

world cup 3

## **Australia vs Germany**

*june 14 2010*

To their credit they tried until the end, as you'd expect. But the full extent of the wishful thinking that has characterised the Socceroos' build up to their opener against Germany was laid bare by half time.

The Germans, sadly not known for their natural modesty or good taste, referred to Australia as minnows before the game and described it afterwards as a light training run. Whilst Australia was hugely outclassed on the day, those observations say rather more about German arrogance than accurate football analysis. Fortunately, their football was more elegant than their media.

The fact is that Pim Verbeek has questions to answer. This is not as good a team as the one that ran Italy ragged four years ago but it *is* good enough to be given its head and allowed to play its natural game. Verbeek's almost preposterously defensive formation from the outset ensured this could not happen. He's a fine coach and there was always reasoning behind his decision to play Cahill as a single striker up front, without support, and contain Germany in the midfield. Unfortunately it was soon evident neither strategy would work. Craig Moore remains a temperamental wild card at the back; and stretched too widely in midfield because of Germany's sheer passing class, Australia never had the means to smother clinical penetration through the middle by the likes of Özil.

By half time, with a 2-0 scoreline, Verbeek ought to have reconsidered his formation and provided Cahill with support up front from Kewell or Kennedy. Australia may have scored and with a little luck may even have snatched a draw (they may have had a penalty at 2-0 for an obvious though probably unintentional handball, missed by the officials). As it is, they have a big swag of goals conceded and a shattered morale which is unlikely to be repaired in time for the next encounter with a formidable Ghana, to be played without their number one striker. Tim Cahill's straight red card from a referee with previous hairy chested form was unacceptable. This happens every four years and this time it happened to Australia. FIFA must look, for once and for all, at the endless problem of the quality of World Cup officials it selects.

Australia must win the next two games. It's not out of the question and Cahill is not the only attacking player capable of finishing. If Verbeek adopts an attacking formation and encourages them to play as if there's nothing to lose – well, perhaps. Anything can happen in the World Cup. But in a tight group which may well come down to goal difference, Australia now has an uphill struggle for an unlikely move into the next round. Supporters should brace themselves for an unfortunate and perhaps undeserved early exit. As long the Germans don't peak too early, they already look the goods for the Final.