

South Korea looks to youth after World Cup loss to Brazil

By Stephen Wade
The Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar — South Korea lost in the Round of 16 of the World Cup and then lost its coach.

The team was beaten by five-time champion Brazil 4-1. After the match, South Korea coach Paulo Bento announced that he was stepping down to end his four-year stint. The Portuguese coach said he made the decision several months ago.

Expectation vs. performance

South Korea was knocked out of the 2019 Asian Cup in the quarterfinals, so reaching the last 16 in Qatar can be seen as a positive. South Korea was appearing in its 10th straight World Cup, and its 11th overall.

This was the third time South Korea reached the knockout round. Its best performance was in 2002 when it co-hosted the event with Japan and reached the semifinals.

Who's out

A key figure missing will be Bento. However, the current group of players is arguably the best that South Korea has assembled, and most are relatively young.

One of the older players is 30-year-old Son Heung-min, the star midfielder at English club Tottenham. Son failed



to score in this World Cup after getting goals in the last two.

He did get a beautiful assist on Hwang-Hee-chan's goal, which gave South Korea a 2-1 victory over Portugal and a place in the last 16.

Son played in the tournament wearing a black facemask to protect a broken left eye socket picked up in a Champions League game on November 2.

WHO'S NEXT. Brazil's Casemiro, left, and South Korea's Lee Kang-in (#18) challenge for the ball during a World Cup Round of 16 soccer match between Brazil and South Korea at Stadium 974 in Doha, Qatar, on December 5, 2022. South Korea lost the match then lost its coach. The country is looking to Lee Kang-in to be a future leader of the squad. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

Who's next

After the loss, Son pointed out who he thinks will be the next players to lead South Korea. He singled out Lee Kang-in and Paik Seung-ho. Paik came in and scored as a substitute against Brazil in his first World Cup action.

"I am grateful that our young players showed what they are capable of doing on this stage and also the potential for what they could do in the future," Son said. "I hope they get even better."

Son also took center stage to apologize for the Brazil loss. "I am really sorry for our people, for soccer fans who supported us," Son said. "It turned out to be an extremely difficult match."

What's next?

South Korea has qualified for the Asian Cup, but will receive tough competition from Japan, Australia, and Saudi Arabia — all World Cup qualifiers. The event, scheduled for January 2024, was moved to Qatar after China withdrew, citing COVID-19.

What's next for Japan after exit on penalty kicks at the World Cup?

By Stephen Wade
The Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar — In Japan's fourth appearance in the Round of 16 at the World Cup, the team was knocked out for the fourth time. The Japanese lost to Croatia in a penalty kick shootout after a 1-1 draw. The Croats won the shootout 3-1.

Japan also reached the Round of 16 in 2002, 2010, and four years ago in Russia.

Expectation vs. performance

Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu said for months that the goal was to reach the quarterfinals for the first time. So by that standard, Japan under-performed.

However, 2-1 victories over former

World Cup champions Spain and Germany in the group stage showed Japan has improved enough to compete with top soccer nations.

"Even though we could not break the wall of the Round of 16 again, players demonstrated a new era of our soccer," Moriyasu said. Moriyasu talked of still needing to improve, but the coach said his players "can look eye-to-eye with anyone now."

Moriyasu's contract expired at the end of the World Cup. Japan soccer association president Tashima Kohzo said in Doha that Moriyasu was likely to be a candidate to continue. He gave no more details.

Who's out?

Fullback Yuto Nagatomo, 36, and

goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima, 39, have each been on four World Cup squads and certainly will not return. Nagatomo played in all four games in Qatar, but Kawashima never left the bench. Instead, he served as a veteran mentor to the young team.

Captain and defender Maya Yoshida was in his third World Cup and, at 34, most likely his last.

"I'm having trouble finding words to describe how I feel," Nagatomo said after the loss to Croatia. "We did everything we could until the very end. I trust that younger players, driven by this sense of regret, will make a better future for Japanese soccer."

Who's next?

Three names come immediately to mind.

Midfielder Ritsu Doan, who plays at German club Freiburg, scored two goals and will certainly be a backbone of future teams. Another is midfielder Kaoru Mitoma, who is having a stellar season at English club Brighton in the Premier League.

Mitoma was one of three Japanese players who missed their penalty kick in the shootout loss to Croatia.

The third is another midfielder, 21-year-old Takefusa Kubo, who plays at Spanish club Real Sociedad.

What's next?

Japan has qualified for the January 2024 Asian Cup, a tourney it has won four times.

OREGON PROBLEM GAMBLING RESOURCE

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The Calendar Page Turns

Whew! Another whirlwind of a holiday season winds down, and you have a moment or two to sit quietly and breathe deeply. It's no wonder that January is the season for introspection and resolution.

For many, a review of the year just past is a chance to find a better path going forward. It's a chance to establish some new practices that could have a positive impact on finances, relationships or personal fulfillment. For some people, gaining control of a gambling habit might be a goal for this new year. If this includes you, we can help.

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