

Japan leave it late

AFP, Muscat



Shinji Okazaki scored a late winner as Asian champions Japan edged Oman 2-1 to zero on a berth at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil on Wednesday.

Oman had not lost at home in the final round of qualifiers and Ahmed Mubarak's 77th-minute free kick looked like preserving their unbeaten streak, after Hiroshi Kiyotake's first goal for Japan had put the visitors in front after 20 minutes.

But Okazaki had the last word when he scored from close range after a break down the left, putting Alberto Zaccheroni's men provisionally eight points clear at the top of Group B with three games to play.

Stuttgart's Okazaki, who missed Japan's recent friendlies against France and Brazil, saw a couple of half-chances saved by Oman's Wigan Athletic goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi at the other end, before Kiyotake broke the deadlock.

Oman failed to properly deal with Yuto Nagatomo's cross from the left and Nuremberg midfielder Kiyotake seized on the loose ball to slot home from close range.

Kiyotake and Sakai both had chances to extend Japan's lead as the pace slowed, but with 13 minutes remaining, Mubarak squeezed in a low free kick which sent the home fans into a frenzy.

However as Oman pressed for the winner, substitute Gotoku Sakai raced free on the left flank and his cross was flicked on at the near post by Yasuhito Endo, leaving the arriving Okazaki with the simplest of finishes.

Japan resume their qualifying campaign away to Jordan on March 26, when Oman are away to Australia.



Australia defender Robert Cornthwaite (L) celebrates his winning goal against South Korea during their international friendly in Hwaseong yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ibra admires Gerrard

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic says Steven Gerrard is not "a normal English player", as the Liverpool midfielder prepares to win his 100th England cap in Wednesday's friendly between the two countries.

Gerrard will join a select band of players to have made 100 appearances for England.

"I think Steven Gerrard is a fantastic player," said Ibrahimovic.

"He has been loyal to his club and he has won some big trophies with the club. He always plays at a high level, when he is not injured.

"He is a very good person to have as a teammate in your team. He always gives 200 percent, is a good fighter, and has good skills and a good touch with the ball also.

"He feels more like an international player, rather than a normal English player. English players have big hearts and are always fighting, very aggressive, but for me, Gerrard feels more international.

"He has more skills than the normal player."

Police drop referee racism complaint

AFP, London



British police said Tuesday they had no plans to continue enquiries into a complaint regarding alleged racist comments by referee Mark Clattenburg towards a Chelsea player because no victim had come forward.

The Society of Black Lawyers reported Clattenburg to London's Metropolitan Police after Chelsea complained to the Football Association the referee used a term understood to have been interpreted as racist towards John Obi Mikel during the 3-2 Premier League defeat by Manchester United on October 28.

While the separate FA enquiry is continuing, a police statement said, from their perspective, "the matter cannot currently be investigated".

"An investigation was launched into alleged comments made during a football match between Chelsea FC and Manchester United FC at Stamford Bridge on 28 October 2012," the statement said.

"This follows on from a complaint received by the Metropolitan Police Service on 29 October.

"Enquiries were made and no victims have come forward. The matter will remain as a recorded incident.

"Without a victim and/or any evidence that any offence has been committed, the matter cannot currently be investigated."

However, the statement added police could look again at the incident.

"If the situation changes and a victim

and/or evidence to support an allegation of a crime comes to police attention then further enquiries will be made," it read.

Before the police made their announcement, Chelsea chairman Bruce Buck gave an interview to Tuesday's London Evening Standard where he insisted the European champions were not hypocrites for backing captain John Terry while lodging a complaint against Clattenburg.

Buck said the London club had a "duty of care" in supporting Terry, who recently completed a four-game domestic ban for racially abusing QPR defender Anton Ferdinand in a match last year.

Meanwhile Buck said Chelsea would have been "crucified" if they had not reported the allegations concerning Clattenburg.

"Suppose we had tried to sweep this under the rug and said to the various players, 'Look, it's not a big deal and the press are going to be all over us, maybe you want to reconsider'.

"If that had leaked out, we would've really been crucified," added Buck.

Meanwhile Buck refuted oft-repeated suggestions that Terry, involved in a number of high-profile incidents, 'ran' things at Stamford Bridge rather more effectively than the club's Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich.

"Chelsea are not run by John Terry," Buck said. "I don't know how I can prove it to you but it's not true. My club is run by Roman Abramovich."

Solo's fiance released

AFP, Seattle

Former NFL player Jerramy Stevens was released without charge Tuesday after his arrest on suspicion of assaulting his fiance, US women's soccer team goalkeeper Hope Solo.

Stevens, a former tight end for the Seattle Seahawks who turned 33 on Tuesday, was arrested on suspicion of fourth-degree assault, but the bail hearing judge found no probable cause to hold Stevens and released him.

So far, Stevens has not been charged. The pair had planned to marry on Tuesday. Instead, Solo was present at Stevens' hearing.

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported that police said Solo was not cooperative when they responded to a disturbance at 3:45 am Monday.

Police said in their report they found Stevens hiding on the floor in one of the upstairs bedrooms. Stevens told police he was sleeping and did not know anything about a loud disturbance at the house involving some unwanted guests who had left before police arrived.

Aussies edge South Korea



AFP, Hwaseong

Late call-up Robert Cornthwaite was the unlikely hero with an 87th-minute winner Wednesday as Australia enjoyed a confidence-boosting 2-1 friendly win over South Korea.

Defender Cornthwaite, who plays for K-League side Chunnam Dragons and was only brought into the squad after a series of injuries, pounced on a loose ball in the box to complete a come-from-behind victory in Hwaseong.

Australia have had just one win in four games in the final round of World Cup qualifying, but they will enjoy their success which came through Nikita Rukavytsya, who cancelled out Lee Dong-Gook's early strike, and Cornthwaite's late winner.

South Korea had climbed to the top of their qualifying group, and they looked on course to see off one of their biggest regional rivals after Lee Dong-Gook volleyed Lee Seung-Gi's cross past the diving Mark Schwarzer on 11 minutes.

But Australia evened things up moments before half-time, as Rukavytsya converted a Tommy Oar pass from the right side of the box.

Both sides began the second half slowly before the game opened up in the final 20 minutes. In the 70th, Hwang Jin-Sung's diving header bounced right at Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer.

Two minutes later, visiting captain Lucas Neill nearly put his side ahead, but Kim Young-Kwang in the South Korean goal kept out his close-range header. At the other end, Schwarzer was equal to another volley from Lee Dong-Gook.

When Australian substitute Tom Rogic's hard, left-foot strike in the 84th went right at Kim in goal, the teams appeared to be headed for a draw.

But in the 87th minute, Cornthwaite capitalised on a mad scramble deep in the South Korean penalty area.

Gomez scores 4 on return

AFP, Berlin

Germany striker Mario Gomez scored four goals, even managing to burst a football, on his comeback after three months off with injury as Bayern Munich romped to a 6-0 friendly win over a sixth division side.

Having had ankle surgery in August, the 27-year-old Gomez played the full 90 minutes hitting the net four times and for his second goal, a penalty shot following a handball, he burst the ball on its way into the net.

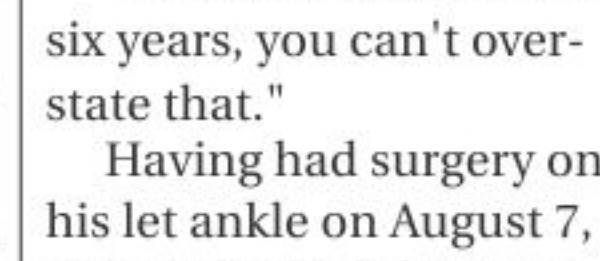
A second-string Bayern team beat local Bavarian side FC Falke Markt Schwaben on Tuesday with Gomez as the star attraction.

"I have played my first game and I am happy about it," said Gomez, who has yet to play a Bundesliga game this season with Bayern seven points clear at the top of the table.

"It was more than just a kick about, but they certainly weren't a strong team."

"I haven't been out for six years, you can't overstate that."

Having had surgery on his left ankle on August 7, Gomez looked sharp on his return and Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes was suitably pleased: "The performance from Mario was great."



Channel 9

Bangladesh v West Indies

First Test, Day 3

Live from 9:30am

STAR Cricket

India v England

First Test, Day 1

Live from 10:00am

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News



Bangladesh v West Indies

First Test, Day 3

Time: 9:30am

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National



PHOTO: REUTERS

Spain players pose for a photograph at the Miraflores Locks during a visit to the Panama Canal in Panama City on Tuesday.

Stevie G's Eng regrets



AFP, Manchester

Steven Gerrard has seen all the highs and lows that have befallen England over the last decade, including three penalty shoot-out defeats in major tournaments.

But something is keeping him going as he earns his 100th cap by captaining his country in a friendly against Sweden in Stockholm on Wednesday.

The Liverpool midfielder has been one of the symbols of English football for as long as many young fans can remember.

But earning a century of caps for England puts him in an exclusive club that includes only Peter Shilton, David Beckham, Bobby Moore, Bobby Charlton and Billy Wright.

Gerrard, who rates his England career as 'six or seven out of 10' in comparison to the greats of the past, names a 5-1 victory over Germany in 2001, in which he scored his first ever international goal, as the most memorable of his career so far.

But even that memory is tinged with regret because he was injured for the finals in Japan, where England lost in the quarterfinals to Brazil.

"I'd probably say that was the strongest England team I have played in," he said. "I think we had a great balance of young and experienced players."

"That team should certainly have got to a semifinal. It is certainly a regret now."