

Hauche leads Argentina

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Football

friendly international played in Resistencia on Wednesday.

Both countries, warming up for the Copa America in Argentina in July, fielded teams made up of home-based players which in Argentina's case is virtually a third string.

Hauche opened the scoring in the ninth minute and added the third just before halftime following a fine run down the right by his Racing Club team mate Ivan Pillud, who beat two defenders before crossing from the goal line.

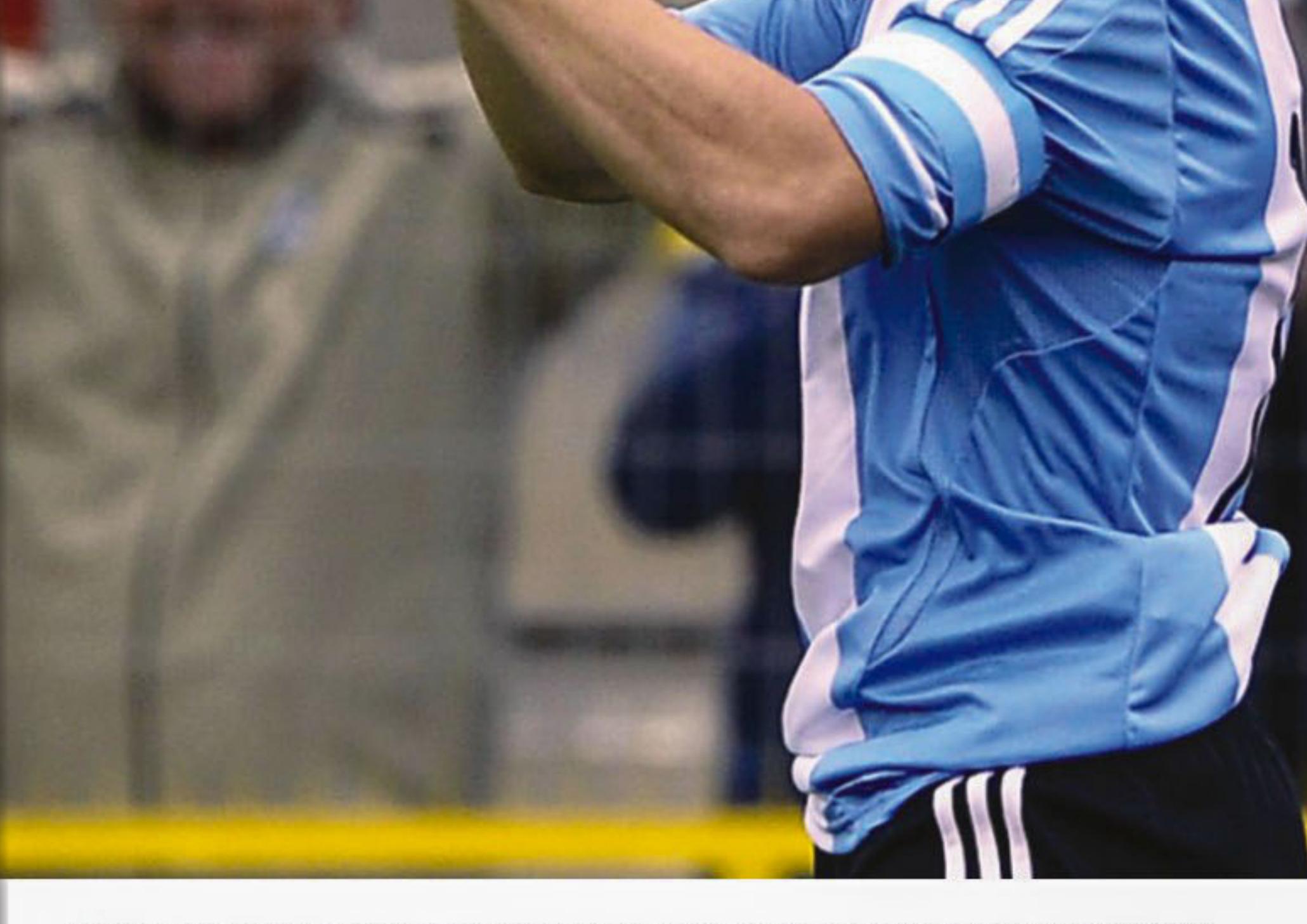
Striker Pablo Zeballos equalised for Paraguay in the 14th minute with a shot that took a deflection and central defender Federico Fernandez restored Argentina's lead in the 37th, heading home a free kick by midfielder Diego Valeri.

Defender Elvis Marecos reduced the deficit 11 minutes into the second half when he headed a corner inside the near post from a corner.

Winger Enzo Perez added Argentina's fourth in the 74th.

Argentina coach Sergio Batista has picked an intermediate squad of foreign-based players on the fringe of his first team for a tour of Nigeria and Poland next month as he looks to settle on his 22 players for the Copa America.

The squad, to meet Nigeria in Abuja on June 1 and Poland in Warsaw four days later, includes the likes of Manchester City's Pablo Zabaleta, 2010 World Cup defender Nicolas Otamendi of Porto and Palermo playmaker Javier Pastore.



Argentina forward Gabriel Hauche celebrates one of his two goals against Paraguay during their international friendly at the Centenario Stadium on Wednesday.

Fulham earn Europa berth

AFP, London

Fulham will play in the Europa League next season after being awarded a place on Thursday under the Premier League's Fair Play League.

England received an additional Europa League place for next season after finishing second in UEFA's national fair-play table.

Chelsea finished top of the Fair Play League but had already qualified for the Champions League and Fulham were in second spot.

Mark Hughes' side had just one player sent off in league matches all season - that happened in the very last game leading to suggestions that relegated Blackpool could pip them to the spot.

The Premier League said in a statement: "Fulham FC has finished the season as the highest placed club in the 2010/11 Fair Play League that has not already qualified for UEFA competitions via the 2010/11 Barclays Premier League."

"The club will take the additional European place awarded to England and compete in next season's UEFA Europa League."

PHOTO:
AFP

Frog juice secret behind Park's energy

AFP, London



Park Ji-Sung has revealed that frog juice is the bizarre secret behind the lung-bursting energy that makes

the South Korean a key part of Manchester United's bid to beat Barcelona in the Champions League final on Saturday.

Park's high-octane style will be an essential ingredient in Sir Alex Ferguson's recipe for success against the Spanish champions at Wembley, but it is a much more unlikely concoction that laid the foundations for the midfielder's rise to prominence.

After showing promise as a schoolboy footballer, Park's progress was in danger of stalling because he lacked the physique required to cope with the demands on a top player's body.

In a bid to fast-track Park's growth, his father would make the long journey from their home in Suwon to Gyeonggi county, where he would visit frog farms to gather the ingredients for an unusual protein drink.

Once back home, the frog's juice would be boiled up before Park gamely swallowed it down.

Park admits the juice tasted disgusting but the skinny teenager was happy to try anything to aid his dream of becoming a footballer.

"My father went to catch wild frogs. I was skinny and weak and my father heard their juice would give

me size and strength," Park said.

"It tasted very, very bad but I had to drink it because I wanted to be a footballer and everyone said I needed to be bigger and stronger.

"They said it was good for my health to become stronger and I ate anything that would improve my health."

Now well established as a significant figure in Ferguson's squad, Park no longer has any need for frog juice.

His astonishing work-rate, an astute tactical brain and under-rated ability on the ball have combined to make him an unsung hero with the Premier League champions.

The 30-year-old has played a major role in United reaching a third Champions League final in four years and this time he is hoping for a happy ending.

Park was left out of the squad for the 2008 victory over Chelsea in Moscow - a decision Ferguson admitted "almost broke my heart". And although he was selected the following year in Rome when United lost 2-0 to Barcelona, an underwhelming display left Park with a few regrets.

"Missing out on one final and losing another makes me more eager to play and win this game," he said.

"If I play and we win the game it will be fantastic for me. It is my dream but I have to play 100 per cent for my dreams to come true."

Facing Barcelona again offers Park and his team-mates a chance for redemption after the defeat in Rome,

but Pep Guardiola's team have been in such good form this season that many pundits expect another Catalan triumph this weekend.

Park is well aware Lionel Messi and company will be formidable opponents again, but he is confident United can find a way to upset the odds.

"Obviously Barcelona are one of the best clubs in the world so if we beat them we will create the perfect final - for me as well," he said.

"It is a great game against one of the best teams in the world. They have changed a couple of players from 2009 but their style has not changed.

"We have changed as well. I don't know what way we will play but we have to show a difference from 2009."

If United are to win a fourth European Cup, Ferguson must find a way to disrupt Messi, Xavi and Andres Iniesta and much rests on Park's ability to harry them out of their rhythm.

"I don't know which role I will have in the final but I have to do it 100 per cent and play only for winning the game," he said.

"We have to keep an eye on Messi in the game. Some players have said to me that I can stop him - that sounds great but one man can't stop him, we have to play as a team. Everyone will give 100 per cent to stop him."

"If we play as a team like we showed against Chelsea or in other big games we can match up against them."

Zidane Real's new sports director

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid will appoint French great Zinedine Zidane, who currently works as an advisor to the club's president on first-team affairs, as its new sports director, a newspaper reported Thursday.

Real president Florentino Perez announced Wednesday that the club's management would be restructured following the dismissal of director general Jorge Valdano, who had clashed repeatedly with coach Jose Mourinho.

"There were two people with a strong sports character and the harmony that needs to exist was lacking. You were all witnesses of this over the past season. There was a clear dysfunction that needed to be resolved," he said.

"He's not withdrawing his candidature, despite any rumours and speculation," a spokesperson told AFP, adding that bin Hammam was "confident" of being cleared by the committee.

"He's going there, he's going to present his case and he's confident he's going to be cleared."

Bin Hammam has said explosive claims he tried to rig next Wednesday's FIFA poll -- where he is trying to deny Switzerland's Blatter a fourth term as the most powerful man in football -- will "vanish in the wind".

"This move is little more than a tactic being used by those who have no confidence in their own ability to emerge successfully from the FIFA presidential election," he said in a statement Wednesday.

"I am confident that there is no charge to answer and that I will be free to stand in the FIFA presidential election on June 1 as originally planned."

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president was carrying on with his regular engagements and flew from Doha to Zurich Thursday to attend a FIFA finance committee meeting, the spokesperson said.

Hammam denies FIFA charge

Football

AFP, Singapore

Asian football chief Mohamed bin Hammam vowed to clear his name Thursday after sensational corruption claims he says are aimed at derailing his bid to oust long-time FIFA president Sepp Blatter.

The Qatari defiantly refused to withdraw from next week's presidential vote and pressed on with his campaign despite being summoned to answer allegations at a hearing of the world body's ethics committee in Zurich Sunday.

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"Nothing has changed. As far as he's concerned, nothing has changed," the spokesperson said.

Bin Hammam, FIFA vice-president Jack Warner and two Caribbean Football Union officials were summoned to the ethics hearing after Chuck Blazer, head of regional body CONCACAF, reported possible misdeeds at a meeting this month.

British media said bin Hammam and Warner are accused of offering \$40,000 cash gifts to national associations at the May 10 and 11 talks in Trinidad in return for their votes in the FIFA poll.

The allegations threaten to upend bin Hammam's campaign -- which is founded on an anti-corruption theme -- and also further besmirch the image of FIFA, which has been dragged through the mire by repeated graft claims.

FIFA opened a separate inquiry earlier this month after accusations made in the British parliament regarding the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

Former English Football Association chairman David Triesman told a committee he had witnessed "improper and unethical" behaviour by four FIFA voters -- including Warner -- while campaigning for England's failed 2018 World Cup bid.

On Monday, Qatar denied claims aired in the committee that it paid large bribes to secure its shock victory in the battle to host the 2022 tournament. Bin Hammam, who was instrumental in the bid, has also rejected the allegations.

And in October, an undercover investigation by Britain's Sunday Times alleged that senior officials had offered to sell their votes in the bidding race for the 2018 World Cup.

Despite FIFA's woes, 13-year leader Blatter looks favourite to stay in power after being endorsed by Europe's UEFA and four African regional federations.



MU seek revenge

AFP, London



Manchester United are seeking to banish the memory of their 2009 humbling by Barcelona as they prepare for Saturday's Champions League final at Wembley.

Two years ago, Sir Alex Ferguson's side arrived in Rome brimming with confidence, ready to justify their status as the bookies' favourites by becoming the first side to clinch back-to-back titles.

Ninety minutes and one passing masterclass later, and United were left dazed and confused after a dizzying evening on Barcelona's famous midfield "carousel" as the Catalans wrapped up a 2-0 win.

Ferguson has never spoken in detail about the reasons for United's defeat that night, and his reluctance to reflect on that chastening loss has been mirrored by his players ahead of Saturday's re-match.

Midfielder Michael Carrick, whose reputation took a battering after an anonymous performance in the Stadio Olimpico, insisted that 2009 would have little relevance at Wembley.

"It doesn't matter about 2009 to be honest," Carrick said. "It's a different game now. It's a one-off so we're concentrating on Saturday."

"We'll play to our strengths and try and win the game. You've got to respect the strengths that Barcelona have because they're a terrific team but we're there for a reason as well."

"We believe we've got a very good team. When we play well and do what we're good at we're a match for anyone. As I said, it's all on the night and who plays best on the night."

Defender Rio Ferdinand said he had never dwelt on Barcelona's decisive second goal in Rome, when he was left in no man's land by a wicked cross from Xavi which was duly headed home by Lionel Messi.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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