

Tormented Turks

AP, REUTERS/AFP, Ulsan/Istanbul

Turkey's return to the World Cup after a half-century gave the country's soccer fans plenty to cheer, but a nightmarish finale left them cursing their luck -- and the South Korean referee.

Turkey coach Senol Gunes was disappointed by the result but remained confident his team would still reach the second phase.

"In the first half we played well but gave away many chances," he said.

"In the second half we set out to control the game. We managed to do that but we conceded two goals that we shouldn't have done.

"There are still six points to win. Our goal was to get five points from three games.

"We deserved one point today but we didn't get it for reasons that I don't talk about here," in an apparent reference to the late penalty awarded by Korean referee Kim Young-Joo.

"We came here with pride and we played the game with pride...we had a great effort but we couldn't get what we deserved."

Midfielder Emre Belozoglu said the offence that led to the penalty, converted by Rivaldo, had happened outside the box. Defender Alpay Ozalan was sent off for pulling back Luizao as he bore down on the Turkish goal.

"Of course as far as we could see it was outside the box," he said. "I thought we played well and fought

hard, the important thing now is to win the coming games and qualify."

Gunes said his team gave too much away. "In the first half, we played good but we gave away many opportunities to Brazil. In the second half, we tried to control the game and we did so. But again we gave away two goals that we shouldn't have."

Gunes said his side deserved better. "We deserved one point. We didn't get it because of some other reasons which I don't want to mention now. We have two games left. We'll try to get the points to take us to the knockout stage," he added.

At halftime, when Turkey led Brazil 1-0 in their Group C opener, crowds of fans who had gathered to watch the match on giant screens in the central squares of Turkey's big cities were preparing to party.

But after two unanswered second-half goals from the Brazilians -- one following a penalty that had Turks everywhere springing from their seats in fury -- the crowds melted away in silence.

"It was a bad day. It's football: somebody's got to win and somebody's got to lose," said 35-year-old Ismail Aksu, who was dancing outside his music store in Ankara after Turkey's goal.

"Of course, I was upset afterward, but it's an honour for Turkey to

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FINALLY THERE'S SAMBA: The Brazilian fans at Ulsan's Munsu Football Stadium show what the World Cup missed until yesterday.

PHOTO:AFP

Samba's R Relief

AFP, Ulsan

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari was a relieved man after a late penalty from superstar Rivaldo saw Brazil get their World Cup campaign off to a winning start with a come-from-behind 2-1 win over nine-man Turkey.

Scolari was happy to have won and said his side could now look forward to reaching the second round.

"To win your first game puts you in a solid position - if we can get six points then we'd be virtually through," said Scolari, whose side face China on Saturday in their next game. Their final game is against Costa Rica.

"I wasn't particularly pleased with how we started in the first half," Scolari added, referring to a lacklustre opening spell when the Brazilians had struggled to get a shot on goal.

"It was an very interesting game. We showed quality and character to win," he added.

Penalty hero Rivaldo said the side was disappointed not to have wrapped up victory earlier. "I regret that we couldn't seal it in the first half. I am relieved that we came from behind to win."

"When they went 1-0 up I was a bit worried. But we had the belief to win," the former world footballer of the year added.

Rivaldo also admitted that he faked the injury that saw Turkey's

Hakan Unsal sent off.

Hakan was given his marching orders in the dying seconds for a second bookable offence after kicking the ball at Rivaldo.

Despite the ball being hit with little force Rivaldo fell to the ground clutching his face as though floored by a Mike Tyson killer punch.

The Brazilian number 10 later said he played up the incident to make a point.

"Obviously I exaggerated the incident for the guy to be sent off," he said.

"The ball hit my hand and my leg. It didn't hit me in the face but that kind of attitude (kicking the ball against an opponent) must not be allowed on the pitch. He deserved to have a red card."

Hakan was the second Turk to be sent off after Alpay Ozalan was shown the door for the shirt pulling that gave Brazil the penalty that won them the match. Rivaldo scored from the spot.

Meanwhile, superstar Ronaldo, who made a triumphant return to the World Cup stage, said he was exhausted when substituted.

"I still feel below the rest of the team in terms of physical condition and that's why I am working so hard in training," he said.

"I knew that I was going to be substituted and when I saw the professor (his name for coach

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Blanco spot on

AFP, Niigata

Mexico had a Cuauhtemoc Blanco penalty to thank for a 1-0 win over Croatia here Monday in their opening World Cup Group G encounter.

After a scoreless first half the match burst into life 13 minutes after the restart.

Croatian defender Boris Zivkovic made a rash challenge on 29-year-old Blanco in the penalty area and duly became the first player at this year's finals to be sent off.

Blanco, who plays in Spain with Real Valladolid, dusted himself down and blasted the spot-kick past Croatian keeper Stipe Pletikosa for his 17th international goal.

Croatian coach Mirko Jozic reacted almost immediately by withdrawing disappointing veteran striker Davor Suker and replacing him with Daniel Saric.

Suker, formerly with Real Madrid and now with Germany's 1860 Munich, had been partnering Middlesbrough's Alen Boksic, making his World Cup debut at 32 after missing the tournament in France following knee surgery.

But the impatient Jozic swiftly hauled Boksic off as well and sent on Mario Stanic.

That strategy didn't work either - despite the team forcing 11 corners - and Croatia must now get a result against Italy next Saturday at Ibaraki if they are to prolong their Asian sojourn beyond the opening round.

With the Italians the group favourites that match will make or break Croatia's tournament.

Croatia stunned the footballing world in 1998 when they placed third on their World Cup debut, largely

down to Suker finishing tournament top scorer with six goals.

But this time he was a shadow of his former self - and so were his teammates, most of whom were

survivors of that memorable campaign.

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PHOTO:AFP

GOT IT! Mexican striker Cuauhtemoc Blanco scores from the spot to seal victory for his side against Croatia in their World Cup Group G match against Croatia at Niigata Big Swan Stadium yesterday.

Berlin Brawl

AP, Berlin

Hundreds of Turkish soccer fans clashed with supporters of Brazil in a World Cup-inspired street brawl Monday in the German capital.

The fighting erupted around a giant outdoor TV screen on central Potsdamer Platz square after Brazil took a 2-1 lead against Turkey on a late penalty, police said.

Some 400 Turkish fans watching the game battled with 60 rooting for Brazil, prompting police to rush in 150 officers to stop the violence.

There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Ref Collina imperfect!

AFP, Seoul

The Italian referee in charge of the potentially explosive showdown between England and World Cup favourites Argentina on Friday has warned both teams not to expect perfection from the man in the middle.

Pierluigi Collina, voted the best referee in the world for the fourth consecutive year, insists that making mistakes is all part of football.

"Football is an imperfect game and I don't understand why we try to make it perfect only in refereeing. I like football as it is nowadays. The referee's decision has to be accepted, it has to be maintained," said Collina.

"Everyone tries to do their best, but sometimes it happens that they can't. I remember a short speech given by Mr (Giovanni) Trapattoni while he was the coach of Fiorentina, three or four years ago, after a big, big mistake made by his goalkeeper. "He said 'If a player cannot commit a mistake on the field we can

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Red rain

AFP, Seoul

The first eight matches of the World Cup went off with the teams involved in those games displaying almost exemplary discipline.

But it couldn't last - and sure enough the red rain descended Monday afternoon with red cards dished out to three players.

the penalty area here on Monday.

Blanco scored from the resulting penalty to give Mexico a 1-0 win.

Turkey then finished with nine men as they lost 2-1 to four-time champions Brazil with Alpay Ozalan and Hakan Unsal both red-carded in the final five minutes.

The record number of dismissals for a single World Cup tournament



PHOTO:AFP

CHEER UP, YOU'RE FIRST! Croatian defender Boris Zivkovic (R) can't believe his bad luck as he becomes the first player to be sent off in the World Cup yesterday.

Croatian defender Boris Zivkovic had the dubious distinction of becoming the first player to be sent off in this year's finals after felling Cuauhtemoc Blanco of Mexico in

is 22 at France 98.

Only in the tournament Brazil hosted in 1950 were there no dismissals throughout the competition.

Asia's big day

REUTERS, Yokohama

Asia experiences its biggest day in World Cup history on Tuesday when co-hosts Japan and South Korea kick off their campaigns and China make their debut in the finals of the competition.

The 2002 World Cup, the first staged in Asia and the first hosted by two nations, is already the richest in terms of television rights and other marketing franchises but fans across the continent will be looking for a different kind of success.

Even North Korea, the only Asian

side to win a match in the World Cup finals, is getting in on the act -- with the reclusive communist state broadcasting rare television footage of scenes from outside its own borders and the first two matches.

On Tuesday, Asia's three brightest hopes in the tournament will be out to show what they are made of.

China, the world's most populous nation which is rapidly emerging from its cocoon, has just joined the World Trade Organisation and won the right to host the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Its national side finally step on to soccer's global stage against Costa Rica in group C in Kwangju, South

Korea, on Tuesday -- after 40 years of trying to qualify and on the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

"Every Chinese will support China. We've waited more than 40 years for this chance," one fan commented in the outlying Turkic-speaking northwestern region of Xinjiang.

Japan, which failed to win a single point on their first appearance in France in 1998, are next out,

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TODAY'S MATCHES

China vs Costa Rica Venue: Gwangju Time: 12:30 pm	Japan vs Belgium Venue: Saitama Time: 3:00 pm	Korea Rep. vs Poland Venue: Busan Time: 5:30 pm
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Sad

REUTERS, Cairo

An Egyptian teenager died after falling from her third floor balcony when adjusting a television antenna ahead of a World Cup soccer match, security sources said on Monday.

Soccer fan Abeer Shaaban, 15, was moving the antenna on Sunday morning when she lost her balance at her home in the northwest suburb of Cairo, the sources said.

Shaaban later died in hospital from her injuries.

CUP CORNER

AFP, Daegu

A South Korean jewellery shop which accused Senegalese midfielder Khalilou Fadiga of stealing a necklace sent him a good-luck token to encourage him to do well at the World Cup.

A manager at the Yonsin Bosok store in the southern city of Daegu said the small gold pig and a letter of reconciliation were handed over to Fadiga on the eve of the World Cup opening match in which Senegal sensationally beat defending champions France 1-0.

Fadiga played despite facing criminal charges for theft after being

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