

IN BRIEF

Bebel kicked out of local Paris league

AFP, Creteil

A mainly Muslim team has been thrown out of a local Paris league after refusing to face a side of gay players.

"The Creteil Bebel team is excluded from the Leisure Football Commission for refusing a match and (making) discriminatory comments," the commission's website said Wednesday.

The decision was taken at the body's management committee on Tuesday night, the posting said.

Paris Foot Gay (PFG) were set to play fellow Creteil side Bebel, who are composed of mainly Muslim players, on October 4.

Bebel cried off a day before in an email.

"Sorry, but because of the name of your team and in keeping with the principles of the team, which is a team of practising Muslims, we cannot play against you," the message said.

"Our convictions are stronger than a game of football."

Press bids
Bilic bye

AFP, Zagreb

Coach Slaven Bilic is on his way out -- barring a last-minute miracle that puts Croatia into the World Cup finals, newspapers said Wednesday.

"Farewell," headlined Sportske Novosti. "Unless there's a miracle, Croatia will not go to the World Cup and will look for a new coach."

"He (Bilic) has been too soft and the players have taken advantage of this to stab him in the back," wrote the Vecernji List newspaper. Some players acted as if international matches were "little holidays", it added.

Slaven Bilic has to go because he has committed serious errors," said leading soccer analysts Tomislav Zidak.

Cahill fires Aussies

Football

AFP, Melbourne

Tim Cahill once again proved Australia's saviour by scoring the winner against Oman to put the Socceroos on top of its Asian Cup qualifying group here on Wednesday.

Oman looked set to frustrate the Socceroos team of European stars before the Everton midfielder rifled home the winner 16 minutes from time.

It was Cahill's 19th goal in 36 internationals.

The hard-earned victory hoisted Australia to the top of Group B with a crucial three points after their scratchy start to qualifying for the 2011 tournament in Qatar.

The Aussies had put themselves in trouble when a below-strength side was upset 1-0 by Kuwait in Canberra in March after drawing 0-0 with Indonesia in Jakarta last January.

Oman looked on course to repeat their determined performance from the 2007 Asian Cup in Bangkok when the Australians needed an injury-time goal from Cahill to scrape home with a 1-1 draw.

But Australia's repeated attacks finally were

rewarded by Cahill's strike.

Oman weathered an early Socceroos onslaught and matched their more illustrious rivals for the rest of the opening 45 minutes.

A Cahill header skimmed the bar and Josh Kennedy had a shot saved before the Omanis worked their way back into the contest.

Midfielder Fawzi Bashir gave the Aussies a big gift in the 23rd minute when goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer pushed his fizzing volley on to an upright, before Amad Al Hosni blasted over the bar after being put through by Bashir minutes later.

Kennedy then had a header well saved by goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi before midfielder Jason Culina let fly with a rasping long-range volley that was just wide in first-half stoppage time.

Al Habsi had the good fortune of saving Lucas Neill's shot with his head just after the resumption as Oman rode their luck.

Cahill finally broke the deadlock in the 74th minute after Scott Chipperfield broke free on the left.

His pass was flicked on by Kennedy into the path of Cahill whose volley went in off the far post to the relief of the 20,595 home crowd.

Oman host the return leg against the Socceroos in Muscat on November 14.

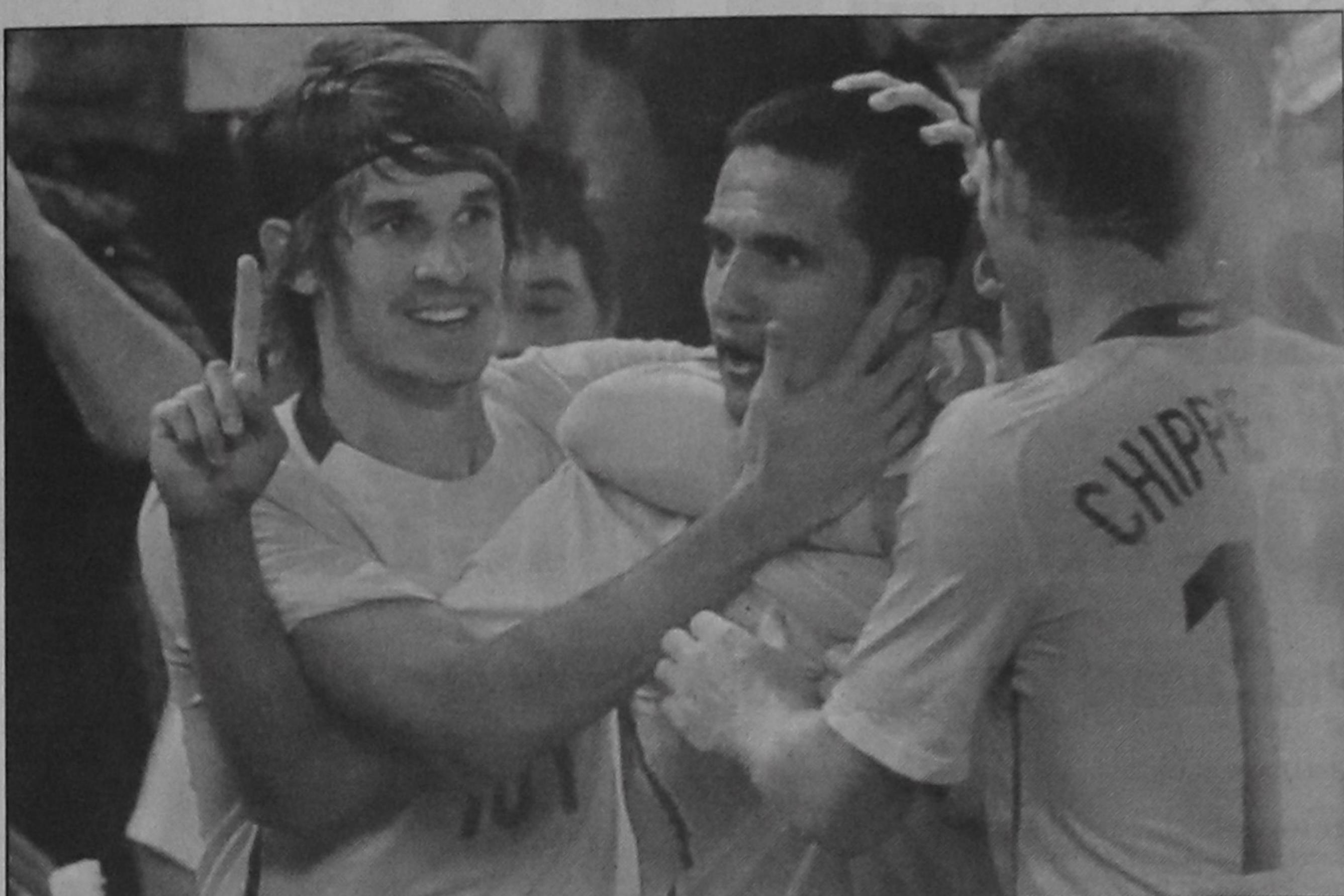


PHOTO: AFP

Australia star Tim Cahill (C) celebrates scoring the all-important goal with his teammates during their 2011 Asian Cup qualifier against Oman in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Sven turns down
North Korea

Football

AFP, London

Former England manager Sven Goran Eriksson has turned down an offer to become the technical adviser of North Korea for the 2010 World Cup, the Press Association reported here Wednesday.

Eriksson, Notts County's director of football, "was approached by the North Korean FA but Press Association Sport understands he has decided against taking up the offer," the British news agency said.

The report came after The Guardian and other leading dailies said the 61-year-old Swede, who twice led England in the tournament during his five years as national manager, was to meet North Korean soccer chiefs in Beijing later this week.

Eriksson was to travel with the club's executive chairman Peter Trembling.

However, Notts County chairman Peter Trembling denied the club had been approached.

"We wish to make it clear that Notts County have not received any approach nor had any discussions whatsoever with the North Korean FA in relation to Sven-Goran Eriksson becoming an interim manager of their national team," Trembling said in a statement.

"It is correct that I am making a business trip to Asia but this is solely and exclusively on official Notts County business."

"I will be visiting Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Thailand to discuss a range of Notts County initiatives linked to our 150th anniversary."

The Guardian said Trembling had already been involved in talks with intermediaries representing the North's football association about loaning Eriksson.

"The process is now advanced enough for Trembling and Eriksson to be travelling to Beijing later this week on an eight-day trip," the paper said.

North Korea's embassy in London suggested an announcement could be made in "two or three weeks," it added.

North Korea has qualified for the final stages for the first time since 1966, but has struggled to score goals.

Eriksson was seen as a candidate to take over Sweden, who are unlikely to qualify for South Africa, but his home federation were reportedly not interested.

Having endured 10 turbulent months as Mexico's coach until April this year, he stunned the football world by joining lowly Notts County in the close season.

The Times of London reported that County were prepared to negotiate a deal for Eriksson, describing the move as "bewildering".

Carlos respects
Real stance
on C'Ron

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal coach Carlos Queiroz says he "respects" Real Madrid's decision to prevent injured star Cristiano Ronaldo from travelling to watch his country's final World Cup qualifier against Malta.

"If that is their decision it will be based on medical advice and we must respect that," Queiroz said on Tuesday.

"It's probably because Real Madrid want to guarantee continuity in his treatment."

Queiroz added that he had not been officially told by the Spanish club that Ronaldo had been banned from attending the match, which Portugal must win to secure a place in the play-offs for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Trezeguet eyes return

Football

AFP, Paris

France coach Raymond Domenech on Tuesday welcomed Juventus striker David Trezeguet's comments about wanting to return to the national set-up.

Trezeguet, 31, announced his retirement from international football after being left out of Domenech's squad for the 2008 European Championship, but recently said he would like to be involved in November's World Cup play-off matches.

"I like it when players say that they want to play, to hear that players need the French team and want to play for it," Domenech said.

"It's good, it's good."

France face Austria here on Wednesday in their final group seven qualifying match, having already secured a place in the play-offs behind group leaders and automatic qualifiers Serbia.

Davies's condition grave

Football

AFP, Washington

American forward Charlie Davies is unlikely to play in the 2010 World Cup after undergoing several hours of emergency surgery Tuesday to repair a shattered right leg and ruptured bladder.

The 23-year-old Davies suffered multiple fractures in his face, a badly broken right leg, a broken left elbow and a lacerated bladder in a fatal car smash in the early morning hours on Tuesday.

Doctors expressed hope that Davies' high level of fitness would speed up his recovery but they added he would need further surgery and could be looking at up to 12 months or more of recovery and physiotherapy treatment.

"Injuries of this nature usually require a recovery period of six to 12 months and extensive rehabilitation," said US national team doctor Dan Kalbac. "Due to Charlie's fitness level, his prognosis for recovery and his ability to resume high-level competition is substantially improved."

Kalbac hoped Davies could eventually recover and play for the national team again but his participation in the 2010 World Cup tournament in South Africa, which begins next June, is in jeopardy.

Davies, who plays for the French club Sochaux, was listed in serious but stable condition in a Washington, D.C. hospital after the emergency surgery on Tuesday.

Doctors said Davies would be in hospital at least a week and more surgery might be needed to repair the fractures in his face and the broken left elbow.

Tuesday's surgery, included inserting titanium rods in his right thigh bone, or femur, and the right lower leg (tibia) bone. The first order of business for surgeons was to repair his ruptured bladder.

The horrific single vehicle smash happened in the early morning hours Tuesday just three days after the US team qualified for the World Cup with a 3-2 win over host Honduras.

Police were probing the 3:15 a.m. crash which took place on a major highway in suburban Virginia.

Davies was not driving but was a passenger in the vehicle where a 22-year-old woman died. Davies had to be taken to hospital by air ambulance.

Police identified the person killed as Ashley Roberta. An officer who was at the scene said the vehicle was ripped in two pieces after crashing into a metal guardrail, the Washington Post reported.

Davies started and played the first 78 minutes in Saturday's win at San Pedro Sula, assisting on the first US goal.

The US squad is in Washington to face Costa Rica on Wednesday at RFK Stadium in the final North American regional World Cup qualifying match, with Costa Rica seeking a victory to secure a World Cup berth.

US coach Bob Bradley gathered the players in a small meeting room at their hotel to deliver the shocking news early Tuesday.

"Obviously as a team we're saddened to learn this news," Bradley said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with Charlie and Charlie's family and the other person in the car and the others involved."

"The team has asked that any other thoughts we have, to keep them with the guys. As a team, we are relying on each other in a moment that has for sure hit us all hard."

Players were told in a team-only meeting that their reaction was the shock and sadness that might be expected, US Soccer spokesman Neil Buethe said.

"Obviously the players are very saddened by the situation and hope the Charlie has a quick recovery," he said.

Buethe said no other members of the team were involved.

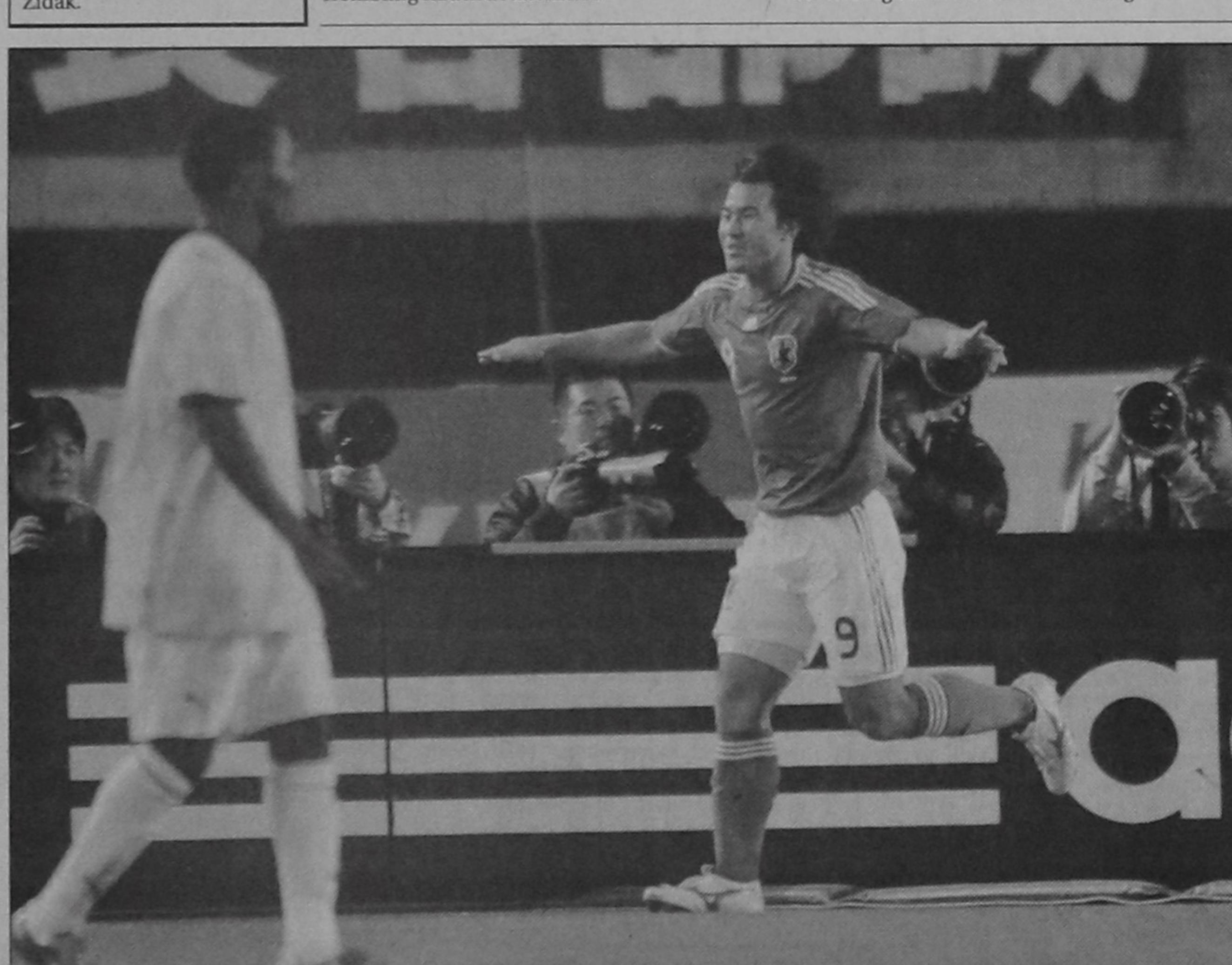
US teen forward Jozy Altidore, who replaced Davies in Saturday's match, typed a series of frowning faces on his Twitter page Tuesday afternoon and said, "I'm not tweeting anymore y'all. Just not feeling well."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE LEOPARD
WANTED TO SCRATCH AN AWFUL ITCH, BUT HE
HAD TROUBLE FINDING THE RIGHT SPOT.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals Y



Japan striker Shinji Okazaki (R) celebrates his first goal against Togo during their international friendly in Sendai on Wednesday.

Japan thrash Togo

Football

AFP, Sendai

Forward Shinji Okazaki scored a hat-trick to lead Japan to a 5-0 victory over second-string Togo on Wednesday in a tune-up game for next year's World Cup in South Africa.

"Our team created high-quality crosses. I just needed to flick it in. Whenever I found a space, I was expecting a cross to come. I was always free there," said a jubilant Okazaki. "It was nice to add a headed goal later."

World Cup qualifiers Japan showed they were streets ahead from the very beginning.

Japan became the first team to qualify for the World Cup when they defeated Uzbekistan in July, while Togo failed to reach the finals losing to Cameroon last weekend.

The Japanese took a comfortable 3-0 lead in the first 11 minutes, overwhelming their defeated opponents, who came here with only 14 players.

Shimizu S-Pulse striker Okazaki opened the scoring in the fifth minute when he netted a cross from the left by Gamba Osaka midfielder Yasuhiro Endo.

Alex signs new deal

AFP, London

The spate of new contracts for Chelsea's current squad continued Wednesday with Brazilian centreback Alex signing a new four-year deal at the English Premier League leaders.

The 27-year-old has been sidelined recently following surgery on his groin but resumed full training this week.

"I am very happy to start again to train and feel no pain, and to sign for four more years," Alex said.

The defender is also targeting a return to the Brazil side in the run-up to next year's World Cup finals in South Africa.

"To go back into the national team is important to me," he added. "Also the Chelsea team started very well this season, is at the top, and this season to win the Premier League is important to me. Now I want to play."

Honda said: "I missed a header goal earlier, so I feel relieved that I scored one."