

# Aguero saves hosts blushes

AFP, La Plata

Argentina, bidding to end a trophy drought going back to 1993, kicked off the 43rd Copa America on Friday with a disappointing 1-1 draw with minnows Bolivia at La Plata outside Buenos Aires.

Sergio Aguero, son-in-law of former World Cup-winning idol and Argentina coach Diego Maradona, came on as a second half substitute and promptly rescued a point after naturalised Brazilian Edivaldo Rojas had stunned the hosts by breaking the deadlock just two minutes into the second half.

Rojas ghosted in to nudge home following a corner on the left, the ball running under Ever Banega's foot on the line with keeper Sergio Romero beaten.

With Lionel Messi's Barcelona form stubbornly elusive - not for the first time in sky blue and white - Argentina struggled to respond before a spell of pressure finally told as Aguero, on just minutes earlier for Ezequiel Lavezzi, blasted them level on 76 minutes following a Nicolas Burdisso chest down.

The opening 45 minutes had seen Argentina enjoy most of the possession and an early succession of corners which came to nothing, while at the other end a Marcelo Martins freekick ended up in Romero's midriff.

Despite having on paper a highly potent attack in Messi and Carlos Tevez, the hosts looked short on ideas to start with. The Manchester City man was also short on fuse, earning a booking for dissent on 36 minutes.

Happy to be level at the break Bolivia came out with a spring in their step and after Rojas put them a goal to the good Martins should have made it two after 58 minutes.

The striker was clean through on goal but showed too much of the ball to a grateful

Romero, leaving coach Gustavo Quinteros fuming on the touchline.

Angel di Maria then drew gasps with a low drive flashing just wide as an equaliser loomed ever larger before Aguero finally delivered.

Argentina will now have to up their game considerably when they meet Colombia at Santa Fe on Wednesday before their final group match against special guests Costa Rica.

Sergio Batista's men came into the tournament under pressure to deliver the goods after their humiliating World Cup defeat at the hands of Germany last summer in South Africa, a loss which saw Batista's former 1986 World Cup-winning teammate Diego Maradona dispensed with as coach.

On Friday, the albiceleste were also mindful of an even worse, if somewhat less public, humiliation which Bolivia visited upon them in the World Cup qualifiers in the pair's last meeting - a 6-1 hiding in La Paz in April 2009, albeit at high altitude.

Even so, the odds were stacked against the visitors, whose only title came on home soil in 1963.

Each of 11 previous face-offs in Buenos Aires went the way of the two-times world champions, with a goal count of 35 for only three conceded but this time they had to make do with stalemate.

Although Brazil, who start their campaign at La Plata on Sunday against Venezuela, have won only eight continental crowns to 14 for Argentina and Uruguay, they have bagged four of the last five editions - Colombia interrupting the sequence in 2001.



## RESULT

Argentina 1 (Aguero 76) Bolivia 1 (Rojas 47)



Argentine forward Sergio Aguero is ecstatic after his equaliser against Bolivia during their Copa America clash at the Ciudad de La Plata Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

## L'Equipe cleared

AFP, Paris

Nicolas Anelka has lost his legal action against L'Equipe, the French sports daily the Chelsea star had accused of libel after it published his foul-mouthed World Cup tirade at Raymond Domenech.

L'Equipe found itself in the dock after publishing a front page account of Anelka's outburst at Domenech at half-time of France's Group A game against Mexico in South Africa last year.

Anelka exploded after then manager Domenech told him to play in a different way in the second half of the June 17 match.

L'Equipe's report claiming Anelka had told the then France manager "go screw yourself, dirty son of a whore" sparked a storm.

Anelka, who insisted he had never said those precise words, was expelled from the team in disgrace, with his teammates then staging their infamous mutiny as France's World Cup campaign imploded.

L'Equipe were cleared of libel by a court in Paris on Friday, with the paper's two journalists who had written the report - Raphael Raymond and Damien Degorre - judged to have just been doing their job.

The trial's president, Joel Boyer, pointed out that neither party, including Anelka, had denied that a dressing room altercation had taken place nor the substance of the insults hurled at Domenech.

In his judgement Boyer dismissed Anelka's claim that L'Equipe had been at fault by sensationalising its account by making it from page headlines.

# Tough task lies ahead

AFP, London

Andre Villas-Boas is anticipating an "awkward" start in his first Premier League match as Chelsea manager when the Blues begin their title challenge away to Stoke.

But the 33-year-old Portuguese, now the youngest manager in English football's top-flight, is looking forward to the challenge.

Villas-Boas, appointed after London club Chelsea sacked experienced Italian boss Carlo Ancelotti after a trophy-less season last term, knows silverware, especially the Champions League, which the Blues have yet to win, will be the key to his survival at Stamford Bridge.

The former Porto manager has cancelled Chelsea's first pre-season

game away to Dutch side Vitesse Arnhem in order to spend more time with his squad.

Chelsea will now travel to Portsmouth for their first official warm-up match on July 16 before heading to the Far East ahead of the Asia Trophy ahead of a clash with Scottish champions Rangers in Glasgow on August 6.

Villas-Boas is confident Chelsea will be ready for the physical challenge posed by Stoke, which will be followed by home games against West Brom and newly-promoted Norwich.

"It is an awkward start," Villas-Boas, who led hometown club Porto to a treble last season comprising the Portuguese league and cup and the Europa League, said Friday.

"We go to Stoke, who had a successful year last year, and are an aggressive,

straightforward and forward-thinking team.

"It is a big challenge in the first game, then we have two home games and we are happy to start in this way.

"We have to be confident enough from the start to be able to perform.

"We have two weeks in Cobham, then we move to Asia.

"It is important for the club to expand its brand in the Asian market, so that is important to show ourselves to them as well, then we are back for another two weeks before Rangers and Stoke.

"We have good enough preparation to be ready for Stoke, and we will progress from there.

"We don't treat pre-season different than we do in the season. Everything will be building up for the next game."

## Govou leaves Panathinaikos

AFP, Athens

Financially-troubled Panathinaikos on Friday announced that they were releasing one of their most expensive players, French international winger Sidney Govou.

Panathinaikos announces that it has come to a mutual agreement with Sidney Govou for a termination of his contract. We thank him for his contribution to the team and wish him every success in his continued career," the club said.

Govou, 32, played in 23 matches for Panathinaikos last season and scored three goals.

# Mexicans in trouble

**Football**

AFP, Mexico City

Four more Mexican players have become embroiled in a doping probe, adding to the case of five further internationals found to have traces of clenbuterol at the CONCACAF Gold Cup which Mexico lifted last week, FIFA chief medical officer Jiri Dvorak said Friday.

"Five players tested positive for a relatively high concentration of clenbuterol (and) we have four others with traces of the same substance," Dvorak told Mexican broadcaster Televisa without revealing which players were concerned.

Five Mexicans were suspended three weeks ago after they tested positive following results from a May 21 test during Mexico's pre-Gold Cup training camp.

Dvorak said the cases were being followed up with further tests at a laboratory in Germany.

Given the number of cases from the same team Dvorak said he was perplexed, saying it was "difficult for me to imagine that practically a whole team from a developing country such as Mexico" should turn in positive tests.

He added it appeared that meat was contaminated with the substance while stressing that the substance is not a performance enhancer.

After the original cases arose Mexican national team director Hector Inarritu brought the players to Los Angeles for further tests at the UCLA doping laboratory amid claims by the team that eating tainted beef and chicken caused the positive tests.

Dvorak is in Mexico as part of a FIFA initiative to promote young people's health through playing football.

The president of the Mexican Federation, Justino Compean, said that the results of an investigation into the clenbuterol cases could be ready as early as next week.

# Messi annoyed

AFP, La Plata



Argentina star Lionel Messi said he was irked at his country's rocky start at the Copa America on Friday following a 1-1 draw in La Plata with minnows Bolivia.

The Bolivians might have shocked the albiceleste in a World Cup qualifier two seasons ago with a 6-1 win in La Paz - but that was at high altitude.

Here, there could be no excuses as Edivaldo Rojas gave the Bolivians a deserved whiff of a first ever win on Argentinian soil after 11 losses before Sergio Aguero rescued a point with a crisp late volley.

"They put men behind the ball, parked the bus and we could not find a way through," admitted Messi, who despite his heroics with Barcelona in scoring over 50 goals last season has never quite reached the heights when he has donned the national shirt.

"It's not what we were hoping for and we are sad.

"Now we know the matches we have to come in the group (against Colombia and Costa Rica) are ones we just have to win," he added.

Bolivia were determined not to be the fall guys in Group A and this draw means they can also hope to get through from the group phase.

Meanwhile, Messi said Argentina must go back to the drawing board and "see what we did well and sift through what we did badly and so try to get back to winning ways.

"We must keep calm. We haven't started

off as well as we hoped but now we simply must up our game in the coming matches."

Aguero said he had to credit Bolivia's fighting spirit.

"Now we have to do a bit better as they made it hard for us though I thought we started off all right before they got the goal," said the Atletico Madrid striker and son-in-law of former Argentina coach Diego Maradona, who dedicated his goal, as ever, to his family.

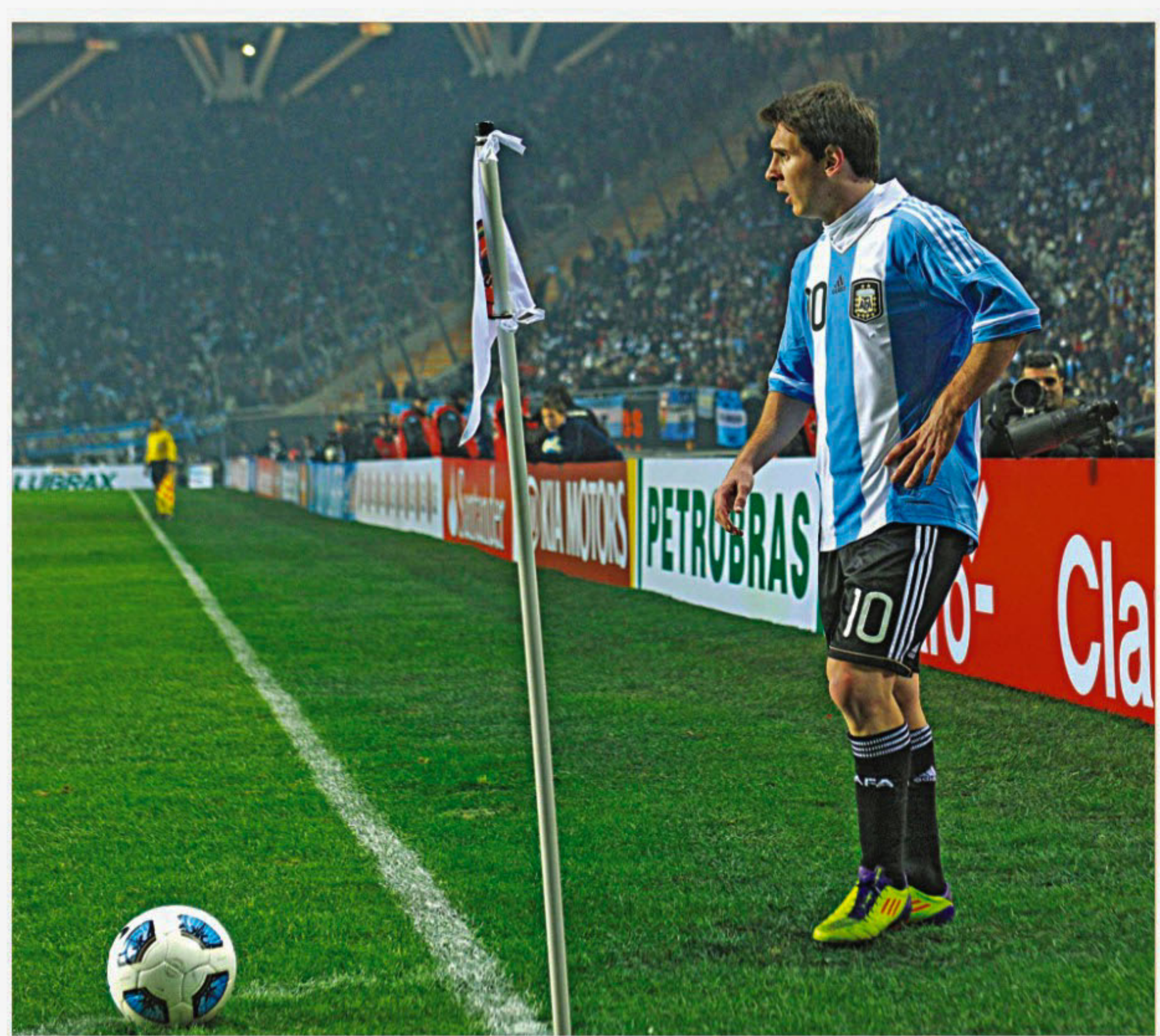
Argentina's other attacking spearhead, Carlos Tevez, warned, meanwhile, that Argentina had work to do if they did not want to fall flat on their faces as they seek to end a barren trophy run stretching back to the 1993 win they managed in Ecuador.

"We knew this would be a tough Copa," said the Manchester City forward.

"We need to keep calm and keep things in perspective as if we lose heart it will be worse for us.

"Today we were short on goals, we didn't gell well in attack or have much mobility but we do know what we are trying to achieve and how we want to approach our game," he insisted.

Argentina, 14 times continental champions - a record they share with Uruguay, with Brazil having netted just eight but four out of the last five nonetheless - now have five days to plot a way past unpredictable Colombia on Wednesday at Santa Fe before they go up against Costa Rica, special guests in the absence of original invitees Japan.



Argentine superstar Lionel Messi is about to take a corner kick during their Copa America first round encounter against Bolivia at the Ciudad de La Plata Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

## SPORTS POLL

### WEEKLY QUESTION

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Bangladesh v Pakistan

World Cup Pre-Qualifier

Live from 9:30pm

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Live from 6:30pm

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Italian Grand Prix

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### STAR Cricket

England v Sri Lanka

Third ODI

Live from 3:45pm

### NEO Sports

Copa America

Brazil v Venezuela

Live from 1:00am (Monday)

Paraguay v Ecuador

Live from 3:30am (Monday)