

Motta answers to critics

REUTERS, Ljubljana

Thiago Motta's goal in Saturday's Euro 2012 qualifying win in Slovenia will temporarily silence critics of Italy's policy of recruiting foreign-born players but the fact they are needed still speaks volumes.

Brazil-born Motta struck his first international goal in only his second Italy appearance on 73 minutes to give Italy side a 1-0 victory and send them six points clear at the top of Group C.

Proud patriotic pundits have bemoaned Cesare Prandelli for resorting to using Motta, fellow Brazil-born Amauri and Argentina-born Cristian Ledesma but the coach has said he has little option given the dearth of young talent in Serie A.

Italian soccer officials are even considering launching an under-21 club side in the second tier so that young players can play regularly instead of being squeezed out in Serie A by foreigners and managers cautious over throwing in youngsters.

Motta's case is all the more controversial because he played for Brazil in the 2003 CONCACAF Gold Cup. That side was deemed to be an invited under-23 team so when Italy's senior team enquired about calling up Inter Milan's Motta, FIFA said yes.

"I have to thank everyone who let me arrive at this point," Motta told reporters.

"I respect everyone's opinions, everybody can say what they like. When I go on the pitch I think about enjoying myself. I forget about everything else."

The skilful former Barcelona midfielder was roundly applauded by Italy's small contingent of travelling fans.

"It was impossible to imagine it better than that," Motta said of the cheers. "I played and won in a strong Italy team which had personality before and didn't need me to bring it."

Italy's star has fallen so much since their fourth World Cup triumph in 2006 that Motta, 28, is badly needed to add verve to their midfield even if striker Amauri and playmaker Ledesma are not in Prandelli's current squad.

The Azzurri next visit Ukraine for a friendly on Tuesday.



Italy forward Antonio Cassano (C) is surrounded by Bojan Jokic (L) and Valter Birsa of Slovenia during their Euro 2012 qualifier in Ljubljana on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Korea trounce Honduras

Football

AFP, Seoul

South Korea trounced Honduras 4-0 on Friday to win its first home football friendly this year.

South Korea dominated the first half at the Seoul World Cup Stadium, watched by some 30,000 fans, and defender Lee Jung-Soo kicked in a loose ball to open the scoring in the 28th minute.

Two minutes before half-time midfielder Kim Jung-Woo doubled the lead, converting a pass from Monaco striker Park Chu-Young, the home side's new captain, past Honduras' diving keeper Noel Valladares.

Park headed in a cross in the 83rd minute, and Lee Keun-Ho rounded out the scoring with a header in the final seconds.

"I am very gratified that we're growing into a relentless team that can play hard until the final whistle," coach Cho Kwang-Rae said, according to Yonhap news agency.

He praised a good combination of starting midfielders -- Ki Sung-Yueng of Scottish giants Celtic, Kim Jung-Woo and Lee Yong-Rae -- for establishing control of the match early on.

"I've long been concerned about our touch around the net. But we've made big strides in our shooting and movements around the goal," Cho said.

Honduras coach Jose Reynaldo Clavasquin admitted his defence broke down after the second goal.

"After giving up two goals, we stopped playing the dynamic football that we're capable of playing," Clavasquin said through an interpreter.

"The Koreans were always a step ahead of us and pressured us to intercept the ball. They were a well-organised team for the whole 90 minutes."

Honduras had their first chance in the 14th minute, when Walter Martinez's floating pass found charging forward Georgie Welcome, but South Korean keeper Jung Sung-ryong made a diving save.

Zac feels Japanese

Football

AFP, Osaka

Japan's national football coach Alberto Zaccheroni believes his adopted country will bounce back from its quake-tsunami disaster, and says his native Italy is ready to help.

"After spending several months as national coach, I feel that Japan is my home and I am Japanese myself," the 57-year-old former AC Milan boss told domestic media after arriving in Osaka.

"When I think of the victims, I feel hurt like everybody else in the nation."

The Blue Samurai, who won a record fourth Asian Cup in January with Zaccheroni in charge, are due to face a J-League select team for a charity match in Osaka on Tuesday to help victims of the catastrophe.

"Japan is a country that never stops, a country that is always moving forward. The Japanese are famous for helping each other as one," he said.

"I want to use the match as the first step in cooperating with the reconstruction work."

Zaccheroni, who stayed in Italy with his family after the March 11 disaster, said Inter Milan manager Leo-

nardo and the Italian Football Federation had offered to support Japan, possibly by playing charity matches.

Leonardo, a Brazilian, played in Japan from 1994 to 1996 with J-League side Kashima Antlers.

"Leonardo told me he wants to come to Japan and do what he can and the Italian football association has also said it wants to do something to help," Zaccheroni said.

"I want to make arrangements for such games," he added. "We need to find possible dates."

The J-League has been suspended until April 23

because of electricity shortages caused by tsunami damage to power facilities, including a crisis-hit Fukushima nuclear plant.

It is seeking to reschedule the cancelled games for a summer break in July, when the national team are due to compete in the South American championship Copa America as guests.

Zaccheroni said he had yet to decide how to respond to a request from the J-League that Japan withdraw from the tournament.

"I want to think about it after understanding the situation," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Japan coach Alberto Zaccheroni (C) is surrounded by football fans as he stages a fund raising campaign for victims of the tsunami and earthquake in Osaka yesterday.

Colombo Curry

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He clipped Lasith Malinga to the boundary to reach the landmark.

Two more boundaries followed in his 32-ball 25 before he chipped one to Thilan Samaraweera to cut off a promising innings.

The dismissal was reminiscent of his dismissal to Rubel Hossain in Chittagong on March 11.

HALF A BAT TO CELEBRATE

Eoin Morgan is possibly the most active batsman you could ever imagine. His coolness is derived solely from his busy demeanour but he

hardly flinches. Except when his bat breaks.

The left-hander resurrected England's faltering innings with his adventurous strokeplay, dominating the 91-run fourth wicket partnership with Ian Trott.

On 49, Lasith Malinga bowled him a routine yorker (only because he looks so calm in delivering it ball after ball) only for Morgan to put some bat on it and get the single. "Some" of that bat actually came off, giving him a broken bat to celebrate his half-century.

A ball later, it was goodbye Morgan as England said hello to the devilish batting Powerplay.

a very low total on that testing wicket in Chittagong.

In this tournament alone, three of his innings have helped England win their games while in his 25-match ODI career, he has scored 50 or more in eight England wins.

His value to England, however, is apparent in a lot of ways as they continuously lose quick wickets at the top of the order, a flow that is always stemmed by Trott.

MSC turns Limited

SPORTS REPORTER

According to the decision taken in their Annual General Meeting in 2009, Mohammedan Sporting Club completed its registration in the form of Limited Company on Thursday the 24th March, 2011.

The registration process with the Joint Stock Companies and Firms started back in 2009, with Mosaddek Hossain Falu named as the convener of the ad-hoc committee of MSC. But he stepped down from the post when he failed to enlist the club as a limited company despite having submitted the necessary papers to the authority concerned.

Independence Day Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19 comfortably defeated BKSP XI in the Independence Day Exhibition cricket match at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

BKSP batted first in the 45 over affair after they won the toss and were bundled out for just 115 runs in the 34th over. The only notable score came from the bat of middle-order Abid Hossain who hit five boundaries and a six in his 43.

Taskin Ahmed grabbed two wickets for 22, while Zakaria Masud bagged three wickets for just seven runs in three overs.

U-19's reached the target in the 23rd over with eight wickets in hand. Opener Aslam Hossain was not out on 52 off 73 balls hitting eight boundaries and a six. Liton Kumars Das was the other unbeaten batsman on 43. Abdullah Imran of BKSP took both the wickets.

Moggi's jail term cut

AFP, Rome

Luciano Moggi, the man at the centre of the 2006 Italian Calciopoli match-fixing scandal, had his prison sentence reduced from a year and a half to one year by the Rome Court of Appeal on Friday.

The former Juventus director's son Alessandro also saw his sentence reduced from a year and two months to just five months.

Lucas warns Scotland

Football

AFP, London

Brazil midfielder Lucas Leiva has warned Scotland that his country won't be taking it easy in Sunday's friendly international at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium.

While Scotland's players are looking forward to a rare meeting with the most glamorous name in world football, in reality they will come up against a Brazilian outfit desperately searching for a new identity under coach Mano Menezes.

Menezes took over after last year's World Cup flop in South Africa, but he has yet significantly to improve the Selecao.

The Brazilians arrive in London on their worst run for nearly three years after successive defeats against France and Argentina and Liverpool star Lucas knows an impressive showing against Scotland is vital to keep the critics at bay ahead of the Copa America later this year.

"The new manager is trying to give opportunities to the young players and trying to build a new team so a lot of new faces are here," Lucas said.

"But we just have to take the opportunity to try and be in the squad all the time and look to the

Copa America.

"It will be a very important game for us. We lost the last games so the pressure is a bit higher.

"But we have a good team and hopefully we will play a very good match.

"Hopefully we will play with confidence and I am sure we will have a big opportunity to win and be confident for the rest of the games."

Lucas may not be cast in the traditional mould of flamboyant playmakers like Kaka and Ronaldinho, who are out of favour under Menezes, but his industrious displays for Liverpool have earned a place in the Selecao starting line-up recently.

The 24-year-old's experience of the Premier League could be important against a combative outfit life Scotland and he added: "It is an important game for Scotland because they have a lot of respect for Brazil, but we know how difficult it will be because they have good players and play with more confidence now."

"Hopefully we will have a very good match and win. That is the most important thing at the moment."

Scottish coach Craig Levein took his squad for a team-bonding break in the Spanish resort of La Manga to prepare for only the sixth meeting

between the countries and the first since Brazil's 2-1 win in the opening game of the 1998 World Cup.

Scotland are still waiting for their first victory over Brazil, with two draws in 1966 and 1974 their best efforts against the self-appointed guardians of the beautiful game.

Blackpool midfielder Charlie Adam remembers watching Tommy Boyd's own goal which condemned Scotland to defeat in that 1998 World Cup clash in Paris and he would love to help his country to a famous victory.

"At France 98 we lost in Paris but that's the only game (between the teams) I really remember," Adam said. "I just hope the current squad we've got now is good enough to put up a good show and get a good performance."

"It'll be a fantastic occasion and hopefully I'll get the opportunity to play."

"Brazil are one of the best teams in the world and they've got some of the best players."

"It's great that I've been picked for the squad and hopefully we'll get the right result."

Brazil will be without injured AC Milan forwards Robinho and Alexandre Pato, while Villarreal striker Nilmar is doubtful with a muscle problem.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Have bills	1 Piece of work
4 Johnson of old TV	2 Apple invader
8 Show-room sample	3 Italian erupter
12 Cauldron	4 Mary-Kate's sister
13 Signet	5 Harvests
14 Pic to click	6 Poi base
15 Grecian vessel	7 Massachusetts symbol
16 Injure	8 "Likewise"
17 Via	9 Singer's comeback?
18 Trivial consideration	10 Oliver Twist's request
21 "Of course"	11 Responsibility
22 Carnival city	
23 Cher's early partner	
26 Foundation	
27 H look-alike	
30 Rodriguez at third base	
31 Morning cupful	
32 Antelope's playmate	
33 Toxic spray	

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: CLASS OF EXTRA-LIGHT EXTINCT REPTILES THAT HAD THE SPECIAL ABILITY TO FLY HIGH: DINO-SCARS.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals T