



Mexico's veteran midfielder Cuauhtemoc Blanco (R) celebrates with teammates Jaime Lozano (L) and Omar Bravo after scoring against Uruguay during their Copa America third-place deciding match in Caracas on Saturday

FIFA overturns La Paz ban

AFP, Maracaibo

FIFA have done an about-turn on their high-altitude policy by allowing Bolivia to play their 2010 World Cup qualifying matches in the capital La Paz, announced the South American football federation (Conmebol) on Saturday.

World football's governing body introduced the new ruling in May, banning matches at more than 2,500 metres above sea level, citing its wish to better protect players' health.

However, after fierce campaigning from the South American country, FIFA decided to overturn the ban for the World Cup qualifiers.

"I reply to a specific request from the Bolivian football federation (FBF) with the backing of the Conmebol, the city of La Paz will be allowed to host international games in the Hernando Siles stadium," read a joint statement from FIFA and Conmebol signed by respective presidents Joseph Blatter and Nicolas Leoz.

The Hernando Siles stadium is situated at an altitude of 3577 metres.

"Bolivian political and sporting authorities have been asked to guarantee that La Paz will be equipped with a sporting complex that fulfils the requirements set by FIFA's medical commission at a maximum altitude of 2500 metres for future competitions," added the statement.

Outrage spread through South America over FIFA's initial 2500

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Mexico master Uruguay

INTERNET, undated



Mexico ended its Copa America campaign on a high with a 3-1 win over Uruguay in the third-place playoff in Caracas on Saturday.

Strikes from Cuauhtemoc Blanco, Omar Bravo and Andres Guardado saw Hugo Sanchez's side overcome an early goal from Sebastian Abreu and repeat its performances of 1997 and 1999.

"I believe it's good to know that we deserve to be only behind Brazil and Argentina," Sanchez said. "The quality of Mexican football has shown that we are on the right road

once again."

Uruguay was on the offensive straight away as only 60 seconds into the game Abreu shot narrowly wide before Jorge Fucile's effort was well-stopped by Mexican goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa.

"We are satisfied and we can leave with our head held high because we played well and played good football," Ochoa said.

Ecuadorian referee Mauricio Reinoso turned down what looked like a clear penalty after defender Diego Lugano's challenge on Bravo after 18 minutes, and Uruguay then immediately went ahead when Abreu headed home Maximiliano Pereira's cross.

"We worked hard and it will be

useful for the future," Abreu said. "The World Cup qualifying rounds are coming up and we are now ready to take on any side. We couldn't reach the final, as we all wanted, but I believe it was a positive tournament for us nevertheless."

But Mexico drew level in the 35th minute as Lugano was not so lucky the second time around when he was shown a red card for elbowing Nery Castillo inside the area and Blanco equalized from the spot.

Mexico improved after the break and Blanco went close to giving his side the lead after 53 minutes but fired just wide.

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Sampras into Hall of Fame



AFP, Newport

American legend Pete Sampras, who captured a record 14 Grand Slam singles titles, was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame here on Saturday.

The 35-year-old American headlined the class of 2007 which also featured Spain's Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, a three-time winner at the French Open and Sven Davidson, the first Swedish player to win a Grand Slam title at Roland Garros in 1957.

Photographer Russ Adams, who

covered the sport for 50 years, was also inducted.

Considered one of the greatest players in the men's game, Sampras won a record 14 Grand Slams, including seven at Wimbledon.

The youngest winner in the history of the US Open at 19 in 1990, the Californian also won five titles at Flushing Meadows and two more at the Australian Open.

However, it was his failure to reach the top at the French Open that has kept the 35-year-old Sampras from being thought of as the best ever.

Along with his Grand Slam success, Sampras held the world

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No. 1 ranking for a record 286 weeks, including a streak of 102 weeks that has been bettered by only Federer.

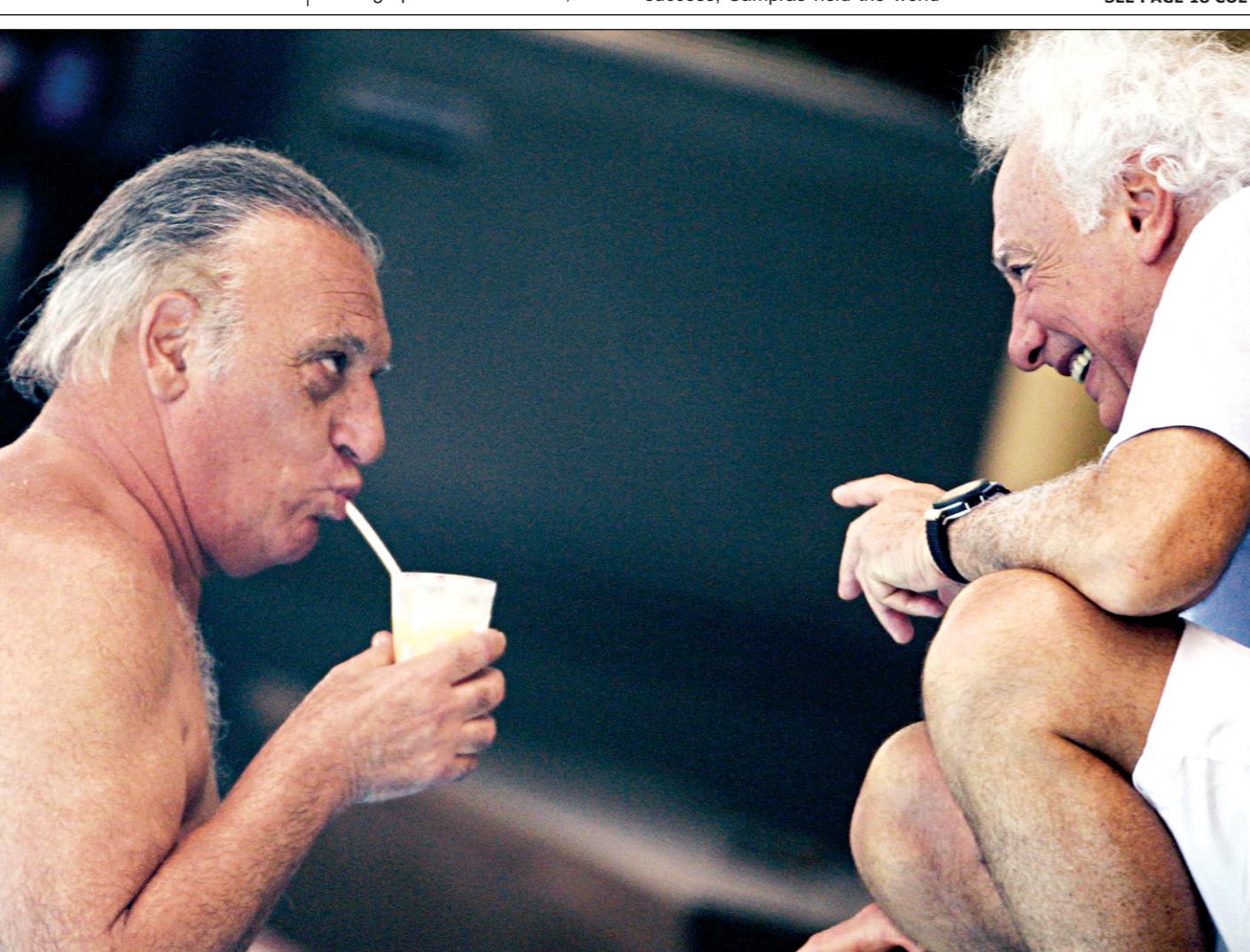
In all, Sampras finished with 64 singles titles, including five from the season-ending ATP World Championships -- a record he shares with Ivan Lendl.

Sampras also played eight years for the United States Davis Cup team.

The first Spanish woman to win the US Open title in 1994, Sanchez-Vicario finished an 18-year career with a total of 14 Grand Slam titles, including 10 in doubles.

She was just one of four women

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Argentina coach Alfio Basile (L) drinks a glass of fruit juice as he talks with Diego Maradona's former agent Guillermo Coppola, at the hotel's pool, in Maracaibo on Saturday. Argentina took on Brazil in the final match of the Copa America on the early hours of Monday.

Robben coming, Cesc booked

AFP, Madrid

Dutch winger Arjen Robben, touted for weeks as a Real Madrid target, is "very close" to quitting Premiership giants Chelsea for the Bernabeu, Spanish media said Saturday.

"Final offensive for Robben," was how El Mundo daily saw a mooted 20 million euros (26 million dollars) for the wide man in Bernd Schuster's revamped side.

"Robben is very close," the paper added, saying that the meringues were also not giving up on Arsenal's Spanish midfield starlet Cesc Fabregas.

Fabregas said during the week for the second summer in a row he was staying in London but El Mundo reported that "Cesc can be in white from 2008 -- it's practically a done deal for the coming year."

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Ayala makes surprise Zaragoza switch

INTERNET, undated

Zaragoza have remarkably signed Roberto Ayala for six million euros before he has even kicked a ball in anger at Villarreal.

Argentine international Ayala agreed in February to move to local rivals Villarreal at the end of the season from long-time club Valencia after it became clear that his contract would not be renewed at the Mestalla.

However the 34-year-old stopper was approached by Zaragoza with a three-year contract, who recently lost captain Gabi Milito to Barcelona for almost 20 million euros.

They have agreed to pay the fee, an amount set by a release clause in

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Peace at Stamford Bridge



Football

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho revealed on Sunday that he and Stamford Bridge owner Roman Abramovich have held clear-the-air talks in an effort to repair their stormy relationship.

I had a very good and long meeting with Abramovich at Stamford Bridge last week," Mourinho said in the News of the World.

"It left everything clear between us so there is no doubt, no doubt at all. I know what he thinks, I know what he feels, I know what he

wants.

"And he knows me as a person, as a manager and he knows the way I work. It was an easy, long and enjoyable meeting and I was more than delighted -- the air is clear again and there is no problem.

"We have a professional relationship and we understand each other."

The two men fell out towards the end of last season as Chelsea's title challenge petered out leading to speculation that the Portuguese coach could quit in the summer.

But Mourinho, whose team will face David Beckham's Los Angeles Galaxy next Saturday on their tour of America, said he is determined to see out his contract, which

expires in 2010.

"I am so happy here because England is at the top for football," he said.

"I am in my fourth season here and if I can carry on five, six, seven, eight years, then I will go on without a problem. I have no desire to change and try something different in Italy or Spain. I don't have that desire."

Mourinho added that after three years in London, he has finally got round to buying a house.

"I didn't do that because I wanted to sell next week or because I am thinking about leaving very, very soon," he said.

"I want to stay -- and if Chelsea had wanted to make a change, they would have done it by now."

China, Iran share the spoils

AFP, Kuala Lumpur



Regional giants Iran and China fought to a 2-2 draw here on Sunday to leave Asian Cup Group C on a knife-edge.

China went 2-0 up with early goals from Shao Jiayi and Mao Jiangting but were pegged back by a Ferydoon Zandi free-kick and a Javad Nekounam header in the second half.

The result means it's all to play for in Group C where China, Iran, and Uzbekistan can qualify with one match left.

Rattled Iran were struggling to carve out chances and it was Zhou Haibin who nearly doubled China's advantage as he put his shot just wide from another free-kick.

But winger Mao Jiangting was gifted the second when he was picked out unmarked in the box by captain Zheng Zhi, with time to control the ball and beat Roudbarian -- again on his near post.

Iran finally came alive with Vahid Hashemian causing problems and skipper Mehdi Mahdavikia also having a shot blocked.

Mahdavikia then cued up Zandi on the stroke of half-time, tapping a free-kick on the right to the midfielder who rammed it round the wall and inside China 'keeper Li Leilei to wrap up a pulsating half.

But it was a very different second period with China intent only on defending their lead and Iran taking their turn to lay siege to the opposition goal.

Reza Enayati nearly put a panicky clearance into his own goal and goalkeeper Hassan Roudbarian dropped a simple catch as China pressed the shaky Iranians into early mistakes.

And Roudbarian looked badly at fault for the opening goal as he was unable to keep out Shao Jiayi's blasted 35-yard free-kick on his near post after six minutes.

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Iran's Javad Kazemeyan (C) comes under heavy marking by Chinese defenders during their Asian Cup Group C match at the Bukit Jalil Stadium in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Pedrosa bags German GP

AFP, Sachsenring

Spaniard Dani Pedrosa got back to winning ways for Honda here on Sunday when he cruised to victory in the MotoGP category at the German Grand Prix.

Pedrosa overtook pole sitter Casey Stoner early in the race and finished over ten seconds ahead of Italy's Loris Capirossi, riding a Ducati, and US Honda rider Nicky Hayden.

It ended a barren spell for the Spaniard going back to the British Grand Prix in July 2006.

Pedrosa achieved his first victory in China last year after moving up to the MotoGP category but had so far failed to reach the top of the podium this season.

Championship rivals Stoner and Valentino Rossi both had poor races with the Australian finishing fifth after suffering problems with his Bridgestone tyres in the searing heat.

Seven-time world champion Rossi crashed at the Sachsenring circuit attempting to overtake Frenchman Randy De Puniet on a corner during lap six.

It was Rossi's first retirement this season. The Italian had reigned his title bid by winning the

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FED CUP All-square between USA and Russia



Tennis

AFP, Stowe, Vermont

Wimbledon champ Venus Williams survived some jitters and Francesca Schiavone posted an upset win as the United States and Italy split their opening FedCup semifinal matches against Russia and France.

Williams posted a 7-6 (8/6), 0-6, 6-4 victory over Nadia Petrova Saturday to deliver a needed point for the USA against Russia.

The victory in the second singles match put the Americans level at 1-1 after the first day of the best-of-five-match tie.

Italy was also at 1-1 against France after Schiavone registered her second straight FedCup victory over Amelie Mauresmo.

All eyes were focused on Williams on the hard court at

Wimbledon, as she is expected to carry the US in the absence of younger sister Serena, who is nursing an injury sustained at

Wimbledon.

Her win proved even more important as 18-year-old American Vania King dropped a 6-1, 6-3 decision to Anna Chakvetadze in the opening match.

Despite losing the first three games, Williams rallied to take the first set in a tiebreaker.

Petrova responded by blowing past Williams in the second to force a third set.

In the deciding set, Williams overcame a break of serve that left her down 3-4 by winning the last three games.

On Sunday, Williams will open against Chakvetadze before King takes on Petrova.

In the concluding doubles, King and top doubles player Lisa Raymond are slated to face Petrova and Elena Vesnina.

Mauresmo lost for the fourth time in eight meetings against the experienced Schiavone, going down in straight sets 6-3, 6-3 on a day when on-court temperatures shot up to 42 degrees Celsius.

Earlier in the day, Tatiana Golovin had given France a winning start to the tie, beating Tathiana Garbin 6-3, 2-6, 6-2.

Mauresmo was 5-3 ahead in the opening set but Schiavone then reeled off the next four games to take the opening set 7-5. The Italian then dominated the second set much to the delight of the home fans.

"I had problems today," said Mauresmo. "In the first set I led without really dominating."</p