



Spain beat Slovenia and break World Cup jinx

By Gideon Long

GWANGJU, South Korea, June 2 (Reuters) - Spain made a winning start to a World Cup campaign for the first time in 52 years on Sunday as they beat Slovenia 3-1 in their opening group B match.

Raul scored the opening goal on the stroke of half-time, selling his marker with a brilliant dummy just inside the box before stabbing the ball past goalkeeper Marko Simeunovic for his 26th international goal.

Spanish midfielder Juan Carlos Valeron added a second in the 74th minute, stealing in at the back post to slide a diagonal shot past the wrong-footed keeper.

Substitute Sebastjan Cimirotic scored a consolation for Slovenia on 82 minutes before defender Fernando Hierro secured the win from the penalty spot five minutes later after Fernando Morientes was brought down by substitute Sasa Gajser.

The match was by no means a classic -- Spain seemed to labour under the weight off their dismal World Cup history while the Slovenians, appearing in the competition for the first time, rarely pushed men forward in large numbers.

But the Spaniards will not care about that.

They have finally broken a jinx dating back to 1950, when they beat Chile in their opening match of the tournament in Brazil.

Since then they have failed to win eight World Cup openers, and have been held by the likes of Honduras and South Korea. In France four years ago they lost to Nigeria in their opening first round tie.

In the early stages of the match, Slovenia looked capable of extending the Spaniards' unwanted record.

Midfielder Miran Pavlin forced a point-blank save from Iker Casillas as early as the third minute and Zlatko Zahovic forced another save with a stinging left foot shot.

Spain's best efforts came from a pair of long range Javi de Pedro free kicks that dipped just over the Slovenian crossbar.

The Spaniards grew in confidence in the second half and Morientes came close to scoring a minute after coming on as substitute.

Spain's win leaves them top of group B ahead of South Africa and Paraguay, who drew 2-2 in the earlier match, and Slovenia.

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