

## Marseille seal Diara deal

AFP, Marseille

French international midfielder Alou Diarra has completed his move from Bordeaux to Marseille, the first division runners-up announced on their website on Monday.

The details of the deal have not been released although French media reports claim he signed a three-year contract and that the fee paid to Bordeaux was in the region of 4.5 million euros.

"In Alou Diarra, the club has picked up the services of a defensive midfielder with international experience who is among the best in France," said the club statement.

The 29-year-old has long been on coach Didier Deschamps' wanted list. He lists Bayern Munich, Liverpool and Lyon among his previous clubs and was an integral member of the Bordeaux team that won the league and cup double in 2009.

First capped by France in 2004, he played in the 2006 World Cup final, captained them in one match at last year's World Cup and has now made 34 international appearances.



Venezuela players acknowledge the crowd at the end of their Copa America match against Brazil at the Ciudad de La Plata Stadium on Sunday. Venezuela held Brazil to a goalless draw.

PHOTO: AFP

# Magic was missing Brazil fire blanks

AFP, La Plata



Now you see the jogo bonito; now you don't.

Brazil were supposed to turn on the

style Sunday and ease past rank outsiders Venezuela in kickstarting a bid for a hoped-for third consecutive Copa America triumph.

Instead, the Venezuelans, straining every sinew for every ball, put the hex on the auriverde at the Estadio Unico in La Plata and secured a second goalless draw with their much-lauded rivals in a row.

Just over a decade ago the five-times world champions slaughtered their counterparts from the Caribbean nation, where baseball remains sport numero uno, 7-0 to get a triumphant Copa campaign under way.

But where Ronaldo, Ronaldino and Rivaldo found rich pickings on that occasion, Brazil this time were left to contemplate only sour grapes as they found this year's 'Vinotinto' made of sterner stuff.

Brazil coach Mario Menezes, in charge for his first tournament after replacing unflinching pragmatist Dunga, had hoped for better things in choosing an attacking line-up.

Hot young talents Neymar and Ganso from Santos, plus comparatively elder statesmen and Milan stars Pato and Robinho were supposed to form the Magic Quartet to create the kind of sumptuous fare served up for France two decades ago by Michel Platini, Alain Giresse, Luis Fernandez and Jean Tigana.

Those four midfield musketeers were dubbed the "carré magique" or magic square and they lit up the 1984 European championship in particular - even if at World Cup level they never quite managed to land the big prize.

But on Sunday's evidence it's more back to square one than magic square for the Brazilians.

Fans at the Estadio Unico in La Plata outside Buenos Aires found little to cheer their chilled bones in close to zero temperatures.

Many could have been forgiven, in their frozen state, for wishing they were instead cheering on the auriverde's women's team at the ongoing World Cup in Germany, where Marta produced the kind of finishing earlier in the day against Norway which was sadly not in evidence from the men.

The parallels are intriguing with the men five-times world champions yet unable to find the net against traditional continental whipping boys whereas Marta, herself a five-time world player of the year, floored muscular Norway almost single-handed with two goals and an assist in a 3-0 win.

Brazil tried the magic quartet approach in 2006 at the World Cup with the Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Adriano and Kaka variant, but that model likewise failed truly to ignite.

Menezes did at least recognise his men were making little headway and withdrew the ineffectual Robinho on the hour for Fluminense's Fred - but he also drew a blank.

More of the same against the tough Paraguayans and thereafter against a hard to break down Ecuador and the holders would be struggling to convince their fans that they still possess, deep down, the magic touch.

AFP, La Plata



Brazil made a tame entrance into the Copa America on Sunday, missing a host of chances

in a goalless draw with ultra-minnows Venezuela at the Estadio Unico in La Plata, outside Buenos Aires.

The five-times world champions had chances - Milan's Pato notably hitting the woodwork early on. But the longed-for samba football never arrived and it was soon apparent there would be no repeat of the auriverde's 7-0 thumping of the vinotinto in a 1999 group opener where Ronaldo and co ran riot.

In the other match Sunday, Paraguay and Ecuador also played to a 0-0 draw at the Brigadier General Estanislao Lopez stadium in Santa Fe.

Before Sunday, Brazil had also won all five previous meetings between the two nations in the competition, scoring 25 goals for just one conceded.

But the baseball-loving Venezuelans have come on since then by leaps and bounds and the only South American country never to make it to the World Cup finals even managed a goalless draw in Brazil during the 2010 World Cup qualifiers.

Selecao coach Mano Menezes admitted the outcome was disappointing.

"In the first half we had chances but in the second it was different. We were

generally a bit lacking - and Venezuela worked like Trojans," he admitted afterwards.

Brazil now go on to face Paraguay on Saturday in Cordoba and Menezes said that "that will be another game."

Counterpart Cesar Farias was delighted with a battling showing.

"It's historic in terms of the Copa America. Brazil played well but we deserve praise for holding them," said Farias.

"When we had the chance to play a bit we did and when we had to defend like gladiators we did that too."

Menezes sent out an attack-minded line-up, led by Santos' precocious talents Neymar and Paulo Henrique Ganso, who arrived at the event fresh from winning the Copa Libertadores, with Robinho and Pato also in the mix.

But they did not follow through and Venezuela supporters and a contingent of Argentina fans in the crowd chanted "Ole" enthusiastically whenever a burgundy-shirted Venezuela player passed the ball.

"The big teams aren't going to get an easy ride - they'll have to scrap for everything in every game, vowed Venezuela keeper Renny Vega afterwards.

Bolivia, ranked 102 in the world, had shown the way by holding Argentina in their opener and 68th-ranked Venezuela took their cue in providing another shock result.

Pato ought to have made the difference but missed with several attempts, including one which hit the bar in the

first period.

But Venezuela were not to be outdone and the impressive Tomas Rincon was held up in his tracks when set for a clean run on goal as Bolivian referee Raul Orozco elected to stop play for a foul by Thiago Silva ten minutes before the break.

Brazil then were unlucky as Neymar fed Robinho but Oswaldo Vizcarrondo made a last ditch block almost on the line.

Then Ganso found Neymar but he missed the target.

The Brazilians have their eye firmly on the 2014 World Cup which they will host - yet they are also after their ninth Copa and fifth in the past six editions.

Argentina and Uruguay hold the record with 14 each.

The favourites continued to press after the break - but had a scare on 59 minutes when Salmon Rondon went down after tangling with Silva in the box.

But Orozco booked Rondon for simulation.

Menezes rolled the dice on the hour, withdrawing Robinho and sending on Fluminense's Fred.

Yet it was Venezuela who came close next as Juan Arango dragged an effort wide.

Elano and Lucas Silva came on for the tiring Pato and Ramires with 15 minutes remaining but the resolute Venezuelan defence, in which Roberto Rosales and Vizcarrondo were outstanding, held firm.

## Grondona defends Messi

AFP, Buenos Aires

The head of Argentina's Football Association (AFA), Julio Grondona, on Sunday praised striker Lionel Messi, but criticised his squad mates in the wake of their disappointing opening Copa America draw with Bolivia.

Messi has often been criticised in his homeland for failing to show his superlative Barcelona form in the national side and the media even question his loyalty to a country which he left for Catalonia as a young teen.

But Grondona told Radio Del Plata: "Messi always plays well, never badly - which is what the others around him were doing."

Coach Sergio Batista had sent out an attacking side to beat the Bolivians but Messi and strike partner Carlos Tevez drew a blank and it was left to sub Sergio Aguiero to rescue a point at La Plata.

For Grondona, Messi was forced to forage too deep.

"As the ball did not get through to Messi he had to drop back to pick it up," Grondona complained.

## Venezuela wish Chavez well

AFP, La Plata

Venezuelan players issued a get well soon message to ailing President Hugo Chavez after their surprise goalless draw Sunday with holders Brazil at the Copa America.

Grandy Perazzo and Franklin Lucena sent the message on behalf of the squad to Chavez, who is convalescing in Cuba after undergoing surgery for a cancerous tumour.



Ecuador fans pose before the start of their Copa America tie against Paraguay at the Cementerio de Elefantes Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

# A dull stalemate

AFP, Santa Fe



Ecuador were more or less satisfied but Paraguay felt irked after the pair fought out a goalless stalemate in Group B of the Copa America on Sunday.

With group favourites and holders Brazil also dropping two points against minnows Venezuela the chance was there for either side to take early ownership of the group with a win in the late game.

Instead, a tight match saw neither side able to make a breakthrough in Santa Fe.

Gerardo Martino's Paraguay were favoured after having shown some impressive form in qualifiers for last year's World Cup, but their forward line of German-based Lucas Barrios and Blackburn man Roque Santa Cruz was unable to make their greater experience of the big occasion count.

"The first 20 to 25 minutes were good from Paraguay - we could have made the difference there," said Martino glumly.

"Then towards the end (of the first period) we lost our way and gave away possession too much and stopped pressing. In the second half we did have some chances and were in control," he noted.

But still the goals wouldn't come, meaning that the Brazilians can recover from their own poor finishing against the Venezuelans if they can edge out Martino's men next Saturday to get back on track.

Paraguay are now sweating on the fitness for that game of winger Edgar Barreto, who went off injured before half time. Ecuador coach Reinaldo Rueda, in contrast said his side had played "very well" in general.

"We came right back into the game (after Paraguay's stronger start) and we are getting our confidence together."

## SPORTS POLL

### WEEKLY QUESTION

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