

## Time To Shine

Sixty thousand fans saw the U.S. men's soccer team fight a hard contest under a warm, humid night in the mid 70s and be able to hold the British scoreless; and unlike the game against Wales, did not wilt in the second half. The British were ranked 5th in the world. As the British star Harry Kane said, "We had our fair share of chances. The Americans were a well organized team and an athletic team, and yeah, they had chances and we had ours, but we should have been more clinical."

Although they did not score, I disagree with the soccer pundits who yak that England is over-hyped. They did not play enough triangular passing on Friday--thank God for that--, yet came very close to scoring, as early as the 10 min mark. This is not, however, your past British guys who loved to play long ball; live by the long pass and die by the long pass. Against Iran, they were deadly. Why, because they are British and you are supposed to fold over?

Baloney. It was their keen passing! Look at the game, review it.

In the U.S. game, both sides really tested each other in the beginning like sparring partners in a boxing match. England came out playing cautious the first 9-10 minutes. I bet what their strategy was, to let the Americans make a couple of crazy cavalry charges, stop them cold, and in quick succession commit to precision passes with a counterattack as the U.S. would leave themselves open early in the game, leaving themselves commiserated on a British counterstrike. But, we were no suckers, we too sparred with the opponent.

To me, the 3 lions did not use the same tactics they had done in their first match vs Iran because they knew of our fierce speed; but so much for the fear factor. Our defense was wonderful, stopping the English from doing as they pleased by giving little space in the midfield, constantly running their legs, pressing, pressing.

The lineup of the British was largely unchanged. The main U.S. change came with the addition of a forward from Los Angeles, Haji Wright. The game never turned into a rout, as some Europeans were suggesting. The Americans played one of their most cohesive display of teamwork, either running both on the side lines in mounting their attacks or curbing a foes's central midfielders strengths to develop any sort of attack. The fullback defense held, with one lucky block by Zimmerman on a point blank shot in front of our net by Saka. All U.S. team members helped each other. Musah and McKennie impressed me with their midfield hustle and passes causing all sorts of problems, especially on the young 19-yr old star Jude Bellingham. Superstar Harry Kane was well marked. But, the British were no soft cookies. The shots on goal is pretty even: U.S. shots on goal 3. English shots on goal 1. Overall shots ratio, Britain 10, the U.S. 8. At the 31st min mark, their midline saw a gap on our left and

rushed us. Only the heroics of McKennie who came like a bat out of hell, lunging in on a sliding tackle kicked out the ball from under the feet of the charging Englishman I believe saved the day.

The U.S.A. came out smoking in the second half, and in the 48th min. McKennie missed in front of the net. Unless we loose McKennie or Weah, we can play at a high level of teamwork and conquer Iran. McKennie and Musah, be warned. They are going to do dirty plays to get you mad and get another yellow, or even a red. Be smart. Out hustle them but outsmart them.

Where the U.S. team got their energy to play against a highly-ranked British the whole match is outstanding and beautiful; I guess attesting to youthful stamina. And, our guys are not even considered in perfect fitness, *believe that or not*. Considering several of our U.S. players were also playing with a yellow card, they kept out of harm's way, and concentrated on speed. Britain's two youngest star players, Sterling and Bellingham--the ladder, the first British born this century to score a goal--were substituted in the second half. I saw the U.S. dominating the right side.

After fancy dribbling and a cross from our right side in the 26th min to McKennie, he was free to shoot from the front of the net. It was too bad he kicked the ball to the moon, straight up for a 3-pointer--too high. Again, from our right side, later saw McKennie from way midfield make a fancy, full circle turn, loose the English defender, then dash with lightning speed along the right line and center a pass to #6 Musah in the middle, who then passed it to Pulisic--a great pass-- to his left, and in 1-2 fashion Pulisic took a murderous shot, that unfortunately hit the top edge of the crossbar and, just bounced out. Rats. Had Pulisic struck just 2 inches lower, he would have scored against the English team.

Around the 40th min, along the right line on a throw in from Dest to McKennie to Weah, the stadium saw Weah then all of a sudden, do the unexpected, he made a lighting back heel pass to a running Dest who penetrated the British defense, yet he too had back luck and missed his shot. But all the maybes in the world don't count. While in the U.S. vs British match, the Americans came up with a 55% to the British 45% possession, I am not inclined to depend on the stat department involving possession. I do not necessarily believe the possession indicator is a yardstick for who will win. If you saw the game between Argentina and Mexico, all you need is a bit of luck with skill to make a goal as did Messi in his ferocious goal; in that game the possession ratio favored Mexico. Of course, it is always a good thing to have possession of the ball most of the time.

People who say we lacked a killer instinct are wrong. You saw McKennie do that dazzling back heal pass in the 40th min out of nowhere. In the second half, the header by on the right side just missed by inches the net because he advanced with a killer attitude, unfortunately it ended up on the other side of the net and not inside; rats. Pulisic came within mere inches in one of his attempts.

There were multiple reasons we did not score, but do not feel bad. We ended up not loosing even with bad luck in the score dept. However, the creativity department was not bad. The high level of capability was there as before. It was bad luck we did not score. I wish the lineup subs had entered a bit earlier too, but now we must concentrate on the Iran game.

What can you say? Watch out Iran, we will have better luck. While many of the shots were not accurate and were way off their mark, hope for better luck next Tues, and by adding a little prayer, they will be accurate! I've seen our U.S. team when they are accurate. Say a little prayer, boys, say a little prayer. Trust in God. I must add this, we do not have an

advantage when we have corner kicks against taller European teams.

Coach Southgate of England did a novel transition of attack, after the 67 min when he brought in fresh legs. Did you notice, he switched and told his attackers to strike via the (their) left flank, and they were successful in penetrating our lines as opposed to the first half. However, remember what the U.S. did in the game vs Mexico. They switched into their banzai mode in the second half against Mexico. In the game against England, they did that after the first 15 minutes of the first half \*without getting red cards. Furthermore, let us not forget what Mexico did in Nov., they creamed Iran a measly month ago. Same coach. Nearly identical players. We just need to repeat it and say a little prayer. With enough prayer and luck, our shots will be on goal. Tyler Adams, Weah and Pulisic must connect. And, score first. Better yet, our defense must shut them out.

So far, Tyler has been phenomenal, and we saw him covering streaming attacks, and running like the devil back to our def lines. In the ladder stages of the game, time after time we had corner kicks. But all the coolest defense in the world and bunch of corners are not good enough unless you score. Did you know Pulisic was voted Player of the Match in the England vs U.S. game? America's tempo, style and braveness must be repeated in the Iran game. The stats boys say Pulisic had a 79% accuracy in his passes last Fri. He must repeat that or better it.

Around the 90th min, the tall British had a scary possibility to score from a corner, with their height advantage and all, but lucky for us, we saw a crummy header. Two minutes later, a foul created a tempting advantage for the foe. A free kick was awarded. Everybody was on the line on the box awaiting the British kick. Such free kicks are called a set piece. You had Maguire and Kane itching to score. Up flew the ball to the center, your heart stopped beating for a second when Kane got his head on the ball. But, the delivery of the ball was not at his height and was just a tad lower than usual, so that when he headed it, he had to bend down to hit the ball, and that was enough for it to miss and sail wrong. He came so close to scoring, and the Golden Generation came so close to being virtually eliminated. All the U.S. blue shirts in the world could not stop him.

Our weakness now? We have little depth and height. Loose one or two of our scorers, moreover, and we in big trouble. How I wish we had a healthy Chris Richards, "Jedi" Robinson, and Matthew Hoppe, but they never made it; maybe he could be your missing #9. You need some more height against those pesky Europeans. So when we play Europe's best, we could send them in; hopefully FIFA keeps the new rotation of five. All that must be corrected by 2026.

Iran was all right last Fri. but could not penetrate to score--until they were playing 11 vs 10. Wales even had a 60% possession rate in their game, until they were playing with only 10 men. In 1998, we lost to them, and they advanced out of the first round and we did not, but tell me, how many American guys were playing in top notch European leagues in '98?

Iran can advance if they tie us. Plug their best striker Mehdi, play like we did against England and we can beat them. We have to practice the rule of Gen. Patton, hit them hard and fast. Hit them where they least expect it. I believe our coaching staff is better than theirs, as are our players. The Tuesday games will be played simultaneously.