

Aussie view

Peter Smith, our man on the spot at Coffs Harbour when Australia beat American Samoa 31-0 to set a new international record, asks the question...

Do more goals mean more entertainment?

For the statisticians amongst us, Wednesday 11 April 2001 will be remembered as the night that International football had a couple of drinks too many, 'slipped into something more comfortable' and engaged in a hedonistic orgy of unprecedented fantasy -- the heights of which of will surely never be reached again.

As soon as the World Cup draw was made over 12 months ago, fears were being raised about the well being of the Stadium scoreboard attendant for the American Samoa match against any opposition, let alone the Oceania superpower Australia.

The American Samoans had just been on the end of an 18-0 drubbing at the hands of the competent, but hardly frightening Tahitians. A near world record in itself. Going into the tournament the list of FIFA records that the Socceroos could potentially achieve, were:

World Cup record score: 19-0
Iran V Guam, 2000

World record score: 20-0 Kuwait
V Bhutan, 2000

Most goals scored in a World Cup match: 7 - Gary Cole Australia V Fiji 1981 & Karim Bagheri Iran V Maldives 1997.

Most goals scored in a Full

International: 10 - Spohus Nielson
Denmark V France 1908 Olympics &
Gottfried Fuchs Germany V Russia
1912 Olympics

That they achieved them all is more of an indication of the mismatch than the greatness of the Aussie performance. If it wasn't enough that the opposition were ranked 203 (out of 203) in the world, they lost the majority of the squad just prior to the tournament when FIFA ruled that players must hold US passports.

All this from an incredibly small pool of just 2000 registered players meant it was men against boys -- literally. The average age of the American Samoa team was 18 with three 15 year olds in the squad. Several of the Sydney University teams would beat the American Samoans.

Remarkably it took the Socceroos a full ten minutes to get on the scoresheet and even then it was direct from a corner. Much to the English tabloid's delight (the result made worldwide news), it was the appropriately named, and the recently convicted (getaway driver in an armed robbery) Con Boutsianis, that got the scoreboard rolling.

From then on it was a procession (obviously) with the all time semi-professional record score in serious

danger at one stage. That being the 36-0 drubbing handed out in the Scottish Cup in 1885. Phenomenal when you consider this requires a goal every 2.5 minutes. The Socceroos 13-0 up after 33 minutes making it 13 goals in a 23 minute period. No wonder an American Samoan fullback was quoted as saying it was "like they (the Socceroos) were on motorbikes"! This 'motorbike' tactic producing the majority of Socceroo goals with balls knocked in behind the defence for Boutsianis or Simon Colosimo to outpace the fullback before knocking the ball in low and hard for an Archie Thompson or David Zdrilic tap-in from 8 yards.

16-0 up at the break and with Archie Thompson's personal tally at eight, the individual World Cup goalscoring record had been broken by half time! With his 11th Thompson not only claimed the all time individual record but smashed the Socceroos tally of 22-0 set two days earlier V Tonga.

At this stage one felt it might have been best if the visitors dropped their attacking 4-3-3 formation in favour of some more befitting the occasion. To their eternal credit, depending on your viewpoint, they maintained this formation perhaps hoping for the biggest comeback since Lazarus last strapped on the boots.

Despite the glut of records the Socceroos were obviously feeling benevolent as they clearly took their foot off the accelerator in the second period - they only scored 15. Either that or the American Samoan tactic of not returning the ball for the restart worked.

On several occasions the defenders would leave the ball lying somewhere near the penalty area all pretending they thought someone else was returning the ball. An ingenious tactic from the point of view that the referee couldn't easily identify any one player as being guilty of ungentlemanly conduct. Credit also to

the American Samoan goalkeeper who saved at least 4-5 seemingly certain goals and made 8-9 good saves. Had say, the Tongan keeper been between the sticks, 36 would have been more than plausible.

In theory the Socceroos should have scored more in the second stanza, as they were clearly the fitter side. Not that the Aussie's could be accused of being unprofessional, other than the occasional moment there were rarely any showboating or selfishness in front of goal. Nevertheless the American Samoans still affected the same manner of a team playing against the Harlem Globetrotters!

The biggest cheer of the night was reserved for the final minutes of the game when the American Samoans managed their only shot on goal. The shot causing Michael Petkovic some anxiety not because it was a difficult save but because he seemed to be wondering what to do - 'what is this white round thing coming towards me'!

The second biggest cheer of the night was the standing ovation given to the vanquished as they left the arena causing them to give an impromptu synchronised wave and Samoan version of the haka. An abbreviated version (by about 95%) that was as piss-weak as you would expect from a team beaten 31 zip. Incredibly though the cheers encouraged them to embark on what appeared to be a lap of, ahem, honour that was only halted when they realised that outside of the grandstand, all the punters had gone home. Nevertheless full marks for the obvious pride they showed in representing their country and dignity in defeat.

Four records achieved that may never be broken. Not to mention that surely Archie Thompson will remain the only player to score 13 in a full international and then be dropped for the next game.