



Japan star Shunsuke Nakamura (L) shoots to score the all-important goal against Bahrain during their 2010 World Cup qualifier at the Saitama Stadium on Saturday.

Japan ride on Nakamura

AFP, Tokyo



Japan and North Korea took giant strides towards the 2010 World Cup on

Saturday with gritty home victories that left them topping their Asian qualifying groups.

Takeshi Okada's Japan had Shunsuke Nakamura to thank for their 1-0 win over Bahrain in Saitama, with the Celtic star pouncing two minutes into the second half.

North Korea moved within sight of their first World Cup since 1966 with a 2-0 win over United Arab Emirates in Pyongyang, all but snuffing out any hope the Gulf side had of playing in South Africa.

Japan now have 11 points in Group A, a point ahead of Australia, who have a game in hand and play Uzbekistan in Sydney on Wednesday. Bahrain are on four points.

In Saturday's other Group A game, the Uzbeks, who have just one point so far, host Qatar, who have four points.

The Koreans top Group B with 10 points from five games,

Terry calls for discipline

Football

AFP, Watford

John Terry admits England's stars have a responsibility to clean up their act after the rash of negative headlines around several of Fabio Capello's squad.

Ashley Cole, Wayne Rooney and Steven Gerrard have been involved in high-profile flashpoints on and off the pitch recently that raised questions about the discipline of English players.

Chelsea defender Cole was arrested for being drunk and disorderly after police were unable to calm him down following an incident with photographers outside a west London restaurant.

Manchester United forward Rooney was sent off on Saturday for throwing the ball at the referee during his side's defeat at Fulham. Rooney then punched a corner flag as he stormed off.

Gerrard faces charges of affray after an nightclub row in Southport ended with a DJ nursing a cut face and broken tooth.

England captain Terry, who is no stranger to controversy himself, insists it is down to the players to stay out of trouble.

"We all know the discipline needed to be part of the England squad and we need to show respect for the management. We have to set an example to kids," he said.

"Sometimes on the pitch things can over-heated and things but that comes with next season."

During the December 14 match at Lyon's Stade Gerland, supporters threw nine flares onto the pitch, slightly injuring a steward.

Marseille chairman Pape Diouf insisted the punishment was not merited.

"This sanction does not to us to have any foundation and still less seems to be applicable."

It for Terry on Friday when newspaper reports revealed that his mother and mother in law had been cautioned for taking 800 pounds worth of goods from a supermarket without paying for them.

Terry refused to be drawn on the issue but insisted it wouldn't affect his performances.

"I've seen different headlines over the years about myself and other things about family and as a player you learn to deal with that," he said.

"The lads have seen the headline and that's it. Solicitors are dealing with it but it doesn't affect me on the pitch or off the pitch. I've seen many headlines over the years and I'll continue to get on with my football."

After some unconvincing at Wembley since the English national stadium was re-opened two years ago, Terry believes England are finally ready to make the most of home advantage.

Capello's side have four matches still to play on home turf during the qualifying campaign, so their attempt to reach South Africa will effectively be decided in north London.

"We've shrugged off the fear factor a little bit. The players are full of confidence. We have a smile on our face in training and we are playing our normal game," Terry said.

"We had a good start at Wembley then things dropped off a little bit. We had a really good performance against the Russians when we won 3-0 but obviously didn't go on to do what we wanted to do."

"We have a lot of home games to come. The fans love to see us winning which is the main thing and a nice performance to top that off would be perfect."

"But sometimes we over assess things and look at things too much. The main thing is we get the three points next Wednesday, that's what we are building to."

Marseille punished

AFP, Marseille

French title contenders Marseille revealed on Friday they will have to play a match behind closed doors following the throwing of fireworks by some of their fans at Lyon last December.

The judgment hanging over the Stade Velodrome has unfortunately fallen, the club said on its website. The sanction of one match behind closed doors was pronounced Thursday (by the French league's disciplinary commission) for use of flares," Marseille added, while stating it was hoping to win an appeal.

The verdict is suspended and Marseille, who are currently a point off leaders Lyon in the title race as they chase a first championship in 17 years, are hoping at least to have any punishment held over to next season.

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Kaka out of Ecuador tie

AP, Rio de Janeiro

Kaka will not play in Brazil's World Cup qualifier against Ecuador on Sunday because of an injured left foot.

The team doctor said Friday that Kaka is not in top shape and still feels pain after hurting his foot while playing for AC Milan this month. He will receive treatment in Porto Alegre.

Kaka's lineup spot likely will be filled by Ronaldinho, his AC Milan teammate who has lost playing time at his club to David Beckham in recent months.

Brazil faces Ecuador in Quito, then hosts Peru three days later. The five-time world champions are second in South American qualifying, six points behind leader Paraguay and one point ahead of both Argentina and Chile.

Domenech's job safe

AFP, Paris

France coach Raymond Domenech was told his job was safe Saturday irrespective of how the national side performed in their key World Cup qualifiers against Lithuania.

Domenech's 2006 World Cup finalists are struggling in Group Seven, five points behind Serbia and the Lithuanians who they meet in Lyon later Saturday and again at the Stade de France in Paris on Wednesday.

Despite the need for wins in both fixtures to boost their hopes of making it to South Africa next year French Football Federation (FFF) president Jean-Pierre Escallettes assured Domenech his position was safe.

"Oh, he doesn't risk anything in particular in the event of poor results against Lithuania," Escallettes told L'Equipe television.

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Juninho mulling Vasco swansong

AFP, Lyon

Juninho Pernambucano, skipper of Lyon's serial champions, said Friday he would wait until the season's end to see what the future holds but admitted he might well choose to finish off his career with Brazilian second-tier outfit Vasco de Gama.

Juninho, who had six years with the club before coming to France in 2001, is out of contract in June but Lyon say they will abide by his decision as to whether he wishes to prolong his stay or return home.

"There are nine matches left to play to help the club to an eighth title and I am concentrating on that. Today, I will not allow myself to think about me," Juninho said, adding the support of the fans could help him make up his mind.

"I hope my story with this club will come to an end in the best way possible," added the Brazilian, who has won seven league crowns as well as the French Cup last season.

"If I can continue to play at this level I may well carry on but returning home to Vasco de Gama is also on the cards," said Juninho, who noted the club have just been relegated for the first time.

Maradona jibes at Pele

Calls rival 'homosexual'

Football

TIMES ONLINE

Diego Maradona will manage Argentina in a competitive match for the first time today and the reformed drug addict who is arguably the world's greatest player has already started making headlines for the wrong reasons in South America.

The only player who has come close to matching Maradona on a football pitch is Pele, the former Brazil forward, but the legends have never seen eye to eye. Pele accused Maradona of being a poor role model for young players last week and the Argentina coach has hit back by claiming, for the second time, that his Brazilian rival is homosexual.

When Maradona was asked at a press conference before Argentina's World Cup qualifying match against Venezuela to respond to Pele's claim that he was a negative influence on children, he said: "What do you want me to say? He lost his virginity to a man."

In 2000, Maradona accused Pele, who has advertised male impotence drugs, of having an affair with a male coach, a claim that a close friend of the Brazilian dismissed as the mad rantings of a sick man who was addicted to cocaine. "It was never true but Pele is a big man and he decided that he would not respond and create a big battle between himself and Maradona," Celso Grellet said.

In his autobiography, I am Diego, Maradona picked Pele as the best player in the world, but he damned his rival with faint praise. "As a player he had it all but he

didn't make the most of it to raise the status of football," Maradona wrote. "I'd have liked to see him put himself forward as president of an association to defend players' rights like I did. I'd like to have seen him look after Garrincha and not let him die in misery. I'd like to see him fight

his opinions on almost every subject are scrutinised and sensationalised. During the build-up to today's game against Venezuela at the River Plate Stadium in Buenos Aires, Maradona created a stir by speaking out in favour of the death penalty. He also found time to talk about football and continue his feud with Juan Roman Riquelme, the Boca Juniors mid-fielder, who was so upset with being criticised by Maradona that he announced two weeks ago that he would not play for his country again unless they appointed a new coach.

Argentina have won two friendlies under Maradona away to Scotland and France but their form under Alfonso Basile, the previous coach, was patchy and they are third in the South American World Cup qualifying group, seven points behind Paraguay, the leaders. "My dream is that the stadium explodes on Saturday and that all my players are applauded," Maradona said. "I want the national team to leave the stadium to a standing ovation, which hasn't happened in a long time. How people receive me is secondary. What I'm worried about is how they receive the players. They're the real stars."

With players such as Lionel Messi, Sergio Aguero, Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano at his disposal, Maradona has every right to be confident about starting his competitive managerial career with three points. The team have been training with two formations this week 4-4-2 and 4-3-3 and if the coach starts with a three-pronged attack of Messi, Aguero and Tevez, Argentina may come close to being as dangerous as they were when Maradona wore his country's famous light blue and white No 10 shirt.

DIEGO MARADONA

the rich and powerful that are damaging football." Pele is no stranger to controversy and this week the 68-year-old was forced to deny that he had accused Robinho, the Manchester City forward, and Ronaldo, the former Brazil forward, of taking recreational drugs at a private party in São Paulo.

Maradona is so huge in Argentina that

Hiddink may stay on

Football

AFP, London

Guus Hiddink suggested Saturday he may stay on and act in a consultancy role at Chelsea after his stint as interim manager runs out at the end of the season.

The Dutchman was brought in to replace sacked Luiz Felipe Scolari and combine his job as coach of Russia with managing Chelsea where his contract expires on May 31.

"Yes, there is such a contract. It expires on May 31. They offered me to continue working for them after that date as a consultant.

"I'll need to have a look at how the situation is going to

develop. Maybe I can be useful for Chelsea in that role."

A potential barrier to Hiddink staying on in London in some capacity has been removed after a key figure in the Russian FA claimed he was happy for him to continue his dual role.

General secretary of the Russian FA Alexey Sorokin revealed that his employers would be open to the existing situation continuing beyond May.

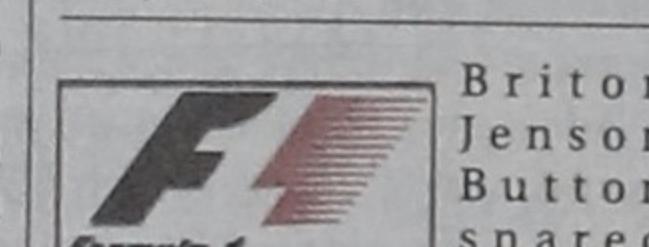
"If Chelsea say they would like to continue we are ready to discuss it with the owners," he said.

"We are comfortable with the situation. We would be uncomfortable if it were a Russian club because when a coach comes from a Russian club to the national team he tends to look after his players more than the players from other clubs. But there is no such contradiction here."

"If he says he can handle it, we have no reasons not to believe it. He is a responsible person with a lot of experience and if he takes that responsibility he will perform for certain."

Button snatches pole

AFP, Melbourne



BRITON JENSON BUTTON SNARED POLE

position just ahead of teammate Rubens Barrichello as newcomers Brawn GP seized initial control of the season-opening Australian Grand Prix here on Saturday.

Despite the need for wins in both fixtures to boost their hopes of making it to South Africa next year French Football Federation (FFF) president Jean-Pierre Escallettes assured Domenech his position was safe.

"I think it's good to go into the weekend positive because we've got a good car."

Button swept around the Albert Street circuit in one minute 26.202 seconds, ahead of Barrichello's best of 1:26.505.

Rising German star Sebastian Vettel was third quickest in his Red Bull in 1:26.830 in an eventful hour-long qualifying with world champion Lewis Hamilton forced to start off the back row of Sunday's grid after gearbox problems.

The British star failed to come out of the McLaren team garage for the second section of qualifying and was credited with 15th position, but he incurred a mandatory five-

place grid penalty and was relegated to 20th.

"I just lost all drive in the gearbox and couldn't continue," Hamilton said.

"I'm still determined to drive an attacking race tomorrow."

Renault's two-time world champion Fernando Alonso will start off on the sixth row after his undistinguished 12th place.

World constructors champions Ferrari were also left behind in the slipstream of the two Brawns with Felipe Massa to come off the fourth row after his seventh and Kimi Raikkonen one row behind after his ninth.

Button is wary because the last time he had pole in Australia, in 2006, his Honda ended up limping home in 10th.

"It's great to be in pole position, but I just hope that the end position is better than back in 2006, and I am expecting it will be," he said.

"Roll on the season, I'm so excited about this year and it's amazing what you can achieve



Jenson Button of Britain powers his Brawn through a corner during the qualifying session for Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on Saturday.