

In search of the winning formula



INTERNET, Teresopolis

The need to win against Venezuela at all costs in Wednesday's crucial World Cup 2002 qualifier...

This much was clear in Sunday's training session when coach Luis Felipe Scolari played Roque Junior...

In the only activity on Sunday, as the afternoon was a rest period for all, 5 changes were made to the first team starting line up...

In defence were keeper Marcos, Lucio, Edmilson and Roque Junior in place of Juan. There were two changes on the wings...

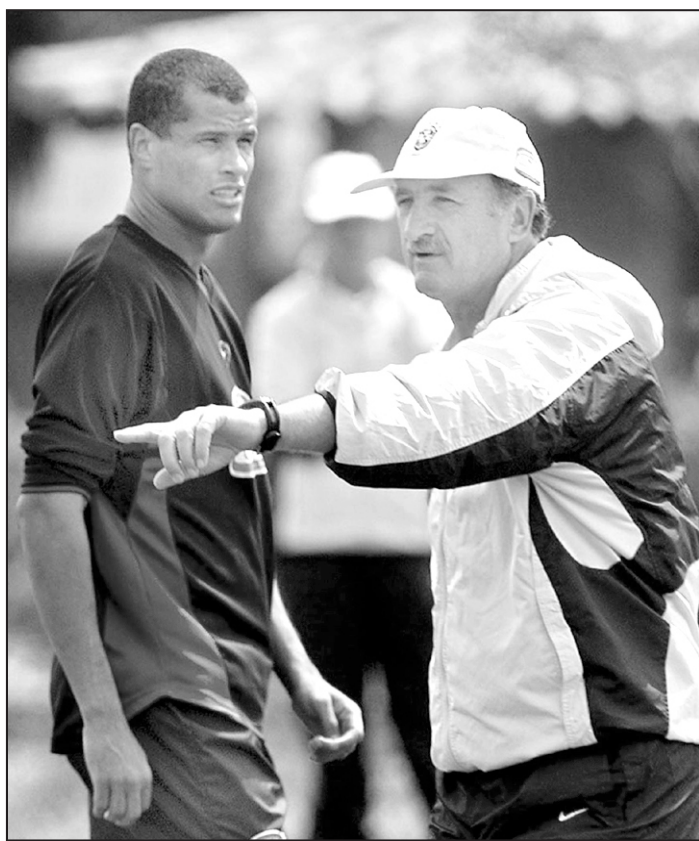


PHOTO: AFP

Brazil coach Luis Felipe Scolari (R), makes a point while superstar Rivaldo listens during a training session at Granja Comari on November 11.

attacks Luizao and Edilson.

The first team showed their class in the first session, particularly the talented Juninho Paulista and Rivaldo.

The reserve team defense soon got to grips with this strategy of using the wings and started to clamp down on the marking of Belletti and Roberto Carlos.

In the second session 'Big Phil' made some changes, replacing Roberto Carlos and Luizao who are both only just recovered from injuries and giving chances to Serginho, Vampeta and Ronaldinho Gaucho...

The change made the first team more offensive and two goals were scored by Rivaldo. He first converted a penalty after Juninho had been brought down in the area.

Primera Liga

Contenders crash



AFP, Madrid

Spanish league leaders Deportivo La Coruna and defending champions Real Madrid must have been licking their lips at the prospect of easy away victories at Tenerife and Real Zaragoza respectively...

Real Madrid went down 2-1 at Zaragoza thanks to an injury time winner from the host's Paraguayan midfielder Toro Acuna...

However, Deportivo stay top of the Spanish First Division with 23 points from 12 games, due to the inability of Valencia to do better than draw 0-0 at Osasuna.

The Champions League finalists for the last two seasons managed to preserve their unbeaten record, but they drop to third on goal difference after Barcelona thrashed Valladolid 4-0.

Real Zaragoza started Sunday with the worst home record in the Spanish First Division but it had improved considerably by the end of the day after Acuna produced a brilliant piece of individual play down the right wing...

Zaragoza had earlier gone into the lead after 22 minutes through Yordi Gonzalez but 11 minutes after the break Spanish international striker Raul Gonzalez got Real Madrid's equaliser from close range.

The goal was Raul's 11th in 15 league games against Zaragoza, against whom he made his First Division debut in 1994.

Real Madrid coach Vicente Del Bosque did not look for excuses after the loss, which pushed his team back into the lower half of the table.

'We gave away control and possession too often and if you do that you can't expect your goalkeeper to save you every time,' said Del Bosque.

The victory will give Real Zaragoza coach Txetxu Rojo a little breathing space after recent weeks when the fans' discontent has extended to calling for his head not only before, during and after games but also at the training ground.

'I think we demonstrated to everybody that we can win against anybody,' said a smug Rojo. Tenerife belied their poor scoring record to beat Deportivo 3-1 and the victory helped the newly-promoted side climb one place, although they still remain rooted in the relegation zone in 18th place.

Bruno Marion showed that he has not been distracted by his recent passport problems, which saw him detained in his native Argentina for several weeks, by getting the first two goals for Tenerife.

If Real Madrid and Deportivo's

losses were painful, Celta Vigo's 3-2 home defeat by Athletic Bilbao probably hurt even more.

The Galician club were 2-0 ahead before David Karanka, Joseba Etxebarria and Pablo Orbaiz all found the net in the final six minutes.

After going ten games unbeaten, Celta have now lost their last two games.

Barcelona may have beaten Valladolid 4-0 but the scoreline does a disservice to the visitors' fighting spirit.

Two goals from the Argentine teenager Javier Saviola - to bring his tally to six for the season - along with a first half strike from Carles Puyol and a Patrick Kluivert penalty helped give the Catalan club the victory.

However, Barcelona goalkeeper Roberto Bonano was required to pull off a string of outstanding saves to ensure maximum points and Tote Lopez missed a penalty a minute from time.

At the other end of the table, Real Mallorca got a crucial 2-1 away win at fellow strugglers Real Sociedad.

Mallorca's Alejandro Campano opened the scoring after 55 minutes with a free kick from just outside the area.

Oscar De Paula equalised after 77 minutes but five minutes from time Albert Riera, starting his first ever game in the top flight of Spanish soccer, latched onto Samuel Eto'o across for the decisive goal which lifted Mallorca out of the relegation zone.

Rayo Vallecano started the day three points adrift at the bottom of the Spanish First Division, and still prop up the table, but reduced the gap on the rest of the relegation candidates with an emphatic 3-0 win over Malaga.

LIST OF COUNTRIES ALREADY QUALIFIED FOR 2002 WC FINALS

Countries already qualified for 2002 World Cup finals following weekend matches, with Mexico on Sunday having become the 25th team to book a place:

HOLDERS France

AFRICA (Qualifiers finished) Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia

ASIA Japan, South Korea (both qualify as hosts) Saudi Arabia (Group A winners) China (Group B winners) Group runners-up Iran meeting Republic of Ireland for place in finals in two-legged playoff.

CONCACAF (finished) Mexico, Costa Rica, United States (qualified)

SOUTH AMERICA (one match to play) Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay (qualified) One more automatic qualifier from Brazil, Uruguay and Colombia - fifth placed team play OCEANIA winners Australia for place in finals in two-legged tie.

OCEANIA (finished) Australia - have to play fifth-placed South American team for place in finals in two-legged tie.

EUROPE (finished, excluding playoffs)

Group One Russia qualify. Slovenia play-off against Romania

Group Two Portugal qualify. Ireland play-off against Asian team

Group Three Denmark qualify. Czech republic play-off against Belgium

Group Four Sweden qualify. Turkey play-off against either Israel or Austria

Group Five Poland qualify. Ukraine play-off against Germany

Group Six Croatia qualify. Belgium play-off against Czech Republic

Group Seven Spain qualify. Austria or Israel play-off against Turkey

Group Eight Italy qualify. Romania play-off against Slovenia

Group Nine England qualify. Germany play-off against Ukraine

*Play-off return legs to be played November 14/15



PHOTO: AFP

Goal scorer Francisco Palencia (L), is joined by ecstatic Mexico team-mates during their World Cup 2002 qualifier against Honduras at Mexico City on November 11.

Mexico break Honduras' heart



AFP, Mexico City

Mexico on Sunday booked their ticket to the World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea next June with a 3-0 win over Honduras at the Aztec Stadium in their final qualifier.

Cuahtemoc Blanco bagged a fine brace with a 65th-minute strike and a second from the penalty spot in the 79th, with Juan Francisco Palencia's 72nd-minute effort sandwiched between.

Blanco's first strike, his eighth of the campaign, came after a deep cross from the left touchline was nodded into his path, his fierce shot leaving Noel Valladares in the Honduras goal no chance.

Seven minutes later Mexico confirmed their growing domination when Palencia's scuffed shot slithered under Valladares to make it 2-0.

The Hondurans were clearly devastated by the blow and a hint of malice had already crept into the game before Mexico's Johan Rodriguez and Honduras' Amado Guevara were both red-carded after an off-the-ball scuffle on 74 minutes.

Blanco then converted a penalty after he himself had been brought down in the box by Valladares as the two chased a ball rebounding from the post off a Palencia header.

The Mexico number ten might have completed a famous hat-trick had he not blasted a free kick high over the Honduras goal late in the match, but he remained the hero of the hour.

With the victory Mexico captured the third and final 2002 World Cup berth from the North and Central America and Caribbean region, from which Costa Rica and the United States had already advanced.

Costa Rica finished off their regional qualifying campaign Sunday with a 1-0 victory over previously eliminated Jamaica at Kingston.

William Sansing scored in the fourth minute, and Costa Rica made it stand up despite a spirited attack from a young and inexperienced Jamaican side. The Central Americans finished at the top of the table in the six-nation final qualifying group from North and Central America and the Caribbean with 23 points.

The Reggae Boyz ended their campaign on eight points, and just ahead of fellow Caribbean team Trinidad and Tobago.

Costa Rica got the all important goal early on as Jamaica pressed forward in numbers and were caught on the counterattack.

A swift ball out of the Costa Rican defence found the unmarked Sansing, who charged into the box and fired past the hapless Aaron Lawrence to make it 1-0.

Long the region's powerhouse, Mexico had entered their final qualifier level on 14 points with Honduras, who were trying to reach the World Cup finals for only the second time.

The hero of the qualifying campaign was manager Javier 'Vasco' Aguirre, who took over after Enrique Meza quit in June in the wake of the team's second straight qualifying defeat.

Mexico were lying fifth in the six-nation final qualifying tournament and appeared headed for elimination.

Under Aguirre's guidance, Mexico won three matches in a row, posted a draw in San Jose against Costa Rica - who had already qualified - and capped the campaign with their victory here Sunday.

STANDINGS

Final table and results in the North and Central America and Caribbean qualifying group for the 2002 World Cup:

(Top three teams qualified for the 2002 World Cup Finals in Japan and South Korea)

(Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Table with columns for team name, goals for, goals against, and points. Rows include Costa Rica, Mexico, United States, Honduras, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Dugarry to have right knee tested

AFP, Bordeaux

French international Christophe Dugarry will undergo tests here Tuesday to establish the damage to his right knee after a wild challenge by Australian defender Kevin Muscat in Sunday's friendly international, his club said.

French coach Roger Lemerre had said after the 1-1 draw in Melbourne that Dugarry had suffered ligament damage to his right knee and would be out of action for three months.

But the striker's club, Bordeaux, said in a statement: 'We will have to wait for the medical examination before we know exactly how long he will be unavailable.'

The match had been heavily criticised by European clubs for taking away their players in the middle of the club season for a friendly on the other side of the world, but Bordeaux said: 'The injury to Christophe Dugarry could have happened in any friendly match, whatever its nature and no matter where it took place.'

Lemerre said the Muscat tackle was 'an act of brutality'.

Ireland without Keane in leg two

AFP, Dublin

Republic of Ireland captain Roy Keane will miss Thursday's second leg of the World Cup play-off in Iran, it was announced Sunday.

The Manchester United midfielder returned to action at Lansdowne Road on Saturday after missing five club matches because of a knee injury and played a major role as Ireland beat Iran 2-0 in the first leg.

He is now set to have further treatment on his knee, sparking fears that the 30-year-old may require another operation, for what is believed to be damage of the patella.

Keane played the whole 90 minutes in Saturday's match after being given clearance by United boss Alex Ferguson.

Homage to Diego



AFP, Buenos Aires

The Argentine press showered Diego Maradona with praise here Sunday after the diminutive player had received a rapturous send off at his testimonial between Argentina and an all-star team.

'Diego confirms he owns the patent on charm,' read the headline in the daily La Nacion.

'His people, who lived through so much joy from the magic of his left boot, will be forever grateful, their love eternal,' La Nacion reported.

Sports daily Ole was equally impressed.

'This is a love that will never end,' it said, while La Cronica said: 'As he deserved, Diego enjoyed a wild party, a worthy tribute from those who adored him.'

Ole also reported a conversa-

tion during the match between the great man and former Colombia keeper Rene Higuita. As Maradona stepped up for his second penalty, the Colombian indicated which way to shoot - the 1986 World Cup winning captain declined to oblige.

They did, however, organise for Higuita to try and save the penalty with his much celebrated 'scorpion' kick, which first came to public attention when, in a friendly international against England, the goalkeeper stunned Wembley by saving a shot with the back of his heels.

Maradona scored twice from the penalty spot for Argentina in their 6-3 win in front of 50,000 fans at his first footballing home, Boca Juniors' Bombonera stadium.

Wild scenes ensued ahead of the match as Maradona appeared on the stadium's giant screen to greet fans.

'I thank all those here with all my heart, all this love and affection'

means so much to me. I hope I can give you something to remember me by,' said the former Boca Juniors, Barcelona and Napoli star before the kickoff.

The 41-year-old, who suffered numerous drug problems in his career and was thrown out of the 1994 World Cup for failing a dope test, delighted the fans near the end of Saturday's match when he took off the national shirt and replaced it with the blue and yellow of Boca Juniors.

Brazil legend Pele fared less well and was booed by fans when he made a brief appearance on the pitch before the game got underway, though he smiled graciously through his ordeal.

Football's world governing body FIFA, meanwhile, are unhappy at the Argentine football federation's decision to retire the Argentine number ten shirt in homage to Maradona, who skippered the Argentines on the night.

Ultimatum from ROK hotels



AFP, Seoul

South Korean hotels on Monday announced they would turn away foreigners during next year's World Cup unless they were given licences for gambling machines and steam baths.

'Many local tourist hotels, which are on the brink of bankruptcy, need the government's financial aid, along with licences for gambling machines and steam baths,' said a resolution passed at a meeting of 300 tourist hotels affiliated with the Korea Tourist Hotel Association.

Yoo Byong-Chil, vice president of the association, told reporters: 'We do not mean a boycott of the World Cup. We just cannot accommodate foreign visitors because of our outdated facilities.'

Yoo said 218 hotels affiliated with the association would cancel a contract with the international football governing body, FIFA, to provide 22,000 rooms for foreigners from May 26 and July 3.

The resolution, however, was not supported by major hotels.

South Korea has prepared a total of some 125,000 rooms for visitors.

The Korea World Cup Organizing Committee (KOWOC) said the capacity was enough to

accommodate some 75,000 soccer fans and tourists expected daily during the games.

KOWOC statistics showed medium- and low-price inns will supply 102,000 rooms, 82 percent of the total, while tourist hotels will furnish another 22,357 rooms.

But an opposition lawmaker has claimed the medium- and low-price inns were in reality 'love motels', popular haunts for romantic rendezvous, that would damage the country's image.

The government has allowed slot machines only at several designated hotels. Steam baths, which were often used for prostitution, were made illegal in 1998.