

Sports



Tomic pulls out at Miami with injury

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BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (2nd-R) vies for the ball with Chile's midfielder Charles Aranguiz (C) during their 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifier football match at the Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Thursday. — AFP

BRAZIL DESTROYS URUGUAY, ARGENTINA SURVIVES

SAO PAULO: Brazil was not intimidated by more than 60,000 raucous fans at the Estadio Centenario in Montevideo, beating second-place Uruguay 4-1 in South America's World Cup qualifying group to retain the lead in the standings after 13 matches. Midfielder Paulinho scored a surprising hat trick, with Barcelona star Neymar adding another, to keep their team firmly on course for football's main event in Russia next year.

Brazil is still to lose a point under coach Tite, who took over in September and secured on Thursday his seventh straight win in the South American qualifiers. Now the five-time World Cup champions total 30 points, seven more than Uruguay and 10 above the lowest place that could guarantee a berth in the next World Cup. With five games to play, Brazil could qualify next Tuesday with victory over Paraguay if Ecuador and Chile fail to win their games.

Argentina beat Chile 1-0 thanks to a penalty scored by Lionel Messi and managed to stay in the chase for a spot in the tournament, going third with 22 points. Chile is in sixth, outside the qualification zone. Fourth-place Colombia

also needed a penalty to score a 1-0 home victory against Bolivia. Elsewhere, seventh-place Paraguay beat fifth-place Ecuador 2-1 and bottom team Venezuela drew 2-2 with eighth-place Peru.

BRAZIL

For the first time since September, a team scored against Brazil. A blunder by defender Marcelo led goalkeeper Alisson to foul striker Edinson Cavani only 7 minutes after kick off. That allowed the Uruguayan to score his ninth goal in South American qualifiers, more than any other player.

It was the first time coach Tite saw his team trail, and that happened against a team that had won all six home games.

Ten minutes later midfielder Paulinho leveled the game with a blast from the edge of the box into goalkeeper Martin Silva's left corner. Scores remained level at halftime, but Brazil's dominance was evident. At 52 minutes, Paulinho scored again to put the visitors in front. The Estadio Centenario went silent.

Uruguay stepped up the pressure to level,

but Brazil was countering dangerously. On 74 minutes, Neymar's genius appeared. After defender Miranda cleared the ball from his box, the Barcelona star beat Uruguayan Coates in a quick race and lobbed Silva to make it 3-1 and score his first goal against Uruguay. By then the Montevideo stadium, which hosted the 1930 World Cup final, sounded more like the Maracana in Rio, with only Brazilian voices being heard.

But that was not all. At 92 minutes, after Brazil wasted a series of other opportunities, Paulinho completed his hat-trick with his chest, after a cross from the right from Dani Alves. "Not in my wildest dreams I expected something like this," the Guangzhou Evergrande midfielder said after the match.

Asked about the historic performance, coach Tite said it was "more than the expected." "I was happy about the 90 minutes ... our capacity to absorb a goal against us and keep playing based on one idea. Our team is very self-aware that it has to triangulate. We did more than controlling the match, we were dominant," he said in a post-match press con-

ference. Uruguay resented the absence of suspended targetman Luis Suarez, while Brazil missed teenage sensation Gabriel Jesus, who has a broken toe. Brazil will miss defender Dani Alves in the clash against Paraguay on Tuesday in Sao Paulo the match that will likely secure its spot in the next World Cup. Uruguay will travel to face Peru.

ARGENTINA

Messi's goal at 16 minutes gave Argentina a valuable victory, putting Edgardo Bauza's side once again in the qualification zone. The Chileans complained about the penalty decision, but failed to take advantage of an unimaginative Argentine team that managed to get few opportunities to score at the Monumental de Nunez in Buenos Aires.

The result takes pressure off Argentina, a team whose players have refused to talk to the media because of criticism they have endured over recent games. Bauza had to speak some words, but they were not too encouraging for the team's future. "What matters is that we won," the coach said. —AP