

# Saudis smash Thai hopes

**Bangkok**

**S**audi Arabia slapped Thailand down in a crushing 3-0 victory at a World Cup qualifier yesterday, with two strikes sandwiching a devastating own-goal from the War Elephants on their home turf.

The win cements Saudi Arabia's leading spot in Group B and propels the team one step closer to the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

It also ended Thailand's hope of exacting revenge over the hotly-contested penalty kick that handed the Saudis a 1-0 win in the final minutes of a match in Riyadh last September.

But passionate roars from Bangkok's fan-packed Rajamangala stadium on Thursday were not enough to propel the players to victory.

Saudi Arabia's sharpshooter Mohammed Al Sahlawi put his team on top early on when he took a pass

from Nawaf Al Abid down on his chest and struck the ball into the net in the 25th minute.

Thailand held up an admirable defence throughout most of the match and looked dangerous a number of times.

But the team was unable to deliver a goal and morale plummeted after Tanaboon Kesarat accidentally turned the ball into his own net in the 84th minute as he tried to block a cross.

The brutal defeat was sealed in an action-packed finale as Taisir Al Jassim set Salman Almuwashar up for for killer strike in injury time in the 92nd minute.

Thailand remains at the bottom of the table after losing every match in the qualifying round save for a 2-2 draw with Australia in November. (AFP)



Bert van Marwijk (C), the head coach of the Saudi Arabia national football team, celebrates his team's win

# Pliskova eases through in Miami

**Miami**

**S**econd seed Karolina Pliskova cruised into the third round of the Miami Open, the Czech beating American qualifier Madison Brengle 6-1, 6-3 on Thursday.

While her serve was not at its best, the 25-year-old Pliskova never looked in danger, comfortably dominating while winning 78 percent of return points.

"There were a few tight games but I think I was pretty solid. It went quite easy and I was really happy to spend only an hour out there because it's pretty hot and humid and so I am happy to save some power for the later matches," said Pliskova.

"The serve wasn't really great and hasn't

been for the last few weeks but I think my game from the baseline was better, it's improving, my backhand is better, I was feeling pretty good just want to improve the serve a bit now," she added.

Pliskova reached the semi-finals of Indian Wells last week and she said she was keen to avoid a repeat of last year when she made the last four in California but fell at the first hurdle in Miami.

"It's a big tournament and I wanted to make it better this year. I will be ready for the next one," said the Czech, whose twin sister Kristyna is also in the Miami field.

Later on Thursday, Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki takes on American qualifier Varvara Lepchenko while sixth-seeded Spaniard Garbine Muguruza faces another American Christina McHale.



Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic returns a shot against Madison Brengle



Saudi forward Salman Mohammed Muwashar celebrates scoring the third goal for his team