

## 2018 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers: Saudi Arabia 1-0 Iraq



### LACKLUSTRE IRAQ HAND THREE POINTS TO RIVALS

A poor performance from Iraq saw them fall to a tame 1-0 defeat against rivals Saudi Arabia as the pressure mounts on manager Radhi Shenaishil.

Iraq's last two games, a win against Asia's top-ranked team Iran and a draw against the Asian champions Australia, were encouraging and would have provided the morale boost that the Lions needed ahead of this match against Saudi Arabia, a traditional rival team for Iraq.

But Iraq were dull and dire for the majority of the game, mustering only one real chance - a header from Iraq's best player Ahmed Ibrahim that was cleared off the line.

Saudi could have gone a goal up in the first half when Yahya Al-Shehri's tame effort squeezed underneath Mohammed Hameed; the ball rolled onto the goal-line and it was almost fully over when Ahmed Ibrahim managed to clear it away. Saudi were never under any real pressure from the Iraqis though, although the team in green could have capitalised on a Saudi defensive mistake when Ahmed Yasin picked up the ball and ran towards goal with multiple players to pass to. Instead, Yasin went for a shot and horribly scuffed it. That was the story of Iraq's attack in this game - toothless.

Saudi took a deserved lead early on in the second period when Al-Shehri curled the ball into the net from outside the box, and Iraq never once looked capable of equalising. A few poor crosses from the likes of Ali Adnan and Alaa Mhawi were all Iraq could muster and even the three substitutes made no impact on the game whatsoever.

The full-time whistle sparked wild scenes in Jeddah as the Saudis celebrated a potentially pivotal win as they are now joint-top of the group on the road to Russia, while their rivals sit in fifth with four measly points. Being able to play the game in Jeddah, rather than playing at a neutral venue as was previously agreed due to the fact that Iraq had to play their home game in Malaysia rather than their usual home of Iran, definitely helped Saudi Arabia and left Iraqis wishing their team was allowed to play in Baghdad or Basra.

Iraq's chances of reaching the World Cup are so slim that they are effectively non-existent, and the pressure continues to mount on coach Radhi Shenaishil with many fans fed up at the team selections and poor results that have been seen under his tenure. Radhi will probably be given the remaining three qualifying games at least, and may be assessed on how Iraq fare in those matches.

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