

Incredible Hulk blasts Shanghai to victory

Seoul
Brazilian forward Hulk blasted Shanghai SIPG to a 1-0 victory over FC Seoul but the big-spending Chinese giants needed to survive a penalty and a red card before winning their AFC Champions League opener on Tuesday.

Hulk's rocket of a strike on 53 minutes got Andre Villas-Boas's team off to a winning start in Group F, where they lie second on goal difference after Urawa Red Diamonds' 4-0 demolition of Western Sydney Wanderers.

A speculative effort from Hulk and another shot way over the bar from the Brazilian were the closest SIPG came in a tepid first half in front of a noisy Seoul crowd.

At the other end, Dejan Damjanovic had a chance to finish off a sweeping move from the hosts but the Montenegrin striker shot tamely at goalkeeper Yoo Hyun from close range.

Oscar's most significant moment of the first half came when he petulantly raised his hand to Lee Sang-Ho's throat and shoved the Seoul forward, earning a yellow card.

But the muscular Hulk brought the game to life with a moment of magic on 53 minutes, when he smashed a left-footed shot from well outside the box which swerved into the top corner.

Reds run riot

Six minutes later Damjanovic tumbled in the box, earning a soft penalty and a second yellow card for He Guan -- but the striker's scuffed spot-kick was easily saved by SIPG's Yan Junling.

Earlier, Japan's Urawa smashed four second-half goals past Western Sydney Wanderers to open their campaign with a thumping win.

Shinzo Koroki and Tadanari Lee struck within two minutes of each other before Tomoaki Makino and Rafael Silva also got

on the scoresheet as the Group F visitors ran riot in Sydney.

The result gives Urawa an early boost in their campaign for a second Champions League crown, but dents the Wanderers' chances of emulating their fairytale title run of 2014, when the club was just two years old.

It was Lee who prised open the home defence on 56 minutes, when his perfectly placed through-ball released Koroki who finished smartly with the outside of his right boot.

Two minutes later and Urawa took a stranglehold on the game, when the Wanderers' defenders failed to clear and stood watching each other as Lee swept home the second goal.

Urawa capitalised on yet more slack defending when Makino, unmarked at the back post, prodded home a loose ball from a corner on 68 minutes to make it 3-0.

In Group E, Kashima Antlers beat Ulsan Hyundai 2-0 and Brisbane Roar were held to a 0-0 home draw by Thailand's Muangthong United.

In Doha, Al Rayyan's heavy reliance on their South American imports was very much in evidence as the Qatar Stars League champions edged out UAE's Al Wahda 2-1 in Group D.

Uruguayan Gonzalo Viera headed in from a corner to give Al Rayyan a 13th-minute lead but the advantage was short-lived as Rim Chang-woo struck from close range to equalise for Al Wahda in the 35th minute.

Al Rayyan, however, were not to be denied as Paraguayan Victor Caceres came to their aid with a header off a Viera assist on the hour to give Michael Laudrup's men all three points.

Also in Group D, Iran's Persepolis held 1991 and 2000 champions Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia to a 1-1 draw, while Al Ain of the UAE and Iran's Zobahan also played out a 1-1 draw in Group C.(AFP)



Urawa Red Diamonds player Kohrogi Shinzoh (R) attempts to steer the ball past Western Sydney Wanderers goalkeeper Janjetovic (bottom)

Rooney returns to United training

London

Manchester United's record goalscorer Wayne Rooney returned to training yesterday after having missed the last four matches with a muscular injury.

The 31-year-old forward -- who became United's all-time goalscorer passing Bobby Charlton's tally of 249 when he scored against Stoke on January 21 -- took part in the squad's last session before they fly to France for Wednesday's Europa League last 32 second leg clash with St Etienne.

United -- who will be without suspended midfielder Ander Herrera and the injured defender Phil Jones -- won the first leg 3-0 part of a four match winning streak coinciding with Rooney's absence.

Rooney -- whom United manager Jose Mourinho said would not be sold despite reported interest from China as the club chases three Cups -- trained in front of the media in a group also comprising Anthony Martial and Henrikh Mkhitaryan.



Wayne Rooney

Blackburn seek new manager

London

English second-tier strugglers Blackburn Rovers are seeking their seventh full-time manager since Indian owners Venkys bought the club in 2010 after Owen Coyle left by mutual consent yesterday.

The 50-year-old Scot -- who guided them to just 11 wins in 37 matches since taking over in June last year -- leaves with the former English champions second from bottom of the Championship and three points adrift of safety.

Coyle, who has also taken charge of Burnley, Bolton Wanderers and Wigan Athletic amongst other clubs, departs just two days after Rovers won compliments for their performance in the 2-1 FA Cup fifth-round defeat by Manchester United.

"The decision has been taken to give the club the best possible chance of climbing to a position of safety in the Championship," said a club statement.

Blackburn's next game is away to fellow Championship strugglers Burton Albion on Friday.