

# Japan advances on yellow cards at World Cup

By Pan Pylas  
The Associated Press

**V**OLGOGRAD, Russia — Nice guys don't necessarily finish last at the World Cup.

Fair play, a newly implemented tiebreaker in the group stage of the world's biggest soccer tournament, was put into use for the first time and Japan came out as the beneficiary.

Despite losing 0-1 to Poland, the Japanese were able to advance to a round of 16 match against Belgium because they received fewer yellow cards than Senegal, which lost to Colombia by the same score at the same time.

Once Colombia scored in Samara, Japan knew it had done enough to advance even though it was losing late in its match. The Japanese players slowed play down to almost nothing, softly passing the ball back and forth in little triangles in their own end to waste time.

"My decision was to rely on the other match," Japan coach Akira Nishino said. "I'm not too happy about this but ... I forced my players to do what I said. And we went through."

"It was an ultimate decision for me to make. We did not go through with victory, but we just relied on the other match and I feel that it was slightly regrettable but I suppose at that point I didn't have any other plans."

The fans at the Volgograd Arena showed their displeasure by booing and whistling loudly over the final minutes. Poland, happy to get a victory after two losses, did little to pressure the opposing side.

Both Japan and Senegal finished the group phase with four points, had the same goal difference, and the same amount of goals scored. They also played to a 2-2 draw. Starting at this year's tournament, disciplinary records — known as fair play — were added by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) as a tiebreaker. Japan had four yellow cards in its three group matches while Senegal had six.

Overall, Japan committed only 28 fouls in three group matches, among the fewest in the tournament. Senegal committed 44



AP Photo/Thembha Hadebe



AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko

**YELLOW CARD TIEBREAKER.** Japanese goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima (top photo) dives to stop a shot near the goal line during a Group H match between Japan and Poland at the 2018 World Cup at Volgograd Arena in Volgograd, Russia, on June 28, 2018. In the bottom photo, Japan's Yuto Nagatomo (#5) and Poland's Bartosz Bereszynski (#18) challenge for the ball in Volgograd, Russia. Despite losing 0-1 to Poland, the Japanese advanced to a round of 16 match because they received fewer yellow cards during the tournament than Senegal.

his players were fatigued. All four of Japan's scorers in the previous two games were left on the bench, but the Japanese still had more of the chances in the first half.

Poland had an early chance to take the lead in the 32nd minute but Japan goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima stopped a header from Kamil Grosicki. Scampering across his goal before diving, Kawashima clawed the ball to safety just before it would have crossed the line.

Robert Lewandowski then had a chance to put Poland ahead 2-0 — a result that would have allowed Senegal to advance — in the 74th minute after a swift counter-attack, but his effort flew over the bar.

**Group dynamics**

Japan faces Group G winner Belgium on July 2 in Rostov-on-Don.

"There is no doubt that our next opponents are going to be stronger than us," Japan defender Yuto Nagatomo said before the foe was known. "We have to pull together and get our hands dirty."

Senegal, however, has become the first victim of the new tiebreaker. As a result, no African team advanced from the first round of the World Cup for the first time since 1982.

"I don't know if the regulation is cruel or not, but I can't ask my players to go on the pitch in order to avoid yellow cards," Senegal coach Aliou Cisse said. "You have to be in contact with other players when you play football. This is how you play football. It worked against us."

**Landmarks**

Japan has reached the knockout round at the World Cup three times in the last five tournaments.

Poland, for the third straight World Cup that it has competed in, lost its first two group matches and then won its third.

fouls.

Poland, which had already been eliminated, got its goal from defender Jan Bednarek in the 59th minute. He beat his marker at the far post and volleyed in a swerving free kick from Rafal Kurzawa.

When Bednarek scored, Japan was facing elimination. However, Colombia's goal in the 74th minute of the other group

match meant Japan was in second place and would advance.

As the game continued, it barely got above walking pace.

"It was for us more important to get into the next round than to win the match," Japan midfielder Gotoku Sakai said.

Nishino made six changes to the starting lineup ahead of the match, saying some of

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		6		2	5	1	
5			6				
9				8			3
7	5		6				9
		9	7				
	2		1	8			4
4		1					9
				5			6
	6	1	4		3		

Difficulty level: Easy #62515

**Instructions:** Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

### Solution to last issue's puzzle

Puzzle #85142 (Hard)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

6	3	8	5	2	1	4	9	7
4	2	1	6	9	7	3	5	8
7	9	5	8	4	3	2	6	1
3	4	6	9	1	8	7	2	5
9	1	7	2	6	5	8	4	3
5	8	2	3	7	4	6	1	9
8	6	4	1	3	9	5	7	2
1	7	3	4	5	2	9	8	6
2	5	9	7	8	6	1	3	4

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