



Iran players celebrate the stunning 2-0 victory over Wales in their Group B fixture of the World Cup at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al-Rayyan yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Siddikur, Jamal on the move

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Siddikur Rahman and Jamal Hossain Mollah made considerable stride in the second round of the Bangabandhu Cup Golf Bangladesh Open at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Friday as Itthipat Buranatanyarat continued to lead the pack at the 400,000 dollar event.

Siddikur, a two-time Asian Tour winner, returned a 66 to stay two shots off the pace with an aggregate of seven-under-par (135).

"Well, it was a wonderful day honestly," said the Bangladesh star. "I made a few really great up and downs so it was not easy. But I'm happy that I got a few birdies and only one bogey today, so it was a wonderful day. Of course, there is a little bit of pressure, but you know I'm always happy to play this tournament. I'm just looking forward to playing my own game, that's my goal the next two days. The rest I don't need to know."

Jamal, meanwhile, was two shots further back in fifth position while Badal Hossain was tied for eighth a stroke behind.

Itthipat Buranatanyarat continued to show scant regard for the fact he has missed the cut in his last five events by carding a three-under-par 68.

A professional since 2014 and a three-time winner on the Asian Development Tour (ADT), Itthipat is bidding to win his first Asian Tour title.

A total of 66 golfers including eight Bangladeshis made it to the weekend rounds.

## Relentless Iran do their talking on the pitch

REUTERS, Al Rayyan

Iran ignored the distractions that have overshadowed the team since they landed in Qatar to get their World Cup campaign up and running as they rallied to beat sloppy Wales 2-0 on Friday, giving themselves a chance of reaching the knockout stage.

Iran were thrashed 6-2 by England in their Group B opener but those two goals against the table-toppers gave them the confidence that they could compete with European sides as they arrived at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium with a point to prove.

The Asian team has never got past the group stage at five previous World Cups but Carlos Queiroz's players will now fancy their chances after an impressive display as they punished a Welsh side that was reduced to 10 men late in the second half.

Leading strikers Sardar Azmoun and Mehdi Taremi both ply their trade in Europe and Queiroz, who had opted for just one forward against England, paired them up front to keep the Welsh defence pegged back and on their toes throughout the game.

Iran goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand missed the game after suffering a concussion and a broken nose against England and his replacement Seyed Hossein Hosseini was very much up to the task against Wales despite shipping six goals in the opener.

A cagey start saw Iran exploit gaps in Wales' midfield which had a numerical advantage but lacked discipline and was easily overrun when both Aaron Ramsey and Ethan Ampadu poured forward.

Iran fired their first warning shot when they had the ball in the net in the opening half against the run of play when they pounced on a weak pass, only for the effort to be ruled out for offside.

But that disallowed goal was enough to sow doubts into the Wales camp while it gave Iran belief that Rob Page's side was there for the taking.

WALES PANIC

After a goalless first half, it was barely minutes into the second period when Iran burst into life as Azmoun and Ali Gholizadeh hit the woodwork within seconds of each other while Saïd Ezatollahi also had an attempt saved.

That sowed panic in the Welsh side that was visibly tiring in the heat and it came to a head when goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey charged out of his box and took out Taremi with a high knee, as he received a red card for his troubles.

The sending off opened up the game for Iran who burst forward with renewed vigour and, with nine minutes of stoppage time added on, they floored Wales with a deadly one-two punch to leave the Welsh fans in the stands in tears.

Roozbeh Cheshmi opened the scoring with a sublime long-range strike that had substitute keeper Danny Ward scrambling before Ramin Rezaeian doubled the lead with a neat chip on another counter-attack where they outnumbered their Welsh counterparts.

Wales manager Robert Page could only look on helplessly as his players failed to implement his plans, with Kieffer Moore and Gareth Bale barely seeing the ball while the experienced Aaron Ramsey failed to influence the game from midfield.

Page had decided to start Moore after his impressive second half performance against the United States.

But it backfired as the physically imposing striker did not make an impact apart from an early shot on goal that was well saved by Hosseini at point-blank range.



## Brazil, CR7 and the naysayers

IRESH ZAKER

Thursday night was, in the words of Borat, "great success" for Brazil, and consequently the cause of gastric tribulation for at least half of Bangladesh's adult population i.e. Argentina fans.

For mostly neutrals, however, it was a good watch. Especially after the hour mark, having unlocked the Serbian vault, the Brazilians played with joy that was reminiscent of Socrates' finest. The joga bonito of old.

Thursday night was also good for Portugal, and the still great Cristiano Ronaldo. While the calculus behind figuring out who was unhappy about Brazil's victory is fairly straightforward, it is harder to define the subset of humanity that is irked by CR7's success. It used to be easy once. The anti-Ronaldo camp was pretty much defined by anyone who hated Real Madrid and Manchester United.

Since snippets of Piers Morgan's interview with the star came out a few weeks ago, however, the anti-Ronaldo

map has gotten murkier. Ronaldo's frank words during a messy divorce with Manchester United has won him fans in the unlikelyst of places. There have been reports of CR7 fan sightings even at Anfield and the Emirates. It is a fascinating study in the evolution of football fandom.

One thing you can say about the man is that he has a flair for the dramatic. The other thing you can say about him is that he is brilliant, even in the twilight of his career.

And what do you know? The Iranians have found their feet.

I mentioned before that the team have been under pressure both on and off the pitch. They had taken a stand by expressing solidarity with demonstrators at home, and before the match, there were reports of an ex Iranian national team player being picked up by authorities for speaking out against the government. They shrugged that off to put on a great show against the Welsh on Friday. It was wonderful to watch.

## 'I told them I needed just one pass'

AGENCIES, Doha

"A few weeks ago, I was crying, not sure if it would come," Richarlison reminisced after scoring two goals to lift Brazil to a 2-0 win in Serbia in their 2022 World Cup opener, reminding fans of the calf injury that appeared to have shattered his dream of playing in the World Cup for Brazil.

"On the day of my medical exam, it was one of the longest days of my life. I remember it was a day off and I went for the exam. I stayed on the stretcher waiting for the result to come out. The doctors went back and forth, I got nervous and time didn't pass. But I think it was worth all the effort in my recovery. God saw my effort, saw how much I wanted to come to the World Cup. That's it. Now it's time to continue!"

"We did the main thing, which was to win the first game, which is very important. Now it's time to think about the second game and rest well. It was the first, now there are six more important games."

The last player to score twice in a World Cup game was striker Neymar, at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil against Cameroon.

In an interview after the



victory, Brazil's No. 9 said he told his teammates at halftime that he would only need one ball to reach the goal. He did so twice, first with an opportunistic lunge to a rebound and then bagging a sublime second that looked like it was made on Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach.

"Today at halftime I talked to them and said I needed a ball, and it arrived. I was prepared and managed to score. It was a

wonderful night, now we have six more games to go to achieve our goal."

Speaking about the great goal, Richarlison remembered the goal he scored in a training session in Turin in the preparation stage before leaving for Qatar.

"I don't know if you followed, but I scored a similar goal in training in Italy. It's like I said, do it in training, do it in the game. Today I had the opportunity to

## Neymar out of Swiss clash

REUTERS, Doha

Neymar will miss Brazil's next World Cup game against Switzerland after he suffered ankle ligament damage in his team's opening win against Serbia, the team doctor said on Friday.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward was seen with a swollen ankle after being substituted during the 2-0 victory against Serbia on Thursday.

Rodrigo Lasmar, the doctor for the Brazilian football federation (CBF), said the 30-year-old had suffered "ligament damage".

Brazil right-back Danilo will also miss Monday's match against Switzerland with an ankle strain.

"We will not have these two players for our next match but they continue their treatment with the aim of recovering in time for the rest of the competition," the doctor said in a video released by the CBF.

The most expensive player in the world played



a pivotal role in Brazil's win in their first game in Group G in Qatar.

He wriggled into the box to pass to Vinicius Jr. to set up Richarlison for Brazil's opening goal in the second half.

Later, however, he appeared to be in tears as he left the pitch with a visibly swollen ankle.

That was reminiscent of the back injury which put Neymar out of the World Cup on home soil in 2014. Match winner Richarlison, who scored a spectacular swivelling overhead volley for Brazil's second goal, said he had spoken to his team mate to check on his injury.

"It seems he has a hurt ankle and I told him to put a lot of ice on it to recover as soon as possible to have him 100% at the next match. When I get to the hotel, I'm going to go and see how he's doing," he said.



Brazil superstar Neymar left the pitch with a swollen ankle after becoming the victim of nine of the 12 total fouls that Serbia committed against Brazil during a 2-0 win in the 2022 World Cup group stages.

PHOTO: REUTERS

volley and hit a beautiful shot. So I hope to continue like this, focused. We scored two goals and I'm going to get more, I want more", said the player.

Richarlison's sparkling start also banished the voodoo over Brazil's No. 9 jersey. Since Fred, against Cameroon in the group stage in the 2014 World Cup, their No. 9s had failed to score.

"When you wear the No. 9 jersey with the Brazilian national team, all you want to do is score goals," he said. "With these teammates, I'm sure the goals will come."

Others, including his Frenchman Hugo Lloris, who plays alongside the Brazilian at Tottenham, took note.

"I'm happy for him. He's probably the least fancied player of the team but he is a fighter and showed yesterday the part of genius that is in him," Lloris said.

His teammates were equally effusive in their praise.

"He's a great guy. He deserves it. That's Richarlison. You give him a chance, he scores. You should see him in training. He shoots from anywhere and everywhere, all sorts of angles. He's an incredible player," teammate Antony said.