



Ghana's Asamoah Gyan (C) leaps high to head towards Nigeria goal during their friendly match at Griffin Park in Middlesex on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ghana hammer Nigeria

Football

AFP, London

Ghana will believe they conclusively proved that they are Africa's strongest football nation after hammering Nigeria 4-1 in their international friendly in west London here on Tuesday.

The Black Stars had not beaten their west African neighbours in 15 years, but this, their biggest win over Nigeria since 1960, was as emphatic as they come.

Level at half-time, Ghana took control in the early minutes of the second half.

With 50 minutes played, Stephen Appiah laid in Asamoah Gyan, drawing a smart save from Vincent Enyeama.

The ball, though, was never fully cleared, and when it fell to Laryea Kingston, he advanced two paces, and smashed a low drive from 22 yards into the bottom corner.

For the winger, recently signed by Hearts, it was a moment of catharsis. Suspended from the World Cup after CAF took draconian action following a minor spat with Senegal's Habib Beye during the African Nations Cup a year ago, he had seemed noticeably keen to

make his mark.

Involved in most of Ghana's most enterprising play in the first half, his heavenward glance after scoring spoke volumes of his emotion at setting Ghana on their way to a win that will reverberate through the annals of the region's football history. Three minutes later it got even better for Ghana, as Sulley Muntari, finding space on the left side of the box, worked the ball onto his right foot before lashing it into the top

corner of the net. And by the hour, it was three, Junior Agogo deftly converting a right-wing cross from Gyan.

A 64th-minute Taye Taiwo penalty, smacked home after John Utaka had been tripped, gave Nigeria some hope, but that was dashed with 13 minutes remaining.

Asamoah Frimpong had been on the field only a minute when he seized on the loose ball as Michael Essien bundled into the box, and

stroked a low shot into the corner.

Austin Eguavoen, who will step aside as Nigeria manager to be replaced by former German handler Berti Vogts later this week had criticised Mourinho for his efforts to keep Mikel out of the game, and he brooked no compromise, keeping the midfielder on the field until the final whistle.

Even Mikel, though, could not prevent Eguavoen's reign ending in the ignominy of a crushing defeat.

Moratti supports new laws

Football

INTERNET, undated

Inter chief Massimo Moratti insists the Italian game is now on the right path to combating football violence.

Football in the peninsula looks set to resume this weekend – if confirmed by a special cabinet meeting on Wednesday – and Moratti has applauded the proposed new measures designed to clean up the game.

"The decision to resume playing immediately has not been made out

of the interests of the clubs, but for the fans," said the Nerazzurri owner.

"I think that the laws that are being proposed are the right ones, this is the path to follow.

"We will obtain the results we are hoping for if there is a strong cooperation between every component of the footballing world.

"I don't think these laws will distort the championship, refereeing mistakes distort it much more. Now we just have to work together for the common good of this sport."

Minister for Sport Giovanna Melandri has reiterated that only stadiums who satisfy the Legge

Pisanu will be permitted fan entry.

Currently only the stadiums in Palermo, Rome, Turin and Siena fit the bill, but Moratti believes that supporters will be allowed to enter the San Siro for the big match between Inter and Roma, which could take place in mid-April.

"I really don't think it will be played behind closed doors because the stadium in Milan should be fine," said the oil tycoon.

"The decision to ban fans would be okay for a short period, but it cannot be a regulation that lasts forever."

South Korea stun Euro champions

REUTERS, London

A stunning late free-kick from Lee Chun-soo gave South Korea a 1-0 victory over Greece in Tuesday's international friendly played in front of a sparse but passionate crowd at Craven Cottage.

Lee curled in a 78th-minute effort from the tightest of angles to provide the 2002 World Cup semifinalists with the ideal preparation for their upcoming Asia Cup campaign.

It was the European champions, however, who dominated a first half which slowly came to life. Manchester City striker Georgios Samaras was their most potent threat, firing just wide on two occasions.

Both sides hit the woodwork before and after halftime as first Lee headed against the post before a Greek substitute Stelios Giannakopoulos's header hit the bar.

The Bolton Wanderers' midfielder proved to be the Greeks' main outlet following his introduction for Samaras at halftime and he later had an injury-time effort ruled out for offside.

Yet his side could hardly bemoan the assistant referee's flag as five minutes earlier Feyenoord's Angelos Charisteas had somehow contrived to miss from six metres out.

Toni 'favours' Juve move

INTERNET, undated

Florentina striker Luca Toni is keen on moving to Juventus at the end of the season, according to reports in Italy.

The Italian international allegedly met with Juve market consultant Roberto Bettega recently where he is understood to have confirmed his availability – even though Juve will be out of Europe next term.

Turin-based newspaper Tuttosport reports that Viola sporting director Pantaleo Corvino has received permission from the Della Valle family, who own the club, to discuss the player's transfer with any interested party.

Toni was paired with a move to Inter last summer after underlining that he wanted to fight for the Scudetto and play in the Champions League, but the Viola blocked his sale.

Now the World Cup winner has reportedly told Bettega that playing in Europe is no longer a primary objective even if he's underlined that Fiorentina will decide his future.

Juventus – the current Serie B leaders – are searching for a possible replacement for David Trezeguet, as the Frenchman seems set on leaving Turin 12 months before his contract expires.

Meanwhile, the Bianconeri are closely following Javier Saviola who has yet to renew his contract with Barcelona which expires in June.

The 25-year-old Argentine is on Didier Deschamps' wish-list after the two worked successfully together at Monaco.

"My first choice is Barcelona and now I am only waiting for the club to make an offer, then I will decide if I will accept it or not," said El Conejo to newspaper La Nacion.

"Where will I be in June? I don't know, there are several issues that need to be resolved before I can make a decision."

Zola interested in Sydney job

AFP, Sydney

Former Italian international Gianfranco Zola has expressed interest in managing troubled Australian A-League side Sydney FC, reports said Wednesday.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported Zola was impressed with the set-up at Australia's richest club when he travelled Down Under over the Christmas break.

"This interest is genuine," a spokesman for Zola told the newspaper. "He definitely believes a move to Australia is something he would like to do, and he feels he could help take the club forward.

"It's really up to the club to make the first move."

Zola was capped 35 times for Italy and was a crowd favourite in his 229 appearances for English Premiership side Chelsea from 1996 to 2003. He is currently assistant coach of the Italian under-21 team.

His interest in Sydney FC comes amid recriminations at the club over its elimination from the A-League finals last week, with speculation current coach Terry Butcher is on borrowed time.

Hollywood actor Anthony LaPaglia, a high-profile Sydney FC shareholder, tried to have Butcher sacked last October and Sydney's Daily Telegraph reported Wednesday that the former England captain had lost the support of his players.

The Telegraph reported Sydney FC had offered to pay out six months of the remaining year left on Butcher's contract.

Hiddink cool on Chelsea talk

Football

INTERNET, undated

Russia coach Guus Hiddink has played down speculation that he will replace Jose Mourinho as Chelsea manager in the summer.

The Dutchman admits that Blues owner Roman Abramovich played a major role in getting him to take over his latest job but he fears the country's football fans would be very upset if Abramovich decided to poach their national team boss.

Russia are battling to qualify from England's Euro 2008 group and Hiddink is remaining focused on the job in hand rather than looking to displace Mourinho.

"In fact, I already had a friendly contact with Roman Abramovich before I started the job as coach for the Russian team," he told Die Welt.

"I discussed with him and the chairman of the Russian Football Federation – Vitaly Mutko – possi-

ble perspectives for my job and to open up new vistas.

"Roman's interest and his promise of support was one reason that I signed the contract with Russia after a good deal of thought.

"I can only say (about Chelsea) that I've never spoken with Roman Abramovich about a possible commitment with Chelsea. I am coach of the Russian national team and will remain so – at least until the summer of 2008.

"I'm happy with my job and satisfied with what I've already achieved. And, aside from this, what do you think would happen if I would quit my job after one year to join Chelsea? Although Chelsea and Abramovich are very popular here in Russia, nobody would understand this decision."

Hiddink has nothing but praise for the impact Abramovich has had on the game.

"When Abramovich started at Chelsea, I was surprised and not free of resentment," he admitted. "A

Russian billionaire and a nobody in the football scene buys a Premier League club.

"The first thoughts about it were obvious – he arrives and there will be a bit of 'rambazamba' -- he makes money and leaves a heap of rubble afterwards.

"But, when I met Roman Abramovich for the first time, I was very surprised about his interest and knowledge about football.

"He loves this sport and he is doing a lot for the development of the infrastructure of the Russian game.

"The establishment of the football academy is thanks to him. People like Abramovich were helpful for football at all times."

Chelsea chief Mourinho is believed to be considering his future at Stamford Bridge, even though he insists he will see out his contract in West London.

Danish lesson for Socceroos

Football

AFP, London

Australia were beaten 3-1 by Denmark in a friendly at Loftus Road here on Tuesday as Danish captain Jon Dahl Tomasson led the way with a two-goal haul.

The VfB Stuttgart striker blasted in an impressive fifth-minute opener before Werder Bremen midfielder Daniel Jensen headed in Denmark's second in the 27th minute. Tomasson side-footed in a simple goal 10 minutes later.

Australia had what they thought were two good goals ruled out and stand-in captain Brett Emerton scored an 85th-minute free kick. However, it was too little, too late for the injury-depleted Socceroos in their home from home, convenient for their Europe-based best players.

The match was played at English Championship side Queens Park Rangers' ground, in the west London heartland of Aussie expats in Britain.

Australia coach Graham Arnold had to make do without injury victims Mark Schwarzer, skipper

Mark Viduka, Harry Kewell, Lucas Neill, Craig Moore, Michael Beauchamp and Luke Wilkshire.

Mark Bresciano and Jason Culina were absent as their girlfriends are about to give birth.

Fringe youngsters Michael Thwaite, Patrick Kisnorbo and Brett Holman therefore started.

Denmark coach Morten Olsen deployed his strongest available team, with only injured striker Nicklas Bendtner missing.

Australia showed their fiercely competitive approach to friendly matches when centre-half Thwaite went straight in on Tomasson in the first minute.

But the foul only served to fire up the 30-year-old, who stunned the Socceroos with an opportunistic blast from the edge of the penalty box.

The ball swerved, bamboozling stand-in Australia goalkeeper Michael Petkovic who was rooted to the spot as it flew past him.

Thwaite headed the ball in from a 22nd-minute Josip Skoko free-kick but the effort was ruled out for an adjudged foul by John Aloisi.

Denmark doubled their lead when Charlton Athletic winger Dennis Rommedahl ran on and

whipped in a cross from the right, finding Daniel Jensen who headed past Petkovic under little pressure.

Tomasson got his second when good passing carved open the Socceroos' defence.

Daniel Jensen cut into the box and passed wide right for Martin Jorgensen who found former AC Milan hitman Tomasson free at the far post for a tap-in.

Australia had the ball in the Danish net for the second time two minutes later, but Aloisi's header from another Skoko cross was ruled out.

The Socceroos were straight out on the attack after the break and Mile Sterjovski hit the crossbar in the 50th minute.

The Basel midfielder forced goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen into a diving save with a volleyed lob from distance, then seconds later blasted a shot against the woodwork from close range.

Australia's substitute striker Ryan Griffiths, on for Everton attacking midfielder Tim Cahill, won a free-kick on the edge of the box and Blackburn Rovers midfielder Emerton curled in the set piece with just a few minutes left.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Denmark striker Jon-Dahl Tomasson (R) is on his heels as he celebrates his strike against Australia in their friendly with his teammates at Loftus Road Stadium in London on Tuesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS**
- 1 Bag
 - 5 Dracula, some-times
 - 8 In addition
 - 12 Colonel Mustard's game
 - 13 Kimono sash
 - 14 Profound
 - 15 Well-ventilated
 - 16 Become insufficient
 - 18 Paging device
 - 20 Sports venues
 - 21 Ox of the Celebes
 - 23 Man-mouse link
 - 24 Summaries
 - 28 Therefore
 - 31 Candle count
 - 32 Within the law
 - 34 Modern-day evidence
 - 35 Therefore
 - 37 Car style
 - 39 Eminem's genre
 - 41 Adam's third son
 - 42 Woman's shirt
 - 45 A gender
 - 49 Fork with curved prongs
 - 51 Novice
 - 52 Theater trophy
 - 53 Derek and Diddley
 - 54 Church section
 - 55 Min. fractions
 - 56 "Help!"
 - 57 Unfavorable votes
 - DOWN
 - 1 Wound cover
 - 2 "It's a Sin to Tell —"
 - 3 Remedy
 - 4 Touch-tone array
 - 5 "Neither a — ..."
 - 6 Dhahi precursor
 - 7 Singer Turner
 - 8 Stick (to)
 - 9 A Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle
 - 10 Antitoxins
 - 11 Chooses
 - 17 "No seats" sign
 - 19 Carbon compound
 - 22 Breed of beef cattle
 - 24 Snitch tastes terrible!
 - 26 Re nerve-tissue cells
 - 27 Rationality
 - 29 Wildebeest
 - 30 Feedbag tidbit
 - 33 Tardy
 - 36 Hollandaise and bearnaise
 - 38 Himalayan nation
 - 40 Next-to-last Greek letter
 - 42 Family biz abbr.
 - 43 Garage job
 - 44 Recedes
 - 46 Glitch in print
 - 47 Gaelic
 - 48 Bucks' mates
 - 50 Old card game

Solution time: 24 mins.

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ELSE ABET PAS
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CRYPTOQUIP

JFMU TVBGS VFTUMO XP
BSXRRXUN FXP NSTPP, LG
OGY PYAAGPM FM PFGYCL
YPM T CGU RGJMS?
Saturday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE IT HAS TO
MAINTAIN ITS MAIN LEGISLATURE BUILDING,
EACH STATE NEEDS CAPITOL CAPITAL.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals Y