

Brazil in final

Breaks Uruguay's hearts in penalties

INTERNET, undated



Defending champions Brazil teetered on the brink of defeat before beating Uruguay on penalties after a bad-tempered 2-2 draw in their Copa America semifinal.

Pablo Garcia, needing to convert Uruguay's sixth kick in the shoot-out to send them through, instead crashed his effort against the post.

Brazil, who twice surrendered the lead during the match, took advantage as they won 5-4 to earn a place in the final against Argentina or Mexico, who meet on Wednesday in Puerto Ordaz.

Gilberto converted their next penalty, then Diego Lugano saw his effort saved by Brazil goalkeeper Doni, who appeared to move several metres before the kick was taken. Both teams had previously missed one kick each.

The game ended in an ugly scuffle after Brazil's celebrations appeared to provoke Uruguay as they repeated their penalty shoot-

out win over the same opponents at the same stage of the previous tournament three years ago.

Earlier, Maicon put Brazil ahead early on before a floodlight failure stopped the first half after 14 minutes.

Diego Forlan equalised after the re-start only for Julio Baptista to head Brazil back in front before halftime. Substitute Sebastian Abreu pulled Uruguay level again from his crossbar and made a superb save to turn away Forlan's shot on the turn.

In the fourth minute of time added on for the floodlight failure, Doni failed to clear a Recoba cross and the ball fell to Forlan, who scored with a low shot from the edge of the penalty area.

Brazil regained the lead five minutes later when Julio Baptista headed in following a free-kick on the right.

Uruguay pulled level again in the 70th minute through Abreu, who replaced Recoba at halftime.

Jorge Fucile slipped the ball to Cristian Rodriguez on the left, his cross from the byline was headed on by Forlan to Abreu, who scrambled the ball in at the far post.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil goalkeeper Doni (C) is the toast of his teammates as his penalty saves yesterday against Uruguay at the Panchenche Stadium saw Brazil through to the final of the Copa America where they are to meet winners of the second semi between Argentina and Mexico.

Gerrard glad to see Torres

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool captain Stephen Gerrard says the arrival of Fernando Torres is a sign that the Reds are at last ready to challenge Manchester United and Chelsea for Premiership honours.

The Atletico Madrid striker agreed a six-year contract last week after a club-record 20 million pound move from Spain with manager Rafael Benitez hoping the 23-year-old will provide the weight of players needed to challenge for the league title.

Liverpool have not won the championship since 1990 but Gerrard believes the arrival of Torres will have made rivals Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal sit up and take notice.

"I'll bet players and fans from other clubs have been looking at us and thinking: Aye, aye, Liverpool are making a move for some of the big boys now," said the England

midfielder.

"Since I've been in the first team I can't remember us making such a major statement of intent in the transfer market as this."

"In recent years it's only really been Manchester United and Chelsea buying players around the 20m mark, so it's great to see us able to compete for players of that kind of value."

"He's a fast, strong centre forward who likes the ball being played into his feet.

"They are the kind of strikers I love playing with. I've no doubt we're going to get our money's worth out of him, with him being such a young player."

"Some of the other players we're being linked with excite me too. It's great to see us looking at young, hungry players with their best years ahead of them."

One of those players is the 20-year-old Babel. Liverpool are likely to return to Ajax with an improved offer after their reported 10million bid was rebuffed.

"This is the first summer in a long time we've been able to do that."

Gerrard is looking forward to playing alongside Torres but with the Reds linked with a number of other players, including Holland Under-21 and Ajax forward Ryan Babel, the Reds captain is optimistic ahead of the new season.



Cyclists race through the picturesque setting of a French countryside road during the third stage of the Tour de France cycling race on Wednesday. Switzerland's Fabian Cancellara, of the CSC team, is currently leading the race.

West Ham snatch Bellamy

Football

AFP, London

West Ham on Tuesday confirmed they had signed unsettled Welsh international striker Craig Bellamy from Liverpool.

Bellamy, 28 later this week, has agreed to a five-year deal that will cost the Londoners a club record 7.5 million pounds (£11 million euros).

Bellamy's future at Anfield was left in doubt after the signing last week of Spain international Fernando Torres from Atletico Madrid.

The transfer was agreed on Friday but was delayed over the weekend as Bellamy thrashed out contractual issues with Liverpool.

The Wales captain is West Ham's fourth summer signing and takes manager Alan Curbishley's spending since his arrival at Upton Park in December to nearly 40 million pounds (£60 million euros).

Bellamy joins midfielders Scott Parker and Julien Faubert plus goalkeeper Richard Wright in signing for the Hammers this summer.

The striker, who had short spells

at Newcastle, Celtic and Blackburn before only staying a year at Liverpool said West Ham, who avoided relegation on the last day of the season, could challenge for a European place.

"I want to play in Europe, it's important to me, and I feel that same drive and ambition here at West Ham."

"Obviously it would be naive of me to say we are going to qualify for the Champions League next season but that's one thing we are really going to be pushing for here in the future."

His move breaks West Ham's previous transfer record of 7.25 million pounds, which the Hammers paid Norwich for Dean Ashton in January 2006.

Bellamy will effectively replace Carlos Tevez, whose proposed move to Manchester United is on the brink of being completed.

West Ham were fined 5.5 million pounds in April after being found guilty of acting improperly and withholding vital documentation over the ownership of Tevez and Javier Mascherano, who is now at Liverpool.

Tevez played a key role in West

No Peace for Juninho

AFP, Lyon

Lyon's Brazilian midfielder Juninho will miss the pre-season Peace Cup worth two million dollars to the winner in South Korea after picking up a right thigh injury in practice, the six-time French champions said Tuesday.

Coach Alain Perrin has put together a squad of 24 players to travel to South Korea which includes striker Sylvain Wiltord, who is reported to be in contact with league rivals Rennes concerning a move.

The team leave for Asia on Wednesday and play Japanese side Shimizu S-Pulse on Friday, English club Reading on July 16 and River Plate of Argentina three days later. The final takes place on July 21.

Milito close to Barca deal

INTERNET, undated

Zaragoza centre back Gabriel Milito is close to moving to Barcelona, according to the Catalan club's president.

The 26-year-old former Independiente stopper has been one of the most consistent defensive performers in La Liga since joining the club in 2003 and has been linked with both Barca and Juventus.

"It is practically done," Joan Laporta declared on Radio Catalunya.

"After yesterday's conversations it could happen this morning."

Milito is currently on Copa America duty with Argentina. He was set to join Real Madrid in 2003, but controversially failed a medical which he subsequently passed at Zaragoza. Real later passed injured England defender Jonathan Woodgate fit to join the club, leading to speculation that Milito was not signed due to internal wrangling over the "galatico" policy.

The defence is one of Barcelona's weak points, with Lilian Thuram proving no more than a stop-gap and captain Carles Puyol injured for the start of next season. Barca have already signed left back Eric Abidal and have been linked to Milito and Romania defender Cristian Chivu, although the latter is now expected to move either to Internazionale or Real Madrid.

Barcelona did not retain their domestic or European titles last season after a poor second half to the season, something many blamed on their inability to defend narrow leads or kill games off.

The failure has led to the close-season signings of Thierry Henry, Yaya Toure and Abidal.

The striker, who had short spells

Nedved commits to Juve

Football

INTERNET, undated

Pavel Nedved's future has finally been cleared up with the Czech midfielder agreeing to stay with Juventus for another year.

The 34-year-old had threatened to retire from the game after talks with the Bianconeri over an increased salary stalled earlier this week. But a deal was concluded late on Tuesday and Nedved will now join his teammates for pre-season training.

Nedved said: "I have been deliberating for quite a long time, but after last season I have rested well and found a new passion for football."

"My debt is still open at Juve and

I would like to help them to the top places in the league but mainly to qualify for the Champions League, where we undoubtedly belong. That is the biggest motivation for me now."

When asked if the Old Lady had met his contract demands, Nedved replied: "Yes, they have improved it. These discussions were not easy and we were discussing it for two days."

"Eventually, both sides have made a compromise and I am glad it has turned out in this way. Juventus wanted to keep me, I wanted to stay, therefore the situation was made easier."

Club officials were thought to have offered Nedved a contract extension until 2009, but Nedved admitted he will see out the remainder of his current contract before thinking about the future.

He said: "They wanted it, but I refused it. We agreed that next year in March or April, we will sit down again and discuss my future."

With doubts hanging over his future, Nedved had been linked with a number of top clubs, including Internazionale. But the former Lazio ace claims he turned down several big money offers to stay with the Turin giants, who he believes can once again make their mark in the top flight after a season spent in Serie B.

He added: "Some of the offers were really exceptional and financially very interesting, something I would not expect at my age."

"If money were the only key factor for my decision, I would leave, but it has not played the main role. I simply did not want to leave Juventus, we can yet prove something."

Iran survive Uzbek scare

AFP, Kuala Lumpur



Iran survived an early scare to beat Uzbekistan 2-1 on Wednesday and take a big step towards the Asian Cup knock-out stages.

Normally unflappable defender Rahman Rezaei put the triple-champions in trouble with a first-half own goal before Seyed Jalal Hosseini levelled and substitute Javad Kazemian took the points with a late winner.

Combustible Iran coach Amir Ghalehnoei lived up to his reputation when he was sent to the stands late in the match.

Iran trail China on goal-difference at the top of Group C with the top two teams progressing to the quarterfinals. They play

China on Sunday and Malaysia on Wednesday.

In front of a palty crowd at Malaysia's National Stadium, Uzbekistan were the first to threaten when Timur Kapadze met a cross from the left and headed straight at Iran goalkeeper Hassan Roudbarian.

Iran striker Vahid Hashemian, running on to an Ali Karimi ball, tested Uzbekistan's Pavel Bugalo at the other end with a left-footed effort in the opening exchanges.

But Rezaei put Iran in serious difficulty on 16 minutes when, under pressure from striker Ulugbek Bakaev, he nodded a hopeful bouncing ball over advancing keeper Roudbarian.

Despite the jolt Iran struggled to produce meaningful chances and it was Uzbekistan who almost doubled their lead when Kapadze headed wide from a free-kick.

hoisted into the box by captain Server Djeparov.

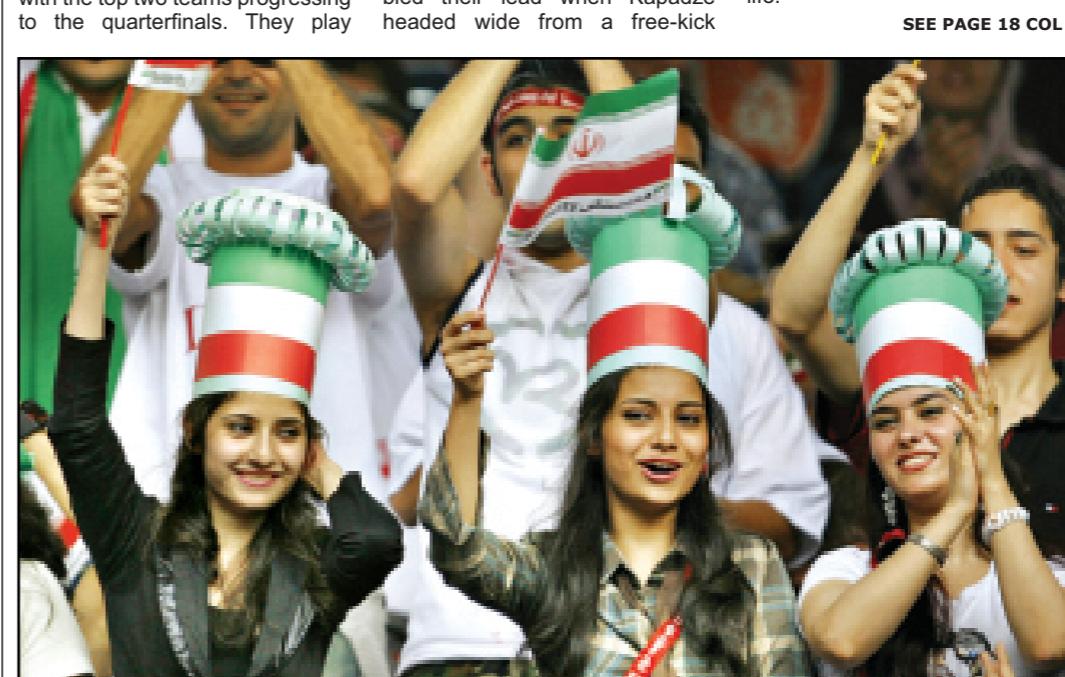
Iran could have equalised near half-time but Al Emarat forward Rassoul Khatibi glanced his header wide from Hashemian's cross.

However, the regional heavyweights emerged from the break with renewed purpose and were back on equal terms within 10 minutes when defender Hosseini headed captain Mehdi Mahdavikia's corner down and into the net.

Reza Enayati looked odds-on to put Iran in front when he met a drag-back but his shot was scrambled wide.

Osasuna midfielder Javad Nekounam headed straight at Bugalo and Kapadze had one-on-one effort parried away by Iran's Roudbarian as the game sprang to life.

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Colourful Iranian fans cheer for their team before the kick-off of the Asian Cup match against Uzbekistan at the Bukit Jalil Stadium in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

De Sanctis arrives at Sevilla

AFP, Madrid

Italian goalkeeper Morgan de Sanctis was on Tuesday unveiled as a Sevilla player after signing a four-year deal with the Spanish club.

"It's a great opportunity for a player of 30 years to receive an offer from such an important club as Sevilla," said de Sanctis who has played for Italian side Udinese since 1999.

De Sanctis was able to benefit from a clause in football's world governing body FIFA's rules which allows players who have played for more than three years with a club, or are aged over 28 years, to get out of their contract.

"It's not clear what compensation has to be paid. Sevilla have covered the risk," said his agent Federico Pastore.

Former Juventus player De Sanctis is aware of the problems he will have to fight for a place against number one goalkeeper Andres Palop.

"I know that Palop is doing very well. It's not a problem. To be competitive it's normal that there are two fighting for the post. I don't want to cause problems. I'll be at the disposal of the coach."

Vieri set for Lazio revival

INTERNET, undated

Christian Vieri is on the verge of a sensational return to Lazio, the club he last played for in 1999.

The Italian international is currently a free agent after the end of his spell at Atalanta, where he scored just two goals in seven Serie A appearances.

Keppt off the field for over a year by injury, he is eager to resume his career in the Champions League with Lazio.

President Claudio Lotito has already announced that his club will sign a striker and a midfielder," so Vieri fits the bill.

Reports in the 'Corriere dello Sport' claim Lotito is seriously considering the proposal to take on the player who turns 34 on Thursday.

The Biancocelesti are in the preliminary round of the Champions League and would welcome the addition of an experienced centre-forward to help Tommaso Rocchi and Goran Pandev.

Vieri moved from Atletico Madrid to Lazio in 1998, but stayed only one season before shattering the world transfer record with a £32.1m switch to Inter.

His wages have dropped considerably since then, as 'Bobo' now earns around £200,000 per season.

Following six years at Inter, Vieri went on to brief and unsuccessful spells at Milan, Monaco and Atalanta, plus a few weeks in which he was under contract at Sampdoria only to terminate it without attending a single training session.