

Argentina

FROM PAGE 13
The opener had been in the making from the start as Argentina dominated the first half with inspired performances from both Tevez and Cesar Delgado.

Colombia did not have an answer to Delgado's darting runs down the right and Argentina created several chances before Tevez's goal.

Tevez and Juan Pablo Sorin were both close with shots from the edge of the area and Cristian Gonzalez was denied in the 24th minute when his lob was headed off the line from under the crossbar by Andres Gonzalez.

After Tevez's goal, Colombia goalkeeper Juan Carlos Henao twice denied Argentina a second goal before halftime as he blocked shots from Luciano Figueroa and Delgado.

But Argentina needed only five minutes of the second to increase their lead.

Striker Luciano Figueroa broke down the left, pulled the ball back, the Colombia defence failed to cut the ball out and Gonzalez stroked the ball into the goal for his second goal of the tournament.

Argentina cruised through the remaining 40 minutes against a hugely disappointing Colombia, who never looked like getting back into the game, and Sorin completed the scoring with a diving header from a Mauro Rosales free kick.



A diving header by Argentina's Juan Pablo Sorin (R) going into the net past Colombian goalkeeper Juan Carlos Henao at the National Stadium in Lima on July 20.

Best yet for Bielsa



REUTERS, Lima

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa enjoyed one of the best performances of his five-year reign as his team demolished Colombia 3-0 in Tuesday's Copa America semi-final.

"I don't have all our games readily in my mind, but yes, I think it was one of our best performances," the introverted coach told the post-match media conference.

"It's not frequent that we play so well and win so convincingly."

"It was a pleasant surprise."

Colombia never got a look-in as Argentina took control of the match from the opening minutes.

Bielsa's team won with a first-half free kick from 20-year-old Carlos Tevez and second half strikes from Luis Gonzalez and Juan Pablo Sorin.

"It was a performance which established a clear difference between ourselves and the our opponents," Bielsa said.

"It was a fair result and a convincing performance."

"We controlled the game, we didn't give Colombia a chance, we didn't suffer any counter-attacks and we calmly created plenty of chances to justify the difference."

The match was a different story to last month's friendly in Miami, which Colombia won 2-0.

"The days change, the performances as well, football is not something predictable as far as performances go," Bielsa said.

Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda admitted his side had been outplayed as they lost for only the second time in eleven matches under his command.

Rueda has led a revival for his team after taking over from Francisco Maturana, who was sacked last year after Colombia made a poor start to the World Cup qualifiers.

"We didn't get ourselves together today, he said.

"Argentina were aggressive from the first moment and we didn't have an answer."

"These things happen in football," he added.

"Argentina had the personality, the willpower, the determination from the start."

"They didn't give us space and we lacked mobility."

Maradona in family rift

AFP, Buenos Aires

Maradona is engaged in a battle with his ex-wife and daughters over where the ailing Argentine football legend should go next to treat his cocaine addiction.

Maradona is due to leave a psychiatric clinic where he has been receiving treatment since May in the next few weeks - from there he wants to return to the drugs rehabilitation centre in Cuba where he has lived since 2000, and after that Switzerland.

He is supported by his doctor, Alfredo Cahe, and lawyers - Oscar Moyano and Roberto Damboriana.

But a close family friend who wished to remain unnamed told AFP Tuesday that his former wife Claudia Villafane and his daughters Dalma and Giannina are trying hard to keep him in Argentina.

They want Maradona to return to the country estate of a friend where he was taken in between hospital visits in April.

They plan to equip the house to deal with the stricken World Cup winner's medical needs and in this they are supported by a team of psychiatrists and government agencies.

If no common ground is found a local court has authority to rule on Maradona's next step.

The 43-year-old Maradona came close to death in April when he was admitted to hospital here with heart and lung problems.

Real want Eto'o back

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid are involved in a bidding war with arch rivals Barcelona for African Player of the Year Samuel Eto'o.

Real loaned out the Cameroonian striker to Real Mallorca in 2000 retaining a 50 per cent stake in him, yet after Eto'o's brilliant form last season they now want him back.

Since his move the 23-year-old has struck form with a vengeance, scoring 54 league goals.

Mallorca president Mateo Alemany, enjoying watching the fierce auction for his prize asset, told a press conference here Tuesday: "Real have made a slightly bigger offer than Barcelona."

According to press reports Barca are prepared to go to 16 million euros for the Cameroonian.

Fergie's message

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson has reignited his feud with Jose Mourinho by claiming Chelsea's spending will not guarantee success.

Ferguson was involved in a furious row with Mourinho when his former club Porto sent United crashing out of the Champions League in March.

And the pair will resume their rivalry on the opening weekend of the Premiership campaign when United head to Stamford Bridge.

"Money isn't the issue. Picking the right players is," said Sir Alex.

Mourinho has added Benfica midfielder Tiago, Serbian striker Mateja Kezman, Porto right-back Paulo Ferreira and Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba in a 70 million pound spree in the last month.

But Ferguson does not believe Roman Abramovich's millions will automatically see them lift the title and claims United can make a big impact during the campaign.

"It could be a very interesting season because Chelsea have a new manager, as have Liverpool, while myself and Arsene Wenger are becoming the old fuddy-duddies of the league."

Rijkaard for the same style



INTERNET SOURCE, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard has revealed that his team will use the same system that brought such good results at the end of last season.

Speaking at a press conference after Monday morning's training session, Rijkaard told reporters that he was "very satisfied" with the way the pre-season preparations were shaping up.

"We chose not to start too strongly because we've got time to prepare ourselves. The team isn't in top physical condition yet. The style of play we're

Rijkaard responded firmly to rumours about Argentine striker Javier Saviola's possible move away from the Club: "He's a Barca player. We can't lose a player like him without having another option. If we had another forward, then we could talk."

Saviola is currently helping his national team in the Copa America tournament where he has already scored a hat-trick.

Rijkaard appeared to have conceded losing countryman Patrick Kluivert.

"I hope something good for him and for the club can be sorted out. The latest news I have about his situation is that he was negotiating with a club."

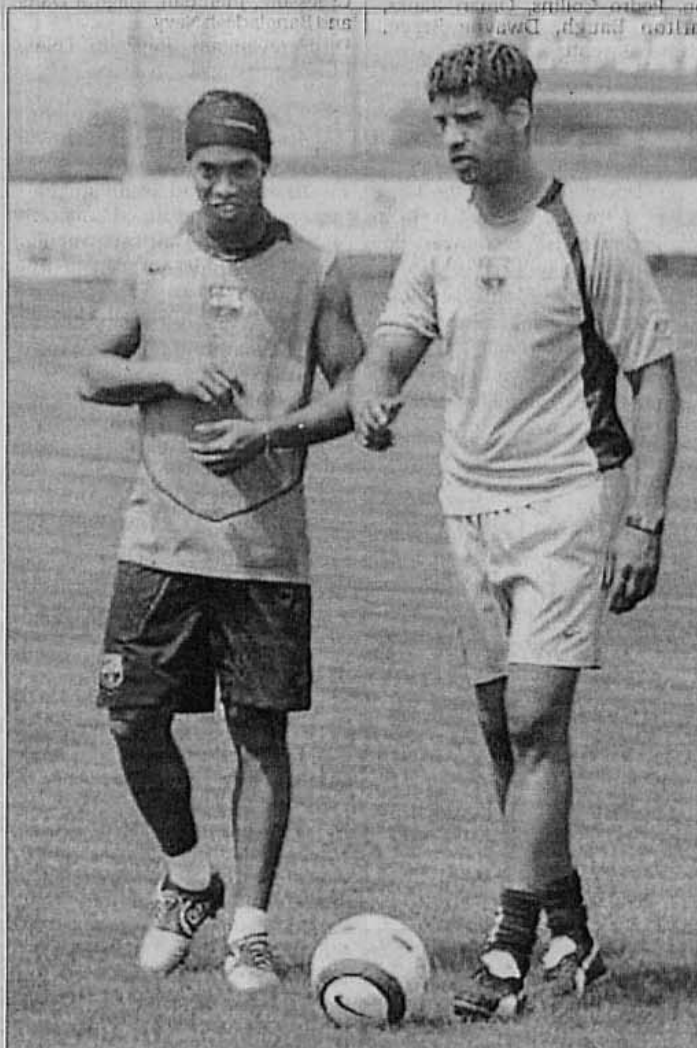


PHOTO: REUTERS

YOU ARE THE KEY! Barcelona's Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard (R) talking to superstar Ronaldinho during a training session in Peralada, Spain on July 19.

following in the pre-season is fairly similar to last season."

Although the system could vary with the arrival of players who haven't started training yet, Rijkaard stressed, "We want to continue with the same system."

This pre-season's opponents are rather different from last season. Local teams from the lower divisions have replaced illustrious clubs such as Milan and Juventus.

"The aim this year is that the players are motivated against any opponent and give the same effort whether it's Milan or Figueras," Rijkaard explained.

"Playing against teams from the lower division means that you can follow the players' development better, training session by training session whereas in previous seasons the players were highly motivated against teams such as Juventus, for example, which could have a negative effect on the physical condition of the players."

Rijkaard also took the opportunity to comment on a number of players. For the former Dutch international, the signing of Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho last year showed that Barca is building a great team.

"He was one of Barcelona's most important signings and came at a time when the fans were pretty fed up with the team's results," said Rijkaard.

Kluivert in Newcastle

AFP, Newcastle

Dutch striker Patrick Kluivert flew into Newcastle on Wednesday declaring himself ready for a move to the English Premiership club after being frozen out at Barcelona.

The 28-year-old Dutchman was expected to put the finishing touches to a 12-month loan deal later in the day.

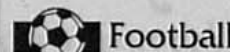
"It's a great club with great players and I hope I can fit in," the striker told Sky Sports News.

Kluivert fell out of favour with both club and country last season and failed to play a single minute for the Netherlands at Euro 2004.

But he has an impressive track record as a goalscorer having netted 40 in 79 appearances for his country. His 123 goals for Barcelona make him the club's fifth top scorer of all time.

The loan deal with Newcastle was made possible by Barca's agreement to pay a percentage of Kluivert's huge salary, which reportedly exceeds seven million dollars a year.

Rivaldo Olympiakos'?



AFP, Athens

Brazil World Cup winner Rivaldo has agreed to join Olympiakos Piraeus, the Greek club's office said Wednesday.

Rivaldo will arrive in Athens later Wednesday when terms are expected to be announced, an Olympiakos spokesman told AFP.

"Rivaldo is coming from Madrid tonight with (senior club official Giorgos) Louvaris," said a spokeswoman for Olympiakos, who finished second in the Greek first division to book a place in the elite Champions League.

Greek media have billed the deal as the "biggest-ever transfer in Greek football history", speculating the 32-year-old Brazilian would earn up to 1.5 million euros (\$1.86 million) per year.

The club were runners-up in last season's championship after winning seven titles in a row. Olympiakos will play in this year's Champions League without having to go through qualifiers.

Rivaldo has been without a club since leaving AC Milan at the end of last season.

He joined Brazil's Cruzeiro soon after but walked out after less than two months. He has since been linked with moves to England's

Bolton Wanderers, Scottish champions Celtic, German side Werder Bremen and clubs in the Middle East.



RIVALDO

Parreira lauds Copa



REUTERS, Lima

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira praised playing standards at the Copa America on Tuesday, saying they were at least equal to the European championship played the previous month in Portugal.

"In terms of comfort for the supporters, facilities, stadiums and organisation, there's no comparison," Parreira told reporters.

"It's a reflection of Europe's far greater economic wealth."

"But in terms of the football which has been played, I don't think the Copa America is in any way inferior."

"It's the same standard or, possibly, better."

The Copa America has enjoyed a revival this year after the previous tournament in Colombia three years ago was fraught with problems.

The 2001 event went ahead at only five days' notice, having been postponed because of security worries. Argentina pulled out and several other countries sent reserve teams.

This time, most teams have been at full-strength though Brazil are one of the exceptions after resting several top players including Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Kaka and Ronaldinho.

Despite this, the world champions have reached the semi-finals where they face Uruguay in the National Stadium on Wednesday.

Parreira said the tournament had been an excellent chance for him to watch new players such as Inter Milan striker Adriano, who is the competition's leading scorer with five goals in as many games.

"The competition has been very useful, we have observed players, we have drawn conclusions, we have spent time together, got to know each other and got results."

"Now, we're in the semi-finals where Brazil should always be. We've reached the point of no return."

Parreira however, blasted the Copa America organisation as absurd and insane for scheduling a third-place play-off at high altitude in the Andean City of Cusco.

The losers of the semi-finals in Lima on Tuesday and Wednesday face a 1,000 km trip to Cusco for Saturday's play-off at 3,300 metres above sea level.

"This is a punishment for not getting to the final," said Parreira. "The third-place match is a waste of time as it is and they do not even play it at the European championship."

"Here, not only do they play it but they go and hold it at more than 3,000 metres above sea level. It's absurd and it's insane."

The match will be the only one of the tournament to be played in the ancient Inca capital, one of Peru's top tourist attractions.

Look who's talking!



AFP, Madrid

England skipper David Beckham says he will make his critics eat their words as Real Madrid look to shake off the hangover of last season.

"Winning the Spanish league is a key objective, as well as the Champions League," said Beckham whose season ended in a media frenzy about alleged affairs and a dreadful Euro 2004 where his woeful penalty miss saw Portugal dump



DAVID BECKHAM

England out in the quarter-finals. "In the past ten years I have had to learn to live with it, as have my family," he told the Real Madrid website.

"A lot of people talk about my life and don't know me. But it's a situation I've got used to and I can live with it."

After making a bright start following his move from Manchester United, Beckham and the team fell away and five straight defeats saw Real slide from league leaders to fourth, forcing them into the Champions League qualifiers.

They were beaten in the Champions League quarter-finals by eventual runners-up Monaco and lost the Spanish Cup final to Real Zaragoza.

Beckham admitted the team was under pressure after going empty handed for the first time in five seasons and said he wanted to make his critics eat their words.

Becks hurts ankle

AFP, Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

David Beckham twisted his right ankle in Real Madrid's pre-season training warm-up against a local youth side at Jerez in the deep south of Spain, club medical staff said on Wednesday.

Team doctors Alfonso Del Corral and Juan Carlos Hernandez said the England skipper missed Wednesday morning training after twisting his ankle in Tuesday's match, the injury having become inflamed overnight.

"Beckham has a slight ankle twist. He complained overnight after twisting it during the game."

"It's not too serious but there was some inflammation and it was bothering him. We decided this morning not to push him and get him to rest," Hernandez said.

He added Beckham was likely to be back in training on Thursday.

Beckham suffered similar trouble with his ankle last season.



AFP, Chongqing

Iran's Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic said he was satisfied with his players' performance, even though it took his side 70 minutes to break the deadlock in their opening Asian Cup 3-0 win over Thailand on Tuesday.

"First I want to say I'm satisfied with the match, especially as it is hard to play the first game of this kind of competition," said Ivankovic.

"Today the most important thing was to win. We did it, I hope that we

play better in the next game."

Iran's first goal came in the 70th minute, when midfielder Mohammad Ali Karimi, surrounded by defenders, broke down the right before passing to striker Gholamreza Enayati who scored from 30 metres out.

Only minutes later, Karimi sent a free kick onto the head of Javad Nekounam who nodded the ball past Thai goalkeeper Kosin Hathairatanakul.

Iran wound up the scoring when veteran striker Ali Daei drove home a penalty kick, giving the 35-year-old team captain his 95th international goal.

"Today we didn't play a weak team. The weather is also terrible for playing football," Ivankovic said of the 33 degree heat in Chongqing.

"The game is 90 minutes so I

insisted that we should be patient, we have quality players so I was sure we would score."

For the Thais the loss was devastating after staying even for much of the match with an Iranian side defending a proud record in the tournament having won the Asian Cup in 1968, 1972 and 1976.

Thailand coach Chatchai Pohapat blamed fatigue for his side's eventual surrender.

"The first half we held them to 0-0, but in the second half we were tired, Iran were very strong, they were fast and proved to be too troublesome for us," Pohapat said.

"We tried to play the game as well as possible, but maybe something happened that after we lost the first goal our team couldn't hold together."

Mourinho wants more



AFP, London

Jose Mourinho wants to extend Chelsea's 70-million-pound summer spending spree with the capture of a top class central defender after completing the signing of Benfica midfielder Tiago.

The Portugal international signed in a ten-million-pound deal just in time to be part of the Chelsea squad that flew out to the United States on Wednesday for a pre-season tour which involves matches against Celtic, AS Roma and AC Milan.

Tiago, 23, was a member of Portugal's Euro 2004 squad, although

he did not get a game. He scored 19 goals in 95 matches for Benfica after joining them in 2002 but had been keen to leave due to differences with the club's new chief Jose Veiga.

The midfielder was Mourinho's fourth signing since he took over at Stamford Bridge after guiding FC Porto to the Champions League title in May.

Serb forward Mateja Kezman, Portugal full-back Paulo Ferreira and Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba, who cost a club record 24 million pounds, were all Mourinho targets.

Dutch winger Arjen Robben and Czech Republic goalkeeper Petr Cech are the other new faces in west London for the upcoming season. Their signings were negotiated under former manager Claudio Ranieri.

Bahrain's last gasp draw

AFP, Beijing

Bahrain conjured up another late, late show Wednesday to scramble a deserved 1-1 draw against Gulf rivals Qatar at the Asian Cup.

The Bahrainis -- who had needed an 89th-minute equaliser to force a draw with China in their opening Group A match -- snatched a share of the spoils thanks to Mohamed Hubail's 90th-minute header at a rain-soaked Workers Stadium.

It was a heartbreaking result for the crisis-hit Qataris, who had sacked French coach Philippe Troussier on Tuesday following a disastrous 2-1 defeat to Indonesia in their first game.