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# Asian teams shine at Women's World Cup

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

Though Asian sports fans were disappointed when the U.S. drubbed Japan in the Women's World Cup championship match, the preliminary rounds gave them plenty to feel good about. Japan made it to the final again and a young Chinese squad showed great promise, while South Korea had its moment and Thailand gave fans a taste of things to come.

Of the five Asian teams that qualified for the tournament, four (including Australia) advanced to the knockout round and three made it to the quarterfinals. Among the Fédération Internationale de Football Association's (FIFA) regional groups, only Europe had more teams reach the second round and just three of those seven teams survived to the quarterfinal round.

Thailand, the lone Asian team that failed to emerge from the group stage, played in their first Women's World Cup in a very tough group. Predictably, they fell to both Norway and top-ranked Germany, but did earn their first World Cup win against Côte d'Ivoire, one of only two teams ranked lower than Thailand at the beginning of the tournament.

After Côte d'Ivoire took the early lead, forward Orathai Srimanee volleyed home a beautiful cross from midfielder Anotsara Maijarern, and then scored again, heading in an assist from midfielder Rattikan Thongsombut. Forward Thanatta Chawong scored Thailand's third goal, thanks to Maijarern, who drew the Ivoirian goalkeeper into the corner of the box, then lofted the ball over the keeper's head to Chawong. A late goal from Côte d'Ivoire didn't change the outcome of the match, but Thailand didn't earn enough points to advance out of Group B.

The other Asian squads had better fortunes. South Korea, in its second Women's World Cup, wanted to rebound from its winless 2003 performance. To do this, the Taeguk Warriors had to get past Brazil and Spain, two countries with long and proud soccer traditions, as well as newcomer Costa Rica.

Brazil blanked the Warriors, 2-0, but South Korea showed their offensive strength against Costa Rica. After falling behind early, the team scored twice in a four-minute span on a penalty kick from forward Soyun Ji and a header from midfielder Gaeul Jeon. But victory was denied them when Karla Villalobos slipped behind the defense to score the equalizer with a minute left in regulation time.

South Korea earned the three points it needed to advance in a match against Spain, again coming back to score twice.

## Japan to start from scratch on Tokyo Olympic stadium plan

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control as the costly stadium was another headache for Abe's government, whose support rating has already fallen over unpopular defense legislation and gaffes by his party members.

Hadid's office blamed soaring construction costs in Tokyo and a tight deadline.

"It is not the case that the recently reported cost increases are due to the design, which uses standard materials and techniques well within the capability of Japanese contractors, and meets the budget set by the Japan Sports Council," Jim Heverin, project director of Zaha Hadid Architects, said in a statement e-mailed to The Associated Press.

Japan's top government spokesman, Yoshihide Suga, said the contract with Hadid would be cancelled, and a new international competition would be



After an excellent buildup from midfield, Sohyun Cho scored, spinning in midair to flick in an athletic header. Defender Sooyun Kim, looking to set up her teammates, also scored when her cross flew directly into the far corner of the net.

Unfortunately, South Korea's tournament ended in the first elimination game, as France dominated the Taeguk Warriors, hammering home two goals in the first eight minutes and then adding a third early in the second half to win with a 3-0 shutout. Despite the tough defeat, the Warriors look well poised to continue their recent success.

China, though strong, also drew a formidable group that featured the Netherlands, Canada, and New Zealand. Known for their slow, grinding style, China held Canada scoreless for more than 90 minutes during the opening match of the tournament before giving up a penalty kick with a minute remaining in second-half stoppage time.

China rallied from the disheartening loss to stun the Netherlands late in the next match. After many near-misses and stellar saves by the opposing goalkeeper, Lisi Wang scored the game-winner on a breakaway in second-half stoppage time, chipping a ball just past the Dutch keeper. That victory, and the three points it earned, proved crucial when China battled New Zealand to a 2-2 draw, and the four points enabled them to reach the elimination round.

Facing Cameroon in the Round of 16, China scored quickly when Shanshan Weng volleyed a line-drive pass past the keeper for the game's only score. China's

completed within six months. A new project and its estimated cost will then be announced.

Construction was scheduled to start in October on Hadid's design, chosen in 2012 in an international competition. Some people likened the design to a bicycle helmet.

Hidetoshi Ohno, a University of Tokyo architecture professor, said Japan has no time to waste, but the initial 130 billion yen budget would be enough to build a world-class stadium.

The latest cost estimate, a sharp increase from a 163 billion yen estimate last year, would have been the world's most expensive sports stadium, surpassing the \$1.6 billion MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Associated Press writers Ken Moritsugu and Jim Armstrong in Tokyo contributed to this story.

**CANADA 2015.** China's Shanshan Wang (#9) clears the ball as teammates Haiyan Wu (#5) and goalkeeper Fei Wang watch during the first half of a quarterfinal match in the Women's World Cup soccer tournament in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Team China met the United States in the game, including Carli Lloyd (#10) and Kelley O'Hara (#5). The United States won the match, 1-0. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press via AP)

the early lead against the Netherlands in the first elimination match, then adding to it before surrendering a late goal to make the game seem closer than it really was. Australia proved a more formidable foe in the quarterfinals, as the tournament's surprise team contained the Blue Samurai for most of the game. Japan prevailed, however, when Mana Iwabuchi, a late substitution, drove home the winning goal on a weak clearance.

This defeat seemed crushing for Australia, but not as heartbreaking as England's loss to Japan in the semifinals. After a tough match that saw the teams score within seven minutes of one another late in the first half, it looked like the game would go into extra time. But in stoppage time, Azusa Iwashimizu tried to slip a pass into England's penalty area, where two of her teammates were making runs. English defender Laura Bassett tried to intercept the pass, only to deflect the ball into the upper right corner of England's net, ending the game with an unfortunate own goal.

Japan faced a red-hot Carli Lloyd and a U.S. squad that played incredibly well together in the final, losing 5-2. Japan's performance, however, along with that of their Asian counterparts, ensured that Asian teams will electrify future Women's World Cups.

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