

History is made as Iraq beat Jordan in the first game at Basra Sports City



After four long years of watching their team play their games in the likes of Qatar, UAE and Iran, fans of the Iraq national team were finally able to see their beloved team in their own homeland as Basra International Stadium hosted its first ever international game.

The opponents for the historic day were Jordan, a team that Iraq had played on 49 occasions prior to today's game. While Iraq had the superior record in total, it wasn't too long ago that Jordan beat Iraq 3-0 in a friendly, so the Lions of Mesopotamia knew that securing victory would be a difficult task.

The stadium began filling with eager, excited fans hours before kickoff, with the Iraqi FA working together with the Ministry of Youth and Sport to put together a true showpiece occasion. The pitch surface was in pristine condition and the security levels were high; those in charge knew the day

had to go smoothly if Iraq wanted to persuade FIFA not only to continue allowing Iraq to host friendlies but also to hopefully allow competitive games to be held in the country too.

At long last, the game kicked off to a huge roar from the 60,000 fans in attendance, all waving Iraqi and Jordanian flags. Iraq's interim manager Basim Qasim decided to field quite a few players from his club side Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya in the starting lineup in an unfamiliar formation for the national team. Jawiya 'keeper Fahad Talib made his international debut, while Bashar Rasan, Ali Husni and Amjad Attwan made up an inexperienced but technically-gifted midfield three. Up front, Jawiya hit man Hammadi Ahmad was preferred to Al-Naft hero Ayman Hussein and Iraq's usual number nine Mohanad Abdul-Raheem, while Alaa Abdul-Zahra was pushed out wide, on the opposite wing to Ahmed Yasin.

And Basim's lineup decision paid dividends within just fifteen minutes when Ali Husni made a bursting run from central midfield and played it out wide. The front three were quite interchangeable during the game and the goal was a prime example of this, as centre-forward Hammadi Ahmad was the man out wide who put in a pinpoint cross for winger Alaa Abdul-Zahra to expertly head home. The stadium went absolutely wild when the ball hit the back of the net, as Alaa scored the first ever international goal at the Basra Sports City Stadium, and his 15th goal in 104 appearances in the national team jersey.



Basim Qasim made three substitutions at half-time, bringing on captain Mohammed Gassid to replace 'keeper Fahad Talib, adding some steel to the midfield by replacing Ali Husni with Saad Abdul-Amir, and adding more pace to Iraq's front three with the introduction of Humam Tariq in place of club teammate Hammadi Ahmad. The second half was played at a much slower tempo to the first with very few chances, but it didn't stop the passionate Iraqi fans from creating a lively atmosphere. In fact they were so loud that people living in Kuwait reported hearing the noise from the stadium.

Iraq were very unlucky not to double their lead right at the death when Amjad Kalaf, a late substitute, nodded the ball to another late substitute in Ayman Hussein, who's shot was cleared off the line by the Jordanian defence. The full-time whistle blew to bring an end to a fabulous day for Iraqi football, and a successful day all round for everyone involved, including new interim manager Basim Qasim who notched his first win as boss. The hope is now that Iraq can

continue to persuade FIFA to allow competitive games such as World Cup Qualifiers to be hosted in Iraq too, rather than just friendly games.

[Click here](#) to see Alaa Abdul-Zahra's goal.