



A performer does her routine during the opening ceremony of the FIFA women's World Cup at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

River dry up

Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Legendary Argentine football giants River Plate were relegated from the country's top division Sunday for the first time in their 110-year history, amid tears and scenes of violent mayhem.

The Buenos Aires team are Argentina's most successful club with 33 championships to their name, and their rivalry with Boca Juniors, based in the same city, is one of the most intense in all sport.

But there will be no Superclasicos next season unless the two sides draw each other in a cup competition, after River Plate were held 1-1 at home in the second leg of a promotion-relegation playoff with lowly Belgrano de Cordoba.

The Primera B side had won the first leg 2-0, meaning River Plate had to win by two clear goals to stay up under the play-off system rules.

The Millionaires, as the team are known, got off to the best possible start, Mariano Pavone scoring after just five minutes.

But they failed to settle and Guillermo Farre silenced the 50,000-crowd in the Estadio Monumental with

an equaliser for the Cordobans in the 61st minute.

Pavone had a chance to put River Plate back in command with a penalty just nine minutes later, but his spot kick was saved by goalkeeper Juan Carlos Olave.

As violence erupted among supporters, referee Sergio Pezzotta brought the tie to a close on 89 minutes, giving Belgrano a 3-1 aggregate win and a place in history, as well as in the Primera Division.

Juan Jose Lopez's players, having brought their illustrious club to an unprecedented low on a cold winter afternoon, spent several minutes hugging each other, in tears, before leaving the pitch.

Belgrano de Cordoba departed under a hail of missiles from the home crowd, as firefighters sprayed water hoses into the stands to try to restore order.

The violence soon spread to the streets outside the stadium, where police used horses and water cannon to control furious fans, television footage showed.

The clashes left 68 people injured, 50 arrested and 15 vehicles destroyed, according to the Federal Police. Two officers were "in serious condition with

head injuries from being hit by projectiles," police said.

About 2,200 police had been deployed for the match.

The 3,000 Belgrano fans who had made the journey to the capital were unable to leave the stadium for two hours, and it was another hour before the River Plate players and staff could do so, under heavy police escort.

"We will resist, we will reformulate the club from now on," said Daniel Passarella, River Plate's president, who captained Argentina's 1978 World Cup-winning side but who is blamed by some fans for the team's decline.

The club, named for the English version of the Rio de la Plata which divides Argentina and Uruguay, were formed in 1901 and earned their nickname in the 1930s, when their resources saw them acquire players from rival clubs for huge transfer fees.

As well as their domestic titles -- the last of them in 2008 -- they have won two Copa Libertadores, the Intercontinental Cup, the Supercopa Sudamericana and the Copa Interamericana.

Boca and Independiente are now the only sides never to have been relegated from Argentina's Primera Division.

Pastore claims Barca talks

ESPNSOCCERNET

Palermo star Javier Pastore has claimed his agent is in talks with Barcelona.

Palermo president Maurizio Zamparini said last week that Pastore, 22, would not be allowed to leave the club unless his €50 million valuation is met.

However, despite reports that Barca are readying an improved offer for Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas, Argentina midfielder Pastore has now claimed his agent is discussing a move to Camp Nou.

"I don't know anything about my future," he told Fox Sports in South America. "Marcelo Simonian [Pastore's agent] is in contact with Barcelona and other clubs, so he will certainly do what is best for me."

Adding that he is "happy at Palermo", he continued: "I love the city, as it's relaxed, by the sea and always has beautiful weather in winter or summer."

"We'll see what happens in future."

Ecuador plea to fans

Football

AFP, Quito

Ecuador are pleading with fans of the Andean country to be patient as they target a strong showing at the Copa America starting Friday.

Fans have become a little restless after their weekend friendly loss to a youthful Mexico side while the latter's full squad concentrated on their Gold Cup final win over the United States.

Ecuador go up against holders Brazil, Paraguay and Venezuela in what appears a tough opening group and will be pinning many of their hopes of reaching the second round in Argentina on their Manchester United star Antonio Valencia.

They start their Group B campaign against the Paraguayans on July 3 in Santa Fe but coach Reinaldo Rueda, a Colombian, is feeling the pressure after fans at the Olimpico Atahualpa stadium in Quito voiced disapproval of his side's final pre-Copa showing by whistling and chanting "ole" when the Mexicans had possession.

Some fans also chanted "Rueda out," even though he has only been in his post ten months.

The 54-year-old former Colombia and Honduras coach's record stands at two wins, seven draws and four defeats in that

time but some fans would prefer to see Sixto Vizuete, an Ecuadorian in charge of the under-20 side, step up to the senior job.

Valencia, who struggled to make an impression in Saturday's loss, told reporters afterwards: "It's a shame they chant like that in our country and throw bottles."

He also reflected that similar things had followed a loss to Uruguay in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers which saw Ecuador - who performed admirably in reaching the last 16 at Germany 2006 - fail to reach South Africa.

Valencia pointed out that many of the squad were coming off a three-week end of season break and were only just getting into gear as the Copa looms.

Squadmate Segundo Castillo of Deportivo Quito, who had short spells with Everton and Wolves in England two years ago, complained that the fans "don't support us." And he added that the squad's chief target is to mould a side for the 2014 World Cup.

But Valencia insisted that at the Copa "we'll see a different Ecuador with a more positive attitude" than that seen against the Mexicans.

Ecuador have never managed better than fourth at the Copa, the world's oldest international tournament stretching back to 1916.

Scandal gets bigger

AFP, Athens

An Athens daily newspaper reported Monday that a new match-fixing case out of the northern Greek city Salonica may involve the Greek national team.

Ta Nea headlined on its front page: "They even fixed matches of the national team" and reported that phone conversations out of Salonica involve a number of football officials, including Super League club owners and referees, and that "even the national team does not escape from the conversations."

The newspaper said judicial authorities are looking into this new case which it said involved individuals who have been named in a previous case and some new names as well.

Greece has been rocked the last few days with judicial authorities naming 83 individuals for being involved in an ongoing investigation into match-fixing in top Greek leagues.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich's new recruit Brazil defender Rafinha takes part in his first training session in Munich yesterday.

Group stage not over

Football

AFP, Sinsheim

Both France and Nigeria feel that the 2011 Women's World Cup opener was just that - an opener to Group A play.

And neither the winners France nor losers Nigeria are counting the group stage as over.

"Just like every other team, we want to win every game we play. We earned three very, very important points. But we have three do-or-die matches and have to win at least two. Now we have to win one more of them," said France coach Bruno Bini, whose team is even with Germany with three points after their 1-0 win in the Group A opener.

Nigeria and Canada both have zero points with two matches each to play.

"It's not done for us, and it's not done for Nigeria. They are a very good team. Nigeria will torture a couple other teams," said Bini.

The French coach has an injury concern looming as right outside back Wendie Renard was forced out injured after 69 minutes and replaced by Laure Lepailleur.

Renard, who was badly limping with a heavily taped left upper leg after the game, was already taking the place of regular starter Corine Franco on the right side.

With his sights set on Thursday and France's second Group A encounter with Canada, Bini said: "We will just sit and calmly analyse this game and see what we did right and wrong."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Sanath Jayasuriya should've been picked?

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