

SPORTS

US reach WC final, heartbreak for England

Houghton misses late penalty

LYON, France, July 3, (RTRS): Defending champions United States reached the Women's World Cup final for the fifth time after an incident-packed 2-1 win over England, who missed a late penalty.

In a tournament that has earned unprecedented attention, the much-anticipated game certainly delivered with an abundance of excitement and relentless effort, topped by moments of wonderful skill.

It was business as usual for the three times World Cup winners but for England there was agony as skipper Steph Houghton missed an 84th-minute penalty that could have pushed the game into extra time.

After a powerful start from the Americans, Christen Press, replacing the absent Megan Rapinoe, opened the scoring in the 10th minute with a fine header but the Lionesses fought back, levelling nine minutes later with Ellen White's sixth goal of the tournament.

The US restored their advantage in the 31st minute through Alex Morgan's header from Lindsey Horan's perfectly floated ball – a goal which Morgan, on her 30th birthday, celebrated with a mocking 'sip of tea' gesture.

England thought they had levelled in the 69th minute, through another excellent White finish, but the goal was ruled out for offside by VAR video review.

VAR did provide England with a lifeline though, a penalty awarded for a foul on White, but Houghton's soft spot kick was saved by Alyssa Naeyer.

England had defender Millie Bright sent off for a second booking three minutes from the end.

The drama on a remarkable night began before the game when the team-sheets showed that Rapinoe, who had scored four goals in the last two games, had been left on the bench, most likely with an injury although the absence was not explained by US team officials.



United States' Lindsey Horan (left), duels for the ball against England's Lucy Bronze during the Women's World Cup semifinal soccer match between England and the United States at the Stade de Lyon outside Lyon, France on July 2. (AP)

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There was an unwelcome surprise for England too with goalkeeper Karen Bardsley missing out with a hamstring injury and Carly Telford drafted in.

As so often, the Americans were fast out of the traps and launched a wave of early attacks and high pressing which England's defence struggled to cope with.

Telford was called into early action to parry a fierce shot from Rose Lavelle after the midfielder had slipped the ball through the legs of Bright and, luckily for the Lionesses, Morgan blasted the loose ball over the bar. The early lead the defending champions had threatened came in the 10th minute when Kelley O'Hara whipped in a cross from the right and Press lost her marker Lucy Bronze and headed firmly past Telford.

With the US fully exploiting the space they were given in midfield, England were in danger of letting the game slip out of their control but against the run of play they levelled in superb style.

Keira Walsh's sweeping cross-field pass found Beth Mead on the left and her ball inside was met first time by White, who lifted a side-foot shot in off the far post.

The Lionesses were back in the game but they soon needed Telford again to keep out a fierce snap-shot from the excellent Lavelle.

But the quality of the Americans in the final third was displayed in perfect fashion when Press collected a ball from deep on the left flank and fed Horan, whose delightful lofted pass was met by Morgan with a pinpoint header that flashed past Telford.

Walsh forced Naeyer into a full-



United States' Lindsey Horan (left), and England's Jill Scott jump for the ball during the Women's World Cup semifinal soccer match between England and the United States at the Stade de Lyon outside Lyon, France on July 2. (AP)

stretch save with a powerful strike from 20 metres out but England needed the tactical adjustments that coach Phil Neville made at the break.

The improved approach looked to have paid dividends when Jill Scott's defence-splitting through ball was slotted home by White but to the agony of the Lionesses the VAR signal was made and the review showed the England striker offside by the tightest of margins.

The next time the signal was made for review, it was after White went down in the area under challenge from Becky Sauerbrunn and after some delay the Brazilian referee pointed to the spot.

But Houghton, so dependable in so many ways for England, let the nerves get to her and a soft kick was easily saved by Naeyer.

It was the killer blow for England and a major let-off for the Americans. When Bright was dismissed any chance of a late upset went with her.

Tunisia draw again but qualify as Mauritania go out

Haidara rocket puts Mali top, sends SA through

ISMAILIA, Egypt, July 3, (RTRS): A majestic strike by Mali midfielder Amadou Haidara secured a 1-0 win over Angola as they won their group, eliminated their opponents at the Africa Cup of Nations and also sent South Africa into the last 16.

Haidara rifled home from outside the penalty area in the 37th minute as Mali, one of the tournament's dark horses, set up an intriguing knockout-round clash with neighbours Ivory Coast.

The Malians, already qualified, finished Group E with two wins and a draw with their three games. Angola ended up third with two points, which was not enough to take them through as one of the best third-placed teams.

Angola, who scored one goal in three games, had plenty of possession and created several openings but their attack lacked punch. Tunisia took second spot with three points after a 0-0 draw with bottom side Mauritania, who finished with two.

South Africa finished with three points in their group and qualified along with Benin, Guinea and Democratic Republic of Congo as the best third-placed teams.

"We had several chances in the first half and, against Mali, you don't have the right to miss those chances," said Angola coach Srdjan Vasiljevic.

"Before the match, we calculated that we were going to have two or three chances to score. That was the case but unfortunately we didn't make the most of those chances." Gelson Dala breached the Mali de-

fence but shot straight at goalkeeper Djigui Diarra in the fifth minute, a miss that Angola would later regret.

Mali, who rested several regular starters including forward Moussa Marega, fired their first warning with an Adama Traore shot which Toni Cabaca turned away for a corner before Haidara broke the deadlock.

He collected a pass from Moussa Doumbia outside the area, took one stride forward and thumped a rising shot into the goal from 25 metres.

Angola created plenty of openings in the second half but were let down by a poor final pass.

Gelson Dala had the best effort when he ran at the heart of the Mali defence and slipped past his marker but sent his angled shot just wide of the post.

"We are a young team with a lot of potential," said Haidara. "We have played together for a long time, we developed together. We wanted to win the group; now we have to concentrate on the next match." Tunisia continued their uninspiring showing at the Africa Cup of Nations in a 0-0 draw with Mauritania at the Suez Stadium but a third successive stalemate was enough to clinch second place in Group E and a place in the last 16.

Tunisia, ranked second on the continent and playing in a record-equaling 14th successive Cup of Nations, finished runners-up to Mali in the section and will now meet Ghana in Ismailia on Monday in the knockout round.

Mauritania finished bottom of the group to exit the tournament with two points, and one goal, but a much enhanced reputation after a plucky display against a team 78 places above them in the FIFA world rankings.

Rookies Mauritania had the best

of the first half exchanges, starting as early as the fourth minute when Ismail Diakhite's shot was punched away by Tunisia goalkeeper Moez Hassen.

El Hacem El Id headed narrowly wide with an unchallenged header at the back post in the 19th minute and Diakhite had another chance just before the break, which he too missed.

Tunisia, whose previous group games were 1-1 draws with Angola and Mali, did not create a decent chance until the 40th minute when captain Youssef Msakni had his shot turned around the post by goalkeeper Brahim Souleimane Mauritania lost captain Abdoul Ba to a bizarre injury when a ball struck him on the knee, forcing him off in the 17th minute, and his replacement Diadie Diarra looked to have broken his arm early in the second half in a heavy fall and was also replaced.

Msakni had another shot saved by Souleimane with some 12 minutes left after a combination with Wahib Khazri offered Tunisian supporters a rare moment of excitement.

Meanwhile, South Africa coach Stuart Baxter has said the challenge of meeting hosts Egypt in the last 16 of the Africa Cup of Nations could awaken his side from their slumber at a tournament where they have been underwhelming so far.

Bafana Bafana squeezed into the knockout round as the last of the four best third-placed teams in the pool stages having beaten minnows Namibia 1-0 and lost to Ivory Coast and Morocco by the same scoreline.

The performances have drawn stinging criticism from fans, many of whom wrote on social media that they hoped the team returned home to avoid further embarrassment before a place in the last 16 was sealed

on Tuesday when Mali defeated Angola.

But Englishman Baxter believes a fixture against Egypt in front of 75,000 at the Cairo International Stadium on Saturday could be just the tonic for his team.

"It is a great challenge and one that the whole squad are looking forward," he told reporters on Wednesday.

"We have got this opportunity to play the host nation in a hostile environment and that is the time you want people to stand up.

"They (the players) want to go on and they have strong reasons to want to do it. They want very badly to get past this hurdle."

South Africa have looked poor in attack and this is the area Baxter will be concentrating on in the days lead-

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ing up to the Egypt clash, rather than a complete change in tactics.

"I don't think I have to change anything, we just need to strengthen some things," he said.

"Our attacking play has not been at its best, but I think on the whole our defensive play has been very good. We need to add on to that a functioning attacking game.

"Against Egypt, I am guessing they will come at us, so there should be more space on offer. If we can up our attacking game 10-15 percent, we will be able to give them problems."

Baxter said the players were also aware that a number of them had not been at the level he would expect.

"I don't think mentally we have to lift them. They know they can do a little bit better and be more efficient."

Leeds sign Wolves forward Costa on initial one-year loan

Afghan coach 'disgusted' by Infantino, wants FIFA head to go

LYON, France, July 3, (Agencies): The coach of the Afghanistan women's soccer team says she is "disgusted" with Gianni Infantino over the handling of sexual abuse cases and called on the FIFA president to resign.

FIFA banned Keramuudin Karim for life from soccer this month for repeated sexual abuse of female players while president of the Afghanistan Football Federation.

But coach Kelly Lindsey is angry that only Karim has been punished, saying FIFA "didn't investigate anyone but the president. They didn't go any deeper than the top layer. In my mind, it's not what we need as a leader of FIFA."

Expanding further on Infantino at a briefing in Lyon at the Women's World Cup, Lindsey said "I'm disgusted with him as a human being, as a leader of our sport. He should not be president of FIFA in my mind."



Infantino

Leeds United have signed Portugal forward **Helder Costa** from Premier League side **Wolverhampton Wanderers** on an initial loan deal which will become a permanent transfer next year, the Championship club said on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old Costa, who joined Wolves from **Benfica** in 2016, made 30 appearances in all competitions last season as **Nuno Espirito Santo's** promoted side finished seventh in the table to qualify for the Europa League.

"Costa has today joined Leeds United from Wolverhampton Wanderers on an initial one year loan deal, which will become

a permanent transfer next summer for an undisclosed fee," Leeds said in a statement on their website.

Leeds said Costa had agreed a four-year contract with the second-tier club which will run until 2024.

The winger, who can also play as a centre forward, made his international debut last year and scored the opening goal in a 3-1 win against Scotland at Hampden Park. Leeds missed out on promotion to the top flight after losing their Championship playoff semifinal to **Derby County** in May.



West Ham United midfielder **Robert Snodgrass** has signed a one-year contract extension to keep him at the London Stadium until 2021, the Premier League club said on Wednesday. The Scotland international made 38 appearances in all com-

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petitions and scored four goals last season, helping West Ham finish 10th in the standings.

West Ham said they had the option of extending the 31-year-old's deal by a further 12 months.

"I'm delighted to commit my future to this great club," Snodgrass said in a statement on West Ham's website.

"Sometimes you get a chance to play for that one club that's special, going through that special time and I believe at this moment that's West Ham. We're trying our best to keep progressing and keep moving forward."

Snodgrass joined West Ham from Hull City in January 2017 and spent the rest of the campaign on loan at Aston Villa in the Championship, before being recalled last season by manager **Manuel Pellegrini**.



In this July 1 photo, Algeria's Adam Ounas controls the ball during the African Cup of Nations Group C soccer match between Tanzania and Algeria in Al Salam Stadium in Cairo, Egypt on July 1. (AP)