



Uzbekistan striker Ulugbek Bakaev (L) surges past Bangladesh midfielder Ujjal during their 2007 Asian Cup qualifier at the Army Stadium in Banani on Wednesday.

Bangladesh welcome 4-star Uzbekistan

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Uzbekistan did not have to reveal their full strength to down Bangladesh 4-0 in the Group F 2007 Asian Cup qualifier at the Army Stadium yesterday and stay alive for a place in next year's finals with their second win in the competition.

Heavy shower shortly before the match came as a relief for the Uzbeks, who were worried about transition from Tashkent's cold to the hot and humid conditions here but happily pushed their collection to eight points with four first half strikes.

After new Bangladesh captain Aminul foiled two early attempts in front of empty stands of the tiny stadium, the visitors opened the floodgate in the 11th minute. Dynamo Kiev striker Maksim

Shatskikh dribbled past two defenders at the right flank and cut the ball back to the path of bald-headed Ilyas Zeytullaev -- the Genoa midfielder from Serie B called first time for the qualifiers -- who neatly pushed the ball into the far corner.

Aminul was rooted to his line again when unmarked forward Ulugbek Bakaev doubled the lead seven minutes later with a glancing header when Leonid Koshelev intercepted a pass by rival back Rajani at the left wing and sent an inch-perfect centre.

Aminul denied Shatskikh from a sitter but the Bangladeshi goalkeeper handled the ball outside his area in the process, awarding a freekick. Diminutive midfielder Server Djeparov curled in a low drive past the wall, giving Aminul no chance in the 22nd minute.

A minute later, Bangladesh hit back with veteran striker Alfaz who set a chance for Moni but his volley from close was tipped over the bar. Nazrul made a goaline

save on a shot by Shatskikh who later rattled the upright as Uzbekistan failed to increase the margin.

Coach Hassanuzzaman Bablu brought fresh legs in Emily and Zahid who fought for the ball and looked more effective than the overweight pair Alfaz and Moni. The hosts shared equal ball possession but Bangladesh, pointless after five losses in as many matches, could not get a consolation goal when fullback Waly Faisal mishit a chance with the rival keeper at his mercy.

"We conceded four goals due to defensive errors. I felt that it was wrong for trying to attack and match a team like Uzbekistan," said Bablu after the match.

"However, we cut down on the mistakes and successfully stopped their attacks in the second half. I am satisfied because I saw my young players also go on the offensive, unlike the match against Qatar when we packed our defence."

"The technical improvement is positive as we want to build a team for the future," added the former national winger.

Despite a big win, Uzbekistan coach Valeri Nepomniatchi said that he was not satisfied.

"I am unhappy because the scoreline should have been doubled. We did not play that good after the break. The condition, however, was very tiring and I must say Bangladesh put on a spirited performance," said the former Cameroon coach, who took the 'Indomitable Lions' to the 1990 World Cup qualifiers and shot into fame.

"I am not worried about qualification to the finals. I hope my players would be on their best against Qatar in the final round."

When asked about Zeytullaev's performance, the Turkmenistan-born coach said that as he had seen very little of the Italy-based player, he was happy for his indefatigable performance.

Bangladesh will play their last qualifier away at Hong Kong in mid-November.

TEAMS
UZBEKISTAN: Juraev, Innomov, Aliqulov, Fyodorov, Suyunov, Zeytullaev (Magdeev 61st minute), Djeparov, Kapade, Koshelev (Denisov, 46th), Bakaev (Geynrikh, 76th) and Shatskikh.
BANGLADESH: Aminul, Parvez Babu, Nazrul, Rajani, Ariful, Waly, Munna (Ujjal, 69th), Arman Aziz, Abdul, Alfaz (Emily, 55th) and Moni (Zahid, 55th).

Australia finished top of their group and claimed a seeding at next year's Asian Cup football finals with a controlled 2-0 win over an under-strength Bahrain here Wednesday.

The Socceroos had few problems with the under-23 Bahrain side, scoring twice in the first half and dominating possession throughout.

The Australians, who were the first team to qualify for the July 7-29 finals, will now hope to avoid the region's other big footballing powers in December's draw.

Ranked 38 after reaching the last 16 of the World Cup, Australia are the highest-placed Asian nation on FIFA's standings.

Fielding a team full of European-based players, the experienced and polished Socceroos, 3-1 winners in February's away leg in Manama, had the Bahrainis under pressure for virtually all of the match.

Bahrain brought their under-23 squad to Australia, preferring to rest their first team for next month's make-or-break home match with group rivals Kuwait.

Australia received a shock when they crashed 2-0 in Kuwait in their last Asian Cup group match, but they were never in danger on Wednesday.

Striker John Aloisi scored his 25th goal from close range on 18

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SOCER OR RUGBY? Bahrain's Ali Aamer Musaifer (L) jumps all over Australia forward John Aloisi during their Asian Cup Qualifier in Sydney on Wednesday.

Juve confident of leniency

AFP, Rome

Juventus president Giovanni Cobelli said he was confident his club would be given a lighter sentence for their part in the Serie A match-fixing scandal as their final appeal began here on Wednesday.

Juve were relegated to Italy's second division (Serie B) and made to start on minus 17 points for their part in rigging matches in the 2004/05 season -- and they expect to be shown leniency.

"We expect a substantial reduction of our penalty," Cobelli said as he left the Court. "Our lawyers have stated their case and their counterparts have had their say. We are confident."

Despite growing pressure on the judges for a quick decision with the season already under way, the appeal verdicts are not expected to be known until the end of the month.

Later Wednesday fellow match-fixers AC Milan and Lazio will present their appeals to the Court, while Fiorentina will be heard on Thursday.

Unlike Juventus, AC Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio were all allowed to keep their Serie A status due to their lesser involvement in the scandal, but they were deducted points.

AC Milan started on minus eight points, Fiorentina on minus 19 and Lazio on minus 11. All of the four guilty clubs qualified for European competition, but only AC Milan were allowed to participate.

The four clubs have already seen their original sentences reduced in earlier appeals and are now seeking further cuts in the last possible avenue left open to them within the boundaries of the sports authorities in Italy.

If unhappy with the Court of Arbitration's verdicts, the clubs could take their appeals to the civil courts, but that could lead to further punishment from the Italian football federation (FIGC).

The FIGC, who handed down the original sentences, are firmly against clubs taking action outside of the sports authorities' legal framework.

The next six minutes saw a flurry of bookings from Swedish referee Stefan Johannesson, as the teams picked up four cards between them.

This glut of bookings included, crucially, a red for Ecuador's Antonio Valencia who had been so strong in attack. Wigan striker Valencia was sent off for a messy elbowing which floored Dudu. Once the Brazilian finally stood up, the referee gave him a yellow.

One man down, Ecuador began to feel the pressure as Brazil started to dominate the game.

Just before the break Fred levelled for Brazil after a shocking display from the Ecuadorian defence. Espinoza attempted a clearance only to find the Lyon striker who smashed it into the right hand corner.

The second half opened to hysterical cheers as Ronaldinho took to the field for the first time. The Barcelona star soon found Fred.

Meanwhile the capital was warming up for the match with a lot of Croatian fans, dressed in the national colours of red and white, walking in downtown Zagreb.

France manager Raymond Domenech hopes the shock treatment meted out by Scotland at the weekend will serve as a wake-up call to his World Cup finalists.

France fell 1-0 to Walter Smith's side at Hampden Park and are looking to get their Euro 2008 qualification back on track against minnows the Faroe Islands here on Wednesday.

Asked at the eve of match press conference on the lessons to be learned by Saturday's surprise loss Domenech said: "I'd like us to worry about it a little. There's this lethargy, this idea that we're the best team in the world... everything's made us fall under this spell -- our first qualifying results, the World Cup just gone, even the media who don't criticise us anymore!"

"The team's missing something. The necessary worry, that's what acts as a motivating factor. But I'm talking about myself when I say 'worry', the players know what they did, or didn't do, against Scotland."

He conceded Saturday's defeat was a slip-up.

"The match in Glasgow was a faux pas, that's true. But we could go and win 8-0 on Wednesday but that wouldn't change the result against Scotland."

"It's like at the World Cup. We lost, full stop."

France striker Thierry Henry stressed the importance of hitting the amateurs from the Faroe Islands hard early on to make up ground in the race to qualify for the next European championships.

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Brazil midfielder Kaka (top) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Ecuador at the Rasunda Stadium in Solna on Tuesday.

Kaka lifts Brazil

Football

AFP, Stockholm

Brazil came from behind to beat Ecuador 2-1 in an international friendly at Raasunda stadium in Stockholm on Tuesday.

Robinho picked up a yellow card in the 80th minute for a needless trip on De La Cruz.

Ronaldinho came close to bringing his 14-month goal drought for his country to an end with a stunning free kick that hammered into the woodwork.

In the dying minutes Brazil maintained the pressure on Ecuador but knew their work was done.

Perhaps not the best display from Brazil, but enough to beat an increasingly desperate and defensive Ecuador.

The Swedes clearly loved their South American guests, with play being held up three times due to fans running onto the pitch, embarrassing Raasunda officials.

One fan, sporting the Barcelona strip, was able to run the length of the pitch before throwing himself around Ronaldinho's neck. He was bundled off by security staff shortly afterwards.

"Supporters that run onto the pitch should be jailed for a month," Brazil coach Dunga said after the match.

Dembele had been a member of both the France under-18 and under-19 teams.

French player arrested

AFP, Rome

French footballer Garra Dembele was arrested in Rome overnight on suspicion of raping an American student at a club in the Italian capital, police said Wednesday.

"We have arrested a French citizen a little over 20 years old of Malian origin who is accused of sexual assault," police official Alberto Intini told a news conference.

The player "admitted trying to approach the American woman but he denied having committed any violent act," Intini said, adding that the footballer said he "could not remember (what) happened because he was drunk."

The American was allegedly raped late Monday night at a chic club in the center of Rome near the Piazza Navona.

Dembele, a former player with French first division club Auxerre, was in the Italian capital for a trial with lower league side Cisco Roma, according to the ANSA news agency. He tried out for Serie A club Lazio during the summer.

Dembele had been a member of both the France under-18 and under-19 teams.



From (L-R) Trix and Flix, mascots for the Euro 2008 Championships in Austria and Switzerland pose for photographers during their presentation in Innsbruck on Tuesday.