

Australia, South Korea win World Cup qualifiers

BRISBANE, Australia (AP) — Everton midfielder Tim Cahill marked his return to World Cup qualifying with the first of Australia's four goals against Qatar, and Manchester United Star Park Ji-sung scored in a similar rout for South Korea.

Australia took top spot in Group A with six points following a 4-0 win over Qatar after the start of their fourth-round Asian qualifying match was delayed a half hour due to a tropical lightning storm in Brisbane.

Uzbekistan helped the Australians keep the two-point cushion by scoring first and then holding Japan to a 1-1 draw at Saitama later Wednesday.

South Korea had a 4-1 win over the United Arab Emirates to take a share of top spot in Group B ahead of the later match between North Korea and Iran.

With two automatic spots at the 2010 tournament in South Africa up for grabs in each of the five-team groups, the UAE is all but out of contention following three straight losses -- two at home.

Uzbekistan risked a similar situation after losing away to Qatar and at home to Australia, but its rousing draw at Saitama kept it in contention. And made things difficult for teams traveling to Tashkent.

Australia captain Lucas Neill said his team's away win over the Uzbeks puts the Socceroos in prime position to advance.

"Uzbekistan is still in contention



and have to win all their matches at home ... Our three points away at Tashkent now look fantastic," Neill said.

He said Australia deserved to be considered favorite to top the group, but needed to maintain its momentum with two away matches coming up.

"We have to say that -- we're two from two, we're leading the group, we've got a five-goal difference -- it's

looking good," he said.

But coach Pim Verbeek had no intention of celebrating prematurely, even after a polished, controlled showing against a team that had previously led the group.

"I'm not running around with a bottle of champagne in my hand because we have six points," Verbeek said. "I will do that when we've qualified for the World Cup."

Cahill, who was sidelined for

six months with a broken foot and only returned for Everton recently, opened the scoring in ninth minute.

He was fouled in the area seven minutes later and Brett Emerton converted the resulting penalty, the first of his two goals of the match.

His next was in the 59th minute and rangy striker Josh Kennedy, who contributed in two other goals, headed in the fourth in the 76th minute.

In Saitama, Japan coach Takeshi Okada remonstrated with his team for wasting its opportunities.

"We wanted to get another goal, but there is a long way to go yet in the qualifiers and we just have to look ahead to the next game and do our best," Okada said. "It's a disappointing result but the players did well to get a goal for me and I don't feel there is any reason to be too pessimistic."

Keiji Tamada scored just before halftime to salvage the draw after Maksim Shatskikh scored Uzbekistan's first goal of the fourth round in the 27th minute.

Competition is tight in Group B, with South Korea joining Saudi Arabia and North Korea on four points.

Lee Keun-ho ran on to a through pass from Lee Young-pyo to fire past Majed Naser in the UAE goal from inside the area after 20 minutes.

Park doubled the lead five minutes later, shooting fiercely into the top left corner after skipping past a defender on the edge of the penalty box.



Kings beat Ducks 6-3 with 3 PP goals

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Now that he's back on the ice, Patrick O'Sullivan's only concern is trying to get the Los Angeles Kings back into the playoffs after a five-year drought.

O'Sullivan scored the tying goal on a power play after teammate Jason LaBarbera gave up a pair of early goals, and the Kings beat the Anaheim Ducks 6-3 Tuesday night for their first victory of the season. Jarret Stoll and Tom Preissing also scored with the man advantage, and Wayne Simmonds got his first NHL goal for Los Angeles.

O'Sullivan had 22 goals and 31 assists last season while the Kings finished tied with Tampa Bay for the fewest points in the overall standings. The 23-year-old center sat out training camp during a contract holdout and signed a three-year, \$8.775 million deal on Oct. 7.

"The contract is not something I think about at all," O'Sullivan said. "I'm just like any other guy on the team. Unfortunately, I had a contract dispute. But at the end of the day, it really doesn't have anything to do with hockey. Every day that goes by, it becomes less and less of a factor."

"I'm not worried about the pressure," he added. "Obviously, I'm counted on to do a lot of things for this team, and I know that. But I'm confident in what I'm able to do. The best thing for me is that I'm starting to get to know the new guys a little better, because I missed that part of training camp as well -- not only the hockey side of it, but meeting the new guys and becoming a team."

The Kings are 1-2 under new coach Terry Murray, who replaced Marc Crawford. It was their first game since second-year defenseman Jack Johnson sustained a shoulder injury that is expected to sideline him through the All-Star break at least.

Brian Sutherby and Todd Marchant scored first-period goals for the Ducks, who are off to an 0-3 start after back-to-back 100-point seasons and a Stanley Cup title in 2007.

"It's not rust. There's no viable excuses. We're just not working as a team," said goaltender Jean-Sebastien Giguere, who has allowed 13 goals on 87 shots in three starts. "We need to work together and rely on each other and be confident that the guy beside you is going to do his job. Right now we're just lacking that confidence."

Teemu Selanne also scored for the Ducks. Eight of the nine goal scorers got their first of the season except for Alexander Frolov, who scored his second into an empty net with 1:12 remaining.

Despite failing to capitalize on a two-man advantage midway through the second period, the Kings converted two of three power plays to take a 3-2 lead with 43 seconds left in the period.

O'Sullivan jumped on a loose puck in the right corner and skated out in front of the net. Nathan McLiver chopped down on O'Sullivan's stick as O'Sullivan tried to jam the puck past Giguere, and it caromed into the net off the skate of Ducks defenseman Chris Pronger with 7 seconds left on Brendan Morrison's hooking penalty.



Thousands turn out for funeral of Rangers prospect

MOSCOW (AP) — Friends, family and thousands of fans paid their last respects Wednesday to Alexei Cherepanov, the 19-year-old rising hockey star who died after suffering heart problems during a game outside Moscow.

State television showed mourners in his Siberian hometown lining up on a red carpet placed on the ice in the hockey stadium of Cherepanov's team, Avangard Omsk, to lay flowers at his coffin.

Cherepanov, a first-round draft pick for the New York Rangers, collapsed on the bench during a game outside Moscow on Monday.

Crowds of mourners followed as pallbearers carried Cherepanov's coffin, draped with white cloth, from the stadium to Omsk's Staro-Severnoye Cemetery, where he was buried.

Some onlookers were so overcome with grief they had to be restrained.

"It is hard to evaluate today the depth of the loss felt by the family of Alexei, Russian sport, and the Avangard team," said Leonid Polezhayev, the governor of the Omsk region, in comments to Russian agency Regnum.

"Alexei Cherepanov wasn't only a talented athlete and a reliable comrade, he was an idol of modern youth."

Investigators have said Cherepanov apparently had chronic ischemia — a medical condition in which not enough blood gets to the heart or other organs. They have raised questions as to why the condition went undetected.

French keep faith with Domenech

PARIS (AFP) — Raymond Domenech will remain coach of the France team, according to the president of the French Football Federation, Jean-Pierre Escalantes, putting an end to recent speculation over his future after an indifferent start to the World Cup qualifying campaign.

Escalettes revealed that 19 out of 20 members of the FFF's federal council had voted to keep Domenech on board.

Domenech took over the reins of Les Bleus in 2004 and the 56-year-old, who had previously coached the youth side, led the French to the World Cup final in 2006, where they bowed out to Italy on penalties.

However, a dreadful Euro 2008 campaign - the French failed to get out of the group stage - brought calls for his head and an inept loss to Austria at the start of the 2010 World Cup qualifiers only increased the pressure.

The FFF had indicated Domenech's men had to garner five points from the opening three qualifiers rather than the four they actually managed for him to quell the speculation.

But Tuesday's friendly win over Tunisia and, crucially, the express support of leading players such as Thierry Henry and Franck Ribery, has strengthened the incumbent's hand and he will now continue in the post looking to improve on a record of 33 wins for eight defeats in 59 matches.

India's Tendulkar eyes milestone against Australia

MOHALI, India (AFP) — Sachin Tendulkar will resume his quest to become the world's most prolific batsman when India take on Australia in the second Test starting here Friday.

Tendulkar needs just 15 runs to overtake West Indian Brian Lara's Test match tally of 11,953 runs and establish a fourth world record in his illustrious career.

The 35-year-old is already the world's top scorer in one-day internationals (16,361) and has the most centuries in Test matches (39) and one-dayers (42).

The master batsman came close to surpassing Lara's milestone in the second innings of the drawn first Test in Bangalore where his gritty 49 helped steer the hosts to a draw.

Australian pacesman Brett Lee said his team had planned well for Tendulkar ahead of the series.

"Sachin is world-class player," Lee told reporters here.

"We had a plan in place for him in the first Test. It worked in the first innings but in the second he got a start and played very well."

"He has a lot of experience and can hang in there if the situation so demands. That is why I love the challenge of bowling to the Little Master."

The other senior batsmen in the Indian side, including Venkatsai Laxman, Rahul Dravid and the retiring Sourav Ganguly, also hit valuable in-



nings to rescue India from defeat.

However, skipper Anil Kumble left many questions hanging over his form and fitness with the 37-year-old veteran leg-spinner going wicketless for only the third time in his Test career, the first time ever in front of a home crowd.

The captain also dropped two catches off his own bowling to cap a miserable outing.

Kumble will assess his fitness before deciding on his availability for Mohali, where the wicket is known for being lively and may tempt India to use

an extra fast bowler at his or Harbhajan Singh's expense.

Singh took just one wicket in Bangalore but hit a handy 54.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting's spin options include specialist Cameron White, who claimed Tendulkar as his maiden Test scalp in Bangalore.

Part-time spinner Michael Clarke contained the Indian batsmen and took two wickets despite the track providing little assistance to the slow bowlers. Off-spinner Jason Krejza is also available, although he failed to shine in a warm-up game in Hyderabad before the first Test.

The action off the field has heated up ahead of the Test, with Indian pacesman Zaheer Khan doubting Australia's bowling ability and Ponting retorting by saying only his team played aggressive cricket throughout.

Lee echoed his captain's views.

"We are proud of the way we played. We could have taken more wickets on the last day but that was not to be."

"We have come to win matches and hopefully we will turn things around and win the match here as well as the series."

"There are a lot of things India can say -- that they had a mental win -- but in hindsight we are very happy with the way we played."

"It's only been one match, so the guys who have not had a chance to fire have three more games to get going."

Nadal roars off to victory in Madrid title quest

MADRID (AFP) — Rafael Nadal thrilled a sold-out home crowd with a comeback performance to win his 78th match of the season as he began the chase for a second title at the Madrid Masters on Tuesday.

The top-seeded world number one who claimed his only trophy in the capital in 2005, rallied past upcoming Latvian Ernests Gulbis 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 riding a late break in the final set to victory.

Nadal, holder of eight titles this season including Paris, Wimbledon and the Olympics, has stalled in the quarter-final at the last two Madrid editions.

He was playing for the first time since leading Spain into the Davis Cup final against Argentina three weeks ago.

The Spanish hero failed to convert on his first match point against the 20-year-old Gulbis, but reached the third round on his second opportunity.

"It was a very tough match and an important one to win," said the relieved Nadal. "Gulbis is young with a great future ahead of him. He fought back well in the second set, winning the important games. I pulled out my best game when I had to."

"It was tough to attack him, and this was my



first match in a few weeks so I have things to improve."

Nadal will play on Thursday against French 15th seed Richard Gasquet, a winner over Marry Fish 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 6-3.

Scot Andy Murray stormed to the third round

as good fortune ran out for Italian lucky loser Simone Bollelli 6-0, 2-1 retired.

The Italian, who earned a place in the draw when Marat Safin withdrew with injury, threw in the towel after 47 minutes after treatment on an upper arm and shoulder.

"I was really happy with how I served and moved," said Murray, who next faces Croatian Marin Cilic, who put out 13th-seeded Spaniard Fernando Verdasco 6-2, 6-3.

"There was a lot for me to take advantage of. He stopped for a shoulder problem, but he seemed to be hitting his serve fine to me."

Cilic, 20 and Murray, a year older, have never played on the ATP Tour though they met in Davis Cup two years ago and as juniors in Paris, standing 1-1.

"He's playing well on these courts," said Murray. "He's done well in big matches this year. It will be a tough match, I'll have to play very well to win. He's a danger here with the ball flying at altitude."

American James Blake maintained his dismal, winless record in Madrid with the frustrated 11th seed crashing out to on-form Frenchman Gilles Simon 3-6, 6-1, 6-4.