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# Japan and South Korea share similar World Cup fates

By Mike Street  
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Japan and South Korea entered this year's World Cup in Brazil with similarly hopeful pasts, but both Asian squads yielded similarly disappointing results. Each team failed to hold a lead, could not defeat a short-handed opponent, allowed four goals in a game, and were eliminated from the tournament by a team with little to gain from a win.

Japan had hoped to build on its strong performance at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, where it won its first matches on foreign soil. Defeating Cameroon and Denmark in group play, Japan battled Paraguay to a scoreless draw in the second round before losing in a penalty shootout. Following that impressive run, the team hired Italian coach Alberto Zaccheroni, who hoped to achieve an even better result in Brazil.

Japan was anchored by veteran midfielder Yasuhito Endo, who leads the team with nearly 150 international appearances, providing devastating passes and accurate free kicks. Endo was joined by Keisuke Honda, an attack-minded midfielder who scored two of Japan's four goals in the 2010 Cup, and forward Shinji Okazaki, who recently set the Japanese scoring record in Germany's Bundesliga; Okazaki, too, scored for Japan in South Africa.

South Korea also hoped to continue its recent successes after qualifying for its eighth-straight World Cup. Like co-host Japan in 2002, South Korea played well, winning its first World Cup match ever, against Poland. The Taeguk Warriors went on to defeat top-flight teams Portugal, Italy, and Spain, eventually falling in a semifinal match to Germany.

In the 2010 Cup, South Korea reached the second round for the first time outside Korea. After scoring five goals in group play, a team record, they lost to Uruguay in the second round, when now-infamous striker (and biter) Luis Suarez scored his second goal of the match in the 80th minute.

The Taeguk Warriors were led by a trio



AP Photo/Petr David Jozek



AP Photo/Lee Jin-man

of youthful midfielders, all playing in the Bundesliga. Twenty-one-year-old Son Heungmin notched that league's first hat trick by a South Korean last November, and Ji Dongwon, just a year older than Son, has played in the English Premier League, too. Both are led by new team captain Koo Jacheol, who led all scorers in the Asian Football Confederation's Asian Cup in 2011 and steered South Korea to a surprise bronze medal at the 2010

Olympics.

In its opening match, South Korea took the lead against Russia but could not hold onto it. Midway through the second half, Lee Chungyong drilled a shot that the Russian goalkeeper mishandled, and the ball popped over his shoulder into the net. But six minutes later, Korean keeper Jung Sungryong deflected a shot in front of his own goalmouth, and forward Aleksandr Kerzhakov drove the rebound home for the

**WORLD CUP WOES.** Japan and South Korea entered this year's World Cup in Brazil with similarly hopeful pasts, but both squads were eliminated after the group stage of the competition. Pictured (top photo) is Japan's Atsuto Uchida (#2) tripping up Ivory Coast's Gervinho (#10) during a Group C World Cup soccer match at Arena Pernambuco in Recife, Brazil. In the bottom photo, South Korea's Yun Suk-young (#3) and Belgium's Nacer Chadli challenge for the ball during their Group H World Cup soccer match at Itaquerao Stadium in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

equalizer, and the game ended in a draw. Japan also failed to hold its lead in its opening match against the Elephants of the Ivory Coast. In the 16th minute, Shinji Kagawa fed the ball to a wide-open Honda, who drove home the game's first goal. The larger Elephants soon wore down the Japanese side, however, and aging superstar Didier Drogba came off the Ivory Coast bench in the second half to overload Japan's defense. Two quick scores followed to hand Japan the defeat.

Japan's draw came against Greece in its second match, one in which they also earned a one-man advantage. Japan was the aggressor early, with Honda nearly curling in a free kick, and then Greek captain Konstantinos Katsouranis was sent off after being issued a second yellow card just before the end of the half. The short-handed Grecian squad came together nicely, threatening Japan, who could not capitalize on several sure-goal opportunities. The Blue Warriors wasted an excellent chance at a win, and the game ended in a scoreless tie.

In its second match, South Korea had little chance at victory against a dynamic Algerian squad who piled up four goals, a World Cup record for an African team. Two early scores left the Taeguk Warriors dazed and confused, possibly leading to a defensive overplay later that half, leaving Abdelmoumene Djabou open to drive home a third tally. South Korea scored excellent goals at the start and finish of the second half, from Son and Koo, but Algeria added its fourth score to seal the victory.

In its final match, South Korea faced a short-handed Belgium squad assured of advancement and resting three of its top

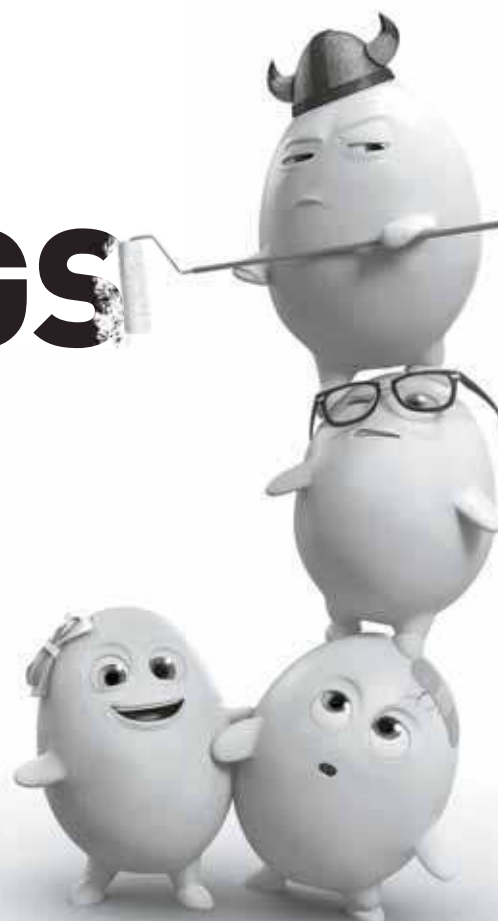
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