



Brazil star Neymar is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal against Colombia during their 2018 World Cup qualifier in Manaus on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Neymar inspires Selecao

AFP, Montevideo

Brazil's march towards the 2018 World Cup gathered pace on Tuesday with a Neymar-inspired win over Colombia as Uruguay surged to the top of the South American qualification standings with a 4-0 rout of Paraguay. Just four days after their first ever victory over Ecuador in Quito, Brazil dug deep to beat Colombia 2-1 in the Amazon jungle city of Manaus courtesy of Neymar's 74th-minute winner. The result left Brazil -- who had started the day outside the automatic qualifying places -- in second place overall, just one point behind leaders Uruguay.

Argentina, who squandered the opportunity to maintain their lead after a 2-2 draw away to Venezuela, are third, trailing Brazil on goal difference with the two heavyweight rivals level on 15 points.

Brazil's win over Colombia was the latest in a series of physical encounters between the two teams, who have skirmished regularly since the 2014 World Cup quarter-finals -- a match that saw Neymar exit with a tournament-ending injury.

Neymar, who was sent off against Colombia in a bruising Copa America

battle in 2015, exacted his revenge with a sweetly struck low shot to decide Tuesday's game.

It completed a memorable few weeks for the Barcelona superstar, who last month scored the winning penalty to give Brazil their first ever Olympic football gold medal at the Rio de Janeiro Games.

Neymar's Barcelona team-mate Luis Suarez meanwhile was in similarly sparkling form for Uruguay in their 4-0 thrashing of Paraguay.

TOP FIVE					
	P	W	D	L	Pts
Uruguay	8	5	1	2	16
Brazil	8	4	3	1	15
Argentina	8	4	3	1	15
Colombia	8	4	1	3	13
Ecuador	8	4	1	3	13

Paraguay had entered the match in Montevideo optimistic of an upset following their win over Copa America champions Chile last week.

But a magnificent individual performance from Suarez -- who laid on two goals for Edinson Cavani before scoring one himself from the penalty spot -- left Paraguay reflecting on a humbling defeat. Cristian Rodriguez scored the other goal for the Uruguayans.

The victory -- and the performance of Suarez and Cavani -- prompted Uruguay's often stony-faced coach

Oscar Tabarez to permit himself a smile. Venezuela came within seven minutes of pulling off the upset of the day in their rain-lashed scrap with Argentina in Merida.

Argentina, missing injured captain Lionel Messi and a galaxy of attacking talent including Sergio Aguero, Gonzalo Higuain and Paulo Dybala, needed an 83rd minute equaliser from Nicolas Otamendi to salvage a 2-2 draw.

Otamendi's late strike -- turning in an Angel Di Maria corner -- completed a gutsy fightback from the Argentines, who had trailed 2-0 shortly after half-time following Venezuelan goals from Malaga's Juanpi Anor and Torino's Josef Martinez.

But while Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina were left heading the table, Chile were still struggling for answers after a 0-0 draw with Bolivia in Santiago.

The Chileans have been the form team in South America over the past two years, winning the 2015 Copa America and this year's Centenary edition in the United States.

Yet their stalemate with Bolivia leaves them seventh overall with 11 points from eight games.

Ecuador meanwhile, the early pace-setters in qualifying with four wins in their opening four games, have slipped to fifth place after a 2-1 defeat in Lima against Peru.

Altidore fires USA

AFP, Jacksonville

Striker Jozy Altidore scored twice as the United States thrashed Trinidad and Tobago 4-0 on Tuesday to book their place in the final round of the CONCACAF region's 2018 World Cup qualifiers.

Altidore scored twice in four minutes midway through the second half, either side of goals from Sacha Kljestan and substitute Paul Arriola to confirm an emphatic win for the hosts at EverBank Field in Jacksonville, Florida.

Jürgen Klinsmann's side had needed only a point to be sure of reaching the final round of qualifiers for CONCACAF.

The USA took the lead in the 44th minute when neat interplay down the right flank involving Fabian Johnson, Kljestan and Pulisic sowed confusion in the Trinidad box.

Khaleem Hyland made a mess of his clearance from Pulisic's low cross, diverting the ball into the path of Kljestan who drilled home a low finish.

Borussia Mönchengladbach fullback Johnson was involved in the build-up for the second on 59 minutes, his pass finding Altidore just inside the penalty area.

Portugal, France stutter

AFP, Paris

With Cristiano Ronaldo still missing due to injury, European champions Portugal began their bid to qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia with a disappointing 2-0 defeat in Switzerland on Tuesday.

Goals seven minutes apart in the first half from teenage sensation Breel Embolo and Admir Mehmedi gave the Swiss the points at the St Jakob-Park in Basel as they got off to the ideal start in qualifying Group B.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Euro 2016 runners-up France also showed signs of a hangover from their summer exertions as Les Bleus were held to a 0-0 draw in Belarus in Group A, while the Netherlands came from behind to draw 1-1 in Sweden.

In Nicosia, former Everton boss Roberto Martinez's first competitive match as coach of Belgium ended in a 3-0 win against Cyprus.

Ronaldo was one of three Portuguese players to have started the 1-0 extra-time triumph against France on July 10 who was absent from the away starting line-up in Basel, with Renato Sanches also sidelined and Joao Mario only on the bench.

Joao Moutinho and Bernardo Silva came in along with Lille striker Eder, the man who came off the bench to score the winning goal at the Stade de France.

But Fernando Santos' side were undone as Switzerland went in front midway through the first half, Schalke striker Embolo heading home the loose ball after Rui Patrício had only managed to parry a Ricardo Rodriguez free-kick.

The Swiss doubled their lead on the half-hour mark when Haris Seferovic cut the ball back for Mehmedi, who took a touch and

finished high into the net.

In the same section, Hungary were held to a 0-0 draw in the Faroe Islands while Valerij Sabala's second-half goal gave Latvia a 1-0 victory in Andorra.

France have had problems against Belarus in the recent past, including taking just one point against the former Soviet Republic in Euro 2012 qualifying.

Paul Pogba, the world's most expensive player, started for the visitors in Borisov, but coach Didier Deschamps made six changes compared to the side that lost the European Championship final, leaving Dimitri Payet on the bench.

With Les Bleus lacking attacking inspiration, though, Payet came on for Anthony Martial just before the hour mark and moments later his corner was headed against the bar by Olivier Giroud.

Antoine Griezmann then met a low ball in to the near post by Moussa Sissoko but was thwarted by Andrei Gorbunov.

In the same group, the Netherlands began their attempt to bounce back from their failure to qualify for Euro 2016 by facing the Swedes at the Friends Arena.

It is the beginning of a new era for Sweden, with Zlatan Ibrahimovic now retired from international football and Janne Andersson having replaced Erik Hamren as coach.

They went in front two minutes before half-time when Kevin Strootman was caught in possession just outside the Dutch box and Marcus Berg, who used to play in Holland for Groningen and PSV Eindhoven, beat Jeroen Zoet with a superb chip from 20 yards.

ANELKA'S 'DJANGO' DIG AT THURAM

Nicolas Anelka has launched a scathing attack on his fellow former France international Lilian Thuram by comparing him to Samuel L Jackson's character in the violent Quentin Tarantino film "Django Unchained". "Similar attitude...If u don't understand watch django unchained Movie," Anelka wrote. In the film Jackson's character is a house slave who, according to the Hollywood entertainment website Variety, "represents a form of toxic black-on-black rivalry still smouldering in American culture today". Anelka's criticism comes after the airing of a documentary on French television called "Another History of France, 1996-2016". In the documentary Thuram, who won the World Cup with France in 1998, hits out at the French squad that famously staged a training ground mutiny during the 2010 tournament in South Africa.

—AFP



Under-16 champs sent back alone

STAR SPORT DESK



It was yesterday reported by a television channel that some of the girls of the Bangladesh under-16 women's football team, who are from Dhobaura upazila in Mymensingh, were hurled abusive words on their way home on a local bus on Tuesday. One of the girls even told the reporter that they deserved to be treated better after what they have achieved. Nine of the girls of the 23-member under-16 team which qualified for the AFC Women's U-16 Championship earlier this week are from the same area of Mymensingh.

In response to this news report, the Bangladesh Football Federation last night issued a press release stating that "the girls were offered air-conditioned microbus, but they refused since they are not comfortable with that". The press release also claimed that "the BFF arranged good-quality bus, but the girls demanded direct local bus to reach their neighbourhood for their ease," and that "every player was transported from BFF house to the bus station with their bag

and baggage under BFF arrangement".

While we cannot independently verify the report's claim that the girls were hurled abusive words by anyone on their way back home or the claims of BFF, we can at least infer that these girls, who have earned a distinction for the nation, should have been treated better. In truth their success should not come into it; they are minors under the care of the BFF and so the game's governing body has a responsibility to provide chaperones, to say the very least. The safety and security of these girls while under the custody of the game's governing body -- and that custody does not end as soon as a competition is over -- should have been of paramount importance.

This incident comes hot on the heels of a debate regarding the wisdom of the game's governing body of keeping the girls at the BFF dorm during the competition while all the visiting teams were accommodated at luxury hotels, in the pretext that some of the deficit of the budget to host the tournament could be maintained. The latest incident, however, shows a lack of responsibility if not another instance of cutting corners.

Messi's son joins Barca baby team

GOAL.COM

Lionel Messi recently revealed his son Thiago wasn't all that keen on following on his father's footsteps.

It's just as well, really, as he's unlikely to ever reach the heights the four-time Ballon d'Or winner has. But they've decided to give it a go anyway.

According to reports in Spain, Messi junior will be one of the first to take part in Barcelona's pilot programme aimed towards the 3-5 year age bracket.

Chess teams lose

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh men's chess team dropped 25 places to 51st position after losing by 05-3.5 points against Germany in the sixth round of the 42nd Chess Olympiad in Baku, Azerbaijan on Tuesday. GM Ziaur Rahman, GM Enamul Hossain Razib and GM Abdullab Al Rakib lost their respective boards while GM Niaz Mursheed, who is having a brilliant campaign, managed to draw his board.

Bangladesh were scheduled to take on lowly-ranked UAE in the seventh round on Wednesday night.

The women's team, meanwhile, continued their poor form after losing by 1.5-2.5 points against Moldova.

WFM Shirin Sharmin Sultana won her board while WFM Nazrana Khan Eva drew hers while Bangladesh lost the other two boards.

Super-sub Cahill sinks UAE

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Tim Cahill came off the bench to score with only his second touch as Australia edged the United Arab Emirates 1-0 in 2018 World Cup qualifying on Tuesday.

The 36-year-old, who replaced Tomi Juric in the 71st minute at the Mohamed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, took only four minutes to ensure Australia's second win in five days in Group B of Asian qualifying.

The goal came when a fine build-up saw Brad Smith freed on the left flank and the Bourmemouth winger whipped an excellent ball into the area for Cahill to convert.

Pliskova into semis

Djokovic thru' after Tsonga retires

AFP, NEW YORK



Czech Karolina Pliskova blew past Croatian teenager Ana Konjuh 6-2, 6-2 on Wednesday to reach the semifinals of the US Open.

Tenth-seeded Pliskova, who survived a match point in her fourth-round victory over sixth-seeded Venus Williams, will face either world number one Serena Williams or fifth-seeded Romanian Simona Halep for a place in Saturday's championship match.

"I'm so excited to be in my first semi-final," said 24-year-old Pliskova, who had failed to make it out of the third round in 17 prior Grand Slam appearances.

Having broken through to the quarters she didn't waste her opportunity.

With a quick break under her belt in the opening game she was able to swing freely and needed just 57 minutes to subdue Konjuh, who upset fourth-seeded Agnieszka Radwanska in the fourth round.

"I think it was the serve," said Pliskova, who finished off the match with two of her three aces. "My serve was very good today."

Meanwhile, defending champion Novak Djokovic booked a 10th straight semifinal appearance when Jo-Wilfried Tsonga retired trailing 6-3, 6-2 in their marquee quarter-final on Tuesday.

It was the third time in five matches that an opponent's injury has worked to Djokovic's advantage, after his walkover into the third round where Mikhail Youzhny retired after just six games.

Ninth-seeded Tsonga gave him more of a workout, but even before an apparent left knee injury began to trouble the Frenchman in the second set Djokovic had the match well in hand.

The Serbian world number one will face another Frenchman, Gael Monfils, for a place in Sunday's championship match after the 10th seed pummelled compatriot Lucas Pouille 6-4, 6-3, 6-3.

It was the first time in 89 years that three French men had reached the quarter-finals of the US championships.

Monfils was in control throughout against the 22-year-old Pouille, who was coming off an epic fifth-set tiebreaker win over 14-time major winner Rafael Nadal.

That marked the 24th-seeded Pouille's third straight five-setter. Whether it was a let-down after the biggest win of his career or sheer fatigue, his 44 unforced errors meant he never

Swiss to host Inter-migrant football contest

AFP, Lausanne

Around 120 asylum seekers and refugees in Switzerland will next week compete in a football tournament organised with the backing of UEFA, organisers said Wednesday.

This first "inter-migrant" contest is being organised by Hospice Generale, a Geneva-based charity established in 1535, together with local authorities in the town of Nyon, where UEFA, the governing body of European football, is headquartered.

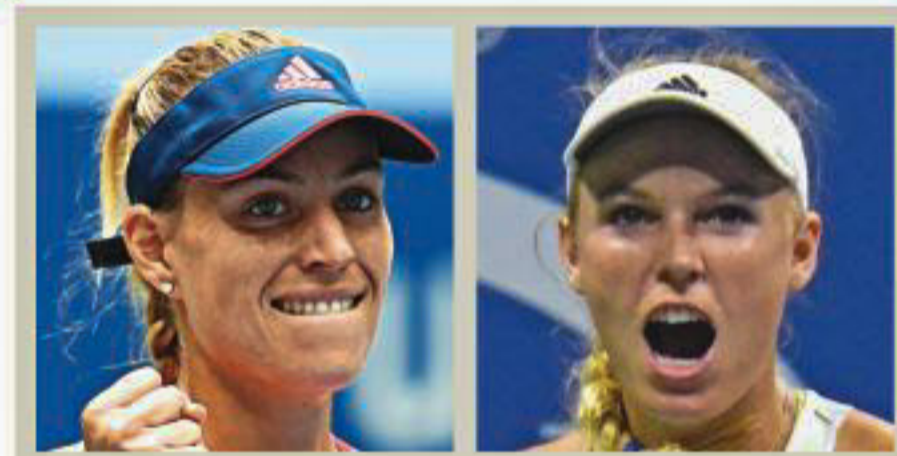
The migrants will be divided into 16 teams of 10 players each, said the project's coordinator, Michel Nicolet.

"They mostly come from Eritrea and Ethiopia. There are also Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and West Africans," he said.

Nicolet explained that the players live in centres in Geneva, Lausanne and Nyon. They include asylum seekers and others whose request for asylum has been granted.

The contest kicks off on September 15 on pitches outside UEFA's headquarters.

SEMIFINAL H2H



ANGELIQUE KERBER (2) V CAROLINE WOZNIACKI

Head to Head (Overall) Played: 12
7 5

Head to Head on Hard Courts Played: 9
4 5

US OPEN 2016 STATS
10 Sets Played 11

0 Sets Lost 1

25 Return Games Won 23

5 Aces 7

77 Winners 89

5h 7h
46m 46m
Hours on court

stood a chance against a dialed-in Monfils. Pouille conceded a break with a stream of errors to fall 1-2 down in the second, and a break of more than 15 minutes to close the new Arthur Ashe stadium roof, with Monfils up 4-3, did nothing to change the momentum.

After holding with back-to-back aces, Monfils broke the error-prone Pouille at love to take the set.

One break was all he needed in the third, as he wrapped up the match without facing a break point.

Caroline Wozniacki's dramatic resurgence continued when the former world number one defeated a hobbling Anastasija Sevastova to reach a fourth US Open semi-final.

The two-time runner-up, ranked at a lowly 74 after an injury-hit campaign, eased to a 6-0, 6-2 win and will face second seed Angelique Kerber for a place in Saturday's championship match.



Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (L) shakes hands with Novak Djokovic after being forced to retire due to injury in their US Open men's singles quarterfinals at Flushing Meadows on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP