

Tunisia, Denmark draw 0-0 in their World Cup opener

Group D: Tunisia frustrate Eriksen's Denmark

DOHA: Tunisia held Denmark to a goalless draw in their World Cup opener on Tuesday, kicking off their Group D campaign with a strong performance against one of the pre-tournament dark horses. Tunisia have never reached the World Cup knockouts in five previous attempts but Jalel Kadri's side will be encouraged both with a point at Education City Stadium and with how they performed against the fancied Danes.

Since Kadri took charge of the team in January Tunisia have only lost to Brazil and they frustrated Denmark in front of thousands of noisy North Africans. Christian Eriksen was largely anonymous on his return to major tournament football after nearly dying on the pitch at the European Championship last year, wilting in the face of ferocious defending. Denmark had come into the match as favorites but Tunisia tore into their more illustrious opponents from kick-off, flying into tackles.

The massed ranks of Tunisians in the stands created a crackling atmosphere and they cheered every tackle and clearance. The African side nearly took the lead in the 11th minute, with Mohamed Drager's long-range effort clipping off Andreas Christensen and drifting just wide. The Danes began to get a foothold in the

game but talisman Eriksen struggled to shake off the attentions of Tunisia's well-organized backline, and although they got into dangerous positions any attacks were comfortably snuffed out.

The Tunisians came closest to taking the lead in the opening period, Copenhagen-born Anis Ben Slimane straying offside before slotting past Kasper Schmeichel, who then made sure the scores were level at the break with a wonderful stop. Issam Jebali managed to break through onto Youssef Msakni's smart pass but his dinked finish was brilliantly tipped away by the onrushing Schmeichel. Tunisia kept up the intensity but it was Denmark who had the two best chances of a tight second half.

Eriksen was denied what would have been a fine goal by Aymen Dahmen's fingertip save in the 69th minute and from the subsequent corner substitute Andreas Cornelius somehow headed onto the post from close range. That would have probably won the match for Denmark as Tunisia failed to match their physical efforts with much real creativity. After surviving a late penalty scare they celebrated a precious and unexpected point with their passionate supporters. — AFP



AL-RAYYAN: Tunisia's defender #03 Montassar Talbi (center) and Tunisia's midfielder #14 Aissa Laidouni both jump to head the ball next to Denmark's defender #04 Simon Kjær during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group D football match between Denmark and Tunisia on November 22, 2022. — AFP

Bale shines as Wales, US draw

AL-RAYYAN: Gareth Bale scored a late penalty to snatch a 1-1 draw with the United States in Wales' first World Cup game in 64 years on Monday. Welsh skipper Bale lashed home an 82nd-minute spot kick to break American hearts moments after earning the penalty when defender Walker Zimmerman crashed into the former Real Madrid star.

The penalty drama cancelled out Tim Weah's superb first-half goal for the Americans which had threatened to ruin the celebratory mood surrounding Wales' long-awaited first World Cup appearance since the 1958 finals in Sweden. Bale's equalizer triggered roars from a large and raucous contingent of Wales fans in a crowd of 43,418 fans at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on the outskirts of Doha.

Bale said afterwards a rousing half-time team talk by manager Rob Page had helped inspire Wales after a lacklustre first-half performance. "Obviously a difficult game. First half was not how we wanted to play," said Bale. "The US played well and we played poorly. We played really well in the second half. "Good point, but we would have loved to have had three." Page paid tribute to the 33-year-old Bale's nous in winning the penalty. "He's very good at finding those spaces," Page said. "He's intelligent, he's got a wise head to get in those positions and he used all his wisdom there."

Until the late penalty it looked as if Wales were heading for a defeat, struggling to break down a skillful and ener-

getic US squad that is the second youngest at the tournament. Coach Gregg Berhalter admitted his team had been left dejected by failure to hang on for victory as they now contemplate a daunting Group B game with England on Friday. "Taking a point in the first game is not the end of the world," Berhalter said. "Walking into the locker room after the game you could see the disappointment in the group. The guys worked hard. "In the end we fell a little bit short of the victory."

Menace

Wales were outplayed for long periods of the first half, with manager Page's decision not to start towering centre-forward Kieffer Moore depriving them of a crucial attacking outlet. Instead it was the US who made all the early running, with Chelsea's Christian Pulisic a constant darting menace. The positive early play almost resulted in a goal when Weah's whipped-in cross almost forced Joe Rodon to head into his own net. The US exuberance led to a flurry of cards for the Americans early on, with Sergino Dest and Weston McKennie both booked for wild tackles on Neco Williams.

The relentless US pressing game meant Wales were unable to construct anything in midfield, where Aaron Ramsey and Ethan Ampadu were rarely afforded time or space. The breakthrough came on 36 minutes. Good hold-up play by Josh Sargent near halfway sent Pulisic accelerating towards goal before picking out



AL-RAYYAN: USA's goalkeeper #01 Matt Turner (2nd right) punches the ball ahead of Wales' defender #05 Chris Mepham (left) during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B football match between USA and Wales on November 21, 2022. — AFP

Weah, who had darted in behind goal. The son of African football icon George Weah showed terrific composure, dinking a cool finish with the outside of his right foot over Wayne Hennessey for a goal that was no less than the US deserved.

Wales were in disciplinary soon afterwards, Bale earning a yellow card for clattering into Yunus Musah at 40 minutes. Chris Mepham joined the Welsh captain in the book after hauling Pulisic down near half-time. Page brought on Moore at half-time for Daniel James and the substitution immediately started to have an effect. Tottenham's Ben Davies almost headed

Wales level on 64 minutes but was denied by goalkeeper Matt Turner with an acrobatic parry over the bar.

Moore powered a header just over from the ensuing corner. The US dropped deeper and Wales pressed more aggressively as they chased an equalizer. On 80 minutes Ramsey surged down the right and cut back for Bale, who shielded the ball and tempted Zimmerman into a wild lunge. Qatari referee Abdulrahman Al-Jassim pointed to the spot and Bale stepped up to save Wales. Wales face Iran on Friday in their second Group B game. England were 6-2 winners over the Iranians earlier on Monday. — AFP

Today's matches

FIFA World Cup 2022	
Morocco v Croatia	13:00
belN Sports HD 2 Max	
belN Sports HD 1 Max	
Germany v Japan	16:00
belN Sports HD 1 Max	
Spain v Costa Rica	19:00
belN Sports HD 1 Max	
Belgium v Canada	22:00
belN Sports HD 2 Max	
belN Sports HD 1 Max	

Germany's Musiala armed with skills

AL SHAMAL: When Mario Goetze scored in extra time against Argentina to win the 2014 World Cup for Germany, an 11-year-old Jamal Musiala watched from his couch alongside his parents in London. Eight years later and still three months shy of his 20th birthday, the former Chelsea youth star has established himself as an essential part of Hansi Flick's XI in Qatar.

The Bayern Munich forward, nicknamed "Bambi" for his youthful appearance, opened Monday's Germany press conference by reiterating the need to keep his cool. Germany begin their latest World Cup title charge on Wednesday against Japan in the Doha heat. "I feel it's important to bring a bit of looseness, not to put too much pressure on yourself and to have a bit of fun, and then it'll go well," said Musiala, whose calm on the ball is crucial in Germany's high-octane attack.

"Jamal is a laid-back guy," teammate Niklas Sule, 27, said while sitting alongside the teenager, who has been showered with praise after a stunning domestic season in which he has scored nine goals and had six assists in 15 league games with Bayern. German legend Lothar Matthaus says that Musiala is so good that he compares him with Lionel Messi.

"Being compared to Messi, it's a little difficult," Musiala said on Monday at Germany's isolated training camp in Al-Shamal, northern Qatar. "I am focused on myself and what I can do better as Jamal." Musiala's form has been so strong that Bayern have hardly noticed the absence of talisman Thomas Mueller, who has missed much of the season so far with injury.

'Play with freedom'

Born in Stuttgart, Musiala moved to England at the age of seven. He returned to Germany in 2019 after spending eight years in the Chelsea youth set-up. Musiala represented England throughout his teenage years but in February 2021 opted to swap allegiance to Germany, despite Gareth Southgate's attempts to keep him.

Former Bayern and England midfielder Owen Hargreaves has called Musiala "one of a kind" and says he "had something that England doesn't have". Musiala remains good friends with several current English stars, including 19-year-old Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham. Musiala said his decade in England armed him with skills that he may not have picked up in Germany.

"In the England youth set-up you learn different things than you do in Germany. I have taken a real lot from (that time), like quality playing as an individual and in one-on-one situations," he said. "A saying they often repeated was 'play with freedom', which I have tried to implement throughout my career (and which) will always be a part of me." Formerly Musiala's teammate at Bayern before an off-season move to Dortmund, Sule recalled the moment he recognized the teenager's "incredible" talent.

"We played against the under-19s and you could see what incredible skills and abilities he had," said Sule, adding that "after this game, he was moved to the professional side". While admitting that as a teenager he "supported England" and was still "happy when they win games", Musiala believes Germany can turn it on when it matters. "We came into the tournament with the mindset that we can win," he said. "We are well prepared and pumped up to know that the tournament is starting." — AFP

Ronaldo to leave Man United with 'immediate effect'

LONDON: Cristiano Ronaldo's controversial second spell at Manchester United is to end with "immediate effect", the Premier League giants announced Tuesday. The Portugal forward

appeared to be on his way out of Old Trafford following a recent television interview in which he said he felt "betrayed" by the club and had no respect for new manager Erik ten Hag.

"Cristiano Ronaldo is to leave Manchester United by mutual agreement, with immediate effect," said a United statement. "The club thanks him for his immense contribution across two spells at Old Trafford, scoring 145 goals in 346 appearances, and wishes him and his family well for the future. "Everyone at Manchester United remains focused on continuing the team's

progress under Erik ten Hag and working together to deliver success on the pitch."

As well as criticizing the Old Trafford hierarchy and ten Hag, the 37-year-old Ronaldo, currently with the Portugal squad at the World Cup, was scathing about the club's US owners. Ronaldo said the Glazer family cared far more about the money-making potential of United than results on the pitch. He even turned on former team-mates Gary Neville and Wayne Rooney, saying "they are not my friends" after recent criticism from the pair. — AFP

Japan seeking to upstage Germany

DOHA: Japan manager Hajime Moriyasu is hoping the apprentices can upset the masters when they take on "role models" Germany in their World Cup opener on Wednesday. Germany has become a popular destination for Japanese players in recent years, with eight of the current squad playing in the Bundesliga.

Moriyasu paid tribute to the contribution German football has made to his players' development but urged them to show their own qualities when the teams meet in Doha. "Germany have won the World Cup and that is our aim too—they are role models for us," the manager said on Tuesday.

"We are learning from Germany but we also want to compete on the world stage with the qualities that Japan has. "We have a lot of feelings towards Germany but we have to treat tomorrow's game as if we are playing any other team and just do our best." Japan have been handed a tough group, with Costa Rica and Spain also lying in wait in Group E. The Blue Samurai have never gone

beyond the last 16 at a World Cup but Moriyasu said they were hoping to "change history" by reaching at least the quarter-finals.

Captain Maya Yoshida acknowledged that their chances of progress could hinge on the result of their opening game. The centre-back has witnessed Germany's players at close quarters since joining Schalke in July, and is impressed by what he has seen. "We understand that they have good qualities—speed, pace and physical ability as well," said the former Southampton player, who is appearing at his third World Cup.

"The key is we have to defend well. Probably less opportunity to attack, but we need to make counter-attacks." Japan have had several injury scares in the build-up to the tournament, with doubts over the fitness of influential midfielder Hidemasa Morita. Moriyasu said his entire squad was available for selection and wants his team to play "with no regrets". "We have players in the Bundesliga, playing with or against the best players in the world, and I want them to be confident when they play in tomorrow's game," he said.

Asian teams have suffered a torrid time at the tournament so far, with host nation Qatar losing 2-0 to Ecuador in the opening game and Iran hammered 6-2 by England. Yoshida urged fans from across Asia



DOHA: Japan's head coach Hajime Moriyasu signs an autograph on a jersey for schoolchildren during a training session in Al Sadd SC in Doha. — AFP

to cheer on Japan. "Germany is so strong so we need some support," he said. "We are representing Japan of course, but at the same time representing Asia. "So hopefully many fans come to the stadium, not only Japanese but also the many Asian fans." — AFP