
AFC U23 Asian Cup/ Uzbekistan Qualify to Semi-Finals after 2-0 Win over Saudi Arabia

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Doha, April 26 (QNA) – Uzbekistan dethroned 10-man Saudi Arabia to book their spot in the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 semi-finals with a 2-0 win on Friday.

Khusain Norchaev and Umarali Rakhmonaliev scored either side of half-time to secure

Uzbekistan a fourth-consecutive semi-final appearance, taking them a step closer to their

Olympic dream with the 2018 champions to face Indonesia in the last four on Monday.

Uzbekistan dominated the early possession but struggled to find openings against a Saudi Arabia side who employed aggressive man-to-man marking at the Khalifa International Stadium.

Saudi Arabia had the first sight on goal in the 19th minute when Aiman Yahya sent a cross into the final third, but it was a little too high for an unmarked Meshal Sibyani to connect.

Uzbekistan's attempt to match Saudi Arabia's intensity almost backfired in the 41st minute when

Abdurauf Buriev fouled Abdullah Radif at the edge of the box, but Yahya steered his free-kick just wide.

The match swung into Uzbekistan's favour two minutes into added time when Rayan Hamed's failed clearance led to a moment of brilliance from Norchaev, who waltzed past a defender and goalkeeper Mohammed Al Absi before slotting home. The young Green Falcons returned for the second half with the same tenacity, with their heavy press keeping Uzbekistan on the defence, but the equaliser continued to elude them as neither Mohammed Abu Al Shamat nor Eid Al Muwallad could get their long-range efforts on target.

Saudi Arabia suffered a further blow in the 70th minute when Yahya was given his marching orders after a second yellow card, with Abbosbek Fayzullaev's subsequent free-kick deflecting off the upright.

Hopes for a Saudi Arabian comeback were then dashed in the 84th minute when Buriev's fierce strike from nearly 30 yards out saw Al Absi parry the ball into the direction of a prowling Rakhmonaliev, who headed home the winner. (QNA)