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U.S., Canada notch opening wins in soccer festival

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The United States thoroughly dominated play in the second game of the 2007 Futbol Internacional Soccer Festival en route to taking a commanding 2-0 victory over China.

Earlier, a crowd estimated at 10,000 saw Canada net a goal with about five minutes to go as it blanked Mexico 1-0 in this six-team tournament.

The U.S. Under-21 squad had 20 shots with 11 of them on goal and generated eight corner kicks. Conversely, China had just two shots and one corner kick in a game that was played almost exclusively in the shadow of the China goal.

The aggressive Americans were offside four times as they pressed forward. China wasn't offside once.

U.S. coach Bill Irwin said his team tended to play the ball in front of its Asian opponents in the first half. In the second half, the Americans sent balls into open space behind the defenders and created more openings.

"Now they have to drop off more, which opens up room for us to play," Irwin said.

The coach said his squad will have to work on taking advantage of its opportunities.

"We created a lot of chances and didn't put them away," he said. "China didn't create a lot against us so we defended really well."

The U.S. appeared set to take the lead in the 27th minute as Danesha Adams slotted a pass to Kelsey Carpenter but her shot bounced off the left post.

Amanda Poach set up both United States goals. She found Carpenter in the 57th minute and Kelley O'Hara in the 74th.

"I just saw Kelsey on the back post," the midfielder said. "I tried to play her a throughball; it didn't exactly get there cleanly but it happened to make it. It was a great run.

"On the second one, Kelley made a great run off the far post," Poach said. "I played the ball in and she made an awesome header. Our forwards worked really well together tonight. That really helped our team."

China coach Rongming Gao said his team felt the effects of having arrived in Birmingham on Friday.

"They feel very tired because the time was so short," he said through an interpreter. "They have very strong jet lag."

Gao added that a number of his players had not played abroad prior to Sunday's game. "They are young and kind of nervous," he added.

The battle of U.S. neighbor nations was decided in the 84th minute of play.

Canada won possession and played the ball wide right. Katie Thorlakson crossed the ball in to reserve Amy Vermeulen, who punched it into the back of the net.

"It's always great to get a result in the opening game of a tournament," coach Bob Birarda said. "This is a mixed group from our World Cup team to our U17 team. They haven't played together before so this was a great opportunity to get a result while we're getting comfortable with one another."

Tournament play resumes Tuesday night as Canada faces Argentina at 7:30 at the Montgomery YMCA Soccer Complex. The USA Under-21s square off against Trinidad & Tobago at 7:30 at Louis Crews Stadium on the campus of Alabama A&M University in Huntsville.

Irwin, the U.S. coach, said he'll likely use a totally different lineup on Tuesday.

"There's a lot of talent here," he said of his team. "The future for the Women's National Team is very, very bright."

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