

Paraguay fight into final

AFP, Mendoza



Ten-man Paraguay beat Venezuela 5-3 on penalties to reach the Copa America final on Wednesday after regulation and extra-time produced a goalless draw.

Twice champions Paraguay will now meet Uruguay, chasing a record 15th title, in Sunday's final in Buenos Aires, having reached the showdown drawing all five of their games.

But the Paraguayans rode their luck as they ended the surprise run of the Venezuelans, traditional whipping boys at this level, in the cruellest of fashions with Dario Veron hitting the match-winning spotkick.

Venezuela hit the woodwork three times in their first-ever semi and had a goal ruled out questionably for offside.

Paraguay also finished with ten men, playing the final 20 minutes of the extra half-hour shorn of the red-carded Jonathan Santana for a second bookable offence and furthermore had coach Gerardo Martino dismissed.

No sooner had they started the second period of extra-time than Veron should have suffered the same fate, for headbutting Nicolas Fedor.

Inexplicably, Mexican referee Francisco Chacon dubbed the incident only worthy of yellow.

That only served to deepen the sense of injustice for the Venezuelans and tempers boiled over at the end with a mass scuffle between both team's benches to mar the occasion.

The Venezuelans were with without the suspended Tomas Rincon, sent off in the shock quarterfinal win over Chile and a key figure in their run to the last four.

Coach Cesar Farias went with Giacomo Di Giorgi and the balance of the side did not appear to be disrupted as they produced some stirring attacking play while Paraguay went with their traditional containment recipe.

Paraguay, quarterfinal conquerors of Brazil on penalties, had to leave experienced striker Roque Santa Cruz on the bench with a knee problem.



Paraguay players celebrate their tie-breaker victory over Venezuela at the end of their Copa America semifinal at the Malvinas Argentinas Stadium on Wednesday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Uruguay mean business

AFP, Buenos Aires



Uruguay will not rest on their laurels as they prepare to go up against

Paraguay in Sunday's Copa America final, says Luis Suarez, semifinal hero against Peru.

The Liverpool forward's brace of goals means the celeste now stand on the threshold of what would be a record 15th title - breaking their current logjam with quarterfinal victims Argentina.

"We'll not forget about those titles (but) we are thinking about the present, about carrying on winning. Uruguay are not going to waste time celebrating past achievements and past titles won," said Suarez.

Should the 24-year-old score in Sunday's final he would likely end up as top scorer - he is currently joint-top marksman with Argentina's Sergio Aguero on three goals.

But "being top scorer is not the important thing for me - the main issue is the collective dream of winning the Copa. Personal stuff is secondary to that," insists Suarez.

Suarez, who joined Liverpool from Ajax last season, gives coach Oscar Tabarez much of the credit for transforming Uruguayan fortunes.

Tabarez took over in 2006 and led the side to the World Cup semi-finals last season but the coach himself stressed after the win over Peru that it was laying the groundwork at more junior levels which was the foundation of the team's recent good form, with youngsters coming through the ranks.

"The under20 team has been doing well, qualifying for the London Olympics, while the under17 side were runners-up at their world championship and we were fourth at the World Cup in South Africa. Now we are in the final of the Copa," said Suarez.

Defender Sebastian Coates came through from the under20 side. He

has been doing well at the tournament here and says the Tabarez method is paying handsome dividends.

"It was very useful for me to cut my teeth with the under20 team and also important to have played with the under 17s."

As players come up level by level "they respect the various processes and this is also very important for those who are with the younger teams right now."

While Argentina and Brazil regroup for the 2014 World Cup, Uruguay are therefore punching above their weight once again, despite being the second-smallest nation in South America after Surinam with a population of around 3.5 million.

They won the first Copa America in 1916 as well as the first ever World Cup in 1930 and repeated the feat in 1950 - beating Brazil in Rio de Janeiro in the final.

Tevez unfazed

Football

AFP, London

Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez is unfazed by the collapse of his transfer to Brazilian side Corinthians and is expecting fresh bids from further clubs, his representative said Thursday.

Argentinian international Tevez is seeking to engineer a move away from City, with the player reportedly desperate to join a club in South America in order to be closer to his family.

The 27-year-old appeared to be close to having his prayers answered in the form of a £40 million transfer to Corinthians before the Brazilian club pulled out this week saying they did not have enough time to wrap up the deal.

However Tevez's representative Kia Joorabchian told the BBC Thursday the player was not "overly worried" by the setback, believing that it was only a matter of time before other clubs entered the frame.

"This is Carlos Tevez we are talking about, one of the best players in the world. We are

not overly worried," Joorabchian told BBC Sport.

"He wants to leave but is still a City player at the moment and we will of course respect that."

"We've just got to wait and see who comes in next for him."

According to reports in British media, Tevez's Corinthians move faltered after City failed to receive bank guarantees for the transfer fee discussed.

However Joorabchian insisted the deal broke down because Corinthians were unable to process it before the closure of the Brazilian transfer window.

"This deal was always going to be difficult because of the timing," he added.

"In the end, this came down to small details, to haggling over a relatively small amount of money, and it couldn't be done in time."

"To say Corinthians could not provide guarantees for the money is nonsense."

"Firstly, they are the biggest club in Brazil. Secondly, any club that makes an offer and cannot pay will get suspended by FIFA and have points deducted," he said.

'I'm not the Zen Master'

INTERNET, San Diego

The "Special One" is well aware of the "Zen Master."

Real Madrid coach José Mourinho has spent the last few days in California during a preseason tour of the United States, where his team has played the LA Galaxy and Mexico's Chivas, and says his skills as a soccer coach cannot be compared to legendary former Lakers coach Phil Jackson.

"No, no, no I'm not the 'Zen Master,'" Mourinho said after his team defeated Chivas 3-0 at Qualcomm Stadium on Wednesday night. "Basketball is basketball. Soccer is soccer. He's special in the basketball world, but it's impossible to compare. Of course I know him, he's big."

If Mourinho is drawing comparisons to Jackson, then Cristiano Ronaldo is his Kobe Bryant.

Like the Lakers superstar guard, Ronaldo has a special swagger to his game and a winning attitude. His flashiness doesn't take away from his ability to add tallies to the scoreboard as he showed with a hattrick against Chivas in the World Football Classic friendly.

"Cristiano is Cristiano," Mourinho said. "Always happy, always motivated and proud to play no matter if he's in China, Japan or the USA. He's self-motivated when it comes to playing well and scoring. We knew we wanted to play this way, to play well."



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo is about to score the opening goal against CD Guadalajara at the Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

C'Ron blasts Guadalajara

Football

AFP, San Diego

Cristiano Ronaldo scored three goals in a devastating nine minute second-half spell on Wednesday to propel Spanish giants Real Madrid to a 3-0 victory over Mexico's Chivas Guadalajara.

Ronaldo, a former world footballer of the year, was thwarted by Chivas keeper Luis Michel in the first half of the friendly.

Michel stopped one of the Portuguese star's signature free kicks in the 6th minute and shortly afterwards denied a Ronaldo headed attempt off a corner.

Then as half-time approached Ronaldo fought off a defender to reach a through ball from Mezut Ozil, only to find Michel had rushed out to close the angle.

Ronaldo finally broke through in the 73rd minute, splitting two Chivas defenders as he raced into the penalty area to meet a cross from French international Karim Benzema and fire beyond Michel with his right foot.

Three minutes later Ronaldo converted a penalty after team-mate and Portuguese compatriot Pepe was brought down in the box by Chivas' Omar Arellano.

Ronaldo completed his hat-trick with a blast to the lower right corner in the 82nd minute.

The match at Qualcomm Stadium was the second on Real Madrid's North American tour, which they opened with a 4-1 victory over Major League Soccer's Los Angeles Galaxy on Saturday.

They play Major League Soccer's Philadelphia Union in Philadelphia on Saturday.

The Spanish club is one of several European sides warming up for the season in North America.

SPORTS POLL

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