group B match in the eight-nation tournament, a half of which got underway in South Korea on Wednesday.

"We are a physically strong and hard attacking team," said the German, who has failed to guide Canada into the World Cup finals a year from now, also to be co-hosted by Japan and South Korea.



PHOTO: AFP

PLOTTING JAPAN'S DOWNFALL? The Canadian players listening to coach Holgar Osieck after a practice session at Niigata Stadium on May 30.

"We are strictly outsiders here but will show you what we have in

store," Osieck said. Japan's coach Philippe Troussier was all aware of his players' conspicuous handicap. They stand five centimetres (two inches) shorter at 178 centimetres (5ft11) on average than the Canadians.

"It will be a good challenge for Japan because, athletically, we are no match," the flamboyant Frenchman said.

"Tactically, the match will be stuck at first," said Troussier, known as "white witchdoctor" for his vast coaching experience in Africa before taking over Japan after their winless World Cup finals debut in France in 1998.

"We will have to take an offensive risk," he said. "We will have to be very aggressive."

His 23-man squad, boosted by AS Roma playmaker Hidetoshi Nakata but hit by last-minute replacements due to injuries, had watched a video of the Canadians in action the night before.

It will be the first-ever full international match between the two countries.

"They seem to be big," Avispa Fukuoka forward Yoshitestu Yamashita said. However he noted the Canadians tended to stay on the defensive. "They are kind of drawn back."

"Physically they are quite strong and they are tall," said Jubilo Iwata forward Masashi Nakayama, who scored Japan's only goal in the last World Cup finals.

"We will be thrown aside if we try to attack straight forward," said the 33-year-old striker, the oldest man in the squad, who has scored 20 points in his 39 internationals.

"We need to be crafty. For example, we may gamble on a daring

pass before they set up a formation."

Canada feature many players with European clubs with defender Tony Menezes exceptionally playing for Brazilian First Division side Botafogo.

Menezes combines with West Ham goalkeeper Craig Forrest and experienced defenders, Paul Fenwick and Jason DeVos, who play in Scotland's Premier League with Hibernian and Dundee United respectively, to make them difficult to break down.

"We are united as a team and we have team spirit," Osieck said. "First of all, we have to perform well and give everybody justifications that we deserve it be here."

Japan's line-up includes only two players with overseas clubs, Nakata and Espanyol Barcelona forward Akinori Nishizawa.

J-League Shimizu S-Pulse defender Ryuzo Morioka called the Canadian side "powerful, big and fast".

"Some of them have great skills and those who play abroad are strong. It seems that the ball can reach the penalty area on a single kick by their goalkeeper," he warned.

Japan, approaching the Confederation Cup as a dress rehearsal for the 2002 World Cup finals, have the added incentive of seeking to reverse a recent losing streak in international matches.

They were thrashed by France 5-0 in March and lost 1-0 to Spain last month through a goal in injury time.

Japan will also play Cameroon here on Saturday and Brazil on Monday in Ibaraki next on Monday.



AFP, Kashima, Japan

Sonny Anderson and Washington, the forwards who will spearhead Brazil's campaign in the Confederations Cup, have a point to



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil strikers Sonny Anderson (L) and Washington (R) talks to the media at Kashima on May 30.