



# More Than A Game

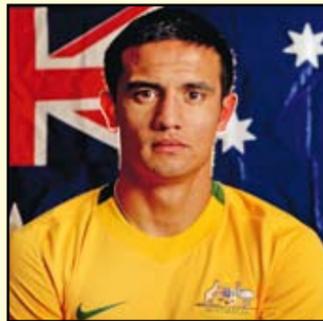
It was unbearably tense. It all nearly went so terribly wrong. On June 12, 2006, Australia played Japan in the Socceroos' first World Cup game in 32 years. The future of football in this country was on the line. Now those at the heart of that match tell it how it was

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

WORDS IVAN SMITH

# ALPHA'S KAISERSLAUTERN INSIDERS

## THE PLAYERS



**Tim Cahill**

**THEN** A relative newcomer, Cahill had played his part in qualifying in 2004, often from the bench. Had not long joined Everton from Millwall.

**NOW** Vital for Everton. With Harry Kewell, the face of the Socceroos, and the fulcrum of the attack for 2010.



**John Aloisi**

**THEN** A consistent striker at Spanish side Deportivo Alaves. Often in the goals for Australia, including the crucial penalty against Uruguay in qualifying.

**NOW** Doubly famous for the Uruguay goal and his World Cup strike against Japan. A Melbourne Heart player.

## THE COACH



**Graham Arnold**

**THEN** Former Socceroo, long-time part of the Australian coaching set-up, and assistant to Guus Hiddink.

**NOW** Went on to coach the Socceroos; current assistant to Pim Verbeek. Will take charge of Central Coast Mariners next season.

## THE COMMENTATOR



**Simon Hill**

**THEN** The voice of SBS's coverage of the Cup. Also voiced and hosted other SBS sports shows.

**NOW** Works at Fox Sports, commentating on A-League games, Socceroos internationals and hosting Fox football shows.

**J**ohn Aloisi scores a penalty against a small South American nation – and changes sport in Australia forever. Ecstasy. Fulfilment. Destiny. Then what? Then we have to actually play in the World Cup. This is what Johnny Warren wanted: Australian footballers proving themselves against other nations; a global audience; a strong and steady growth for the local game at every level. The need for more success. You can't live forever on a penalty against Uruguay.

The Socceroos' first 2006 World Cup match against Japan, at the Fritz-Walter-Stadion in Kaiserslautern, south-west Germany, has long since passed into a haze of happy memories. But those involved knew it rested on a knife-edge. They studied Group F and felt a little chill. If the Socceroos lost to Japan, then (almost inevitably) to world champions Brazil, that was it. Out. Sport's like that: succeed and you're a god. Fail and you're a nothing. Against Japan, you could multiply those stakes by 1000.

Commentator Simon Hill, preparing to call his first World Cup game for SBS, saw how fragile things were for the Australian game, despite the Uruguay effect.

"In 2004, Australia played Turkey in friendlies in Sydney and Melbourne. The Sydney game was the Socceroos' first on home soil for nearly three years. They organised a press conference at Sydney Airport. All these stars – Timmy, Harry – all lined up for this press conference and there were about three people there, of which I was one. The Turkish team came in and had 200 supporters to cheer them when they landed. There was one Australian fan. All of a sudden here are 15,000 wearing green and gold jerseys in Kaiserslautern to support Australia in the World Cup. I thought, 'F-k me.'"

The Socceroos faced a solid Japan team, which had qualified for the two previous World Cups. A strong spine included the veteran midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata, perhaps Asia's most famous player, who had played much of his career in Italy's

top division; and Shunsuke Nakamura, a creative force and free-kick specialist, who was then at Celtic. The goalkeeper, Yoshi Kawaguchi, was very experienced at this level; while the coach was Brazilian legend Zico, who encouraged an expansive, attacking style the players seemed to enjoy. Sheer patriotism gave you hope, but, as a must-win affair, this was a very big ask.

The Socceroos themselves had two things going their way: one was a generation of genuinely gifted individuals, the like of which Australia had never seen before. The other was Guus Hiddink.

Hiddink was and is one of the most respected coaches in football. He gathered the Australian players together for several pre-Cup friendlies, in an atmosphere of football focus and brutal training. John Aloisi, Tim Cahill, Australia assistant coach Graham Arnold, and SBS commentator Simon Hill, describe what happened next.

**GRAHAM ARNOLD:** The players were pushed to the max. Guus's belief was that there was only one way we were going to be any type of success at the World Cup and that was by flogging the players in training. Hiddink believed in athletes. He wanted to run the other team off their legs.

**TIM CAHILL:** We went straight to camp and were locked away in Ohringen (Germany). That was our base and it just became a case of treatment, training, recovery, eat, sleep, treatment, training, recovery. Our mindset was pure football.

**JOHN ALOISI:** We knew the big game was Japan because we had to win to stand a chance of qualifying. That was our big opportunity. It was like our final.

**SIMON HILL:** What we later learned was that they invested a hell of a lot in that first game; they felt if they could get a win they were in with a good chance of getting through.

**As the game loomed, the coaching staff made tough selection choices.**

**GA:** We had no injury worries. We had a selection dilemma out of (Harry) Kewell, (Mark) Bresciano, Cahill – which two of them would play up front with Mark Viduka. Guus believed only two out of three of those could play together – otherwise it would leave us vulnerable defensively.

**TC:** I was so nervous. Am I going to get picked? Am I going to play? It didn't matter which player you were – if you were the biggest or the smallest – playing under Guus Hiddink, you never knew if you were going to play. He told me right before the team meeting, "I'm not starting ya." That sticks in the mind. You'd be inhuman for it not to hurt.

**JA:** Guus didn't tell me [I wasn't starting]. I saw it in the starting XI he put out the day before.

**Game Day, June 12, 2006, in a blisteringly hot Kaiserslautern.**

**GA:** We were driving down the autobahns and there was a police escort – in front, beside and behind, with a helicopter above us. They blocked off a whole autobahn to let us get there. We didn't know how big it was going to be for us when we drove into Kaiserslautern. There was just a mass of fans by the side of the road – they'd basically taken over the city. The players were blown away.

**SH:** The actual stadium is precariously placed on the top of a hill; I remember being out of breath, because we had to park down at the bottom and lug all our camera equipment up the hill. It's a beautiful stadium.

With minutes to go, the anthem plays, the camera panning along a slightly nervy-looking Socceroos line-up, hands on hearts, as the crowd sings loudly.

**GA:** What might have shaken them a bit was the national anthems. In Germany they just played the music, but the Australian contingent sang it – like a home game. A lot of emotion – I'm getting goose bumps now talking about it. Even Guus said it was incredible.

## KICK-OFF

**6:00 MINUTES:** Viduka has a double-chance early on, the Mark Bresciano-Viduka combination already working; a left-foot strike on the bounce, saved by the 'keeper and a right that's also parried away.

**13:00** Japan shoot over the bar.

**22:00** Japan shoot just wide. Despite the chances, the quality of the play is flat and understandably nervous, from both sides.

**25:00** A moment of quality as Viduka back-heels the ball into the path of Bresciano, whose long shot is saved.

**JA:** We were getting frustrated – from the bench we thought we were the better side.

**26:00** Japan score, with a hugely controversial goal. Coming to claim Shunsuke Nakamura's floated cross, goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer either runs into, or is impeded by, Atsushi Yanagisawa and Naohiro Takahara. With Schwarzer grounded, the ball drifts over his head and in.

**TC:** I just thought, "Here we go." I was sitting with Laza (Stan Lazaridis), (Tony) Popovic, (Zeljko) Kalac and Archie (Thompson) on the bench and we were all looking at each other, hoping it wasn't going to be one of those days. But we did think we would get this back – Mark Viduka had already had a few chances.

**GA:** We all felt it was unacceptable; Hiddink went straight to the fourth official and he basically said, "You owe us. You're going to be shown on TV all over the world, allowing a goal that wasn't a goal."

**27:00** A Kewell shot grazes the top of the bar, but the game becomes bogged down.

**41:00** Bresciano curls a free around the post.

**GA:** We always felt that we would come home strong, but there was a little bit of panic setting in. **TC:** It was like a sauna on the bench; I was wiping away so much sweat. I was desperate to get out there because I felt like I was missing my chance.



Cross examination: Was Schwarzer pushed?

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER WALLIS (ALOISI (HEAD SHOT)); RICHARD DOBSON (HILL); GREGG PORTEOUS (ARNOLD); BRESCIANO SUB; CAHILL (HEAD SHOT); JAPAN (GOAL).



Sub plot: The moment that changed the game.

**“It was like a sauna on the bench; I was wiping away so much sweat. Just get me on. I kept looking at the clock, then at Guus, hoping he would give me my chance.” – TIM CAHILL**

Just get me on. I kept looking at the clock, and then looking at Guus, hoping he would give me my chance.

## HALF-TIME

**GA:** We were pissed off with the goal we'd conceded and the way it was conceded. We said, "Look, everything's going fine. OK, that goal happened, but you guys are so fit and strong, these Japanese players will not keep up with you." Hiddink said, "A goal will come, and when it comes we'll get two or three."

**52:00** Cahill comes on, Mark Bresciano goes off. **TC:** I didn't feel loads of nerves, because I just wanted the chance to play. The other thing was, we were 1-0 down and I had nothing to lose. My attitude was to try and seize the moment and make something special happen. Guus said, "Go on and score: get behind them and cause havoc." I knew that around the penalty box, anything that came near me I was going to hit.

**GA:** Timmy's turned round to Kalac as he threw his top off, and said, "I'll be the first Australian to score at the World Cup." But in the first part of the second-half, it was a flat, nervous Australian performance and it was going to take something – luck, the bounce of the ball – to change the game.

**61:00** Josh Kennedy comes on, Craig Moore goes off.

**67:00** Kennedy flings himself at a corner in the six-yard area, but it grazes the top of his head.

**GA:** I always felt we had players – in Harry, in Timmy, Bresciano, Viduka, with an X-factor of Josh Kennedy, that we were always going to get the result. The only concern was getting caught on the break.

**69:00** Viduka's free kick is saved by Kawaguchi, who is having a worryingly solid game.

**75:00** Still no equaliser. The last Socceroos sub, Aloisi, comes on, Luke Wilkshire goes off.

**JA:** I knew that if the result stayed the same I was going to get on. I didn't feel nervous at all. It was actually the opposite. I was ready and couldn't wait to come on and try to change the game.

**78:00** Aloisi is more than ready – he's a ball of adrenaline, and quickly goes in the book.

**SH:** Not giving up is one of the Socceroos' strengths, so I don't think there's any feeling they'd given up the ghost. But if you'd told them they were going to win 3-1 with eight minutes to go, they'd have laughed in your face.

**GA:** We were throwing players forward – Harry played wide on the left, Aloisi, Kennedy and Viduka through the middle, and we pushed

(Jason) Culina to the right, with Cahill just in behind. That's a lot of firepower.

**83:00** Aloisi blasts a free kick straight at the keeper who again is equal to it.

**JA:** By the time I came on I was that pumped I ended up taking it and smacking it straight at the 'keeper. It went out for a throw-in...

**84:00 GOAL!** The long, looping throw-in from Lucas Neill is headed on by Kennedy, as the goalkeeper charges in and fails to claim it. In the melee, Kewell's snapped left-foot shot is blocked at close range. It rebounds to Cahill, who puts it, finally, past Kawaguchi. "It's poked home by Tim Cahill!" shouts Simon Hill, as the stadium erupts. "Australia have done it!"

**TC:** It was one of the biggest moments in my life, and will be forever. To be part of Australia's history and world history will never be taken away from me and can never be taken away from Australians. The celebrations – for the first goal, particularly – was a celebration of triumph for Australian football. It wasn't the prettiest goal I've ever scored, but it was the most important.

**GA:** John Aloisi ran over to the sideline and said to Hiddink, "What do we do now?" Hiddink said, "Go and get the second one."

**86:00** Japan are still trying. Midfielder Yuichi Komano dashes down the wing and into the area – where Cahill, already booked in this game, brings him down.

**JA:** It should have been a penalty, and we should have drawn the game 2-2, with Timmy sent off. Hiddink told him off for that tackle.

**GA:** It was the turning point. That may have been the payback (for the Japan decision).

**SH:** All of a sudden Japan looked tired. They'd had the lead for so long; quickly it was gone and you saw their body language change completely.

**87:00** But still the chances come. Takashi Fukunishi lashes one past the post.

**GA:** Our main concern was getting caught on the break, but we always felt we were going to run over the top of them.



Killer Cahill: We're lucky our main man didn't see red.

**89:00 GOAL!** A spectacular strike from Cahill on the edge of the area. Culina heads a bouncing ball to Aloisi, who touches it to Cahill. Cahill controls it with his studs, looks up, takes another touch and curves it against both posts and in. Hill is now yelling at the top of his voice. "Tim Cahill has done it again! What a goal by Tim Cahill!"

**TC:** I wanted to push forward and get on the end of something more. Johnny Aloisi played it in to my feet, I took a touch, rolled it over the top of my foot, gave the keeper the eyes, and curled it in to the top left corner. Giving him the eyes worked brilliantly, the keeper hardly moved, and I didn't even look at where I was kicking the ball. It was a great strike. It had that extra bit of spice because it hit both posts and eventually went in. It had me on my tippy-toes before I could run off and do

directly at goal. I couldn't let Tim grab all the glory. I always said to myself when I first played the game that you have to score a goal in the World Cup, because that's how people really know who you are, and recognise you around the world, really. I'm sure the Japanese know who I am.

**Finally, seconds later, the referee blows his whistle. On the brink for a long time, now Australia are firmly in the tournament.**

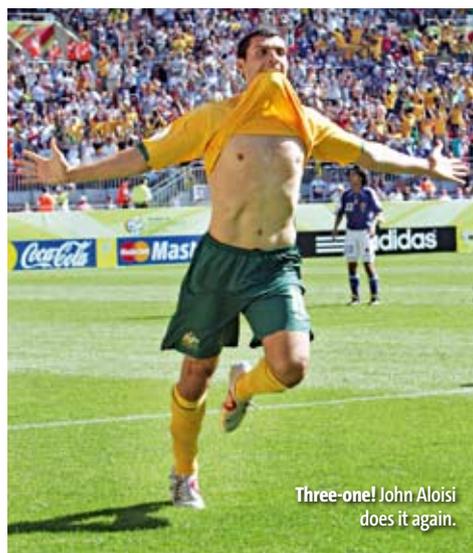
**GA:** In the dressing room afterwards, the players were so happy in their belief that we were going to go further in the competition. It was an unbelievable feeling. You don't experience many in your career like that. I turned my mobile phone on after the game and had about 86 messages from home. And from people who are rugby league people, players – all saying the country's gone mad.

**JA:** After the game we got to celebrate with the fans – we went over to where most of them were. To see that sea of gold, that was just a standout for us.

**TC:** It was straight back to the hotel, ice-bath, eat and bed. I spoke to my family quickly on the phone and that was it. We had training the next day; recovery; and we had to think about Brazil. We didn't see a paper, any footage, nothing. Only after finally seeing the pictures did it hit us how big it was to Australians, and I'm talking two or three weeks after the World Cup. Seeing the sea of green and yellow back in Australia was like watching a movie.

**SH:** My abiding memory is being proud of the game in Australia. I covered the dying days of the old NSL, the last grand final – 9000 people in the pissing rain. And those games against Turkey in Sydney and Melbourne: I kid you not, there were more Turks there than Aussies. I remember looking around the stadium and thinking, "This game has got no chance. If they won't turn up to support their own national team, you can forget it." Now we're moaning about only getting 20,000 to Suncorp against Indonesia.

**“When I got the ball there was only one thing on my mind, and that was go directly at goal. I couldn't let Tim grab all the glory.” – JOHN ALOISI**



Three-one! John Aloisi does it again.

my celebration. I'm always in the zone when I'm on the pitch, but that was something else. I can watch the second goal now and that feeling comes back. It's very hard to describe. It's a priceless feeling. Priceless. The whole World Cup, still now, is an experience that doesn't feel real.

**GA:** It was euphoria.

**90:00** Three minutes of extra-time signalled.

**92:00 GOAL!** Japan are still trying to come forward, but the Socceroos win it in defence and thump it high and clear. Kennedy wins a bouncing ball and lays it to Cahill, who puts it diagonally forward to Aloisi. Nearly at a dead stop, he accelerates for goal, as defender Komano backs off him, then unleashes a low, left-foot shot into the corner. Overjoyed, Aloisi runs to the crowd, his jersey-front in his mouth, almost in disbelief. Hill says, "It's a sea of green and gold around the Fritz-Walter Stadium."

**JA:** I felt, as soon as I ran on the pitch, I was going to score a goal. When I did get the ball there was only one thing on my mind, and that was go

**WANT MORE?** YouTube "Australia Japan 3-1" and you'll more than likely get the same chills Alpha does. YouTube "Most amazing World Cup goal celebrations ever" and you'll feel like you were actually there.