

Henry hand robs Ireland

AFP, Paris



Superstar Thierry Henry was at the centre of a sensational World Cup cheating storm on Wednesday as France reached the 2010 finals in South Africa along with Portugal, Greece and Slovenia.

France, the 1998 champions and 2006 runners-up, drew 1-1 with Ireland at the Stade de France here in the second leg of their play-off for a 2-1 aggregate win.

But the extra-time triumph came in controversial circumstances when French skipper Henry appeared to control the ball with his hand before his angled pass allowed William Gallas to head in the crucial 103rd-minute goal.

Ireland, who had deservedly levelled the tie through Robbie Keane's 32nd-minute goal and were unfortunately not to win in regulation time, protested desperately, but in vain, to match referee Martin Hansson.

"Yes, there was a hand, but I'm not the referee," said Henry. "Of course, I kept playing. The referee didn't whistle for handball. I was behind two Irish players, the ball bounced and it hit my hand."

Ireland coach Giovanni Trapattoni was furious. "You could see the referee hesitate and look at Henry. He could have asked him what he thought. If the referee had asked Henry, he would have said: 'Yes, it was handball,'" said the Italian.

Meanwhile, in Zenica, a 56th-minute strike by Raul Meireles was enough to break Bosnian hearts and send 2006 semifinalists Portugal through to the finals 1-0 on the night and 2-0 on aggregate. Meireles took a pass from Manchester United star Nani and slipped a low, precise shot past Kenan Hasagic in the Bosnian goal to settle the tie.

"These marathons are only over after the final whistle and I want to thank my players for

showing such spirit," said Portugal coach Carlos Queiroz, who was once again without the injured Cristiano Ronaldo, the world's most expensive player.

Bosnia, trying to reach the World Cup for the first time, had midfielder Sejad Salihovic red-carded late in the game while a linesman was struck by an object thrown from the crowd.

Guus Hiddink, who famously took South Korea to the 2002 semifinals, will be missing from South Africa after Slovenia beat his Russian side 1-0 in Maribor to qualify on the away goals rule.

Striker Zlatko Dedic scored the only goal just before the break.

Russia had won the first leg 2-1 in Moscow on Saturday,

but Nejc Pecnik's goal two minutes from time gave Slovenia hope for Wednesday's return and they seized their chance to reach their first finals since 2002.

Hiddink's side ended the match with nine men after Alexander Kerzhakov and Yuri Zhirkov were both red-carded.

"My team have continued the Slovenian football

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FINAL QUALIFIERS

HOSTS

South Africa

EUROPE ZONE

Denmark: The Danes got top spot and they only lost once in a group they were not expected to win.

England: A defeat to Ukraine aside, Fabio Capello's side were consistently impressive as they won 9 out of their 10 games and bagged the most goals too.

Germany: With two wins over rivals Russia, the Germans sealed their place with some gritty performances.

Italy: The World Champions struggled away from home, came back from two goals down against Cyprus, and still topped the group.

Netherlands: Wrapped up qualification early with a 100% record; conceded just two goals on their way to the finals.

Serbia: A shock group winner after holding off France.

Spain: Arguably the best side in the competition, a classy display saw them maintain a 100% record and not concede a single goal at home.

Slovakia: They picked up a win over Poland to book their place at their first international competition.

Switzerland: With a point enough on the final day, the Swiss lost only once - to minnows Luxembourg.

PLAY-OFFS

Greece

Slovenia

Portugal

France

SOUTH AMERICA ZONE

Brazil: Dunga's men made sure of qualification without dominating and struggled slightly away from home.

Paraguay: Winning seven of their eight home games, Paraguay surprised many by easing through the qualifiers with wins over Brazil and Argentina.

Chile: Getting to a World Cup for the first time since France '98, their away form saw them score 18 goals and seal their place.

Argentina: After making a meal of qualifying,

including a horrible final run, Maradona's men made it by beating Uruguay away in the last game.

NORTH AMERICA

Mexico: A perfect home record and no real surprises.

United States: The USA also cruised through by virtue of an impressive home record.

Honduras: In the most dramatic of conclusions on the final day, Honduras beat El Salvador 1-0 but only qualified when the U.S. equalised against Costa Rica with 20 seconds remaining.

INTERCONTINENTAL PLAY-OFF

Uruguay

AFRICA ZONE

Ghana: Dominant home form from the Black Stars kept them at the top of each of their groups.

Ivory Coast: A commanding qualification from the Elephants, as they did not lose a game in either group stage on their way to the finals.

Nigeria: The Super Eagles pipped Tunisia to the post on Saturday when coming from behind to beat Kenya 3-2 and ensure a dramatic conclusion to qualifying.

Cameroon: A win away at Morocco saw Cameroon hold off the challenge of Gabon to finish first in Group A.

Algeria: A fiery affair they needed a play-off against Egypt which was held in neutral Sudan. Algeria won 1-0, sending them to their first World Cup since 1986.

ASIA

Australia: Hammering all before them at home they qualified with ease.

Japan: Finished as runners-up behind the Socceroos.

South Korea: They topped both their groups without losing a game.

Korea DPR: Getting through for the first time since 1966, when they famously beat Italy, Korea DPR finished as runners-up behind their southern rivals as they had a better goal difference than Saudi Arabia.



HAND OF GOD PART II: A TV grab shows French forward Thierry Henry touches the ball with his hand before providing the cross to William Gallas for the extra-time equaliser against Ireland during their 2010 World Cup qualifying playoff at the Stade de France in Paris on Wednesday. Henry's hand helped an unimpressive former world champions to win a ticket to South Africa as one last four teams from Europe.

PHOTO: AFP

It's now Bangabandhu C'ship

SPORTS REPORTER



The SAFF Championship has been named after Bangabandhu as Beximco, country's one of leading business house, has won the sponsorship right of the regional football extravaganza, scheduled for December 4-13 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The announcement came yesterday at an elegant logo unveiling ceremony at a city hotel in the capital that was also followed by a stage performance led by Shiblee Mohammed and Shamimara Nipa.

It is the first time in the SAFF history that the regional meet has been named after a person though the second edition saw a company sponsoring the event.

"Like Nelson Mandela, Bangabandhu (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) had a great personality as well as quality and he was a great democratic leader in this sub-continent and we feel proud to honour such a person after naming the tournament after him,"

said Salman F Rahman, the vice president of Beximco Ltd.

A company generally sponsors any sports events for publicity of their product, but it is so far a different phenomenon.

"It is a pride of the whole

nation to name the SAFF Championship after Bangabandhu and we are not thinking of our produce. Even, we are also thinking of continuing it in future," said Rahman, who is also chairman of popu-

lar Abahani Limited.

"We are involved in all sports disciplines in the country and we will love to see country's football going far like what the cricket has

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PHOTO: STAR

Performers parade with the flags of the eight participating nations for next month's SAFF Games during the logo unveiling ceremony at a city hotel yesterday. The sixth edition of the regional football carnival, starting on December 4, is named Bangabandhu SAFF Championship 2009.

Spy game as Razzaq misses flight!

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani will not get the services of Pakistan international Abdul Razzaq in today's crucial Premier Division Cricket League match against Gazi Tank at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The 29-year-old all-rounder, who played 46 Tests and 237 ODIs, was scheduled to arrive in Dhaka yesterday but a mysterious phone call forced him to cancel his ticket, claimed an Abahani official.

"What we learnt is that someone from Dhaka in the name of an Abahani official gave him a call and told that the league matches will resume after the Eid vacation and that's why he cancelled his ticket. He took the decision from the airport but surprisingly he didn't even check with the agent," informed Jalal Yunus, vice-chairman of Abahani's cricket committee.

"We are really surprised and can't understand who gave this call. We talked with the agent and he tried to arrange his ticket in the next available flight but ultimately

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SL avalanche at Ahmedabad



AFP, Ahmedabad

India were waging a grim battle to survive the first cricket Test after Sri Lanka went on a record-breaking batting spree on the fourth day here on Thursday.

The Indians, trailing by 334 runs on the first innings as Sri Lanka piled up 760-7 declared, moved to 190-2 in their second knock by stumps at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad.

Gautam Gambhir was unbeaten on 74 and nightwatchman Amit Mishra was on 12, with India facing three tough sessions on the final day to avoid defeat in the first match of the three-Test series.

Sri Lanka, who have never won a Test in India, will bank on the spin duo of world record holder Muttiah Muralitharan and Rangana Herath to exploit a fifth day wicket that has so far proved a bowlers' graveyard.

Virender Sehwag smashed a typically robust 51 with seven boundaries in a first-wicket stand of 81 with Gambhir, before he holed out in the deep off left-arm spinner Herath soon after tea.

Rahul Dravid, who made 177 in the first innings, put on 88 for the second wicket with Gambhir before he was declared leg-before to seamer Chanaka Welegedara for 38.

Earlier, Sri Lanka compiled the highest ever

total on Indian soil before skipper Kumar Sangakkara declared the first innings 40 minutes after lunch.

Former captain Mahela Jayawardene hit a monumental 275 and wicketkeeper Prasanna Jayawardene remained unbeaten on 154 after a world-record stand of 351 for the sixth wicket.

The pair broke the 72-year record set by Australians Don Bradman and Jack Fingleton, who had put on 346 for the sixth wicket against England at Melbourne in 1937.

Sri Lanka's total surpassed India's 676-7 against the same opponents in Kanpur in 1986, which was the previous highest total in a Test match played in India.

Mahela Jayawardene batted for eight hours in his sixth double-century that was studded with 27 boundaries and a six.

He was dismissed in the third over after lunch when he shaped to drive leg-spinner Mishra, missed the line and was bowled out.

Sangakkara declared at the fall of Dammika Prasad's wicket, caught in the deep off Harbhajan Singh, leaving Prasanna Jayawardene stranded at the other end.

India claimed the third new ball from the start of the day's play, but it failed to contain the flow of runs.

Prasanna, who was on 84 overnight, reached his second Test century by edging Ishant Sharma to the third man fence for his eighth boundary.

Mahela, the ninth-highest scorer in Test

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