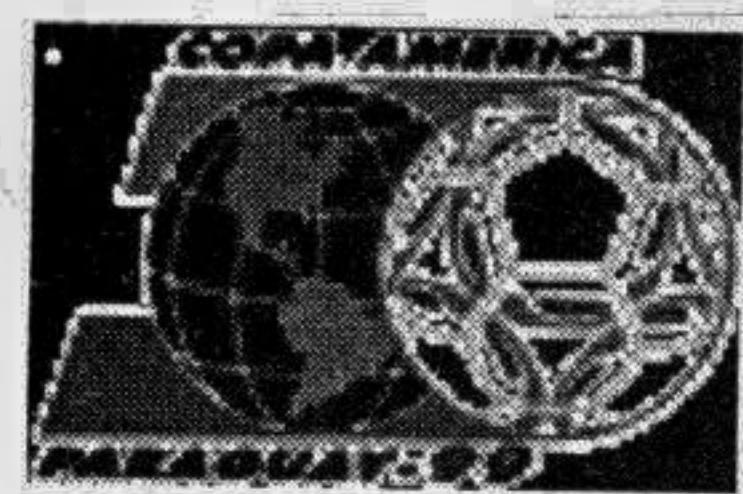


Blanco turns tragedy king

## Brazil's three in three



ASUNCION, July 7 (Reuters/AP) : Cuauhtemoc Blanco scored twice to send Mexico into the quarterfinals of the Copa America on Tuesday, then got himself suspended by being sent off.

His goals also sent Chile into the last eight before they started their match against Brazil, which they lost 1-0 to a Ronaldo penalty.

## BRAZIL-CHILE

The game was suspended when a dense fog descended on the February 3 stadium in Ciudad del Este.

The South American Football Confederation decided the score would stand after fog brought an end to play in the 85th minute.

Match observer Alvaro Castro told journalists a 1-0 win had been awarded to Brazil in the group B match, meaning the defending champions finished top of the group with nine points, followed by Mexico on six and Chile on three.

A dense fog suddenly descended on the pitch with around ten minutes left, causing visibility to drop from clear to nearly zero in the space of five minutes. The referee waited around five minutes before suspending play.

The decision suited everyone as both teams had already qualified for the quarter-finals and the unlikely event of Chile turning the game around would only have altered the order of finishing in the group. This would not have been matched by the inconvenience of turning out on Wednesday in a competition which has a tight schedule.

Ironically, the problem would not have happened if the match, which began ten minutes late, had started on time.

Before the fog descended, Brazil's Ronaldo had converted a 30th-minute penalty to give his team the lead following a foul by Miguel Ramirez on Ze Roberto.

Ronaldo calmly jogged up and struck the penalty shot — a low, driving ball that sailed under the sprawled legs of Chilean goalkeeper Marcelo Ramirez.

The 22-year-old superstar was inexhaustible in Brazil's final first-round match, constantly attacking the goal only to be denied by 'bad aim' or Ramirez.

In the first half, Ronaldo dashed between two players and danced around a third before his shot landed in the goal's side netting. Minutes later, Ronaldo charged forward again, this time on a one-on-one, only to be tripped up.

At the other end, Chile kept up the competition's amazing record of missed penalties. Pedro Gonzalez was the culprit, when his weak shot was saved by Dida in the 75th minute.

Brazil dominated the match and Ronaldo was denied from adding further goals by some superb goalkeeping from Chile goalkeeper Marcelo Ramirez.

Ivan Zamorano had several good looks early in the match.

Brazilian coach Vanderley Luxemburgo rested starters Cafu and Antonio Carlos, both burdened with yellow cards. Rivaldo and Emerson were also sidelined, serving one-game suspensions.

Chile were without Lazio forward Marcelo Salas, who received a red card in the team's 3-0 win over Venezuela.

## MEXICO-VENEZUELA

Blanco scored two goals and assisted on another as Mexico eliminated Venezuela from the Copa America tournament with a 3-1 victory.

Blanco scored in the 20th and 39th minutes Tuesday, and assisted on Daniel Osorno's goal in the 29th minute. But Blanco, who along with Luis Hernandez form Mexico's formidable striker duo, was red-carded late in the game for an elbowing infraction. He will not play in Mexico's quarterfinal match.

Venezuela was eliminated from the tournament after suffering its third consecutive loss in Group B play, the first a 7-0 romp by Brazil, followed by a 3-0 loss to Chile.

Playing against a substitute-laden Mexican team, Venezuela did manage to score their first goal in the tournament. Gabriel Urdaneta scored the team's goal

## GOALSCORERS

ASUNCION, July 7 (Reuters) : Copa America goalscorers after Tuesday's games:

3 — Amoroso, Ronaldo (Brazil), Roque Santa Cruz (Paraguay)

2 — Roberto Holsen (Peru), Ronaldo (Brazil), Martin Palermo (Argentina), Miguel Benitez (Paraguay), Marcelo Zalayeta (Uruguay), Ivan Kaviedes (Uruguay), Wagner Lopes (Japan), Cuauhtemoc Blanco (Mexico)

1 — Atsuhiko Mitra (Japan), Jorge Soto, Israel Zunica (Peru), Luis Hernandez, Isaac Terrazas, Daniel Osorno (Mexico), Ronaldo Assis, Rivaldo, Emerson Ferreira, Alex (Brazil), Victor Bonilla (Colombia), Diego Simeone (Argentina), Ivan Zamorano, Jose Luis Sierra (Chile), Jhonni Montano, Ivan Cordoba, Edwin Congo (Colombia), Erwin Sanchez (Bolivia), Gabriel Urdaneta (Venezuela).



Ronaldo (L) being embraced by teammates after putting Brazil in front against Chile. — AFP photo

of honor in the 72nd minute.

But the Venezuelans, who have never won a game in the tournament, head home yielding a tournament-high 13 goals.

Mexican coach Manuel Lapuente rested striker Luis Hernandez for the quarterfinals, but that didn't stop Mexico from picking apart a porous Venezuelan defense.

Osorno fed Blanco on his first goal, a lunging left-footed shot past goalkeeper Manuel Sanhouse. That combination worked again minutes later, with Blanco attacking up Venezuela's right side to beat a defender and find Osorno, who beat Sanhouse with a snapping header.

Blanco, who pestered Venezuelan defenders in various parts of the field all night, scored Mexico's third goal on a header.

## TODAY'S MATCHES

Colombia vs Ecuador 5 am BST

Argentina vs Uruguay 7 am BST

Star Sports television will be showing both the games live.

## STANDINGS

ASUNCION, July 7 (Reuters) : Copa America cumulative results and standings after Tuesday's games:

## GROUP A

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Paraguay	3	2	1	0	5	0	7
Peru	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Bolivia	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Japan	3	0	1	2	3	8	1

Peru and Paraguay qualify.

**Results:** June 29 — Paraguay 0 Bolivia 0; Peru 3 Japan 2; July 2 — Paraguay 4 Japan 0; Peru 1 Bolivia 0; July 5 — Bolivia 1 Japan 1; Paraguay 1 Peru 0.

## GROUP B

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Brazil	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
Mexico	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Chile	3	1	0	2	3	1	3
Venezuela	3	0	0	3	1	13	0

Brazil, Mexico and Chile qualify.

**Results:** June 30 — Mexico 1, Chile 0; Brazil 7 Venezuela 0; July 3 — Chile 3 Venezuela 0; Brazil 2 Mexico 1; July 6 — Venezuela 1 Mexico 3; Brazil 1 Chile 0.

## GROUP C

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Colombia	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Uruguay	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Argentina	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Ecudor	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

Colombia already qualified.

**Results:** July 1 — Colombia 1 Uruguay 0, Argentina 3 Ecuador 1; July 4 — Argentina 0 Colombia 3, Ecuador 1 Uruguay 2.

## Remaining fixtures:

July 7 — Ecuador v Colombia, Uruguay v Argentina.

**Note:** Top two in each group plus the two best third-placed teams qualify for the quarterfinals.

## Palermo puts up a brave face

ASUNCION, Paraguay, July 7 (AP/Reuters) : If Argentina's Martin Palermo wanted to make an impression in international soccer, he succeeded.

Palermo has been in the world's spotlight all right; his picture has been splashed across sports pages around the world and his play is attracting the attention of his country's president, Carlos Menem.

But for all the wrong reasons.

Soccer aficionados were still digging through the record books Tuesday, after Palermo reinvented the hatrick in his team's 3-0 loss to Colombia on Sunday in a first-round Copa America match.

Palermo might have found himself a unique place in history as the only national team player ever to stuff three penalty kicks in an international match.

If that wasn't enough, the botch even had financial repercussions: stock in Palermo's club, Boca Juniors, slumped nearly 5 per cent the day after his feat. Palermo is considered the president, Carlos Menem.

Palermo, who claimed his first international goals in the 3-1 win over Ecuador when he scored twice, acknowledged he had been instantly transformed from hero to something approaching a laughing stock.

After clobbering Argentina 3-0 and edging Uruguay 1-0, Colombia will have another South American rival at its hands: Ecuador. Ecuador is still in search of its first points in the tournament.

As match records rarely include missed penalties, it has been impossible to prove whether Palermo has broken the club's biggest asset.

The jokes have been relentless: one headline in a Colombian daily newspaper read: "Colombia 3, Palermo 0."

But friend Diego Maradona soothed Palermo. So did Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa. President Carlos Menem told reporters: "Instead of knocking him we should offer support to him and the entire team."

Despite his disastrous fumble, Palermo will remain in Argentina's starting lineup against Uruguay when the teams meet Wednesday as the first phase of the three-week tournament winds down.

"I feel very confident and I like this type of challenge,"

Palermo said Tuesday, describing the entire episode as "unpleasant" but not a "disgrace."

Palermo appeared to have overcome his ordeal as he faced the massed ranks of the Argentine media with the same strength of character he showed on Sunday when he insisted on taking his team's third penalty despite missing the previous two.

"I still have the confidence to take penalties. But the team is more important than the individual and if it is better for the team someone else can take them," he said.

Velez Sarsfield's Claudio Hueso will start in place of Javier Zanetti, out after being red-carded in the last game. Bielsa also said he is considering some tactical adjustments.

With Palermo's debacle hanging over the Argentines, Uruguayan forward Marcelo Zalayeta said the pressure will be on them, not his upstart Uruguay.

Meanwhile, Colombia, is exuding confidence, complete with more threats from coach Javier Alvarez.

Alvarez again issued what is fast becoming his customary pre-game taunt: "Colombia will score on any team that isn't prepared for us."

After clobbering Argentina 3-0 and edging Uruguay 1-0, Colombia will have another South American rival at its hands: Ecuador. Ecuador is still in search of its first points in the tournament.

Thursday night's action has consequences on quarterfinals competition as Colombia leads Group C with six points. Argentina and Uruguay have three each.

As it stands now, Colombia, Argentina, and Uruguay will be the most likely from Group C to advance to the next round.

A Colombia victory would eliminate Ecuador, leaving Argentina and Uruguay to battle it out for second-and-third-place.

Should Ecuador defeat Colombia, Ecuador would win its first three points in the tournament to open a battle for third place and clear the way for the winner of Argentina and Uruguay to win the group.

Argentina and Uruguay would advance if they play to a tie, regardless of the Colombia-Ecuador outcome.



THE PICTURE SAYS IT ALL: Players stand puzzled as dense fog engulfs the ground during the Brazil-Chile match on July 6. — AFP photo

## Balic not bothered

MADRID, July 7 (Reuters/Internet) : Real Madrid forward Elvir Balic is confident he can live with the pressure of being the most expensive player in the history of the club which has won the European Cup seven times.

The 24-year-old Bosnian international, signed for a club record \$15 million from Turkish club Fenerbahce, was presented as a Real Madrid player on Wednesday after signing a six-year contract.

And Balic, who scored 18 league goals for Fenerbahce last season following a \$12.8 million move from Bursaspor, is sure he can triumph at Real despite the record price tag.

"The truth is I'm not going to be under any pressure," he told a news conference at the Bernabeu stadium.

"The Spanish league will be a lot more difficult than in Turkey but I'll have great players around me. That will make life a lot easier."

You could also say that I've been here before. I was supposedly under a lot of pressure after my move to Fenerbahce but I ended up impressing everyone, including the press."

Real president Lorenzo Sanz, who travelled to Geneva on Monday to negotiate the deal, admitted Balic's signing was a risk.

"You can't be sure about any player before he arrives but the coach was keen to sign him. It's definitely a risk but I'm sure that in the end this won't seem like an expensive signing," Sanz said.

Balic is the sixth addition to the Real squad for next season, following the signings of Cameroon midfielder Geremi Njipap, ex-Liverpool midfielder Steve McManaman, Colombian international Edwin Congo and Spaniard Michel Salgado and Ivan Helguera.

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Salgado, a 2,000 million peseta (\$12.30 million) acquisition from Celta Vigo, was previously the record buy but, as an established Spanish international, few eyebrows were raised at the size of the fee.