

Assignment: News Story 2

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Heartbreak At The Office: Reggae Boyz Lose Automatic World Cup Spot After Stalemate Against Curacao

By Leonardo Salmon



Fan in distress after finding out that the stoppage time penalty was ruled out by VAR at the National Stadium in Kingston, Jamaica on Tuesday November 18, 2025. Photo Credit: Leonardo Salmon

Jamaica's Reggae Boyz were held to a 0–0 draw by Curaçao at the National Stadium on Tuesday night, a result that ended their hopes of automatic World Cup qualification. This result sent Curacao to the tournament for the first time in the nation's history. The draw, coming days after Jamaica's costly 1–1 result against Trinidad and Tobago, meant only a victory would have secured their place at the 2026 World Cup.

Jamaica began the match aware that had they beaten Trinidad and Tobago last week, a draw on Tuesday would have been enough to qualify. Instead, the pressure was now mounted on head coach Steve McClaren and a squad that dominated possession but failed to convert a series of clear chances.

The Reggae Boyz struck the woodwork three times. Greg Leigh's effort struck the post in the 53rd minute and Shamar Nicholson's header rattled the crossbar in the 70th and Bailey Cadamarteri hit the upright with three minutes remaining. Curaçao goalkeeper Eloy Room

produced several crucial saves to keep his side level as Jamaica pushed desperately for a breakthrough.

The decisive moment appeared to arrive deep into stoppage time when substitute Djuan “Whisper” Richards was brought down by Jeremy Antonisse in the penalty area. Referee Ivan Barton awarded the penalty, sending the National Stadium into a frenzy. The celebrations however were short-lived. After an extended VAR review, officials determined that Richards initiated the contact, and the decision was overturned. The stadium erupted in boos as Jamaica’s final opportunity slipped away.

Outside the stadium, frustration among supporters was at a premium as they focused on missed chances and earlier results. “We shouldn’t have been in this position in the first place,” said Rushauna Mignott, a fan from St. Andrew. “If we had beaten Trinidad and Whisper had started tonight, we would be going to the world cup.” Ackeem Henry was a lot harsher in his critique as he lamented, “JFF and McClaren are fools, they all need to go.”

Speaking in a post-match interview with TVJ, McClaren acknowledged the disappointment and announced his resignation. “Leading this team has been one of the greatest honours of my career but football is a results business and tonight we’ve fallen short of our goal which was to qualify from this group. It is the responsibility of the leader to step forward and take accountability. After deep reflection and an honest assessment...I have decided to step down as the head coach of the Jamaican national team.”

The Jamaica Football Federation (JFF) responded in the following few days. In a press release issued on November 21, 2025, the federation confirmed that Rudolph Speid had been appointed interim head coach and that contact had been made with the agent of former Jamaica College head coach Miguel Coley to serve as his assistant. President Michael Ricketts stated in the release that “this interim structure is aimed at maintaining stability during this important time for Jamaican football.”

Curacao’s celebrations began immediately after the final whistle, with captain Leandro Bacuna bursting into tears while being embraced by his teammates. FIFA and CONCACAF also acknowledged the achievement, posting congratulations across their official platforms and noting that Curacao had become the smallest country ever to qualify for the World Cup.

Despite the setback, Jamaica’s campaign is not over. The Reggae Boyz ranked 70th by FIFA will now advance to the intercontinental playoffs in March, where they will face New Caledonia (ranked 149th) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (ranked 56th). The playoff draw, announced by FIFA on November 20, confirmed that Jamaica must win both matches to secure one of the final remaining spots at the 2026 World Cup.

With automatic qualification no longer possible, the Reggae Boyz must regroup and prepare quickly under new leadership. Their journey continues, but the margin for error has now disappeared as they enter the decisive playoff stage.

