



By George Stavroulakis

GUAM'S AUSSIE COACH ON ITALIAN MAESTRO'S WORDS AFTER ASIAN QUALIFIER

HEAD COACH OF GUAM, AUSTRALIA'S KARL DODD, SAYS ITALIAN SUPER-COACH MARCELLO LIPPI'S COMPLIMENT WAS VALIDATION OF HOW HE'S SHAPING FOOTBALL IN THE TINY PACIFIC NATION.

Minnows Guam and powerhouse China PR were due to meet in Thailand in March in a Group A preliminary round 2 Asian qualifier.

This match, like many, was canceled due to the coronavirus situation, however, the two nations met at a packed Guangzhou last October.

"We knew that the experience was going to be daunting for the majority of the squad who had never experienced an atmosphere or an opposition like this before," Dodd told FTBL today.

"The nerves got the better of some players and the first 31 minutes was very costly, as we conceded five goals.

"Then we settled into the game and the second half was a lot better. It was the round where the top seeds played the bottom seeds and considering other scorelines that round, (Iran v Cambodia 14-0) we could be somewhat content considering last time the two teams met Guam lost 19-0."

China featured naturalised star striker Elkeson in their starting line up.

"We didn't sit back and we stuck to our principles of play and was an excellent test to see the difference between the two teams and use that as a lesson to understand what was required to match China.

"It was the David v Goliath battle and was a great learning experience for the group," he added of the 7-0 result.

"It was also a great experience for myself as a coach to be against Marcelo Lippi (above) who was very complimentary in our approach to how we tried to play football.

"Rather than parking a bus and kicking it long, something that he was accustomed too when playing lower-ranked teams."

Lippi has since moved on with Li Tie the former Everton defender now in charge of China.

Dodd has been back in Queensland since mid-March, and just in time with some extortionate airline pricing kicked in ("\$8000 for a one-way flight") from Guam to Australia.

He added: "It's a logistical nightmare with the airports and borders shutting."

"We were adamant we didn't want to play games in March and June. Player safety has to come first."

There is even some speculation there may be no international games in the region till next year.

"I'm a big believer in the scope of practice, so if the medical experts have their say, we'll abide by that. But I think you have to put people first.



"It's a tough one as people will be disagreeing either way."

The Matao's next games are scheduled for October and November though they remain under a cloud as the virus situation remains unclear across the region.

East Asian Football Federation clashes were slated for June and July but they will also be canned as the region deals with the global pandemic.

What is clear is that Dodd, in his third year in the Guam hot seat, is relishing his opportunity at international level and is learning every day from his unique role in Asian football.

Dodd's Guam versus China in Guangzhou **Coaching against** the likes of Lippi of China and others is supercharging his knowledge and experience.

"I'm really enjoying it. Learning every day," he added.

Guam's lockdown is till the end of May and quarantine restrictions of two weeks apply to those who fly back in.

At the time of writing, Guam has 148 confirmed cases, with 126 recovered, and five deaths.

Worryingly, nearly 3,000 sailors aboard a

US Navy aircraft carrier were brought onto the tiny Pacific island with a coronavirus outbreak onboard and 777 reportedly testing positive.

And with Guam being such a small island and a popular tourist hub for Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean holidaymakers, little wonder the former A-League defender opted to return home.

Across Asia, the number of cases numbers approximately 200,000 while an ambassador for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 has tested positive for COVID-19, the tournament's organizers said on Thursday.

Apart from writing national team training programs with his coaching staff for the various national teams, Dodd's "riding it out" with family in Australia.

"There are planning and strategic stuff, but to be honest, just enjoying time with the family," he said.

"I haven't a break in about 10 years. Holidays in football aren't really a break so you never switch off.

"Just to be forced to be switched off it's been good to reconnect and balance out as a person."

CAHILL: 'THAT FIRST GAME OF FOOTBALL BACK WILL BE PRICELESS'

CAHILL SAYS FOOTBALL'S "JUST NOT THAT IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW" BUT WHEN IT EVENTUALLY RESUMES, IT WILL HAVE A UNITING EFFECT ON A POST COVID19 WORLD.

Cahill said that a shift away from sport has been notable in a population re-evaluating their priorities in light of a global pandemic.

"Sport has been front and centre in my life since I was old enough to kick a ball with my brothers and sister in the backyard, but something like this really puts things into perspective," Cahill said.

"It's just not that important right now. People are unwell, scared and stressed, and many have lost loved ones. Kicking a football doesn't really register next to life-changing circumstances that so many are experiencing."

The former Socceroos star has taken on an ambassadorial role for the Qatar 2022 World Cup and spoke about the tournament's place in providing a return to sporting normalcy.

"The 2022 World Cup is going to be a powerful symbol

and an invaluable tool for unity, togetherness and recovery across the world," he said.

"I believe grassroots sport is going to be equally important in reuniting communities once the threat of coronavirus has passed.

"I think in a post-coronavirus world, grassroots sport will help bring us closer together again.

"One of the toughest things about the situation we're in now is that it has divided us. First as borders across the world are closed, then cities as movement became restricted and then in many cases we have had to divide into households.

"It's really important that we don't hold onto this mentality. I think sports has a role to play.

"I know that first game of football back on TV and first kick in the park with my kids is going to be priceless. As it will for millions of others around the world."

