

After their last World Cup game, Korea didn't play again until November



THE COACH



Kim Jong-Hun

Few would not sympathise with Kim Jong-Hun, bar the country's Government. After the recent World Cup, team members were reportedly individually told to criticise the coach and he was forced to perform hard labour on a construction site. This after leading them to their first World Cup in over 40 years. Failure in Qatar is not an option, but don't be fooled by his brooding demeanour, this no-nonsense coach received more red cards than his players.

DPR KOREA



Despite reaching the World Cup finals for only the second time after a wait of over forty years, DPR Korea, or North Korea, sit at a lowly ranked 106 in world football.

In a Communist nation where there have been cases of under-performing athletes being sent to prison camps, the DPR Korea team were deemed to have got-off lightly after South Africa, where their entire squad was forced onto a stage and subjected to criticism from the sports minister, while 400 government officials, students and journalists watched.

They will not want to succumb to the same embarrassment again after three losses at the World Cup, including a 7-0 drubbing by Portugal, the first and likely last time a live football game will be shown in the country.

On the Asian scene, the team have progressed in recent years and won the 2010 AFC Challenge Cup in February this year in Sri Lanka, although their opposition, including Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Myanmar, did not provide the steeliest of challenges.

Preparation for the Asian Cup has been virtually non-existent, as after the final group game in the 2010 World Cup – a 3-0 loss to the Ivory Coast in South Africa – the team

didn't play another competitive game until early November when they squeezed past Singapore 2-1.

Politics, the nation's dictatorship status and the government's involvement in the national team are the squad's biggest enemy. As for the actual team, a lack of firepower, depth and little chance to play teams from outside Asia has left most of the players internationally inexperienced.

On the upside, bar their leakage of 12 goals in South Africa, DPR Korea's modern success stems from a solid backline. A five-man defence and supporting midfielders conceded just seven times in 16 World Cup qualifiers. This ultra-defensive approach has at times proved successful and the swift counter-attacks are capable of catching out an opposition that strays too far forward. Unpredictability and mental strength will be key to progression.

The predominantly domestic-based squad will be heavily banking upon their captain and forward Hong Yong-Jo. Hard-hitting

defender Pak Nam Chol has the task of keeping the back-line disciplined and reducing attacks upon impressive keeper Ri Myong-Guk, with veteran playmaker Mun In-Guk orchestrating play.

ONE TO WATCH

Japanese-born Jong Tae-Se is the undisputed King of North Korean football.

Described as the "The People's Rooney" he endeared himself further to his compatriots when he cried as the national anthem was played in South Africa 2010. Fast, powerful and direct, 15 goals in 25 games for his country ensured a summer transfer to Germany's VFL Bochum.

FOURFOURTWO PREDICTS...

With little proper preparation and limited support from their country, just escaping from Group D is very unlikely indeed.



FIXTURES

Jan 11, UAE

Doha, 12.15am

Jan 16, Iran

Doha, 12.15am

Jan 20, Iraq

Al Rayyan, 3.15am

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

Winner of the 2010 AFC Challenge Cup

ASIAN CUP RECORD

1956-1976 N/A

1980 Fourth Place

1984-1988 DNQ

1992 Group Stage

1996-2007 DNQ