



Asia Japan's, the world next

AFP, Doha

Japan reaffirmed their status as a heavyweight football nation with victory at the Asian Cup and coach Alberto Zaccheroni believes there are bigger and better things to come.

Substitute Tadanari Lee scored an extra-time winner as his side edged Australia 1-0 to win a pulsating final on Saturday and become the most successful team in the history of the competition.

Lee sent a stunning left-foot volley past the diving Mark Schwarzer in the 109th minute to hand his country their fourth title at the continental showcase, a feat no-one else has achieved.

The win, following their successes in 1992, 2000 and 2004, carried the added bonus of an automatic place at the 2013 Confederations Cup in Brazil -- the traditional World Cup warm-up tournament.

"It is a great victory. We have a really great team. They were united and won the title against

such strong opponents," said Zaccheroni, who singled out Lee for praise.

"I knew he would do it. What is great about this team is that players who started on the bench could produce results on the pitch."

Zaccheroni, who was recruited after last year's World Cup and tasked with bettering their last-16 performance in Brazil in 2014, said it was a tribute to his players that they won after a gruelling semifinal.

"We improved throughout the tournament. Our attack played with great speed and accuracy. That's a great feature of this team at the moment. To get into the final, physically we were very exhausted," he said.

"So to play against a tactically and physically very good Australian team and win is a great achievement."

"This is an excellent team with fantastic players and I'm really proud of myself to be managing

Zaccheroni the toast of Samurai

AFP, Tokyo

Japan praised Italian coach Alberto Zaccheroni after a sleepless night Sunday, saying his shrewd and timely use of squad players helped the Blue Samurai lift a record fourth Asian Cup.

Hundreds of fans celebrated in the streets of Tokyo's all-night hub Shibuya after extra-time substitute Tadanari Lee scored a 109th-minute goal, powering Japan to a 1-0 win over Australia in the final in Doha.

"Nippon! Nippon!" they chanted, some of them waving red-sun Japanese flags, after the match ended at about 2:30 am on Sunday Japan time. Sports bars and public halls in

big cities across the country were filled with fans watching the match live on television, according to media reports.

"Japan, the champions of Asia," read the banner headline in a four-page special issued by the influential daily Asahi Shimbun, as the news of the victory came too late for the Sunday newspapers.

"Zaccheroni has used many players and controlled their motivation," said sports writer Tetsuo Nakanishi, adding that the 57-year-old former

AC Milan boss used 21 of the 23 players in his squad in the continental showcase.

"He is courageous enough to use young players," he told a Sunday morning show on the TBS network.



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them."

Like their great rivals South Korea, who they beat in the last four on penalties, Japan brought a young team to Doha, but it showed that they have big potential.

Captain Makoto Hasebe, who plays for German team Wolfsburg, said it bode well for the future.

"It is meaningful that we have won the tournament despite the fact that we have come as a young team," he said.

"I think it was a great experience for the young players and I hope they will build on it."

But he is convinced they still have room to improve.

"To fight in the world, we must improve our individual skills otherwise we cannot win. In this sense, we can see a task ahead of us. I hope everyone of us will work hard after going back to their clubs," he said.

"We were outdone by Australia physically. We must improve

ourselves in this area."

In an indication of Japan's quality, CSKA Moscow star Keisuke Honda was voted the tournament's most valuable player.

"It hasn't really sunk in," said the midfielder, who has reportedly attracted the interest of several English clubs.

"I am not personally satisfied with my performance and I want to improve myself more and more and want to show an improved Honda to the people of Japan."

Asked what winning the tournament meant for Japanese football, he replied: "I have seen Japan win this title a number of times since I was a child."

"But I personally think this victory is more valuable than previous ones. We beat Qatar, we beat South Korea and we beat Australia to win the title."

"The value of this victory is something unseen in our previous Asian Cups."

IN brief

Ballack coy about national team

AFP, Berlin

Having made his first start since September, Germany captain Michael Ballack was coy about whether he expects to be named this week in Joachim Loew's squad to face Italy in a friendly.

Germany take on the 2006 World Cup winners in Dortmund on February 9 and Ballack is hoping his 90 minutes in Leverkusen's 2-0 win over Hanover last Friday was enough to win back his place when the team is announced.

"I still have lots of work to do to get completely fit again," said Ballack.

"Perhaps the lord will look down and say, 'he has had enough bad luck', I hope so."

"For the moment there is no contact with Jogi Loew," said Ballack.

"I have to keep putting in good performances with Leverkusen first."

"The coach will then decide how things will go."

Fergie hails Hernandez

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson admitted he tinkered too much with his Manchester United line-up before hailing Mexican hotshot Javier Hernandez for another face-saving strike.

"He's only had one chance and he's scored - one chance, one goal is a tremendous ratio," said Ferguson.

"He has great feet in and around the box and gets his shots away quickly with hardly any backlift."

"His workrate is fantastic and he's always on the move. We probably didn't find enough space for him at times, but you also have to give Southampton a bit of credit too. Their defenders read things well."

Jose flirts with England again

SOCCERNET

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho has once again suggested that he could leave the Bernabeu and return to the Premier League at the end of the season.

"It's always important for me and my family to be happy and I love English football and my family love England," Mourinho said in the Sunday Mirror. "I have always maintained I will return one day but maybe it will come sooner than I expected."

"If you want to build something England is the place to do it. The culture, the atmosphere and the fair play are unlike anything anywhere else."

"Besides I want to live in England again. My family loved it here. We still have a house in England and they come back frequently. And if my family are

Bremen sink to new depths

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich had to come from behind on Saturday to win 3-1 at Werder Bremen, while Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund kept up their domination with a 3-0 win at Wolfsburg.

Bremen's Per Mertesacker went from joy to despair as his opening goal just after the break was cancelled out by an Arjen Robben goal before Mertesacker turned the ball into his own net to give Bayern the win which puts them third.

"Bremen were strong in the first 20 minutes, but we changed our tactics and were better," said Bayern coach Louis van Gaal.

"After conceding the goal at the start of the second half, my team became significantly more aggressive in their play."

"At the end, we deserved our win and I am

proud of my team."

The defeat leaves Bremen 15th, hovering above the dreaded bottom three and deep in the battle to avoid relegation.

The win moves Bayern up to third, but still 14 points behind the leaders.

Dortmund kept up their stranglehold on the Bundesliga with their 16th victory from 20 matches with a convincing win at Wolfsburg to inflict another defeat on ex-England coach Steve McClaren.

Paraguay striker Lucas Barrios scored Dortmund's first goal after just two minutes and nearly grabbed his second on 40 minutes when his shot was charged down, but Turkey midfielder Nuri Sahin was on hand to score Borussia's second.

With just over 20 minutes left, McClaren brought on newcomer Dieumerci Mbokani, the Congo striker who was signed from Monaco on loan, but Dortmund defender Mats Hummels headed home on 71 minutes.

RESULTS

Schalke 04 0 Hoffenheim 1 (Vorsah 4)
Werder Bremen 1 (Mertesacker 47)
Bayern Munich 3 (Robben 65, Mertesacker 75-og, Klose 86)
VfL Wolfsburg 0 Borussia Dortmund 3 (Barrios 2, Sahin 40, Hummels 71)
Nuremberg 2 (Simons 59-pen, Cohen 70) Hamburg 0
St. Pauli 3 (Takyi 30, 36, Bruns 76-pen) Cologne 0

Bommel off, but Milan still win

AFP, Rome



Mark van Bommel was sent off on his AC Milan league debut but the Serie A leaders still claimed the three points in a 2-0 win at Catania on Saturday.

Despite playing most of the second half with 10 men, goals from Robinho and Zlatan Ibrahimovic sent Milan seven points clear at the top ahead of Sunday's matches.

Goalscorer Robinho claimed the Rossoneri are closing in on the Scudetto.

"I'm happy with the win against a team that defends really well," he told SkySport.

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri said Van Bommel will have to learn to adapt to Italian football while praising Ibrahimovic's contribution.

"Van Bommel needs to be more cunning but it's only his second game (following his debut in the Italian Cup in midweek)," he

said.

"You don't get booked for fouls like that in Germany but he's inclined to go in hard."

"(Ibrahimovic) is having the best season of his career in terms of the intensity of his play."

"He's very enthusiastic, he feels he's a leader and he's even defending. That's the most important thing he does, if he does it then everyone gets behind him."

Earlier, Czech forward Libor Kozak grabbed both goals as Lazio beat Fiorentina 2-0 to keep their slim title hopes alive.

They moved up to third ahead of Sunday's matches.

Despite their lofty standing, Reja still insists the club have modest ambitions having reached the 40-point mark, the theoretical number of points needed to avoid relegation.

"Today we reached 40 points so we're safe," he said. "Our aim hasn't changed, we want to get into the Europa League."

RESULTS

Lazio 2 (Kozak 69-pen, 73) Fiorentina 0
Catania 0 AC Milan 2 (Robinho 58,



Dortmund striker Lucas Barrios (R) rejoices after scoring the first during their Bundesliga match against VfL Wolfsburg at Wolfsburg on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

MU rebound, Chelsea held

INTERNET, Undated

Michael Owen scored a second-half equalizer and Javier Hernandez netted the winner as Manchester United came from behind to beat Southampton 2-1 in their FA Cup fourth-round tie on Saturday.

Richard Chaplow gave Southampton a deserved lead just before half-time, smashing a dropping ball in at Anders Lindegaard's near post.

Owen had hit the bar with a mishit cross in the first half, and he found the equalizer 20 minutes into the second half, heading in Gabriel Obertan's deflected cross.

And with 16 minutes remaining, Owen won the ball in the Southampton half, and slipped it to Ryan Giggs who fed Hernandez to squeeze in the winner.

Salomon Kalou struck four minutes after coming off the bench to earn holders Chelsea a 1-1 draw at Everton.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will play the World Cup?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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DAY'S EVENT



Premier Division Cricket

Super League

Cricket Coaching v Biman

Venue: SCS (Bogra)

Abahani v Gazi Tank

Venue: BKSP-2

Mohammedan v Old DOHS

Venue: SKS (Rajshahi)

Bangladesh League

Ctg Mohammedan v Farashganj

Time: 2:30pm

Venue: Cox's Bazar Stadium

Rahmatganj v Ctg Abahani

Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Bishreshtha Mostafa Kamal