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Russian World Cup Coach Capello Backs Blundering Goalkeeper

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Blundering Russia goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev will get a second chance at the World Cup on Sunday.

Coach Fabio Capello will stick with his No. 1 against Belgium and give Akinfeev an opportunity to redeem himself after his glaring error gifted South Korea a goal in the Russians' Group H opener.

In fact, Capello never thought about dropping Akinfeev, he said Saturday. The 'keeper let a weak shot by Lee Keun-ho slip through his hands and into the net for the opener in the 1-1 draw on Tuesday.

"I had decided after the mistake already that Akinfeev would stay because he's a great goalkeeper," Capello said at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium through a translator. "I never thought for one minute I would change him ... He's one of the best in the world."

Luckily for Akinfeev, Alexander Kerzhakov rescued Russia with a goal six minutes later.

While Capello backed the CSKA Moscow 'keeper against the Belgians at the Maracana, captain and defender Vasily Berezutsky had no special words for club teammate Akinfeev straight after the slip in the 68th minute against South Korea in Cuiaba.

Lee Keun-ho's speculative effort appeared to be easily covered by Akinfeev, until the ball bobbled out of his hands, looped back over his shoulder and dropped into the goal. He collapsed to the ground with his hands covering his face.

"Everyone is prone to mistakes," Berezutsky said. "I told him 'get up, let's not waste time, we need to win this back'. That's all."

Kerzhakov's equalizer partially saved Akinfeev's blushes, but Russia needs a victory against Belgium to revive its hopes of making the last 16 in Brazil. Belgium was highly impressive in qualifying for the World Cup and although it started slowly to come from a goal down to beat Algeria 2-1 in its opener, it has a real attacking threat in striker Romelu Lukaku and playmaker Eden Hazard.

"Well, in the qualifying matches this was the team that surprised everyone most of all," Capello said of Belgium. "It's a very balanced and very strong team indeed with great individuals. So, I have great respect for Belgium, but nonetheless I have great trust in my own team."

For skipper Berezutsky, Russia's shaky start against South Korea was mostly down to nerves. The country hadn't played at the World Cup since 2002, and is therefore a squad of first-timers on the big stage. He thinks they've settled now.

"If we take the first game, there was an adrenaline factor because no one has played at this level before," Berezutsky said. "Now everybody is calm and ready."

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