The Asian Cup 2007

The Asian Cup final takes place this weekend between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, a match that few people would have predicted before the start of the tournament. True, the Saudis have a real pedigree in this competition with 6 appearances in the past 7 finals, but Iraq? Despite a recent improvement in their team few would have chosen them to make the final. Indeed, most 'experts' felt that the winner would come from the east of Asia, or in the case of Australia, not even in Asia itself. However, two of the pre-competition favourites, China and Australia, played extremely poorly and were eliminated early on, while Korea and Japan, two other footballing power-houses of the region, both fell at the semi-final stage, albeit in nail-biting fashion.

Japan were aiming for a third Asian title in a row and under new coach, Osim, a stern Bosnian, they coasted through the early group stage before meeting Australia in the quarter finals in what is turning out to be the grudge match of the region. The game went to penalties and this is what Ben and Furito of our modestly titled World All Stars football team in Tokyo thought would happen.

Ben/Furito comment

Nice one Furito, two penalty saves from Kawaguchi meant Japan faced the Saudis in the semi final. Unlucky Ben but let's hear what you and other members of the team had to say about that semi final.

Ben's comment

Wrong again Ben but when Japan equalised to make the game 2-2 and only 15 minutes left we asked our new Everton blogger for the final score. Surely he would get it right this time?

Ben's comment

No, wrong again Ben as a fantastic goal by Malek in the best game of the tournament so far sent the holders Japan crashing out. Japan will be back as they undoubtedly have talent and a coach that will not accept second best. As for Ben's predictions I am not so sure.

The competition overall has been good and despite poor attendances at a few of the matches and some teams struggling in the humidity, the decision to host the tournament in 4 South-east Asian countries has been a positive one as countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam, who reached the quarter finals, will all gain valuable experience from playing at this level. Despite this, doubts remain about the quality of Asian football on a world level, for though the Saudis may be dominant here they have consistently failed to make any impression at World Cup level. That of course will not matter this Sunday in Jakarta as both teams strive to become 2007 Asian Champions.