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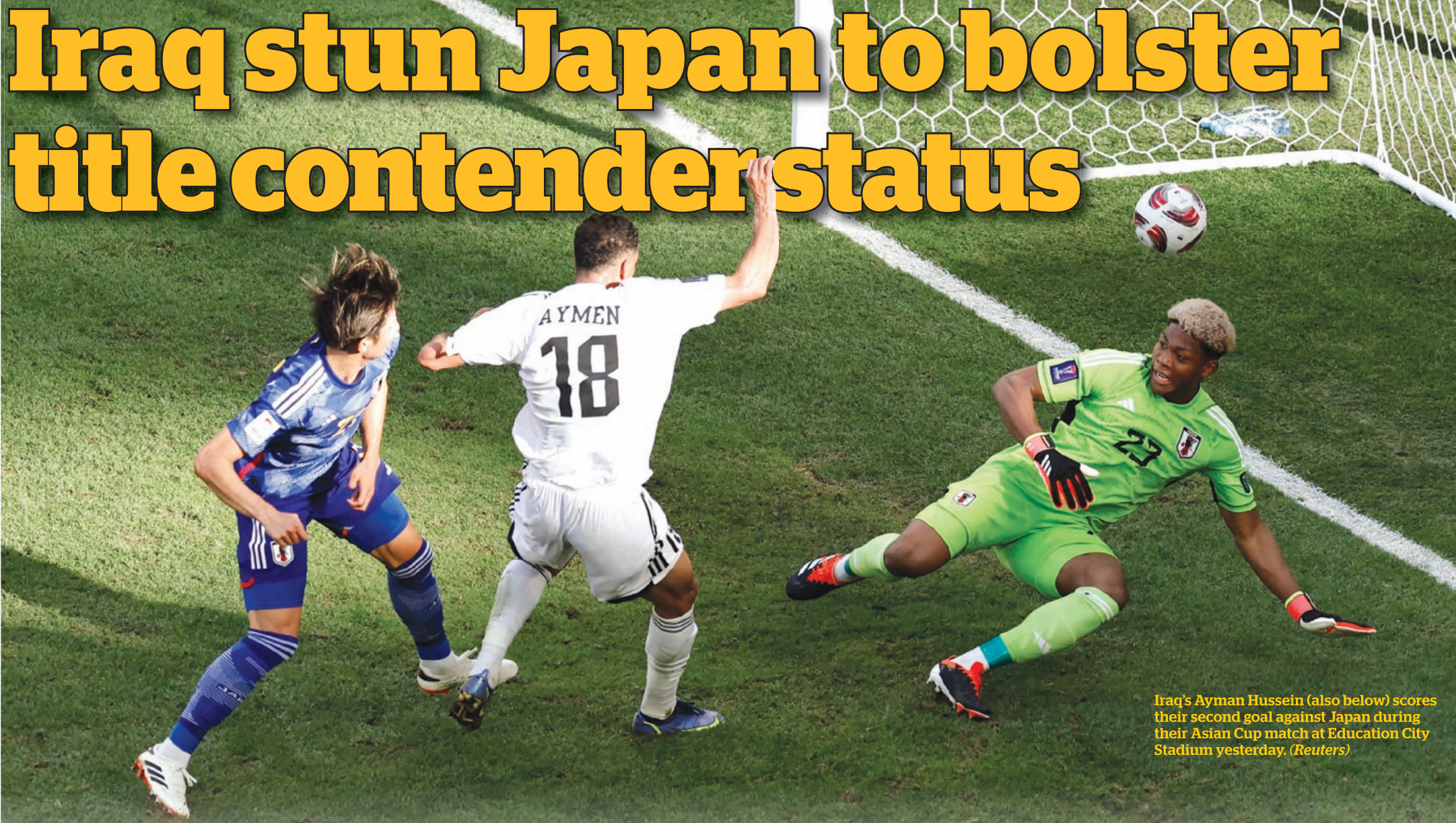
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SPORT

MATCH REPORT



Iraq stun Japan to bolster title contender status

Iraq's Ayman Hussein (also below) scores their second goal against Japan during their Asian Cup match at Education City Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)

Hussein's double strike in first half seals 2-1 win, ends Iraq's 42-year wait for a victory over Japan

By Sahar Bidappa
Doha

Iraq coach Jesus Casas wasn't just making empty statements when he declared, on the eve of the Asian Cup, that his team was a genuine contender for the title. And the Lions of Mesopotamia made a roaring statement to back their coach's claim as they stunned tournament favourites Japan 2-1 and qualified for the knockout stage at the Education City Stadium yesterday.

Ayman Hussein with two first-half headers was the hero for Iraq, who condemned four-time champions Japan to a first Asian Cup group-stage defeat in 26 matches. It was also Iraq's first victory over Japan in 42 years, with the Blue Samurais unbeaten against the West Asian side in their last nine games.

While a victory or draw over Vietnam would ensure Iraq top Group D, Hajime Moriyasu's Japan have three points and need at least a draw against Indonesia in the final match to progress into the last 16. Indonesia too have three points after posting a 1-0 win over Vietnam in the other game yesterday.

While Casas called his team's performance 'close to perfect' the 38,000 partisan Iraqi crowd rose to their feet in approval as the West Asian side showed remarkable

physicality and composure on the ball to frustrate the Japanese.

Iraq – ranked 63 in the world to Japan's 17 – were rarely intimidated by their rivals, who went into the game on the back of a 10-game winning streak in which they had scored 43 goals. Moriyasu also had overseen his side

beat European heavyweights Spain and Germany to reach the last 16 of the 2022 Qatar World Cup.

Japan failed to break Iraq's resolve until the third of eight minutes of stoppage time when Liverpool's Wataru Endo headed in to reduce the deficit. But they ran out of time as Iraq held on resolutely for a famous win.

"Today is a great day for Iraqi people but

for us it's just a win. We have six points, but the players must now think of Vietnam (in the last group game) and they need to rest," Casas said.

"I'm very proud of my players. All Iraqi players should be proud...The perfect match is impossible, but we were close

to the perfect match I wanted."

Iraq had overcome tremendous odds to emerge Asian champions in 2007, but since then their best performance has been a semi-final finish in 2015. But Casas – who took charge in November 2022 on a four-year contract – has carefully reshaped the squad with the Spaniard's ultimate aim is to guide Iraq to 2026 World Cup qualification.

Casas, a 49-year-old former assistant coach of Spain under Luis Enrique, guided Iraq to its first Gulf Cup title in 35 years after having been in charge for just two months. Iraq Football Federa-

tion's decision to include expatriate players into the team has also paid dividends with Casas having handed debuts to players based in Sweden, Denmark and Germany. While Japan were too slow to start, Iraq hit the ground running straight away and had their first chance in the fourth minute with Ali Jasim's long range effort palmed away by goalkeeper Zion Suzuki.

But they did not had to wait for long as Suzuki failed to handle a cross, inadvertently parrying the ball to Hussein, who skillfully headed it into the top corner.

While Japan players, who primarily ply their trade in big European leagues, settled into the game and used their speed on the wings, they could not breach Iraq's defence. And a second goal from Iraq just before half-time deflated them further. Ahmed al-Hajjaj delivered a cross that Hussein converted perfectly from point-blank range.

While Hussein did not take the field in the second half after sustaining an injury before the break, his teammates kept the Japanese at bay. They also breathed a sigh of relief when the referee overturned his initial decision to award a penalty to Japan after a VAR check. In the second half, Moriyasu made five substitutions yet the Samu-



Iraq coach Jesus Casas Garcia reacts during the match yesterday.

rai Blue struggled to test the Iraqi goalkeeper until the 94th minute when Endo finally scored with a header from a corner. The match's final moments were tense as Japan desperately sought an equaliser, but Iraq managed to hold on.

"The atmosphere was like an away game and conceding early hurt us," said Moriyasu. "Conceding at the end of the first half hit us hard and made it a very difficult game. We need to learn from our mistakes. We analysed before the game and knew how Iraq would play at the start, they did play very aggressively. Unfortunately we couldn't handle it, I know we need to do more."

While the result in its entirety is not disastrous for Japan. But a second-place finish in the group could set them on a potential collision course with South Korea in the last 16.



Iraq players celebrate in front of their fans after the match. (Reuters)



Dejected Japan's players at the end of the match yesterday. (AFP)



Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return against Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry during their singles match on day six of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

Melbourne: Novak Djokovic resumed business as usual to move a step closer to an 11th Australian Open title with a host of other contenders also making light work of third-round matches yesterday. Jannik Sinner, Coco Gauff and Stefanos Tsitsipas were equally efficient in their third-round matches, although not quite as much as defending women's champion Aryna Sabalenka who beat Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko 6-0 6-0.

The opening days of the year's first Grand Slam have been littered with lengthy duels, marathon tiebreaks and upsets and Djokovic, unbeaten at Melbourne Park since 2018, had survived dogfights in his opening two matches.

But the Serb, playing his 100th Australian Open match, was in no mood for a late night as he clinically disposed of dangerous Argentine 30th seed Tomas Etcheverry 6-3 6-3 7-6(2) to move ominously into the second week.

"It was a great match, the best for me so far in this tournament and I was pleased with the way I played the entire match," Djokovic, who is bidding to collect

a record 25th Grand Slam title, said on Rod Laver Arena. "He raised his level in the third and we went toe to toe, but I found the right shots in the tiebreaker to close it."

Djokovic's 92nd match win at the Australian Open never looked in doubt as he looked sharper than in his laboured victories against Dino Prizmic and Alexei Popyrin.

Etcheverry dug deep to extend Djokovic in the third set but the tiebreak had an inevitable feel as the top seed moved through to the last 16 where he will face either rising American Ben Shelton or experienced Frenchman Adrian Mannarino.

While day six largely avoided the drama of Thursday's action, Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva produced a thrilling comeback from 5-1 down in the third set to beat Frenchwoman Diane Parry 1-6 6-1 7-6(5) win.

Elsewhere there were some ruthless performances. Sabalenka took less than an hour to beat 28th-seeded Tsurenko, sweeping into the last 16 without dropping a set as she did last year on her way to her first Grand Slam title.

Even with top 10 seeds Elena Rybakina, Jessica Pegula, Ons Jabeur, Marketa Vondrousova and Maria Sakkari already out, Sabalenka was not getting carried away.

"Listen, it's tennis," the Belarusian second seed said. "As we see with some of the top players losing in the earlier matches, anything can happen."

There was no handshake between the two players after match point and Ukraine's Tsurenko spoke later about not forgetting the ongoing conflict in her country after Russia's 2022 invasion, an action in which Belarus was used as a staging post.

"People don't want to talk about war. People don't want to hear bad news. I get a lot of bad messages on social media, People are annoyed if I post something," she said. "But it's very tough to explain if you don't feel what I feel and how other Ukrainians feel."

Sinner, the hottest player on the men's tour at the end of 2023, continued his fine start to the season with a 6-1 6-0 6-3 pummelling of Argentine Sebastian Baez but was equally cautious.

"Let's see how I handle the situation when the score

is even or I'm down, how I react," the Italian said. "It's going to be interesting to see."

Seventh seed Tsitsipas was particularly happy with his 6-3 6-0 6-4 win over French young gun Luca Van Assche given he had lost the opening set in his first two matches at Melbourne Park.

"I had a great start to the match," he said after firing 36 winners on Rod Laver Arena. "Things worked out for me pretty nicely at moments that I needed it the most."

Tsitsipas will next face Taylor Fritz, who he beat at the same stage in 2022.

Gauff is another contender who might exploit the haemorrhaging of top women's seeds and she looked like she might be about to hand out a second "double bagel" of the day when she raced through her first set against Alycia Parks.

The US Open champion's compatriot and long-time friend did manage to stall her progress by getting on the board in the second set but Gauff still eased into the fourth round with a 6-0 6-2 win in just over an hour on Margaret Court Arena.

CRICKET

Australia pummel West Indies inside 3 days in Adelaide

'GREAT TEST MATCH, GOOD TO HAVE IT OVER IN THREE DAYS'

Reuters
Melbourne

Josh Hazlewood finished with a nine-wicket match haul as world champions Australia crushed a depleted West Indies by 10 wickets inside seven sessions of the opening Test in the two-match series at the Adelaide Oval yesterday.

Usman Khawaja was forced to retire hurt after being struck in the head by West Indies debutant quick Shamar Joseph with one run required for victory and Marnus Labuschagne got the home side over the line off the second ball he faced.

A handy first-innings lead of 95 had put the hosts in charge of the low-scoring contest and their victory was merely a matter of time after Hazlewood, who claimed 5-35 in the second innings, blew away the West Indies top order on Thursday.

West Indies followed their first innings 188 with another below-par total of 120, losing their last four wickets for 47 runs yesterday morning, which left Australia needing 26 to go 1-0 up in the two-Test series.

The home side knocked off the target in 6.4 overs to triumph inside three days and cement their position at the top of the World Test Championship (WTC) standings.

"Great Test match, good to have it over in three days," Australia captain Pat Cummins said. "It was a wicket where you felt like you were a ball away from nicking it. Don't think anyone even got over a fifty for us except Trav," he said referring to player-of-the-match Travis Head, who smashed the match's only individual hundred.

West Indies have not won a Test Down Under since 1997 and few expected that winless streak to end after they arrived with a



Australia's Steve Smith (centre) reacts after his team's victory in the first Test against the West Indies in Adelaide yesterday. (AFP)

weakened squad. The Caribbean side fielded three debutants after their best all-rounders, Jason Holder and Kyle Mayers, skipped the series opting to play in lucrative Twenty20 leagues instead. Australia had no such concerns though and hometown hero Head once again proved his worth in the middle order by smashing a rapid 119 in the first innings that made all the difference.

Thoroughly outplayed, West Indies may prefer to look at the silver lining having unearthed a future match-winner in Shamar Joseph, who dazzled in his Test debut.

The 24-year-old fast bowler from Guyana smashed 36 at number 11, their second highest individual score in the first innings,

and followed it with a five-wicket haul in his maiden Test.

The second and final Test in Brisbane, a day-night affair, begins on Thursday.

BRIEF SCORES
West Indies first innings 188 (K. McKenzie 50; P. Cummins 4-41, J. Hazlewood 4-44)
Australia 1st innings 283 (T. Head 119, S. Joseph 5-94) **West Indies second innings 120 all out:** (K. McKenzie 26; J. Greaves 24; J. Hazlewood 5-35) **Australia second innings 26** for 0 wickets)
Toss: Australia
Result: Australia win by 10 wickets
Player of the match: Travis Head

New Zealand chase down Pakistan to win fourth T20 international

Christchurch: Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips combined to steer New Zealand to a seven-wicket win over Pakistan in the fourth Twenty20 international in Christchurch yesterday, placing them on the verge of a series clean sweep.

The Black Caps pair scored unbeaten half-centuries in a 139-run stand as the home side reached 159-3 in the 19th over in response to Pakistan's 158-5.

They were forced to mount a rear-guard action after Pakistan captain

Shaheen Shah Afridi knocked over New Zealand's top order, reducing them to 3-20 in the third over. Mitchell scored 72 off 44 balls and Phillips 70 off 52, accelerating over the closing stages to complete victory with 11 balls to spare, having begun their partnership in a cautious fashion.

Big-hitting allrounder Mitchell said the first priority was seeing off the immediate threat of Afridi, before the pair set themselves targets.

"The way Shaheen swung it up

top made it challenging so we had to take it as deep as we could," Mitchell said.

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 158-5 in 20 overs (M. Rizwan 90 not out, M. Nawaz 21 not out; M. Henry 2-22) **v New Zealand 159-3 in 18.1 overs** (D. Mitchell 72 not out, G. Phillips 70 not out; S. Afridi 3-34)
Result: New Zealand win by 7 wickets **Series:** New Zealand lead best-of-five series 4-0



MOTORSPORT

Sainz makes Dakar Rally history, wins car title for the fourth time



Team Audi Sport's Carlos Sainz and co-driver Lucas Cruz celebrate after winning in the car category at the Dakar Rally following the conclusion of Stage 12 - from Yanbu to Yanbu - Saudi Arabia, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

Veteran Spanish driver Carlos Sainz won the gruelling Dakar Rally for a fourth time yesterday, becoming the oldest winner of the race at 61.

The two-time world rally champion known as 'El Matador' had been all but guaranteed success when closest rival Sebastien Loeb was stranded in the desert for over an hour in Thursday's penultimate stage.

On arriving, Sainz climbed out of his Audi car and jumped into the arms of his son, Ferrari Formula One driver Carlos Sainz Jr.

Sainz had led since the sixth stage and, aided by his fellow Audi drivers Sweden's Mattias Ekstrom and France's 'Mr Dakar', 14-time champion Stephane Peterhansel, controlled the race from then on.

He finished more than an hour ahead of Belgian debutant Guillaume De Mevius (Toyota) with nine-time world rally champion Loeb (Prodrive) third, slipping a place from his two successive runners-up spots.

Sainz delivered German outfit Audi their first Dakar title.

The Spaniard's fourth win takes him alongside Ari Vatanen in the rally winners' roll of honour.

He trails only the five victories of Qatar's Nasser al-Attiyah - whose defence of his title ended early this year - and Peterhansel and his eight car triumphs. This year was 58-year-old Peterhansel's final race.

Sainz said his boundless enthusiasm had kept him in the driving seat.

"I think the energy comes from the passion I have," he said.

"It's obviously, believing in yourself, believing that you can still drive and a lot of work behind

the scenes as well. To be here at my age and to stay at the level, you need to work a lot beforehand.

"It doesn't just come like that. It shows that when you work hard, normally it pays off."

Sainz - whose previous wins came in 2010, 2018 and two years later - said he was unsure whether he would pursue a fifth title in 2025.

"At the moment, I want to enjoy this victory and I will think about my future in the next weeks," he said.

De Mevius could barely believe he had battled his way to the podium.

"It was a crazy race," the 29-year-old said. "We never expected to be on the podium. We always dreamed about it, but it was not the objective at the beginning of the race. It's an amazing feeling to be here, it's an amazing feeling to be second."

Earlier American Ricky Brabec had taken the honours in the motorbike category for a second time.

The 32-year-old Honda rider held an advantage of 10min 53sec, as the 12th stage brought the curtain down, over Botswana's Ross Branch on a Hero.

Frenchman Adrien van Beveren, 33, claimed his first podium finish in the rally to fill third spot.

Brabec had made history in 2020 when he became the first American to win the crown, but he was just as excited about doubling his tally.

There was an emotional moment too, but for very different reasons, for Italian rider Gioele Meoni, who was competing due to a promise he made when his father Fabrizio was killed in the 2005 edition of the rally.

He crossed the finishing line with tears streaming down his face and tapped the orange liveried KTM 450 orange, the same colour as that of his father's bike.

FOOTBALL

Daboub, Costa hail players after entertaining draw

‘We are still masters of our own destiny, I think if we win, we will have a great chance of advancing’

Palestine head coach Makram Daboub hailed a ‘near perfect’ performance from his players who picked up their first point of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Group C in a 1-1 draw against the UAE at Al Janoub Stadium on Thursday.

In a thrilling game under the rain, Palestine dominated from start to finish, ending the match with 65% of ball possession, 24 shots compared to the UAE’s five and a tournament-record 16 corners to only one for their opponents, but were only able to find the back of the net once thanks to an own goal by UAE defender Bader Nasser.

“It was a difficult game, I thought we did everything right but lacked the cutting edge in front of goal,” said Daboub.

“Based on our performances in the qualifiers and friendlies, this is the level of performance I expected from my players. The first game against Iran was a bit of a shock because the players were too excited and driven, so we allowed an early goal. Today the only thing we lacked was finishing, but hopefully we will have that in the next match.

“In the qualifiers we didn’t have many attacking players, but now we have more attacking players and a shortage of central midfielders, so we had to change our formation. In friendlies, we tried to find a system that serves as against the type of opponents we expected to face at the AFC Asian Cup. But ultimately, no matter what formation we play, the most important thing is to find a system in which the players are comfortable.”



Palestine's Tunisian coach Makram Daboub directs his players during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group C match against United Arab Emirates at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah, south of Doha, yesterday. (AFP)

Palestine found themselves behind after 23 minutes when Sultan Adil headed home for the UAE, but they soon recovered and had a golden chance to equalise before the break when Oday Dabbagh was brought down inside the box, but Tamer Seyam missed the resulting penalty which was saved by goalkeeper Khaled Eisa.

Striker Oday Dabbagh, the team's talisman who plies his trade at Portuguese side Arouca was a constant threat to the UAE defence, but was unable to cap off his exceptional performance with a goal. “It could be that the pressure got to the player, but penalties are also a bit about luck. A player could choose a direction and the goalkeeper dives the same

way. We were unfortunate in being unable to convert our chances, but hopefully the game against Hong Kong will be our date with joy for us and for the Palestinian people.”

“Seyam was the first choice to take the penalty because he was in good form. He missed the penalty, but he played very well overall and it was his cross that resulted in the own goal which helped us get the point.”

“Oday is an excellent player with plenty of good qualities. Every striker goes through periods where everything goes his way and others where luck is not on his side. The lack of match fitness had an impact on all of the players, but as long as we are creating chances, the goals will come.”



Palestine's forward Oday Dabbagh jumps for a header during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group C match against UAE at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah, south of Doha, on Thursday. (AFP)

“I would like to thank the fans for the great support in every game. We are still masters of our own destiny, I think if we win,

we will have a great chance of advancing to the next round,” said Daboub.

The UAE saw defender Khalifa

al-Hammadi sent-off for the foul which also resulted in the penalty, while they also conceded an own goal when Nasser headed Seyam's cross from the left into his own net, and the unfortunate night for the Whites was rounded-off by the sending off of head coach Paulo Bento deep into added time.

Having beaten Hong Kong, China 3-1 in their opening match, the UAE remain unbeaten and could well find themselves in the round of 16 come the final whistle of their last game of the group against Iran.

“There was one defining moment in this game,” said UAE assistant coach Sergio Costa.

“The sending off changed everything; we were in control, but after going down to 10 men, the game changed completely, but still through their game they reached in our area through a lot of crosses. We felt some difficulties, but our players were heroes. The sacrifices that we made were worthy of respect. With 11 players or with ten, they all did a great job.

“It was a very emotional game with a lot of factors that influenced the course of the match. We are human beings and we react to situations with emotions sometimes.”

“We will go step by step. The next match against Iran we will prepare very well, and we will have no doubts. We want the best possible result, which is to win. There are too many possible results that can happen and influence who we would face in the next round if we qualify, so it is useless to talk about it now.”

the-afc.com

PREMIER LEAGUE

‘Recharged’ Arsenal ready to thrive after blip in title race

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta insists spluttering Arsenal will return to the Premier League title race at full power after a revitalising winter break in Dubai.

Arteta's side trail leaders Liverpool by five points after a dismal run of three successive defeats and one win from their last seven games in all competitions.

The fourth-placed Gunners were knocked out of the FA Cup third round by Liverpool before jetting off to Dubai for a warm-weather training camp. With Crystal Palace visiting the Emirates Stadium on Saturday, Arteta is confident his players are more energised thanks to their spell in the sunshine while the rest of England shivered in the winter chill.

“We are recharged, full of energy and super motivated so we want to attack the second half of the season with a lot of ambition and the understanding that the team is capable of big things. They are convinced of that,” Arteta told reporters on Friday.

“It was a phenomenal camp. We recharged our batteries and the context of the environment, in the beautiful weather, helps.



The togetherness and moments we shared together were great, so yeah we're fully recharged.”

After topping the Premier League table in December, Arsenal have lost their way in their chase for a first title since 2004.

A lack of goals has been the main issue, with only five scored across their seven-game stumble.

However, Brazil striker Gabriel Jesus is due back from a knee injury

that forced him to miss the Liverpool loss and Arteta reiterated he would not move for a forward in the January transfer window.

“No, because I love the players that we have,” he said when asked about the potential for a signing amid reports of a bid for Brentford's Ivan Toney. Arteta also revealed Dutch defender Jurrien Timber, who sustained anterior cruciate ligament damage in Au-

gust, was among the squad for the training camp and could return by the end of the season.

“At the moment he's still very far from competing. That's the realistic picture of it,” Arteta said.

“Are we hopeful that he could have a realistic impact before the end of the season? If everything goes well, it looks like that might happen. At the moment though it's too early to make that call.”

Von Eckermann impresses in 1.50m class at Doha Tour



World No.1 Henrik von Eckermann emerged triumphant in the CSI4* 150cm class during the second round of the Doha International Equestrian Tour at Al Shaqab yesterday. The Swede partnered with his mare Glamour Girl to finish more than one second clear of Brazil's Santiago Lambre and Chacco Blue II. Japan's Mike Kawai was third with mare Promise Z. The winners were presented trophies by Mohamed Jaber al-Khayareen, Director of the Equestrian Education Department at Al Shaqab. Italian Emanuele Gaudiano took top spot in the 145cm class with stallion Crack Balou. Frenchman Simone Delestre came second with I Amelusina R, while Jennifer Hochstadter from Liechtenstein was third with gelding Tinka's Hero Z. Earlier in the two-star 145cm class, Gaudiano had finished ahead of von Eckermann with Jordan's Ibrahim Hani coming in third. In the two-star 120cm class witnessed intense competition with top three spot grabbed by Qatari riders. Khaled al-Emadi came first, followed by Khalifa al-Khalidi and Hamad Nasser al-Qadi. In the 135cm class, Qatar's Faleh Suwaid al-Ajmi grabbed the victory ahead of China's Kenneth Cheng and Saudi's Khaled al-Mubti.



Italy's Emanuele Gaudiano won 145cm class with Crack Balou.

Egypt star Salah to undergo tests on hamstring injury



Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah reacts after being injured during the Africa Cup of Nations Group B match against Ghana at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Stadium in Abidjan on Thursday. (AFP)

ABIDJAN: Mohamed Salah was set to undergo tests yesterday on his left hamstring after coming off injured in Egypt's 2-2 draw with Ghana at the Africa Cup of Nations, the team's doctor said.

The Liverpool superstar came off just before half-time in the AFCON Group B match at the Felix Houphouet Boigny Stadium in Abidjan on Thursday. The 31-year-old appeared to be walking normally at the Egyptian team hotel in Ivory Coast's economic capital.

Egypt's final Group B match against Cape Verde on Monday is set to be decisive in their quest to reach the last 16 of the competition.

They needed an injury-time penalty from Salah to salvage a 2-2 draw with Mozambique in their opening game at the tournament.

On Thursday they had to come from behind twice to draw with Ghana, Omar Marmoush and Mostafa Mohamed scoring their goals, with the result leaving them on two points from two matches. Egypt have won the Cup of Nations a record seven times but the last of those titles came in 2010, a year before Salah made his international debut.

In yesterday's early match, former Manchester United forward Bebe's long-range free-kick set Cape Verde on the way to a 3-0 win over Mozambique as the Atlantic Ocean island nation became the first team through to the last 16. Bebe opened the scoring just after the half-hour mark. Captain Ryan Mendes doubled their lead and Kevin Pina wrapped up the win with a stunning strike.

MATCH REPORT

Mangkualam keeps Indonesia hopes alive

Victory over Vietnam takes Garudas to third in the group, level on points with Japan

Indonesia breathed new life into their AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Group D campaign after edging Vietnam 1-0 at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday, thanks to Asnawi Mangkualam's first half penalty.

The victory took Indonesia to third in the standings, level on points with Japan ahead of their meeting on Wednesday, as the Garudas ended a six-match winless run against Southeast Asian rivals Vietnam, whose hopes suffered a body blow.

Both teams opted to make two changes each with Nguyen Quang Hai and Nguyen Van Tung coming in for Vietnam while Sandy Walsh and Egy Maulana Vikri were given a starting opportunity for Indonesia.

It was Indonesia who started stronger, Ivar Jenner putting Rafael Struick through inside the first minute but goalkeeper Nguyen Filip was equal to the shot then minutes later, Struick again with a shot on the turn that just went past the post.

Slowly but surely Vietnam's midfield trio of Quang Hai, Nguyen Tuan Anh and Nguyen Thai Son began to see more of the ball and midway through the half, produced their first attempt on target through Pham Xuan Manh's header but it was straight at custodian Ernando Ari.

Filip was alert to deny another Indonesian opportunity when Justin Hubner clipped a pass to the far post for Walsh to nod at goal, however, the custodian went down to his left to push the ball to safety.

Three minutes before the break, Indonesia took a deserved lead when captain Asnawi Mangkualam tucked away a spot-kick after Nguyen Thanh Binh was penalised for pulling Struick's jersey.

Vietnam head coach Philippe Troussier made two changes at the start of the second half with Khuat Van Khang and Le Pham Thanh Long replacing Pham Tuan Hai and Thai Son respectively, and it almost paid dividends immediately.



Indonesia's Asnawi Mangkualam (right) wheels away in celebration with his teammates after scoring from the penalty spot during the AFC Asian Cup Group D match against Vietnam at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

Vietnam began to rain shots at Indonesia's goal with Van Khang's fierce shot from the left forcing Ernando into a good save, then Tuan Anh slid inside the box but hooked the ball just over the bar.

Play was stopped for almost five minutes at the 64th minute mark after Jordi Amat

suffered a blow to the head following an aerial tussle with Van Tung, with the Indonesia captain eventually forced to be replaced by Rizky Ridho.

To their credit, Vietnam continued to push for the equaliser but luck wasn't on their side and the UAE 2019 quarter-

finalists even went down to 10 men in stoppage time after Thanh Long picked up his second yellow in the game. Indonesia need a result against Japan on Wednesday to stay in the knockout stage race while Vietnam will play for pride against already-qualified Iraq. **(the-afc.com)**

No margin for error for Bahrain and Malaysia

Doha: There will be no margin for error for either side when Bahrain and Malaysia face off at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today to revive their respective AFC Asian Cup Qatar campaigns. Both suffered defeat in their opening matches and now victory is needed if they are to keep their hopes of advancing into the Round of 16 alive.

Bahrain are undefeated in their last eight encounters with Malaysia - including a 2-1 win during qualification for the Asian Cup - but head coach Juan Antonio Pizzi said his team won't be taking their opponents lightly. "The game against Malaysia is going to be very challenging; it won't be easy. Both teams share the same ambition of qualifying into the knockout stage. To succeed, we must maintain 100 percent focus and strive to secure a victory," said Pizzi.

"For me it doesn't matter where we are playing, what we want is to focus and get the three points."

Bahrain will be without the services of Amine Benaddi, the defender having to come off with an injury in the second half against South Korea, but Pizzi said his team will adapt. "The injury to Amine (Benaddi) is crucial for the team, both in terms of skill and morale support. Finding a suitable replacement has been challenging, but as always, we have plans and ideas to implement on the pitch, and we have faith in our strategy."

"We know we need to improve our game from one match to another. However, it's crucial to emphasise that our level (against South Korea) was not weak at the centre of the attack."

Having conceded four goals against Jordan in their opening fixture, head coach Kim Pan-gon faces another challenge in steering Malaysia past Bahrain.

"We will approach tomorrow's game with the same mentality as our first match. We have to be brave and dominate," said Kim.

PREVIEW

'Hurting' South Korea want to win title for stricken goalkeeper



South Korea's coach Jurgen Klinsmann (left) and midfielder Lee Jae-sung at a press conference yesterday.

Agencies

Doha

Jurgen Klinsmann's South Korea want to win the Asian Cup for Kim Seung-gyu after the first-choice goalkeeper was ruled out of the rest of the tournament yesterday with injury. Kim suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee during a training session on Thursday in Doha.

The 33-year-old stopper, who plays in the Saudi Pro League, is a mainstay of the South Korean side, winning 79 caps since making his debut in 2013.

South Korea are trying to win the Asian Cup for the first time since 1960 and can seal their place in the last 16 with victory today against Jordan.

"I want to share how disappointed we are as a team and how sorry we are for him," midfielder Lee Jae-sung said. "We are going to be playing for him and he is going to be with us in our hearts until the end of the tournament."

Lee added that Kim's injury "hurts (us), it hurts a lot...but it will be a motivation for us. Hopefully it can be a motivation to go far."

Legendary German striker Klinsmann, who took over as South Korea coach a year ago, said his team could not afford to dwell on the loss of Kim. Klinsmann could now turn to 32-year-old Ulsan stopper Jo Hyeon-woo, who has 24 caps. "We are very sad about the injury, but it is part of the tournament," Klinsmann said.

"We need to move on. We keep him in our thoughts and we are fighting for him."

With Kim in goal, South Korea defeated Bahrain 3-1 in their opening match in Qatar.

Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Hwang Hee-chan was not involved because of injury and Klinsmann suggested he will not be ready for the Jordan game. "Every day looks better and hopefully he will be back soon," he said.

Meanwhile, the strength of the South Korean side is not lost on Jordan head coach Hussein Ammouta, who is hoping to see his side capitalise on their impeccable performance against Malaysia to combat the East Asian heavyweights' stellar line-up.

"We played an outstanding match and the three points have really helped us," said Ammouta. "But now we are up against one of the strongest teams in the competition and we need to play as one team and our reaction time has to be minimal."

Tasked with the responsibility of containing formidable talents like Lee Kang-in and Son Heung-min, the Jordan head coach is placing his trust in a strategic zonal marking approach to thwart any potential goal-scoring threats.

"Man marking is difficult because it creates large gaps. We prefer to use zonal marking and will resort to man marking only in very specific situations," he said.

"Our main focus is to remain compact, defend from the front and not leave many spaces behind for Korea Republic to use."

FOCUS

Ghayedi strike takes Iran to last 16

Mehdi Ghayedi's second goal of the AFC Asian Cup was the difference as Iran overcame Hong Kong 1-0 in Group C at Khalifa International Stadium yesterday.

With six points to their name, Team Melli join hosts Qatar, Australia and Iraq in the round of 16 with a game to spare, while Hong Kong's hopes of progressing will depend on being able to beat Palestine on the final day of the group, as well as other results going their way. The first chance of the game fell Hong Kong's way when Matt Orr took advantage of a defensive mistake to collect the ball on the edge of the area and send a left-footed strike that was saved by goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

The East Asian side thought they had taken the lead in the 17th minute when a misplaced pass by Roozbeh Cheshmi saw the ball find its way to Everton Camargo who rounded Beiranvand but skied his finish well over the crossbar. Team Melli waited until the 23rd minute to get their first sight of goal, but when they did, they were denied by the upright when Ramin Rezaeian advanced down the right and delivered a cross at the far post for Shahriyar Moghanlou whose diving header hit the post and went behind for a goal-kick.

Two minutes later, Iran took the lead when Milad Mohammadi fed Ghayedi on the left wing and the Ittihad Kalba forward expertly curled it into the bottom far corner for his second goal of the campaign in a similar fashion to his strike against Palestine days earlier.

The second half started with intensity from both sides, but with play centred around the



Iran's forward Mehdi Ghayedi (centre) looks on as he scores against Hong Kong during the Asian Cup Group C match at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha. (AFP)

middle of the pitch and clear-cut chances few and far between. Hong Kong goalkeeper Yapp Hung Fai showed his quality in making a flying save to push away a well-executed curled free-kick from Rezaeian which looked destined for the top corner.

Rezaeian found himself face-to-face with the opposition goalkeeper with just seven

minutes to go after being set-up by a perfectly-weighted Saman Ghoddos pass, but the right-back failed to direct his shot goalwards.

Iran end their group stage at Education City Stadium against the UAE on Tuesday, while Hong Kong take on Palestine at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in the other 6pm kick-off on the same day. **(the-afc.com)**

QATAR QUALIFY FOR 2025 WORLD HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP



Qatar's handball team qualified for 2025 World Championship to be held in Croatia, Denmark and Norway. With its second victory over Iran 27-23 in their second main round match of the 21st Asian Men's Championship, which is currently being held in Bahrain, Al Annabi sealed their ticket to world championships. Qatar had earlier defeated UAE 25-21. They will face Japan tomorrow. In preliminary round, defending champions Qatar showcased dominance, securing the first position in Group A by defeating Kuwait, Oman, and Chinese Taipei.