



PHOTO: AFP

Japan goalkeeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi saves a penalty shot during the tie-breaker at the Asian Cup quarterfinal against Australia in Hanoi yesterday.

IRAQ BLANK VIETNAM

Japan vanquish Australia

AFP, Hanoi



Defending champions Japan gained revenge over Australia Saturday to secure their place in the Asian Cup semi-finals where they were joined by Iraq who outclassed minnows Vietnam.

Japan won a tense penalty shootout here after a gruelling 120 minutes of football ended with the scores locked at 1-1 to set up a last four showdown with either Saudi Arabia or Uzbekistan who play on Sunday.

Iraq was a class above Vietnam in Bangkok, running out comfortable 2-0 winners to set up a semi-final clash with arch rivals Iran or 2002

World Cup semi-finalists South Korea.

Goalkeeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi was Japan's hero, blocking the Socceroos first two spot kicks from Harry Kewell and Lucas Neill, with Yuji Nakazawa scoring the decisive penalty.

Two goals in the space of three minutes in the second half sparked the game into life, with John Aloisi making the breakthrough for Australia in the 69th minute only for Naohiro Takahara to level soon after.

"The Japanese team achieved a lot tonight," said elated coach Ivica Osim, who retreated to the locker room after extra time and did not watch the penalties.

"I thought that if I watched Japan might lose," he explained.

"I didn't see the television in the dressing room so I didn't know the

progress but when I heard the news I jumped and hit the ceiling."

Australia was reduced to 10 men with 15 minutes to play after Vince Grella was sent off for elbowing Naohiro Takahara but a tired Japan failed to capitalise as the game went to extra-time in hot and humid conditions.

Both coaches had been keen to play down the revenge aspect of the game following Australia's 3-1 victory over Japan at the World Cup in Germany, but it was clear the Blue Samurais desperately wanted to win this one.

Australian coach Graham Arnold, who faces an uncertain future, said he was proud of his team despite the loss.

"I'm extremely proud of the way my players performed in those conditions, a man short. They

worked very hard," he said.

"We have learned a lot these past couple of weeks. Asia is very difficult.

In Bangkok, Younis Mahmoud scored a brace to ensure the war-ravaged nation has something to cheer about, although Vietnam, who few expected to make it this far, did themselves proud.

Mahmoud did the damage with a strike in the second minute and the plucky Vietnamese never fully recovered, with the Al Gharafa forward putting it beyond their reach in the 66th minute with a beautifully struck free-kick.

The victory was a ray of light for the beleaguered Iraqi people who have previously celebrated their team's victories with rounds of

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Ecclestone denies Arsenal bid

AFP, Nurburging

Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone has firmly denied that he is to launch a takeover bid for English soccer team Arsenal.

American billionaire Stan Kroenke, who already controls a 12.2 percent stake in the North London club, has been strongly tipped to table a formal bid for control, but Ecclestone was announced as a surprise rival in an English newspaper on Saturday. However, Ecclestone, whose fortune is estimated to be over three billion pounds, was unequivocal when asked if he was planning to buy The Gunners.

Speaking at the European Grand Prix in Germany, he said: "Don't believe what you read in the papers."

Ecclestone has previously admitted that he was poised to make a bid for control of Arsenal's London rivals Chelsea in 2003 before another billionaire, Russian

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Cannavaro staying put

INTERNET, undated

Fabio Cannavaro has turned down the chance to move to Chelsea after being told that he is a key part of Bernd Schuster's plans at the Bernabéu.

The Italian defender was the subject of an offer from the Blues as speculation mounted that he would leave Spain after only one season.

Chelsea made a move for the 33-year-old, but Madrid told the player and his agent that he was an integral member of the squad and did not want him to leave.

"We postponed everything due to Real Madrid's wish," Cannavaro's representative, Gaetano Fedele, said.

"New Madrid coach Bernd Schuster has said that Fabio is untouchable. It's highly unlikely that Fabio will leave Real Madrid at least this year."

Reports have also linked the Ballon D'Or winner to a return his former clubs, Juventus and Napoli.

Fedele moved to put an end to

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Messi eyes 'Fantastic Four'

INTERNET, undated

Lionel Messi believes that the 'Fantastic Four' can all play in the same team at FC Barcelona and cannot wait to return to the club to start playing again.

The Argentinian star is currently in China for a Pepsi promotion and will then enjoy a few more days off after playing in the Copa América.

Looking ahead to the new season, the 20-year-old is relishing the prospect of lining up alongside Thierry Henry, Ronaldinho and Samuel Eto'o in the same team.

"I think that we can all play together and for the fans it would be spectacular, but it depends on (Frank) Rijkaard," he said.

"From a personal point of view, I will give everything to earn a place in the starting team."

While the rest of the Barça team are due to return to pre-season training next Monday, Messi will not join the squad until August 5 in the Far East.

"The truth is that I am anxious to return to Barcelona, but I do not to have some rest for a few days," he continued.

"I am very happy and excited

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Owen injured again

AFP, London

Newcastle striker Michael Owen, who has been cursed by injury in the last two years, suffered another setback on Friday when he hurt his thigh in training.

The Premiership club said that the 27-year-old England attacker will miss the next two friendly matches against Carlisle on Saturday and Celtic on Tuesday.

"We hope that this won't last longer than 10 days," said manager Sam Allardyce. "We need him back quickly."

Newcastle hope to have Owen fit for the game with Juventus on July 29.

Owen broke his foot at the start of the 2005-06 season after joining from Real Madrid and then damaged his knee at the 2006 World Cup which kept him sidelined until the last few games of the 2006-07 campaign.

Owen scored his first Newcastle goal for more than 18 months in the 3-1 friendly win over Hartlepool last week.

'We will be unstoppable'

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho has warned that nothing can stop Chelsea from recapturing the Premier League

title from Manchester United next season.

Mourinho buried the hatchet with Roman Abramovich during clear-the-air talks with the Blues owner and Russian billionaire in London last week.

And he declared on Friday that Chelsea are united as they turn their minds to reclaiming the crown.

"I'm happy with the club and happy with the structure. I'm happy with the support and communication and my players are fantastic," he told the club's official website.

"I don't want to communicate with people outside my club. I don't want to because I don't need to send

messages to my club through the press.

"The communication at this moment is fantastic. In my club, everything is perfect. Me and the people outside, I simply just don't care. I'm not interested."

Mourinho, who is preparing Chelsea for the last match of their pre-season tour to America against LA Galaxy on Saturday, is convinced he will bring more silverware to Stamford Bridge.

"I'm optimistic. I won trophies in the last five years of my career, so not occasionally. This happens for some reason, and I think we're going in the same direction," he said.

"We always have two big competitions, the Premiership and Champions League. The cups in England are very important too."

England midfielder Joe Cole, who spent long spells of last season in the treatment room with knee and foot injuries, believes Chelsea's big

names must perform if United are to be deposed.

Cole insists the form of Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo was the key to United's success last term and hopes some of his Blues teammates step up to the plate in similar fashion.

"Our rivals have strengthened but so have we. I don't think it's going to be who spends the most money who wins the league. That has never been the case," he said.

"It's always been who has the fighting spirit, togetherness and which of the big players had the better season."

"Cristiano Ronaldo had a good season last year and was the main reason United won the league."

"This year we need two or three important players in attack to come up with the goods and that's what we'll be trying to do."

Loew lauds Klose switch

AFP, Berlin



Germany coach Joachim Loew said on Saturday striker Miroslav Klose's move to Bayern Munich will benefit both the player and the

German national side in their quest to reach Euro 2008.

Klose, 29, signed for Bayern for 12 million euros earlier this month after his former club Werder Bremen finally agreed to sell him after months of intense speculation.

Klose was set to make his competitive debut for Bayern in the League Cup quarterfinal against Bremen in Dusseldorf on Saturday afternoon.

And Loew says Munich's high-pressure environment will suit the top-scorer at last year's World Cup, which will boost Germany's chances of qualifying for next summer's

European Championships in Austria and Switzerland.

"Klose will benefit from his transfer to Bayern where high demands will be made of him," Loew, who succeeded Jurgen Klinsmann as Germany's head coach after last year's World Cup, told German online magazine Sports-Bild.

"He really wanted to make the switch, it was the right time. It would have been difficult for him to remain at Bremen if his head and heart were already with Bayern."

"I am glad that the issue has now been put to bed, now he can completely focus on his job at Bayern and concentrate on Germany's Euro 2008 campaign."

But Klose can expect no preferential treatment despite his 33 goals in 69 appearances for his country - including five goals at last year's World Cup.

"Who gets to play depends on who is in form and who has the necessary self-confidence," said Loew.

Loew added he is pleased to see

several top young players like defender Marcell Jansen and striker January Schlaudraff move to a high-profile club like Bayern, while defender Christoph Metzelder will also benefit from his move to Real Madrid.

Germany are top of their qualifying group with a five point lead over nearest rivals the Czech Republic, but Loew is insisting on maximum points from their remaining five games.

There are only five Euro 2008 qualifying games left for Germany, but Wales (September 8), Ireland (October 13), the Czech Republic (October 17), Cyprus (November 17) and Wales again (November 21) will face strong German side.

"These games are important, we have not yet qualified and we will field our strongest sides in those games, there will be some friendly games when we may experiment," insisted Loew.

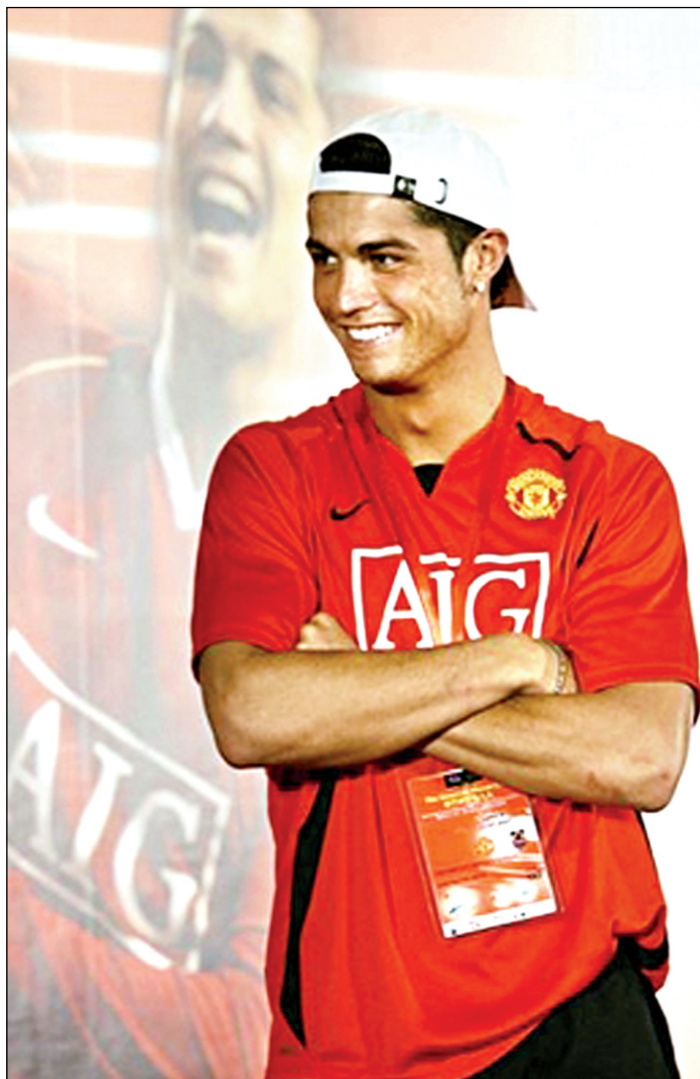


PHOTO: INTERNET

Cristiano Ronaldo of Manchester United poses at a news conference in Macau on Saturday. Manchester United will play a friendly match against Shenzhen FC on July 23.

Errant Seedorf

AP, Surinam

AC Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf took the Champions League trophy to his native Suriname against the wishes of his club.

Milan had asked the 31-year-old Dutchman to take a replica instead on his trip that also included the Middle East and horn of Africa but he refused.

"I took the original cup earlier to Dubai and to Djibouti, so I told them that if they wouldn't allow me to bring it to Suriname then maybe it was time for me to look for another club," Seedorf said.

About 2,000 people turned out to catch a glimpse of Seedorf at a news conference late Thursday.

Milan won its sixth European

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Peace Cup Lyon's



AFP, Seoul

French club Lyon made it third time lucky when they claimed the Peace Cup by defeating English Premiership side Bolton 1-0 in South Korea on Saturday.

Lyon midfielder Kim Kallstrom scored the winning goal in the 85th minute following a strong run by substitute Hatem Ben Arfa.

"It was a physically demanding game for us," Kallstrom said. "But our players came together and I am very satisfied with the result."

Lyon, who had been runners-up in the two previous Peace Cups, had a number of chances in the first

half.

Karim Benzema set up Sidney Govou from a free kick in the sixth minute but Govou's header was straight at Bolton goalkeeper Jussi Jaaskelainen.

A minute later, Abdul Kader Keita's header from a Benzema cross hit the crossbar.

Kallstrom had golden chances in the 36th and the 39th minutes but Jaaskelainen denied him.

Jaaskelainen continued to perform heroics in the second half.

In the 70th minute, Bolton's Finnish keeper denied Ben Arfa

and Milan Baros from close range.

Bolton's best chance of the match came in the 33rd minute,

when Ricardo Vaz Te's bicycle kick set up Nicolas Anelka, whose

header was off target.

Lyon took home two million dollars as winners of the tournament.

Benzema was the Golden Ball winner as the most valuable player of the tournament.

"I am glad we achieved our goal of winning this tournament," said Lyon manager Alain Perrin. "We also made significant tactical improvements here."

Bolton boss Sammy Lee said the teams put on "a terrific exhibition of European football," and that he was pleased with his team's progress and the players' commitment at the tournament.

The next Peace Cup will be held in 2009, with organisers hoping to stage the tournament outside Korea for the first time.



PHOTO: AFP

Lyon's Kim Kallstrom (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring the only goal against Bolton Wanderers during the final of the Peace Cup in Seoul on Saturday. Lyon beat Bolton 1-0 to pocket a prize-money of two million dollars.

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Adriano's alcohol nightmare



INTERNET, undated

Adriano has revealed the reason for his excessive partying and how Massimo Moratti helped him out of this nightmare. "I will repay Inter."

Once considered potentially the greatest striker in the world, the last two years have seen L'Imperatore spend more time making headlines in the gossip columns than the sport section.

"I miss my father so much. He died in the summer of 2004, but it seemed as if my mind only registered his absence some time later," he explained to the 'Gazzetta dello Sport'.

"I hadn't seen him die, so when I returned to Italy to play, it felt like in a certain sense he was still here

with us. I started suffering when I went to Brazil for my holidays. He wasn't there and I so wanted to be with him."

That was the start of a spiral that took Adriano further and further away from a stable home life, something he in fact craved.

"I argued with my girlfriend Daniela, who was expecting my son, and started to go to nightclubs and bars. Above all I tried to wash away all my problems with alcohol."

"I drank a lot and couldn't help go out at night. I had to, otherwise I couldn't sleep at all. It became impossible for me to stay at home. I felt so alone."

The Brazilian fell badly out of form, gained weight and was excluded from the Nerazzurri side after a row with coach Roberto Mancini.

He seemed set to leave Inter for

Real Madrid, but President Moratti never lost faith in his favourite hitman.

"I looked into my son's eyes on his birthday and all the clouds disappeared. I realised we had to get back together and be a family again. Today I have rediscovered my family, my girlfriend and my responsibilities," continued Adriano.

"This is what gives me the certainty I can give back to Moratti everything I took away from him in this period. I must thank him for the patience he had with me."

"It is wonderful to know that, especially in the most difficult moments, your president still counts on you. He was at times tough with me, but never let me feel alone. I will repay him, not just with goals, but with effort, hard work and sweat."