

Portugal squeeze past Ghana 3-2 in their World Cup opener

Ronaldo breaks records, first man to score in 5 World Cups



DOHA: Portugal's forward #15 Rafael Leao (left) scores his team's third goal past Ghana's goalkeeper #01 Lawrence Ati Zigi (right) during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group H football match between Portugal and Ghana on November 24, 2022. — AFP photos

DOHA: Cristiano Ronaldo became the first man to score at five World Cups on Thursday when he scored the opening goal from the penalty spot in Portugal's 3-2 win over Ghana. The 37-year-old set the record when he smashed home his spot-kick in the 65th minute at the 974 Stadium in Doha to send Fernando Santos' team to a victory which moved them top of Group H, two points ahead of Uruguay and South Korea.

Joao Felix and rising star Rafael Leao made sure of the win after Andre Ayew's leveller had briefly threatened to ruin Ronaldo's party. Osman Bukari netted in the final minute for Ghana but the tournament's lowest-ranked side couldn't pull off a shock and sit bottom of the group. Ronaldo overtakes Pele and Germans Uwe Seeler and Miroslav Klose, who all scored in four World Cups, after being brought down by Mohammed Salisu and taking the penalty himself.

Manchester United announced this week that Ronaldo will leave with immediate effect after he criticized the club and manager Erik ten Hag in a TV interview, but he has showed no signs of strain from the bitter end to his time at Old Trafford. All the attention pre-match was on Ronaldo and whether he could break the record and he had the perfect chance to do so in the



Cristiano Ronaldo

10th minute.

Mohammed Kudus gave the ball away sloppily in midfield and Otavio slipped Ronaldo through, only for the once clinical finisher to miscontrol the pass and clatter into Ghana goalkeeper Lawrence Ati-Zigi as he tried to poke home. And shortly afterwards Ronaldo headed Raphael Guerreiro's deep cross wide from close range, a chance that in his prime he would have been almost guaranteed to score. He did have the ball in the net just after the half-hour mark when it dropped to him in the

area, but he was harshly judged by referee Ismail Elfath to have pushed Alexander Djiku before turning and stroking home a classy finish.

Ronaldo was in fact Portugal's only real goal threat against what on paper is Group H's weakest team, who were backed by an enthusiastic set of supporters who put on more of a show in the stands than their workaday players initially did on the pitch. Ajax midfielder Kudus had the crowd briefly off their feet 10 minutes after the break when he burst forward against an exposed Portugal defence and let off a powerful shot which in the end sailed comfortably wide of Diogo Costa's left-hand post.

Ronaldo then crashed in his record-breaking penalty but as the chorus of cheers and chants of his name started to die down a previously dull game sparked into life, Ayew stunning the crowd by tapping in Kudus' pull-back in the 73rd minute. However Felix and Leao made sure Portugal would take the points with two lovely finishes in as many minutes, both strikes set up by Ronaldo's former United teammate Bruno Fernandes. Bukari then imitated Ronaldo with his goal celebration after heading home completely unmarked, but Portugal held out for a big win on a historic day. — AFP

Switzerland beat Cameroon

DOHA: Breel Embolo scored against the country of his birth as Switzerland defeated Cameroon 1-0 to make a winning start to their World Cup campaign on Thursday. Embolo struck three minutes into the second half at Al Janoub Stadium as Switzerland secured a vital three points in a group that includes tournament favourites Brazil and Serbia. Cameroon have now lost their last eight World Cup matches going back to 2002. Roger Milla was presented with an award before kick-off as the oldest goalscorer in World Cup history, a reminder of past glories for Cameroon who have won just one game since reaching the quarter-finals 32 years ago.

Cameroon coach Rigobert Song, who played at four World Cups including with a 42-year-old Milla in 1994, opted for the in-form Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting to lead the attack in place of usual captain Vincent Aboubakar. African teams had made an encouraging start in Qatar after all five failed to get past the group stage in 2018, but Cameroon will regret not making more of a first half they controlled.

Bryan Mbeumo fired at Yann Sommer after a superb ball through

from Martin Hongla before Karl Toko Ekambi lashed over the rebound. Sommer then got down low to save from Choupo-Moting after he pinched the ball away from Manuel Akanji, although a questionable foul was given against the Bayern Munich striker. Silvan Widmer made a vital challenge to stop Toko Ekambi turning in a cross from Collins Fai and Sommer pushed away a weak effort by Hongla.

Akanji glanced wide at a corner as Cameroon switched off on the stroke of half-time but there was no such escape when they were again caught napping at the start the second half. Granit Xhaka and Remo Freuler worked the ball out wide on the right to Xherdan Shaqiri whose low cross into the area was swept home by an unmarked Embolo, who chose not to celebrate against his birth country. Choupo-Moting neatly weaved his way past a couple of defenders in the box but couldn't beat Sommer from a tight angle.

Andre Onana kept Cameroon in the game with a brilliant stop to deny Ruben Vargas who found himself completely free in an almost carbon copy of Embolo's goal. Only a desperate block prevented Haris Seferovic from adding a late second. Song said the rankings meant nothing coming into the tournament, but Cameroon's eighth World Cup appearance risks being brief with games to come against Serbia and Brazil. — AFP

Uruguay and South Korea in stalemate

DOHA: The returning Son Heung-min could not inspire South Korea as the Tigers of Asia started their World Cup Group H campaign with a 0-0 draw against Uruguay in Qatar on Thursday. Uruguay captain Diego Godin and Real Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde came closest to breaking the deadlock when hitting the woodwork in each half, while Hwang Ui-jo wasted Korea's best chance, skying a shot from 10 yards out with only the goalkeeper to beat.

It was a game of few chances as neither Son on one side nor Uruguay's fearsome strikers Luis Suarez, Darwin Nunez and Edinson Cavani could find a clear opening. With matches against Ghana and group favorites Portugal, both sides seemed to be more intent on not losing than pushing for the win at the Education City stadium in Doha. Both coaches were satisfied with the point. "This was a very good match from our side, we were better in the first half, we had many moments where we controlled the match," said Korea's Portuguese coach Paulo Bento.

"After half-time we were not at our best, we suffered a bit because they are high quality players but we also did well in that situation and conced-

ed very little." Uruguay's Diego Alonso added: "It was a good game, a tight game with two competitive nations. The first half, especially the first 20 minutes we struggled, we couldn't get the ball off them. But it was good that we were able to adjust afterwards and we dominated the second half."

The early part of the match settled into a predictable pattern as Korea made a fast start and Uruguay sat deep, soaking up the pressure without giving anything away. In particular, the South Americans kept Korean danger man Son quiet. Uruguay created the first clear chances as two raking crossfield balls from centre-back Jose Maria Gimenez picked out runners coming in at an angle.

Valverde clipped the first over the bar, while Nunez failed to make proper contact on the second from just eight yards out with the goal at his mercy. Just past the hour mark, Korea should have been in front after a slick passing move opened up the Uruguay defence but unmarked 10 yards out, Hwang fired the ball high over the bar. Godin then went closest to scoring when he hit the inside of the post with a header from Valverde's outswinging corner.

Neither side could get their game changers into the match, with Son clearly not fully fit, playing his first match since surgery on a broken bone around his eye suffered at the beginning of the month against Marseille in the Champions League. — AFP



Cameroon's defender #25 Nouhou Tolo (right) heads the ball next to Switzerland's forward #19 Noah Okafor during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group G football match on November 24, 2022.



Cameroon's midfielder #08 Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa fights for the ball with Switzerland's midfielder #10 Granit Xhaka during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group G football match on November 24, 2022.



Cameroon fans take their selfie ahead of the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group G football match between Switzerland and Cameroon at the Al-Janoub Stadium on November 24, 2022.



Uruguay's forward #09 Luis Suarez (center) fights for the ball with South Korea's midfielder #10 Lee Jae-sung (left) and South Korea's defender #04 Kim Min-jae (right) during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group H football match on November 24, 2022.



Uruguay supporters arrive to attend the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group H football match between Uruguay and South Korea at the Education City Stadium in Al-Rayyan on November 24, 2022.



People wave Qatari and South Korea flags during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group H football match between Uruguay and South Korea on November 24, 2022.