

URUGUAY land record title

AFP, Buenos Aires



Uruguay defeated Paraguay 3-0 on Sunday to win a record 15th Copa America with striker

Diego Forlan grabbing two goals to take his international tally to 31 and complete an incredible family story.

Liverpool attacker Luis Suarez, the player of the tournament, was also on target as Uruguay claimed a first continental crown since 1995 and broke their all-time Copa title tie of 14 which they held with Argentina.

For Forlan, it was an emotional triumph as he followed his father and grand-father into the record books as a Copa America winner.

"This really means a lot for me because my grand-father won it, my father won it and now I have also done it," said the former Manchester United striker, who took his international tally to 31 goals, a record he now holds with Hector Scarone.

"Three generations have won this trophy. The name of Forlan will stay in history."

Suarez opened the scoring in the 12th minute when his drive took a deflection off Dario Veron and left goalkeeper Justo Villar wrong-footed.

Atletico Madrid star Forlan added the second three minutes from the interval when Egidio Arevalo cleverly intercepted the ball to release the veteran attacker who confidently buried a left-footed strike.

It was Forlan's first goal in 13 matches as Uruguay, who knocked out hosts Argentina in the quarter-finals, were in cruise control at River Plate's famous Estadio Monumental.

Suarez added: "We really wanted this. We are a united group and we deserved it. We had to fight like crazy to win this and we've

achieved something great."

Captain Diego Lugano said the win was a triumph for the whole of his country.

"I'm really proud of the way we played and the way we did it. You cannot imagine how I feel. We've made a lot of people very happy."

Uruguay, who were World Cup semi-finalists in 2010, dominated the first half while Paraguay, who had reached the final without winning a game, were desperately short of ideas and inspiration.

They had been fortunate not to have been a goal down as early as the second minute, needing Villar to pull off a sensational, point-blank save to keep out a bullet header from Diego Lugano.

Paraguay, the champions in 1953 and 1979, had defeated Brazil and Venezuela in penalty shoot-outs in both the quarter-finals and semi-finals after the games ended 0-0 in extra-time.

But they came close to pulling a goal back in the 54th minute when Nelson Valdez crashed a right-foot volley off the crossbar with Uruguay goalkeeper Fernando Muslera getting a slight touch to deflect the ball towards the woodwork.

Just moments earlier, Suarez had muscled his way down the left, but his cut-back for Forlan dropped just inches behind the Atletico Madrid man as he closed down on goal.

Paraguay again looked dangerous when Ivan Piris charged down the right flank before crossing to Christian Riveros whose flick was saved by Muslera.

Uruguay remained in a positive frame of mind, bringing on prolific Napoli striker Edinson Cavani for Alvaro Pereira after 65 minutes.

Cavani then teed-up Sebastian Eguren 10 minutes later but Villar pulled off a one-handed save despite being off-balance.

Forlan then hit his 31st international goal in the last minute after being set-up by Cavani and Suarez.



Uruguayan players celebrate with the trophy at the end of the Copa America final against Paraguay at the Monumental Stadium on Sunday.

Beckham
keen to
play on

SOCCERNET

David Beckham believes he has at least two more years left before retirement as the former England skipper continues his club career with MLS side LA Galaxy.

Beckham, 36, still has a year to run on his current deal in Los Angeles and hinted he may be willing to extend that contract to finish his career in the United States.

"I still feel good, I feel healthy. I'm still enjoying getting up in the morning to go training," he told various newspapers.

"Yes [I have], one, maybe two, more years. Until I get up and don't feel the same, I'll continue. I still have to play at a certain level but I think I can do that."

"This is the last year in my contract but I enjoy playing in this league, for this franchise, with the players we have and with Bruce Arena as my manager."

Meanwhile, Beckham, who played in the Galaxy's penalty shootout loss to Manchester City, says his former club United should try to sign Wesley Sneijder.

The Holland international has been linked with a move to Old Trafford and Beckham thinks he would be an ideal replacement for his old team-mate Paul Scholes.

"Scholes is the one player they want to replace," he added. "He is such a great talent and he will be missed. They're going to have to get someone special."

"There's a lot of talk about Wesley Sneijder. He's such a talented player, a great guy as well. I'm sure he would fit right into a United team."

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Hammam blasts Blatter

Football

AFP, Paris

Banned Asian football chief Mohammed Bin Hammam likened FIFA president Sepp Blatter to a "dictator" on Monday, and said bribery claims against him were the result of cultural misunderstandings.

The 62-year-old former Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president was banned from the game for life on Saturday following a two-day FIFA ethics committee hearing at the organisation's Zurich headquarters.

Bin Hammam had been accused of seeking to buy votes in the FIFA presidential election by offering cash gifts of \$40,000 each to delegates at a Caribbean Football Union (CFU) get-together in May.

He has pledged to appeal the decision.

The Qatari reacted to his ban on Saturday by publishing a scanned copy of a personal letter sent to him by Blatter in 2008 on his personal blog, demonstrating the extent to which he felt betrayed by the 75-year-old Swiss.

He returned to the theme in an interview carried out in Doha with Britain's Sky News, broadcast on Monday, in which he compared Blatter to a tyrant.

"When you are in a position to lead, the leader usually doesn't revenge," he said.

"This is actually the act of the dictators, and you have witnessed through history the dictators, when they think this or that person is a prominent one to replace him, the first thing they do is execute him."

"And they try to fabricate any allegation against him, to jail him or something like that."

"So I mean usually -- I don't know

whether Mr Blatter considers himself a leader or not -- but the leader doesn't revenge."

Bin Hammam also said that gift-giving was a routine practice in FIFA and that exchanging presents with other members of the organisation should not be regarded as attempted bribery.

"This is a normal, normal, normal practice," he said. "I'm telling you again, I did not give any cash gifts to anybody but these are normal."

Pointing to his wrist watch, he added: "This watch is a gift."

Despite his claims, Bin Hammam insisted "he had nothing to do with" the cash-filled envelopes allegedly distributed to the CFU officials.

Bin Hammam's suspension by FIFA on May 29 led to his withdrawal from the presidential election, thereby handing Blatter a fourth consecutive term in office.

Balotelli irks Mancini

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

Mario Balotelli's failed trick shot sparked a heated row with manager Roberto Mancini that took the lustre off Manchester City's penalty shootout win over the Los Angeles Galaxy Sunday.

The Italian striker with a hot-headed reputation scored the lone goal in regulation for City but was relegated to the showers by the time the teams went to a penalty shootout to decide the exhibition match.

Mancini was incensed after Balotelli broke in on the Galaxy goal in the 28th minute and then turned backwards and tried to hit a ball into the net with the back of his foot. The ball went wide and Balotelli was pulled from the game as soon as his replacement could warm up.

"I think for the player, this can be a lesson," Mancini said. "This can't happen on a strong team."

"I hope he understands that he needs to have good behaviour."

Goalkeeper Joe Hart made the game-winning penalty kick as City beat the Galaxy 7-6 in a penalty shootout in the friendly football.

Balotelli, who has been criticized before for his unprofessional antics, was replaced by James Milner.

Once on the sidelines, Mancini and Balotelli got into it. Mancini appeared to motion for Balotelli to head to the locker room but Balotelli extended his arms, said something and then sat down on the bench where he slammed a cup to the turf and took off his jersey as he watched the rest of the half. He stayed in the locker room for the second half.

Mancini told reporters after the match that the situation is under control and there is no need to take it any further.

The temperamental Balotelli has a chequered past. Three months ago he got into a row with Manchester United players at the end of a FA Cup semifinal match.

Villas-Boas back in Hong Kong

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

New Chelsea boss Andre Villas-Boas this week returns to Hong Kong set on using the Barclays Asia Trophy to vet a growing Chelsea squad he is still getting to know.

Chelsea returned to form with a convincing 4-0 victory in Thailand on Sunday, after a disappointing showing in Malaysia. They will end their Asian trip with two games in the four-team tournament in Hong Kong.

The London side were due to arrive in Hong Kong on Monday, while Blackburn and Aston Villa touched down over the weekend. Hong Kong champions Kitchee add local flavour to the field.

Four years ago, Villas-Boas attended the Barclays Asia Trophy as a Chelsea scout, using the exhibition tournament to cast an eye over Portsmouth and Liverpool, ahead of English Premier League fixtures against them.

This time, the ex-Porto manager will be preparing for season in charge as he calculates how to bridge the gap that saw Manchester United win the league last season by nine points.

Villas-Boas announced the signing of 19-year-old midfielder Oriol Romeu from Barcelona in Bangkok, the second stop on the club's Asian pre-season tour, but the club has said it is close to two more signings.

The 33-year-old manager is sure to be a major attraction in his own right, having completed a £13.3 million move to Chelsea in the summer, which made him the most expensive managerial transfer.

"Going back to Asia is important to us," Villas-Boas said ahead of the club's Asia trip. "It shortens the distance with the Asian public who are following us from a big distance. It is important for them to feel we have respect for them and we are able to feel their heat."

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