

Co-hosts oust holders



AFP, Ulsan

Holdings Mexico were dumped out of the Confederations Cup here Friday by a 90th minute header from South Korea's Yoo Sang Chul.

The Koreans outpaced the central Americans, winning 2-1 as their hard running at the creaking Mexican defence marshalled by Claudio Suarez on a world record-breaking 158th international appearance paid off.

They failed to deliver a knock-out blow in the first half, guilty of trying to be too spectacular with their finishing.

But their dominance paid off 11 minutes after the break when Hwang Sun Hong powered home a cross by the ever menacing Choi Sung Yong into the bottom left of Mexican keeper Sanchez's net.

A crafty free kick on the left-hand edge of the box by substitute Victor Ruiz 10 minutes from time gave the Mexicans a glimmer of hope but it only sparked more swathes of attacks from the Koreans.

Yoo powered home just as the home crowd thought the team would be denied victory. A capacity crowd gave the team a heroes' reception as they made a lap of honour at the end of the game.

The result gives Mexico no hope of holding on to the trophy which Suarez lifted in front of his home supporters in 1999.

Korea's Dutch coach Guus Hiddink had said that their 5-0 defeat against France on the opening day of the competition had exposed their lack of competitive toughness and guile.



PHOTO: AFP

Ecstatic teammates chase South Korea's hero of the night Yoo Sang-Chul (L) after his match-clincher against Mexico on June 1 at Ulsan.

But the Koreans went at the Mexicans from the off with a string of crosses from both flanks prompting nervous reactions from the visitors.

Park Ji Sung could have given them the lead as early as the sixth minute when he let loose a right-foot volley on the corner of the box which flew just over.

A glaring miss by Kim Do Hoon from a cross by Hwang Sun Hong in the 20th minute left Hiddink staring into the sky. Hwang tried to back heel an inch-perfect cross into the net but only succeeded in directing it towards the corner flag.

Yoo Sang Chul also went close just before the break as he rose to meet a cross by Choi and collided with Jared Borgetti. Both required extensive treatment and Borgetti was substituted soon after, his head

heavily bandaged.

Mexico rarely threatened in the first half and failed to raise the tempo after the interval, with the Koreans taking strength from the crowd's backing.

Earlier, Suarez had been presented with a special trophy by FIFA vice president Jack Warner to mark his record-breaking achievement but he left the field grim-faced.

Australia's shock 1-0 victory over World Champions France in the other Group A match earlier in the day meant that victory was vital for both teams in this game.

The Mexicans take on France in the final Group A match here Sunday while South Korea play the Australians in Suwon on Sunday.

Group A standings

Group A standings in the Confederations Cup after Friday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Australia	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
France	2	1	0	1	5	1	3
South Korea	2	1	0	1	2	6	3
Mexico	2	0	0	2	1	4	0

PREVIEW

Rattled Holland, Portugal



AFP, Paris

Ireland can start to dream of a trip to the World Cup in Japan and South Korea next year if they manage to extinguish the threat of a star-studded Portugal in the 2002 World Cup Europe zone qualifier on Saturday at Lansdowne Road.

Though Portugal have a game in hand on the Irish, who lead Group 2 by three points over Portugal and the Netherlands, Ireland's 1-1 draw in Lisbon and 2-2 draw on Dutch soil has given Mick McCarthy's rugged side an unexpected sheen.

Ireland's points advantage could see them sit back and hit Portugal where it often hurts most, on the counter-attack, but Portugal have plenty to offer in the way of response.

Slick stars Luis Figo of Real Madrid, the world's most expensive footballer, and Fiorentina pair Nuno Gomes and Rui Costa, should provide a stark contrast to Ireland's hard man Roy Keane, and Leeds pair Ian Harte and Robbie Keane.

But Leeds defender and free kick specialist Harte has been up close to Figo twice this season, in the Champions League and in Ireland's October draw in Lisbon.

"He can get you in all kinds of trouble, but I don't think he likes the more physical side of the game," Harte said on Thursday, hinting at the kind of tactics Ireland may employ against the Euro 2000 semi-finalists.

Former Inter Milan striker Robbie Keane is trying to shake off an ankle problem ahead of the qualifier. The 20-year-old trained for 40 minutes Wednesday and will be replaced by Bohemians striker Glen Crowe should he fail a late fitness test.

Portugal and the Netherlands were hit Thursday when Fernando Couto and Edgar Davids were suspended from playing in any matches by world governing body FIFA following positive tests for the banned steroid nandrolone.

Dutch captain Frank De Boer has also tested positive for nandrolone but FIFA have yet to make a decision on the Barcelona defender.

Group One favourites and runaway leaders Russia go head-to-head for the first time with struggling Yugoslavia, who have a game in hand but trail Russia by eight points.

Serie A strikers Predrag Mijatovic and Savo Milosevic of Fiorentina and Parma will be hoping to shoot Yugoslavia back into contention.

In Group Three third-placed Denmark need a win to overhaul leaders Czech Republic in their clash at Prague.

Everything is to play for in Group Four, with Slovakia, Turkey and Sweden neck-and-neck on 11 points.

Turkey have an easy home

encounter against Azerbaijan but Sweden host goal-difference group leaders Slovakia on Saturday after the two slugged out a 0-0 draw in Slovenia in October.

Italy have a seven-point lead in Group Eight and look unlikely to drop points when they travel to Georgia at the weekend.

Giovanni Trapattoni's side beat the former Russian republic 2-0 in October and a quick glance at his forward line-up should convince even the harshest of critics that Italy's famous defensive "catenaccio" will be well complimented by flair.

Alessandro Del Piero and Filippo Inzaghi of Juventus, Vincenzo Montella and Francesco Totti of AS Roma and Christian Vieri of Inter Milan make Trapattoni the envy of world football's national coaches.

Also in Group 8, Romania host neighbours Hungary in the battle for second spot Saturday and should boast Cosmin Contra in defence fresh from his 10 million dollar move from Spanish side Alaves to Italian giants AC Milan.

Fixtures for Saturday (June 2):

- Gp 1 Russia v Yugoslavia; Faroe Islands v Switzerland; Slovenia v Luxembourg
- Gp 2 Ireland v Portugal; Estonia v Netherlands
- Gp 3 Iceland v Malta; Northern Ireland v Bulgaria; Denmark v Czech Republic
- Gp 4 Sweden v Slovakia; Turkey v Azerbaijan; Macedonia v Moldova
- Gp 5 Armenia v Belarus; Wales v Poland; Ukraine v Norway
- Gp 6 Croatia v San Marino; Belgium v Latvia
- Gp 7 Spain v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Liechtenstein v Israel
- Gp 8 Romania v Hungary; Georgia v Italy
- Gp 9 Greece v Albania; Finland v Germany

Cuper keeps Barca guessing

AFP, Barcelona

Two-time Champions League finalists Valencia's coach Hector Cuper will have to pay a million dollar damages to Barcelona should he accept an offer to coach Italy's Inter Milan, it was reported here on Friday.

The Argentine, who has guided Valencia to two successive Champions League finals losing to Real Madrid last year and then on penalties to Bayern Munich last week, was widely reported to have decided on a move to Inter.

This news came as a shock to Barcelona, who are battling to qualify for next season's Champions League, as Cuper had signed an agreement to spend two years with them.

Cuper remained mute on the subject Friday but has declared he is certain to leave Valencia at the end of the season.

Riquelme now Barca's?

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina and Boca Juniors playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme will play with Spanish giants Barcelona next season, the Argentine press reported here Wednesday.

The 22-year-old Argentine player of the year, who has yet to officially agree to the deal, attended a meeting between representatives from the Catalan club and Boca Juniors president Mauricio Macri on Wednesday.

It is believed that Riquelme will agree to the transfer - which he had initially opposed in March when both clubs announced his transfer without him knowing.

According to press reports Barcelona will pay half of the total transfer fee (11 million dollars) to Boca and pay the remainder within a year, or when Riquelme has played in 40 Spanish First Division matches.

Boca also demanded a guarantee that the player would be allowed to remain with them until the two-leg final of the Cup Libertadores (June 20-27). The Argentine team are set to play the semi-final against Brazilian side Palmeiras.

Riquelme made his debut for Boca on November 10, 1996 after arriving from Argentinos Juniors, the former club of Diego Maradona.

Marseille's dramatic demotion!

AFP, Taegu

France's 1993 European Cup champions Marseille were sensationally relegated from the First Division Friday by the French Football League's Financial Directorate for lacking the necessary funds to continue among the elite.

Toulouse, who had already been relegated from the First Division having finished third from bottom, were relegated to the Third Division for similar reasons.

Claude Simonet, President of the French Football Federation, made the announcement here where he is attending the Confederations Cup.

"This decision was taken because of the difference between the outgoing expenses and those coming in to the club," Simonet said. "It leaves a lot to the imagination as to whether they could correct this disparity."

"However, they have leave to appeal within the next two weeks," he added.

Simonet said that the ramifications for French football could be enormous given Marseille's stature in the domestic game.

"From now until the potential appeals are heard it is up to the directors of the clubs involved to provide concrete assurances of their future financial security," he said.

"This is going to cause a hell of a fuss in French football because Marseille is a club that contributes so much to the domestic game."

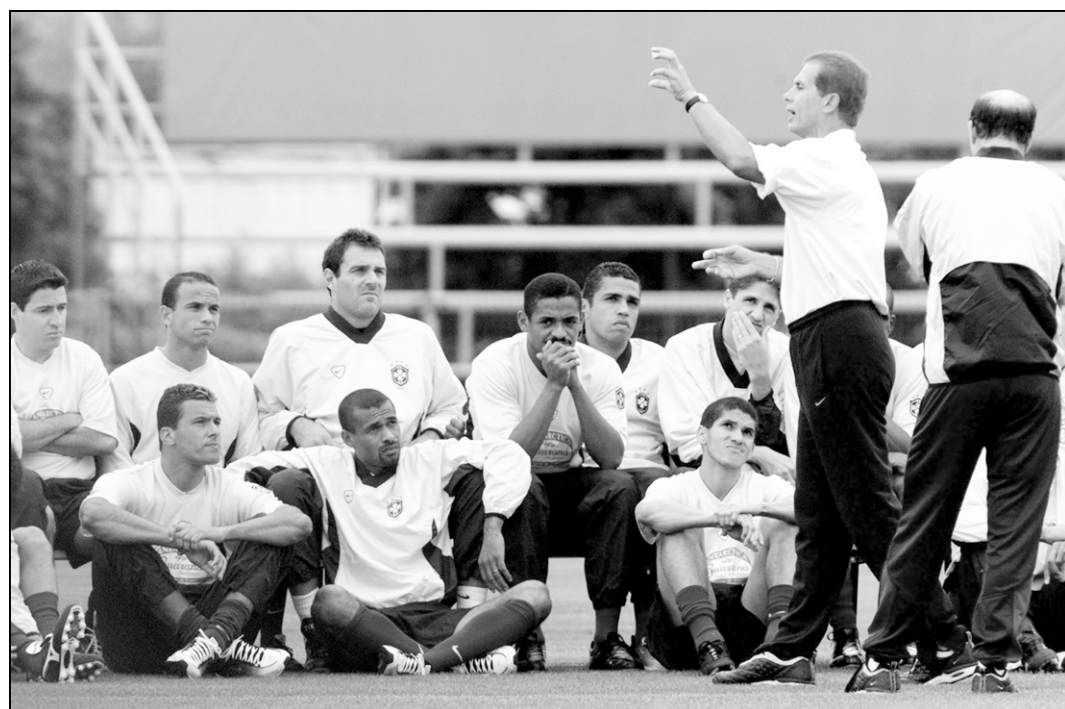


PHOTO: AFP

The Brazil squad listens attentively to coach Emerson Leao before a training session at Kashima on June 1.

Miguel-inspired Samba



AFP, Kashima

Like every football-mad Brazilian schoolboy, Carlos Miguel grew up dreaming of the day when he would pull on the famous gold jersey of his national team.

Having made it as a professional, the Sao Paulo winger was able to nurture the dream for longer than most. A respectable career, including a spell in Europe with Sporting Lisbon, allowed him to carry on hoping that one day the call might come.

As he moved into his late twenties however, Miguel was beginning to resign himself to the fact that it might never happen. But then it did. Not only that, it happened in such fairytale circumstances that even a Roy of the Rovers (comic book) editor would have rejected the script as ludicrously implausible.

Two days short of his 29th birthday, Miguel finally made his international debut against Cameroon on Thursday.

With Brazil struggling badly at half-time, coach Emerson Leao decided to gamble. He pulled off wing-back Vagner and threw Miguel into the fray with orders to run at the Cameroon defenders.

Miguel did just that and his lively presence down the left flank turned the match around. Brazil, who had been woeful in the opening period and were lucky not to be trailing by several goals, were suddenly recog-

nisable again with Miguel the catalyst for the transformation.

Eight minutes after the break Washington fired them ahead. Another four and Miguel had rounded off his dream debut with a spectacular volley to complete a comfortable 2-0 win over the African champions.

Miguel could have been forgiven

ling for 28 hours," Miguel said.

"On the morning of the match I woke up at five a.m. because of the jet lag. I could not get back to sleep so I just read a book."

Leao was generous in his praise for the winger's performance. "He is a player who knows how to make things happen and that is what we needed at that time."

Miguel now looks certain to celebrate his birthday on Saturday with another international appearance in Brazil's second match against Canada, when victory should be enough to ensure them a place in the semi-finals.

But having endured so many years in obscurity, he knows that he cannot take his time in the limelight for granted.

"Hopefully I will be in the starting team but it is entirely up to professor Leao -- whatever he decides I will respect."

The Brazilians will be expected to comfortably dispose of Canada, the lowest-ranked team in the tournament. The Canadians face a tough task in picking themselves up after their demoralising 3-0 defeat by Japan on Thursday night.

Canada had contained the joint hosts for nearly an hour but they faded badly at the end. After spending more than five hours travelling by Niigata to Kashima on Friday, they will have only 24 hours before facing a Brazilian side that has been revitalised by Thursday's Miguel-inspired performance.

"The first thing we will have to check is the fatigue factor," admitted Canada's German coach, Holger Osieck. "When you lose a game it is always twice as hard to recover as when you win."

"But we have a couple of fresh legs available to us and I will have to see how I will adjust the team."



CARLOS MIGUEL

had he chosen to reach for the oldest cliché in the footballer's lexicon -- "It was like a dream come true."

As it was, he said: "I just cannot believe it. I had no idea that anything like this would happen."

"A few days ago I did not know I would be coming to Japan. Even when I got here I never expected to play. When Leao told me to get ready to go on for the second half, it was a total shock. I did not have time to get nervous."

The winger was only in the Brazilian squad as a last minute replacement for Ze Roberto, the Bayer Leverkusen midfielder who pulled out injured.

"I only arrived in Japan on Wednesday and I had been travel-

Japan weary of 'home-again' Mboma



AFP, Niigata

Patrick Mboma, the African player of the year, may count on his "home advantage" to keep Cameroon in contention at the Confederations Cup when they meet hosts Japan here on Saturday.

The jet-lagged Parma striker's

gun fell silent when Cameroon lost to Brazil 2-0 in their opening Group-B match in Kashima, but he seems certain to put his best boot forward before his former J-League rivals.

"Since Mboma understands the significance of playing in Japan, he will surely boost the motivation of his teammates as well," Japan coach Philippe Troussier warned Friday on the heels of his side's 3-0 win over Canada.

Mboma's success story began in Japan in 1997 when he played for Gamba Osaka and became the J-League's best scorer with 25 goals from 28 matches.

He moved on to Italy's Cagliari after competing in the 1998 World

Cup finals in France and to Parma last year when Mboma, now 30, powered the "Indomitable Lions" to the African Nations Cup and the Olympics title.

"Mboma may take it upon himself to perform at high levels for the benefit of (Japanese) fans," Troussier said.

The African champions need to beat Japan -- in their first-ever full international encounter -- to keep their title hopes alive in the eight-nation tournament.

"Indeed, we lost the first match. But, if we will fight all out from now, we will triumph in the end," Mboma said after an hour-long tune-up at the floodlit Niigata Stadium. "We will

concentrate our efforts to reach the semi-finals."

Mboma said Japan had grown into an "international team with a lot of Japanese players competing in Europe" since he left Japan three years ago.

He remembered that up-and-coming midfielder Junichi Inamoto, 21, was only a junior player when they briefly played together for Osaka.

Cameroon captain Rigobert Song, a West Ham defender, admitted that his team felt "tired" after their defeat. Six of them only joined the team three days ago on leave from their European clubs. The team arrived here on a six-hour train ride from Kashima via Tokyo.

"But we have good spirit in the team. And, we have a good bench. If anybody is tired, we have good players to come in," said Song.

Troussier said both teams were under "tremendous pressure" ahead of Saturday's match as Japan were aware that a win would likely put them through to the semi-finals.

"I know Cameroon will come to tomorrow's match with a great vengeance and a great amount of motivation," said Troussier, known in Africa as "white witch doctor" for his vast coaching experience there before he became Japan coach after the country's winless World Cup finals debut in France.

But 46-year-old Troussier also said Japan's confidence had been restored with their first international win this year. They were thrashed 5-0 by world and European champions France in March and lost to Spain 1-0 in April.

Acknowledging Cameroon's physical superiority over Japan, he added: "They are strong in physical contact and do some dirty plays as well. On top of that, they have foot techniques matching those of Brazil."

But Japan can play their own kind of football that is "technical, smart and agile," he said. "They may ask fans for a shot in the arm when it comes to motivation."

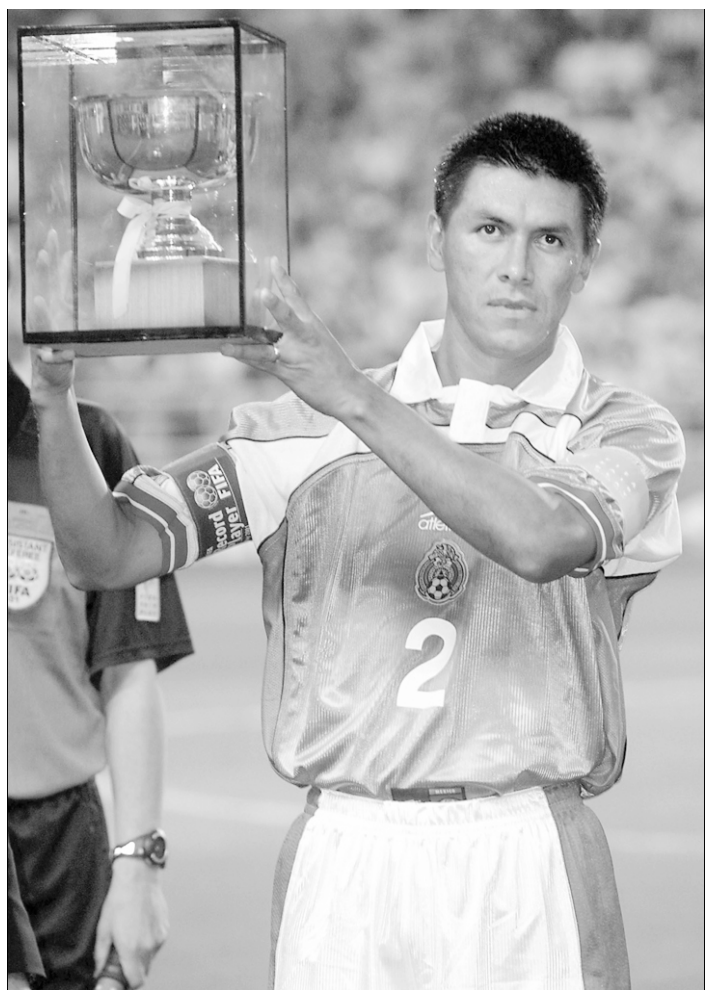


PHOTO: AFP

STANDING TALLER THAN THE REST: Mexico captain Claudio Suarez shows the trophy presented to him on behalf of FIFA for becoming the world's most capped footballer before the start of his record breaking 158th appearance against South Korea at Ulsan on June 1.

Suarez tops 'em all



REUTERS, Ulsan

Claudio Suarez became the most capped player in the world on Friday when he made his 158th appearance for Mexico against South Korea in the Confederations Cup.

Suarez, the 32-year-old Mexican skipper, moved ahead of Hossam Hassan of Egypt after equalling Hassan's tally of 157 caps in Mexico's 2-0 defeat to Australia on Wednesday.

Ten most capped

REUTERS, Ulsan

TOP TEN

- Claudio Suarez (Mexico) 158
- Hossam Hassan (Egypt) 157
- Lothar Matthaeus (Germany) 150
- Mohamed Al-Deayea (Saudi Arabia) 149
- Thomas Ravelli (Sweden) 143
- Majed Abdullah (Saudi Arabia) 140
- Mohammed Al-Khilaiwi (Saudi Arabia) 138
- Cobi Jones (United States) 138
- Peter Schmeichel (Denmark) 129
- Marcelo Balboa (United States) 128



PHOTO: AFP

KEY PLAYERS: (L) Cameroon's ace striker Patrick Mboma controlling the ball on his head and (R), Japan's star playmaker Shinji Ono making a move during their respective team-practice at Niigata on June 1.