

Michael Beauchamp

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Zitat

Clean-sheets Beauchamp awake to the Iraqi threat

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WHILE Scott McDonald is ready to accept the responsibility for scoring the goals to take Australia to the World Cup, Michael Beauchamp is just as determined to stop them going in at the wrong end - and a solid month in the green and gold shirt could open the door to the promised land of England's Premier League.

Beauchamp is a certain starter in the heart of the Socceroos defence in Sunday's crucial qualifier against Iraq, and if he keeps his spot for the remaining three group games, he might have tallied enough caps to convince Britain's notoriously fussy immigration authorities that he deserves a fresh start in England.

Things didn't go well for Beauchamp in the second half of the Bundesliga season - a change of coach froze him out of the first team at Nurnberg, and by the end of next month he'll be a free agent. But while he knows he won't be staying at Nurnberg, he's not sure where he'll end up, except to admit a stint in the Premier League is an attractive option.

For now, though, the focus is on the national team, and signs for Beauchamp are encouraging. He's started the past three games under new coach Pim Verbeek - friendlies against Singapore and Ghana, and the World Cup qualifier against China - and

on each occasion the Socceroos kept a clean sheet.

"If you come off the park as a defender, and you've kept a clean sheet, the job's done," he said. "To do well in the qualifiers, we have to keep them [goals] out. But that's not just about the guys at the back. You have to defend as a unit, and the strikers are the first line of defence.

"But for me, personally, it's not just about stopping the other guy. It's also about getting the ball forward, trying to create things. You want to start something from the back as well."

Beauchamp jokes that defenders especially like clean sheets because "it puts pressure on the strikers to score". There's no doubt the Socceroos have become hard to break down under Verbeek, but they've also found goals hard to come by. McDonald, fresh from finishing the Scottish season as top scorer, is ready to step up to the plate and open his Socceroos account.

"I haven't got off the mark yet, as everyone knows," McDonald said yesterday. "I think I have only started three games; I'm still learning to play with all the boys, and this week is a good opportunity for me to learn, like the game against Qatar, and more and more I am starting to link better with 'Bresh' [Mark Bresciano], Josh [Kennedy] and few others and I enjoyed and loved it.

"To get the opportunity to play with these guys, Harry [Kewell] as well, it's great, and I am just really looking forward to showing my stuff."

Beauchamp knows what it's like to score goals for the national team himself, and ironically it was Iraq who provided the opportunity. He was on the bench at the Rajamangala Stadium in Bangkok a year ago when the Iraqis effectively knocked the Socceroos out of the Asian Cup, and when then-coach Graham Arnold decided he needed to put a rocket under his underperforming side for the next match against Thailand, one of his first moves was to give Beauchamp a start. It proved to be a turning point in his international career.

"I suppose you could say I've got Iraq to thank, but you never want to sit there and watch your team get beaten," he said. "Obviously, Arnie wanted to change things around, and I got my chance. It was a tough situation, because there was a lot of pressure on the team, a lot of stuff being written in the press which wasn't true. But I played not too bad and I scored, so for me personally things worked out well."

So what did he learn from watching Iraq that he can put into practice when he takes the field on Sunday?

"That they're a very good side," he said. "They've got some quick boys in there, and the main guy in midfield [Nashat Akram] was creating the opportunities, so he's one to watch out for. But if we defend well, and stay tight, we should be OK."

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