

Bolivia snap Brazil run

AGENCIES, La Paz



Bolivia ended Brazil's 11-game winning streak on Sunday with a 2-1 World Cup qualifying victory at high altitude.

Edgar Olivares headed home a corner in the 10th minute and Marcelo Martins doubled the hosts' advantage at the Hernando Siles Stadium in the 30th by curling a free kick over the defensive wall beyond flat-footed goalkeeper Julio Cesar.

Brazil had their chances before finally getting on the scoreboard in the 70th minute when Maicon intercepted a sloppy Bolivia set play deep in Brazilian territory to spark a fast break that Nilmar capped with a headed goal.

Coach Dunga blamed the 3,600-metre location of La Paz -- the world's highest capital.

"Playing up here is not easy without acclimatisation," the Brazilian said after watching his side's run of 11 straight victories and 19 games undefeated come to an end.

Brazil were without Kaka and Luis Fabiano as coach Dunga fielded a team of mostly reserves having already qualified for next year's finals in South Africa.

Brazil, which haven't won at La Paz since 1997, were level with Paraguay atop South American qualifying with 33 points with one match remaining, against Venezuela on Wednesday.

Bolivia's last win - a 6-1 defeat of Argentina in April - also came at 3,600 meters (11,800 feet), but Bolivia is already out of contention for the 2010 tournament as they sit second-bottom with 15 points. They wrap up qualifying against last-place Peru.

The match could be the last at La Paz as FIFA re-examines whether to bar matches above 2,500 meters (8,202 feet) without adequate time preparation.



Bolivia striker Marcelo Martins celebrates his goal against Brazil during their 2010 World Cup qualifier at the Hernando Siles Stadium in La Paz on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Rooney to miss final qualifier

AFP, London

England striker Wayne Rooney will miss Wednesday's final 2010 World Cup qualifier against Belarus after the Manchester United forward picked up a calf strain in Saturday's 1-0 defeat away to Ukraine.

The news is a surprise as Rooney got through the entire game, turning in a decent performance for an England side that was reduced to 10 men after 15 minutes following the dismissal of Robert Green.

Rooney, however, must now undergo treatment in the hope of being fit for United's Premier League encounter with Bolton.

He will also be making the reverse journey to Ben Foster, who was named as Green's replacement given the West Ham keeper is now suspended for the Belarus encounter, one of only three remaining before manager Fabio Capello has to name his squad for next summer's World Cup.

Unless injury hits one of his other four strikers, Capello is unlikely to call in a replacement.

The Italian has the option of pushing Steven Gerrard into a more advanced position, which he plays in so successfully for Liverpool.

Alternatively, he could pair Carlton Cole with Emile Heskey, or possibly Aston Villa's Gabriel Agbonlahor, who was an unused substitute on Saturday.

England, with wins in their first eight matches, had already ensured automatic qualification to the world Cup before the defeat to Ukraine as Group 6 leaders.

Pressure on Bilic

INTERNET, undated

The Croatian sports media on Monday unanimously pressed the nation's coach Slaven Bilic to resign after his team is left with only a vague chance to qualify for the 2010 World Cup. "Go, good man, your time has expired, the arena which until recently cheered for you and glorified your name, now turned the thumb down," the Jutarnji List daily said.

Mass-circulation paper Vecernji List accused Bilic of committing "mortal sins" which have cost the nation a trip to the final in South Africa.

He "failed to find the way to the Mondial... set up cowardly tactics against Ukraine, underestimated (England coach) Fabio Capello, is too fond of his players and too soft on them, he tolerated wild player parties and allowed his team to squabble," it said.

Croatia rank third in qualifying group 6, one point behind Ukraine who hold second place for a playoff berth. In the final round on Wednesday, Ukraine are at bottom side Andorra while Croatia play in Kazakhstan. England are the group winners.

Capello's England got revenge on Croatia, who ousted them in Euro 2008 qualifying and propelled Bilic from an interim coach to the status of a superstar.

Heskey targets WC spot

AFP, London



Emile Heskey is ready to quit Aston Villa in January in order to ensure he keeps his place in England's starting line-up in the run-up to next year's World Cup finals.

The striker has established himself as the first-choice partner for Wayne Rooney in the England attack, but is acutely aware that Fabio Capello wants all the players he takes to South Africa to be starting regularly for their clubs.

Heskey, signed from Wigan for 3.5 million pounds at the start of the year, has started just one Premier League match this season with Villa boss Martin O'Neill generally preferring Norway's John Carew alongside Gabriel Agbonlahor.

"I'm happy to be playing for England and, obviously, not playing at club level is difficult," Heskey said. "It's something I will have to look at when I get back and try to address it."

Asked whether that meant he would seek a move in the winter transfer window, the 31-year-old replied: "That's what I mean. I will have to sit down and think about my next move. I don't know whether I can get a World Cup place if I'm not playing for Villa." The manager hasn't really spoken to me about it. I just have to keep performing well in training and keep going. But you always wonder about those kind of things, whether it will affect my chances. I will just have to try to address it when the time is right."

Despite Heskey's lack of game time with Villa, Capello has kept faith with him for

England because he believes the forward's physical presence and ability to hold the ball up creates space for his team-mates, most importantly Wayne Rooney.

After suffering a 1-0 defeat by Ukraine on Saturday -- their first competitive loss under Capello -- England will round off an otherwise immaculate qualifying campaign against Belarus on Wednesday.

With Rooney ruled out of the Wembley match by a calf injury, Capello will have the opportunity to see how England can cope without the Manchester United forward, whose outstanding performance in Dnipropetrovsk was described as "incredible" by the coach.

The most likely option involves Steven Gerrard being pushed forward into the second striker role in which he excelled for Liverpool last season.

Robert Green's red card in Ukraine means the West Ham goalkeeper is suspended for the Belarus match. Manchester United's Ben Foster has been added to the squad as cover but David James is expected to start on Wednesday.

Aston Villa midfielder James Milner meanwhile has claimed that England's experience of playing with ten men for almost 80 minutes could prove useful in the future.

"Going down to 10 men is a learning curve especially with it happening so early in a match," said Milner, who came on for Gerrard at half-time on Saturday.

"It might happen at some stage in the World Cup and it is about using that as an experience and learning from it. We did well with 10 men and were unlucky not to get something out of the game."

USA eye redemption

AFP, Washington



After securing a spot in the 2010 World Cup lineup, the United States will travel to South Africa next June looking to make up for past mistakes.

"After what most of us would say was a very disappointing 2006 World Cup, we now have a chance at redemption," US star Landon Donovan said after a 3-2 victory at Honduras on Saturday to secure a World Cup spot.

The Americans, who conclude North American qualifying here Wednesday against Costa Rica, had two losses and a draw and went out in the first round in 2006 at Germany.

But the US squad bounced back with a mix of veterans and young new faces, reaching the Confederations Cup final earlier this year in South Africa and seizing a half-time lead on Brazil before falling.

While the Americans celebrated joyfully on the pitch in Honduras, they know that in some ways their challenge is only just beginning now that a sixth consecutive berth in the global football showdown has been secured.

"The celebration was a very good one

because when you have a group that has come together, that has worked hard, that has grown, when they've accomplished something it's a special feeling," US coach Bob Bradley said.

It doesn't mean the US side can relax for the final match, however. The Americans must defeat Costa Rica to clinch the group crown and the Ticos have yet to secure their place in the World Cup lineup.

"It is important to win the group," Bradley said. We take a great amount of pride in trying to be the best team in CONCACAF. We're in position going into the Costa Rica game to finish first in the group, and that's the goal."

Donovan, whose free kick goal proved to be the margin of victory, was proud of how the Americans rallied for victory, becoming the only road team to defeat the Hondurans on their home field in qualifying.

"It was a culmination of a long learning process and we played mature, experienced, a hard fought 90 minutes, and I was very proud of us," he said.

"You don't want to go into the last game leaving anything to chance. Anything can happen in one game and we didn't want to leave that opportunity open. It was nice to get it done."

Azzurri on Carlo's mind

Football

SOCCERNET

Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti has revealed he would love to coach Roma and the Italian national side one day.

The 50-year-old left Milan for Stamford Bridge in the summer and has a superb start to his time in charge of the Premier League team. And he claims the only club he would return to Italy for is the Giallorossi, where he spent eight years as a player.

"I would love to return to Roma," Ancelotti told sportmediaset.it. "It would be the only Italian club I would go to."

Ancelotti added that he would also consider the Italy job if he was to be offered it and would have Antonio Cassano - who continues to be omitted from the Azzurri squad despite the Sampdoria striker's stunning form - spearheading his attack. He said: "I would like to coach Italy after the World Cup. And with Cassano too. I would want him."

The former AC Milan boss also cast an eye over his old team, where new coach Leonardo has come under a lot of fire as the Rossoneri's poor form continues. "The team lost a bit of motivation when Kaka left. As for Ronaldinho, it's a simple problem: he needs to train," added Ancelotti.

Chelsea are top of the Premier League table, two points above Manchester United and have won all but one of their opening matches. Ancelotti is having no difficulty getting through to his players, although he admits it gets tough when things become heated.

"What's difficult is to transmit emotions when I talk," he said. "So one time I just blurted out 'oh go sod off'. They all understood me. What's the difference between Italy and England? The first thing Italy can do is build stadiums. Ours are old and obsolete."

Chelsea's main rival for the Premier League crown looks set to be Sir Alex Ferguson's United once again. However, Ancelotti has been impressed by another one of his rivals more than the Scotsman. "(Liverpool coach Rafael) Benitez is the one I admire the most," he said.

Fabio should be free

Football

SOCCERNET

Fabio Cannavaro did not commit a doping offence and should be cleared because he took cortisone only to treat a bee sting, the Italian Olympic Committee's (CONI) anti-doping prosecutor said on Saturday.

CONI's Ettore Torri, who questioned Cannavaro on Friday, will now recommend to an anti-doping tribunal, due to meet in the coming days, that the Italy captain should not receive any sanction.

"The prosecutor asks for the Cannavaro case to be dropped," a statement from the prosecutor's office said. "We can exclude (the possibility) that Cannavaro is responsible. This office reserves the right to make further judgements in the future over other parties... which were responsible."

Cannavaro, 36, requested exemption to take

Neoton after being treated in hospital but did not receive it before he was dope tested and CONI said that after the exemption request arrived it had written to the player asking for a doctor's certificate.

"I am happy the prosecutor has asked for my case to be dropped because this shows he appreciates my good faith and my behaviour," Cannavaro told the Juventus website. "I had no doubt that this would happen and I am sorry that such an insignificant incident generated so much clamour."

It is not the first time Cannavaro has been in trouble. In 2005, a video was shown on Italian TV of the defender being injected with a performance-enhancing substance the night before the 1999 UEFA Cup final. The sequence was shot in a Moscow hotel room, shortly before his Parma team beat Marseille 3-0 for the title.

The substance was Neoton, a creatine phosphate, that was not on any banned lists in Italy at the time.

Cesc on Barca wishlist

Football

SOCCERNET

Barcelona sporting director Txiki Begiristain believes Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas will end up at the Nou Camp one day and has also hinted the European champions could make a move for Manchester City forward Robinho.

Fabregas, a Barca youth-team product, has long been linked with a return to the Catalan giants even though the player and his club have always maintained he is committed to seeing out his long-term contract.

But Begiristain said of the 22-year-old to Spanish daily Sport: "He is a player with the Barca profile. He was born here, breathing football. One day, he will end up playing at the Nou Camp. I'm sure."

Barca are expected to bolster their squad in January with Seydou Keita and Yaya Toure likely to be away on African Nations Cup duty.

Brazil forward Robinho looks to be another player on Barca's radar, with Begiristain saying:

"He's a very interesting player and can play the Champions League."

A move for Bayern Munich's Franck Ribery could also be resuscitated.

"We have a great relationship with Bayern Munich and eventually we told them we were interested in signing Ribery," Begiristain said of the summer attempts to sign the 26-year-old France international.

"Twice we have offered money for him and both times we were told he was not for sale. And it is true, because they said the same thing to Chelsea and Real Madrid."

"If Bayern Munich puts Ribery on the market, we'll know first. Another thing is the price, of course."

Begiristain insists, however, that treble-winning coach Pep Guardiola has not been overly demanding regarding players he wants to see brought in.

"I must say that Pep has never complained or pressured us," he added. "He knows how the football transfer market is and sometimes it is impossible to sign any player you want in spite of the efforts you make."

Nigeria stay in hunt

AFP, Johannesburg



Tunisia scored early and Nigeria late Sunday to ensure a thrilling 2010 World Cup Group B qualifying race in Africa will go down to the wire next month.

France-based striker Issam Jomaa struck in the first minute as Tunisia won 1-0 against Kenya in Rades while Victor Nsofor from Spanish club Malaga netted three minutes into stoppage time as Nigeria piped Mozambique 1-0 in Abuja.

These results left the Carthage Eagles of Tunisia two points above the Super Eagles of Nigeria with the leaders after the November 14 final fixtures qualifying for the world tournament in South Africa.

Tunisia visit Mozambique and Nigeria travel to Kenya and while the two hosts have been out of the World Cup reckoning for some time, they are fighting to finish third and claim a place at the 2010 African Nations Cup in Angola.

All seemed lost for three-time World Cup qualifiers Nigeria as a dour tussle with well-organised and slick Mozambique drifted into additional time at a far-from-full 60,000-seat National Stadium.

But the Mambas (Snakes) resistance finally cracked after 93 minutes when a parry by goalkeeper Joao Kapango was crossed into the goalmouth and unmarked 22-year-old Nsofor nodded in.

Had Nigeria drawn they would have failed to reach a second consecutive World Cup after a shock second-place finish behind Angola in the 2006 qualifying tournament for Germany.

Both teams were foiled by the woodwork in a cagey encounter Nigeria dominated territorially only to be let down by a blunt strike force

and spectacular Kapango saves.

Tunisia, who came from behind twice to force a draw in Nigeria last month, made the perfect start with unmarked Jomaa heading past goalkeeper Willis Ochieng just 60 seconds into the first half.

But the North African team seeking a record-equalling fourth consecutive World Cup appearance by an African team, could not build on the early advantage and must win in Maputo to be certain of qualifying.

Algeria came from behind to defeat Rwanda 3-1 in Blida and regain a three-point advantage over African champions Egypt, who will host a top-of-the-table Group C clash next month.

Mafisango Mutesa stunned the Desert Foxes with an early goal, Abdelkader Ghezal levelled soon after, Nadir Belhadj put Algeria ahead in first-half stoppage time and Karim Ziani converted a late penalty.

Ghana, who last month became the first African country to qualify for the 2010 finals after hosts South Africa, surrendered the last 100 percent record in the final round when falling 1-0 against Benin in Cotonou.

The Benin 'Squirrels' were impressively led by striker Razack Omotoyossi and dominated without reward until France-based striker Mohamed Aoudoud scored two minutes into stoppage time.

There was also a late winner in the other Group D fixture with 2008 African Footballer of the Year Frederic Kanoute scoring one minute from full-time to earn dominant Mali a 1-0 victory over Sudan in Bamako.

Their leading scorer in the qualifying competitions, Qatar-based Moumouni Dagano, raised his tally to 11 with the first goal as Burkina Faso ended a two-match Group E losing streak courtesy of a 2-1 win over Guinea in Accra.



Nigeria striker Obafemi Martins (L) shrugs off a Mozambique defender (C) during their 2010 World Cup qualifier in Abuja on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP