

Big boys victorious

AFP, Hanoi



Ten-man South Korea came from a goal down to beat unheralded Vietnam 2-1 and maintain their position at the top of Asian Group 7

in World Cup qualifying on Wednesday.

Fellow powerhouse Japan routed India 4-0 in Kolkata to strengthen their leadership in Group 3.

War-torn Iraq were also convincing winners against Taiwan in Group 2.

South Korea were a man down for most of the game in Hanoi after Cha Du-Ri's 11th-minute red-card, fell behind early in the second half when Park Jae-Hong directed a shot from Vietnam's Tai Em past his own keeper.

However, Lee Dong-Gook headed the visitors level before Lee Chun-Soo curled home a delicious free-kick on 77 minutes, silencing the capacity Ho Chi Minh City crowd.

But it was a far from convincing performance from the 2002 World Cup semi-finalists whose defence was repeatedly caught napping by Vietnam's speedy counter-attacks.

In a scrappy opening first 15 minutes both teams struggled to put together any decent attacks, although South Korea dominated territory and possession and were more aggressive on the ball.

But the visitors got off to the worst possible start after the break with Park Jae-Hong accidentally heading Tai Em's shot into the top righthand corner, sending the home fans wild.

However, a period of concerted pressure at the other end saw Lee Dong-Gook head home a cross fired in from the right by Lee Chun-Soo to level the scores.

Thirteen minutes later, Lee Chun-

Soo fired in a David Beckham-esque freekick which curled into the top left-hand corner of the net to save South Korea's blushes.

Japan went ahead through Suzuki in the last minute of the first half. Feyenoord midfielder Shinji Ono extended the lead in the 59th minute. Fukunishi and Miyamoto scored the other goals. Japan only requires draws in their remaining return games against Oman and Singapore to qualify for the next round.

At Dushanbe, Syria grabbed a narrow win over hosts Tajikistan in a Group Six encounter.

The result left Syria with seven points from four matches, three points behind group leaders Bahrain, who clinched a 2-1 away win at Kyrgyzstan on Wednesday to confirm their position at top of the group's table.

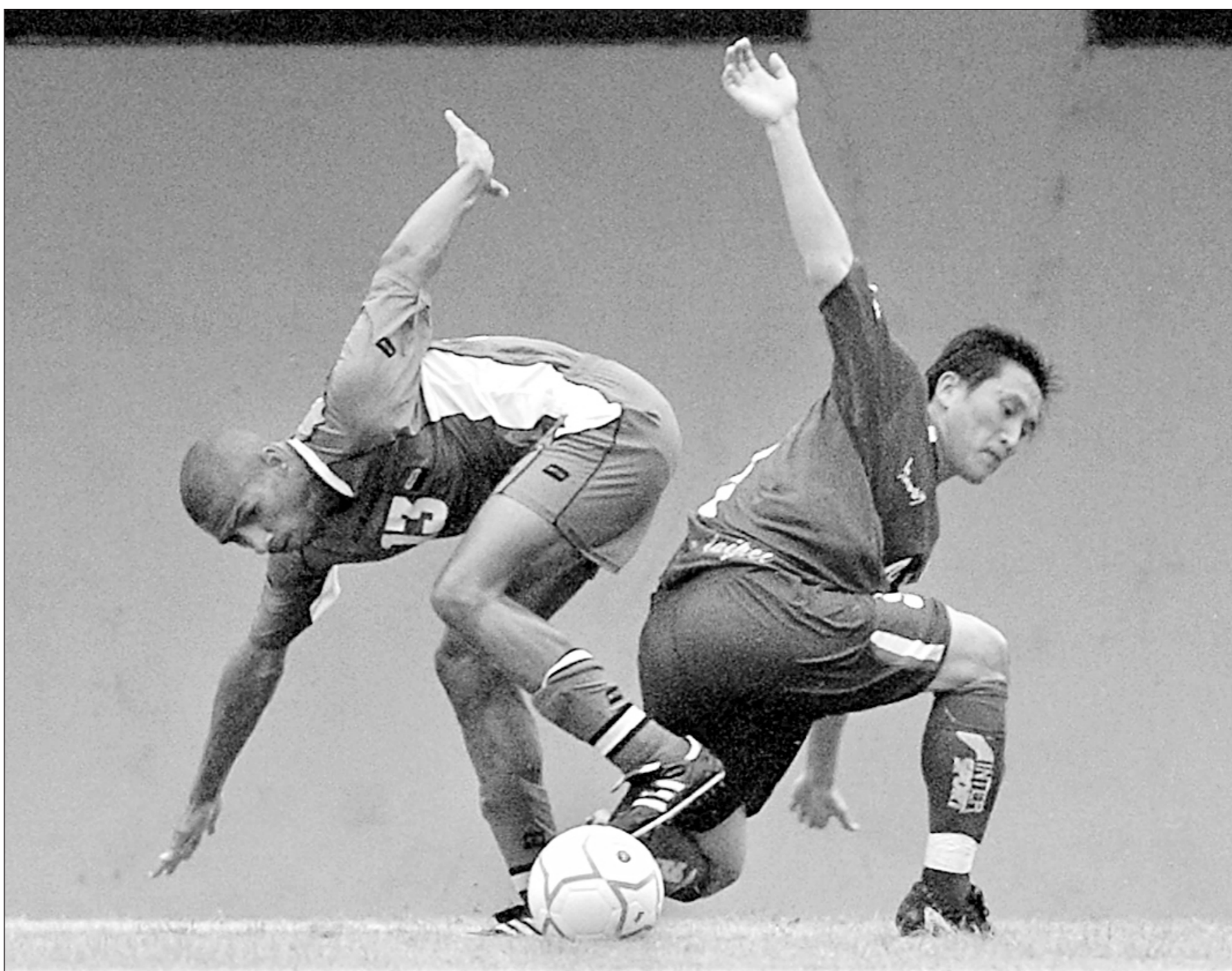
Iraq's footballers carried their Olympic form into World Cup qualifying with a 4-1 victory over Taiwan at Taipei.

The Iraqis, fresh from their semi-finals heroics in Athens, kept up the pressure on Uzbekistan with a convincing win inspired by Salih Sadir, who netted the opener of a first-half double after just three minutes.

Defender Saad Attiya added a third on 82 minutes before Taiwan's late consolation strike through Tsai Hui Kai. Razzaq Farhan wrapped up the scoring at 90 minutes.

Iraq's footballing exploits have been a rare cause for celebration in the war-weary nation with wins over Portugal and Australia in Athens before falling to Paraguay in the semi-finals.

Uzbekistan, two points ahead of Iraq at the top of Group 2 going in to Wednesday's qualifiers, were due to face Palestine in a later fixture.



LET'S DO SOME STRETCHING! Iraq's Aboudy M. Qusay (L) and Chinese Taipei's Chen Jui-te locked in a tussle in Taipei yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Mourinho no pervert!

AFP, Lisbon

Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho denied on Tuesday allegations that he harassed a female football fan as the war of words between him and supporters of his former club Porto intensified.

"It is totally false that Jose Mourinho sent text messages or made phone calls to the female fan," said a statement released by Mourinho's representatives to the Portuguese press.

"The only certainty is that Jose Mourinho has received death threats."

A group of Porto fans has admitted that a fellow spectator had sent death threats to Mourinho on the eve of the Champions League final last season between Porto and Monaco.

The group said that the threat was sent in retaliation after Mourinho was accused of harassing the woman by telephone and text message.

Mourinho revealed last week that he had refused to celebrate Porto's 3-0 win over Monaco in the Champions League final because of the threats, preferring instead to return to his family.

"These rumours attack the honour and dignity of Jose Mourinho," added the statement.

Ironically, Mourinho's Chelsea team have been drawn to play Porto in the opening round of this season's Champions League.

The sides clash on September 29 at Stamford Bridge with the return in Portugal on December 7.

Mutu a mental case

THE SUN

Adrian Mutu has been told to see a shrink after being banned from driving following a dramatic car chase with cops.

The troubled Chelsea striker was hit with a three-month ban after trying to escape from police on the streets of Bucharest at 4am last Thursday.

Mutu, who was in Romania preparing for the World Cup qualifier with Macedonia, at first refused to stop after officers flagged him down for speeding in his BMW X5.

Extra cars had to be drafted in to stop him but when they eventually did he refused to show his ID.

Amazingly, Mutu escaped with a slap on the wrist, a small fine and a ban.

It is the latest incident for a player whose career has hit rock-bottom after falling out with Blues boss Jose Mourinho.

And a leading Romanian psychologist has told Mutu he needs urgent therapy.

Dr Florin Tudose, of the Bucharest University Hospital, said: "We can definitely say there is an identifiable medical case here."

"Mutu has no moral criteria at all. He shows no respect to people and this causes him trouble with his family, at his club, in the streets and at the football stadium."

"He's very puerile and despite being 25 behaves as if he were much younger. He's like a child who demands to have what he wants immediately."

"He is not mentally sick but has extremely serious personality and maturity issues. He needs a specialist to help him."

Mutu recently went through a bitter divorce from wife Alexandra and custody battle for their son Mario.

Abahani

FROM PAGE 13
Joy was later adjudged man-of-the-match.

Yellow cards: Hassan (Abahani) and Shuvra, Anwar (Mohammedan).

TEAMS
ABAHANI: Nizam, Aminul (Siraji), Shawkat, Hassan, Masud Rana, Parvez (Ruku), Joy, Ndem, Nayan (Pranotoshi), Ujjal and Khokon.

MOHAMMEDAN: Bijan, Shuvra, Jewel Rana, Faisal, Kaiser (Nakib), Pappu, Sentu (Anwar), Faisal Mahmud (Khokon Das), Amin Rana and Manju.

Referee: Maruf Shikder.

Film guru buying Napoli

Football

AP, Naples

Film producer Aurelio De Laurentiis will buy financially troubled Napoli for 29.25 million (US\$35.3 million).

De Laurentiis reached an agreement with an Italian court to buy the club, which Diego Maradona led to Serie A titles in 1987 and 1990.

The southern team has been in the hands of various Italian courts since it was disbanded and relegated from the second division to the third in July due to financial problems.

Since then, the club's numerous supporters have protested outside court hearings, and even blocked Naples' central train station on one occasion to show their dismay over the team's fate.

"A new era is beginning and I hope the fans have the patience and the respect for this club that it requires," De Laurentiis said on Monday after his ownership was confirmed.

Napoli has been struggling financially since Maradona left, and has spent five of the past six seasons in Serie B.

However, the club still holds immense sentimental value in Italy, where it is considered the team of the south.

Besides its two Serie A titles, Napoli also finished runner-up four times in the top division.

Perugia owner Luciano Gaucci also attempted to buy the club, but his offers were rejected and he dropped his pursuit of the club on Tuesday.

De Laurentiis previously made failed attempts to buy the club in 1997 and 1999.

He said his role model in taking over the club would be Diego Della Valle, the shoe industrialist who brought Fiorentina back to the top division after it was similarly disbanded and relegated two years ago.

De Laurentiis indicated he would likely hire former Atalanta manager Giovanni Vavassori as the club's new coach.

League officials on Tuesday confirmed Napoli's starting position in the third division -- Serie C1 -- and gave the club until Sept. 23 to acquire new players and have a preseason. The team's first two matches were postponed until later in the season.

Girlfriends don't come easy!

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazilian superstar Ronaldo believes that asking his model girlfriend to marry him was harder than winning the World Cup.

The Real Madrid ace will tie the knot with Daniella Ciccarelli on January 2 next year.

"Asking Daniella's father for permission to marry was ten times

harder than scoring in the World Cup final," Ronaldo told the Brazilian press.

"It's a lot more easier winning the World Cup than being in this situation. Now I can go to Germany a lot happier."

Ronaldo is in the Brazilian team to face Germany in a friendly international game in Berlin on Wednesday in a game being staged to mark the opening of the new look Olympic Stadium.

Shabbir to see specialist

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan pace bowler Shabbir Ahmed will seek specialist help in South Africa for the knee injury that ruled him out of the ICC Champions Trophy, the Pakistan team manager said on Tuesday.

Shabbir returned home from England on Monday after being replaced by all rounder Azhar Mahmood in the Champions Trophy squad.

"Initial scans have shown damaged ligaments in his knee but we want to be sure it is nothing more serious because he is one of our best bowlers," said Haroon Rasheed.

"For the moment he has been advised complete rest for six weeks but we want him fit for the Australian tour in December, which is why we are getting a second opinion about his injury."

Shabbir joins fellow pace bowler Umar Gul on the sidelines.

Gul, who has not played since April, was diagnosed with three stress fractures in his back and been advised to rest for a minimum of six months.

Noffke signs for Durham

AFP, Durham

Australian fast bowler Ashley Noffke will play county cricket for Durham next year, the English club announced on Tuesday.

Alongside Mike Hussey, Noffke becomes the second overseas player to have signed for Durham for the 2005 season.

In 2003, Noffke took 45 wickets in eight games for Middlesex.

"I am really excited about joining Durham," said Noffke.

"Their performance in the National League this year indicates that there is huge potential in this squad and promotion should be in our sights for both forms of cricket next season. I am looking forward to playing a major role in helping the squad to achieve this."

Counting on 'Father' Fidel!

Football

AP, Havana

Diego Maradona's doctors hope a tough paternal role by President Fidel Castro will help the Argentine World Cup hero finally cure his drug addiction in Cuba, Argentina's ambassador said Tuesday.

The doctors plan to ask Castro to take advantage of "the friendly relationship he has with Maradona to become a strict father" to him when he returns here for treatment, Ambassador Raul Taleb told reporters in Havana.

Basing his comments on a recent conversation with Maradona's doctor Alfredo Cahe, Taleb said the former sports great would receive no special privileges in Cuba and could be returned to Argentina -- and even lose his property -- if he failed to follow the court-ordered treatment plan.

When Maradona returns to Cuba in the coming days for treatment, he will stay in a locked psychiatric center, Taleb said. While undergoing treatment in Cuba in the past, Maradona stayed at the upscale La Pradera health tourism resort, where he could come and go as he pleased and invite people to his guest house.

Castro has characterized himself as a friend and admirer of Maradona, and in early July said he hoped Maradona could return to Cuba, where he spent several years undergoing treatment for drug problems.

Castro himself has not publicly commented on the ruling Monday by a federal judge in Buenos Aires that Maradona could return to Cuba. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said Tuesday that Maradona would be welcomed on the island.

"The affection that the Argentines feel is similar that which we Cubans feel (for Maradona)," Perez Roque told reporters who asked him about the former sports star at an unrelated event Monday morning. "He loves our country, he trusts our doctors and he will receive all our support."

It was not immediately

announced when Maradona would travel to the island, but Cahe has said it could be as soon as Friday.

Maradona, who bears a tattoo of Castro's face on one leg, has also

expressed admiration for the Cuban leader and received at least one visit from the president during his earlier stay here.

The 43-year-old Maradona has

been receiving treatment in Argentina since early May, after twice being rushed to a clinic for heart and lung problems.

An admitted cocaine addict, the former Argentine captain had been barred from leaving his native country after several family members sought a legal injunction to keep him from travelling without their consent.

Maradona's former wife and parents had reportedly urged him to continue treatment at home where he could be more closely monitored.

Maradona, who has been confined to a psychiatric hospital for the last three months, appealed to judicial authorities to let him go to Cuba, where he was in a drug rehabilitation program for four years before traveling to Argentina earlier this year.

Argentine Judge Norberto Garcia Vedia, who has been overseeing Maradona's rehabilitation, said the family agreed to his request to seek treatment abroad as long as he was accompanied by a relative.

Maradona has said he would prefer to return to Cuba, where he insists he can remain out of the public eye.

Hector Leguizamon, a member of Maradona's legal team, said Maradona was expected to travel to Cuba with his father, a sister and his personal physician to resume treatment at the Havana psychiatric center.

In Cuba, Maradona is to stay in the National Center for Mental Health, a sprawling complex of individual houses with red-tile roofs in a quiet, palm-tree dotted neighborhood in western Havana.

A portrait of revolutionary icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara marks the main entrance to the center, described by Maradona's doctor as a "closed community." Birds can be heard chirping in the peaceful, suburban-style setting.

Maradona led Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title and 1990 final, and retired in 1997. In 2000, FIFA chose him and Pele as the greatest players in history.



PHOTO: AP

CUBA AT HEART: A file photo taken in February this year of Argentine legend Diego Maradona who is showing a tattoo on his leg of Cuban President Fidel Castro in Havana, Cuba.



PHOTO: AFP

'Strawberry' going to jail?

AP, Riga



A topless woman who interrupted the Latvia-Portugal World Cup qualifier by running onto the field and hugging a Portuguese

defender was charged with hooliganism, Latvia police said on Monday.

She faces up to two years in jail, community service or a fine.

As is customary in Latvia, police identified the woman by her first name, Liene, adding that she went by the nickname "Strawberry."

Her topless run in the 54th minute of Saturday's game drew a roar of approval from the crowd but

appeared to unsettle the Latvian team as Portugal scored two goals just minutes after play resumed. Latvia lost 2-0.

The streak, the first at a Latvian soccer game, appeared to leave police unsettled, too. The woman waited on the field for nearly a minute before officers escorted her off.

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, who was shown on television laughing through the incident, jokingly credited the woman's run as the game's turning point.

But Latvian prosecutors and soccer officials weren't amused. A court date was not announced.

Liene told police she ran on the field in the name of art, saying it made her happy to have brought so

many smiles to the fans and to Scolari.

Fans on the popular Latvian Web forum Delfi thought the charges were severe.

"This is funny, but it's actually tragic," wrote one contributor calling himself Cidons. "For an action that didn't harm anyone and made people laugh they're going to open a criminal case?"

Another thought Latvia should learn from the incident.

"When we play in Portugal we need to get a Portuguese Strawberry to run on the field to mess with the minds of their locals. Then we'll score three goals," wrote a contributor calling himself Smins.