

## Tipu rescues

FROM PAGE 16  
from the short whistle when he blocked Ujjal's powerful shot from point blank range.

In the next two minutes, Abahani's foreign duo Ibrahim and Nizam both sliced through the rival defence but could not keep cool.

Arambagh, who fought bravely before losing 4-3 to Mukti Jiddha in the last round, came close to double the margin from an early second-half counter attack but Kenyan forward Dominic's close range shot was parried by Nizam on one-on-one.

Abahani piled on the pressure but Arambagh fullback Russell's double goal-line saves denied Ibrahim and Ujjal just after the hour-mark.

Having been handcuffed for 78 minutes Abahani finally relieved their fans when Tipu -- tagged super-sub since his match winner against India in the SAF Games football semifinal in 1999 -- scored the equaliser following a combined move down the right.

Ibrahim raced into the rival box with a through from Zahed and the Ghanaian striker cut back a centre at the far post where Tipu, who replaced Farhad just four minutes earlier, effortlessly nodded home with his first touch of the ball.

Abahani, who take on arch-rivals Mohammadi in their next match, raised their collection to seven points compared to Arambagh's one after three outings.

Yellow cards: Ibrahim (Abahani) and Russell, Ritu, Jewel (Arambagh).

## TEAMS

**ABAHANI:** Nizam, Obaidur, Shipon, Pradeep, Lajuk, Zahed, Joy, Ndem (Parvez), Ujjal, Ibrahim and Farhad (Tipu).

**ARAMBAGH:** Shakil, Dulal (Mahmud), Ramjan, Ghansah, Akram, Russell, Juku (Jewel), Imrul, Moshred (Ridon), Dominic and Ritu.

**Referee:** Tayab Hassan.



THE IDOL RETURNS: The legendary Diego Maradona (L) waves to fans as he enters his hotel in Naples on Thursday. Maradona returned to Naples, where he played for Napoli from 1984 to 1991, after 14 years.

## The God back in Naples

REUTERS, Rome

Hundreds of fans gathered at Capodichino airport in Naples on Thursday to welcome back Diego Maradona, 14 years after he last set foot in the city.

The 44-year-old former World Cup winner was returning to the scene of some of his greatest triumphs to appear at a farewell match in honour of former Napoli team mate Ciro Ferrara.

No-one knows whether Maradona will play in the game, which takes place at San Paolo stadium on Thursday and pits a selection of his former Napoli team mates against past and present Juventus players, including Frenchman Zinedine Zidane.

"The moment for him to return to Naples has arrived," Ferrara was quoted as saying in *La Gazzetta dello Sport*.

"He being here would be a present for the 20 years of my career."

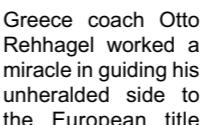
Maradona's arrival for a world record fee of 6.9 million pounds (\$12.59 million) in 1984 signalled the start of a golden period for Napoli, transforming them from a mediocre club into one of the best in the world.

With the Argentine up front, they won two Serie A titles, the Italian Cup and the 1989 UEFA Cup.

## UEFA ZONE QUALIFIERS

## Ukraine stymie Greece

AFP, Paris



Greece coach Otto Rehhagel worked a miracle in guiding his unheralded side to the European title last year but after a 1-0 home defeat to Ukraine on Wednesday he will need to pull off an even greater achievement if they are to make even the play-offs for the 2006 World Cup finals.

A late goal by Andrei Uhsin saw Ukraine take the three points and move to within just two points of qualifying automatically as group 2 winners while Greece slipped to third a point behind bitter rivals Turkey, who slammed pointless Kazakhstan 6-0 away.

Defeat left the hosts without a competitive victory since October last.

However the Dutch will not be able to rest easy as their perennial rivals the Czech Republic racked up another massive win with a 6-1 thrashing of Macedonia, and that after they had gone behind to the visitors.

Group 1 remains too close to call as

group leaders Holland recorded a 4-0 win away against Finland. However, it was only three late goals including one by veteran Philippe Cocu that ensured victory after Ruud van Nistelrooy had given them a 37th minute lead.

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However, Scotland's hopes of at least securing second place suffered a blow with a 0-0 draw in Belarus, though, manager Walter Smith saw some hope for the future.

"I said before the game that Belarus are arguably the best side in the group after Italy in terms of attacking and it was a very tough 90 minutes," Smith said.

"But we showed a great deal of resilience to come away with a result away from home."

"It was always going to be a tough task (qualifying) but we have shown an improvement and I was very proud of the way we played tonight."

Comments probably not to be echoed by Rehhagel.

## AFC ZONE QUALIFIERS

## Asian lineup complete

AFP, Nicosia

 Asian heavyweights Iran, Japan, Saudi Arabia and South Korea lived up to their footballing reputations on Wednesday, all securing wins and clinching automatic qualifying spots for next year's World Cup in Germany.

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Japan secured a 2-0 victory over fierce rivals North Korea, although celebrations were muted with the match played behind closed doors in Bangkok.

Strikers Atsushi Yanagisawa and Masashi Oguro were the heroes for Japan, securing their team's tickets to Germany with second-half goals that ensured their team would finish in the top two of the Asian zone's Group B.

The celebrations were far from muted in Tehran where Iran's 1-0 home win over Bahrain sparked mass celebrations across the Islamic republic.

Huge crowds of delighted residents took to the streets, as the capital and other big cities erupted into a deafening cacophony of car horns, firecrackers and cheering.

"We will go to the World Cup to achieve something there, not only to participate," Iran's elated Croatian coach Branko Ivankovich told reporters.

The win put Iran - the top Asian side and 18th in FIFA's world rankings - top of Asian qualifying Group B with 13 points, followed by Japan with 12 points. Bahrain have four points and the North Koreans none.

The match saw Iran get off to a strong start, with two chances in the third minute, and defender Mohammad Nosrati hitting the post in the fourth. In the first 15 minutes, Iran had seven corners.

But Bahrain were no pushover, quickly managing to assert themselves and had several strong chances in the first half - exposing weaknesses in Iran's defence.

But just seconds into the second half, a free kick from near the corner spot from Fereydoun Zandi found the six yard box and Nosrati headed the ball into the lower right hand corner of the net.

Iran's Mehdi Mahdavikia skinned the post in the 56th minute and found the goalkeeper at close range in the 70th. But much of the rest of the game was anecdotal - as Iran firmed up their defence and waited for the final whistle.

"I swear to God that last night I

dreamed of this goal, and after my first shot hit the post I was afraid God did not like me," Nosrati said after the match. "But when I scored, my dream came true."

"This is one of the most beautiful days of my life, because we have made 70 million people happy," said veteran captain Ali Daei. "We have a lot of plans to prepare our game for the World Cup."

In Group A, South Korea, 2002 World Cup semi-finalists, secured their entry into the World Cup for the eighth time and the third time in succession, with a 4-0 drubbing of Kuwait, whose fans resorted to chanting "Korea, Korea" in the game's final half-hour.

South Korea went ahead in the 19th minute, virtually from their first organized attack, when unmarked Kim Dong-Jin received the ball on the left flank and sent a neat pass for Park Chu-Young who scored from close range.

In the 28th minute, Park Chu-Young broke the offside trap for a one-on-one with the goalkeeper but was brought down in the box by Masaed al-Enezi. Lee Dong-Gook converted from the penalty spot to put the Koreans 2-0 up.

Angered by the result, fans started throwing bottles onto the pitch which forced the Thai referee to stop the game for seven minutes.

Ten minutes after the interval, Kim Sang-Sik fired a powerful shot from the edge of the box to beat diving Kuwaiti goalkeeper Shehab Kankuni.

Park Ji-Sung sealed Kuwait's fate by scoring the fourth goal in the 62nd minute when he deceived Kankuni after penetrating deep into the Kuwaiti area.

But it was Saudi Arabia who topped the group, one point clear of South Korea after a 3-0 win over Uzbekistan.

Inspirational Saudi captain Sami al-Jaber scored twice for the hosts, in the 9th and 60th minutes.

Saad al-Harthi, who came on as a replacement for Jaber in the 68th minute, grabbed a third for Saudi Arabia three minutes from full-time.

The result left Saudi Arabia on top of the Asian qualifying Group 1, with 11 points from five games. South Korea lie second a point behind.

Kuwait are in third place on four points while Uzbekistan lie bottom with two points. These two teams play their last game in Tashkent in August.

The third-place finishers in the two Asian groups will play off

against each other, with the winners facing the fourth-placed team in the North and Central American and Caribbean Zone for a back door entry to Germany 2006.

## Christiano Ronaldo to visit Aceh

AFP, Jakarta

Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo is to visit Indonesia's tsunami-hit province of Aceh this weekend to raise funds for victims of the massive December disaster, an event organized said Thursday.

The 20-year-old Portuguese international will arrive on Saturday and fly to Aceh the same day where he will be reunited with tsunami child survivor Tressor Moreno, an organiser of Ronaldo's trip told AFP.

Martunis triggered an outpouring of aid from Portuguese football officials and players after he was pictured wearing Portugal's national colours after surviving the December 26 disaster.

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That was followed by an unstoppable second from Riquelme in the 18th minute, when the Villarreal player slipped past Roque Junior and scored with a rising shot from 25-metres.

Crespo added the third in the 40th minute when he beat Roque Junior to Javier Saviola's near post cross to head the third.

A rocketing Roberto Carlos free kick brought Brazil to life in the 72nd minute and the River Plate crowd held their breaths when Adriano had a clear-cut chance with six minutes left but fired against the post.

There were also some quality goals in Barranquilla where midfielder Tressor Moreno scored twice in the first ten minutes to spark Colombia's win.

He rifled home a loose ball in the sixth minute and produced a 25-metre scorcher three minutes later

after Juan Pablo Angel chested the ball into his path.

Martin Arzuaga, who plays for local club Atletico Junior, added the third in the 70th minute, two minutes after coming on as substitute.

Luis Jimenez scored in the 30th and 60th minutes to put Chile in command against Venezuela, but the visitors pulled one back with Ruberto Moran's sixth goal of the qualifiers with seven minutes to go.

The defeat virtually ended Venezuela's brave attempt to reach their first World Cup.

"We suffered too much at the end," Chile coach Nelson Acosta said after the second game of his second stint in charge.

"We missed three goals at the start of the second half which would have finished them off."

Carlos Gamarra, Roque Santa Cruz, Julio Cesar Caceres and

Bolivia, however, produced the best goal of the night, a 30-metre first-time effort from Gonzalo Galindo.

## STANDINGS

Standings in the South American qualifying zone for the World Cup finals after Wednesday's matches (played, won, lost, for, against, points)

	Argentina	15	9	4	2	27	15	31
Brazil	15	7	6	2	26	16	27	
Ecuador	15	7	2	6	21	18	23	
Paraguay	15	6	4	5	21	22	22	
Colombia	15	5	5	5	20	12	20	
Chile	15	5	5	5	17	16	20	
Uruguay	15	4	6	5	19	26	18	
Venezuela	15	4	3	8	16	23	1	5
Peru	15	3	6	6	13	19	15	
Bolivia	15	4	1	10	17	30	13	

(Top four teams qualify for the World Cup finals in Germany and the fifth team goes into a playoff against the winner of the Oceania group)

## Derby relish

FROM PAGE 16

Bangladesh are desperate to use the two practice matches including the second one at Worcester as a morale-booster going into the first ODI against England at The Oval on June 16 after a disappointing two-Test series that they lost by innings and inside three days.

LD Sutton will lead Derby, whose brightest son is Bob Taylor and presently coached by former Zimbabwe captain Dave Houghton.