

Costa Rica rip USA

AFP, San Jose



Alvario Saborio and Selso Borges scored early goals to give Costa Rica a 3-1 victory over the United States here on Wednesday, putting the Ticos atop North America's World Cup 2010 qualifying.

Costa Rica improved to 3-1 for nine points in the North and Central America and Caribbean region (CONCACAF) to move past the Americans, who slid to 2-1-1 for seven points to stand second in the six-nation hexagonal qualifying event.

The top three teams advance directly to the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa. The fourth-place team must come through against the fifth-best from South America in a playoff to reach South Africa.

The Americans suffered their sixth loss in a row at Costa Rica, the longest US road losing streak to any foe, and remained winless on the artificial turf of Saprissa Stadium, known for rowdy supporters fenced off near the pitch.

The Ticos seized the lead in the opening seconds when Saborio sent the ball high and bent it around diving US goalkeeper Tim Howard.

Saborio netted the second-fastest goal ever

allowed by the US lineup in a World Cup qualifier, the only faster being a header in the first minute by Carlos Hermosillo in a 2-2 draw with Mexico from 1997.

Borges took a pass from Esteban Sirias and blasted the ball into the net in the 12th minute to double the hosts' edge.

Pablo Herrera put the finishing touches on the rout in the 68th minute as the margin matched the 3-0 drubbing suffered by the US team in 2005 in their most recent prior visit to Costa Rica.

Landon Donovan averted a shutout with a penalty kick in the second minute of stoppage time, netting the first US goal in Costa Rica since 2000 with a right-footed blast.

Adding to the Americans' woes was a yellow card on US midfielder Michael Bradley in the 55th minute, one that will keep him out Saturday against Honduras in Chicago in the next qualifying match.

US forward Brian Ching had a hamstring injury and missed the match, which was brought forward one week to allow the Americans to prepare for and play in the FIFA Confederations Cup later this month in South Africa.

Qualifying matches continue Saturday when Costa Rica will visit Trinidad and Tobago, the US squad plays host to Honduras and Mexico will travel to El Salvador.



Costa Rican Alvaro Saborio (L) shoots the ball to score the opening goal against the US during their 2010 World Cup qualifier at the Ricardo Saprissa Stadium in San Jose on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Kaka still Milanese'

Football

AFP, Rome

Brazilian playmaker Kaka remains an AC Milan player, despite reports from Spain he is heading for Real Madrid in a 65-million-euro deal, Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi said Wednesday.

Spanish radio station Cadena Ser reported on Tuesday the deal had been agreed by newly-installed Real president Florentino Perez, AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani and Bosco Leite, Kaka's father and agent.

But Berlusconi insisted that "there is still no decision" on a definitive move and added he would be meeting with the player on Monday after the latter returns from a weekend World Cup qualifier against Uruguay.

"I will meet Kaka on Monday and then I'll tell you," Berlusconi told state broadcaster Rai.

"It is always the players who decide on their future, who have to decide how to pursue their

career," he added, noting that despite his own close relationship with Ukrainian striker Sergei Shevchenko the forward had ultimately left in 2005 to join Chelsea.

"I did all I could but in the end he took his decision," said Berlusconi, adding that he was disappointed to see that French star Yoan Gourcuff had elected to sign permanently for Bordeaux, whom he helped to the French league title while on loan from Milan.

Cadena Ser had reported Kaka would sign up for five years and a salary worth nine million euros a year, while Italian news agency Ansa Tuesday had quoted Berlusconi as coming close to admitting the star was on his way.

"I do not know if we can keep Kaka at Milan because they (Real) have offered him so much money," Ansa quoted Berlusconi as saying.

English side Chelsea, who have just landed Kaka's former boss at Milan, Carlo Ancelotti, as coach meanwhile denied reports late Wednesday that they had tabled an 85 million euro bid for the Brazilian coupled with a net annual salary of 10 million euros.

Japan invited to play in 2011 Copa America

AFP, Tokyo

Japan have been invited to play in the 2011 Copa America in Argentina, following their maiden appearance in the 1999 edition, the Japan Football Association said Thursday.

Junji Ogura, the association's vice president, learned of the invitation in Nassau, Bahamas, where he was attending the congress of football's world governing body FIFA, a spokeswoman for the FA said.

"We'll have more details when the vice president returns home," she added.

Japan competed in the South American continental championship in 1999 in Paraguay under French coach Philippe Troussier.

The Blue Samurai were knocked out at the group stage with one point, losing to Paraguay and Peru and drawing 1-1 with Bolivia.

Sahagir ton lifts BD A

SPORTS REPORTER

Middle-order batsman Sahagir Hossain hit a brilliant unbeaten century to guide Bangladesh A to a comfortable position against visiting Maharashtra Cricket Association (MCA) on the second day of their second four-day match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Resuming the day with an overnight score of 158 for 3 in 64 overs, the hosts raced to 357 before being all out in 134 overs.

Nafis Iqbal scored 81 runs off 193 balls with 12 fours while former national skipper Rajin Saleh made 34 off 88 balls with two fours and two sixes.

Right-handed Sahagir hit 102 runs off 212 balls that featured 12 fours and a six while Ziaur Rahman added 29 off 49 balls.

Ganesh Gaikwad grabbed four wickets conceding 71 runs and Kiran Yadav captured three wickets for 127 runs while Samad Fallah scalped two for 79 runs for the tourists.

In reply, MCA scored 60 in 28 overs for the loss of two wickets at stumps.

The visitors made a shaky start losing both of their openers, skipper Harshad Khadiwale (3) and Roman Bhosale (8) early as the visitors were tottering at 17 for 2 in 11.1 overs.

One down Sangram Attitkar and number four Kedar Jadhav were unbeaten on 30 and 17 runs respectively.

Dollar Mahmud and Nazmul Hossain took one wicket each for three and 11 runs respectively.

Socceroos, Japan on the verge

AFP, Singapore



Australia and Japan are poised to be among the first teams to qualify for the World Cup finals on Saturday, and they are determined to grab the opportunity.

The Socceroos are unbeaten in their five Asian Group A games and can book their place in South Africa by either beating or drawing with Qatar in the searing heat of Doha.

Japan will join them if they take all three points against Uzbekistan in Tashkent, leaving Qatar, Bahrain and the Uzbeks to battle for the third place play-off slot.

In Group B, South Korea are in the driving seat with 11 points from five games, one ahead of North Korea and Saudi Arabia who have played a game more. Iran have five points from five matches.

South Korea, spearheaded by Manchester United's Park Ji-Sung, travel to Dubai where the UAE, who are out of the running, have only pride to play for, while Iran need to beat North Korea in Pyongyang to stay in the race.

Australian coach Pim Verbeek has selected virtually all of the country's high-profile players for their matches against Qatar then Bahrain on June 10 and Japan on June 17.

But Newcastle target man Mark Viduka is missing after saying he needed to rest while Everton linchpin Tim Cahill is a doubt for Saturday.

Cahill pulled up clutching his left leg after blocking a clearance from Chelsea defender Alex in last weekend's FA Cup final, and Verbeek will not want to risk aggravating the injury.

The 29-year-old, though, is determined to play and help Australia qualify.

"I'm anxious to play in the next game for Australia because I want to qualify for the World Cup," said Cahill.

"It was a bang on my hip. It's pretty sore, but you get loads of knocks and just get on with it."

Japan look to be in fine form after inflicting 4-0 defeats on both Chile and Belgium in friendlies over the past week, although coach Takeshi Okada has made it clear there is no room for complacency.

"We need to refresh our minds for the Uzbekistan game, and definitely come home with a victory," he said, having set his team a target of reaching the World Cup semi-finals.

South Korea, who made the semi-finals under Guus Hiddink at the 2002 World Cup, have added three new faces to their squad for the matches against UAE on Saturday, then Saudi Arabia on June 10 and Iran on June 17, both in Seoul.

But the onus will once again be on the likes of Park Ji-Sung, Monaco star Park Joo-Young and Dortmund's Lee Young-Pyo.

Their key problem against the UAE will be the heat with midday temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius (101 degrees Fahrenheit) in Dubai.

"The heat makes it impossible for us to practise during the day and we have to limit our practices to evenings," said coach Huh Jung-Moo.

"But I'm sure my players will overcome the heat come game time."

Iran have their work cut-out if they want to make the finals for a second successive time with a formidable trip to secretive North Korea.

Iranian-American Afshin Qotbi, their new coach, will need to call on all the knowledge of Korean football he picked up in a long stint assisting Hiddink, Dick Advocaat and then Verbeek at South Korea.

But their preparations have not been perfect with a 1-0 defeat to lowly China this week in Qotbi's first full international.

The Saudis rest on Saturday before facing South Korea next week and then North Korea on June 17.

Barca ready to let Eto'o go

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona president Joan Laporta has left the door open for the departure of Samuel Eto'o, saying Wednesday that the future of the Cameroon striker at the Spanish champions would depend on the transfer market.

"The football market is very dynamic and maybe there could be a surprise because he is a player who is very much in demand," he said.

Eto'o, the top scorer for Barcelona in the league this season with 30 goals, is under contract with the Catalan side until 2010 and "it would be great if he finished his career at Barcelona," he added.

The 28-year-old has reportedly sparked interest from English Premier League club Manchester City and French side Lyon and Italian side Inter Milan.

Catalan radio RAC1 reported Tuesday that Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola has told Eto'o that he will not be counting on him next year.

Row over

FROM PAGE 17 Sports Association (Rangpur), Brothers Union Pabna (Rajshahi), Shuktara Jubo Sangsad (Narayanganj), Dinajpur Football Academy, Shariatpur Sadar Upazilla Krira Samity and Young Men's Club (Dhaka).

Barguna, Habiganj, Feni and Meherpur are the venues where the final round teams are yet to be decided in a meeting of the tournament committee today. Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) representatives at the venues will submit their report to tournament committee chairman Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir who will preside over the meeting.

ICL duo seeks

FROM PAGE 17 The players can also make their way into the national team after a six-month "cooling period" which ends on December 31.

"I have said earlier that I welcome any of our ICL players to come back to domestic cricket. The deadline for them to terminate their contracts with the ICL is on June 15 so we expect more players to submit their letters in the next few days," said BCB media committee chairman Jalal Yunus Chowdhury on the issue.

The rebel players met at Dhaka Warriors opener Shahriar Nafees' residence on Wednesday night to discuss their return to local cricket and are expecting their NOCs (no objection certificates) from the ICL organizers in the next few days.

NOTICE

Due to unavoidable reason Crossword Puzzle could not be published today. It will be published tomorrow.

-Sports Editor



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh A wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain Pavel (L) drives through the covers during his unbeaten knock of 102 runs off 212 balls against Maharashtra Cricket Association on Day Two of the second four-day match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.