

Japan FA defends Nishimura

AFP, Tokyo

The Japan Football Association (JFA) has defended referee Yuichi Nishimura's command of English after his controversial performance in the World Cup opener, according to a media report Monday.

Nishimura was slammed by Croatia's players and coaching staff after Thursday's 3-1 defeat by Brazil for awarding the hosts a soft penalty and for his alleged poor English.

After the game Croatia defender Vedran Corluka said: "It was embarrassing that the referee didn't speak English, he was speaking Japanese."

Nishimura awarded Brazil a soft penalty in the 71st minute with the game finely poised at 1-1.

Furious Croatian protests seemed to be lost in translation but the JFA has insisted its referees are linguistically competent, the Wall Street Journal reported online.

"Seminars are conducted in English whenever a referee is to take part in an international match organised by FIFA," a JFA spokesman was quoted as saying.

Without commenting on Nishimura's display, the spokesperson admitted, however, that English tests were not included in the JFA's refereeing exams.



Brazil's squad trains ahead of their second group match against Mexico yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

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BRAZIL V MEXICO
Selecao eye last 16

AFP, Fortaleza

Brazil striker Hulk insists revenge is not on the agenda as the World Cup hosts bid to all but secure their place in the last 16 against rivals Mexico on Tuesday.

Mexico shattered Brazil's dream of winning the only major prize missing from their honours list two years ago, when they stunned the South Americans 2-1 to claim the Olympic gold medal in London.

But Hulk insists there is no question of Brazil looking to settle a score as they face the Mexicans at Fortaleza's Castelao Stadium.

It is the same venue where they met in the group stage of the Confederations Cup last year when Luiz Felipe Scolari's side claimed a 2-0 victory.

"There's success means a measure of revenge has been exacted, and forward Hulk insisted that Brazil will only have one thing on their minds come kick-off on Tuesday.

"In the Confederations Cup we tried to think only about winning the game and it will be the same this time. If we think about revenge it could cause us problems," said the powerful forward, who scored in the Olympic final clash.

Nevertheless, the Olympic defeat left its mark on him, Thiago Silva, Marcelo, Oscar and Neymar, the five members of Brazil's 2014 squad who featured at Wembley.

"Of course I was very sad. It is a medal that Brazil has never won and we lost the final. Mexico are a very good team. I just hope the Selecao, in the next Olympics (in Rio de Janeiro), can win gold," said Oscar, one of the

Hodgson piles the pressure on Suarez

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

England boss Roy Hodgson raised the stakes ahead of Thursday's potentially do-or-die World Cup clash against Uruguay by insisting that Luis Suarez has yet to prove he's a world class striker.

The 27-year-old Liverpool star voted Footballer of the Year for his Premier League performances, is set to return to the Uruguay team for the game in Sao Paulo after missing the 3-1 loss to Costa Rica with a knee injury.

But despite receiving generous plaudits for his 31 goals in England last season, Hodgson believes the jury is still out on the Suarez legacy.

"You can be a great player in your league but to be recognised as one of the all-time greats you have got to do it at the World Cup," said Hodgson.

Like Copa America champions Uruguay, England were also losers in their Group D opener, downed 2-1 by Italy in steamy Manaus.

Those results have left both sides' hopes of qualification on a knife-edge, but Hodgson doesn't want his team to be distracted by the Suarez menace.

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Ox returns to training

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's chances of featuring in England's second World Cup game against Uruguay were enhanced on Monday when he took part in training at the squad's Rio de Janeiro base.

Wearing white strapping above and below his right knee, the 20-year-old Arsenal midfielder participated in the initial stages of training with the rest of the squad before breaking off to carry out individual exercises.

Oxlade-Chamberlain damaged ligaments in his knee in England's 2-2 friendly draw with Ecuador in Miami on June 4 and missed their opening 2-1 loss to World Cup Group D rivals Italy in Manaus on Saturday.

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BELGIUM V ALGERIA
Red Devils set to dazzle

AFP, Belo Horizonte

Belgium's vibrant young team are preparing to launch their World Cup campaign against Algeria on Tuesday with competition hotting up on the training pitch ahead of the Group H clash.

Seen as dark horses to lift the trophy, the richly talented squad is blessed with players such as Chelsea playmaker Eden Hazard, Chelsea striker Romelu Lukaku and Manchester City defender Vincent Kompany.

Belgium have not appeared at a major international championships since the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea but they impressed in qualifying and will fancy their chances of matching their semi-final showing in Mexico in 1986.

The sole survivor from their 2002 campaign is veteran defender Daniel van Buyten, who said there were some feisty tackles flying in during the team's training sessions in the build-up to their match in Belo Horizonte.

"We usually train lightly before important matches so players hit their peak at the right time," said the Bayern Munich player. "But the duels on the training pitch have become more full-blooded."

"Every player should be ready. There are only 11 starting places and everybody wants to be in the line-up but the substitutes must be ready at any moment to make the difference."

Coach Marc Wilmots can also call on young Manchester United sensation Adnan Januzaj and his club teammate Marouane Fellaini as well as Chelsea goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, outstanding while on loan at Atletico Madrid last season.

Lukaku, who only returned to training on Wednesday after suffering an ankle injury in a bruising friendly with Tunisia, will spearhead an attack missing injured Aston Villa forward Christian Benteke.

Belgium, also grouped with Russia and South Korea, are expected to qualify for the knockout rounds with ease but Manchester City captain Kompany urged caution over their chances of unseating football's superpowers.

"We have a young squad, it's their first major tournament," he said. "I think it's a still a bit too early to dream of the summit. For overall victory it's better waiting until 2016 and the Euros



Portugal defender Pepe (L) headbutts Germany forward Thomas Mueller before being sent off during their Group G match in Salvador yesterday. Mueller scored a hatrick as Germany routed Portugal 4-0. PHOTO: AFP

RUSSIA V KOREA
Discipline is the key for Russians

AFP, Yuzon

Cameron skipper Samuel Eto'o admitted Monday that he needs a miracle if he is to shake off a right knee injury in time to play in Wednesday's crucial World Cup clash against Croatia.

The 33-year-old striker had a quiet game in Cameroon's 1-0 Group A defeat to Mexico on Friday and was not even present at team training at Vitoria, near Belo Horizonte, on Sunday.

"I'm hoping the gods grant me a miracle and that I am able to defend my team, beautiful country," Eto'o told Cameroon Radio-Television (CRTV).

"If this is not the case, I will always play my role as captain and especially as the big brother to push my young teammates to victory.

stretch to say the Koreans are in disarray.

Losers of four of their last five, including a 4-0 hammering by Ghana in their final warm-up on Monday, South Korea can only cast envious glances at their opponent's defensive solidity having shipped 11 goals during the horror run.

Coach Hong Myung-bo, who skipped the Koreans on their magical run to the semifinals on home soil 12 years ago, has his work cut out to rebuild their shattered confidence before Tuesday, but there

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1st stalemate of a dazzling World Cup

REUTERS, Curitiba

Iran and Nigeria laboured to the first stalemate of a scintillating World Cup on Monday with a dismal 0-0 draw that left both sides still chasing their first victory at a finals since 1998.

While Iran could take some small satisfaction in keeping a clean sheet in the first time since their debut in 1978, the bore at the Baixada arena stood out like a suit salesman on Copacabana beach.

With Lionel Messi's Argentina, installed as clear Group F favourites, and exciting debutants Bosnia still to come, the other two look destined for an early exit unless they can raise their game considerably.

Both teams were whistled and booed off the field by the largely Brazilian crowd of 39,000 after a first half that looked shockingly meagre compared to the goal feasts served up elsewhere.

Iran packed their defence as expected and Nigeria, with Emmanuel Emenike rarely posing a threat as the main target man for the African champions, squandered their chances with long balls to nowhere and passes straight to opponents.

The Super Eagles had the ball in the back of the net after seven minutes in a goalmouth scramble but Ecuadorian referee Carlos Vera, perhaps harshly, ruled it out for a push on goalkeeper Alireza Haghighi.

Ogenyi Onazi then drilled a shot wide two minutes later.

Iran came closest to breaking the deadlock in the 33rd minute when goalkeeper captain Vincent Enyeama produced a fine save to beat out Reza Ghoochnejhad's header from their first corner of the game.

INFO ZONE
HEAD-TO-HEAD

BELGIUM					ALGERIA				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
2	1	1	0		2	0	1	1	

LAST MEETING: ALGERIA 1-3 BELGIUM (INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY, 12 FEB 2003)

KEY PLAYERS

EDEN HAZARD	NABIL BENTALEB
45	3
6	1
0	0

TEAM FORMATION

4-3-3	4-4-1-1
Courtois	Zemmamouche
4: Alderweireld, Kompany, Van Buyten, Vertoghen	4: Mandim, Medjani, Boughera, Ghoulam
3: Fellaini, De Bruyne, Witzel	4: Feghouli, Guediouara, Bentaleb, Brahimi
3: Mirallas, Lukaku, Hazard	1: Taider, 1: Slimani

HEAD-TO-HEAD

BRAZIL					MEXICO				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
38	22	6	10		38	10	6	22	

LAST MATCH: BRAZIL 2-0 MEXICO (19 JUNE, 2013 CONFEDERATIONS CUP)

KEY PLAYERS

OSCAR	GIOVANNI DOS SANTOS
32	77
10	14
1	0

TEAM FORMATION

4-2-3-1	4-4-2
Cesar	Orchoa
4: Alves, Silva, D. Luiz, Marcelo	4: Aquilar, Rodriguez, Marquez, Moreno
2: Paulinho, Gustavo	4: Layun, Herrera, Vasquez, Guardado
3: Hulk, Oscar, Neymar	1: Fried

'I need a miracle'

AFP, Yuzon

Cameron skipper Samuel Eto'o admitted Monday that he needs a miracle if he is to shake off a right knee injury in time to play in Wednesday's crucial World Cup clash against Croatia.

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HEAD-TO-HEAD

RUSSIA					SOUTH KOREA				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
1	1	0	0		1	0	0	1	

LAST MEETING: RUSSIA 2-1 SOUTH KOREA (19 NOVEMBER, 2013 FRIENDLY)

KEY PLAYERS

ALEKSANDR KOKRIN	SON HEUNG-MIN
22	25
5	6
0	0

TEAM FORMATION

4-2-3-1	4-4-1-1
Akinfeev	Jung Sung-ryong
4: Eschenko, Berezutskiy, Ignashevich, Kombarov	4: Kim Chang-soo, Kim Yong-gwn, Kwak Tae-hwi, Yun Suk-young
2: Denisov, Shirokov	4: Lee Chung-yeung, Ki Song-yeung, Park Jeong-woo, Ji Dong-wan
3: Faizulin, Dzagoev, Kokorin	1: Son Heung-min
1: Kerzhakov	1: Park Chu-young

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