

The Algarve Cup – A wake up call for our Women's National Team

The Algarve cup, played in Portugal, is one of the most prestigious soccer events in the world alongside with the Olympics and the World Cup. Started in 1994, has assembled every year the best women teams in the world. Of the 20 editions played so far, the United States won 8 of them, placing second four times, third twice, and fourth once. Not a bad record.

Yesterday I saw the result of the Japan USA game (1-0), and I was not at all surprised. I saw the two teams playing in Columbus prior to the world cup, and even if the US outmuscled them, and managed to win 2-0, I felt that Japan was technically the better team on the field. I was impressed by the technical abilities of all the Japanese players.

I believe that Japan did learn a lot about the WNT during that game, particularly that they could not match the Americans in the physical area. During the world cup match, I noticed even more that the Japanese players played most one-touch ball, taking away from the Americans their physical power and the ability of keeping possession of the ball.

In the Algarve cup, once more, with tight marking and one-touch-ball passes, Japan has kept the ball away from us, managed to score a goal and withstand the pressure exercised by the American girls for another win. Also I thought that the defensive marking when the corner was taken was kind of tentative.

We needed only a tie to advance, and probably played for a tie. Personally, I feel that we should have played to win first and then if you tie the game it's still OK. It reminds me of Brazil when they played Italy in 1982 and lost 3-2. They too needed a tie to advance, and played accordingly disregarding the Italians who in the final analysis won their third world cup that year... I do not know if this has happened with our team, what I do know is that it had something to do with the Japanese and their playing.

The USA coach admitted: "Too many times we gave away the ball in situations when we were not even, under pressure or in tight space. We could not keep the ball enough to be dangerous. When you give away the ball against Japan they keep it."

It may happen that a team has a bad game, but three of them and against the same team it must have a message, that is that we are outplayed technically and, judging by the way Japan managed to maintain the lead, also tactically by Japan..

I believe that we are still the powerhouse in women soccer, but also that the rest of the world is catching up with us. In the past we could outmuscled opponents, now it has become more difficult because the level of play has improved many folds. It is time to concentrate more in the technical aspect of the game.

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