

Chile sweet for Brazil

AFP, Santiago

Two goals from man-of-the-match Luiz Fabiano and one from Manchester City's new signing Robinho put Brazil's World Cup qualification back on track here Sunday with a 3-0 win over Chile.

The five-times World Cup winners had been languishing in sixth place in the 10-team South American zone qualifier, two places outside of assuring one of the four automatic places for the 2010 finals in South Africa.

And with coach Dunga under constant criticism for recent poor performances, including from his country's president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the trip to Santiago had loomed as a potential disaster.

Chile opened well and dominated proceedings, but it was Sevilla striker Fabiano who opened the scoring against the run of play in the 20th minute when he headed home a Ronaldinho free-kick.

It was Brazil's first goal in 317 minutes play, the last having come in a friendly against

Canada in June.

The AC Milan midfielder, showing glimpses of his top form, had the chance to make it 2-0 after Diego was downed in the box in the 34th minute, but his penalty-kick was superbly saved by goalkeeper Claudio Bravo.

Ten minutes later and on the stroke of half-time though Fabiano made an opening for former Real Madrid star Robinho and he made no mistake to make it 2-0.

Cheered on by a capacity 70,000 crowd, the Chileans lunged everything into attack at the start of the second half, and with tempers

STANDINGS

Standings in the World Cup 2010 South American qualifying zone after the weekend's games:

(Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points)	Paraguay	Brazil	Argentina	Uruguay	Colombia	Chile	Ecuador	Venezuela	Peru	Bolivia	
7, 4, 2, 1, 14, 6	14	7, 3, 3, 1, 11, 4	12	7, 3, 3, 1, 10, 4	12	7, 3, 2, 2, 16, 6	11	7, 2, 4, 1, 4, 3	10	7, 3, 1, 3, 9, 12	10
7, 2, 2, 3, 10, 14	8	7, 2, 1, 4, 9, 11	7	7, 1, 3, 3, 4, 15	6	7, 1, 1, 5, 8, 20	4				

flaring both Brazil's Kleber Anderson and Chile's Jorge Valdivia were sent off.

With Brazil content to sit back on their lead, the home side pressed forward and were caught out eight minutes from time when Fabiano struck for his second goal of the match with a shot that went through Bravo's legs.

The win hoisted Brazil into second place in the standings level on 12 points from seven games with eternal rivals Argentina but ahead on goal difference.

Paraguay remain top on 14 points ahead of Wednesday's eighth round of games which see Brazil host bottom dogs Bolivia and Argentina travel to second-bottom Peru. Paraguay also have a comfortable looking matchup against third from bottom Venezuela.

"I think that our president will be happy today as will all Brazilians thanks to the way our team played," former World Cup skipper Dunga said.

"In Brazil we have a lot of obligations: first of all to win, secondly to score a lot of goals and thirdly to put on a show - it's not always possible."



Brazil striker Luis Fabiano (R) scores his second goal through Chilean goalkeeper Claudio Bravo's legs during their 2010 World Cup qualifier at the National Stadium in Santiago on Sunday.

A Benin surprise

AFP, Johannesburg

Minnows Benin reached the last qualifying phase in Africa for the 2010 World Cup Sunday with giants Egypt and Ivory Coast poised to join them.

Razack Omotoyossi scored twice as the Squirrels of Benin beat the Black Antelopes of Angola 3-2 in a Cotonou thriller to accompany Cameroon and Nigeria into the third elimination stage on the road to the finals in South Africa.

Victory gave Benin an unassailable five-point advantage over surprise 2006 World Cup qualifiers Angola and Uganda in Group 3 with one series of second round fixtures to come next month.

African champions Egypt bounced back from a friendly hiding in Sudan last month to overcome the Democratic Republic of Congo 1-0 in Kinshasa with star midfielder Mohamed Abouttraika snatching the winner.

A point from their final fixture against whipping boys Djibouti in Cairo will clinch top spot in Group 12 for the Pharaohs while Malawi and DR Congo scrap to fill one of eight slots reserved for runners-up.

Didier Drogha-less Ivory Coast surrendered the lead in a 1-1 away draw with Mozambique but closest Group 7 challengers Botswana lost leaving the Elephants needing only a draw to progress when they host modest Madagascar.

Congo left it late to keep alive hopes of advancing from Group 10 with Wilfried Endzanga scoring the only goal against pacesetters Mali three minutes before full-time in Brazzaville.

And Gabon moved above Ghana into second place on the Group 5 standings after a 3-0 away triumph over Lesotho thanks to second half goals from Bruno Ecuele, Roguy Meye and Bruno Mbanagoye.

Madagascar won for the first time in Group 7 with an early goal from Mauritius-based Stephan Rabemananjara separating the Indian Ocean island nation from the visiting Zebras of Botswana in Antananarivo.

Zimbabwe were held 0-0 by Guinea in Harare and after dropping four points in two Group 2 home outings must win their final fixture away to Namibia to have any chance of squeezing through among the best runners-up.

Uganda are masters of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory

and the Cranes conceded two late goals to crash 3-1 at previously pointless Niger in Group 3 and probably blow any hope of being among the final 20 contenders.

Khaled Adenon gave Benin a first-minute lead and although Flavio Amado levelled soon after, Omotoyossi rocked Angola with two second half goals before Arsenal 'Love' Cabungula reduced arrears and triggered a tense climax.

Recent Wigan Athletic signing Amr Zaki dispossessed a Congolese defender to present Egypt's arch predator Abouttraika with the chance to lob goalkeeper Muteba Kidiaba on 30 minutes before a capacity 80,000 crowd at the Martyrs Stadium.

An Ivorian team lacking injured strikers Drogha, Arouna Kone and Aruna Dindane took an early second half lead in Maputo through Bakary Kone only for Mozambique defender Almiro 'Miro' Lobo to equalise four minutes later.

Alassane Issoufou was the scourge of Uganda in Niamey, cancelling a David Obua goal before putting his team ahead five minutes from full-time to give Scottish coach Bobby Williamson a painful debut.

Zola favourite for Hammers

AFP, London

Gianfranco Zola emerged Monday as a strong favourite to become West Ham's new manager after Croatia boss Slaven Bilic was quoted as saying he does not want the job.

Bilic, a former Hammers defender, was seen as the leading candidate to take over at Upton Park following Alan Curbishley's resignation last week, but he appears committed to the task of leading his country to the 2010 World Cup finals.

"I'm not going anywhere," Bilic told the Sun newspaper. "Any club from England is a great opportunity. Not for money, honestly, for me it's about ambition. It's about working in England, a country you know I adore."

"But it's like, no. West Ham is my club, I have feelings for them but I won't go."

Bilic led Croatia to Euro 2008 last year and his reputation as a coach was enhanced by home and away wins over England in the qualifiers. The two countries have been drawn together in the World

Cup qualifying competition and England are due to play in Zagreb on Wednesday.

Bilic added: "I had many offers in the period between our win at Wembley last November until I signed a new deal (with the Croatia FA) in May."

"I decided to stay. Whether that's good for me only God knows."

Croatian football chiefs have expressed anger over the speculation linking Bilic to the West Ham

job, which they see as a plot to destabilise the national team ahead of Wednesday's crucial match.

Vlatko Markovic, the Croatian FA's President, was quoted in English media as saying: "This is another dirty trick by the English. They obviously want to cause trouble for us before we play."

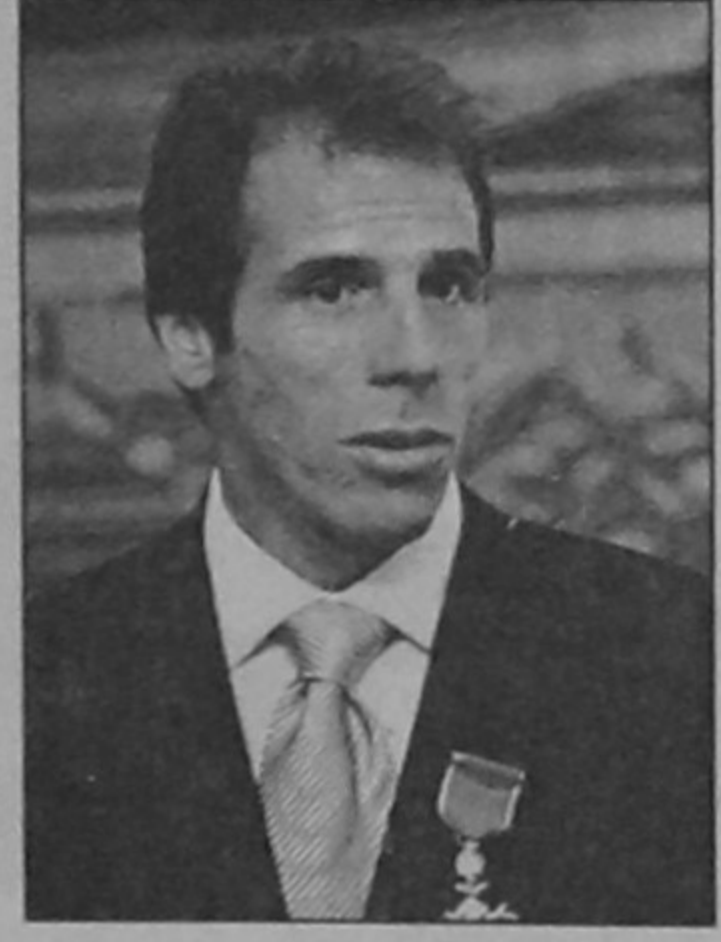
"It's typical of the sleaze in English football. For the story about West Ham wanting Bilic to come out now is very poor."

"We are very suspicious and unhappy as it is not the first time something like this has happened with England."

With Bilic apparently out of the picture, former Napoli, Chelsea and Italy midfielder Zola is in pole position after having a second interview for the post at the weekend.

Zola is currently joint coach of Italy's under-21 squad and has also been linked with the vacancy at Newcastle.

Former Italy boss Roberto Donadoni is also in contention while Danish legend Michael Laudrup was due to be interviewed on Monday.



GIANFRANCO ZOLA

Cesc plays down reaction

INTERNET, undated

Spain midfielder Cesc Fabregas has played down his seemingly angry reaction to being substituted against Bosnia-Herzegovina during his side's World Cup qualifying victory on Saturday.

Spain coach coach Vicente del Bosque replaced the Arsenal player with Xabi Alonso in the 65th minute of the encounter, not long after the 21-year-old's pinpoint through-ball had helped David Villa net the only goal of the game in Murcia.

And though he admits he was not best pleased by the switch, Fabregas insists he has nothing to apologise for, saying: "The day that they replace me and I'm not angry I

will leave football.

"It's normal that you think like that when you've been taken off. It's not a lack of respect for anybody for wanting to be a better player every day."

"The most important thing is that we won and that we've started the qualification phase with three points. It was not easy and we had it tough to break down their defence, but we did it."

"The 21-year-old Fabregas, who has made 33 appearances for his country but only played in five full matches, added: "They always change me when we are winning. This suggests that I need to be better in defence to be a more complete midfielder."

"I want to improve, to be a complete midfielder and show to everybody that I can play in both positions, as much in attack as defence."

Meanwhile, Fabregas' fellow midfielder Andres Iniesta is hoping to see the European champions put on a good show when they return to the region where he grew up to face Armenia on Wednesday.

Barcelona ace Iniesta, who was born just outside the city of Albacete where this week's game will be staged, said: "On Wednesday there is every incentive to have a good game."

"I think it was a good game (against Bosnia-Herzegovina). In the second half we played a faster game, we created quite a few chances and scored a goal."

"We had some chances to score more goals. There are other games where you score in the first half and things change. What's important is to be clear about things - we got a goal, three points and that's that."

Rio boost for England

AFP, Barcelona

Rio Ferdinand resumed training with his England team-mates here on Monday, handing Fabio Capello a major boost ahead of Wednesday's World Cup qualifying clash with Croatia in Zagreb.

Manchester United defender Ferdinand had been struggling with a neck problem and missed the 2-0 victory over Andorra here on Saturday.

But after Monday's session, he was passed fit to travel to the Croatian capital and will expect to return to the centre of defence alongside captain John Terry, with Everton's Joleon Lescott making way.

Head coach Capello, who is under pressure after England's lacklustre display against the group minnows, is expected to promote Joe Cole to the starting line-up after the Chelsea midfielder came off the bench to score both goals against Andorra.

England head for Zagreb aiming to avoid a repeat of the defeat they suffered there at the start of their unsuccessful campaign to reach Euro 2008.

S Africa 'on time' for 2010 WC

AFP, Berlin

Danny Jordaan, the chief executive of the organising committee for the 2010 World Cup, insisted Sunday South Africa "is on time" to host the tournament and dismissed rumours Germany could step in as a replacement.

And Jordaan said FIFA president Sepp Blatter would be impressed, the next time he visits South Africa at the progress made there in recent months.

"We are on time and there will be no more strikes on the construction building sites," Jordaan was quoted in Monday's edition of Die Welt. "The next time Mr Blatter visits South Africa, we will show him what enormous progress we have made."

The announcement in July, that the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium in Port Elizabeth would not be ready by the time of the Confederations Cup in 2009 - the traditional World Cup dress rehearsal - had caused fresh doubts over South Africa's ability to host the tournament.

But Jordaan insisted the idea of another country replacing South Africa as hosts was incomprehensible.

"No country would be in the position to host the World Cup in such a short period of time, not even Germany," he insisted, adding all stadiums would be ready by the end of October 2009.

South Africa will build five new stadiums for the tournament, while a further five will be renovated at a cost of more than 9.8 billion South African Rand (1.2 billion US dollars).

Cole stakes his claim

AFP, Barcelona

Joe Cole is being tipped to finally win over new England manager Fabio Capello and force his way into the starting line-up for Wednesday's crunch World Cup qualifier against Croatia in Zagreb.

Chelsea midfielder Cole, mysteriously left on the bench by Capello despite being one of England's most consistent players over a number of years, has saved his manager's blushes for the last two games in a row.

He came on as a second-half substitute to score a last-minute equalizer against the Czech Republic at Wembley last month and then repeated the trick on Saturday, scoring twice inside 10 second-half minutes against Andorra to confirm a 2-0 victory and three World Cup qualifying points.

Those goals, at a time when England were struggling to break down a 10-man defence, saved Capello from the kind of inquest that eventually put an end to his predecessor Steve McClaren.

Now many of the England squad expect to see Cole rewarded with a starting berth in Zagreb on

Wednesday, a tie regarded as possibly the most crucial of all in Group 6.

"I think Joe is staking his claim," said Cole's England and Chelsea team-mate Frank Lampard.

"No player likes being left out of the starting line-up and Joe isn't any different. No-one trains harder or gives his all as much as Joe and he wants to be in the team."

"He's come on and scored two goals so that's as much as he can do. The decision is always down to the manager but he has given him something to think about by coming on and doing that."

"When you aren't in the team - whether it's because you are out of favour or it's a tactical thing - all you can do is do your stuff when you are called on and Joe has done that yet again."

Lampard has seen Cole at close quarters for the last five years at Chelsea and although he refuses to criticize England boss Capello he is no doubt as baffled as anyone else as to why the midfielder has been overlooked.

Lampard added: "Joe's got tremendous ability and he can score important goals - he's done that for Chelsea over the past couple of years."

Joe showed against Andorra that he can unlock a defence and his goals were the kind of goal-

poaching types of goals which he's added to his game in recent years. That's the sort of player you want in your team when you are desperate to nick a goal and his prime years are to come.

"He's only 26 and there's a lot more ahead from him I'm sure."

Even with Cole on top form, however, Lampard admits England weren't up to scratch on Saturday as they laboured to beat a team ranked 186th in the world.

But he insists what really matters is how they play in Zagreb on Wednesday - and whether they qualify for the World Cup Finals in 2010.

He said: "I think we've under-achieved as a group over the past couple of years - that's a fact. I think we just have to play better and that's what we're trying to do."

"Listen, no one needs telling that we should beat teams like Andorra - we all know that. But it is tough when they are just throwing everyone behind the ball like that."

"At least Croatia will come at us, but they have got very good players so that presents different problems. It will be a bit more open. They've got a lot more threats in their team, but it might be a bit more enjoyable."

Gattuso out of Georgia clash

AFP, Rome

Midfield stalwart Gennaro Gattuso will miss Italy's World Cup qualifier against Georgia at Udine on Wednesday after injuring his wrist in training.

The AC Milan player, who slipped and hurt his left wrist in a practice match, underwent surgery on Sunday and will be ruled out for around a month, said Enrico Castellacci, the team doctor with the world champions.

Meanwhile, defenders Fabio Grosso and Alessandro Gamberini, who were injured in the laboured 2-1 opening World Cup qualifying win in Cyprus on Saturday, will not be replaced, said Italian coach Marcello Lippi.

Grosso has fractured ribs while Gamberini suffered a dislocated shoulder.

Grosso would be out for about a month and Gamberini would not be back for at least two weeks.

"There is no point in replacing someone who is going to sit in the stands," said Lippi, explaining why he had not called up replacements.

Italy needed a last-minute goal to eke out their 2-1 victory against Cyprus in Larnaca on Saturday. Antonio Di Natale, with his second goal of the night, secured an undeserved three points in the Group Eight game.

Hughton given Magpies reins

INTERNET, undated

Chris Hughton has been named caretaker manager of Newcastle following the departures of Terry McDermott and Adam Sadler.

Assistant boss McDermott and reserve team coach Sadler have both left St James' Park in the wake of Kevin Keegan's sensational exit last week.

Keegan resigned last week citing differences with the board over the club's transfer policy and now close ally McDermott and Sadler have followed him out of the door.

McDermott, a former Magpies player, had a long coaching association with the club dating back to Keegan's first stint in charge in 1992.

He also worked under Kenny Dalglish, Graeme Souness, Glenn Roeder and Sam Allardyce in the North East.

Former youth team goalkeeper Sadler worked at the club's academy until being promoted by Roeder in 2006.

Ex-Tottenham assistant manager Hughton will now take caretaker charge of the side for this weekend's clash with Hull, with academy director Richard Money and academy coach Alan Thompson set to assist him.

Hamilton stripped of win

AFP, Spa-Francorchamps

Formula One was plunged into new controversy on Sunday when race stewards at the Belgian Grand Prix stunningly stripped Lewis Hamilton of a brilliant victory.

The stewards' decision, which will be seen by many as part of a conspiracy to rig the results to ensure a close fight in the title race, came long after the race when they hit the Briton and his McLaren team with a 25-second penalty.

Their decision came in relation to a move in the final stages of the race when after attempting to pass Ferrari world champion Kimi Raikkonen, who was leading, he was forced off the circuit and cut out the 'Bus Stop' chicane.

Hamilton recognised immediately that he had done this - and gained an advantage by going ahead of the Finn - so he slowed to allow his rival to re-pass him and lead as they completed the lap in teaming rain.

When they began racing again, 23-year-old Hamilton passed Raikkonen and went on to win after the Finn slipped on the rain-drenched surface and crashed out.

Hamilton was relegated to third and the race victory was handed to Ferrari's Brazilian driver Felipe Massa who had struggled to keep pace with the Briton and Raikkonen.

McLaren said they would appeal the decision.

"We have studied the details and put them before the FIA stewards," said a team statement.

"They show that after cutting the chicane Lewis lifted off, he was 6km/h slower than Kimi. After conceding the lead to Kimi, Lewis repositioned his car on the right and beat Kimi on the brakes going into the hairpin."

Critics and paddock observers were swift in their condemnation of a decision that reeked of potential favouritism for Ferrari and seemed entirely unjustified following the most exciting race of the year.

Last year, the sport's ruling body, the International Motoring Federation (FIA) was accused of a 'witch-hunt' against McLaren and this spectre was raised again by their stewards' action at the famous Spa-Francorchamps circuit.

In the immediate post-race euphoria on Sunday, there were no calls for an investigation by any driver or team, but the stewards announced they would be making an official investigation.

The decision to hit Hamilton with a 'drive-through' penalty worth 25 seconds wrecked the value of the race as a spectacle and at the same time devalued Massa's win to nothing more than a hollow sporting victory gifted to him.

It will be seen by most observers as another move by the FIA artifi-

cially to keep alive the championship and make it closer by hitting McLaren with a sanction.

At the previous race in Valencia, Ferrari escaped any punishment for taking advantage at a controversial pit-stop when most observers expected Massa, who escaped sanction, to be given a 'drive-through' penalty.

Sunday's shock decision, which demoted Hamilton to third place behind Massa and BMW Sauber driver Nick Heidfeld, left the British driver with just a two-point lead over Massa in the championship with only five races left.

"Kimi pushed me wide. I was a little bit ahead. I was outside on Turn One, I had no room and he basically pushed me so I went on the escape route," said Hamilton before his punishment was announced.

"So I let him past, then got in his tow and he was ducking and diving left and right but I managed to get past him and I was pretty much gone from there."

Two-time world champion Fernando Alonso of Spain came home fourth for Renault ahead of German Sebastian Vettel in a Toro Rosso and sixth-placed Pole Robert Kubica in the second BMW.

In another late development, Timo Glock of Toyota was demoted a place to ninth, with Mark Webber of Red Bull promoted to eighth, following a 25sec penalty for not taking notice of yellow flags.