

Japan edge Australia

AFP, Osaka



Japan striker Shinji Okazaki scored with a swashbuckling backheel as the Asian champions beat fierce rivals Australia 2-1 in a friendly on Tuesday.

Okazaki's right-foot flick in the 68th minute made it 2-0 to the home side in Osaka, and was a goal which Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi would have been proud of.

It also gave Japan breathing room -- and they needed it, as Tim Cahill popped up to score with a trademark header in extra time which would otherwise have given the Socceroos a share of the spoils before a potential meeting at the Asian Cup in Australia beginning on January 9.

The Australians created the better chances in a scoreless first half but were overrun by the Blue Samurai in the second term.

Substitute Yasuyuki Konno headed the Blue Samurai in front after 61 minutes as Australia's defence contrived to let a Keisuke Honda corner travel unmolested to the backpost.

Okazaki's moment of magic gave him a 40th international goal before Cahill gave the visitors a deserved consolation, though it came too late to prevent Japan coach Javier Aguirre recording back-to-back wins for the first time since taking over after the World Cup.

Japan, who beat Australia in the 2011 Asian Cup final to lift the trophy for a record fourth time, had thrashed Honduras 6-0 last Friday after Aguirre brought back the team's old guard in a bid to stop the rot following a woeful run of form.

Despite the victory, the Mexican looked to be getting his excuses in early before Japan head Down Under to defend their Asian title.

"It's a building process," said the former Espanyol manager. "We wanted to win both these games and we've done that. Australia are the Asian Cup hosts so it will not be an easy tournament for us to win."

The Socceroos could have made life very uncomfortable for Aguirre had a fine header by Mathew Leckie not been acrobatically tipped onto the bar by goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima early on, a goal would have seen the Japanese come under serious pressure, something they have not accustomed to.

Japan had won just once in four matches under Aguirre before ripping apart Honduras and getting a fortuitous 1-0 victory over Jamaica. They were however, thoroughly humiliated by Brazil last month when they were dismantled 4-0 in what appeared to be demolition job, as Neymar ran riot through the Japanese, bagging 4 goals in the game.

ASIAN BEACH GAMES Basketball team finish fourth

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh beach basketball team finished fourth in the 4th Asian Beach Games as they suffered a 15-17 point defeat against hosts Thailand in the third-place deciding match in Phuket yesterday.

Bangladesh had earlier defeated China by 20-19 points in the quarterfinal and lost their semifinal against India by 21-06 points.

In volleyball, Bangladesh beat Tajikistan in 2-0 sets while Bangladesh suffered 0-2 sets defeat to Bahrain in handball, said a Bangladesh Olympic Association press release yesterday.

Eriksson takes over Shanghai

AFP, Beijing

Former England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson was unveiled by cash-rich Shanghai East Asia as their new coach Tuesday, on a contract that reportedly puts him among the top earners in football management.

The Swede was presented by officials at the Chinese Super League (CSL) club after intense speculation following his exit from fellow top-flight outfit Guangzhou R&F last week.

The well-travelled coach was reported to have been paid up to \$3 million at Guangzhou, and Chinese media said his new bosses were willing to double the coaching team's salaries.

Shanghai East Asia will spend 500 million yuan (\$82 million) on developing their side next season, reports in China said but it is unclear whether Eriksson will have full control over the funds.

Abahani suffer 'shock' defeat

SPORTS REPORTER



Four-time professional league champions Abahani suffered a shock 0-1 defeat at the hands of Bhutanese national league runners-up Ugyen Academy in their second match of the King's Cup at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu yesterday.

The Sky Blues wasted a host of scoring opportunities in the first half and paid for those mistakes when Tshering Wangdi scored the winning goal in the 86th minute

profiting from a blunder in the Abahani defence.

This is perhaps the first time that a Bangladeshi outfit have conceded defeat to a Bhutanese side. Sheikh Former Bangladesh Premier League champions Sheikh Russel KC had beaten this side 4-0 in the AFC President's Cup group stages earlier this year.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu termed the result as a 'shock' defeat and blamed the profligacy of his forwards for the defeat.

"This is a big shock for us. Had we won, we would have had a great chance to qualify for the semifinal,"

said Rupu in his post-match reaction. "They played very good brand of football and played in the same pace for 90 minutes. Our team missed four to five open chances in the first half, which put the pressure on us. Ugyen created one chance and they availed a mistake of one of our defenders and scored the winning goal."

After their 1-0 win over the Assam Electricity Board in the opener, Abahani needed a win today to stay competitive in Group B, which also includes holders Manang Marshyangdi Club of Nepal and Indian I-League side Pune FC.

Abahani's Guinean striker Ismael

Bangoura was the chief culprit as he deposited the ball straight at the opposition goalkeeper Hari Guring in the 19th minute before being denied by the goalie once more ten minutes later.

Ugyen defender Miphom Chopel cleared the ball off the line in the 41st minute before Ugyen striker Sonam Yoester saw his attempt sail over the bar at the stroke of half-time. A frustrated Abahani could not yield any chances in the second half and paid off for their mistakes by conceding the decisive goal four minutes from time.



The Bangladesh women's football team member appear to be in good spirits yesterday at a practice session at the Jinnah Sports Complex in Islamabad, ahead of their SAAF Championship semi-final clash against Nepal today.

PHOTO: COURTESY

SAFF WOMEN'S C'SHIP BD up against Nepal today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be hoping to achieve their target of reaching the final of the 3rd S A F F W o m e n ' s Championship as they take on favourites Nepal in today's semifinal. The match, to be held at the Jinnah Football Stadium in Islamabad, will start at 2:30pm Bangladesh time.

Prior to their departure for Islamabad, Bangladesh team's Japanese coach Norio Tsukitate stated that their target is to reach the final of the regional football tournament, where their previous best effort was reaching the semifinals in the inaugural edition held in Bangladesh in 2010. The Bangladeshi girls started their campaign with an emphatic 6-1 win over Afghanistan before suffering a 1-5 defeat to two-time champions India. However, Bangladesh bounced back strongly in their next match with a 3-1 win over Maldives which also ensured their semifinal berth.

Today Bangladesh would meet their biggest hurdle so far as they take on Nepal, who defeated Bangladesh 3-0 in the semifinal of the 2010 edition and 1-0 in the 2010 South Asian Games. Bangladesh coach informed that every player of the squad is fit and mentally charged up and that they would give their best effort to win this match.

The first semifinal between favourites India and Sri Lanka will start at 11:00pm Bangladesh time at the same venue.

NATIONAL BADMINTON

Elina's double

SPORTS REPORTER

Elina Sultana and Ayan Ibne Zaman clinched the titles in women's and men's singles of the Rupali Bank 33rd National Badminton Championship which concluded in Sylhet yesterday.

Elina beat holder Shapla Khatun in 3-2 sets in women's singles final while Ayman beat Enamul in 3-2 sets in men's singles final.

It was double delight for Elina, who pairing up with Shapla of Narayanganj, won the women's doubles title after handing the pair of Bangladesh Army a 3-1 sets defeat. Elina, also pairing up with Enayetullah Khan, became runners-up in mixed doubles.

Shyamol and Khaled pair of Sylhet clinched men's doubles title beating their teammates Tagor and Joyanal in 3-2 sets.

Ligue 1 engulfed in controversy

AFP, Marseille



Caen and Nimes could be expelled from Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 respectively should match-fixing allegations be proven, the French League (LFP) president said on Tuesday.

"If corruption, match fixing were to be proven, the League would impose the necessary sanctions with the greatest severity and I remind you that it could go as far as the exclusion from the league," Frederic Thiriez told a news conference on Tuesday.

Caen chairman Jean-Francois Fortin was among nine people arrested on Tuesday morning on suspicion of fixing the result of a game between his team and Nimes last season, allowing the southern club to stay in Ligue 2,

according to a police source.

Nimes president Jean-Marc Conrad has also been arrested.

The game in question ended in a 1-1 draw on May 13 this year, allowing Nimes to stay in Ligue 2 while Caen virtually secured their promotion to the elite that day.

"I confirm that searches were performed and arrests were made this morning over corruption suspicions on Ligue 2 matches last season," said LFP president Thiriez.

He added that the LFP and the French soccer federation would join a potential law suit as a civil party.

Caen and Nimes officials were not immediately available for comment.

In 1994, Olympique de Marseille were relegated to the second division over a match-fixing scandal dating back to the 1992-93 season, with OM also losing their 1993 French title.

Meanwhile, the president of Marseille football club and two former directors were also taken in for questioning Tuesday as part of a probe into transfers.

Vincent Labrune was taken into custody in Marseille along with director-general of the club Philippe Perez and former president Pape Diouf while another former president, Jean-Claude Dassier, was being held in Paris.

The investigation is looking into "contentious" money transfers "made in recent years", sources close to the investigation said. A police source spoke of "fraud linked to several transfers".

The transfer of Gignac from Toulouse in 2010 is part of the probe, which is being overseen by France's organised and financial crime squad.

Those in custody "will have to explain themselves from top to bottom", the source added.

Silva, Neymar make peace

AFP, Vienna



Ex-Brazil captain Thiago Silva revealed he has made peace with current skipper Neymar, a day after expressing his dismay at being stripped of the armband.

Paris Saint-Germain defender Silva had reportedly said that he had been "upset" to lose the captain's armband to Neymar without any explanation. However, Silva insisted that he has since made peace with Neymar.

"I consider Neymar like a brother and that's not going to change because of an armband," Silva told reporters.

Neymar had expressed his "surprise by the comments" of his teammate.

"He (Silva) phoned me to discuss things and I told him that I didn't have to comment on that while I'm the captain.

"I don't have to talk about it. It's a question of hierarchy like in a club. Everything is resolved now. For me to be captain is not a goal in itself. I don't want to be captain at any price. But now that I've been chosen, I'll try to carry out this responsibility in the best possible way."

Silva added he had had a "good conversation" with Neymar.

"He's like my brother. I have great affection for him. I'm a sincere guy. I told him what I thought and it does not affect my friendship," he explained.

Messi hints at Barca exit

REUTERS, Barcelona



Argentina captain Lionel Messi has given the strongest hint yet he could consider leaving Barcelona, saying in an interview published in Ole newspaper on Tuesday "things can change a lot in soccer".

The four-times World Player of the Year, who joined Barca's academy at the age of 13, has not been at his scintillating best over the past 18 months and has also had problems with the Spanish tax authorities.

Now 27, Messi probably has at least five years left at the top of the game and if the right offer was made, likely to be a world record fee in excess of 100 million euros (\$125 million), it is not inconceivable he could quit Barca.

Probed about his future plans, Messi told Ole he was living "in the present" and was focusing on winning titles with Barca after failing to secure major silverware in 2013-14.

"After that we'll see," he said, when asked if he was still planning to stay at Barca for his entire professional career.

"Things can change a lot in soccer. While I have always said I would like to stay there (at Barca) forever, sometimes things don't work out the way you would like."



Quizzed about whether he would choose to leave or whether it would happen because of someone else's decision, Messi added:

"Yes, I have said it many times. If it was up to me I would stay forever."

"But as I just said, sometimes not everything happens in the way you would like."

"The more so in football, which is so volatile and where so many things happen."

"It's complicated, the more so during the moments like those Barcelona is experiencing right now."

Modric out 3 months

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid midfielder Luka Modric could be sidelined for up to three months after injuring his left thigh while playing for Croatia in a 1-1 draw with Italy, press reports said Tuesday.

Modric hobbled off just before the half-hour mark of the Euro 2016 Group H qualifier at a packed San Siro on Sunday and was replaced by Inter Milan midfielder Mateo Kovacic.

"Modric, three months KO," headlined Spain's top sports daily Marca, while rival As cited "experts" as saying he would not play again this year and would be sidelined for between six and eight weeks.

Real Madrid confirmed that Modric had torn a muscle in his thigh, but gave no estimate of how long he would be out of action for.

Kiwis in the lead

AFP, Dubai



Pakistan were under pressure after losing both their openers for 34 in reply to New Zealand's big total of 403 in the second Test in Dubai on Tuesday.

Azhar Ali (four) and Younis Khan (one) were unbeaten at close on the second day after Shan Masood (13) and Taufeeq Umar (16) departed early to give New Zealand an edge for the first time in the series.

Pakistan still need 170 runs more to avoid the follow-on with eight wickets intact.

Pakistan's new opening pair, after Ahmed Shehzad and Mohammad Hafeez were ruled out due to injuries, flopped as Masood played over a sharp turning delivery from Ish Sodhi and was bowled between the gap.

Umar, playing his first Test in two years, was stumped as he was beaten by off-spinner Mark Craig.

That capped a good day for New Zealand who added 260 runs in the day.

Besides opener Tom Latham's brilliant 137, New Zealand owed their total to tail-enders who added 125 runs for the last four wickets after they had seemingly squandered a chance to post a big total at 278-6.

Mark Craig (43), BJ Watling (39) and Ish Sodhi (32 not out) fought hard to ensure New Zealand get past the 400-mark, a total

which could put an in-form Pakistan batting under pressure.

Left-arm spinner Zulfiqar Babar was the pick of bowlers with 4-137 while leggie Yasir Shah finished with 2-92 and seamer Ehsan Adil 2-73.

Watling and Craig added 68 for the seventh wicket in the post-lunch session to leave the Pakistani bowlers frustrated on an unresponsive pitch.

It was left to part-timer Azhar Ali to break the stand when he had Watling caught in the slips and then two runs later Babar trapped Craig leg-before to leave New Zealand at 348-8.

Craig hit five boundaries in his 110-ball knock while Watling had three hits to the fence in his two-hour stay.

Sodhi and Tim Southee (17) added a further 39 for the ninth wicket and Sodhi lofted Babar for a six to post the 400.

Babar though had the last laugh, dismissing number eleven Trent Boult to wrap up the innings.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 403 (Latham 137, McCullum 43, Williamson 32, Taylor 23, Neesham 17, Watling 39, Craig 43, Southee 17, Sodhi 32 not out; Adil 2-73, Babar 4-137, Shah 2-92)

PAKISTAN: First innings 34 for 2 (Masood 13, Taufeeq 16, Azhar 4 not out, Younis 1 not out; Craig 1-8, Sodhi 1-12)