



HUMAN CHAIN: Argentine Carlos Tevez (R) battles with Paraguayan Julio at the Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires during their South American World Cup qualifier on Sunday.

Late penalty denies Brazil

AFP, Santiago



Brazil retained top place in the South American zone qualifiers for the 2006 World Cup finals despite dropping two points to a late penalty in their game against Chile here Sunday.

The Brazilians, 3-1 winners over Argentina on Wednesday went ahead in the 17th minute when Luis Fabiano, standing in for the injured Barcelona striker Ronaldinho, latched on to a pass from Kaka to sweep past goalkeeper Nelson Tapia and slot the ball home from a tight angle.

But with one minute to go and the Brazilians seemingly headed for all three points, the referee pointed to the penalty spot after a contested foul in the box on Rodrigo Perez.

Striker Reinaldo Navia stepped forward to slam the ball home as the match finished in a draw.

It was a disappointing way to finish the game for the world champions who never managed to reproduce the fluent style of play that had staggered Argentina.

But it means they retained top spot in the group with 13 points from seven games played, one ahead of Argentina who were held

0-0 at home by Paraguay and two points clear of Chile and Paraguay.

With the top four teams qualifying by right for the finals in Germany in two years time, the Brazilians are well-placed to continue their record of having played in every World Cup finals since the tournament started in Uruguay in 1930.

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said the match had been exactly as he had expected.

"It was a tough, hard-fought

game played at a tremendous pace and we saw Chile doing all they could to avoid a defeat at home," he said.

"The got their reward with a goal in the second half, but this result leaves both teams in a good position."

Chile coach Juvenal Olmos said he was happy with the way his side had played, adding they had deserved a share of the spoils.

Argentina fans must have expected greater things when

coach Marcelo Bielsa fielded a brand new strike duo in Carlos Tevez of Boca Juniors and Barcelona's Javier Saviola.

Though the players added creativity and unpredictability to an otherwise tedious match, neither of them were able to get on the scoresheet.

Paraguayan full-backs Paulo Da Silva and Denis Caniza closed off the flanks and the central defensive pairing of Carlos Gamarra and Julio Caesar Caceres proved a formidable wall for Argentina to penetrate.

Paraguay were up against it when midfielder Angel Ortiz was sent off with 30 minutes to go, but Paraguay's superb backline combined with Villar's excellent goalkeeping, earned them their valuable draw.

Since the 3-1 defeat to Brazil on Wednesday, Argentine fans have been disgruntled with Bielsa and this most recent result will not have helped.

In Sunday's other games, Peru and Venezuela drew 0-0 and Colombia hit five past Uruguay in Bogota leaving the former World Cup winners languishing near the foot of the table.

On Saturday, Ecuador defeated Bolivia 3-2 in Quito to take fifth place in the table which would qualify them for a play-off against the winner of the Oceania zone should it remain like that.

Cannavaro's wish

AFP, Rome

Fabio Cannavaro is determined to erase the memory of Italy's heart-breaking defeat to France in the final of Euro 2000 by leading the Azzurri to glory in Portugal this summer.

Italy were seconds away from winning the trophy four years ago when Sylvain Wiltord scored a 90th minute equaliser and David Trezeguet netted a dramatic winning golden goal in extra time.

"It still hurts," said Italy's 30-year-old captain.

"When you have the cup in your hands and you fail to win, it leaves a bitter taste in your mouth."

Naples-born Cannavaro believes the fact that no Serie A club reached the final four of last season's two European competitions - the Champions League and the UEFA Cup - will work in the national side's favour.

"It's been a disappointing season for Italian clubs but it could turn into something positive," he said.

FA upset at ruling



AFP, London

England are to ask UEFA for a clear ruling on hooligans after Europe's football chiefs insisted they would have to take responsibility for the behaviour of all England fans in Portugal.

UEFA chief executive Lars-Christer Olsson has warned England would take the rap for outbreaks of disorder involving any England fans at Euro 2004.

But Football Association officials are angry with UEFA for selling tickets freely over the internet while they taken detailed steps to monitor who is buying tickets from them.

The FA have pointed out to UEFA they have sold more than 30,000 tickets for England's three group matches with each fan having to apply separately and have their name checked against

police intelligence records.

However, fans have also been able to buy directly from UEFA through the internet, with one



SVEN-GORAN ERIKSSON

person able to buy up to four tickets.

The FA are concerned that many tickets could have fallen into the

hands of trouble-makers or have ended up with touts and UEFA will hold them responsible for these people too.

The worry is the events of 2000 might be repeated when, after outbreaks of crowd violence, UEFA threatened England with expulsion from the European Championships.

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has already made a personal appeal for fans to behave and has backed the FA's stance against UEFA.

"The FA are doing everything they can to ensure that safety and security preparations are paramount. However, the FA cannot be responsible for those fans who have bought tickets directly over the internet," Eriksson said.

"Every team at Euro 2004 has challenges and pressures but England is unique in having a UEFA warning hanging over us. It would be a tragedy, not only for the team but for millions of England fans, if events off the pitch denied them a chance of glory."

Cameroon come from behind

AFP, Johannesburg



Cameroon started a campaign to qualify for the World Cup a fifth consecutive time by coming from behind to beat Benin 2-1 in Yaounde Sunday.

Seidah Kounabe stunned a capacity 60,000 crowd at the Omnisports Stadium with a 10th-minute goal for the Squirrels, but African Footballer of the Year Samuel Eto'o and Rigobert Song turned the tide with late first half strikes.

Other matches in Group 3, branded the Group of Death, produced an impressive 3-0 victory for Egypt in Sudan and a controversial 2-0 home win for Ivory Coast over Libya.

Liberia upset Mali 1-0 in Group 1 thanks to a late goal from Alvin Kieh and Uganda won by a similar score against the Democratic

Republic of Congo in Group 2 to complete a 14-match weekend programme.

There were wins for Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia and Zambia Saturday while the Algeria-Angola, Gabon-Zimbabwe and Malawi-Morocco fixtures finished level.

The match between Kenya and Guinea scheduled for Nairobi was cancelled after the host nation were barred from international football by world governing body FIFA due to government interference in the sport.

Kounabe stunned the 'Indomitable Lions', who have been African champions a record-equaling four times, with a long-range shot that soared past Idriss Kameni into the roof of the net.

Veteran Song missed a head on a pitch made slippery by pre-match rain before a Herve Tum flick set up Eto'o for the equaliser and Song headed in a Geremi Njitap cross to give the Lions a stoppage-time lead.

Aruna Dindane, voted the best player in Belgium this season, put the Ivorian Elephants ahead after

35 minutes in Abidjan, clinically finishing a superb pass from Tchiressoua Guel.

If the first goal was a masterpiece, the second was a mystery to everyone except the referee as Ivory Coast were awarded an unexplained penalty that Didier Drogba rammed into the net with 61 minutes gone.

Egypt made a dream competitive debut under Italian coach Marco Tardelli thanks to goals from Abdelhalim Ali (eight minutes), Mohammed Abou Trika (51) and Mohammed Abdel Wahad (87) in Omdurman.

It is a result that will instil confidence in the Pharaohs ahead of the first clash of giants in the group on June 18 when Ivory Coast play at the intimidating Cairo Stadium cauldron.

Mali exceeded expectations at the 2004 African Nations Cup by reaching the semi-finals and hopes of success in Liberia were high despite a change of coaches with Alain Moizan replacing French compatriot Henri Stambouli.

But sustained Liberian pressure bore fruit after 80 minutes in

Monrovia when a pass from midfielder Diah Williams carved open the 'Eagles' defence and Kieh darted in for a goal that triggered frenzied celebrations.

NZ dream over

AFP, Auckland

New Zealand coach Mick Waitt took the blame for his side's calamitous 2006 World Cup exit Monday, refusing to point the finger at Australia for fielding an under-strength side in a crucial qualifier.

Waitt said the Socceroos' decision to rest several players in their match against the Solomon Islands on Sunday was not the reason for New Zealand's humiliating early round exit.

Australia drew 2-2 with the Solomon Islands, a result that left New Zealand eliminated from the competition.

Voeller won't push panic button



AFP, Kaiserslautern

Germany's brittle defence in their 2-0 defeat by Hungary here on Sunday has sent the alarm bells ringing ahead of the 2004 European championships but coach Rudi Voller refused to press the panic button.

Germany defeated Hungary 5-2 the last time the pair played back in 2001 but there was little evidence of a repeat as two first half goals from Sandor Torghelle put a huge dent in the World Cup finalists preparations for Portugal.

"We suffered from concentration lapses," confessed Voller.

"But our future is not bleak and I am sure we will perform well in Portugal. But it is clear that a few players need to do more."

Hungary were expected to be cannon fodder for Germany - particularly after 22 players withdrew from the squad - but German icon Lothar Matthaus inspired his team to victory.

"We were brilliant and showed so much heart," enthused Matthaus.

"The fact that we had so many players missing made the win all the better."

Capped a record 150 times by Germany, Matthaus had words of encouragement for his 1990 World Cup winning team-mate Voller.

"I wish Germany a successful Euro 2004," added Matthaus.

"Our win should not be blown out of proportion because other teams are not in top form either. I am sure Rudi will come up trumps in Portugal."

Holland await Germany in nine days time in Oporto in their Euro 2004 opener.

While Matthaus and Voller refused to play down Germany's chances in Portugal captain Oliver



PHOTO: REUTERS

CALAMITY KAHN: German goalkeeper Oliver Kahn picks the ball up after Hungary scored during their friendly international in Kaiserslautern on Sunday.

Zidane rescues France



AFP, Paris

Zinedine Zidane fired home a late volley for a 1-0 win over compact Ukraine at the Stade de France here on Sunday to boost France in their final Euro 2004 warm-up match.

Exactly a week before their European championship opener against England, France managed to overcome a well-organised defence in the 88th minute when Zidane, fed by Thierry Henry, fired low and to the left for the winner.

Zidane's showing improved gradually throughout the 90 minutes and he was probably most people's man-of-the-match.

France have now played their 18th match without defeat and their defence has not conceded a goal in 1040 minutes. France can leave for Portugal knowing their preparation has been up to par and they can now put in an impressive title defence.

The supporters were a bit on the subdued side but for most of the match they had little reason to get excited.

The Ukrainians, without their star AC Milan striker Andrei

Shevchenko, played a disciplined match with tight marking giving little space for France to put on the style.

Zidane showed a bit more creativity, particularly in his exchanges with Bixente Lizarazu, but for the most part there was not much glitz on show.

France were without usual skipper Marcel Desailly who has a painful knee and twisted ankle victim David Trezeguet, but that apart, they played the side likely to start against England in their opening match in Portugal on June 13.

In defence, Mikael Silvestre adequately stood in for Desailly, who did not come on the pitch for his last match at the Stade de France, alongside fellow central defender Lilian Thuram who was winning his 99th cap.

Williams Gallas played well on the right flank in defence and with that performance could challenge Willy Sagnol for the position.

Coach Jacques Santini now has a week to digest anything he learned from this fixture for their Lisbon Group B clash against England.

"Physically we are ready," said Santini.

"We lacked a bit of energy at the

end of the match but I expect us to be in peak form with batteries charged at Euro."

5 German cities for 2005 Confeds Cup

AFP, Frankfurt

Frankfurt, Hannover, Cologne, Leipzig and Nuremberg are the five German cities chosen for the 2005 Confederations Cup from June 15 to June 29, football's world governing body FIFA confirmed on Monday.

Each of the five cities will host three matches apart from Frankfurt who host four including the final.

Four out of the eight participants are set with hosts Germany, World Cup winners Brazil, 2004 African Cup victors Tunisia and Mexico, winner of the 2003 CONCACAF Gold Cup.

The other quartet will be the winner of the 2004 Asian Cup, the 2004 South American champions, the Oceania champions along with the 2004 European championships winner from Portugal.

If Brazil win the Copa America the second placed team will be propelled into the tournament and the same is the case should Germany be crowned European champions in Portugal.



PHOTO: AFP

France midfielder and captain Zinedine Zidane celebrates after scoring the winner against Ukraine at the Stade de France on June 6.