

Brazil start with a bang

REUTERS, Brasilia



Hosts Brazil opened the Confederations Cup with a comfortable 3-0 win over Japan on Saturday although the occasion was marred when police fired teargas at protesters outside the ManeGarrincha National Stadium.

A stunning third minute goal from Neymar set Brazil on their way before Paulinho ended Japan's challenge by adding a second three minutes into the second half of the Group A match.

Substitute Jo completed the scoring in stoppage time as the hosts, playing their first competitive match since the Copa America nearly two years ago, dealt competently with the Asian champions who created some nice moves in midfield but lacked punch.

A 67,000 capacity crowd was treated to a competent Brazilian victory by Luiz Felipe Scolari's men who are looking for a third successive Confederations Cup success after winning the tournament in 2005 and 2009.

The game came alive after three minutes when Neymar scored a stunning goal, smashing home a right foot shot from the edge of the box after a long cross from Marcelo was chested down by Fred.

That lifted the massed ranks of the fickle yellow-shirted home crowd but they began to show their impatience soon enough as Brazil failed to build on that early goal and Japan came into the match with Keisuke Honda in particular making inroads in midfield.

Japan, who started with only Shinji Okazaki as the nominal front man, began to look increasingly dangerous with some incisive moves through the middle but they never seriously troubled goalkeeper Julio Cesar.

Despite allowing Japan some clever passing play, Brazil also showed some flashes of flair.

Neymar produced a little shimmy on the left, but failed to get past his marker, while Hulk, ploughing his way up and down the right wing like a farmyard tractor, crashed a well-struck shot into the side netting.

Fred forced Eiji Kawashima into a fine one-handed save with a low snapshot after a floated cross from Neymar two minutes before the break.

Three minutes after the break though, Brazil did find the net again when Paulinho met DaniAlves's cross and blasted home.

In a largely uneventful second half, Brazil coped easily with what limited danger Japan put in their path before Jo finished off a counter-attack to give them a convincing win.

The match was the first international game to feature goal-line technology although it was not called into action.



(Clockwise from L) Brazilian sensation Neymar started the Confederation Cup with a bang as his sensational volley evaded the Japanese goalkeeper to give his team an early lead at the Maracana on Saturday. Neymar, sporting the legendary 10 shirt for the first time, celebrated in style.



PHOTOS: REUTERS

Pressure release, Neymar style

AFP, Brasilia



The clock showed two minutes and 57 seconds as Luiz Felipe Scolari, who said before the Confederations Cup that Neymar needed protecting as the idol of 200 million Brazilians, afforded himself a tight smile of vindication.

Brazil coach Scolari's policy of simultaneously playing "good cop bad cop" with the 21-year-old -- effusively praising his performances but also pointedly demanding he be "a team player" -- paid an early dividend on Saturday as the Barcelona-bound forward struck a brilliant goal to underpin a 3-0 victory over Japan.

If the half-volley finish, which ended a goal drought of nine

matches for former club Santos and the Selacao, was rip-roaringly brilliant, it was not the product of one man.

It was a glowing example of the team ethic in which Scolari takes such pride, for all that he and his compatriots have been weaned on individual magic down the decades.

Real Madrid defender Marcelo crossed languidly from the left and in-form number nine Fred chested down, rather than look for a sixth goal in his last seven appearances for his country, allowing Neymar to crunch home an unstoppable drive from 20 metres into the top corner of Eiji Kawashima's net.

"It all happened in a flash," said Neymar. "Fred collected the ball and laid it off, I connected full on and happily the ball found the target."

"I am very happy to score and

help Brazil to achieve a victory," said the spiky-haired star, substituted with some 20 minutes remaining after picking up a knock.

Pele's exalted 1958-1970 reign as O Dez (number ten) for Brazil created a mythical shirt which has hung heavy on the shoulders of those others who have worn it since.

Neymar himself has just switched from 11 to 10.

Of the switch he says: "The number doesn't matter one jot -- what does is the Brazil shirt."

The starlet rounded angrily on the media ahead of Saturday's game by insisting that the Neymar who plays for Brazil and the variant who starred for Santos could not play exactly the same way.

He would not change his style, while Scolari said the player always did as he was asked for the national

side.

"If I am called into the Brazil squad on the basis of how I have been playing for Santos then I must be doing something right, whether I score goals or not," he remarked in midweek.

"I just play my normal game -- I have never changed the way I play, be it for club or national team."

His goal aside, Neymar was a true thorn in the side of the Japanese defence and it took a rough challenge from Japan skipper Makoto Hasebe, which earned a booking in first-half injury time, to prevent him from doing even more damage.

Paulinho and Jo added the gloss with two further goals but it was Neymar who took away the man of the match accolade as Brazil made a convincing start.

Odd moment

It wouldn't be an international football tournament without FIFA president Sepp Blatter getting booed and that's what happened when he was introduced at the Estadio Nacional Mane Garrincha during the Confederations Cup opening ceremony. The moment was made all the more awkward when both he and Brazil president Dilma Rousseff couldn't figure out if their microphones were on and repeatedly blew into them. While outside the stadium riot police fired tear gas shells at the protester who are angry at the cost of building stadiums for the tournament and next year's World Cup

SOURCE: INTERNET

Mercury rises before battle at Ulsan

REUTERS, New Delhi



A war of words between the coaches of Iran and South Korea has spiced things up between the Group A rivals as they bid to secure automatic qualifying spots for the 2014 World Cup.

The top two sides in the group clash in Ulsan on Tuesday, when a draw will ensure both side's progress to the summer World Cup in Brazil next year.

South Korea, on 14 points, could still take one of Group A's two automatic berths even if they lose to Iran but coach Choi Kang-hee has ensured Tuesday's clash will not lack intensity.

Choi said he wanted revenge for October's 1-0 defeat in Tehran where his team were "badly treated".

"The manners they showed were not good ... they were not hospitable. Aside from who makes it to the World Cup, I

would like to beat Iran no matter what," Choi told reporters after his side's 1-0 win against Uzbekistan last week.

"Honestly, I dislike Iran more (than Uzbekistan). I hope Uzbekistan make it to the World Cup."

Iran, who beat Lebanon 4-0 on Tuesday, have 13 points while Uzbekistan have 11 and need a win against Qatar to leapfrog Iran. Choi's comments did not go down well with Iranian coach Queiroz, who wanted an apology from the South Korean coach.

"Choi should apologise to the Iranian people," the Portuguese told reporters upon arrival in Seoul.

"He said the Korean team was badly treated in Iran but we gave the best treatment available. He humiliated the Iranian citizens."

The war of words escalated after the former Real Madrid coach accused the Koreans of not pushing harder for a bigger victory against the Uzbeks.

"I will buy an Uzbek uniform and give it to Choi as a present," the Iran boss quipped.

Elephants in play-offs

AFP, Johannesburg

Ivory Coast became the first country to reach the play-offs in the Africa zone qualifiers for the 2014 World Cup after winning 4-2 in Tanzania Sunday.

The result gave the 'Elephants' from west Africa an unassailable five-point Group C lead over Morocco, who triumphed 2-0 against bottom side Gambia in Marrakech late Saturday.

Substitute Wilfried Bony sealed victory for the 2006 and 2010 World Cup qualifiers with a goal three minutes into stoppage time at the Benjamin Mkapa Stadium in Indian Ocean city Dar es Salaam.

The other five goals came in a thrilling first half with Amri Kiemba giving Tanzania the lead on two minutes and striker Lacina Traore levelling.

'Selfish players cause trouble'

REUTERS, London



Jose Mourinho has told his players not to act selfishly in his second spell as manager of Chelsea otherwise there will be "big trouble" at Stamford Bridge.

Divisions emerged in the dressing room during the last few months of Mourinho's reign at his previous club Real Madrid and he seems determined to avoid a repeat.

"If you are a top professional, if you are not a selfish person, if you put the club in front of yourself and if you are here to work 100 percent for me, for your fellow players and for the club, we will have a wonderful relationship," he told reporters.

"If you are selfish, if you don't care about the club, don't care about the fans, don't care about the image... we are in big trouble."

"Sometimes you have groups that adapt to this in a very easy way. Sometimes you have groups that this becomes like a doctrine and everything

Mourinho knew it

"I knew that Ferguson was retiring many months ago and I was so happy to have his trust. It was big news for the world. I can imagine that just a very close circle around him knew that and it was a big responsibility for me to know that," he said. "Why do I know that? Because we are friends. If I am his friend to know he is going to retire, he is also my friend to know that the club I want to coach in England is Chelsea. Of course I told him," added Mourinho. "For Chelsea, I would turn down every job in the world."

is easy," said Mourinho.

"Sometimes you have a couple of guys who are not so keen to accept these kind of rules and this is where you have some problematic relationships."

Mourinho is one of eight Chelsea managers to have been appointed since Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich bought the club in 2003.

Mourinho has signed a four-year contract with Chelsea and he believes stability is important to the Europa

League winners especially as they have started to invest in youth in the last year or two.

"Last season this club won the trophy I don't want to win," he said. "I won it with Porto before I won the 2004 Champions League and that is the way it should be done, you win first the Europa League and after you win the Champions League."

"I want to go back to always playing in the Champions League and playing in it without risk."

"Two seasons ago Chelsea had risk, if we hadn't won the 2012 Champions League we wouldn't have played in it the following season because we finished sixth," said Mourinho.

"This season we also had risk until the last match... so we need to go back to this stability. Stability is important for the development of the young players, for the club, the fan base, for the economic situation that is more and more important with FFP (Financial Fair Play)."

"I think the owner and board, they want very, very much this stability."

No tourists

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It has become the standard for teams from the Oceania Confederation to be the source of curiosity and amused speculation when they qualify to play in world football tournaments, and this year's flag-bearer at the Confederations Cup is Tahiti.

A nation with only 11,000 registered footballers and the first Pacific Islands state to play in such a tournament, Tahiti beat New Caledonia in the final of last year's Oceania Nations Cup -- where 2010 World Cup qualifier New Zealand finished third.

Things are likely to be a bit tougher when the Tahitians play in Brazil. Drawn into Group B, Tahiti will face African champion Nigeria tonight. Ranked 138 in the world, Tahiti is a team of 99 percent amateurs and have not previously qualified for a major FIFA senior competition before, although the country reached the Under 20 World Cup in Egypt in 2009 -- where they were also drawn in a group with Nigeria and Spain.

"It's amazing to think that here we are, a little country of 250,000 people, playing against the best teams in the world," coach Eddie Etaeta said. "It's going to be exciting to face Spain at the Maracana and it will be an incredible feeling if we can score. As for our objectives, we need to be realistic."

Tahiti's most high-profile player is Papeete-born striker Marama Vahirua who is currently on loan to Greek club Panthrakikos.

"Some people say it won't be possible to get the results we need in," Etaeta said, "but I can assure you we will not be taking any tourists with us to Brazil."

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