

## STURRIDGE BREAKS DOWN

Liverpool striker Daniel Sturridge is facing another spell on the sidelines after England manager Roy Hodgson confirmed he had suffered a muscle tear in his hip. Sturridge, who has already missed five months of the season through injury, was sent home from international duty earlier this week ahead of Friday's Euro 2016 qualifier against Lithuania and a friendly against Italy on Tuesday. The striker, who suffered the injury in Liverpool's 2-1 Premier League defeat by Manchester United on Sunday, could now be out for around a month, according to British media reports. -REUTERS



## Terry signs new deal

AFP, London

John Terry has signed a one-year contract extension with Chelsea, the Premier League leaders announced on Thursday.

Terry's current deal was due to expire at the end of the season, but Blues' boss Jose Mourinho had insisted earlier this month there was no chance Chelsea's captain would be allowed to leave Stamford Bridge and the club have followed through on that promise.

The 34-year-old centre-back has been a key figure as Chelsea have opened up a six-point lead at the top of the Premier League, as well as winning the League Cup.

His new contract, which runs until the end of the 2015-16 campaign, is in line with Chelsea's policy of offering those over the age of 30 only one-year deals, but Terry hopes to stay for several more seasons.



Brazil superstar Neymar (L) is about to score the second goal against France during their international friendly in Paris on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

## Colombia rout Bahrain

REUTERS, Buenos Aires



World Cup quarterfinalists Colombia cruised to a 6-0 rout of Bahrain while Chile lost 2-0 to Iran in contrasting Copa America warm-ups for the two South American teams on Thursday.

Colombia captain Radamel Falcao laid on an opening 14th-minute goal for strike partner Carlos Bacca then scored twice in five minutes, his first a sweet volley, as Colombia hardly broke sweat at Bahrain's National Stadium in Riffa.

Falcao, who is lacking regular first team football at Manchester United, leapt at his chance to lead his country's attack and responded with goals in the 32nd and 36th minutes to take his tally to 23 in 55 internationals.

The striker, who missed the World Cup in Brazil last year after knee ligament surgery and last scored for the national team in a friendly against El Salvador in October, is one goal short of Arnoldo Iguaran's Colombia record of 24.

Adrian Ramos and debutants Johan Mojica and Andres Renteria added further goals in the final half hour for the visitors who were without World Cup ace James Rodriguez, who is coming back from a foot injury.

Iran ran up a two-goal lead over a second string Chile side after 50 minutes through midfielders Javad Nekounam and Vahid Amiri in the Austrian town of Sankt Poelten.

A raft of changes in the second half, including the introduction of Alexis Sanchez, David Pizarro and Gary Medel, failed to stop Chile suffering a disappointing defeat.

## Brazil trump France

AFP, Paris



A fine finish from captain Neymar helped secure a comeback behind 3-1 win for Brazil over France in a friendly in Paris on Thursday as they maintained their perfect record since the return as coach of Dunga.

Real Madrid defender Raphael Varane had headed the hosts in front on a cold night at a packed Stade de France, only for Oscar to equalise late in the first half.

Barcelona forward Neymar then controlled a Willian pass and lashed the ball high into the roof of the net from the left edge of the six-yard box in the 57th minute to put the visitors in front, and a Luiz Gustavo header secured the victory midway through the second period.

Brazil have now won seven consecutive friendly matches under Dunga following the heavy defeats to Germany and the Netherlands that saw their World Cup campaign on home soil last year end in such catastrophic fashion.

And this latest success against an

accomplished France side will have been particularly pleasing to Dunga, back where he captained the Selecao in a painful 3-0 World Cup final defeat to the French in 1998.

In the opposite dugout this time was Didier Deschamps, the current France coach who skippered Les Bleus on that glorious night 17 years ago.

Seeing them lock horns once again added extra intrigue to an occasion which was also notable for the French Football Federation's decision to honour those who have won more than 100 caps for France.

World Cup winners Marcel Desailly, Patrick Vieira, Thierry Henry and Zinedine Zidane were all received by President Francois Hollande inside the stadium and then presented to the adoring crowd before the game.

The French, without goalkeeper Hugo Lloris and midfield duo Yohan Cabaye and Paul Pogba due to injury, had themselves not been beaten since exiting last year's World Cup at the quarterfinal stage to Germany and had not lost a friendly since a 3-0 defeat in Brazil in June

2013.

They started the game well and only a remarkable save by goalkeeper Jefferson prevented Karim Benzema -- wearing the captain's armband in the absence of Lloris -- from opening the scoring from point-blank range early on.

That chance had come from a corner and it was from another corner that the hosts got the breakthrough in the 21st minute, Varane rising to meet a Mathieu Valbuena delivery from the left and heading home.

It was a second goal in as many international outings for the central defender, who also scored with his head in the 1-0 friendly defeat of Sweden in November.

Neymar had forced a good low save out of Steve Mandanda in the French goal just before that, and Brazil slowly grew into the game, threatening through Robert Firmino before Oscar levelled five minutes prior to the break.

The little Chelsea midfielder exchanged passes with Firmino before stabbing a shot low under Mandanda from just inside the area.

Buoyed by that, Dunga's men started the second period strongly and Mandanda beat away a Luiz Gustavo shot before they took the lead thanks to Neymar's 43rd international goal.

Benzema blazed over from a Valbuena cross and Jefferson tipped over a speculative long-range strike by Antoine Griezmann but it was Brazil who struck again on 69 minutes.

Patrice Evra had gone down injured during a France attack but Brazil played on and Oscar saw a shot turned around the post by Mandanda.

The corner that followed was delivered from the right by Willian and Wolfsburg midfielder Luiz Gustavo -- the only starter on the night along with Oscar who also started in that infamous 7-1 loss to Germany last year -- headed powerfully home.

That put the final outcome beyond doubt, although France substitute Nabil Fekir, making his international debut, curled a shot just wide from a Benzema pass late on.

## Juve-inspired Italy

AFP, Milan



World Cup flops Italy look to continue their strong start to Euro 2016 qualifying when they face Bulgaria away in a Group H clash that could revive memories of coach Antonio Conte's spell at Juventus.

Italy are unbeaten after four opening games, having suffered their only setback in a 1-1 draw with group leaders Croatia in November.

Conte quit Juventus with three scudetto titles to his name before inheriting the Azzurri helm from Cesare Prandelli following their disastrous, first-round exit from the World Cup in Brazil.

Those achievements, and his proximity to the nucleus of his current squad, appear to be bearing fruit as Conte seeks to lead Italy back on the road to success.

"Conte is the same as the person who coached Juventus, he hasn't changed since he made the switch," said Leonardo Bonucci, one of the five Juventus players expected to line up against Luboslav Penev's side in Sofia.

"He has very strong ideas about what football he wants to play and while he was at Juventus we honed our technical and tactical skills."

Although Juventus midfielder Andrea Pirlo is missing through injury, the Italian champions will be well represented.

A three-man Juventus defence of Giorgio Chiellini, Bonucci and Andrea Barzagli will line up in front of Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, while Juve's Claudio Marchisio and Antonio Candreva of Lazio are expected to flank Paris Saint Germain midfielder Marco Verratti.

Verratti will replace Pirlo in the central midfield role, with Torino's Matteo Darmian and Manuel Pasqual of Fiorentina expected to occupy the wingback roles of which Conte was so fond while coach of the Bianconeri.

Verratti, who has scored twice for Italy in 10 appearances, admits it's a rare chance to showcase his potential on the international stage.

"I'm going to make the most of this opportunity," said Verratti.

"It's normal not to start out as first choice in the national team, it could hardly be any different when you have players like Pirlo and De Rossi ahead of you in the reckoning."

The big question from Italian fans ahead of Saturday concerns Conte's choice of strikers.

Simone Zaza -- a young and powerful front man who can score both in and outside the box -- could line up with Ciro Immobile, who has hit a rich vein of form for German Bundesliga stutterers Borussia Dortmund.

## Japan subs sink Tunisia

AFP, Tokyo



Shinji Okazaki and Keisuke Honda came off the bench to score quickfire goals as Japan beat Tunisia 2-0 on Friday in their first outing under new coach Vahid Halilhodzic.

The firebrand Franco-Bosnian wore a face like thunder as he prowled the touchline in a pinstripe suit gesticulating furiously as Japan wasted several first-half chances, with debutant Kengo Kawamata coming closest by heading against the bar after 20 minutes.

Honda and Shinji Kagawa were introduced on the hour mark, quickly followed by Okazaki, and all three made an impact as the Blue Samurai blew out the cobwebs after their Asian Cup flop in January.

Honda crossed for Okazaki to head home at the far post on 78 minutes and Japan's blond cult hero stabbed home from close range five minutes later after Kagawa had struck panic into Tunisia's defence.

"I'm delighted," said Halilhodzic, who replaced Javier Aguirre after the Mexican's sacking amid allegations of match-fixing dating back to a previous tenure in Spain.

"We played very well. Honda and Kagawa have shown that they have the ability to change games. We've taken a big step with this victory but I still want to explore new options."

The 62-year-old Halilhodzic, who led Algeria to the knockout stages of last year's World Cup in Brazil, made sweeping changes for his first game in Oita, western Japan, but the arrival of Honda and Kagawa gave the home side an instant lift.

Former Bayern Munich loanee Takashi Usami almost marked his debut with a goal just before the final whistle, hitting the post with a curling effort, but Halilhodzic will have a clearer idea of his best side before the 2018 Asian World Cup qualifiers begin in June.

Former Yugoslavia striker Halilhodzic, who has promised to restore Japan's shattered confidence, will have another opportunity to tinker when his side face Uzbekistan in Tokyo on Tuesday.

"The focus is on the World Cup qualifiers," he said. "We have another game in a few days and another chance to look at different players."

Japan exited the 2014 World Cup with barely a whimper under Italian Alberto Zaccheroni before their Asian Cup defence ended in an embarrassing quarterfinal defeat to the United Arab Emirates on penalties.

## Dunga delighted

AFP, Paris



Brazil coach Dunga was delighted with the character shown by his side as they came from behind to beat France 3-1 in a friendly in Paris on Thursday to continue their impressive post-World Cup form.

The Selecao recovered from falling behind to a Raphael Varane header in the first half at the Stade de France to equalise through Oscar just prior to half-time, before goals from captain Neymar and Luiz



Gustavo in the second period secured the victory.

Brazil have now won seven consecutive friendly matches since Dunga was appointed as coach for a second time last year to replace Luiz Felipe Scolari, under whom they suffered that infamous 7-1 loss to Germany in the World Cup semifinals on home soil.

And this result, against a France team who have impressed of late under Didier Deschamps, was arguably the best win yet for Dunga in his second spell in charge.

"It's difficult to play France here in a packed stadium. In football you win and

lose, but it's always good to win against a team as strong as them," said Dunga, who was back at the ground where he captained Brazil in their 3-0 defeat to France in the 1998 World Cup final.

"As Brazil we have to win and play well, and the team played well. We broke out quickly and had good possession, but nothing was perfect," added the coach after his team recovered from a shaky start in which they conceded from a set-piece.

"We made mistakes that could have been avoided. We know that France are very strong at set-pieces, but once we rectified that we found a balance that allowed us to win the match."

Dunga is overseeing a period of transition as Brazil build towards the Copa America in Chile in June.

Only two members of his starting line-up against France -- Oscar and Luiz Gustavo -- started in that defeat to Germany, although six of his side were in the squad at last year's World Cup.

Dunga, who also skippered Brazil when they won the World Cup in 1994 and coached the team that lost in the last eight in South Africa in 2010, insisted that his squad for this match and this weekend's friendly with Chile in London was by no means certain to remain the same come the Copa America.

"We have spoken a lot to the players, telling them that if they are here it is because they deserve to be here and because we believe in them," he said.

"It's always good to win, but winning is the only option for us and we need to be able to handle that pressure."

"Today was a really, really difficult match, because it was against France and we hadn't played or seen each other for three months."

The French will move on to another home match with Denmark on Sunday in Saint-Etienne after suffering a first defeat in a friendly encounter since a 3-0 loss in Brazil in June 2013.

## Manosh, Rumi triumph in TT

SPORTS REPORTER

Manosh Chowdhury and Moumita Rumi emerged champion in the men's and women's singles event of 35th National Table Tennis Championship at the International Indoor Gymnasium in Gopalganj yesterday.

Manosh from Chittagong beat Parag 4-1 in men's singles final while Rumi from Bangladesh Ansar beat her teammate Rahima 4-0 in women's singles final.

Parag and Rumi won the mixed doubles final beating Palash and Synthya 3-2 while Gautam and Rocky beat Parag and Tuhin 3-2 to win men's doubles title.

## Marquinhos extends with PSG

AFP, Paris

Brazilian international defender Marquinhos has extended his contract with Paris Saint-Germain by a year until 2019, the Ligue 1 champions confirmed on Thursday.

Capped four times for Brazil, Marquinhos, 20, arrived in the French capital in July 2013 from AS Roma.

"It's a wonderful achievement, good news. It shows work well done," said Marquinhos as PSG sit top of Ligue 1.

## Hull fined £30,000

AFP, London



Hull have been fined £30,000 (\$44,500, 41,000 euros) by the Football Association for failing to control their players in March 14's stormy Premier League goalless draw with bottom side Leicester.

City initially denied the charge but were on Friday found guilty of "failing to ensure its players conducted themselves in an orderly fashion".

The incident was brought about by the reaction of a number of Hull players after Alex Bruce was booked by referee Jon Moss following a tackle on Riyadh Mahrez.

The findings are something of an embarrassment for Hull, whose manager Steve Bruce criticised the Leicester players for their conduct during the nervy 0-0 draw.

He was unimpressed by what he perceived to be attempts to persuade Moss to penalise his son.

"I saw everyone surround Alex (asking) for a red card for his challenge," he said in the post-match press conference.

"The reason we enjoy the Premier League is its honesty and integrity and if we're going to go down the route of every other league - jumping around and whingeing and trying to get people yellow and red cards - for me that's not right."

Hull were handed six bookings in the match, two of which led to Tom Huddlestone's sending-off.



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