



Japan striker Shinji Okazaki celebrates one of his three goals against Saudi Arabia during their Asian Cup encounter at the Al-Rayyan Stadium in Doha on Monday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Japan rout S. Arabia

Football

AFP, Doha

Japan routed Saudi Arabia 5-0 on Monday to set up an Asian Cup quarterfinal clash with hosts Qatar, while Jordan joined them in the last eight by coming from behind to defeat neighbours Syria 2-1.

A hat-trick from striker Shinji Okazaki was the centrepiece of a comfortable Japan victory that consigned traditional powerhouses Saudi Arabia to one of the most abject and humiliating defeats in their history.

The emphatic margin of Japan's victory saw them through as Group B winners, pipping Jordan to top spot on goal difference.

Three-time champions Japan, who needed an injury-time goal to rescue a 1-1 draw with Jordan in their opening game, raced into a 3-0 lead inside 20 minutes at Doha's Al Rayyan Stadium.

Reported Stuttgart target Okazaki, a replacement for injured playmaker Keisuke Honda, broke the deadlock in the eighth minute before doubling Japan's lead five minutes later with a diving header from Shinji Kagawa's centre.

Ryoichi Maeda made it 3-0 when he flicked home Yuto Nagamoto's cross in the 19th minute and Saudi Arabia, who sacked Portuguese coach Jose Pereiro after their opening 2-1 defeat by Syria, were already dead and buried.

Maeda extended Japan's lead early in the second half before Okazaki lashed home his

third in the 80th minute as the hapless Saudis, themselves three-time champions, crashed to a third successive defeat in the competition.

A draw would have been sufficient to take Jordan through at the expense of Middle East neighbours Syria and they saw Hasan Abdel Fattah fire narrowly wide after only 36 seconds at the Qatar Sports Club Stadium.

Syria gradually assumed control of the game, however, and on 15 minutes they took the lead.

Sanharib Malki's low shot was parried by Jordan goalkeeper Amer Shafi into the path of Mohamed Al Zino, who gleefully slammed the ball into an open goal from six yards.

Syria were through as things stood, but with their fans launching a premature Mexican wave, Jordan levelled.

It was a desperately poor goal to concede, defender Ali Dyab rising to meet Amer Deeb's innocuous cross from the Syrian right and succeeding only in heading the ball over goalkeeper Mosab Balhous and into his own net.

Jordan completed the turnaround shortly before the hour mark with another goal that owed much to statuesque reactions in the Syrian defence.

A goal-kick from Jordan goalkeeper Amer Shafi was allowed to reach the edge of the Syria box and striker Odai Al Shaify capitalised on the hesitancy to poke the ball past Balhous and send the Jordan fans into raptures.

IN brief

King praises Jordan

AFP, Doha

King Abdullah II led the praises and the celebrations after Jordan sealed a place in the Asian Cup last eight by coming from behind to defeat Syria 2-1, saying the team had made the country proud.

"I can't explain the amount of happiness at my home tonight. I don't think the children are going to sleep tonight," he said in a phone call to the national television station in the wake of Monday's victory.

"All thanks for the players and the Jordanian people. And congratulations to all of you. The players made us all proud today," added the king, who is known to be a football fanatic.

Hammers retain Grant

AFP, London

Struggling English Premier League side West Ham insisted Tuesday they are committed to retaining manager Avram Grant after weeks of speculation over his future at the club.

The Israeli coach appeared on his way out of Upton Park, with reports at the weekend linking former Aston Villa boss Martin O'Neill with the post.

However, the club said in a statement they were standing by Grant, despite the club sitting bottom of the Premier League with just four wins from their first 20 matches.

A statement posted on www.whufc.com read: "The club are committed to retaining Avram Grant as manager and have identified potential transfer targets to give us the best possible chance of retaining Premier League status."

Jones agrees Rovers deal

AFP, Blackburn

Schalke midfielder Jermaine Jones has agreed a six-month loan deal with Blackburn Rovers, the English Premier League club confirmed on Tuesday.

The 29-year-old USA international becomes the club's second signing of the transfer window after the arrival of Roque Santa Cruz from Manchester City.

"He's a fantastic signing for us," manager Steve Kean told the club's official website. "Anybody who knows him as a player, he's a natural ball winner, he's a very good passer as well."

Kean added: "He's got a fantastic engine, he can go box-to-box, he's a genuine all round midfielder player."

Rovers have now to await for international clearance.

The midfielder has been at Schalke since 2007, but has fallen out of favour with coach Felix Magath.

Saudis axe coach again

AFP, Doha

Saudi Arabia axed coach Nasser Al Johar after just two games on Tuesday and vowed to replace him with a high-profile international name after their dismal showing at the Asian Cup.

The country also accepted the resignation of team manager Fahd Al-Misaibeh and his staff, the Saudi state news agency SPA, monitored here, said.

It followed the former regional powerhouse's humiliating 5-0 defeat by Japan on Monday, which left them bottom of their group with three straight defeats and out of the tournament.

It was only the second time in Asian Cup history that Saudi Arabia have not made it to the knockout stage.

The recriminations had already started with their Portuguese coach Jose Peseiro fired after their opening match loss to Syria.

Mario slams Jose

Football

AFP, Rome

Jose Mourinho is impolite and disrespectful according to his former player Mario Balotelli.

Speaking in a new sports pull-out in Tuesday's Gazzetta dello Sport called Extra Time, Manchester City striker Balotelli hits out at the Real Madrid coach.

The pair were at Inter Milan in the previous two seasons but fell out on several occasions, usually over Balotelli's attitude.

Mourinho even once banished him from the first team picture for seven matches but Inter finished the season with an unprecedented treble in Italian football, although with Balotelli mostly warming the bench.

"Mourinho is the best coach in the world but as a man he has a lot to learn about politeness and respect," said the 20-year-old who expressed his preference for his current coach Roberto Mancini, whom he also worked under at Inter before Mourinho joined.

"He's the most important coach I've had. Soon he'll be the best in the world," he added.

"As a man he's 10km ahead of Mourinho." Balotelli, who has never been shy about

blowing his own trumpet -- last month after winning a best young player in the world award he claimed he was better than everyone except Lionel Messi -- also hit out at AC Milan president and Italy Prime Minister for having described Antonio Cassano as the best talent in Italy.

"Either Berlusconi's made a mistake or he doesn't know Balotelli very well," he said.

And Balotelli also hit out at the English press, who earlier this month reported that he had cheated on glamour model girlfriend Sophie Reade with her best friend Faye-Evette Betts.

"English football is as far ahead in the stands as it is behind in its newspapers," he said.

"All I can say about Sophie is that I saw her once and then she started hassling me with messages while one of her friends is much more interesting."

Balotelli, who reportedly had a scrap with team-mate Jerome Boateng earlier this season described City's Adam Johnson as having great technique and Emmanuel Adebayor as being the most fun.

He also described AC Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic as being from another planet and said former team-mate Wesley Sneijder and not Messi should have won the Ballon D'Or.

C'Ron calls for reinforcements

Football

AFP, Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo called for reinforcements to Real Madrid's front line on Tuesday to help the club's desperate struggle to wrestle the Spanish league title from bitter rivals Barcelona.

"We need someone for six months," said Portuguese star Ronaldo.

"There has been talk of some great players such as Ruud (van Nistelrooy) and I'm glad. The more players there are here who want to help this team win the better," said the Portuguese star, who has 22 goals at the half way stage of the season.

Malki bemoans mistakes

Football

AFP, Doha

Angry Syria striker Sanharib Malki has joined his coach in slamming the defensive errors that saw his side eliminated from the Asian Cup.

Malki, who turned down the chance to represent Belgium, where he has played since 2002, was instrumental in the goal on 15 minutes that put Syria ahead against Jordan in Monday's must-win game.

At that point Syria were heading into the last eight at Jordan's expense.

But they surrendered the lead with an own goal before Jordan scored the winner just before the hour after a long punt upfield that somehow went all the way through to Jordan striker Odai Al Saify, who made no mistake.

"It was a big disappointment because I think that Jordan didn't play better than us but we gave them two goals," Malki, 26, told reporters.

"I feel angry about it because both goals that they scored came about as a result of our defensive mistakes."

Paul's ashes on display

AFP, Berlin



Paul the octopus, who shot to fame during the football World Cup last year for his flawless record in predicting the outcome of games, will get a shrine to mark three months since he died, his aquarium said Monday.

The tentacled tipster will on Thursday be honoured with a "Paul Corner" at his former home, containing his ashes and a "huge memorial," the centre in western Germany said.

"There will be a statue around 1.80 metres high (six feet) of Paul, on top of a football, in the middle of which will be a see-through window with the golden urn containing Paul's ashes," spokeswoman Tanja Munzig told AFP.

Paul thrilled punters and cost bookmakers a small fortune during the World Cup in South Africa in June and July by defying the odds to tip correctly seven German matches and Spain's 1-0 triumph against the Netherlands in the final.

His astonishing ability made him a global media phenomenon. His later predictions were carried live on rolling news channels in Germany.

He died peacefully in his sleep aged nearly three in October, sparking hundreds of messages of condolence from his Facebook fan club, whose ranks have more than tripled since his death to 200,000.

Blanc dismayed over new kit

AFP, Paris

France coach Laurent Blanc on Monday expressed his dismay that the new multi-million euro France kit unveiled on Monday makes Les Bleus look too much like their Italian rivals.

"I find that the completely blue jersey is beautiful but a bit Italian," said Blanc after US sports apparel giants Nike unveiled the new kit in Paris.

"We know that the French are very attached to the blue-white-red. I made this remark but there's a clever thing on the sleeve that you can lift up and that's red inside."

"Afterwards it's a question of consistency and uniformity. It will be up to the players to decide if we lift up the sleeves or not."

"In any case when we play in blue we'll have white shorts and red socks so the blue-white-red will be visible."

Nike have agreed a record annual 42.6 million euro contract with the French football federation (FFF) until 2018 which brings an end to the 38-year era of German rivals Adidas (1972-2010).

Nike have completely broken with the Adidas era opting for a very refined totally blue jersey - between dark and light blue - the red motifs have disappeared with only the FFF emblem and the Nike logo in white.



NEO Cricket	
New Zealand v Pakistan	Second Test, Day 5
Live from 4:00am	ESPN
Sportscentre India	Sports News
Live at 8:30pm	AFC Asian Cup
UAE v Iran	Live from 10:30pm
STAR Sports	Australian Open
Live from 6:00am	AFC Asian Cup
Iraq v North Korea	Live from 10:30pm



Premier Division Cricket League	
Abahani v Prime Doleshwar	Venue: KSOAS
Kalabagan v Surjo Tarun	Venue: BKSP-2
Mohammedan v Biman	Venue: SBNC

Atletico stay in hunt

AFP, Barcelona



Atletico Madrid beat Real Mallorca 3-0 on Monday to maintain their hunt for a European place and ease the pressure on coach Quique Sanchez Flores.

Recent poor form including a 4-1 thumping by Hercules put Sanchez Flores in the firing line and there were rumours that if they lost to Mallorca and city rivals Real Madrid in their second leg cup-tie, he would be sacked.

However, Atletico responded to some good early possession from Mallorca with Juan Valera heading home a Jose Antonio

Reyes corner.

Cameroon hitman Pierre Webo had a shot blocked by Atletico keeper David De Gea before Diego Forlan extended Atletico's lead.

The key moment of the second-half came when Antonio Lopez conceded a penalty for pushing over Emilio Nsue and was dismissed. Webo stepped up to take the penalty but De Gea guessed right and blocked well.

Mallorca also finished with ten men after Jonathan De Guzman was sent off for a tackle from behind on Juanfran Torres and in the final minute Reyes wrapped up the scoring on the counter-attack.

On Sunday Barcelona had moved four points clear at the top of the table with a 4-1 win over Malaga.



Jordan forward Odai al-Saifi (C) scores the winning goal against Syria during their Asian Cup clash at the Qatar Sports Stadium in Doha on Monday.

PHOTO:
AFP