



Brazil forward Roberto Firmino celebrates with teammates after scoring their second goal in a 5-0 thrashing of Peru in the Copa America in Sao Paulo on Saturday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Messi dreaming of meeting his hero

AFP, Porto Alegre



Lionel Messi has played football since he was born but now he hopes to realise a dream: to meet his namesake and five-time Ballon d'Or winner.

The six-year-old from Alvorada, a suburb of Porto Alegre, is waiting at the gates of the Beira Rio stadium alongside his mother Lisiana Maier, hoping to speak to Barcelona and Argentina superstar Messi.

He's wearing a Barcelona shirt and boots with Messi's name stitched into them.

"His name is Lionel Messi. He loves football and really admires the way Lionel plays. We paid tribute to him by giving him this name," Maier told AFP.

Argentina play guests Qatar in the Copa America in Porto Alegre on Sunday in a must-win match where the loser is sure to be heading home early and even the winners aren't certain of qualifying for the knock-out stages.

The Maier family may not get another chance to introduce their son to his namesake.

"Since I play and my husband too, he was already playing with a ball from inside my tummy," said Maier.

The young Brazilian has "exceptional talent, he has Messi's calmness," but he's



not left-footed like his idol. Even so, his mother has coached him to use both feet, improving him as a player for his local club.

However, this was not to be a story with a happy ending for young Lionel Messi Maier.

Like the other Brazilian and Argentinian kids waiting to catch a glimpse of their hero, they were to leave disappointed.

And the Maier family won't be able to see him live on Sunday either, during the Copa America Group B encounter at the Beira Rio stadium.

Match tickets are so expensive that the family had to choose between "eating or going to the match."

Brazil crush Peru to reach quarters

AFP, Sao Paulo



Peru goalkeeper Pedro Gallese committed a horrendous error as Brazil ensured top spot in their Copa America group on Saturday with a 5-0 victory in Sao Paulo.

Goals from Casemiro, Roberto Firmino, Everton, Dani Alves and Willian ensured the Selecao would finish top of Group A and will play their quarterfinal in Porto Alegre, potentially against out-of-sorts Argentina, their bitter rivals.

"We knew we'd get there sooner or later because we worked very hard," captain Alves told TV Globo.

"It's thanks to wins like this that we're connected with the fans. When we're all together, we feel the positive energy," he added, alluding to the jeers that greeted the team in their first two group matches.

With Peru already 1-0 down, it was Gallese's dreadful error that led to Firmino's goal and swept the mat from under Peru's feet, with the game turning into a rout.

Darwin Machis scored a brace as Venezuela beat Bolivia 3-1 in Belo Horizonte and leapfrogged Peru into second place, securing a quarterfinal at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium.

Peru, who finish third on four points, must now wait nervously to see what happens in the other two groups on Sunday and Monday

to find out if they will qualify for the knock-out rounds as one of the two best third-place finishers.

Never before since the Copa America adopted a 12-team format in 1993 with eight sides going through to the quarterfinals, has a side mustering four points failed to progress.

Hosts Brazil took an early lead in scrappy fashion when Philippe Coutinho's corner was flicked on at the near post for Marquinhos to head goalwards from inside the six-yard box, with Gallese rooted to his line.

The ball came back off the post, grazed Marquinhos's shoulder and was then headed over the line by Casemiro on 12 minutes.

If Gallese was partly at fault there for not commanding his area, he was totally to blame for Brazil's second.

The goalkeeper dallied over a clearance and when he tried to hoof the ball upfield, it cannoned off a jumping Firmino, looped over his head and again came back off the post.

The ball bounced back to Firmino who waltzed around the stranded Gallese and slotted the ball into the empty net on 19 minutes.

Peru had barely been in the game but captain Paolo Guerrero did curl a free-kick over the top.

Yet the match was effectively over as a contest on 32 minutes when Everton cut in off the left flank and fired a snap effort into the bottom corner, with Gallese a touch slow to react and

beaten at his near post.

With almost two thirds of the match to go, Peru were relying on a favor from Bolivia to hold onto second place in the group.

Brazil, who were boosted by a visit from the injured and absent Neymar on Friday, did not let up in the second half.

Alves was next in on the scoring act after playing a pair of one-twos with Arthur and Firmino before firing across Gallese on 53 minutes.

Willian sealed the rout in the last minute with a stunning strike from the corner of the 18-yard box.

And there was still time for Gallese to give away and then save a Gabriel Jesus penalty in stoppage time.

In Belo Horizonte, Venezuela were off to a dream start when Machis headed home a cross from Ronald Hernandez in the second minute.

Machis doubled Venezuela's lead on 58 minutes, converting a pass from Tomas Rincon.

But just after Jhon Chancellor missed the chance to extend Venezuela's lead when he hit the bar with a header, Leonel Justiniano pulled back a goal for Bolivia from outside the area.

Venezuela, though, were not to be denied and Josef Martinez flick home a header from Yeferson Soteldo's dinked cross to book their place in the knock-out stages.

"We dedicate this to the whole country, which is always keeping an eye on us," said Martinez.

Four footballers to leave for Brazil

SPORTS REPORTER

Four budding footballers are set to leave for Brazil in the early hours of Wednesday for a month-long training at a Brazil football academy, confirmed team coordinator and former national footballer Khondokar Rakibul Islam.

The four footballers are midfielder Umor Faruq, forward Jogen Larka, midfielder Lotifur Rahman and defender Nazmul Hossain Akondo, who have been picked from last year's inaugural Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman U-17 Gold Cup football tournament.

The four footballers were supposed to have a one-year training in Brazil as part of that initiative, but a FIFA law put bar on those footballers due to their under-age status.

"There is a barrier from FIFA that a footballer, who is under-18, can't train abroad, so we have managed for a one-month training at Gama Sports Club in Brazil," selector and former national footballer Sheikh Mohammad Aslam said.

"After the training, a delegation from Brazil will come here to assess what type of facilities we need and they will suggest us for the next course of action" said coordinator Rakibul.

"All the four footballers are from needy families. One of them, named Nazmul, had worked at a brick kiln and his father is riskshawpuller. Lakra is an indigenous boy. Father of father of Mithu is labourer while Lotifur's father is a small trader," informed Rakibul, who will accompany the boys along with local coach Abdur Razzak.

Abahani leave sans Sunday

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani reached Assam yesterday to play their final group match of AFC Cup against Minerva Punjab without their Nigerian striker Sunday Chizoba.

In April, Sunday was late to join Abahani for away match against Chennaiyin FC due to visa complications and they lost that match 1-0.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said that they did not get a positive response on Sunday's visa from Indian high commission, but they are still trying to obtain it through the foreign ministry.

Group leaders Abahani need a victory to progress to the inter-zone play-off but they will miss Sunday and injured Brazilian midfielder Wellington Priori.

The match will take place on June 26.

Barty on top

AFP, Birmingham

Ashleigh Barty became only the second Australian woman to top the world rankings when she won the Birmingham WTA title on Sunday, beating Julia Goerges 6-3, 7-5.

The 23-year-old French Open champion emulates Yvonne Goolagong-Cawley, who held it for a fortnight in 1976.

Barty displaces Japan's Naomi Osaka as women's world number one.

Barty showed little sign of the arm injury -- the same one she had going into the French Open -- which saw her pull out of the doubles on Saturday where coincidentally she was partnering Goerges.

Barty saved two break points early in the first set but she made no mistake when she was offered the opportunity -- Goerges putting a backhand wide to give the Australian a 4-2 lead.

Barty closed out the set without further ado, taking it 6-3 before winning the second set 7-5 to win the game.

Federer wins 'unbeleivable' 10th Halle title

AFP, Halle Westfalen



extending 10th title at the ATP event in Halle on Sunday.

Federer, 37, beat Goffin 7-6 (7/2), 6-1 to secure his 102nd career singles title and remain unbeaten on grass so far this season.

"It's unbelievable. I never thought when I first played here that I would win 10 titles," said Federer.

"I've never won a tournament 10 times before, so I will remember forever that I did so here in Halle."

The Swiss star is chasing a ninth Wimbledon crown in London next month as he looks to extend and defend his record of 20 career majors.

Long-term rival Rafael Nadal moved to within just two titles of Federer's record with his 12th French Open triumph earlier this month, while world number one Novak Djokovic is just five short with 15 career majors.

Federer endured a rough ride in the early rounds in Halle, battling to hard-fought, three-set victories over Jo-Wilfried Tsonga and Roberto Bautista Agut.

Things got easier in the latter stages as he thrashed Andy Murray's new doubles partner Pierre-Hugues Herbert in the semi-finals before dispatching Goffin on Sunday.

Federer held off three break points



PHOTO: REUTERS

Swiss maestro Roger Federer kisses the trophy after beating David Goffin of Belgium in the final to win his 10th Halle title in Germany on Sunday.

early in the first set before prevailing in the tiebreaker.

An unsettled looking Goffin then gifted Federer the opening game of the second set with a double fault on break point.

From there, the Swiss never looked back, breaking Goffin twice more on his way to a 10th Halle title.

"I thought David was actually better than me in the first 10 games," said Federer.

Goffin added: "I thought I started

really well, there was great intensity in the first set.

"I had opportunities, but you have to take them against Roger. This guy is pretty good."

It is the first time Federer has reached double figures at any individual tournament.

He has triumphed eight times at both Wimbledon and the Dubai Open, and has won his home tournament in Basel on nine occasions.

Dani Alves leaves PSG

AFP, Paris



Just hours after scoring in Brazil's 5-0 thrashing of Peru at the Copa America, Dani Alves announced he was leaving Paris Saint-Germain.

The 36-year-old right back, who is captain of Brazil, had been with the French champions for two seasons and was at the end of his contract.

"Everything has a start, middle and end, and the time has come to put a full stop here," Alves said on Instagram.

Alves did not reveal where he might go, and leaves PSG as compatriot Leonardo returns as the new sporting director.

The Juazeiro-born player, capped 111

times internationally, previously played club football for Bahia in Brazil, Sevilla and Barcelona in Spain and Juventus.

Alves' two seasons with PSG saw him part of a team that won back-to-back Ligue 1 titles as well as League Cup and French Cup trophies in his first year.

"Today I close another cycle in my life, a cycle of victory, learning and experiences," maintained Alves.

"I would like to thank the PSG family for the opportunity to build together a page in the history of this club."

Alves added: "It was two years of resilience and continuous reinvention to fulfil my mission... I apologise if at any point I was not up to it on the pitch, I apologise if at some point I made a mistake, I just tried to give my best."

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