



PHOTO: REUTERS

Italy attacking midfielder Sebastian Giovinco is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal in their pulsating Confederations Cup clash against Japan at the Arena Pernambuco in Recife on Wednesday.

Italy edge 7-goal classic

REUTERS, Recife

 Substitute Sebastian Giovinco tapped in a late goal to secure Italy a thrilling 4-3 win over Japan on Wednesday and a semi-final berth in the Confederations Cup.

Giovinco slotted home the winner in the 86th minute after latching onto a cross in the area, capping a pulsating contest that saw the Azzurri edge ahead with three consecutive goals after trailing 2-0 before halftime.

"We were lucky, Japan played a lot better than we did," Italy manager Cesare Prandelli told reporters.

"But we didn't give up and tried to get the goals back and even when they equalized at 3-3 we still had the drive to keep attacking."

Shinji Okazaki nodded a lovely, glancing header past Italy keeper Gianluigi Buffon from a Yasuhito Endo free kick to level at 3-3 in the 69th minute, and Japan tried desperately to respond to Giovinco's late score in a frenetic finish but to no avail.

Italy join Brazil in the semi-finals

and might consider themselves lucky after starting poorly and benefiting from an own goal by Japan defender Atsuto Uchida.

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni worried his side might be overawed by the four-times world champions but they began confidently and had their first goal in the 21st minute when Keisuke Honda slotted home a penalty kick after Buffon was adjudged to have brought down Okazaki.

The Blue Samurai doubled their lead in the 33rd minute after the Italian defence missed a high ball and it fell to Shinji Kagawa who swiveled and hammered it home.

Italy pulled one back in the 41st minute when de Rossi rose to powerfully head home a Pirlo corner and almost had an equaliser on the stroke of halftime when Emanuele Giaccherini hit the post after Mario Balotelli had set him up with a deft header.

Italy's second goal came just five minutes after the restart when Maya Yoshida was caught in possession by Giaccherini and Uchida turned his cross ball into his own net with

Balotelli waiting to pounce.

Italy took the lead in controversial circumstances just two minutes later after Makoto Hasebe was harshly punished for a handball in the box and Balotelli made no mistake from the spot.

Okazaki's header gave Japan renewed hope and they were unlucky not to grab a fourth goal when they hit the post and bar in a matter of seconds.

But sloppy defending opened the door for Giovinco to grab the clincher with four minutes left in regular time.

"This match took me back to the Italy-Germany game in the 1970 World Cup. This was end to end stuff with constant changes and it was really exciting," said Japan coach Alberto Zaccheroni.

"Usually when you lay like this you win so I feel sorry for my players. I feel also that the team that won was the team that deserved it the most."

"We need to acknowledge that Italy are better at seizing their chances, they had fewer chances than us but they were more clinical in taking them."

GM Niaz Mursheed drew with IM Goh Wei Ming

Premier Div b'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhumketu and Eagles won their respective matches of the Citycell Premier Division Basketball League at the Dhanamondi Basketball Gymnasium yesterday.

Dhumketu registered a convincing 56-35 win over Bakshi Bazar, who also suffered a 67-53 defeat at the hands of Eagles on Wednesday.

Masters Chess

SPORTS REPORTER

GM Niaz Mursheed drew with IM Goh Wei Ming

Kevin in his seventh board of the DYTMM Raja Dr. Nazrin Shah Invitational Masters Chess in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia yesterday.

Niaz has now four points

from seven matches. Zia was

playing the eighth round

game against Malaysian IM

Mas Hafizulhelmi till the

report was filed.

TAX FRAUD CASE

Judge summons Messi, father

REUTERS, Madrid

Argentina forward Lionel Messi and his father Jorge were ordered on Thursday to appear before a Barcelona court in September after Spanish prosecutors accused the pair of tax fraud.

Earlier in the day, Spanish media reported that an examining magistrate had brought official charges against the Messis but a writ showed the two had been summoned to give evidence.

The magistrate has accepted a complaint from the Catalonia tax crime prosecutor, who has accused Barcelona's World Player of the Year and his father of defrauding the Spanish tax office of more than 4 million euros (5.4 million dollars).

"The judge has accepted the complaint presented by the prosecutor against Lionel Messi and Jorge Horacio Messi for three alleged crimes against the tax authorities," a statement from the Barcelona court said.

"The acceptance of the case is the next step after a complaint is presented. The court can start to investigate and reach a conclusion as to whether a crime has been committed or not."

"The magistrate has called the accused to give evidence on September 17."

In the Spanish legal system, if the magistrate determines there is sufficient evidence to bring charges, he or she will do so and then proceed with a pre-trial investigation.

The complaint relates to the three tax periods of 2007, 2008 and 2009, the court said..

Pele comments mocked by locals

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Brazilian soccer great Pele has called on thousands of protesters demonstrating over poor quality public services and corruption to leave the streets and focus on football, an appeal that was quickly met with derision on social media.

"Let's forget all this commotion happening in Brazil, all these protests, and let's remember how the Brazilian squad is our country and our blood," Pele said in a brief broadcast via the O Globo TV network, which was also posted online.

While revered by soccer fans the world over, Pele's image has been tarnished at home by a string of perceived clumsy comments over the years, once prompting former Brazilian strike Romario to famously comment that "Pele when silent is a poet".

Social media users were less than compli-

mentary about his latest comments, many saying the Brazil great's wealth meant he knew little of how ordinary Brazilians lived.

"Now Pele takes it upon himself to record a video telling the population to forget this commotion and back the squad. The national squad, FIFA, the stadiums costing millions, go to hell," one Brazilian posted on her Facebook page.

"Go to the hospitals, take a bus with no security, then I want to see if you keep saying stupid things," wrote another in response to an online local media report on his remarks.

"Pele, your ignorance is in proportion with your footballing genius," wrote another poster.

Another former Brazilian icon Ronaldo was also mocked this week after commenting that "you can't hold a World Cup with hospitals" in response to protests over the billions spent on stadiums that many Brazilians say would have been better invested in public amenities.

Prandelli laments fitness issues

REUTERS, Recife

 Italy coach Cesare Prandelli lamented the physical toll the Confederations Cup schedule and hot Brazilian climate were taking on his players on Wednesday.

"This is an interesting tournament but perhaps there should be more rest days," Prandelli said. "This is a very hot country and the players need more time to get their strength back."

Prandelli said he could not even look ahead to Italy's next match, against hosts Brazil on Saturday, until he gauges the fitness of his squad.

Both teams have already qualified from Group A but the winner could have the advantage of not facing world champions Spain in the semi-final.

"We are focused on how many (players) we can recover," he said. "The Brazil game is an important game, we can't underestimate it. So my problem is to get some of the physical fitness back. We have to play the next game with the same kind of determination and physical fitness."

Dark side to Brazil's game

REUTERS, Fortaleza

 While Brazil enjoy a perfect record of two wins, five goals scored and none conceded from their two games at the Confederations Cup, another statistic has shown a less appealing side to their game.

Brazil committed 25 fouls during Wednesday's 2-0 win over Mexico, the highest by any team in a single match at the tournament so far and more even than the 22 Uruguay conceded in the face of Spain's relentless passing game.

Brazil are usually associated with the finer arts of the game, yet systematic fouling in midfield has often been just as much a part of their football culture, at both club and national team level, as the exuberant skills of their forwards.

Although there was no obvious violence in Wednesday's match at the Castelao, Mexico repeatedly found their moves interrupted by so-called "tactical fouls" such as a sly trip or tug of the shirt.

"I was surprised and a little disappointed at the number of fouls that they have, constantly fouling," said former United States defender Alexi Lalas, analysing the game for ESPN.

"We know how important set pieces are, and that is going to be something to look for if they keep fouling, rather than actually playing the game."

The fact that Brazil picked up only two yellow cards for their 25 fouls suggested that FIFA may need to consider the way tactical fouls are dealt with by referees.



Brazil sensation
Neymar (2nd from L) follows through on a sublime volley that finds the back of the Mexico net past the despairing dive of goalkeeper Jose Corona in their Confederations Cup clash at Fortaleza on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Inspired Neymar fires Brazil

REUTERS, Fortaleza

 Neymar, inspired by the protest movement which has swept Brazil in the last few days, gave possibly his best performance for his country in a 2-0 win over Mexico in the Confederations Cup on Wednesday.

The Barcelona-bound 21-year-old, who has often struggled at international level despite his billing as the next great Brazilian player, set the hosts on their way with a stunning volley in the ninth minute, the second game in a row that he has got them off to a flying start.

He repeatedly tormented the Mexican defence and brought the crowd to life with his often cheeky trickery before producing the high point of his display deep into stoppage time.

Collecting the ball on the left, he teased the two defenders blocking his way to the

penalty area, then somehow slipped between them and laid the ball off for substitute Jo, only called up as a replacement for the injured Leandro Damiao, to score for the second match running.

Neymar's performance lit up an otherwise ordinary display by Brazil, who produced an electrifying opening 20 minutes but only performed in fits and starts after that.

"We faced a lot of difficulties at certain moments of the game," Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, whose side have won both their Group A matches without conceding a goal, told touchline television reporters.

"We lost ourselves for 15 minutes, we lost concentration at certain points and that's something we have to correct. But I want to emphasize this Brazilian spirit which we experienced in Fortaleza."

The game was played against the backdrop of protests which have rocked Brazil in

the last few days.

There were demonstrations outside the stadium before kick off with protesters demanding "health, education, not corruption".

The nationwide protests were sparked last week by transportation fare increases, which came as Brazil struggles with annual inflation of 6.5 percent, unleashing a tide of complaints that caught authorities off guard.

Contrasting the country's high taxes with its ramshackle schools, hospitals and other government services, demonstrators have criticised the 28 billion reais (\$12.9 billion) of public money being spent on preparations for the 2014 soccer World Cup, to be played in 12 Brazilian cities.

The Confederations Cup is a warmup for next year's tournament.

Inside the stadium, fans enthusiastically sang the national anthem and some held up

signs saying: "This protest is not against the national team but against corruption."

Before the match, Neymar surprisingly spoke up in favour of the protesters, an unusual move for footballers who usually steer clear of politics and try to say as little as possible.

"I'm Brazilian and I love my country. I have a family and friends who live in Brazil. For that reason, I want a Brazil which is more just, safer, healthier and more honest," he said on Facebook.

"The only way I can represent and defend Brazil is on the pitch, playing football. From now on, I will enter the field inspired by this movement."

Playing at the stadium where they suffered their last home defeat, against Paraguay in 2002, Brazil went straight for the jugular as they created several chances before Neymar put them ahead.