



Japanese goalkeeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi could do nothing about that strike from Mexican midfielder Zinha at the Hannover on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Mexican run continues

AFP, Hannover



Mexico stretched their unbeaten run to 19 mat-ches with a 2-1 win over Zico's Japan in the Confederations Cup here on Thursday.

Atsushi Yanagisawa gave the Japanese an early lead before playmaker Zinha's exquisite equaliser, with Jose Fonseca bagging the second half winner to put Ricardo Lavolpe's side temporarily top of Group B before Thursday's late match between Brazil and Greece.

Mexico made life difficult for the Asian champions especially from the air, a fact Zico readily acknowledged.

"A big problem for us today were the high balls. We're going to have to work to correct that for the next game. It was difficult for our goalkeeper.

"I didn't expect to lose but I'm calm, not uptight about it. We'll go back now and prepare hard for our next match against Greece.

"Mexico had good ball play, especially Zinha who set up most of their play. It's not for nothing

that their in the top ten of FIFA's rankings."

Lavolpe praised his side's mastery of the ball.

"We moved well and had very good control, which is the important thing.

"You always have to respect Japan, but we were a bit surprised by their speed at the start but we got stronger and became more aggressive."

Mexico, who beat Brazil to win the 1999 edition, were missing four first choice players on Copa Libertadores duty as well as injured Barcelona defender Rafael Marquez.

Japan, the first country to reserve their 2006 World Cup seat, welcomed back their best known stars, Fiorentina's Hidetoshi Nakata, and Shunsuke Nakamura, both suspended for their last game against North Korea.

Mexico went close to taking a seventh minute lead but Japan defender Akira Kaji headed away a floating shot from the right with keeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi beaten.

And the FC Tokyo player was soon instrumental in putting Japan ahead when in the 12th

minute he burst down the right flank, crossing to the waiting Yanagisawa who deftly flicked the ball with his backheel past keeper Oswaldo.

Mexico levelled in the 39th minute when a high ball fell to Zinha outside the area and with the Japanese defence asleep the Brazil-born midfielder had what seemed an eternity before lobbing it into the top right hand corner well out of reach of Kawaguchi's grasping hands.

To honour Zinha's third international goal a Mexican wave, what else, rippled round the half empty stadium which numbered Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger among the crowd.

West Brom's Atsuhiko Inamoto replaced Nakamura on the hour and the Premiership player was quick to get into the thick of things with a dangerous 30-yard shot which skimmed the wrong side of the crossbar.

But then second half substitute Luis Perez crossed a high ball into the box for Fonseca to head home in the 64th minute to get Mexico's Confed Cup campaign off to the perfect start.

Johansson wants 'pretty' players' game

AFP, London

Lennart Johansson, the 75-year-old Swede who runs European football, has expressed controversial views over the way women's football should be promoted.

Johansson believes sponsors must make the most of womens' physical attributes.

"There are companies who could make use of a sweaty, lovely looking girl playing on the ground and it would sell," he told BBC Radio.

"Otherwise they have to accept that the money that they ask for comes when the spectators are coming and when the sponsors are interested."

Johansson's comments follow a similar line to those made by FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who has previously claimed women should wear "tighter shorts".

"Let the women play in more feminine clothes like they do in volleyball. They could, for example, have tighter shorts," Blatter, 69, said recently.

"Female players are pretty, if you excuse me for saying so, and they already have some different rules to men - such as playing with a lighter ball.

"That decision was taken to create a more female aesthetic, so why not do it in fashion?"

Johansson steps down as UEFA president in 2007 when Germany's Franz Beckenbauer, the 1974 World Cup winner, and France's Michel Platini are bidding to succeed him.

Germany and Norway, who meet in the final of the European women's Championship at Blackburn on Sunday, might not find the comments so amusing.

Raving about Robinho

AFP, Leipzig



The latest Brazilian football prodigy, Robinho, announced his arrival in Europe with a neatly taken goal and a display of skills which drew a glowing tribute from his coach.

"It is a treasure for us to have such a player, with such a personality and such skills," said Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira after the 21-year-old contributed handsomely to a 3-0 win over European champions Greece in the Confederations Cup in Leipzig on Thursday.

"He is very young and he has such a long way to go. But I think he can try for a starting spot in the team very soon," Parreira added.

With a tired but still effective World Footballer of the Year Ronaldinho feeding him passes from midfield, the elegant Robinho flourished against a Greek side lacking its normal defensive bite.

He could have claimed a hat-trick on his first appearance in Europe had he connected with a first half shot and then a volley on the stroke of half-time, and he had the ball in the net after the break but was

clearly offside.

But his run to connect with the low cross from Gilberto in the 46th minute was world-class, and so were a host of nicely weighted passes.

"It was not an easy game for us, but the instruction from the coach was to pass the ball very fast and that is how we played. I think it worked," Robinho said.

"I was happy to score but I am even happier that we started the tournament with a win."

The young man from Sao Paulo could soon be leaving Pele's old club Santos to join the starry cast at Real Madrid, according to wide-spread rumours.

Robinho has followed the well-travelled Brazilian route from a poor background to riches through football.

Unfortunately, his wealth has made his family a target of kidnappers who snatched his mother Marina Silva de Souza at a barbecue last year, the day after the speculation about Real Madrid began to surface.

Robinho and his advisors took charge of the operation to free his mother -- he gave a remarkable press conference in which he

begged journalists not to write about the case and allow him to deal with the kidnappers and he even asked the police to take their officers off the case.

His strategy worked and his mother was freed by her captors in December 2004 after being held for 41 days.

Comparisons have inevitably been made between Robinho's playing style and Pele, the standard against which every world class player is held.

Pele first set his eyes on Robinho in 1999, when the 15-year-old approached him at the team's headquarters.

The legend predicted in a TV interview at the time that the boy would be a great player.

Robinho rose to prominence in an outstanding young Santos team in 2002, which won the national championship, Robinho giving a fantastic performance in the two-legged playoff final. He duly made his Brazil debut in 2003.

Brazilian veteran Roberto Carlos said recently his compatriot would be joining him at Real Madrid for the 2005-2006 season.

If that is true, the Bernabeu is in for a treat.

Australia to lodge complaint

AFP, Nuremberg

Australia revealed Friday they will lodge an official complaint to football's governing body FIFA about Bastian Schweinsteiger's tackle on Tony Popovic during the 4-3 Confederations Cup defeat against Germany on Wednesday.

Bayern Munich midfielder Schweinsteiger tread on the ankle of Popovic in the 57th minute forcing the Crystal Palace defender to limp off and he will now take no further part in the tournament.

"The foul was a disgrace," raged Australia coach Frank Farina. "That is why we have lodged an official complaint with FIFA."

"If we are talking about fairplay here then this attack is not acceptable."

Paraguayan referee Carlos Amarilla missed the incident and did not blow up for a foul leaving the Australian players furious.

Brothers Union

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Arambagh custodian Shakil just 60 seconds later.

Yellow cards: Akram Hossain (Arambagh) and Parvez Babu (Brothers).

TEAMS

Arambagh: Shakil, Ghansha, Murad (Monu), Ramjan, Akram, Dulal, Imu, Dominic, Rintu (Sohel), Ridhan (Faisal) and Murshed.

BROTHERS: Tareq, Suján, Siraji (Liton Khan), Jewel, Shuvro, Parvez Babu, Khokon (Pranotosh), Abul (Monwar), Liton, Edward and Emily.

Referee: Hannan Miron.

Lloyd aspires

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however, be nominated by one of the Caribbean's regional cricket bodies.

"My vast experience as player, captain, manager and ICC referee at the highest level renders me uniquely qualified for this post," he commented.

A new board president will be elected next month following Teddy Griffith's decision to step down.

As well as trying to raise the standard of the game at all levels in the Caribbean, the successful candidate will also have the task of overseeing preparations for the 2007 World Cup.

A statement issued on his behalf said Griffith, who was elected in September 2003, would not be able to "commit the energy and resources required to fulfil the role" because of personal and family considerations.

B'DESH V ENG SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the opening one-day international of the triangular NatWest Series between Bangladesh and England at The Oval in London on Thursday:

BANGLADESH: 190 all out in 45.2 overs (Aftab 51, Rafique 30, Mortuza 29 not out, Iqbal 19, Bashir 19, Javed 13; Harmison 4-39, Lewis 3-32, Gough 2-33)

ENGLAND

Trescethick not out	100
Strauss not out	82
Extras: (lb-5, w-1, nb-4)	10
Total: (Without loss in 24.5 overs)	192

Did not bat: Vaughan, Collingwood, Flintoff, Pietersen, Jones, Solanki, Lewis, Gough, Harmison

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mortuza	6	1	33	0
Nazmul	7	0	61	0
Mahmud	3	0	39	0
Rafique	6	0	40	0
Aftab	2.5	0	14	0

Result: England won by 10 wickets.

Man-of-the-match: Marcus Trescothick.

Toss: England.

Umpires: Mark Benson (England) and Aleem Dar (Pakistan).

ARGENTINA V AUSTRALIA

LIVE ON ESPN 12:40AM

Another classic contest?

AFP, Nuremberg



Having proved they are not just at the Confederations Cup to make up the numbers, Australia take on in-form Argentina in their second match of the tournament on Saturday.

The Australians pushed host nation Germany all the way of a pulsating opening match in Frankfurt, only to lose 4-3 as the unconvincing Germans pulled away at the end.

Now they face the Argentinians, who beat Brazil 3-1 last week to clinch qualification for the 2006 World Cup and overcame Tunisia 2-1 in their first match in this tournament on Wednesday.

Australia coach Frank Farina said his side had deserved a better outcome against Germany.

"When you score three goals you

expect to win," he said.

"The referee made some poor decisions throughout the match and now it will be very difficult for us as we need to win both remaining group games."

The Australians' task became greater when it was announced that key defender Tony Popovic is likely to miss the rest of the tournament because of a badly sprained ankle.

However, Mark Viduka may finally return to the national side after recovering from a hamstring injury that has restricted him to just a handful of minutes for his English Premiership club Middlesbrough this year.

Viduka's strength could pose problems for an Argentinian defence that was breached by the lively Tunisians and goalkeeper German Luk looked vulnerable.

Argentina coach Jose Pekerman has made no secret that he is using the eight-nation Confederations Cup as a chance to try out younger players as he searches for a winning

formula for next year's finals in Germany.

The lineup that takes the field against Australia is likely to show a number of changes.

"There are a lot of positives to take from this game, but a few negatives too," he said after the Tunisia match.

"A lot of the players out on the pitch this evening lacked experience, but it's good to know I can count on them."

Argentina defender Juan Pablo Sorin said there were no weak links at this tournament.

"All the teams here are strong, every game will be a tough test. We'll turn our attention to Australia now, and we'll only start thinking about Germany after that."

Argentina meet Germany in Nuremberg on Tuesday, while Australia will complete their group games against Tunisia in Leipzig the same day.

GERMANY V TUNISIA

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 9:55PM

Semis spot beckons hosts

AFP, Cologne



Hosts Germany have the opportunity to all but book a place in the semi-finals of the Confederations Cup when they take on African champions Tunisia on Saturday.

While the opening 4-3 Group A win over Australia was far from convincing the three points means another victory over Tunisia will virtually secure Germany's passage into the last four.

"We were criticised after the Australia game but if we win against Tunisia we are in the semi-finals," said Germany keeper Oliver Kahn.

Kahn is expected to make way for Jens Lehmann in goal, as manager Jurgen Klinsmann continues to rotate his goalkeepers, and the Arsenal man will not want to concede three times.

"We need to be more compact against Tunisia," explained

Klinsmann. "Australia had too much space in midfield and we cannot let that happen again."

Tunisia lost their first group match 2-1 to Argentina, rueing a first half penalty miss, but captain and Ajax star Hatem Trabelsi is confident for the Germany encounter.

"It will be a totally different match against Germany - they play very differently to Argentina and I think we can upset them," Trabelsi said.

Tunisia have played Germany just twice and on both occasions the spoils have been shared, with a 0-0 draw in the 1978 World Cup and a 1-1 friendly draw in Tunis in 1993.

"Tunisia may not be the most attractive team but they are effective," declared Germany captain Michael Ballack.

"They are a good side and their style is more European than African style because of their manager."

Roger Lemerre won this compe-

tion with France in 2001 but just getting out of the group stage with debutants Tunisia would be an achievement.

The last time Germany played in Cologne they beat Belgium 3-0 in a friendly and the local crowd are looking forward to seeing their 20-year-old striking sensation Lukas Podolski in action.

"It will be something special for me to play in front of my own fans," admitted Podolski. "I hope I can score a goal for them."

The bolder attacking approach of Klinsmann is likely to see Podolski and Kevin Kuranyi continue in attack with Ballack coming from deep.

As an attacking unit Germany looked potent in their opening match but must find a way to stabilise a defence that has leaked five goals in its last two matches.

With nothing to lose Tunisia may choose to test out the German backline with a more adventurous line-up.

Greece melt

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men behind the ball, Brazil's superior technique told as the artistry of Ronaldinho, Robinho, Kaka and Adriano found increasingly large gaps in the Greek defence.

Greece could have gone ahead as early as the second minute, though, when the unmarked Sotirios Kyrgiakos wasted a clear header.

It was their last clearcut chance until first-half stoppage time when Angelos Haristeas swept the ball into the side netting with only Brazilian keeper Dida to beat.

Brazil missed a good chance after 17 minutes when Ronaldinho jinked his way past a defender to set up Robinho for a rasping shot which Nikopolidis saved superbly.

Kyrgiakos was a tower for Greece at the back and followed Adriano like a shadow all over the pitch, but was powerless to stop him scoring four minutes before the break.

Kyrgiakos had only just returned to the field after being treated for a leg injury and for once allowed some daylight between himself and Adriano, who took full advantage.

Robinho could also have doubled Brazil's lead with the last kick of the first half when he

volleyed high and wide unmarked at the far post -- although he made up for that seconds after the break with Brazil's second.

With the likes of Cafu, Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo all missing from this squad, Parreira is testing younger players like right-back Cicinho and Robinho, who both acquitted themselves well.

Greece's German coach Otto Rehhagel, starting the match with eight of the players who won Euro 2004 a year ago, saw his team play with their usual gritty defensive strength.

But the Brazilian rearguard, helped by an outstanding Roque Junior, performed even better and in the end, there was only one team in it.

Rehhagel admitted: "It was a special feeling for us today, there were so many Greek fans here."

"It was just a shame it was not a more open match and I wish we could have put up more of a fight against them. I think we played better in the second half but it was against Brazil and it is always difficult against Brazil."

"You can't do much against a bomb kick that from Adriano. You can't shut Brazil down for 90 minutes."

Twenty20 cricket

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It would be played after completion of the Hot Weather matches which start on Saturday.

"We are planning to organise 20-20 overs matches involving all top eight teams of Premier Division for the Super Hot Weather 20-20 Cup," DDCAsports secretary Sunil Dev told a press conference here.

Dev also announced that the Hot Weather Cricket tournament would begin on Saturday.

"This year's Hot Weather Cricket tournament will be on a knock-out basis which will be participated by 42 teams. The matches will be played on 10 grounds in 12 days," he said.

DDCA general secretary SP Bansal said the new Kotla pitch would be ready by the end of this month. "The work at the Kotla ground, including installation of flood lights, would be over in six months".

Dev also announced the launch of DCCA website. "Our website would be available from this evening."

"We are much ahead in launching our website comparing to BCCI. The website will have daily match details as well as other features," he said.

The DCCA aimed at an improved performance from the players in view of which it would select the teams "much before important tournaments from this year", Dev said.

He also informed that match referees would be appointed in all the matches of the tournament.

Strauss warns Aussie tail

Cricket

AFP, London

England batsman Andrew Strauss has told Australia's tail-enders to expect plenty more short-pitched bowling below this season's one-dayers and Ashes Test series are finished.

When the sides met for the first time this year, at the Rose Bowl on Monday, England won a Twenty20 contest by 100 runs.

But arguably of greater significance was the moment when Australia fast bowler Brett Lee was hit on the right shoulder batting against pace bowler all-rounder Andrew Flintoff.

That in turn may have contributed to the change of bowling action that prevented the New South Wales paceman from bowling his full quota of overs in Australia's shock four-wicket defeat against Somerset at Taunton on Wednesday.

Such has been Australia's dominance in winning the last eight Ashes series against England they've rarely had need to resort to intimidatory bowling -- a thorny topic ever since England's infamous 4-1 'Bodyline' series win in Australia in 1932-33 when the tourists' quicks

were accused of too often aiming at batsmen's bodies rather than their stumps.

However 28-year-old left-hander Strauss, speaking after scoring an unbeaten 82 in England's 10-wicket triangular opening thrashing of Bangladesh at The Oval on Thursday, said there was a place for short-pitched bowling.

"Someone like Brett Lee loves the ball being pitched up and he'll try to spank you over your head if you do."

"The bowlers we've got, the likes of Flintoff and (Stephen) Harmison, do that as a matter of course against any tail really and rightly so because tail-enders don't like it short and at their bodies."

"It's a good tactic and I'm sure we'll continue to do it as the summer goes on. I'm sure we'll be getting our fair share as well."

"It goes with the territory a little bit these days and fortunately we've got bowlers who can do that."

But Strauss, who scored a century at Lord's against New Zealand last year, warned that world champions Australia could more than cope with Lee's absence.

"They are a weaker side without him in it. But they are certainly not a one-man bowling attack and the other guys (Glenn McGrath, Jason Gillespie and Michael Kasprovic),

are more than capable of doing a job themselves.

"We've got the advantage in pace if Brett Lee is not playing but it's only one component of the game really."

Meanwhile Strauss played down the impact of Wednesday's game where Australia lost despite scoring 342 for five.

"It was interesting Somerset got 340-odd but we all know what the wicket is like at Taunton and it is possible to do that."

"It hasn't been ideal for them but I remember last time they came over here (in 2001) they lost to Middlesex in a warm-up game which I was playing in."

"Everyone was saying 'are things slipping?' and they went on and won the one-day series very comfortably."

"They'll be very, very keen to come back strongly on Sunday. I'm sure they'll hit us pretty hard and it should be a good tussle."

But Strauss, who played alongside McGrath and Australia Test batsman Justin Langer at Middlesex, said that for all their desire to win on the field, the teams enjoyed friendly relations away from the middle.

"They are a good bunch of lads. It's going to be a fairly competitive summer on the pitch but that doesn't mean we can't speak off the pitch."

Testing time for Sharapova

WIMBLEDON

REUTERS, London

Maria Sharapova has become a multi-million-dollar industry since her stunning Wimbledon triumph a year ago when she demolished Serena Williams in the final.

Lucrative contracts and modelling assignments have rolled in for the statuesque, 18-year-old Siberian. Marketing executives queue up for a slice of the action and Sharapova has even launched her own brand of perfume.

Next week, though, is all about tennis and Maria the business-woman will be consigned firmly to the locker room when Sharapova walks out on Centre Court on Tuesday to begin the defence of her title against Spain's Nuria Llagostera Vives.

Maria the fiercely competitive tennis player, with her nerves of steel and icy stare, will have only

one objective -- proving that last year was no flash in the pan.

It will be a tough assignment, even for a young woman who sacrificed a normal childhood at the age of nine, left her mother and arrived in Florida with just a handful of dollars.

Before a couple of days of "retail therapy" in London, Sharapova completed her Wimbledon warm-up by retaining her title in Edgbaston, stretching an unbeaten run on grass to 17.

However there were times when the Russian world number two, suffering from a cold and aching limbs, appeared distinctly ill at ease with her game.

Three times she was pushed to a deciding set as her game see-sawed between spectacular winners and elementary errors.

Sharapova is unlikely to change her all-or-nothing approach on the slick Wimbledon grass, although tactically she will have to smarten up if she is to

fend off the challenge of her main title rivals.

Two of those lurk in her half of the draw, with fourth seed Serena Williams or rejuvenated Belgian Justine Henin-Hardenne, seeded seven, her likely semifinal opponents.

Twice former champion Williams, who missed the French Open with an ankle injury, is likely to make as big an impact with her latest outfit as her tennis, although the powerful American will be hard to stop if she survives the opening rounds.

Observers announcing the end of the Williams era have already had to eat their words once this year after Serena captured the Australian Open title in January.

Henin-Hardenne, who tuned 23 just before claiming her second French Open title earlier this month, outclassed Sharapova in the uarter-finals at Roland Garros.

Bodyline ball

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and Bill Woodfull.

Woodfull said at the time: "There are two sides out there. One is trying to play cricket, the other is not."

"The game is too good to be spoilt. It is time some people got out of it."

Auctioneer Paul Keen looked forward to a lucrative return from the precious piece of memorabilia: "I have not found any record of any other balls from the bodyline tour coming up in public auction," he observed.

"With the Ashes series fast approaching this could prove of interest to many cricket followers."