

SATURDAY, JULY 8, 2011 – GRAZ, AUSTRIA - Twice the world champion and silver medalist in 2007 only by virtue of a double overtime loss to the United States, Japan fired a clear message that they will be among the teams to beat at the 2011 IFAF Senior World Championship with a convincing 24-6 win over host Austria.

Japan lead 17-6 at halftime in the opening Group B game after two rushing touchdowns silenced a noisy partisan home crowd at the UPC Arena in Graz. The defense stepped up in the second half to shut out a frustrated home offense and added a third touchdown to put the result beyond doubt.

“I was disappointed, especially in the first half, starting out with an interception that we never seemed to recover from,” said Austria head coach Rick Rhoades. “I thought our guys played hard against a great team. There were a few mistakes and they proved crucial. We have to learn from it and move on.”

A perfectly disguised handoff opened up the middle of the field for a touchdown dash by Tomokazu Sueyoshi then a fake field goal saw Yasuhiro Maruta race to the endzone to open up an 11-point lead. Austria had taken a 3-0 lead and looked to have ended the half with a field goal, but left too much time on the clock and in less than 30 seconds Japan drove again to tag on three more points.

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Japan were welcomed by an ear-splitting 6,000-strong home crowd as Nori Kinoshita showed why he was among the leading kick returners during his NFL Europe career by taking the ball to midfield. Quarterback Tetsuo Takata moved the ball efficiently downfield, but Michael Suess and Philip Stojaspal combined for a key sack on third down and when settling for three points, Japan's field goal attempt was tipped and fell short.

Both teams went three and out and then the home crowd fell noticeably silent to help their team. The Austrian drive moved quickly as quarterback Christoph Gross targeted his key offensive weapons Jakob Dieplinger, Florian Grein and Andreas Proller to move the ball into Japan territory as the first quarter ended.

Gross hit Wolfrum Hofbauer for a first down at the Japan 30-yard mark and then looked to have found Dieplinger making a spectacular catch at the back of the end zone, but he was ruled out of bounds. A pass interference call moved the ball 15 yards anyway then after Grien came up just short of a touchdown on third down, a 23 yard field goal by Peter Kramberger gave Austria the lead.

Japan replied immediately as first a good return to midfield and then a 15-yard penalty as Johannes Kain dragged down Takata out of bounds moved them downfield. Sueyoshi tore almost untouched up the middle on misdirection play with a perfectly faked hand off for a 31-yard touchdown and 7-3 lead that silenced the passionate crowd.

Japan's Koki Kato intercepted Gross to end what looked like a promising drive and Japan took over in Austria territory. The home defense came up with a key stop on third down, forcing Japan to settle for a field goal, but running back Maruta lined up as the kicker and took a perfect pitch from Shun Sagawara to dash to the end zone on a 7-yard carry for a 14-3 lead.

Austria went to the air in reply and drove downfield for Kramberger to split the uprights from 31 yards away, but left 47 seconds on the clock, which was enough for Japan to efficiently move themselves into Daisuke Aoki's 47-yard field goal range and take a 17-6 halftime lead.

Austrian running back Grein had an explosive start to the second half with a big gain to midfield on his way to winning team MVP honors. But Japan's Koki Kato came up with his second interception of Gross and Japan took over on their own 13-yard mark. Austria continued to show promise with some impressive catches by Armando Ponce de Leon and Florian Hiess but another drive was halted by Japan defense.

Japan also looked to have stalled before a bomb to Kinoshita earned a first down and a big gain as MVP Takata rolled out to his left and hit the receiver on a perfect post pattern. The quarterback then scrambled to come up just short on third down and the usually reliable Aoki pulled his field goal attempt wide right.

The miss barely knocked Japan from their stride as after some good runs by back up quarterback Minoru Tono, Furutani, Takata connected with Shoei Hasegawa at Austria's seven yard line and after a period of treatment for the injured receiver, a well-executed shovel pass to Tomokazu Sueyoshi produced another touchdown and a decisive 24-6 fourth quarter lead.

Box score

Japan (1-0) vs. Austria (0-1)
Date: Jul 09, 2011
Site: Graz Stadium: UPC Arena
Attendance: 6000
Score by Quarters 1 2 3 4 Score
Japan..... 0 17 0 7 - 24
Austria..... 0 6 0 0 - 6

Scoring Summary:

2nd 08:56 AUT - Peter Kramberger 23 yd field goal
12 plays, 70 yards, TOP 6:48, JPN 0 - AUT 3

08:23 JPN - Tomokazu Sueyoshi 31 yd run (Daisuke Aoki kick)
2 plays, 48 yards, TOP 0:26, JPN 7 - AUT 3

04:22 JPN - Yasuhiro Maruta 7 yd run (Daisuke Aoki kick)
5 plays, 26 yards, TOP 2:05, JPN 14 - AUT 3

00:32 AUT - Peter Kramberger 31 yd field goal
7 plays, 66 yards, TOP 3:50, JPN 14 - AUT 6

00:02 JPN - Daisuke Aoki 47 yd field goal
3 plays, 12 yards, TOP 0:21, JPN 17 - AUT 6

4th 06:13 JPN - Tomokazu Sueyoshi 6 yd pass from Minoru Tono (Daisuke Aoki kick)
6 plays, 53 yards, TOP 2:44, JPN 24 - AUT 6