

2006 World Cup Special

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Ghana learn lessons the hard way

HANOVER

Ghana became the third African team in three days to show that possession alone counts for little in the World Cup, going down 2-0 to Italy on Monday.

Despite having most of the ball, 53 percent against 47, Ghana fared second best in front of goal.

Although Italy had only four shots more than their opponents, 13 of their 18 efforts were on target. Ghana were accurate with four out of 14.

Following in the footsteps of Cote d'Ivoire and Angola, the Black Stars also seemed to get a touch of stage fright and were indecisive, allowing the Azzurri to take the leading role.

Conceded two goals

Naivety, particularly in defence, is a description probably used too many times to describe African teams, but it is also a fact.

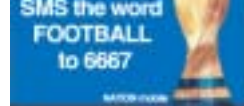
Another footballing cliché is the one which says a team must take their chances when they come along.

Italy, like Argentina and Portugal had done against Cote d'Ivoire and Angola respectively, did that in clinical fashion.

"We made two mistakes and conceded two goals.

"We didn't take our chances and they took theirs," Ghana captain Stephen Appiah told reporters.

Cote d'Ivoire skipper Didier Drogba said much the same after his team's defeat on Saturday. A 70 percent fit Francesco Totti and his partner Luca Toni proved



a potent pair in Italy's attack.

Both were unlucky not to score, with Toni striking the underside of the crossbar.

That incident came before man of the match Andrea Pirlo deservedly grabbed the first goal for the Italians.

On the plus side for Ghana was the performance of Michael Essien. Like his Chelsea colleague Drogba, the midfielder lived up to his billing.

Trio shine

Much was said before the tournament of his midfield partnership with Appiah and Sulley Muntari.

Essien was the only member of the trio to shine against Italy although he will need to polish up his shooting for the next Group E game against Czech Republic on Saturday.

A great team can often be judged by the players they have on the bench and if Italy's performance is measured by the showing of their substitutes alone, the side will go a long way in this World Cup.

The introduction of their three second-half substitutes seemed to act as a boost, most notably when Vincenzo Iaquinta came off the bench to notch his first goal for his country.

— Reuters

TODAY'S MATCHES

Spain vs Ukraine . . . 4.00 pm
Tunisia vs S. Arabia . . . 7 pm
Germany vs Poland . . . 10 pm



LESSONS

We always have our luggage ready, says Black Stars coach

HANOVER

Ghana will have to learn fast if they are to have any chance of progressing to the second round of the World Cup following a 2-0 defeat by Italy in their opening match.

If the opening matches in Group E are anything to go by, the Black Stars first appearance at the finals will be a short one. But maybe Ghana coach, Ratomir Djukovic already knew that. "We always have our luggage ready to go," he said ahead of the game against Italy. Given their performance on Monday, they should keep their cases at the ready. On paper, Ghana's hopes of progressing from Group H looked difficult but with the Azzurri giving the Africans a lesson in finishing and the Czech Republic demolishing the United States 3-0 in the other group game, that chance has become even thinner. Ghana dominated possession but when they had the

ball they did not seem to know what to do with it. They also gave away possession in crucial areas of the pitch and Italy made them pay for it.

The Africans never really looked like creating history against Italy despite the best efforts of Michael Essien in midfield. But Chelsea's 25 million pound (£3.3 billion) man had no support act in midfield with captain Stephen Appiah and Sulley Muntari playing bit parts. It was either very naive, very silly or just plain nervous defending at the back that allowed Italy to pounce twice through Andrea Pirlo and substitute Vincenzo Iaquinta.

It could have been even worse if Luca Toni's shot had not come back off the crossbar following more uncertain defending. Ghana play the Czech Republic next, before rounding off against the United States but if they play as they did on Monday, these will be their only outings in Germany.

— Reuters

Photo/AP & Reuters

Ghana's Samuel Osei Kuffour kneels on the pitch after Ghana's Group E match against Italy in Hanover. Left: German soccer great Franz Beckenbauer (left) the Fifa World Cup Organising committee president, greets Ghana President John Kufuor before Ghana's match. Italy won 2-0.

