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Emirates get clean record on home ice in Division III Qualification

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The United Arab Emirates celebrate a goal against Greece. Both nations advance to the 2013 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division III in South Africa. Photo: Fatima Al Ali

ABU DHABI – The United Arab Emirates won the 2013 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division III Qualification on home ice in Abu Dhabi and advance to the main tournament in South Africa along with second-place Greece.

For the Emirati team it has been the biggest success in the World Championship program and after having collected trophies while competing in the Challenge Cup of Asia.

The Emirates had participated in the World Championship program only one time before in 2010, but lost their games to Greece, Luxembourg and Ireland.

This time they avenged their loss from two-and-a-half years ago and defeated Greece 2-0 in the opener at the Zayed Sports City's ice rink, thanks to goals from captain Juma Al Dhaheri and Mubarak Al Mazrouei and a 25-save shutout performance from Khaled Al Suwaidi.

The Emirates dominated Mongolia in their second game with a 55-14 shots on goal advantage in their favour, but struggled in scoring goals what was a penalty-filled affair.

Al Dhaheri opened the scoring with 1:16 left in the first period, but Mishigsuren Namjil tied it up at 4:01 of the middle stanza.

Al Mazrouei with a shorthanded goal and Mohammed Al Shamisi on a power play made it a 3-1 lead for the UAE just before the midway point of the game. This time the Mongolians weren't able to equalize. Tserenbaljir Baatarkhuu cut the Emirates' lead to 3-2, but this goal with eight seconds remaining in regulation time came too late.

On the last day the Emirati steamrolled Georgia, 9-1, ending the tournament with a clean record.

Finishing in second place, Greece is the second team that qualified for the 2013 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division III in Cape Town, South Africa.

The Greeks recovered from the loss in the opening game of their return to the Division III competition. They blanked Georgia 13-0 and won the

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deciding game for second place against Mongolia 5-2 on Wednesday.

The game was close over the first two periods. Alexandros Valsamas-Rallis and Dimitrios Kalyvas took the lead twice for the Greeks, but Boldbayar Bayajikh and Namjil replied with markers for the Mongolians.

The direction of the game changed in the third period when Greece came out strong and had 20-4 shots on goal for the last 20 minutes of play. Ioannis Koufis scored the game winner at 1:05 of the third period. Later on he and Valsamas-Rallis each scored their second goal of the day for the 5-2 final score.

Mongolia finished the event in third place and won't return to the Division III this year after having played at that level four times, in 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2012.

On the upside, the Mongolians won their first game ever in the World Championship program as they defeated newcomer Georgia 6-0 on the opening day.

Mongolia doesn't have ice outside of the winter months when they play on outdoor rinks, but the team had a training camp in Beijing before travelling to Abu Dhabi.

Also Georgia practised abroad, in Erzurum, Turkey. However, for the Georgians it has been a tough debut in the IIHF program. The Caucasus nation lost all three games but Gocha Jeiranashvili at least scored the country's first goal in IIHF competition in the last game.

The 2013 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division III in Cape Town, South Africa, will be played 15-21 April 2013. South Africa, DPR Korea, Luxembourg, Ireland, the United Arab Emirates and Greece will be the participants. The winner will be promoted to the Division II Group B while the last-ranked team will be relegated to the qualification event.

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