

Beat: Sports

Unbelievable! U23 Vietnam reaches to the AFC U23 semi-finals for the first time

AFC U23 CHAMPIONSHIP

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USPA NEWS - U23 Vietnam national soccer team defeated former champions U23 Iraq 5-3 in a penalty shootout after an extraordinary 3-3 draw following extra-time to reach to the AFC U23 Championship semi-finals for the first time.

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Iraq went into the game in confident mood after topping Group D and dictated the opening exchanges but, with Vietnam's defensive discipline to the fore in the early exchanges, there was little Abdulghani Shahad's side could do to find a way through.

Indeed, it was the Vietnamese who took the lead with just 12 minutes on the clock after Iraq's defence failed to clear a corner. The ball fell to Phan Van Duc, whose mis-hit attempt at an overhead kick landed at the feet of Nguyen Cong Phuong, who scored past Ahmed Basil from inside the six-yard box.

Undeterred by going a goal down, Iraq continued to push forward and their pressure paid off in the 29th minute when Aymen Hussein was fouled inside the area and referee Christopher Beath pointed to the spot. Hussein converted to level the scores.

With three minutes remaining Alaa Mhawani had the chance to ensure the game did not go into extra-time, but he sent his attempt over the bar after being set up for the opportunity by Resan.

Iraq looked the more determined to ensure the outcome was decided without the need for spot-kicks and, just four minutes into the first additional period, the former champions took a 2-1 lead when Hussein headed in Resan's corner. Vietnam, however, were level again in the 108th minute as Basil's mistake gifted possession to Nguyen Quang Hai, and he set up Van Duc to score.

The frenetic pace of extra-time continued when Ha Duc Chinh headed home Luong Xuan Truong's corner to put Vietnam 3-2 ahead, only for parity to be restored yet again with four minutes remaining as Alaa Mhawani struck from a tight angle, sending the game into a shootout.

That left Resan to fluff his lines, missing with his penalty in the first round as all five Vietnamese penalty takers held their nerve from 12 yards to claim a famous win.

Resan's attempt to float his penalty down the middle of the goal in the opening round of spot-kicks failed to fool goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung and the Vietnamese goalkeeper calmly collected the ball in his arms to, ultimately, seal Vietnam's victory.

The shootout brought a remarkable game to a tense conclusion and sends Vietnam into the last four for the first time ever, and they will take on Qatar in the semi-finals in Changzhou on Tuesday.

Vietnam coach Park Hang-seo: Vietnam head coach

"I want to present this win to all football fans in Vietnam, and I want to thank the Vietnam Football Federation and everyone who has supported football in Vietnam. Before the match I told the players that our mission was not easy, but that we had the team spirit and the determination of the players who will never stop until the final whistle."

Abdulghani Shahad: Iraq head coach

"I apologise to the Iraqi fans, I think that our team played a good match, especially in attack, However, our defensive mistakes cost us the goals as Vietnam scored twice from corner kicks. Mistakes can happen in football, and I take the responsibility for any bad result, regardless of the players' mistakes, as mistakes are part and parcel of football."

(Source: AFC)

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