



The red mist descended on Argentina's Javier Mascherano after the midfielder was sent-off for kicking a medic while being wheeled off on a cart late in their World Cup qualifier against Ecuador. An irate Mascherano had to be restrained by teammate Ezequiel Lavezzi.

# Day of strikers

## RESULTS

**Colombia 2** (Falcao 13-pen, Gutierrez 45) Peru 0  
Ecuador 1 (Castillo 17) Argentina 1 (Aguero 4-pen)  
Venezuela 0 **Uruguay 1** (Cavani 28)  
**Chile 3** (Vargas 16, Sanchez 18, Vidal 90+2)

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Strikers Falcao, Alexis Sanchez and Edinson Cavani all scored as Colombia ate into Argentina's lead, Chile notched a second successive win and Uruguay revived their hopes in South American World Cup qualifying on Tuesday.

Falcao's early penalty, taking his tally to seven in the competition, put Colombia on the road to a 2-0 home win over Peru that leaves them three points behind leaders Argentina with a game in hand.



Colombia coach Jose Pekerman told reporters.

Cavani struck a fine goal as Uruguay beat Venezuela 1-0 away for their first win in seven qualifiers, lifting the 2010 World Cup semi-finalists up to fifth in the nine-nation group, which would earn them a playoff should they maintain the position.

Uruguay leapfrogged Venezuela, a well-drilled outfit looking to take their country to the finals for the first time in Brazil next year, on goal difference with four matches remaining.

"We were aware that it could have all

"Falcao was essential in the first half as Peru were unable to deal with his movement. He makes fantastic runs (off the ball)... the 'Tiger' is phenomenal,"

been over for us today," Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez, deprived of top scorer Luis Suarez through suspension, said.

"We can't say the situation has got comfortable but it's an important step."

Venezuela remain confident of qualifying, despite the setback

"We still have chances and I'm not going to surrender," coach Cesar Farias said.

"We dominated the whole match but it's not about who deserves the win, it's about who scores the goals," captain Juan Arango added.

Chile benefited from the revived goal instincts of Sanchez and the return after eight years of 33-year-old midfielder David Pizarro in a 3-1 home win over Bolivia that consolidated fourth place behind Ecuador on goal difference.

Ecuador will rue their poor finishing after failing to take more than one goal

from an endless string of corners and free kicks in a 1-1 draw with an Argentina side missing Lionel Messi for an hour and struggling in the thin air in Quito.

In two qualifiers this month, Ecuador have picked up only one point and slipped in the standings while Chile, equal on 21 points, are breathing down their necks and Uruguay and Venezuela pose a latent threat.

Ecuador's run of six home victories in as many matches was halted by Argentina, who took an early lead with a Sergio Aguero penalty, and they now have only one fixture at high altitude, Uruguay in October, out of their four remaining qualifiers.

Argentina, who have drawn their last three matches albeit two at high altitude, have a bye in the next round on Sept. 6 when Colombia can catch them at the top if they beat Ecuador at home.

## Red mist

INTERNET, Undated

Barcelona hard man Javier Mascherano is known for his no-nonsense attitude on the football pitch, causing him trouble on a number of occasions.

And on Tuesday night, during Argentina's World Cup qualifier in Ecuador's capital Quito, the red mist flared up again.

The 29-year-old former Liverpool and West Ham midfielder was ejected from the field in the most bizarre of circumstances.

Mascherano had been injured in the 87th minute, with the game in the balance at 1-1, and was riding off on a motorised cart - as rules dictate - when he kicked out at the driver. Video replays showed that the midfielder had water squirted on him while being taken off.

Never one to hold back, he was then seen to jab the official steering the vehicle with his left foot and then sitting up to confront him.

Referee Enrique Caceres, from Paraguay, had no option but to send off Mascherano, much to his incredulity. He had to be led off by his teammate Ezequiel Lavezzi.

Mascherano was contrite on Twitter later on Tuesday, and wrote: "I really apologize for the reaction I had, nothing justifies this. Great team work and effort!!"

"One preaches non-violence in our country, and in this I was mistaken. My reaction is not justified. I feel ashamed. The stretcher was going too fast and I was about to fall. I warned him (the driver) and he ignored me, but what I did was not justified. I'm big enough to admit mistakes. I'm embarrassed, and saddened."

## USA win to go top

REUTERS, Seattle

Goals from Jozy Altidore and Eddie Johnson gave a confident United States a 2-0 win over Panama in Seattle on Tuesday as Juergen Klinsmann's team moved to the top of the six-team CONCACAF World Cup qualifying group.

The United States took the lead in the 36th minute with a nicely worked move - Michael Bradley bursting out of midfield, feeding Fabian Johnson on the left and his low cross was turned in at the back post by Altidore.

Altidore, who had been struggling for goals at international level, has now scored in the last three games for the United States.

Panama, who went into the game unbeaten, had the ball in the net on the stroke of halftime but Luis Tejada's effort was ruled out for offside.

Johnson made sure of the win for the hosts in the 53rd minute when Geoff Cameron picked him out with a superb cross-field pass which the Seattle Sounders forward confidently converted to the delight of his home fans.

Three teams qualify automatically from CONCACAF to next year's World Cup finals in Brazil - the United States lead on 10 points (five games), two points clear of closest rivals Costa Rica and Mexico.

## Messi denies tax accusations

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi denied stunning allegations Wednesday that he and his father engaged in tax fraud worth more than four million euros (\$5 million).

The 25-year-old Argentina international and four-time World Player of the year expressed shock at the accusation by Spanish financial crimes prosecutors.

"We are surprised about this news because we have never committed any infringement," the striker said in an English-language statement released on his Facebook account.

"We have always fulfilled all our tax obligations, following the advice of

our tax consultants who will take care of clarifying this situation," Messi said.

The player said he had just heard of the move against him through the media.

Messi and his father Jorge Horacio Messi were accused of fiddling the taxes in a legal filing lodged by financial crimes prosecutor Raquel Amado, a copy of which was obtained by AFP.

"It is all a mistake, you have to speak about this to the tax experts and lawyers who need to clear it up," the player's father told Spanish sports daily AS.

"I don't understand what is going on. I don't manage these matters, I am resident in Argentina," he said.

The father said he had not spoken to his son about the reports. "I don't need to since it is a mistake. Why would I

shock him?"

The allegations were filed in a court in Catalonia, where Messi is resident, but judges could yet refuse to let it proceed, a judicial source told AFP.

The player and his father are accused of three crimes of defrauding the state of taxes related to income from the use of his image from 2006-2009.

The allegations centre on tax declarations made in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

The striker and his father aimed to "deceive" the taxman by ceding Messi's image rights to companies based in tax havens such as Belize and Uruguay, the prosecutor's complaint said.

They drew up deals related to his image rights in Britain and Switzerland, ensuring that the income went straight to the tax havens without any tax being paid, it said.

## Iker still has it

REUTERS, Madrid



If Vicente del Bosque had any doubts about the form of Spain captain and goalkeeper Iker Casillas they were surely dispelled by his performance as a second-half substitute against Ireland in Tuesday's friendly in New York.

The Real Madrid stopper came on for Barcelona's Victor Valdes with just over half an hour left at Yankee Stadium and conjured up two trademark reflex saves to deny the Irish an equaliser before Juan Mata's late strike wrapped up a 2-0 win for the world and European champions.

After Roberto Soldado had put Spain ahead in the 69th minute, Casillas thrust out a hand to tip James McLean's fierce drive over the crossbar and then palmed a point-blank header from a corner on to the underside of the bar and away.

Known as "Saint Iker" to adoring fans after a string of match-winning performances, he earned effusive praise from the local sports media on Wednesday.

"Casillas stops Ireland with two saves for the history books," wrote Marca, while As added: "Two miraculous interventions from 'The Saint' Iker Casillas".

## Injured Zanetti given extension

REUTERS, Milan

Injured Inter Milan captain Javier Zanetti has been given a one-year contract extension by the Serie A club despite facing months out of action and turning 40 in August.

The Argentine defender, who has played more than 840 games for Inter, had an operation on his ruptured Achilles at the end of April and was told he faced six months on the sidelines.

"We talked at length about the injury and we decided to do another year together," Zanetti told the club website (www.inter.it) on Wednesday. "They have shown once again their belief in me and my passion for Inter."

## Haiti hold Italy

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro



Italy were embarrassed by Haiti on Tuesday as the unheralded Caribbean side scored two goals in the last five minutes to secure a 2-2 draw in a friendly despite falling behind after 19 seconds.

Haiti's players, who gave Spain a few frights before losing 2-1 to the world champions at the weekend, celebrated deliriously on the pitch at Vasco da Gama's Sao Januario stadium after shocking their illustrious opponents who slunk quietly away.

Italy, playing only 36 hours after arriving in Brazil for the Confederations Cup, went ahead through Emanuele Giaccherini before Haiti had even touched the ball and, after their opponents had wasted several chances to equalise, added a second through Claudio Marchisio in the 72nd minute.

They seemed to have survived everything Haiti could throw at them until Davide

Astori fouled Jean-Eudes Maurice in the penalty area and Olrish Saurel converted the penalty with five minutes to go.

Italy looked dazed and weary when a long ball forward found Jean Philippe Peguero and he poked it past goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu to the joy of the neutrals in the crowd.

"We know that 2-2 is a really bad result," a sheepish Italy coach Cesare Prandelli told RAI television. "We agreed to play this match, we arrived yesterday, we made a lot of changes but we needed to show a different spirit."

"You could see today we lost every single sprint, so we hope in five days the team can begin to deliver."

The sides had met once before at the 1974 World Cup when Haiti memorably took the lead before Italy eventually hit back to win 3-1.

Haiti had lost their previous six matches and looked set to continue their run when their static defence allowed Giaccherini to nip in and score Italy's fastest-ever goal after Antonio Candreva had pulled the ball back.

## Neill finally scores, after 17 years

INTERNET, Undated

He might have broken one of the longest scoreless streaks in international football but Lucas Neill was even happier at seeing the Socceroos move to within inches of a place at next year's World Cup.

The captain's late header capped a 4-0 win over Jordan at Etihad Stadium, ending his run of 90 scoreless matches, dating way back to when he made his debut as a teenager in 1996.

The 35-year old was rapt to break through after a string of close shaves but even prouder to see his team rise to the occasion, putting forward their most dominant display since the 2011 Asian Cup 6-0 semi-final romp over Uzbekistan.

"It was in the 90th minute plus one but they all count and it was a fantastic moment to finally get that goal," he said after the game.

"But to do it on a night where the team put in an outstanding performance was truly fantastic."

"Now what we need to do is just focus on the next game. Mark [Schwarzer] and I said to the players now was the time to concentrate on the job ahead of us. We've still got a lot of work to do."