



TWO SIDES OF THE SEA OF JAPAN: A Chinese fan (L) in Shanghai breaks down after her national team's loss against Costa Rica while at Saitama the Japanese supporters are delighted by the spirited showing of their team against Belgium yesterday.

China's cry

AFP, Beijing

Millions of fans in football-mad China were putting on a brave face Tuesday after their national team was defeated 2-0 by Costa Rica in their World Cup debut.

Many had already prepared themselves mentally for a loss and kept their composure despite huge disappointment that the high expectations their team would at least score one goal or draw the match had been dashed.

"Of course I'm disappointed. At least it should've been just 1-0. The Chinese team was working very hard, but they weren't good enough," said Yang Di, a student from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute.

Many students and workers had taken time off from their normal routine to watch the match - considered the best opportunity for China to win as it will later face the stronger teams of Brazil and Turkey.

"It's finished. There's no more hope. It's difficult to accept but rationally speaking, we have to accept our team was weaker," said Wang Zehai.

But for many fans, simply having a chance to watch their country compete in the World Cup was a dream come true after a 44-year-

long quest.

"I've been a football fan for 20 years," said 39-year-old rental car salesman Wei Zhiwu, adding it was a very important day for him.

"We're very calm right now because it's our team's first time in the World Cup. They really worked hard. They carried an attitude of learning. China's soccer standards are vastly different from other countries. Other countries are stronger than we are."

Fans were driven by a strong sense of patriotism and many remained supportive to the last minute, while non-fans began dispersing from public viewing venues before the match was over.

Hundreds of people watching the match at a big screen in Beijing's Wangfujing shopping street chanted "Jia you! Jia you!" - Chinese for "Go go go" even after Costa Rica had scored two goals and the match was down to the last few minutes.

They watched with baited breath a few times when it appeared China was close to scoring.

Even China's foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said commented on the match during a routine briefing Tuesday saying he

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Japan's joy

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan's soccer fans cheered a 2-2 draw against Belgium with a muted "banzai", full of pride at their team's first World Cup point but dismayed at a referee's decision that robbed them of victory.

Roared on by a nearly hysterical crowd in the stadium, Junichi Inamoto's superb 68th-minute goal appeared to have clinched a historic win for Japan until Belgium equalised with 15 minutes left.

Then with four minutes left on the clock, fans went mad thinking Inamoto had grabbed victory with a deft chip. But the referee ruled the goal out for an earlier foul.

"This is the first time that Japan has earned a point, so this is a big step for Japanese soccer," said Shigeru Nakagawa, a 47-year-old teacher who watched the game on television in a Japanese pub in the northern city of Sapporo.

Fans who jammed into the pub cheered wildly when Japan scored, strangers even hugging each other in joy.

At Saitama Stadium, Japanese coach Philippe Troussier paid tribute to the fans' support. "We always felt we had the public behind us. They were our twelfth man today," the Frenchman said.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said he'd watched the match with his heart in his mouth, but he added - diplomatically - that a draw was fine.

"It was really thrilling," he told reporters at his official residence in Tokyo after returning from the match.

"I wanted them to win, but considering our ties with Belgium, this was the best outcome."

Many fans were enthusiastic - but realistic - before the match. In Japan, baseball fans outnumber football devotees and few dared to dream of winning the World Cup.

What they did want to avoid was a re-run of Japan's dismal debut four years ago, when they were eliminated after three defeats and just one goal.

So, pleasure that the worst was averted was palpable.

"It's great, they really played hard," said Chikashi Koizumi, an opposition lawmaker who belongs to the Japanese Parliament Football Club and watched the match on TV in his Tokyo flat.

"They really fought with spirit," said Koizumi, who shares Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's name

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PORTUGAL VS USA

Latin passion Euro style

REUTERS, Suwon

Portugal, one of Europe's most talented sides, are itching to begin their first World Cup campaign for 16 years against the United States on Wednesday.

Supporters back home will accept nothing less than Portugal making the second round and the players are confident.

"Everybody sets out to win - the France-Senegal game proved that - so we want to win. Winning three points to start with is very important," said playmaker Rui Costa.

But Portugal, orchestrated by World Player of the Year Luis Figo, have had plenty of time to reflect on how world champions France came unstuck against Senegal on Friday.

"We know we are favourites, but we have to prove it on the field. The U.S. are a good team, they have some very good players (based) in Europe. To beat them, we will have to work and run more than them," striker Nuno Gomes said.

Coach Antonio Oliveira will probably keep the 4-1-3-2 formation that Portugal used to top its qualifying group with Joao Pinto and Pauleta up front.

At the back, Nuno Frechaut is likely to step in for defender Abel Xavier, who has a torn thigh muscle, and midfielder Paulo Sousa is also likely to miss the game with a thigh injury.

Playmaker Rui Costa is fully fit after an injury-plagued season as is Figo, who looked jaded last month after a long season with Champions

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PHOTO: INTERNET

THE DIFFERENCE? Portugal superstar Luis Figo training with team-mates at Suwon World Cup Stadium yesterday.

PROBABLE TEAMS

Portugal (Formation 4-1-3-2; Jersey numbers in the beginning): 1-Vitor Baia; 18-Nuno Frechaut, 2-Jorge Costa, 5-Fernando Couto, 23-Rui Jorge; 20-Armando Petit; 11-Sergio Conceicao, 10-Rui Costa, 7-Luis Figo; 8-Joao Pinto, 9-Pauleta.

USA (Formation 4-1-3-2; Jersey numbers in the beginning): 18-Kasey Keller; 22-Tony Sanneh, 23-Eddie Pope, 12-Jeff Agoos, 2-Frankie Hejduk; 10-Claudio Reyna; 8-Earnie Stewart, 5-John O'Brien, 17-DaMarcus Beasley; 20-Brian McBride, 11-Clint Mathis.

Referee: Byron Moreno (Ecuador)

Rivaldo in a soup

AFP, Seoul/Ulsan

FIFA's disciplinary committee has delayed by 24 hours its verdict on Brazilian star Rivaldo after he faked an injury that led to the expulsion of Turkey's Hakan Unsal.

The committee had planned to watch the video of the incident on Tuesday but FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper said the hearing had been put back to Wednesday.

Rivaldo could face a severe ban and a fine for his actions.

The Barcelona player collapsed at the corner flag clutching his head after Unsal kicked the ball at his leg. Korean referee Kim Young-Joo promptly showed Unsal the red card as Rivaldo rolled in agony.

After the match Rivaldo admitted he had feigned injury.

"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."

Meanwhile, Brazilian coach Luiz Felipe Scolari leapt to the defence of the under-fire midfielder.

"He was protecting his face from the ball," said Scolari, referring to Rivaldo writhing on the ground clutching his face at the corner flag after a ball kicked at him by Hakan apparently hit him only on the leg and arm.

"Rivaldo made a defensive movement because the ball hit him in the leg and was travelling upwards."

"The ball hit him on the hand because he was protecting his face."

Scolari accused the media of "exaggerating" the incident.

"The press is saying Rivaldo is going to be punished because they think that is the most interesting story," he said.

"But the importance of the incident has been exaggerated."

Edgy Eriksson

INTERNET, Kobe

England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson announced he faces the greatest challenge of his career: to raise the spirits of the England players for their vital World Cup clash with one of the favourites of the tournament, Argentina.

The 54-year-old Swede admitted his squad's self-belief and confidence had suffered a mighty blow following England's disappointing 1-1 draw in Sunday's opening game against Sweden.

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PHOTO: AFP

TICKET CROWD! Hundreds of fans wait behind a police barrier for tickets for the South Korea-Poland game at Busan yesterday.

CUP CORNER

REUTERS, Seoul

World Cup officials decided to censor the television pictures on the stadium screen in the first half of England's game with Sweden on Sunday because they threatened to inflame the crowd.

Television replays are usually not shown on big screens in English grounds because of worries they may lead to trouble between rival fans.

Keith Cooper, communications director of soccer's world governing

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TODAY'S MATCHES

Russia vs Tunisia Venue: Kobe Time: 12:30 pm	USA vs Portugal Venue: Suwon Time: 3:00 pm	Germany vs Rep of Ireland Venue: Ibaraki Time: 5:30 pm
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