

Brazil close in



AP, Curitiba

Brazil overcame a sluggish start to beat Chile 2-0 in a World Cup qualifier on Sunday and sharply improve its chances of reaching next year's Cup.

Edilson and Rivaldo scored in the second half to guarantee the win and boost Brazil into sole possession of fourth place in the South American group behind Argentina, Paraguay and Ecuador.

"This was a game we simply had to win," goalie Marcos said. "But we took advantage of our opportunities and deserved the victory."

Uruguay, which was tied with Brazil at 24 points going into Sunday's match, tied 1-1 with Colombia and fell into fifth place. The top four South American teams qualify for the Cup, while the fifth place Australia for the final spot.

Brazil coach Luis Felipe Scolari says he thinks Brazil will be able to avoid that prospect.

"Of course Uruguay's draw favours us. We have tightened things up in defence and that has stabilised us.

"It was an important victory," AS Roma midfielder Emerson said. "This gives us some tranquility."

Still, Brazil again failed to deliver its famed offensive punch against a weak Chilean squad that is in last place in the South American group, with 11 losses in 16 games and already eliminated from contention for a World Cup berth.

The Brazilians started fast against the cautious Chilean team, and a slick dribble by Vampeta was enough to bring shouts of "Ole" from the sellout crowd of 55,000 at Couto Pereira stadium.

But it was Chile that threatened first, when Juventus striker Marcelo Salas drove in on the right side but couldn't get a shot off.

Play got sloppy on the rain-slicked pitch, and the crowd grew impatient with Brazil's inability to move the ball past the dogged Chilean defense. With FC Barcelona star Rivaldo inoperative as playmaker, Brazil failed to mount a coordinated attack and the game bogged down.

At 36 minutes, Rivaldo came close on a free kick from 20 meters (yards) out, but goalie Carlos Toro dove to knock it away from the upper left corner. Marcelinho Paraíba wasted two chances, and the crowd boomed as the half ended.

But Brazil was a different team in the second half, when Betis striker Denilson replaced Marcelinho Paraíba.

In the 52nd minute, goalie Marcos sent a long kick upfield and found Edilson, who had joined the squad as a last-minute replacement for the injured Ronaldo. Edilson caught it on the run, cut inside defender Raul Munoz and shot low past Toro to make it 1-0.

The goal gave Brazil a lift, and in the 63rd minute Roma defender Cafu drove to the right baseline and fired a cross into the penalty area. Rivaldo hit a spectacular left-footed half-volley at full stretch to deflect the ball into the near corner for a 2-0 lead.

Superstar Rivaldo deserved just a few praising words after his good



PHOTO: AFP

TOO HOT TO HANDLE: Chilean defender David Pizarro (R) having a tough time in containing Brazilian Superstar Rivaldo (L) during their World Cup qualification game in Curitiba on October 7.

performance against Chile.

Rivaldo, who has achieved the title of the World Player of the Year, has recently been permanently criticised for giving his best for his Spanish club Barcelona and turning back on Brazil.

"It's the first time I've left the field to applaud playing for the national team.

"I feel very happy. I'm very proud to serve the national team", commented Rivaldo after the match.

In the 71st minute, Denilson made the play of the game, twisting his defender around and dribbling the length of the field before passing to Rivaldo, whose shot was smothered.

Meanwhile, Brazil's bitter rivals Argentina, who have dominated the marathon campaign to qualify with four matches to spare could only manage a 2-2 draw at Paraguay.

Eccentric home keeper Jose Luis Chilavert opening the scoring from the spot.

Paris Saint Germain defender Mauricio Pochettino levelled, Gustavo Morinigo put the hosts ahead once more before Gabriel Batistuta smashed home the 55th goal of his stellar international career with 17 minutes remaining.

But the point was more than enough for Marcelo Bielsa's men, who have cruised through the group with 12 wins and three draws in 16 matches - the only blot coming more than a year ago in Brazil.

The overall picture is now becoming clear with Argentina qualified and three more places up for grabs with Paraguay and Ecuador on the brink of claiming two of them and Brazil, Uruguay and Colombia scrapping for the final one.

Paraguay are three points clear of Brazil and have yet to face Venezuela away and Colombia at home. The Colombians are four points adrift of fifth-placed Uruguay and even a playoff berth looks beyond them.

Ecuador, who have been a revelation, thrashed Bolivia 5-1 away at the weekend and can qualify if they win their home encounter with Uruguay on November 8.

Brazil travel to Bolivia for a potentially tricky high-altitude date on the same day and a sixth defeat of the qualifying tournament would leave their hopes hanging by a thread - particularly if Uruguay were then to beat Argentina on the final day of qualifying, November 14.

Brazil ought to claim three easy points that day with a home match against hapless Venezuela.

The weekend may have ended on a happy note for Scolari and company but tragedy struck on Saturday when one person was killed and ten injured at the Ecuadorian capital Quito amid wild celebrations which followed Ecuador's win in Bolivia.

Nigeria tie Japan

AFP, London

World Cup 2002 co-hosts Japan drew 2-2 with Nigeria in football friendly at English Premiership side Southampton's St Mary's Stadium on Sunday.

The Africans twice came from behind and although they deserved a draw they were undoubtedly helped on their way by Yokohama defender Naoki Matsuda.

Matsuda put the ball into his own net and made another crucial error nine minutes from time to hand Juleus Aghahowa the chance to score Nigeria's second equaliser.

Japan, who will stage next year's World Cup with South Korea, scored through Atsushi Yamagisawa (26) and Takayuki Suzuki (57).

In torrential rain it was Japan's Yoshi Kawaguchi, due to join Southampton's arch south-coast rivals and First Division outfit Portsmouth later this month, who was the busier of the two goalkeepers.

The Yokohama shot-stopper was particularly impressive in the first half, saving splendidly from Karibe Ojigwe and then showing superb agility to dive full-length and tip away a 20-yard half volley from Ipswich's Fintidi George.

His good work was rewarded when Japan took the lead as Yamagisawa headed in a free-kick at the near post.

But barely a minute later Nigeria were level after Matsuda deflected Eric Ejiogor's centre past Kawaguchi.

Suzuki's volley after a Toshihiro Hattori free-kick restored Japan's lead 12 minutes into the second half.

Substitute Aghahowa atoned for two appalling misses by striker Victor Agali when he pounced on a Matsuda error and rifled home before celebrating with a series of backflips and somersaults.

Nigeria, also qualified for the 2002 World Cup, were down to 10 men for the final five minutes after Ejiogor was sent-off following his second yellow card offence.

Velappan delighted

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asian football supremo Peter Velappan Monday hailed China's qualification for next year's World Cup finals, saying it would boost ticket sales and spur interest in the game in Asia.

"We are delighted with China's qualification. It is not only important for China," he told AFP.

"It is a windfall for Korea and Japan (co-hosts for the finals). Hundreds of thousands of Chinese are now planning to watch their team play, given the close geographical proximity."

Velappan, secretary-general of the Asian Football Confederation and FIFA's coordinating director for the World Cup, said he would ask the authorities of the two hosts to lift visa restrictions for the Chinese.

China, the world's most populous country, qualified for the finals with a 1-0 Group B win over Oman on Sunday, securing the nation's first-ever trip to soccer's most prestigious sporting event.

Moore carries USA



AFP, Foxboro, Massachusetts

Joe-Max Moore converted a penalty kick in the 81st minute and the United States qualified for the 2002 World Cup finals by beating Jamaica 2-1 here on Sunday.

The victory lifted the United States to 16 points, second in the six-team North American qualifying tournament, two points ahead of both Honduras and Mexico with one match remaining for each team in the round-robin affair.

But the US team has an unbeatable position in the fight for three berths in next year's 32-team field in South Korea and Japan because Honduras plays at Mexico on November 11, so only one of them could move ahead of the US team.

Costa Rica has already clinched a berth and will finish against Jamaica, a 1998 World Cup qualifier that was eliminated with the loss here.

The Americans will finish at Trinidad and Tobago, which upset Honduras 1-0 to clinch the US spot in Asia next year.

The Mexico-Honduras match will decide the third qualifier from North America. Mexico would advance on superior goal difference if the teams draw.

The Americans were awarded the deciding penalty kick after second-half substitute Tryone Marshall took down Landon Donovan in the penalty box before a crowd of 40,483 at Foxboro Stadium.

Moore, who opened the scoring in the fourth minute, placed his shot to the lower right of goalkeeper Aaron Lawrence to break the 1-1 deadlock.

Moore's first goal was set up when Jamaican midfielder Theodore Whitmore fouled midfielder Chris Armas several yards outside the left side of the penalty area.

Claudio Reyna, who had missed three consecutive matches due to injury and suspension, then sent a free kick into the box that Moore headed into the right corner past Lawrence.

The Jamaicans equalized in the 14th minute as James Lawrence chested down a throw-in and had all the time in the world to shoot from 10 yards, beating goalkeeper Brad Friedel.

Aaron Lawrence denied the Americans a second goal with a spectacular goal three minutes into the second half. John O'Brien motored past two defenders toward the left corner and sent a cross to Moore, whose four-yard volley was knocked away by Lawrence.



PHOTO: AFP

USA's Joe-Max Moore (C), being congratulated by team mate Earnie O'Brian (R) after scoring from the spot against Jamaica at the Foxboro Stadium in Massachusetts on October 7.

STANDINGS

Table and remaining fixtures in the North and Central America and Caribbean qualifying group for the 2002 World Cup:

* Top three teams qualify for the finals. Costa Rica and United States already through. (Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Costa Rica	9	6	2	1	16	7	20
United States	9	5	1	3	11	8	16
Mexico	9	4	2	3	13	9	14
Honduras	9	4	2	3	17	14	14
Jamaica	9	2	2	5	7	13	8
Trinidad and Tobago	9	1	1	7	5	18	4

To play
11-11-01: Mexico v Honduras, Jamaica v Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago v USA

Sweden without blemish



AP, Stockholm

Henrik Larsson scored his eighth goal in 10 qualifiers as Sweden completed its unbeaten campaign with a 3-0 victory Sunday over Azerbaijan in the same stadium where it enjoyed its biggest World Cup showing 43 years ago.

England, Russia, Italy, Croatia, Denmark and Portugal booked their places in the finals Saturday, joining Poland, Spain and Sweden as European qualifiers in next year's World Cup.

Champion France has automatic entry as do hosts South Korea and Japan.

In other games Sunday, Slovakia trounced Macedonia 5-0, and Bosnia-Herzegovina beat Liechtenstein 5-0 in meaningless matches.

"There are a few things that we can improve, and hopefully we can play better in the World Cup [next year]," said Larsson, easily Sweden's most valuable player during the qualifying phase.

Sweden, which will make its 10th

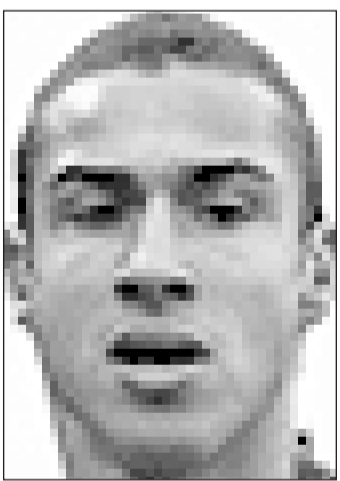
World Cup appearance next year, finished with a 8-2-0 record atop the Group 4 standings. With 20 goals, the Swedes were one of the top

Anders Svensson, who transferred to Southampton in the Premier League during the summer break, fired a right-foot shot past Jahangir Hasanzade from just outside the penalty area to give Sweden a 1-0 lead in the 53rd minute.

Larsson, Europe's top goalscorer with Glasgow Celtic last season, made it 2-0 on a penalty eight minutes later. It was the eighth goal in 10 qualifiers for Larsson, who was mostly used as a substitute when Sweden finished third in the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

Many of the fans yelled "Zlatan, Zlatan" in the second half, wanting to see the popular Zlatan Ibrahimovic making his debut after a sensational stint with Malmö FF in Sweden before going to the Netherlands and Ajax before the new season.

The fans were rewarded in the 66th minute, when Ibrahimovic replaced fellow striker Magnus Alback up front. Only four minutes later, Ibrahimovic had his first goal for Sweden, connecting a rebound from close range. In the Ajax uniform, Ibrahimovic has scored four goals in his last six games.



HENRIK LARSSON

offensive teams in Europe. Playing in chilly weather before a crowd of 32,876 at Rasunda Stadium, site of the 1958 World Cup final won 5-2 by Brazil against the Swedish hosts, Sweden scored all its goals in the second half.

Kaiser spells the harsh truth

AFP, Cologne

Bayern Munich president and former World Cup-winning German coach Franz Beckenbauer said Sunday he saw a dire shortage of real talent as his countrymen prepared for next month's playoff against Ukraine.

The Germans' failure to see off Finland at home on Saturday in their World Cup 2002 Group nine qualifier handed automatic qualification to England.

According to Beckenbauer Germany "doesn't have other players" capable of performing at the top level.

"I was in shock" Beckenbauer told Cologne newspaper Express.

"I left the stadium a few minutes before the end so I didn't have to comment - which I regretted afterwards.

"In the first half it was as if we were playing a friendly. But we shouldn't slam the team - we don't have any other players," said Beckenbauer, who skipped the 1974 world champions and coached the 1990 vintage.

"We are a long way from being one of the top football nations. They have relegated us way down the list.

"Currently Germany can participate - but she can no longer win," was the curt assessment of "Der Kaiser", who alongside his Bayern duties is a vice-president of the German Football Federation.

He added that it would be "an error" if coach Rudi Voller resigns.

"Rudi has laid down a straight line and worked well," he said. Of the two playoff matches against Ukraine, which Germany would have to dominate to qualify, Beckenbauer said: "We are not favourites. It's 50-50. Ukraine is at exactly the same level as Germany."

Primera Liga

Betis regain lead



AFP, Madrid

Real Betis continued their outstanding run of form by beating Alaves 1-0 on Sunday, and regained the Spanish league leadership after a hiatus of a week.

"People are now going to have to start giving us some respect," said coach Juande Ramos after the newly-promoted side's fifth win in six games.

"Getting goals against a side like Alaves is always difficult and this game demonstrated that we can keep our cool against tough opponents," added Ramos.

However, the Seville club kept their 30,000 fans in the Manuel Ruiz de Lopera stadium waiting for the decisive goal until ten minutes before the end.

Portuguese international Joao Tomas scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot, after Alaves defender Fabricio Colocchini had brought down Joaquin Sanchez in the box.

The game was more notable for nine names going into the referee's book than the quality of football played but Alaves went close to drawing first blood after 70 minutes when a thundering free kick from the Basque club's captain Pablo Gomez required an excellent save from Betis goalkeeper Toni Prats to keep the ball out of the net.

"Betis are always an attacking team at home and we were aiming to surprise them on the counter-attack," commented Alaves coach Mane Esnal, alluding to the spilling tactics he had designed for his team.

Betis are now unbeaten since the first game of the season and are on top of the Spanish First Division with 16 points from seven games.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Betis' Capi (R), falls under pressure from Alaves' Ion Bodgan Mara at Seville on October 7.

They are two points clear of Deportivo La Coruna, who are second by virtue of beating Barcelona 2-1 on Saturday.

At the other end of the table Real Sociedad remain in relegation trouble - and the job of their coach John Toshack remains on the line - after they threw away a two goal lead to finish 3-3 against Sevilla.

Two goals in three minutes from Igor Gabilondo and Georgian striker George Demetradze put the San Sebastian side 2-0 up at the break and well on their way to their first win of the season.

However, Moises Gracia pulled one back for Sevilla after 54 minutes and then Nico Olivera equalised from the penalty spot after Real

Primera Liga's top six

Spanish First Division table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Real Betis	7	5	1	1	11	4	16
Deportivo	4	2	1	1	4	8	14
Barcelona	7	4	2	1	11	4	14
Celta Vigo	7	3	4	0	13	5	13
Valencia	7	3	4	0	7	4	13
Villarreal	7	4	1	2	8	5	13