

Iraq vs. Australia (FIFA World Cup Qualifier) - Match Preview



Iraq's hopes of qualifying for their second ever FIFA World Cup are extremely slim. Having taken just three points out of fifteen thus far, Iraq will need a miracle even greater than their 2007 Asian Cup win if they want to take part in the showpiece tournament in Russia next year.

Iraq's disastrous qualifying run started against Australia, and the Lions were comfortably beaten by two unanswered goals. That game made it clear that there was a significant gulf between the two sides. Iraq went on to perform much better in their next three games, but then put in their worst performance of all in their defeat to the UAE.

This is Iraq's last chance to salvage something from this campaign. Lose against the country from Oceania and it's definitely all over for Iraq, but win against the Asian Cup champions and belief will be brought back into the side, giving us at least a slight chance of achieving the unthinkable.

Our opponents

Australia's campaign thus far has had ups and downs. They won their first two group games but their last three qualifying games have ended in draws, the most disappointing of them being a 2-2 tie with Thailand, whom Iraq crushed 4-0. Australia have named five uncapped players in their 23-man squad, but nonetheless the Socceroos are strong, particularly with the 2015 Asian Cup MVP, Massimo Luongo, up front.

Mile Jedinak provides a steel in midfield that Iraq lack, and despite his age Tim Cahill remains an important player for Australia as evidenced by his goal off the bench against UAE. Iraq fans have long been wondering why Radhi Shenaishil doesn't use Younis Mahmoud in the same way as the Australians use Tim Cahill; alas, Younis has now retired from football after Radhi's snub.



Iraq's lineup

Iraq will most likely be fielding the same players that took to the pitch against the UAE, aside from arguably their best attacking player Justin Meram who wasn't able to travel to Iran due to their tensions with his country USA. This ridiculous situation means that Radhi will now have to play either Ali Husni or Amjad Kalaf on the wing instead - a big blow for Iraq. Leading the line in the Iraqi 4-2-3-1 formation will be their key player, Mohanad Abdul-Raheem who has scored six goals in his last six qualifying games for Iraq. He is fresh from scoring twice for Al-Zawraa in the AFC Cup and Iraq will need him to be a focal point for the attack, not only to score goals but also to bring the Iraqi wingers into play by winning headers and holding the ball up.

With in-form Hammadi Ahmed in the squad, Iraq will have a good option available from the bench if Mohanad needs some help up top. Young Amjad Attwan will need to prove the doubters wrong in midfield on Thursday if he wants to keep his place in the team - he was especially dreadful against UAE and legions of fans called for Brwa Nouri to play instead of him. But Radhi decided not to call up Brwa at all and will keep his faith in young Amjad for now. If Iraq lose this game, it will be five losses from six qualifying games and you can expect a lot of Iraqis to call for Radhi to get the sack.

The verdict

With the game being played at a neutral venue rather than in Australia like last time, we hope that Iraq will put out a more respectable performance in Tehran and give Australia a run for their money playing quick, positive football. But unfortunately, we can't see Iraq's young squad gaining all three points against the reigning Asian champions in this game, and if we are right in this verdict, our World Cup hopes will well and truly be over.