

ECUADOR V COSTA RICA

Crunch time for Ticos

AFP, Hamburg

Striker Paulo Wanchope has called on Costa Rica to show the same spirit that gave mighty Germany a World Cup scare when they face Ecuador in a do-or-die Group A clash here on Thursday.

The 29-year-old former Derby, West Ham and Manchester City player scored both his side's goals in their opening 4-2 defeat to the hosts and knows that only a win against Ecuador, who saw off Poland 2-0 in their opener, will suffice.

"We left with our heads held high after the German game and we always expect to score goals," said Wanchope, who has hit 45 goals in 70 internationals.

"We have a very good side and we'll stick together."

"Ecuador are a really tough team and they are certainly very compact. They have very quick players such as (Ulises) De la Cruz, (Carlos) Tenorio is a threat on the right and Agustin Delgado has a good nose for goal," added the striker who is hoping that a good tournament could see him win a move to Serie A giants AS Roma.

Costa Rica, playing in their third finals, reached the last 16 in

1990, but failed to get beyond the first round in 2002.

Germany can secure their place in the next round if they defeat Poland on Wednesday leaving both Costa Rica and Ecuador in no doubt as to what they need to do to keep their plans on track.

"If Poland lose to Germany that would mean in practice that the battle for second place would be between Ecuador and ourselves," Costa Rica skipper Luis Marin said.

"It'll be death or glory and we have to win it."

TEAMS

Ecuador (4-4-2)

12-Cristian Mora, 4-Ulises de la Cruz, 3-Ivan Hurtado, 17-Giovanny Espinoza, 18-Nelicer Reasco, 8-Edison Mendez, 20-Edwin Tenorio, 14-Segundo Castillo, 16-Luis Antonio Valencia, 11-Agustin Delgado, 21-Carlos Tenorio

Costa Rica (3-5-2)

18-Jose Francisco Porras, 3-Luis Marin, 4-Michael Umana, 2-Jervis Drummond, 12-Leonardo Gonzales, 8-Mauricio Solis, 10-Walter Centeno, 20-Douglas Sequeira, 6-Danny Fonseca, 11-Ronald Gomez, 9-Paulo Wanchope

Coach Alexander Guimaraes insists he saw enough in the game with Germany to make him believe that they can beat Ecuador.

"Our hopes are still very high, the team is going to get better and well keep our chances alive," he said.

"I'll repeat what I said to begin with - if we keep playing like that we've got every chance of beating Ecuador and Poland."

Ecuador are playing in their second successive finals having been knocked out in the first round in 2002.

The South American minnows believe they can qualify for the last 16 but want to wrap up their place before facing Germany in their last group game on June 20.

"Costa Rica have great players and a lot of experience," said coach Luis Fernando Suarez, Ecuador's Colombian coach, who is aware of the danger posed by Wanchope.

"It's going to be a completely different game... It is a more dangerous game for us than against Poland," he said.

"We will have to ensure that we don't let them play," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT: Members of the Costa Rica team go through a training session as part of their preparation for Thursday's encounter against Ecuador.

'Colin Powell is my hero'

REUTERS, Bad Kissingen

Ecuador coach Luis Fernando Suarez said he was fascinated by great leaders and was spending time between matches reading about former U.S. military chief and secretary of state Colin Powell.

"I like reading leadership books," Suarez told a news conference on Tuesday as his team prepared for their second World Cup Group A game against Costa Rica in Hamburg on Thursday.

"I'm reading how Powell led his troops... he achieved a lot and those who achieve a lot typically have great leadership style." Suarez, 46, steered Ecuador to their second World Cup and may be on the verge of guiding his team to the knockout phase for the first time after recording a shock 2-0 win over Poland last Friday.

"This match represents a chance to make history," the coach said.

Guimaraes denies fielding injured player

AP, Walldorf

Costa Rica has denied that defender Gilberto Martinez played injured in his team's 4-2 loss to Germany in the opening match of the World Cup.

The 26-year-old Martinez was forced to leave the field in the 61st minute Friday and doctors said he will miss the rest of the tournament because of tendinitis in his left leg.

Costa Rica coach Alexandre Guimaraes said the Brescia player was healthy before the game against Germany.

Martinez reported some minor pain the morning before the match, and team doctor Gerardo Artavia said he was examined and found to be in good condition.

"I've had this tendinitis since many, but it had been well treated to avoid a recurrence, and I was feeling well," Martinez said.

But 61 minutes into the game, Martinez left the field limping.

"Neither Martinez nor any other player was allowed to play injured," the doctor said. "We were not thinking only on the inaugural match but also on the following ones."

"Besides, with think of our players not only as such, but also as human beings," Artavia said.

Artavia admitted that some players may lie and insist on playing while injured if they think that a match can be a route to better professional contracts.

But, he said, that does not happen in the Costa Rican team.

Martinez, too, said that was not the case.

Costa Rica will be more aggressive

INTERNET, undated

Costa Rica will have to play a more attacking game when they meet Ecuador in their second match of World Cup Group A in Hamburg on Thursday. They cannot afford a second defeat after losing to hosts 4-2 Germany in the tournament's opener.

"These situations force us to a change and we will strengthen our attack," Costa Rica coach Alexandre Guimaraes said. "We have to take control and make sure we create lots of chances. We could not do that against Germany but this is our turn to attack."

Striker Paulo Wanchope, who scored both goals against Germany, echoed his coach's view: "We have to be more on the offensive and seek the victory from the very beginning."

But Ecuador's confidence is never higher and they are looking to achieve their third victory in the World Cup finals in a row. They ended the 2002 tournament with a 1-0 win over Croatia and started this one with a 2-0 win over Poland.

A win will take Ecuador to the knockout stage and they would be relaxed before playing Germany in their final group match.

Both Costa Rica and Ecuador have some injury worries after their opening matches. Costa Rica right back Gilberto Martinez will be out of the game after aggravating a knee injury and Wanchope also

suffered an ankle knock against Germany but he is almost sure to play.

Ecuador captain Ivan Hurtado and strikers Carlos Tenorio and Agustin Delgado were replaced in the second half of the Poland game because of minor injuries. But they are expected to be available to face Costa Rica.

With a win in hand, Ecuador coach Luis Fernando Suarez does not take it for granted that they will return from Hamburg with a victory.

"We know them well and they know us well. It's going to be a completely different game. It is a more dangerous game for us than against Poland," Suarez said.

He added, "We respect Costa Rica as rivals. They have a very aggressive frontline, they are quick at breaking down the flanks and have a good striker in Paulo Wanchope."

His captain Ivan Hurtado also said, "We're just 90 minutes from ensuring qualification, but of course we've done nothing yet."

Ecuador wary of dangers

AFP, Bad Kissingen

Ecuador say they are alive to the "danger" posed by World Cup Group A rivals Costa Rica, whom they face Thursday in Hamburg in a game which could propel them into the last 16.

After Friday's impressive 2-0 win over Poland in Gelsenkirchen, the South American minnows believe progress is there for the taking but with Germany to come on June 20 they know they likely have only one bite at the cherry.

"Costa Rica have great players and a lot of experience," said coach Luis Fernando Suarez, Ecuador's Colombian coach.

Identifying striker Paulo Wanchope, Costa Rica's two-goal star against the Germans in an honourable 4-2 defeat, as the threat Suarez said that "we will have to ensure that we don't let them play."

"If Costa Rica have the ball they can be very dangerous as they have players with a lot of talent. This game is more dangerous than the Poland match," he insisted.

"So far we have taken an important step but we haven't qualified yet."



PHOTO: AFP

LARA PLAYING SOCCER! Ecuador midfielder Christian Lara (L) kicks the ball while forward Ivan Kaviedes looks on during training on Monday. Ecuador meet Costa Rica in a World Cup Group A match today.

Last chance for old guard

REUTERS, Bad Kissingen

Ecuador are only playing in their second World Cup yet key members of their squad already see Thursday's match against Costa Rica as a chance to end their careers in style.

After a shock 2-0 win over Poland last Friday, victory in their second Group A match would almost certainly guarantee Ecuador's passage to the knockout stage of the tournament for the first time, four years after their World Cup debut.

"For many of us it is likely to be our last World Cup. It's the match of our lives," defender Giovanny Espinoza, 29, told reporters before Tuesday's training, the squad's final session before travelling to the match in Hamburg.

Key squad members are already over 30 - captain Ivan Hurtado is

31, fellow defender Ulises de la Cruz 32 and striker Agustin Delgado 31.

The maths is simple. If they win and rivals Germany avoid losing to Poland on Wednesday, Ecuador would be through.

Mindful that their final match is against the hosts, Ecuador justifiably view the Costa Rica encounter as their best chance to pick up the necessary three points.

Coach Luis Fernando Suarez has sought to dampen assumptions from a fervent public that Ecuador have already qualified and insists Costa Rica are formidable opponents who will fight hard to stay in the tournament after a 4-2 opening loss to Germany.

"Costa Rica deserve to be at the World Cup. They will give everything to win," he said.

Suarez is aware that Ecuadorians throughout the

Americas and Europe would be glued to television screens and naturally hoped they would be cheering as they did after the Poland match.

"The diaspora will be looking on. There's a very healthy patriotism," he said. "This match represents a chance to make history."

Ecuador went out in the first round on their only other appearance at a World Cup in 2002 after defeats by Italy and Mexico, although they did beat Croatia in their final match.

Suarez said Ecuador have no major injury concerns. Hurtado had a mild calf strain, striker Carlos Tenorio was still recovering from a similar injury picked up before the World Cup while Agustin Delgado was training on his own at times.

However, all three would be ready to play on Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP

WORLD CUP LOVE: Two Brazil supporters kiss during their team's World Cup Group F match against Croatia in Berlin on Tuesday.