

## Sports

# Brazil, Argentina eye Qatar World Cup qualification

## South American arch rivals face off next week in San Juan

MONTEVIDEO: Brazil host Colombia in Sao Paulo today knowing victory will book their ticket to Qatar with six World Cup qualifiers to spare following a near perfect record so far.

Even a draw for the Selecao would be enough if Uruguay lose at home to Argentina on Friday, and Brazilian media have reported that coach Tite is already planning to head to the Arab Cup in Qatar next month to check out World Cup venues and facilities.

Publicly, though, Tite is not getting ahead of himself with a trip to face arch rivals Argentina in San Juan on the horizon next week. "We have two important matches against two teams that, for me, are of the highest level," said Tite. "A good performance and a good result against Colombia will provide us with a good preparation for Argentina."

Tite caused a surprise by recalling Barcelona's Philippe Coutinho to his squad after more than a year out, largely due to a nine-month absence with a knee injury that required three surgeries. "It feels like it did the first time, that's how I see it every time I'm in the squad. It's an honor to wear this jersey," said Coutinho, who has struggled for playing time this season at his club.

Brazil have dominated the single CONMEBOL World Cup qualifying group, winning 10 of their 11 matches and scoring 26 goals. Their only blemish was a 0-0 draw away to Colombia last month that brought to an end a nine-match winning run.

Another tight game is likely against a team on a run of three consecutive goalless draws. Colombia welcome back playmaker James Rodriguez for the first time in a year despite his ignominious start to life at Al-Rayyan, his new Qatari club.

Lats month, in only his third league match since leaving Everton, the former Real Madrid and Bayern Munich player was bizarrely sent off after picking up two quickfire yellow cards for protesting after he was awarded a free-kick. James's inclusion is a welcome boost for Colombia, who will be without injured veteran striker Radamel Falcao.

Colombia are currently locked in a tight battle to qualify automatically for the World Cup alongside Ecuador and Uruguay. The three sides are separated by a single point in the battle to finish in the top four places, with the fifth-placed finishers heading into an inter-confederation play-off.

### Messi a doubt

Like Brazil, second-placed Argentina could also secure qualification this month, although they would need other results to go their way. And they may have to do without star player Lionel Messi, who is suffering from knee and hamstring problems and has missed his club Paris Saint-Germain's last two matches.

After their trip to Uruguay, Argentina, unbeaten in 25 matches, host Brazil next week and victories in both could be enough to book their ticket to Qatar. Uruguay, though, will be out for revenge after their 3-0 capitulation in Buenos



### Uruguay without Cavani; Suarez suits up



EZEIZA: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (center), midfielder Rodrigo de Paul (left), midfielder Nahuel Molina (second left) and forward Paulo Dybala (third left), attend a training session in Ezeiza, Buenos Aires, on Tuesday, ahead of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualifier matches against Uruguay on November 12 and against Brazil on November 16. — AFP

Aires last month.

They will be without injured Manchester United forward Edinson Cavani, although Atletico Madrid's Luis Suarez has traveled back to South America. Having also crumbled 4-1 away to Brazil last month, iconic Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez finds himself under pressure, with many fans believing the 74-year-old's record-breaking 15-year tenure should come to an end.

He will also have to do without Real Madrid's

Federico Valverde amongst eight absentees. Free-scoring Ecuador, in third, will look to bolster their qualification hopes as they host rock-bottom Venezuela today, before a trip to Chile next week.

Only Venezuela appear out of the qualification picture, sitting nine points behind the top five, although Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Bolivia have some ground to make up with just six qualifiers left. Crucially, Paraguay host Chile and Peru entertain Bolivia on Thursday in must-win matches. — AFP

## Chelsea power to 7-goal thrashing in Women's Champions League

PARIS: Chelsea laid down a marker to their Women's Champions League rivals on Tuesday as a destructive first-half performance set up a 7-0 thumping of Servette in Switzerland. Paris Saint-Germain also eased to a comfortable 4-0 win at home to Real Madrid but the power of Chelsea's performance will send shivers down the spines of their rivals.

Sam Kerr and Fran Kirby both scored twice as last season's runners-up raced into a six-goal half-time lead. Melanie Leupolz and Canada international Jessie Fleming both also netted in the opening period before Guro Reiten completed the rout less than five minutes after the break.

"I think in the first half we were unbelievable," England striker Kirby told uefa.com. "We set the tone from the beginning. We were really happy to come away with seven goals and three points. Everyone played an amazing game."

This was the biggest winning margin in the inaugural Champions League group stage, although somewhat short of the all-time record — Apollon's 21-0 victory over Ada Velipoje in 2012. Chelsea suffered a first-half nightmare of their own when losing 4-0 to Barcelona in the 2020-21 final in May. The English champions top Group A, two points ahead of Wolfsburg with whom they shared a 3-3 draw last month.

The Germans thought they had secured all three points against Juventus in Turin after goals from Lena Lattwein and Tabea Wassmuth wiped out Cristiana Girelli's opener for the home side. Wolfsburg's Felicitas Rauch, however, collected a second yellow card in the 90th minute and from the resulting free-kick, the ball fell to Girelli to fire home her second and secure a 2-2 draw.

PSG made it three wins from three in Group B with a comfortable 4-0 victory over Real Madrid at the Parc des Princes. Marie-Antoinette Katoto kept her head to put PSG into a 13th minute lead and, after Sara Dabritz had doubled the score shortly before half-time, added a second — her 18th goal in all competitions this season — to make it 3-0 early in the second half.

Madrid defender Rocío Galvez then sliced an attempted clearance past her own goalkeeper to complete a miserable evening for the Spaniards. PSG top the group with nine points, three ahead of Madrid. The Spanish side still look likely to qualify after the other game in Group B between Ukrainians Kharkiv and Icelandic side Breidablik ended in a goalless draw, giving both sides their first point of the campaign. — AFP

## Salah has two goals as African World Cup qualifying intensifies

JOHANNESBURG: Liverpool marksman Mo Salah leads Egypt against Angola this weekend with the clear objective of ending his scoring drought to help lift his nation into the final stage of Africa World Cup qualifying. Qualifying for the 2022 tournament in Qatar intensifies on the continent with the last two group rounds, with victory in Luanda moving Egypt into the next stage as Group F winners.

The two-time African Footballer of the Year wants to get back on the goal trail in Angola having failed to find the net in his last three appearances for the Merseysiders. Before his mini-slump, Salah had scored in 10 consecutive matches in all competitions for Liverpool. Victory will take Salah and his team into the final qualifying phase to decide which five countries represent Africa in Qatar next year. Here, AFP Sport highlights matchdays 5 and 6, which run from today through Tuesday, with 21 nations chasing eight final-round places, 17 out of contention and Senegal and Morocco already through.

### Group A

Riyad Mahrez-captained African champions Algeria and Burkina Faso are heading for a final round showdown on a Blida pitch publicly criticized by both teams as unsuitable for international football. While Algeria can pick nine starters from the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations final against Senegal, Burkina Faso will lack leading scorer Abdou Traore and Aston Villa forward Bertrand Traore due to injuries.

### Group B

Victory for Tunisia away to closest challengers Equatorial Guinea will clinch first place with a match to spare, and Wahbi Khazri is a potential match-winner for the Carthage Eagles. He scored a 68-metre goal recently in the French Ligue 1 and has notched three in four World Cup qualifiers, including the last in a 3-0 home win over the Equatoguineans.

### Group C

Nigeria recovered swiftly from a stunning home defeat by the Central African Republic and will take an unassailable lead if they defeat Liberia in matchday 5 and Cape Verde fail to secure maximum points. The Super Eagles have recalled former Manchester United forward Odion Ighalo and Premier League midfielders Wilfred Ndidi and Alex Iwobi have overcome injuries that sidelined them last month.

### Group D

Matchday 5 wins for leaders the Ivory Coast at home to Mozambique and Cameroon away to Malawi will leave one point separating them heading into a final round showdown in Yaounde. Ivory Coast will miss unavailable Crystal Palace winger Wilfried Zaha while Cameroon have called up Ajax Amsterdam goalkeeper Andre Onana, who has completed a lengthy ban for a doping violation.

### Group E

Mali appear the strongest of the African challengers who have never qualified for the World Cup and hold a two-point advantage over Uganda in a section where Kenya have fared dimly. A Malian Eagles squad including Southampton winger Moussa Djenebo will seal top spot with a match to spare if they win in Rwanda and Uganda fail to secure maximum points when they host Kenya.

### Group F

Former Real Madrid manager and twice Manchester United assistant Carlos Queiroz has had an immediate impact on Egypt since replacing sacked Hossam el Badry after matchday 2. Home and away victories over Libya gave the record seven-time African champions a four-point advantage and even if they lose in Angola, a win over Gabon in Alexandria will ensure progress.

### Group G

A groin injury could prevent Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey playing for Ghana against Ethiopia, but he is a likely starter in a probable group decider at home to leaders South Africa. South Africa forward Victor Letsoalo, who has impressed for newcomers Royal AM in the domestic league, misses the home



Mohamed Salah

match against Zimbabwe through suspension.

### Group H

Only pride is at stake in a group where Senegal boast a perfect four-match record and clinched first place last month by winning away to Namibia through a Famara Diedhiou hat-trick. Senegal have a powerful 'spine' of goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, center-back Kalidou Koulibaly, midfielder Idrissa Gueye and forward Sadio Mane and are expected to qualify for Qatar.

### Group I

Morocco have also secured a final-round place, helped by playing away matches against Guinea and Guinea-Bissau at home because of a Conakry coup and a Bissau stadium not up to international standards. Bottom team Sudan are another country without a suitable venue for World Cup qualifying so they must tackle the Wahid Halilhodzic-coached Moroccans in Rabat.

### Group J

The most intriguing section with co-leaders Benin and Tanzania, top seeds the Democratic Republic of Congo and surprise 2019 Cup of Nations quarter-finalists Madagascar all capable of finishing first. Madagascar may be four points behind the pacesetters, but will snatch top spot if they defeat Benin and Tanzania and DR Congo draw their two fixtures. — AFP

## Kuwaiti Red Bull Neymar Champions win place at Qatar World Finals

KUWAIT: The Juniors team secured the country title this year at the Kuwait edition of the wildly popular accelerated football tournament. Red Bull Neymar Jr's Five took place throughout October 2021, with the final match played on November 4, 2021. This year the qualifiers rounds were divided into four groups, one for each day of competition. The first group division brought the following results:

Team Red Castle defeated team AFG 5-0. Red Castle went on to lose to Caspion 0-2 in their second match. Caspion were the division leaders that day, also taking a win against AFG by a score of 1-0. Red Castle were the runners-up for their group.

In the second group division, The Juniors took both matches that day to come out on top. First game was against Al-Nashami with a final score of 2-0, and second against Golden Boys with a 5-0 score. Golden Boys also suffered a loss to Al-Nashami by 0-5, who came second place in their

group. The third group saw team Jayeenkom take first place by winning their matches against their scheduled opponents. First match was against Trend, 5-0. Second game they were matched up with Morocco, which they won by a final tally of 4-0. Trend went on to beat Morocco 1-0 to qualify for the runner-up position.

The fourth group saw team Al-Najjar take their division with decisive wins against Yellows Time (4-1), and Abaden (2-0). For second position, Abaden defeated Yellows Time, 3-1.

Division champions and runner-ups automatically qualified for the quarter-finals.

Quarterfinals first match went to Al-Nashami, who took the win 3-1 over Caspian.

Second quarter-final game saw Al-Najjar take a strong win against Trend, 5-0.

The third quarter final was a 4-0 win for The Juniors against Red Castle.



Fourth and last quarter-final match went to Jayeenkom winning 3-0 over Abadeen.

Semi-finals first match went to The Juniors, taking a 1-0 lead over Nashami.

Second semi-finals had Al-Najjar squeak by Jayeenkom by 2-1.

At a packed Red Bull Neymar Jr's Country Finals attendance, The Juniors won with a maximum score of 5-0 over Al-Najjar to close out the tournament with confidence. The worldwide tour-

namment includes over 30 participating countries. For the first time in the history of Red Bull Neymar Jr's Five, the World Finals will be held in an Arab Gulf country, Qatar.

The events were held in cooperation with sports group, Puma, and water company Acqua Eva, who both proudly supported the major event as well as Kuwait Times. To find out more about the Red Bull Neymar Jr's Five, follow @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook.