

USA pull it out of a hat

AFP, Rustenburg

 The United States came from nowhere to grab a place in the Confederations Cup semifinals after a stunning 3-0 win over Egypt here on Sunday. Bob Bradley's side went into the game as rank outsiders to qualify behind world champions Italy and Egypt but goals from Charlie Davies, Michael Bradley and Clint Dempsey saw them edge out the Azzurri on goals scored to finish as Group B runners-up behind Brazil.

Their reward is a semifinal date with Spain in Bloemfontein on Wednesday.

The US went into this match demoralised after successive defeats to Brazil (3-0) and Italy (3-1) at this World Cup warm-up.

But Bradley's boys made a mockery of the formbook on Sunday.

Man of the match Dempsey admitted: "I wasn't even aware we had a chance of qualifying until yesterday."

"All credit to the guys and the coaching staff, we got the result we wanted, now we have to refocus and prepare for Spain."

Bob Bradley added: "We were in a tough group but we knew we still had to go for it and give it a chance."

"Unlike against Brazil we started with lots of energy and got the first goal which was important."

"At half time we felt if we were smart and continued to press we could get more goals."

Egypt assistant coach Shawki Ghareeb said fatigue had played a part in their downfall.

"I would like to congratulate the USA. As for us I think our performances against Brazil and the win over Italy took their toll on our players. Our play wasn't up to the level to qualify but we can take positives from our time here to help prepare for World Cup qualifying."

Egypt were without Mohamed Zidan, sidelined with a hamstring injury picked up in the 1-0 win over Italy while Bradley replaced Everton keeper Tim Howard with his Premier League colleague Brad Guzan, the Aston Villa stopper making his Confederations Cup debut.

Also dropped were Rangers' midfielder Marcus DaBeasley, with Ricardo Clark, suspended for the Italy game, back in the side.

Forward Davies came on for Sacha Kljestan, who picked up the States' second successive red card against Italy.

The US grabbed the lead in the 21st minute.

A Jonathan Bornstein throw-in from the left, with Jozy Altidore spurring it on its way, caused havoc in the box as Essam El Hadary scrambled around trying to get his hands on the ball only for Davies to pounce and slot home by the near post.

El Hadary required medical attention after getting inadvertently kicked in the mayhem by his colleague Ahmed Fathi, the Egyptian skipper sporting a big white bandage round his head for the rest of the game.

The US could have doubled their advantage shortly after only for El Hadary's bravery bringing a goalbound charge by Landon Donovan to an abrupt end.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



A GREAT ESCAPE: USA midfielder Clint Dempsey (L) celebrates with teammates after scoring the third goal against Egypt during their Confederations Cup encounter at the Royal Bafokeng Stadium in Rustenburg on Sunday. Dempsey's 71st minute header was enough to qualify USA into an unlikely last four place.

PHOTO: AFP

Fabiano keeps a promise

INTERNET, undated

 Sunday was Father's Day in South Africa and for Brazilian striker Luis Fabiano it really was a special day. Not only did he manage to score two goals in Brazil's 3-0 rout in a Confederations Cup Group B match played in Pretoria's Loftus Versfeld Stadium, he also managed to fulfil a promise he made to his daughter a few days earlier.

The Sevilla striker, who was not surprisingly named the man of the match for his performance against the Azzurri, said: "On Thursday, the day of our match against the US, my daughter Giovana had her birthday. I promised her that I would score a goal for her."

"We won the game 3-0, but I could not score. I then told her that I would score one for her in our next game and I am very happy that I managed to do that."

"I am very happy that I can dedicate my two goals to my two daughters

Giovana and Gabriela."

But the goals were not only important for the 28-year-old because he was able to make good on a promise to his daughter, they were also important because they kept him in the running to retain his place in the Brazilian national team.

Brazilian coach Carlos Dunga is in the very enviable position of having a whole array of exceptional strikers to choose from. Not only the likes of Robinho, Alexandre Pato and Nilmar, who are all in the Confederations Cup squad, but also players like Adriano, Ronaldinho and Ronaldinho, who failed to make the team this time around.

"I have a dream and that dream is to be a part of the World Cup squad next year in South Africa."

"It is still a year to go, but when you are called up you have to use all the opportunities. And this is the only opportunity that I will have before the World Cup in a competition."

"I will try to make the dream of playing at the World Cup a reality," he said.

Fabiano's strike rate in the national

team is quiet remarkable and although he played his first game for the Selecao in 2003, he had a three year absence from the team between 2004 and 2007.

He now has 28 caps to his credit and has scored 20 goals in those matches.

The striker was born in Campinas in the Sao Paulo region, from where his mother was kidnapped in 2006, but released after 61 days in captivity.

He started playing at local side Ponte Preta as a teenager, before moving to Stade Rennes, where he endured a disappointing spell.

He then returned to Brazil and signed for Sao Paulo. In 2004 he moved to Porto, but again failed to live up to expectations and was transferred to Sevilla after just one season in Portugal.

Playing in the La Liga he finally blossomed as a player and he has recently signed a contract extension until 2011.

After impressing in Spain, he was recalled into the national squad again and he has been a fairly regular starter since 2008.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Cruz close to City move

SOCERNET

 Blackburn Rovers striker Roque Santa Cruz is undergoing a medical ahead of his proposed transfer to Manchester City.

It was widely reported that the two Premier League clubs agreed a transfer fee of around £18m on Friday.

City manager Mark Hughes brought the Paraguayan international to Rovers for just £3.8m from Bayern Munich two years ago and is eager to be reunited with the striker at Eastlands.

The 27-year-old enjoyed a tremendous first season in England but struggled for form and fitness following Hughes' move from Blackburn to Manchester in June 2008.

Monday's medical will no doubt focus on Santa Cruz's troublesome knees. He has had three knee operations during his career; most recently in April, which ruled him out for the last three months of the 2008-09 Premier League season.

Santa Cruz would be City's second signing, following the £12m capture of Gareth Barry from Aston Villa, in a summer in which they are in the hunt for "four to six players" to "set the tone very clearly" for the club's pursuit of silverware, according to chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak.

City are also reported to be

pursuing Manchester United's Carlos Tevez and Barcelona's Samuel Eto'o.

AUSTRIAN starlet heading to Inter

AFP, Vienna

Austrian striker Marko Arnautovic has agreed terms on a five-year deal with Inter Milan, the FC Twente players' agent Robert Groener said here Monday.

However Groener admitted the serious ankle injury recently suffered by the 20-year-old could still compromise the deal.

Arnautovic scored 14 goals and assisted seven others for Dutch first division side Twente last season, prompting Premier League giants Chelsea's interest.

Chelsea last month were reported to have offered 12 million euros for the player to Twente, who are holding out for a 15 million euro fee.

According to Austrian news

Fans enjoy big clash

AFP, Pretoria

With three goals by half-time, the Confederations Cup clash between Italy and Brazil delivered its sold-out promise of being unmissable for fans.

"The quality of football was absolutely superb. Both sides," said Brazil fan Arnem Jacobs, 40, who travelled from Cape Town to see the South Americans trounce the Italian world champions.

Yellow-bedeviled Mustafa Essak from Johannesburg even predicted that the 2006 title holders would crash out of the 2010 World Cup curtain-raiser after the triple blow that sealed the team's Confederations Cup fate.

"I couldn't have asked for anything better. Italy have no chance. They can go home tomorrow," he told AFP before the second half.

Essak was one of some 41,000 roaring Brazilian and Italian fans in the stadium on Sunday for the tournament's first match to be sold out, even ahead of next Sunday's final.

"You can't miss this game. It's like a once in a lifetime chance," said 16-year-old Gabriella De Pretta from Johannesburg in the front row with a group of Italy fans.

Zambian lawyer Fraser Chisholm travelled from Lusaka for the match, the only Confederations Cup fixture he will watch.

"This is the only one we are going to see because it's the only one," he told AFP. "This is

the final."

The clash was also the only Confederations Cup match for first time live soccer goer Franco Santoro, 54, who came from Hermanus in the Western Cape to see Marcello Lippi's team play.

Although disappointed by Italy's thumping, he said the atmosphere and match was "the best", with the traditional rugby homeground Loftus Versfeld stadium in Pretoria awash with blue, green, and yellow.

Brazilian architect Danielle Barreto, 31, who works in neighbouring Mozambique hopes the team will make it to the final.

"Three goals and it's against the world champions," she said about the match.

His face painted in Brazilian colours, Kyle Schoeman, 22, paid less than nine dollars (six euros) to watch the match. "It was fantastic - you'll never get that again in your life."

Brazil fan Gareth Manuel from the coastal city of Durban who travelled to Pretoria to see the likes of former AC Milan-turned Real Madrid star Kaka, who he has only ever seen on television.

The 22-year-old student, who said it was "magical" to watch the South Americans run onto the pitch, felt no qualms about the Italy-Brazil clash being his only Confederations Cup ticket.

"I can get a chance to see a Bafana game any time during the year. Where can you see Italian

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Lippi defends selection

AFP, Pretoria

 Italy coach Marcello Lippi insists he won't be ringing the changes despite the world champions crashing out of the Confederations Cup.

The Italians had a tournament to forget, beating the United States 3-1 but then being shocked by Egypt 1-0 before Brazil hammered the final nail in their coffin with a comprehensive 3-0 thrashing on Sunday.

With the United States beaten 3-0, Italy missed out on making the semifinals on goal difference and head home as underachievers, unable to lay down a marker ahead of their World Cup title defence back here next year.

Lippi has been criticised at home for persisting with his "old men" rather than handing a chance to the plethora of young talent he has on hand, but he defended his tactics.

"You speak so much about young people - what young people," said the 61-year-old, back in charge since Roberto Donadoni's departure after Euro 2008.

"You don't throw youngsters into these matches, you have to put them in gradually."

"We must stay calm, and keep in mind that it is important to have experience in these types of matches."

"We have youngsters but they need to mature. The best players in Italy you have seen right here on the pitch."

Seven of his starting 11 against Brazil were aged 30 or more, with captain Fabio Cannavaro almost 36.

But despite the current squad continuing to offer uninspiring performances, Lippi has no plans for big changes.

"My plan is not going to change, I'm sticking to it," he said.

"I feel a bit sad now, as do the players, because we didn't play well. But we all know the image of Italy is not that which we showed here."

He blamed the long Serie A season on his team's failure to shine, despite the same reasoning applying to other sides here like Brazil and Spain who have been in scintillating form.

"Frankly I didn't think our condition was brilliant when we first showed up. I hoped the physical ability of the players would grow but we going home," he said.

"I'm talking about the circumstances of certain players. Some had injury problems and they were lagging behind, because normally this would not be the performance of this team."

"We're disappointed with our performance and we're very



Italy national team coach Marcello Lippi addresses a press conference at the Irene Centurion college in Southdown on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Fairytale turnaround

AFP, Rustenburg

This North West Province town is barely more than a decent throw-in away from Sun City but not even the most adventurous of risk takers at the gamblers' paradise would have dared put a dime on the United States making it to the Confederations Cup semifinals.

Bob Bradley's Stars and Stripes turned up for their last Group B fixture against African champions Egypt Sunday as such massive outsiders midfielder Clint Dempsey only realised they could still grab the runners-up spot and with it a ticket to the last four 24 hours before kick-off.

Lopsided defeats Brazil and world champions Italy, losses compounded by having a player sent off in each game, had seemingly left them facing an early trip home.

But Dempsey's 71st minute header coming on top of goals from Charlie Davies and Michael Bradley, the coach's son, saw the CONCACAF Gold Cup winners sink Egypt and pip Italy on number of goals scored.

Man of the match Dempsey revealed he was only conscious the States had pulled off a Confederations Cup conjuring trick when he saw the bench go wild on the final whistle.

Chelsea last month were reported to have offered 12 million euros for the player to Twente, who are holding out for a 15 million euro fee.

According to Austrian news

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

"It's an amazing thing and I can't even begin to properly explain how happy I am right now. This team never stops scrapping and clawing and fighting. We proved people wrong."

The reward for Dempsey, Donovan, Bradley and company is a daunting semifinal match-up with the world's top-ranked team, Spain, in Bloemfontein, on Wednesday.

Dempsey reflected: "We have to regroup now and try to go as far as we can, as a player you don't get many opportunities like this."

"Spain are a great team," Bradley senior ventured.

"We played them last year in a friendly in Santander, their last warm-up before Euro 2008."

"They wore us down in the second half, but then we watched as they wore down Russia, Holland and eventually Germany at the European championships."

"I pointed out to the players that they should take note that we had done a good job."

"It's a short turnaround and playing them is such a challenge, it's like playing Barcelona and the national team. We'll have our work cut out against the likes of Torres and Xavi."

It was tense stuff on Sunday night as one goal from the Egyptians would have closed the semi-final door for the States and seen the Pharaohs marching on to Bloemfontein as would an Italy fightback in their game against Brazil