

Japan too good for Canada



AFP, Niigata

Co-hosts and Asian Cup champions Japan broke down the great wall of the taller Canadians to a spirited 3-0 victory in their rain-drenched opening Confederations Cup Group-B match here Thursday.

After a scoreless equilibrium in the first half, hot J-League property Shinji Ono opened the scoring in the 57th minute on a free kick for his second career international goal.

The 21-year-old 16-capped Urawa Reds playmaker, who has chosen not to play abroad this season after talks with a few European clubs, took the kick after Jibilo Iwata striker Masashi Nakayama was tripped down.

His right-footer curled over a wall of six Canadians and sank into the left corner of the net.

Three minutes later, Akinori Nishizawa, whose contract with Espanyol Barcelona was reported to be up in the air, headed home a right cross from Hiroaki Morishima who volleyed back an overshot centering pass from Nakayama.

Morishima scored a goal in his own right in the 88th minute when he caught a long through pass from Ono, who was the key man after AS Roma playmaker Hidetoshi Nakata was substituted seven minutes earlier.



Hiroaki Morishima (R) of Japan scoring past Canadian custodian Craig Forrest (L) at the Big Swan Stadium in Niigata on May 31.

It was Japan's first full international "A" match with Canada, who qualified for this tournament of continental champions through a surprise 2-0 win over Colombia in the Gold Cup final.

Japan coach Philippe Troussier has told his side to take "offensive risks" as they were smaller than the Canadians who mostly stand five centimetres (two inches) taller at 183cm (6ft 1in).

Japan controlled the ball early in the match but their passwork found it hard to penetrate a tough defence by the Canadians.

A 25-metre free kick in the third

minute by Nakata, on leave from Italian league leaders AS Roma, went far wide.

Canada's counter-attack earned a corner in the eighth minute but Nottingham Forest midfielder Jim Brennan could not pull it close to the net.

Japan's running attack threatened Canada's goal twice in the 11th minute.

Ono found a clear angle from the left but shot over the bar. Only seconds later, Nishizawa got the ball at the goal mouth but his shot was stopped by Canadian goalkeeper Craig Forrest.

Japan kept on pressing but Canada hit back in the 29th minute when Jason DeVos headed a pass to Xausa but his close-range shot was saved by Japan's gutsy goalie Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi.

Canada sparked with counter-attacks toward half-time. Xausa's cross toward Paul Peschisolido at the net was cleared by Kazuyuki Toda in the 40th minute.

A minute later, DeVos headed home a grounder on a corner kick but it was swatted overhead by Kawaguchi.

Milan rope in Contra

AFP, Rome

Italian giants AC Milan have signed Romanian international defender Cosmin Contra for a ten million dollar fee from Spanish outfit Alaves, the Milanese club said Wednesday.

The news was revealed after a meeting between Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani and Alaves president Gonzalo Anton at AC Milan's headquarters Wednesday.

Contra, 25, was one of the revelations of the Spanish League this year after joining the Basque outfit from Dinamo Bucharest in 1999.

He will join his former Alaves teammate Javi Moreno, who also recently signed at AC Milan after topping the Liga's scoring charts this season.

Euro 2008 Scotland prepare multi-million pound bid

AFP, Glasgow

Scottish Football Association (SFA) chiefs on Wednesday confirmed that they are preparing a multi-million pound bid to stage the European Championships in 2008.

First Minister Henry McLeish and SFA chief executive David Taylor unveiled plans for a strategy which they hope will be used to persuade European football's governing body UEFA to let them host the prestigious tournament.

"We are one of the great football loving nations in the world, we have the best fans in the world, so wouldn't it be a rich prize for these fans to see, on their home ground, the best the world has to offer?" said McLeish.

FIFA bans Davids, Couto



REUTERS, London

Dutch international Edgar Davids and Portugal's Fernando Couto have been suspended from all football with immediate effect, FIFA said on Thursday.

The suspension will run until the end of the open-ended ban imposed by the Italian authorities after the players tested positive for illegal substances.

Davids of Juventus and Lazio's Couto will therefore not be eligible to play in the upcoming World Cup qualifiers of the Netherlands and Portugal on 2 and 6 June 2001.

Both countries are in qualifying group two with second-placed Portugal playing Ireland on Saturday and Cyprus next Wednesday. The Netherlands visit Estonia on Saturday but don't play another qualifier until September.

FIFA has yet to make a decision on another Dutch international, Frank De Boer, who has also tested positive but is awaiting the result of tests on his B sample.

His case will be dealt with by UEFA at a meeting provisionally scheduled for 14 June.

FIFA informed the respective associations on Wednesday from Seoul, where officials are attending the Confederations Cup.

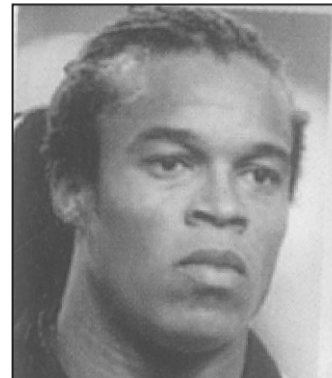
FIFA's statement said: "Both players have been sanctioned by the competent Italian bodies for having tested positive for a substance prohibited under the applicable regulations."

"Under the current FIFA regulations, a player who is suspended for

and Couto, FIFA is confronted with a confirmed doping situation.

"Doping is an illegal way of enhancing performance and is a total anathema to the concept of fair play and football ethics."

"As such it is without doubt a particularly serious offence and it is

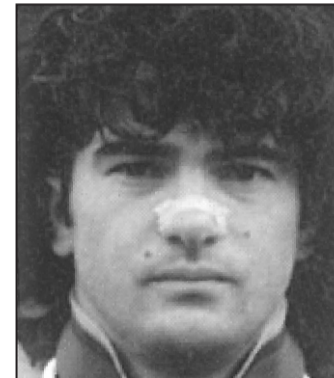


EDGAR DAVIDS

having breached a compulsory regulation is also prevented from playing in other associations for the duration of his suspension.

"Furthermore, an extension of this suspension to national teams competitions is decided on a case-by-case basis if the infringement committed is considered as being particularly serious."

"Regarding the infringement committed by the players Davids



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therefore unquestionable that players found guilty of doping should be prevented from playing not only in the competition in which they were convicted of doping but also in all other football competitions."

Couto was suspended on April 27 Davids following on May 17. Both players, and De Boer, the Dutch national captain, tested positive for nandrolone.

PREVIEW

Germany, Russia halfway there



REUTERS, London

Germany could all but secure their place at the 2002 World Cup finals

as European qualifying for South Korea and Japan resumes with matches on Saturday and Wednesday.

Germany, who have a maximum 12 points from four games in Group Nine, travel to Finland and Albania over the next week knowing that two wins would leave them needing -- at most -- two points from their last two games in September and October.

Along with Russia, who are in an even better position, Germany could take a major step towards becoming the first nation to claim a place at the finals apart from the co-hosts and France, who qualify as holders.

Rudi Voeller's team find themselves in such a strong position because of the poor start that their main rivals in the group, England, made to their campaign under Kevin Keegan.

The Germans -- three times world champions as West Germany -- beat England 1-0 in the last competitive international at Wembley last October and it was that result that prompted Keegan to resign as coach.

Sweden Sven Goran Eriksson was brought in to rejuvenate England and he has done an excellent job. They play Greece in Athens on Wednesday and they should pip the Finns to the runners-up slot in the group and qualify for a playoff place.

Russia, now with home advantage, will win Group One, barring a series of massive upsets, if they repeat their 1-0 victory over Yugoslavia in April.

With 13 points, Russia already have a commanding five-point lead over second-placed Switzerland, with the prospect of claiming three easy points in Luxembourg next week.

Beating the Yugoslavs, who are fourth behind Slovenia and the Swiss but with a game hand, would see off the threat of the team they would have most feared when the draw was made.

While Germany and Russia look set to run away with their groups, and the automatic qualification place, other groups are much closer-fought.

Nowhere will the competition be tougher than in Group Two, where Euro 2000 semifinalists Netherlands and Portugal, both currently on 11 points, were expected to qualify when the draw

was announced.

Their problem is that the Republic of Ireland are top with 14 points.

Ireland have already played both their rivals away, securing two creditable draws, and will be looking to at least avoid defeat when they host the Portuguese this weekend.

Portugal pose a bigger qualifying threat to Mick McCarthy's side, not only because they have a game in hand, but also because they have one of the most gifted midfield formations in the game led by Real Madrid's Luis Figo.

The Dutch will meanwhile be looking for points in Estonia, which will be Ireland's destination next week.

Group four is tighter still with only goal difference separating Slovakia, Turkey and Sweden, who have recovered well from a disappointing start to their campaign.

Sweden, who finished third at the USA 94 finals but missed out on France 98, face a telling match on Saturday at home to the Slovaks.

Group six could well be changing shape, as group leaders Scotland do not play. Second-placed Belgium, with one game in hand, and third-placed Croatia, with two, are both out to make up lost ground.

However, for Europe's heavyweights, the next week should only bring good news in their bid to reach the finals in Japan and South Korea. Italy, losing Euro 2000 finalists but runaway leaders in a soft group eight, face a trip to Georgia.

More significant will be the outcome of Saturday's game in Bucharest between Romania and Hungary, currently vying for the runners-up slot.

Two quick wins, over Bosnia and Israel, would lift a talented Spain side from second place to a comfortable five-point lead over Austria in group seven.

Poland, top of group five and clearly on the way back as one of Europe's better national sides, will be looking to build on a three-point lead over Belarus.

The Poles, who are away to Wales and Armenia over the next week, should put their qualification beyond little doubt.

Denmark, currently third, can get their campaign back on track by beating group three leaders Czech Republic at home on Saturday, while Bulgaria try their luck in Belfast against Northern Ireland.

Crucial tie for both



AFP, Ulsan

Holders Mexico and hosts South Korea must put opening day defeats behind them to stay in the Confederations Cup when they meet Friday as Claudio Suarez prepares to make football history.

Mexican coach Enrique Meza faces an uphill task to motivate his players after their surprising 2-0 defeat to Australia on Wednesday which followed a 4-0 mauling against England last weekend.

Meza admitted after Wednesday's match that the team's heads had dropped after conceding a second goal early in the second-half but insisted Thursday that morale was not a problem.

"I speak to the players all the time about motivation. There are high spirits. There is a lot of fire in the field," he told AFP through an interpreter.

Meza's Korean counterpart Guus Hiddink said his team had to toughen up and cut out childish errors after their comprehensive 5-0 defeat against France.

He said they would not be over-awed by the occasion and could get a result against the Mexicans.

Hiddink, the manager who has tasted the joy of winning the European Cup and the frustrations of handling the egos of the Dutch team, is facing his hardest task yet as the boss of South Korea.

The Dutchman, who has previously managed Real Madrid, Valencia and PSV Eindhoven, took

charge of the South Korean national team at the beginning of the year in the countdown to next year's World Cup finals.

The Koreans, as co-hosts with Japan, are determined to put on a good show and wanted a man who had the experience and tactical nous to make up for the shortcomings of the team. They have made a number of appearances in the World Cup finals over the years but have never got beyond the first round stage, a record Hiddink has been charged with changing.

He was given a rude reminder of the size of the task that he is facing on Wednesday night in Taegu.

France were without key players such as Zinedine Zidane due to club commitments and even allowed themselves the luxury of missing a first-half penalty but still ran rings around the Koreans.

"We came up against the strongest team in the world. Two or three players were not available but that does not matter to France," he said.

"We can see that there is a lack of competition toughness and cleverness in various actions so we lost possession very easily -- very childish -- and France is clever enough and strong enough to take advantage of that."

Hiddink's reign as Dutch manager was often overshadowed by rows within the squad as he struggled to gel the talents of Dennis Bergkamp, Edgar Davids and Clarence Seedorf.

The Koreans lack any player that could be called world class and only three of their squad in this competition ply their trade in Europe. But Hiddink said that his team had shown a willing to learn from their mistakes and he had made progress.

"The lesson of this tournament is for the team to be much more strong next year.

"There's improvement from the

first week I started in January until now but not enough to be competitive. I hope I can see them more competitive."

The Mexicans must improve their finishing after being guilty of squandering a host of opportunities against Australia. Both Jose Manuel Abundis and Juan Pablo Rodriguez caused problems as they ran at defenders but they failed to exploit their approach work.

One of the few players to have emerged with credit from Wednesday's match was goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez who has ousted the flamboyant Jorge Campos in the team.

He was confident about Friday's clash and said the team could not blame their hectic fixture list for their recent disappointments.

"It is not so tiring and the players have been working all the time for this tournament and there is no excuse to lose the games. I expect to have more focus for the games," he said. "We expect to win tomorrow."

Suarez, 32, will become the most capped international of all time when he leads Mexico out at this southern city on his 158th appearance for the Aztecs.

Meza paid tribute to his captain and said the central defender brought a unique spirit to the side.

"Claudio Suarez is Claudio Suarez. He is the heart and the spirit of the side."

Both squads had an opportunity to train Thursday evening at Ulsan's elegant new 43,550-seat stadium which has been built to host matches in next year's World Cup.

This is the first competitive fixture between the two sides since Mexico beat South Korea 3-1 at the 1998 World Cup in Lyons, France.

In the other Group A match Friday, France are to play Australia in Taegu. Mexico play France in Ulsan on Sunday when South Korea face Australia in Suwon.



The Australian squad warming up at Taegu on May 31.

Lemerre for experiments



AFP, Taegu

French coach Roger Lemerre has called on the veteran heroes in his side to help his quest to maintain the team's invincibility at the next World Cup -- even if their places are at threat.

Strengthened by a 5-0 win over hosts South Korea, Lemerre will use France's second game at the Confederations Cup against Australia on Friday to try out more new players alongside the established world and European champions.

Ruling out a major challenge from Australia, who beat Mexico 2-0, Lemerre said he would try a new goalkeeper and make several other changes for the match in Taegu.

"Since 1996, this team has had a well anchored winning culture," Lemerre said after Wednesday's emphatic victory in the opening Group A match.

"For the moment the team plays its football without too much difficulty. It knows its strength.

"I want to emphasise that against South Korea I did not realise there were new players out there -- they were so well guided by the old ones."

Lemerre declared his intention to let every one of the 23 man squad get a game during the three group matches in South Korea. France, already top of the group, finish the first round against Mexico on Sunday.

He said that Mickael Landreau of Nantes or Gregory Coupet of Lyon would come in for Bordeaux's Ulrich Rame, the established understudy to Fabien Barthez who has been rested for the tournament.

France's Leboeuf and Nicolas Gillet will come into the defence and Zoumana Camara will get a game on the right of midfield, Lemerre said.

"My aim is for everyone to get a game in the first round. But there will be a balance in the mix between the old ones and the new ones. The new players must be responsible for their actions but the old ones will have to help."

Many of the older players, such as Leboeuf, know their future in the French squad is now under threat in the year up to the World Cup finals.

But the defender, who said he was trying to find an alternative to another year at English side Chelsea, insisted he had no problem with Lemerre's decision to leave him out of the South Korea game. "It's part of the game. In the end experience will still have its day," he said.

Lemerre singled out Eric Carriere

for praise in the opening win, in which Nantes' attacking midfielder was making his debut. The player admitted this week he was "amazed" to be sat with his World Cup heroes on the plane.

"Eric Carriere passed his test well," said the coach. "It was good for him and the French team. Nothing is in the bag yet, but the result of the first match means France can hope to reach the final. That is encouraging for 2002."

Lemerre indicated he had plenty of leeway to experiment in the remaining group games of the eight-nation tournament, which is a rehearsal for the World Cup on and off the pitch.

"I know that Australia will be physically tougher and more athletic, but I don't think Australia has the means to challenge the French team," he said confidently.

But Australia are equally determined to put up a fight following their encouraging win over Mexico with fine goals from defender Shaun Murphy and particularly a 25 metre shot by Josep Skoko.

Australian skipper Paul Okon said: "We gave little away and scored two fantastic goals. I was happy with our level of fitness after a long season."

Australia are without English-based stars Harry Kewell and Mark Viduka. But Okon added: "There's no reason to fear France. We will be the underdogs and that suits us."



South Korea coach Guus Hiddink (C) makes a point while his charges listen during practice at Ulsan on May 31.

Effenberg's English plans



REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich playmaker and captain Stefan Effenberg plans to move to England after one more season with the European champions, his wife and manager has said.

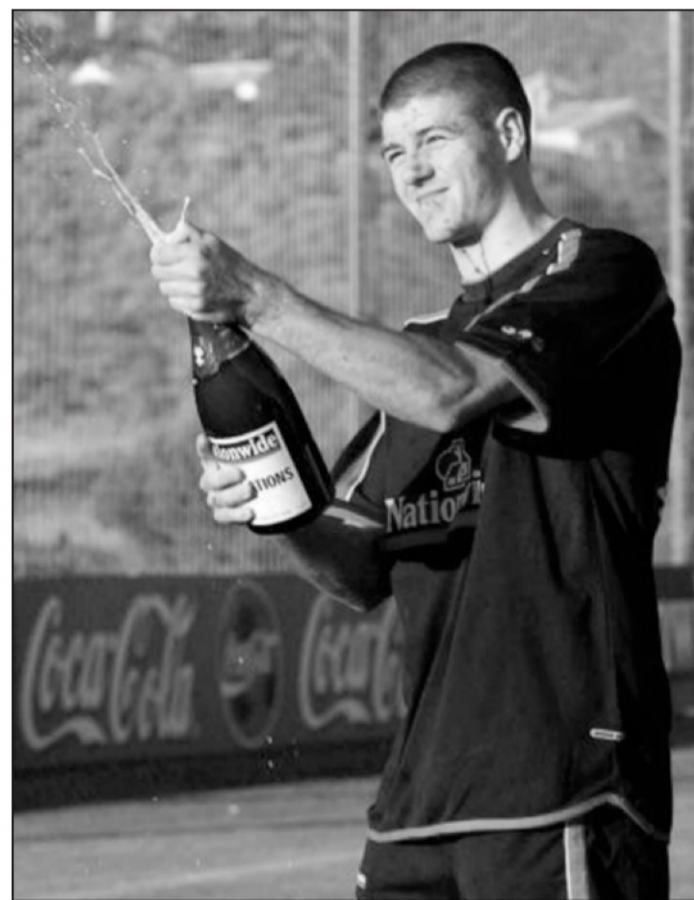
"What will happen next has been clear to us for quite some time," Martina Effenberg told Thursday's daily Bild.

"We will leave Munich and go to England."

Effenberg, 32, has said several times that he wanted to leave Bayern for a foreign club once his contract expires at the end of June 2002.

Bayern commercial manager Uli Hoessens said on Wednesday that the Munich club were hoping to buy Germany midfielders Michael Ballack and Sebastian Deisler, currently with Bayer Leverkusen and Hertha Berlin respectively. If the two joined, Effenberg's contract would not be extended, Hoessens added.

Effenberg first played for Bayern from 1990 to 1992 before rejoining them from Borussia Moenchengladbach in 1998.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY: England and Liverpool midfielder Steven Gerrard, who will be 21 tomorrow, uncorks a champagne bottle after practice at La Manga in Spain on May 29. England play Greece in a World Cup qualifier on June 6.