



# Japan, Uruguay draw after VAR controversy

AFP, Porto Alegre

Two goals from Koji Miyoshi helped Japan secure a hard-earned point in a 2-2 draw with Uruguay at the Copa America on Thursday.

Miyoshi twice fired Japan into the lead only for Uruguay to level through a controversial penalty from Luis Suarez and a second-half header from Jose Gimenez.

The draw means Japan have an outside chance of reaching the quarterfinals from Group C, with one game remaining against Ecuador.

Uruguay, who trounced Ecuador in their opening game, missed the chance to make certain of their place in the last eight against a Japan team who had been trounced 4-0 by Chile in their opening game.

Japan had been let down by poor finishing in their defeat to Chile, but were a different proposition at the Arena do Gremio as coach Hajime Moriyasu range the changes in his starting line-up.

Former Leicester City striker Shinji Okazaki started alongside Hiroki Abe up front as Moriyasu relegated Ayase Ueda and Takefusa Kubo to the bench.

Miyoshi meanwhile provided attacking thrust in a new-look Japanese midfield.

Edinson Cavani almost created the opening goal for Luis Suarez in the 12th minute, working a one-two with Diego Godin before crossing for Suarez.

The Barcelona star however could

only direct his chance at goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima, who gathered safely.

Naomichi Ueda then had a half-chance for Japan at the other end but his glancing header from a free-kick was easily saved.

With Uruguay's defence looking uncharacteristically vulnerable, Japan took the lead on 25 minutes when a long diagonal pass from Gaku Shibasaki sent Miyoshi racing clear.

The 22-year-old Yokohama F. Marinos midfielder still had plenty to do, but ghosted to the byline before smashing into the roof of the net from a tight angle.

But Japan's joy was short-lived as Uruguay were gifted an equaliser with a VAR-assisted penalty four minutes later.

There appeared to be no question of a foul after Cavani and Ueda came together in the penalty area with the Uruguayan striker stretching to reach a pass.

But VAR ruled that Ueda had fouled Cavani prompting Colombian referee Andres Rojas to point to the spot.

Suarez stepped up to convert and Uruguay were level.

Cavani almost gave Uruguay the lead in the 36th minute with 25-yard rocket that crashed off the bar but Japan reached the break level.

The second half saw Uruguay gradually get on top but yet another incisive break from Japan led to Miyoshi grabbing his second to make it 2-1 in the 59th minute.

Again though Uruguay were quick to respond, Gimenez heading in Nicolas Lodeiro's cross in the 66th minute to make it 2-2.

Japan players set off to celebrate Koji Miyoshi's second goal as Uruguay players look on dejectedly during their Copa America group fixture at Porto Alegre on Thursday. PHOTO: REUTERS

# August-May football season from now on?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is planning to reduce the time-frame of next football season in an attempt to match the international schedule of the national team as well as the club sides.

Keeping this in mind, the game's local governing body has drafted a calendar in which the players' transfer window for next Bangladesh Premier League gets underway from August 16 while season's curtain-raising tournament, Federation Cup, is scheduled to start from October 21. The 12th edition of the BPL has been scheduled from December 2019 to May 2020.

"A few executive members, who have been involved with the clubs, requested the meeting whether the ongoing professional football league can be completed by July 31 instead of August 8 because the BFF has prepared next season's calendar which starts from August 16. So we have to rearrange the schedule soon. We will sit with the clubs within a couple of days to fix everything," said BFF's senior vice-president and league committee chairman Abdus Salam Murshedy after its executive meeting at the BFF house yesterday.

However, the initiative of the game's local governing body is likely to face challenge from small clubs, who struggle to form squads every

season due to financial constraints. Those clubs have not responded to the proposal sent by the BFF.

"This season's league has been lengthy because of national elections and some other reasons but we want to match our domestic calendar with international schedule. If we can do that, we will get success with the national team as well as with clubs. This year we got success with the national team and Abahani have also been performing well in the AFC Cup because all players have been in action in domestic competitions.

"We know it will be tough for the small clubs to take part in the transfers within a few days after the completion of the league, but if we want to do well at international level, we must follow the August-May calendar. Then we can also use the FIFA window for the national team and the clubs will also play the AFC Cup without any interruption," said BFF vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed.

BFF thanked the Prime Minister and Finance Minister for allocating Tk 20 crore for football and Nabil informed that the fund will be used for the national team, women's team and development work.

Murshedy informed that BFF estimated Tk 6.5 crore per year for its football academy in Beraid all of which will be borne by sponsors Fortis Group and K-Sports.

# Mamunul's goal voted the best

SPORTS REPORTER

Midfielder Mamunul Islam's stunning goal against Manang Marshyangdi Club was adjudged 'Goal of the Week' by public vote for ongoing AFC Cup, the Asian Football Confederation revealed yesterday.

Mamunul scored Abahani's fifth and final goal against the Nepalese outfit with a powerful left-footer from outside the box to earn the feat as the second Bangladeshi footballer to be named in such a list. Former national striker Alfaz Ahmed was named 'AFC's player of the month [August], 1996 for scoring four goals for Mohammedan against Laos's Electricity Club during the AFC Cup Winners Cup in Dhaka.

Goals from four players - Mohammad Al Wakid of Syria's Al Jaish SC, Samuel Lalmanpuia of India's Minerva Punjab, Dilshod Vasiev of Tajikistan's FC Khujand and Mamunul of Bangladesh's Abahani - were uploaded by the AFC for voting by the public, where Mamunul got 52 percent votes out of 15520 votes cast which ended midway through middle of yesterday.

Mamunul's nearest competitor - Mohammad All Wakid - got 46 percent votes while the two other players received only two percent of votes each.

"It is really pleasing that my goal has



Abahani midfielder Mamunul Islam celebrates with teammates after scoring the fifth goal against Manang Marshyangdi on Wednesday which has been voted as the 'Goal of the week' for the AFC Cup. PHOTO: STAR

been declared the best of the week. It is also an honour for me and I want to thank those who voted for me," Mamunul said. "It proves that our football has not died as people still love football and they voted for me. I will try to contribute to my team by scoring in future."

Mamunul started for Abahani in the

last two matches of the AFC Cup and scored in both matches.

"If you want me to select the best goal, I would keep the goal against Chennaiyin FC ahead because I scored that goal from a distance with a right-footed shot, which helped Abahani win the match," said Mamunul.

# Murray wins on Queen's return

AFP, London

Former world number one Andy Murray made a victorious return after what he described as "life-changing" hip surgery at a raucous Queen's on Thursday.

The three-time Grand Slam champion partnered Spain's Feliciano Lopez to a 7-6 (7/5) 6-3 victory in his first competitive match in five months.

Playing on a packed centre court including his wife Kim, Murray showed little fear in stretching himself despite being off the circuit since January.

His friend Lopez did not show any sign either of being burdened by the allegations made against him of match-fixing in the Spanish media, which he strongly denied on Wednesday.

"It was brilliant, I enjoyed it a lot," Murray told the BBC.

"I was a bit slow at the beginning but got better as the match went along.

"I'm really fortunate to be playing tennis again. I absolutely love playing on this court (he won the singles title five times), it's a brilliant place to play.

"I felt quite relaxed in the build-up, but we said as we were walking on to the court that we were starting to feel a bit nervous. But you need those butterflies."



Britain's Andy Murray (R) and Spain's Feliciano Lopez celebrate a point during their first-round doubles match at the ATP Fever-Tree Championships at Queen's Club in London on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

Murray sealed the first-set tie-break against top seeds Juan Sebastian Cabal and Robert Farah with an imperious forehand which clipped the net and provoked the Scotsman to raise his hand apologetically.

The 32-year-old Scot was all action at the net, securing the first game on their serve in the second set with a brilliant volley which their opponents just got back, but left Murray to put the ball into an empty court.

The number of slapping of hands and fist pumping increased between Lopez and Murray as they took hold of the match and the two-time Olympic champion visibly relaxed as he found his rhythm.

He was all over the court, his confidence surging to the extent that he put them 3-2 up on serve with a stunning one-handed backhand winner.

Two magnificent aces followed to put them within a game of victory -- and not even a warning for a time violation for taking too long over a discussion could dull their joy.

They had little trouble in closing out the match with Lopez serving brilliantly, and at the end the pair hugged each other as fans in the crowd brandished the Union Jack in celebration.

# Messi focussing on positives

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Lionel Messi was looking at a glass half full after his penalty kept alive Argentina's hopes of reaching the Copa America knock-out stages following a 1-1 draw with Paraguay.

Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi's 57th-minute penalty cancelled out a first-half opener from Paraguay's Richard Sanchez on Wednesday night.

But Argentina also had goalkeeper Franco Armani -- perhaps lucky to still be on the field at that point after denying Derlis Gonzalez a clear goalscoring opportunity in the first half -- to thank for saving a second-half penalty.

"We have to think positively and keep our confidence," said Barcelona forward Messi.

"We need to improve and arrive in the best shape possible for the next match ... and we have to win."

Defeat would not have ended Argentina's hopes of reaching the quarter-finals since eight of the 12 participating teams will progress to the knock-out stages.

As well as the top two in each of the three groups, the best two third-placed finishers qualify.

"It would be crazy if we couldn't progress from the group given that there are practically three teams that go through," said Messi, who will turn 32 on Monday.

Defeat at the Mineiro stadium in

Belo Horizonte would have meant that Argentina could finish no higher than third -- Colombia have already won the group after two straight wins.

Now they know that victory over invitees Qatar in Porto Alegre on Sunday will likely be enough to see them into the quarters.

Argentina had been second best in the first half of their 2-0 defeat by Colombia last Saturday, but then still conceded both goals in a much improved second-half showing.

Scaloni dropped Manchester City's Sergio Aguero and Angel Di Maria of Paris Saint-Germain for the Paraguay match but Argentina produced another disjointed and unconvincing display.

But Messi insisted that the level of competition is tougher than some appreciate and pointed to Venezuela holding Brazil to a 0-0 draw on Tuesday as proof.

"We knew it wasn't going to be easy playing in a Copa America, we're searching for a team, for a performance," said Messi.

"Venezuela made it hard for Brazil. At the moment we're not winning any more in the (Argentina) shirt and we have to put things right to earn the three points" against Qatar.

Messi came to Brazil hoping to end a painful run of losing finals with Argentina. Despite winning La Liga 10 times and the Champions League four times with Barcelona, he's never won a major honor with his country.

# Torres hangs up his boots

AFP, Madrid

Fernando Torres, the former Atletico Madrid, Liverpool and Chelsea forward who won the World Cup with Spain, announced Friday he was retiring.

"I have something very important to announce. After 18 exciting years, the time has come to put an end to my football career," Torres, 35, said on Twitter.

Torres currently plays for Japanese side Sagan Tosu.

Torres left Atletico last summer to play in Japan after returning to his boyhood club in 2015.

He played 334 times in total for Atletico, scoring 111 goals. Torres also made 142 appearances for Liverpool, finding the net 81 times, and scored 45 goals in 172 matches for Chelsea.

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