

LUCKY escape for Argentina

AFP, Montevideo



Argentina rode their luck to come away from Lima with a 1-1 draw against Peru and maintain their slender one-point lead at the top of the World Cup 2014 South American qualifying table.

But as tournament lives up to its billing as the toughest of the zonal qualifiers, the Argentinians are now just three points clear of sixth-placed Venezuela, who beat out-of-sorts Paraguay 2-0 in Asuncion.

There was little consolation, though, for reigning continental champions Uruguay who, after their crushing 4-0 defeat by Colombia on Friday night brought an 18-match unbeaten run to an end, were held to a tame 1-1 draw by Ecuador in Montevideo.

Colombia, on the other hand, go from strength to strength, wrestling second place in the group from Chile with a commanding 3-1 victory in Santiago and are now just a point off the lead and level on points with Ecuador.

Argentina were made to struggle in Peru and were fortunate to hold on for a point in front of more than 50,000 spectators who taunted playmaker Lionel Messi unmercifully every time he touched the ball.

Peru should have taken an early lead after two minutes when they were awarded a penalty but Argentine goalkeeper Sergio Romero spared his side's blushes by saving Claudio Pizarro's tame effort. However, the Peruvians dominated and went in front after 21 minutes through defender Carlos Zambrano.

That stung the Argentines into life and they were level 15 minutes later through Gonzalo Higuain who took one of the few chances his side carved out on the night after being put through by Ezequiel Lavezzi.

After the debacle in Colombia, Uruguay found themselves trailing again to a Felipe Caicedo penalty against Ecuador, but Edinson Cavani hit back with only his second goal in 14 qualifying matches.

The recent poor run of form prompted Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez to comment: "The players are as committed as ever but it goes without saying that we haven't come away with what we wanted from these two games. It was clear for everyone to see: we're not playing well."

Colombia, meanwhile, dealt Chile their first defeat in eight games, coming from behind to win a nail-biter 3-1.

Chile's Gary Medel was sent off after 34 minutes and the home side threw everything into attack and were rewarded with a Matias Fernandez goal in the 58th minute. But James Rodriguez hit back immediately and two goals inside three minutes, from Radamel Falcao and Teofilo Gutierrez, broke Chile down.

Venezuela, the only South American country never to have qualified for the finals, kept up their challenge with a 2-0 win over bottom-of-the-table Paraguay, with both goals



Peru defender Carlos Zambrano (L) is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Argentina during their 2014 World Cup South American zone qualifier at the Nacional Stadium in Lima on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Brazil picks WC mascot

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

At the last World Cup, in 2010 in South Africa, it was Zakumi the green-haired leopard. The mascot in Germany four years earlier was a lion named Goleo. Now, Brazil has reportedly picked an armadillo.

Press reports said world football governing body FIFA on Tuesday registered with the European Patent Office the next playful symbol of the world's supreme sporting event: a smiling armadillo whose name will be picked through an Internet vote.

The three-banded armadillo -- known as a 'tatu-bola' in Brazil -- is an endangered species.

FIFA would not confirm the reports, but told AFP that the design will be unveiled on Brazilian television Sunday.

"We are anxious to give the Brazilian public and the entire world the opportunity to know more about it during the preparation of the event," it said in an

Lamps rescues England

AFP, Paris



British countries failed to feed off the feel-good factor of the success of the London Olympics and Paralympics on Tuesday as all four failed to win their 2014 World Cup qualifiers.

England had to rely on veteran Frank Lampard's late penalty to force a 1-1 draw at home to Ukraine, while Northern Ireland were held humiliatingly 1-1 at home by Luxembourg.

Both Scotland and Wales already face uphill tasks to even get a play-off place in their Group A as the Scots had to come from behind to draw 1-1 with lowly Macedonia, while Wales' woes under Chris Coleman continued with a 6-1 hammering in Serbia.

Those two results will heap the pressure on Scotland boss Craig Levein and Coleman, who has yet to win in five matches in charge of the Welsh since predecessor Gary Speed took his own life.

Elsewhere, the European heavyweight quintet of reigning World and European champions Spain, Germany, France, Italy and Portugal all recorded

victories, though several were made to work hard for the three points over lesser opposition.

The Spanish edged Georgia 1-0 in Tbilisi with a late goal from Roberto Soldado, while Group I rivals France avoided a repeat of their shock Euro 2012 qualifying defeat at home to Belarus with a 3-1 win over them in Didier Deschamps' first match at the Stade de France as coach of Les Bleus.

Germany made it two wins from two in Group C with a hard-fought 2-1 win over neighbours Austria in Vienna.

Despite Lampard rescuing England a point with his third goal in two games, manager Roy Hodgson thought that a point was the least they deserved.

"The first 15 minutes we weren't at our best. The next 75 minutes we dominated the game," said Hodgson, whose side had beaten the same opponents 1-0 in the group stages at Euro 2012.

"The fact is we played against a very good Ukraine team but I was very pleased with the way the players went about their task."

Levein remained defiant despite a second successive home draw -- they were held 0-0 by Serbia last Saturday -- leaving them already struggling in

perhaps the toughest group with Croatia and Belgium, who drew 1-1 on Tuesday, also involved.

"I think we struggled a bit to really get going. The second half was better than the first," Levein said.

"We didn't quite get our game going in the attacking sense and losing the early goal put us on the back foot. I think on the evidence of the last two games that this group is going to be really tight indeed."

Georgia's plucky performance against Spain drew high praise from La Roja coach Vicente del Bosque, whose side showed some rustiness in what was their first qualifier.

However, the ever astute tactician's second-half introduction of Cesc Fabregas and Pedro changed the balance.

He will be pleased to have had a relatively tough run out before Spain host France next month in a repeat of their meeting at the quarter-finals of Euro 2012 in Donetsk, when Spain comfortably won 2-0.

Deschamps, while admitting that his side were far from the finished article, said that it was mission accomplished thus far with two wins from two qualifiers.

RESULTS

Belgium 1 (Gillet 45+1) Croatia 1 (Perisic 5)
Scotland 1 (Miller 43) Macedonia 1 (Noveski 10)
Serbia 6 (Kolarov 16, Tosic 24, Djuricic 39, Tadic 55, Ivanovic 79, Sulejmani 90)
Wales 1 (Bale 30)
Italy 2 (Destro 5, Cohen 90+2-og) Malta 0
Bulgaria 1 (Manolov 43) Armenia 0
Austria 1 (Junuzovic 57) **Germany 2** (Reuss 44, Ozil 52-pen)
Sweden 2 (Elm 37, Berg 90+4) Kazakhstan 0
Hungary 1 (Dzsudzsak 7-pen) **Netherlands 4** (Lens 3, 53, Martins Indi 19, Huntelaar 74)
Romania 4 (Toje 29, Lazar 44, Gaman 90+1, Maxim 90+3) Andorra 0
Turkey 3 (Emre Belozoglu 44, Bulut 60, Inan 75) Estonia 0
Cyprus 1 (Makridis 57) Iceland 0
Switzerland 2 (Shaqiri 23, Inler 68-pen) Albania 0
Norway 2 (Henriksen 26, Riise 90+4-pen) Slovenia 1 (Suler 16)
Northern Ireland 1 (Shiels 14)
Luxembourg 1 (Daniel Da Mota 86)
Portugal 3 (Varela 64, Postiga 85, Bruno Alves 88) Azerbaijan 0
Israel 0 **Russia 4** (Kerzhakov 7, 64, Korokin 18, Faizulin 77)
Slovakia 2 (Sapara 36, Jakubko 78) Liechtenstein 0
Greece 2 (Ninis 55, Mitroglou 72) Lithuania 0
Bosnia-Herzegovina 4 (Misimovic 12-pen, 54, Pjanic 44, Dzeko 90+1) Latvia 1 (Gorkss 5)
England 1 (Lampard 87-pen) Ukraine 1 (Konoplyanka 39)
San Marino 0 **Montenegro 6** (Bordjevic 24, Beciraj 25, 52, Zvenkot 69, Delibasic 78, 82)
Poland 2 (Blaszczkowski 33-pen, Warzyniak 81) Moldova 0
France 3 (Capoue 49, Jallet 68, Ribery 80)

FA celebrates 150 years

AFP, London

England will play friendlies against Brazil and the Republic of Ireland in 2013 as a way of launching the Football Association's 150th anniversary, the national governing body said Wednesday.

Five-time World Cup winners Brazil will visit Wembley in February as part of a two-match arrangement that sees England heading to South America for a brief tour in June.

Prior to the home game against Brazil, England will play the Republic of Ireland, also at Wembley, for the first time since their infamous fixture in 1995 was abandoned after a riot by England fans at Dublin's Lansdowne Road.

Voeller wants Ballack to coach

AFP, Berlin

Former Germany captain Michael Ballack, without a club since leaving Bayer Leverkusen at the end of last season, should get his coaching badges, Leverkusen manager Rudi Voeller has recommended.

"He has the capability and intelligence to be a coach," Voeller told Sport Bild newspaper, adding that he had suggested Ballack "get his badges" after the last match of the 2011-12 season.

The 35-year-old Ballack, capped 98 times by Germany, has fallen out off the football radar since leaving Leverkusen.

Gomez fires USA

AFP, Columbus



Herculez Gomez scored a second-half free-kick as the USA got their 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign back on track with a 1-0 win over Jamaica on Tuesday.

Meanwhile Mexico became the first team through to the next regional stage of qualifying after Javier Hernandez scored the only goal in a 1-0 win against Costa Rica.

Gomez curled in a shot from just outside the penalty area in the 55th minute to avenge the defeat to

Jamaica last week in front of a crowd of 23,881 at the Columbus Crew Stadium.

The United States, Jamaica and Guatemala all have seven points at the top of Group A in the semifinal round of qualifying in North and Central America and the Caribbean (CONCACAF).

The top two teams from each group will advance to phase of next year.

Guatemala and the United States hold the edge over Jamaica with a superior goal difference.

In other matches Tuesday, Guatemala defeated Antigua and Barbuda 1-0, El Salvador edged Guyana 3-2, Panama beat Canada 2-0 and Honduras blanked Cuba 1-0.

The US have two games left, at home to Antigua and Barbuda on October 12 and away in Guatemala four days later.

Jamaica had claimed their first-ever win against the United States

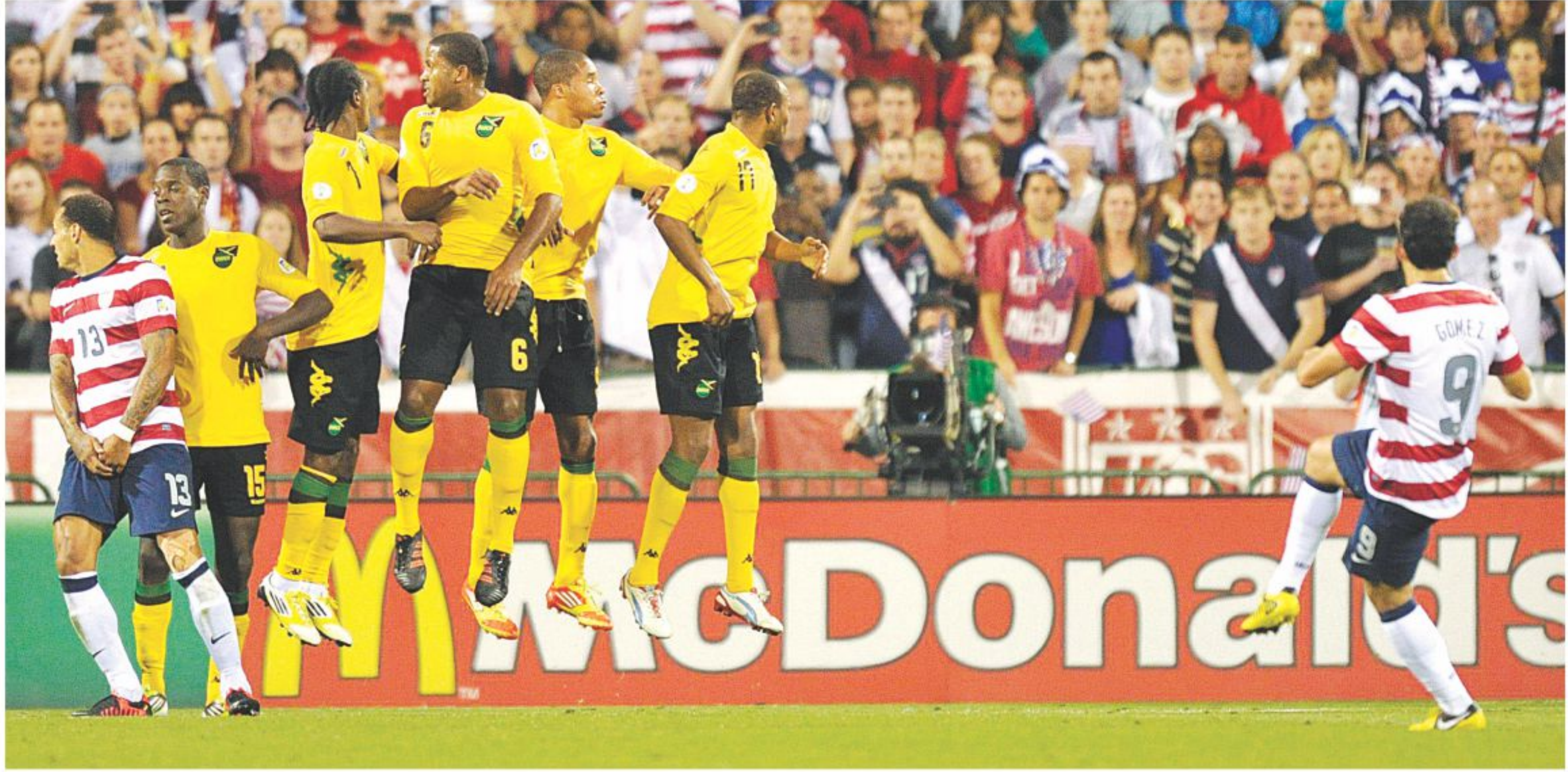
with a 2-1 victory in Kingston on Friday.

The United States dominated the opening half Tuesday but failed to convert their chances as the game remained scoreless going into half-time.

Jamaican goalkeeper Dwayne Miller was superb throughout. In the 20th minute, he deflected a Steve Cherundolo cross onto a post.

American Danny Williams also had an excellent scoring attempt in the 30th minute, but his shot from 25 yards out rebounded off the post.

The USA were awarded a free-kick when Clint Dempsey was fouled just outside the penalty area by Jamaica's Rodolph Austin.



United States striker Herculez Gomez (R) scores the all-important goal from a freekick during their 2014 World Cup qualifying match against Jamaica at the Crew Stadium in Ohio on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Jordan dent Aussies

AFP, Amman



Australia's 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign suffered a shattering blow when they crashed to a humiliating 2-1 defeat against Jordan here on Tuesday.

Already under pressure following two consecutive draws against Oman and Japan in Group B, the Socceroos appeared overwhelmed at the packed King Abdullah Stadium where the sturdy Jordanians matched their more famous rivals man for man to clinch a historic victory.

Hassan Abdel-Fattah scored a penalty in the 51st minute and Amer Deeb struck in the 73rd for Jordan before Archie Thompson pulled one back for Australia in the 85th.

The Australians, who are aiming to make the World Cup for the third straight time, lacked a clear strategy, while the Jordanians, who have never qualified for the quadrennial event, played without any pressure and victory sent them second behind Japan.

Japan, who beat Iraq 1-0 earlier on Tuesday, have 10 points from four matches, while Jordan have four from three.

Iraq are third with two points while Australia, also with two points, are fourth on goal difference. Oman, also on two points, are fifth.

After a scrappy start the pace picked up in the second half with both teams showing more enterprise up front.

That almost brought immediate dividends for Australia when they were presented with a golden chance to score in the 46th minute, but Mile Jedinak leapt high over the Jordanian defence only to head the ball narrowly wide of the mark.

Jedinak, however, was to turn villain later when he brought down Jordan forward Odai al-Saify a metre inside the penalty area and Abdel-Fattah beat Mark Schwarzer to his left with a powerful low penalty to trigger off wild celebrations in the stands.

The referee had earlier missed another penalty when Tim Cahill appeared to have blocked the ball with his arm off a free kick awarded to Jordan in the first half.

The Australian defence lived dangerously, with the ball drifting dangerously close to the goal on a few occasions and once Schwarzer had to lunge backwards to tip away a dipping 25-yard shot from the left.

RESULTS

Uzbekistan 2 (Ki Sung-Yeung 13-og, Tursunov 59) South Korea 2 (Kwak Tae-Hwi 43, Lee Dong-Gook 57)
Lebanon 1 (Antar 28) Iran 0
Japan 1 (Maeda 25) Iraq 0
Jordan 2 (Abdel-Fattah 51-pen, Deeb