



PHOTO: AFP

Japan defender Maya Yoshida (R), chased by teammates, runs off to celebrate his all-important goal during their 2014 World Cup qualifiers against North Korea in Saitama yesterday.

## Japan leave it late Last-ditch signings

### Football

AFP, Singapore

Asian big guns Australia and Japan left it perilously late before snatching vital winners in World Cup qualifying Friday, as South Korea got off to a roaring start against Lebanon.

Australia were just four minutes from a humiliating home draw with Thailand before Alex Brosque's late strike, while Japan had to wait until the 94th minute to overcome fierce rivals North Korea in stormy Saitama.

But South Korea hit six past stunned Lebanon in Goyang to take a decisive first step on the road to Brazil 2014 as Asia's top-ranked sides entered the lengthy qualifying process, which winds up next year.

Aussie goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer admitted the Soccerroos' 2-1 win felt more like a defeat against unfancied Thailand, who lie some 98 places lower in the FIFA

rankings.

Teerasil Dangda gave the visitors a shock lead on 15 minutes and Australia were not back on terms until Josh Kennedy's 58th minute strike, before Brosque's last-gasp decider relieved Brisbane's Suncorp Stadium crowd.

"It feels like a loss," Schwarzer said. "It was one of our worst performances for a long time and there are no excuses, we weren't good enough at times, but at least we won which is the positive."

Japan put their fans through even greater agony before defender Maya Yoshida rose to head home a cross on 94 minutes as the Asian champions' quality finally told.

The Blue Samurai had dominated play despite missing midfield duo Keisuke Honda and Kengo Nakamura through injury, and coach Alberto Zaccheroni said the result was a just reward for their patient play.

"I think North Korea played their 100 percent. We had to be

patient, patient patient, but we were threatening them repeatedly and finally Maya scored a goal," said the Italian.

"We were on the offensive for most of the time and I just waited for the goal for a long time," he added.

In Goyang, Park Chu-Young celebrated this week's move to Arsenal with a hat-trick as South Korea ran riot against the Lebanese.

Park, who was signed from AS Monaco, set the Koreans on their way with two goals in the first half before completing his treble on 67 minutes. Sunderland forward Ji Dong-won scored twice and Kim Jung-woo once.

The winners and runners-up of the five groups will be drawn into two pools for the round-robin fourth stage, with the eventual top two in each section earning a ticket to Brazil.

The two third-placed teams will then face each other for the right to contest an intercontinental play-off.

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger embarked on a last-ditch spending spree on transfer deadline day as the under-pressure Arsenal boss signed Mikel Arteta, Andre Santos, Per Mertesacker and Yossi Benayoun, while Manchester City completed their shock swoop for injury-plagued midfielder Owen Hargreaves.

Wenger has been feeling the heat since his side's humiliating 8-2 defeat at Manchester United on Sunday and he reacted by splashing out around £24 million on a quartet of new faces on Wednesday.

He paid £10 million for Everton midfielder Arteta in an attempt to fill the void left by Cesc Fabregas's move to Barcelona.

The Frenchman also landed Brazilian full-back Santos from Fenerbahce for £6.2 million and Werder Bremen centre-back Mertesacker for around £8 million as he tries to shore up his leaky defence.

Chelsea midfielder Benayoun was Wenger's other signing, arriving on loan for the rest of the season -- effectively to replace Samir Nasri after he joined Manchester City -- while Danish striker Nicklas Bendtner left

Arsenal for a loan spell at Sunderland. Meanwhile City took a gamble on Hargreaves, released by local rivals Manchester United at the end of last season after the champions rejected his offer to play for free following a miserable four-year spell at Old Trafford.

City believe Hargreaves is completely recovered from his knee operations and they put the finishing touches to the one-year contract after the 30-year-old passed an extensive medical over the last 24 hours.

Elsewhere, Tottenham signed England midfielder Scott Parker from West Ham in a deal believed to be worth £6 million.

Redknapp was able to hang onto Croatia midfielder Luka Modric despite a £40 million offer from Chelsea on Tuesday, but England striker Peter Crouch followed Spurs teammate Wilson Palacios to Stoke after the Honduras midfielder completed a £6 million switch to the FA Cup finalists.

With Chelsea failing to get Modric, the Blues made a £12 million swoop for Liverpool midfielder Raul Meireles, who handed in a transfer request to force through a deal shortly before the window closed at 22:00 GMT.

Liverpool boss Kenny Dalglish brought Craig Bellamy back to Anfield four years after the Wales striker left the club.

### Inter agree Zarate deal

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan have agreed a deal with Lazio for the loan of Argentine forward Mauro Zarate but have missed out on Genoa's Argentinian attacking midfielder Rodrigo Palacios.

Inter had been in discussions with Genoa over the transfer of Palacios but allegedly failed to reach agreement on a price despite offering 10 million euros, according to Italian media reports.

Instead they have plumped for Lazio's out of favour forward Zarate who will cost the nerazzurri three million euros for the season-long loan with a provision for a 15-million-euro permanent deal in a year, Italian press report.

Inter have been in need of attacking reinforcements having sold Samuel Eto'o to Russians Anzhi Makhachkala and let Goran Pandev go to Napoli on loan.

They also signed veteran Uruguay striker Diego Forlan from Atletico Madrid earlier this week.

## Barca thrash Villarreal

AFP, Barcelona



Champions Barcelona produced the perfect response to bitter rivals Real Madrid here on Monday as they overwhelmed Champions League qualifiers Villarreal 5-0 in their opening league match of the season.

A double by Lionel Messi plus goals on their league debuts for summer acquisitions Cesc Fabregas and Alexis Sanchez after an opener from Thiago came just a day

after Real had thrashed Real Zaragoza 6-0.

Barcelona's win, though, is an ominous sign for Real Madrid as Villarreal are considered a far stronger side than Zaragoza.

The Catalan side are in the hunt for their fourth consecutive league triumph and having started the season by lifting the domestic and European Super Cups they showed no mercy against a Villarreal side who spent the match chasing shadows.

On paper Barcelona appeared to have problems with Pique and Dani Alves all missing from the defence but coach Pep Guardiola reverted to a 3-4-3 formation made famous by his mentor Johan Cruyff as Barcelona handler in the early 1990s.

Thiago and Fabregas, both starting the game in the centre of the pitch, made it 2-0 by half-time, while a strike from Villarreal's Italian striker Giuseppe Rossi that went narrowly wide was all the visitors could muster.

Sanchez opened his account for Barca with a goal after the break before a Messi double completed the scoring.



Barcelona forward Alexis Sanchez is ecstatic after his goal against Villarreal during their Primera Liga encounter at Nou Camp on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

### SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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Men's & Women's 3rd Rd

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Sri Lanka v Australia

First Test, Day 4