



Chile forward Alexis Sanchez celebrates his winning goal against Ecuador during their Copa America Group C fixture at the Fonte Nova Arena in Salvador on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Sanchez sends Chile into quarterfinals

AFP, Salvador

Alexis Sanchez put a miserable club season with Manchester United behind him as he sent Chile into the Copa America quarter-finals with the winning goal in Friday's 2-1 win over Ecuador.

Jose Fuenzalida gave reigning champions Chile an eighth-minute lead but Enner Valencia equalized for Ecuador from the spot.

Sanchez bagged the winner, his 43rd goal for his country, but Chile finished with 10 men after Gabriel Achilier's red card a minute from time.

The 30-year-old Sanchez started only nine Premier League matches, scoring just once, in an injury-interrupted season for the Red Devils in which he struggled to make an impact when he did play.

But he scored for the second game running in Salvador as Chile joined Colombia as the only teams to qualify for the knock-out stages after their first two games.

However, he revealed afterwards that he turned his ankle during the first half, aggravating an old injury.

"I think I have a sprain, I hope it's not too serious. At half-time they strapped it up, I played on with a bit of pain," he said.

Chile top Group C with a perfect six

points ahead of their clash with Uruguay at Rio's iconic Maracana on Monday.

Ecuador are left staring elimination in the face after a second straight defeat, knowing they must beat Japan in Belo Horizonte on Monday to stand any chance of progressing.

"We put in a huge effort but we're making the mistake of switching off and that's why they scored silly goals," moaned Valencia.

"We'll try and beat Japan and then see where that takes us."

Chile began as they had left off in their 4-0 thrashing of Japan last Monday, opening the scoring after just eight minutes.

Ecuador made a hash of clearing a corner and Fuenzalida sent an angled volley from the edge of the area into the far bottom corner.

In what proved a niggly encounter, referee Patricio Loustau showed nine yellow cards and a red.

"We lacked the intelligence to control the game after the first goal," said Chile coach Reinaldo Rueda.

"Ecuador reacted really well and equalized in a moment in which we lost our shape."

Ecuador were bossing possession but were toothless up front, while Sanchez and Eduardo Vargas provided far greater cut and thrust for Chile.

Giampaolo hoping to turn Milan's fortunes

AFP, Milan

New AC Milan coach Marco Giampaolo said Saturday he was ready to seize the opportunity to turn the clock back for former European giants AC Milan days before taking over at the San Siro.

The 51-year-old former Sampdoria boss replaces Gennaro Gattuso on a two-year deal reported to be worth two million euros (\$2.2 million) annually.



"I was struck by their seriousness, competence and passion," said Giampaolo of technical director Maldini and chief operating officer Bohan.

"They are top level figures and their passion is contagious."

Frederic Massara has also been appointed as club sporting director, arriving from league rivals Roma.

Giampaolo led Sampdoria to ninth-place last season having previously coached teams including Siena, Empoli, Brescia and Cagliari.

"I worked really hard to get this chance," Giampaolo, who will take over on July 1, told Milan TV.

"Milan are the most successful and one of the most important clubs in Europe. This is a great opportunity for me.

"Milan's history speaks of a club that always sought the beauty in football and the aesthetics along with the result.

"I'm happy and motivated, the path will be long because you never finish building, but I am very happy to start this adventure."

Giampaolo replaces former Milan player Gattuso who quit last month after leading the club to a fifth-placed finish in Serie A.

Sporting director Leonardo also left the club with former players Zvonimir Boban and Paolo Maldini brought in as part of an overhaul at the cash-strapped seven-time European champions.

Barty closes in on top spot

AFP, Birmingham

French Open champion Ashleigh Barty moved to within two wins of becoming world number one after seeing off Venus Williams 6-4, 6-3 to reach the semi-finals of the Birmingham Classic.

Barty will edge ahead of Naomi Osaka at the top of the rankings before Wimbledon by taking the title and she extended her winning streak to 10 matches against the five-time Wimbledon champion.

"I feel like every match is getting a little bit better and better on the grass, and it's just nice to give myself another opportunity to get on the grass courts and to play another singles match," said Barty.

"It's always a privilege to play against a champion like Venus.

"She's done incredible things for our sport. She's inspired generations to pick up a tennis racket. Any time you get to play against her, it's a real privilege."

Williams made the better start as the 39-year-old took a 4-1 first-set lead.

Barty, though, is also at ease on the grass and responded in style by romping through the next five games to take the set.

The Australian had to stave off break points in her opening service game of the second set, but then took control with two breaks of the Williams serve to set up a meeting with Barbora Strycova in Saturday's semi-finals.

Strycova got the better of an all-Czech battle to beat Kristyna Pliskova 6-2, 6-4 to reach the last four in Birmingham for the fourth time in six appearances.

Federer battles into Halle semis

AFP, Halle Westfalen

Roger Federer's resolve was tested again on Friday as he battled to a 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 win over Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut to reach the last four of the ATP event in Halle for the 15th time.

World number three Federer is chasing a record-extending tenth title on the Halle grass as he warms up for Wimbledon next month, but has had to scrap to stay in the tournament this week.

He prevailed in a gruelling three-set encounter with Jo-Wilfried Tsonga on Thursday, and was taken the distance again by Bautista Agut in Friday's quarter-final.

The Swiss next faces Andy Murray's Wimbledon doubles partner Pierre-Hugues Herbert in Saturday's semi-finals.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion has now reached the last four in each of his last 15 appearances at Halle since losing to Pat Rafter in the 2001 quarters.

The 37-year-old will be aiming for his ninth Wimbledon triumph in July, having seen Rafael Nadal cut his lead in



Switzerland's Roger Federer battled to a three-sets victory over Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain during their quarterfinal in Halle on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldo to become CR9?

AGENCIES

Juventus Coach Maurizio Sarri visited Cristiano Ronaldo on vacation to discuss the new centre-forward role for CR7, which papers are already nicknaming CR9.

Multiple sources including La Stampa, Corriere della Sera, Gazzetta dello Sport and more all state that Sarri and director of sport Fabio Paratici flew out to the Cote d'Azur on Friday for a face-to-face meeting with Ronaldo on his yacht.

The former Napoli and Chelsea tactician has already hinted he'd like Ronaldo to shatter the existing Serie A record of 36 goals in a single season, set by Gonzalo Higuain at Sarri's Napoli.

The key will reportedly be to move the Portuguese winger into the False 9 role, following in the footsteps of Dries Mertens and Eden Hazard.

Sarri made it clear in his Press conference that he is not stuck with the 4-3-3 system, having used 4-3-1-2 at Empoli and at the beginning of his Napoli career.

He intends to speak to the players and adapt his tactics to fit their characteristics, starting with the MVP Ronaldo.

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De Ligt for Juventus!

REUTERS, Turin

Netherlands teenage centre back Matthijs de Ligt has agreed a deal to join Italian champions Juventus from Ajax Amsterdam, Sky Italy reported on Saturday.

According to the report, Juventus will pay 62 million pounds (\$78.99 million) for the Ajax captain, 19, who was one of the key players in the Dutch side's thrilling run to the Champions League semi-finals.

He will become new Juventus head coach Maurizio Sarri's first signing after the Italian was appointed as Massimiliano Allegri's successor last week.

De Ligt said earlier this month



that he was asked about a move to Juventus by Cristiano Ronaldo at the end of the Nations League final after Portugal beat the Netherlands 1-0.

"I didn't understand him at first. I was a little shocked, so I laughed.

But I didn't say anything," De Ligt had told the Netherlands' NOS television.

"So soon after the game you are not at all concerned with it. You are disappointed that you have lost

and that is the only thing you are thinking about."

Spanish media reports had said the highly-rated player was expected to join Barcelona and link up with Ajax's Frenkie de Jong, 22, who is set to move to Spain next month.

De Ligt broke into the Ajax first team aged 17 in 2016, becoming a regular starter the following season and soon became the most coveted defender in Europe thanks to his strength, anticipation and ability on the ball.

He played 90 minutes in 17 of 18 matches and scored three times in Ajax's Champions League campaign, which culminated in an agonising semi-final defeat to Tottenham Hotspur on away goals.

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