

2018 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers: Iraq 1-1 Australia



AHMED YASIN SCORES OFF THE BENCH AS IRAQ EARN DECENT POINT

Iraq drew 1-1 with Asian champions Australia on Thursday with substitute Ahmed Yasin scoring the equalising goal for Iraq in the second half.

The starting lineup caused a lot of debate among Iraqi fans - captain and forward Alaa Abdul-Zahra was injured in the warm-up and Radhi Shenaishil decided to replace him with centre-back Ali Bahjat, switching to a three-at-the-back system with two wingbacks in Dhurgham and Mhawi. Many Iraqi fans, also angered by the absence of Ahmed Yasin in attack (whose spot was taken by Amjad Kalaf), felt that Radhi had made the wrong team selection.

But the Lions of Mesopotamia started the game on the front foot, with Saad Abdul-Amir going close from a corner and Amjad Kalaf being blocked when nearly through on goal. Iraq continued to pile the pressure on in the early exchanges of the match and should have gone a goal up when Kalaf found himself a few yards away from goal with just the scrambling Australia 'keeper in his way. But the two-time Iraqi League winner decided to try and chip the goalie and got it horribly wrong, lifting it over the bar.

The missed chance seemed to knock Iraq's confidence a bit as Australia started to take control of possession on the poor pitch surface in Iran. And the Socceroos managed to take a one-goal lead into half-time when Mathew Leckie powered in a header unmarked from a corner. Alaa Mhawi let him go too easily and the young Al-Zawraa man had a poor game both defensively and attack-wise.

Radhi decided to take off the misfiring Amjad Kalaf at half-time, but surprised fans and pundits by replacing him with central midfielder Amjad Attwan, rather than subbing on winger Ahmed Yasin. Iraq could have scored twice when Mohanad's header went off target and Ahmed Ibrahim's was well-saved, but Australia also had chances of their own, narrowly missing one at the near post and seeing another effort saved by Mohammed Hameed. Radhi made further changes in the second period, bringing on in-form striker Hammadi Ahmed and expat attacker Ahmed Yasin, switching to a more attacking formation. The changes paid dividends when both subs played a huge part in Iraq's 76th-minute equaliser.

Hammadi and Ali Adnan had some nice link-up play on the left wing, resulting in Ali Adnan bursting down the line and swinging in an inviting cross towards Hammadi who had made a great run into the centre. Hammadi couldn't get onto the end of it but that left Ahmed Yasin in acres of space at the back post to tap the ball into the net and bring Iraq back on level terms. And Iraq could have taken the three points right at the end but Yasin saw his outside-of-the-foot effort blocked by an Aussie defender. The Iraqis also had a penalty shout for what looked like a handball waved away by the referee late on.

An entertaining game ended one-a-piece and while the result makes qualification nigh on impossible for the 2007 Asian Cup champions, it was an encouraging performance against the reigning Asian champions by Radhi Shenaishil's side.

To see highlights of the game, [click here](#).