

## Gomez can't take it

REUTERS, Chicalayo

Ecuador coach Hernan Dario Gomez is considering his future after watching his side lose 6-1 to Argentina in their Copa America opener on Wednesday.

"With a result like this, one is almost out the door, one's position is untenable," said Gomez, a Colombian who has become a national hero in Ecuador after leading them to their first World Cup in 2002.

"This was a coach-devouring result. When the Copa finishes, I will seriously think about leaving because it wears you down."

However, Ecuador Football Federation president Luis Chiriboga stood by Gomez despite the heavy defeat.

"I'm not the sort of director to kick out the coach because of one result," he told reporters.

"I stand by the players and the coach in the bad times as well as the good."

"This isn't the time to recriminate. Nobody expected a score like this, especially from players who have given such happiness to the Ecuadorean people in the past."

Ecuador appeared set for a good result when Agustin Delgado scored in the 62nd minute to cancel out Cristian Gonzalez's early penalty for Argentina in the Group B encounter.

Instead, they capitulated, conceding five goals in the last 26 minutes.

"It was a disastrous performance, a night to forget," Chiriboga admitted.

"Ecuador did not have faith or conviction."

"We fought back, we equalised and then disaster struck."

## Wenger's no to Germany

AFP, Berlin

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has turned down an approach to become new coach of Germany but the Germans were still hoping they could lure Greece coach Otto Rehhagel.

Wenger, who hails from the French region of Alsace which has a strong Germanic culture, insists he will see out his contract with Arsenal.

"I have a contract with Arsenal until 2005 and I intend to respect it," Wenger told Kicker magazine.

"What's more the club would not let me go because there are only three or four weeks to the start of the season."

Former Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld and Fenerbahce boss Christoph Daum have already ruled themselves out of contention in the race to succeed Rudi Voller.

Rehhagel says he needs time to think of his future after leading Greece to the Euro 2004 title on Sunday.

"In any case I want to be involved in the 2006 World Cup," he told Bild in a remark which encouraged the Germans to believe they may yet get their man.

Greece have been handed a tricky path to the 2006 World Cup finals with 2002 semi-finalists Turkey and Denmark joining them in Group Two. Ukraine, Georgia, Albania and Kazakhstan complete the pool.

As hosts, Germany qualify automatically.

### FIFA rankings

## Argentines slip below 10

AP, Zurich

The United States advanced to an all-time high No. 7 in FIFA's rankings Wednesday while Greece jumped 21 spots to No. 14 after its dazzling run to the European Championship title.

Brazil remained No. 1 for the 25th straight month, and France and Spain stayed at second and third.

The United States twice had climbed as high as eighth -- in September 2002 and again in May. The Americans beat Grenada in a home-and-home series in June to reach the semifinals of World Cup qualifying in its region of North and Central America and the Caribbean.

Greece was ranked as low as 59th as recently as March 2002. It climbed "possibly the greatest ever number of places in the upper reaches of the ranking," soccer's governing body said.

Its 1-0 victory over Portugal on Sunday in the Euro 2004 final gave Greece its first major title.

The rankings are a computer calculation of the relative strength of national teams based on results the previous eight years.

The Czech Republic, which lost to Greece in the Euro 2004 semifinals, advanced seven spots to fourth. Germany, which did not win a game at Euro 2004, dropped to 12th, tied with Portugal.

The Netherlands, which reached the Euro semis, remained fifth while Mexico dropped two places to sixth. England, beaten by Portugal in the Euro quarters, returned to the top 10 after a two-month absence. The English moved up five places to eighth and were followed by Italy and Turkey.

Argentina, which had gone winless in three games before a 2-1 victory over Peru on July 1, dropped six places to 11th.



PHOTO: AFP

**JUMPING RABBIT!** Argentina's hat-trick man Javier Saviola heads to score the third goal against Ecuador at the Elias Aguirre Stadium in Chicalayo on July 7.

# Rampaging Argentina



AP, Chicalayo

Javier Saviola notched a hat trick as Argentina crushed Ecuador 6-1 while Mexico blew a 2-1 lead and man advantage in conceding a 2-2 draw with Uruguay in the Copa America on Wednesday.

**ARGENTINA 6; ECUADOR 1** Argentina's biggest output in nine years lifted it to the top of Group B in a successful first appearance at the Copa since 1999. It missed the 2001 event in Colombia because of security concerns.

Saviola led a second-half goalfest, rescuing Argentina from a 1-1 deadlock and finding the back of the net in the 64th, 74th, and 79th minutes. Cristian Gonzalez, Andres D'Alessandro, and Luis Gonzalez also scored in Argentina's most lopsided win against Ecuador since 1960.

Agustin Delgado scored the lone goal for Ecuador. Argentina played with poise and flair against an Ecuadorean team that included many starters from its 2002 World Cup squad.

Cristian Gonzalez made it 1-0 in the fifth minute on a penalty.

Referee Carlos Amarilla awarded the spot kick after Ecuador defender Giovanny Espinoza shoved Luis Gonzalez off the ball in the penalty area as he turned to receive a pass. Cristian Gonzalez converted as goalkeeper Giovanny Ibarra dove to his right, sending his shot in the opposite direction.

Argentina played its tournament opener only hours after learning it had fallen out of FIFA's top 10 rankings for the first time since 1998, slipping six places to 11th.

Ecuador rarely threatened in the first half, but after the break Delgado came off the bench and equalised in the 61st minute, shooting a blistering shot between three Argentine defenders.

Saviola responded three minutes later, outmanoeuvring four defenders and shooting as he leaned to his left. Ten minutes

later,

Saviola leapt and beat Ibarra with a header that set off a goal fiesta - Argentina scored four goals in the final 30 minutes.

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa, heavily criticised for the team's recent lacklustre play, pumped his fist in the air after each goal in celebration.

**URUGUAY 2; MEXICO 2**



PHOTO: AFP

Uruguay's Paolo Montero runs towards the substitutes' bench after netting the second goal against Mexico at Elias Aguirre Stadium in Chicalayo on July 7.

Earlier, former Uruguay captain Paolo Montero headed in an 88th-minute corner in his first international in two years to help his 10-man team draw Mexico 2-2.

Montero retired from international duty after leading Uruguay at the 2002 World Cup, but justified his recall by new coach Jorge Fossati with his equaliser.

The presence of the Juventus defender helped unfancied Uruguay surprise favoured Mexico by scoring first and last, after replacement Ricardo Morales was sent off in the 81st for a late body slam on Pavel Pardo, who scored Mexico's second goal on a 25-meter blast.

Uruguay had allowed 11 goals

in its last three World Cup qualifiers, but rose to the occasion at Elias Aguirre Stadium.

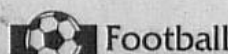
"We were really pleased with the way we played, but with everything we've suffered, it's a result to be happy about," said Uruguay coach Jorge Fossati.

Fossati was pleased with his team's defensive work. "That's what worried us and it was the first

its opening goal in the 42nd minute a minor shock. A centre pass to the edge of the penalty box was headed on by Marcelo Sosa, and lefty Carlos Bueno spun and fired off his hip into the back of the net.

But a minute into injury time, Mexico equalised out of nowhere, as Ricardo Osorio, unmarked on the right sideline,

## Greek hope



AFP, Athens

German coach Otto Rehhagel will honour his contract with European champions Greece through to the 2006 World Cup, Greek football chief Vassilis Gagatsis said Wednesday.

"Rehhagel will stay with the Greek Football Federation (EPO) until 2006," said Gagatsis, dismissing reports that 65-year-old Rehhagel, who was hired in 2001, had accepted to prolong his contract until 2008.

"On the flight back from Portugal I offered him to extend the contract until 2008 and he told me that he didn't want to be transported into the football ground on a wheelchair," he said.

"We honoured our contract with him and he honoured his contract with us. Rehhagel had other offers from abroad, and very good ones, at a time when everybody in Greece asked for his head," Gagatsis said.

The German had been the brunt of criticism after Greece started the European qualifiers with two defeats against Spain and the

Ukraine.

Gagatsis said that they were unconcerned by reports linking Rehhagel with the vacant post as Germany coach.

"It's absolutely normal if the DFB (German Football Federation) want

him... and it is an honour for us and our choice (to hire him)," he said.

"He is one of us, he believed in the Greeks," Gagatsis said.

"Words are too poor to express our feelings for the effort he has put in to this great achievement".



PHOTO: AFP

**PLEASE STAY!** Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis (L) with German coach Otto Rehhagel who is holding the Euro 2004 trophy during a reception in honor of the national soccer team at the Maximos Mansion, the Prime Minister's residence in Athens on July 6.

## Inter assign Mancini



REUTERS, Rome

Roberto Mancini has taken over as coach of Inter Milan, joining the Serie A side with a three-year deal after resolving a dispute with Lazio, the club announced on Wednesday.

The 39-year-old succeeds Alberto Zaccheroni, who resigned last month after only eight months in charge.

"FC Internazionale communicates that it has sealed the signing of Roberto Mancini. The coach has put pen to paper on a contract which ties him to the club until 30 June 2007," Inter said in a statement on its website.

His appointment ends months of speculation in the Italian media, which even before the end of last season reported Inter owner Massimo Moratti had decided to replace Zaccheroni with Mancini.

When Zaccheroni resigned, Inter president Giacinto Facchetti told a shareholders meeting Mancini

would sign for Inter within days, but his move was slowed by a dispute with Lazio, with whom he had a contract until 2008.

Lazio's decision on Tuesday to release Mancini, however, opened the way for him to take up the Inter post.

Mancini, who as a player won Serie A titles with Sampdoria and Lazio as well as making 36 international appearances for Italy, is considered one of the brightest young coaches in Serie A.

Having started out as assistant to current England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson at Lazio, Mancini took over at Fiorentina during the 2000-2001 season, leading them to the Italian Cup in his first season in charge.

He quit the following year as Fiorentina spiralled towards bankruptcy before rejoining Rome-based Lazio in August 2002.

Mancini again had to cope with serious financial problems that forced the departures of players Alessandro Nesta and Hernan Crespo, but guided the club to

fourth place in Serie A and the semifinals of the UEFA Cup in the 2002-03 season.

Last season Lazio won the Italian Cup and finished sixth in Serie A.

At Inter, money is less of an issue than the inability of a series of high-profile coaches to turn huge investment by Moratti into success on the pitch.

Since acquiring the club in February 1995, Moratti has bought and sold a string of world-class players, including Brazilian World Cup winners Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo, but the Serie A title has eluded him.

Inter were last crowned Italian champions in 1989. Last season the club finished fourth, 23 points behind champions and arch-rivals AC Milan.

The sole triumph of Moratti's ownership remains the 1998 UEFA Cup final, won 3-0 against Lazio.

Mancini is the 11th man to take charge at Inter since Moratti became its owner.

## Nations Cup 2008 Ghana pip Libya

AFP, Cairo

Ghana were awarded the 2008 African Nations Cup here Thursday after defeating Libya 9-3 in a vote among Confederation of African Football (CAF) executive committee members.

There was one abstention with veteran Senegalese official Mawade Wade not turning up at CAF headquarters on the outskirts of the Egyptian capital.

The outcome was a surprise as many observers believed Libyan promises to pump millions of dollars into new stadia would sway delegates in favour of the North African state.

Ghana, who staged the biennial showcase of African football in 1963 and 1978 and were co-hosts with Nigeria four years ago, will use stadia in Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi and Tamale.

Successful bid committee chairman Kofi Amoah told reporters: "I feel excited. We have worked hard to win. The 2008 tournament will be for the whole of Africa."

Tunisia hosted and won the Nations Cup this year and Egypt will stage the 2006 edition.

## Bolton tracking Hierro

AFP, Bolton

Former Spain and Real Madrid defender Fernando Hierro is a Bolton Wanderers target, Trotters manager Sam Allardyce said.

The 36-year-old, who scored 29 goals in 89 internationals, is after a new club following a season in Qatar.

Hierro could find himself alongside his former Real team-mate Ivan Campo next season, if Allardyce, who has a talent for persuading the likes of Youri Djorkaeff, Jay-Jay Okocha and Campo to play at the Reebok Stadium, has his way.

Allardyce confirmed: "I am interested in Fernando Hierro."

The Bolton boss has already recruited one defender this week -- Tunisia centre-half Radhi Jaidi on a two-year contract.

Jaidi's arrival follows that of two strikers, Michael Bridges and Les Ferdinand, formerly of Leeds and Leicester respectively.

## Desailly fancies Celtic?



AFP, Glasgow

Former France captain Marcel Desailly wants to play for Scottish champions Celtic.

The most-capped player in French football history wants to end his career with Celtic after being released after six years with Chelsea.

And the 35-year-old who was on 2 million pounds-a-year at Stamford Bridge, claims he would be ready to take a pay cut.

"A number of Premiership clubs want me to sign but I don't want to play against my old club Chelsea," he told the Daily Record.

"I would like the chance to play for Celtic, if they want me, because I have watched them over the last couple of years and I like the way they play. I also know about Martin O'Neill and believe I could work with a manager like him."

"At this stage in my life it's about wanting to play with another big team with high ambitions because I know I have at least one, maybe two good years left and I think Celtic would be ideal."

"They are in the Champions League, they want to progress and I could help them do that."

Desailly, who has won the European Cup with Marseille and AC Milan, wants to bow out at the top.

He has instructed his agent, Willie McKay, to find out if Celtic would be willing to talk.

McKay said: "He is serious about moving to Scotland. He has left Chelsea by mutual consent a year early and doesn't want to play against them for anyone else, so he is looking north of the Border."

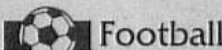
"He knows all about Celtic and if they want him he would be happy to play."

He joined Chelsea for 5 million pounds in 1998, just a few days after having been the driving force behind France's World Cup triumph.

Desailly, who has 113 caps and a Euro 2000 winners' medal, insists he can improve on last season's injury-plagued season.

He was dropped by France at Euro 2004 after Rangers' new signing Dado Prso left him for dead for Croatia's second goal in a 2-2 draw.

## New France coach on Monday



AFP, Paris

French football federation president Claude Simonet has delayed naming the new France coach until next Monday after finishing interviewing leading candidates.

World Cup defender Laurent Blanc and former Monaco and Fulham manager Jean Tigana are favourites but Simonet has also interviewed former England and Tottenham manager Glenn Hoddle, France's Under-21 coach Raymond Domenech and former Senegal World Cup coach Bruno Metsu.

"There's no rush, we need to go through this process carefully because we have to get the right management team to take us to the

2006 World Cup," said French league president Frederic Thiriez.

The French had been expected to name the new coach at Friday's management committee meeting.

Metsu, contacted by l'Equipe sports daily, was under no illusion. "It's between Laurent (Blanc) and Jean (Tigana)," he said.

Tigana has problems as he is in the middle of a bitter court battle with Fulham while former Manchester United defender Blanc, at 38, has no previous coaching experience but is considered the better man manager.

FFF vice-president Michel Platini has sided with his former team-mate Tigana to succeed Jacques Santini who left for Tottenham when Simonet refused to extend his contract before Euro 2004.

## Roque Junior now Leverkusen's

REUTERS, Berlin

Brazilian World Cup winner Roque Junior has signed a three-year contract with Bayer Leverkusen, the German side announced on Thursday.

The 27-year-old defender, who was on loan at Siena but contracted to AC Milan, arrived on a free transfer and is likely to fill the gap left by compatriot Lucio, who joined rivals Bayern Munich from Leverkusen in the close season.

The new recruit played in the World Cup final against Germany in Japan in 2002 which Brazil won 2-0.

He joined Milan from Palmeiras in 2000 but was out of the starting lineup last season with loan spells at Leeds United and Siena.

## No Real move yet



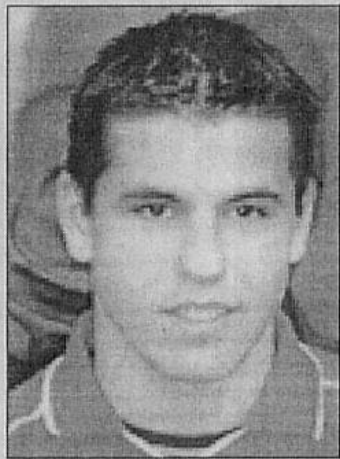
AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool insisted Thursday that Real Madrid had not been in touch over their Czech Republic striker Milan Baros.

The 22-year-old said earlier in the week that the Spanish giants had contacted him with a view to a move.

Baros finished as the top goalscorer in Euro 2004, hitting the net five times for the Czechs before they were knocked out by eventual champions Greece in the semifinals.

Liverpool spokesman Ian



MILAN BAROS

Cotton said on the club's website: "There has been no contact between the clubs. Milan is expected back in training on July 19, along with the other players who played in Euro 2004."

Baros may well now wait to discuss his future with new Reds boss Rafael Benitez before making a decision as to whether he wishes to stay at Anfield.

"Real Madrid have made a concrete offer but it is still a question of discussions," the former Banik Ostrava striker had told Czech TV.

"It is only an offer. I still have a contract with Liverpool and go back there on July 19," he said.