



By George Stavroulakis

AUSTRALIA U-23 MEN'S NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM SEAL TICKET TO TOKYO 2020

Australia U-23 men's national football team secured a place in the men's football competition at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games on Saturday evening, defeating Uzbekistan 1-0 at Bangkok's iconic Rajamangala Stadium.

The win over the White Wolves not only ensured that Australia will return to the Olympic Games in men's football for the first time since Beijing 2008, it also meant that the green and gold finished a commendable third at the AFC U-23 Championship Thailand 2020 – their best ever finish at the 16-nation biannual tournament.

Australia's appearance at this year's Olympics was sealed with help from a fine goal early in the second half from Perth Glory marksman Nicholas D'Agostino.

Following the fixture in Bangkok Australia's Head Coach in Thailand, Graham Arnold – who played for Australia at Seoul 1988, was an Assistant Coach with team in Athens 2004 and Head Coach of Australia in Beijing 2008 – hailed his side's effort and attitude.

"I am really proud of the way they worked this whole tournament," Arnold said.

"Their attitude has been fantastic, we probably came in and we weren't the strongest team in Asia, or close to being the strongest team, we were ranked number 11 in Asia when we came in."

"To create what we have just achieved is so huge for Australian football because it is the first time that we have qualified for the Olympics for 12 years and I do know that when you have a great pathway, a great preparation for the Olympics, then it creates six or seven top Socceroo players and for the senior national team and that is very important."

"That (game against Uzbekistan) would 100 per cent be the biggest game of their careers and their lives. They have not experienced anything like that at club level as well as obviously with the national teams, so it has been a wonderful learning process for the players and I felt that we dealt with it very well."

Meanwhile, some of the team's players shared their emotions and reactions post-game.

Captain Thomas Deng said: "With these kind of tournaments once you come to the end and you have reached your goal of qualifying for the Olympics, especially since 2008 we have failed many times, to finally get there and believe we are going is the biggest thing and it brings a lot of joy. I thank Rene (Meulenstein) and also 'Arnie' (Graham Arnold) for believing in us, and everything that they have done for us, it's amazing."

"It is a massive honour to represent Australia at the highest level. The past few months has been very good, we have learnt a lot. It feels so good to finally come to the end and you have achieved your goal. I couldn't be prouder of the boys and also the staff who believed in us. I am just astounded and very happy."

Goal scorer D'Agostino said: "It is a moment I am never going to forget, and it wasn't just me, it was a team performance tonight. We had to fight right until the end and we know as Australia that we have the fight, the talent, and the courage to do a

Australia U-23 Men's National Team Squad \ AFCU-23 Championship Thailand 2020

Name	Current Club, Country
Keanu BACCUS	Western Sydney Wanderers FC, Australia
Daniel BOUMAN	SC Cambuur, Netherlands
Trent BUHAGIAR	Sydney FC, Australia
Gabriel CLEUR	U.S. Alessandria, Italy
Nicholas D'AGOSTINO	Perth Glory FC, Australia
Thomas DENG	Melbourne Victory, Australia
Zach DUNCAN	AGF Aarhus, Denmark
Ben FOLAMI	Ipswich Town FC, England
Denis GENREAU	Melbourne City FC, Australia
Alex GERSBACH	AGF Aarhus, Denmark
Thomas GLOVER (Gk)	Melbourne City FC, Australia
Jordan HOLMES (Gk)	Ebbsfleet United FC, England
Jacob ITALIANO	Borussia Monchengladbach, Germany
Joshua LAWS*	Fortuna Dusseldorf II, Germany
Daniel MARGUSH (Gk)	Perth Glory FC, Australia
Connor METCALFE	Melbourne City FC, Australia
Tass MOURDOUKOUTAS	Western Sydney Wanderers FC, Australia
Ramy NAJJARINE	Melbourne City FC, Australia
Aiden O'NEILL	Brisbane Roar FC, Australia
Connor O'TOOLE	Brisbane Roar FC, Australia
Reno PISCOPO	Wellington Phoenix FC, Australia
Dylan RYAN	Willem II Tilburg, Netherlands
Al Hassan TOURE	Adelaide United, Australia

job. We wanted to come here and win the tournament and unfortunately it didn't happen but we're not taking anything away from the boys tonight, they did a fantastic job, we are through to the Olympics, we can't be happier."

Midfielder Keanu Baccus said: "I am over the moon. It is the most exciting feeling that I have had in my short career so far and hopefully more to come."

Please find below post-match press conference vision and audio with Head Coach Graham Arnold, as well as reaction with a selection of players following the game.

Players included in the reaction grabs are (in order of appearance) team captain Thomas Deng, goal-getter Nicholas D'Agostino, and Western Sydney Wanderers FC midfielder Keanu Baccus.

FFA Chairman & CEO congratulate Australia's U-23s on qualification to Tokyo 2020

Football Federation Australia (FFA) Chairman, Chris Nikou, and Chief Executive Officer, James Johnson, today congratulated Australia's U-23 men's national football team for securing a place at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Overnight Australia defeated Uzbekistan 1-0 at the Rajamangala Stadium in Bangkok, with Nicholas D'Agostino's fine strike early in the second half separating the two teams on the scoreboard.

The win ensured that Australia finished third at the AFC U-23 Championship in Thailand – their highest ever finish – and sealed a place in the men's football competition at Tokyo 2020, breaking a 12-year Olympic hiatus.

Nikou said FFA and the Australian football community was proud of the achievements of the squad and staff in Thailand, with the success adding another element to what is shaping as a huge 2020 for the game.

"Everyone involved with football in Australia ought to be immensely proud of the achievements of our under 23s this month," Nikou said. "The players, coaches and staff represented the nation with distinction, securing three wins and two draws from their six matches to finish a very commendable

third in the tournament."

"The efforts produced and outcomes achieved by our players and staff in trying conditions with matches coming thick and fast means that Australia can once again look forward to watching the green and gold participate in the men's football competition at the Olympics."

"With the continuation of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ qualifiers throughout 2020, Australia's historic participation in the Copa America, forthcoming women's Olympic qualifiers, and now qualification for men's football in Tokyo, 2020 is shaping as an enormous year for our national teams with much to look forward to for everyone connected with the game," he said.

New FFA CEO Johnson attended the match in Bangkok. Johnson said he was proud of the way Graham Arnold's side showed resilience and courage against a determined Uzbekistan team.

"What impressed me most about this achievement was the manner in which the team played," Johnson said. "In difficult conditions and against a very good Uzbekistan side, our team was resilient, courageous, and came together to achieve an historic result for football in Australia."

"While my time in Thailand was brief, I enjoyed the opportunity to witness firsthand how much qualification meant to the players, coaches, and staff."

"Over the coming days, weeks and months I look forward to the opportunity to speak with a range of the game's key stakeholders, including our national team coaches, to consider ways that we can work collaboratively to ensure that these players, and those that will come after them, are provided with enhanced development opportunities in Australia. Our game's key stakeholders must be aligned to ensure generations of talented players have the opportunity to excel individually and collectively," he said.