



Buenos Aires: Argentina's River Plate forward Rodrigo Mora celebrates after scoring the team's second goal against Paraguay's Guarani during their Libertadores Cup semifinal first leg football match. — AFP

RIVER PLATE DEFEAT GUARANI

Buenos Aires: River Plate struggled to break down a resolute Guarani side in their Libertadores Cup semi-final on Tuesday but they upped the tempo in the second half to get the goals that gave them a 2-0 advantage to take into next week's return leg in Paraguay.

Guarani matched their rivals in a competitive opening period but the home side found a higher gear after the break. Gabriel Mercado got the opener after 59 minutes when he seized on a knock down from a corner to fire the ball home from close range.

Rodrigo Mora got a second 13 minutes later when he beat the offside trap and then lifted a sublime chip over the keeper.

"The result was fair and it allows us the chance to go to Paraguay with a two-goal advantage without losing any goals," River Plate coach Marcelo Gallardo said.

"We were imprecise but we didn't give up and we were rewarded for keeping plugging away." "The tie isn't over but it gives us the tranquility to go to Paraguay with a favorable result."

River Plate are aiming to win the competition for a third time, while Guarani have never won South America's equivalent of the Champions League.

The Buenos Aires club had the poorest record of all 16 group qualifiers with just one win in six games but they have shown some steel since, eliminating city rivals Boca Juniors and then beating Brazilian side Cruzeiro 3-0 away from home.

The winner of next Tuesday's tie in Asuncion will play either Internacional or Mexican side Tigres in the final. The two teams play their first leg in Porto Alegre yesterday. — Reuters

VILLA TAKEOVER DEAL DEAD, SAYS SHERWOOD

LONDON: Talks over a planned takeover at Aston Villa by a consortium of investors have collapsed, manager Tim Sherwood said on Tuesday.

British media reported in May that a group of investors led by former Chelsea business director Paul Smith had made a bid for the Premier League club of around 150 million pounds (\$234.35 million). American owner Randy Lerner, who completed a 62.6 million pounds takeover of the club in 2006, put Villa up for sale in May 2014 and said recently he would stand down as club chairman whether or not he managed to sell the club.

"I think it's dead now, to be honest," Sherwood said on Sky Sports. "It was fairly live, but I think the people who were talking are now not there." "The chairman is picking it up and running with it now. I'm not sure if anyone is too close now. Until it's done it's never there."

Villa, based in the city of Birmingham, finished 17th in the Premier League last season, one place above the relegation zone. They reached the FA Cup final, but

were beaten 4-0 by Arsenal at Wembley. They have won the English title seven times but the last of those triumphs came in 1981. They won the European Cup in the following season and their last major trophy was the League Cup in 1996. Villa's Belgian striker Christian Benteke has been strongly linked by British media with a move to Liverpool, who now have money in their pocket following the sale of Raheem Sterling to Manchester City in a deal worth up to 49 million pounds.

Benteke has a buyout clause in his contract and Sherwood reiterated the club's stance that he would not be leaving unless the clause was activated.

"I think Liverpool-I looked the other day-had six or seven strikers at the club. Now I'm not sure how many they actually need," Sherwood said. "We know Christian is a very good player and we want to keep hold of him. If someone matches that buyout clause, there is nothing we can do about it. But until that happens, he is an Aston Villa player and we are all very pleased about that." — Reuters

FEWER HOTELS, MORE CAMPSITES AS RUSSIA CUTS WORLD CUP COSTS

MOSCOW: Soccer fans at the 2018 World Cup could find themselves sleeping on boats or pitching tents in Soviet-era summer camps as Russia reins in spending on the tournament by cutting back on the number of hotels.

Back in 2010, when it won the right to host the finals, Russia promised to provide 100,000 rooms for visiting supporters, far exceeding the 60,000 required by soccer's world governing body FIFA. Since then an economic downturn, worsened by a fall in global oil prices and Western sanctions over Moscow's role in the Ukraine crisis, has forced Russia to scale back its ambitions. The government in April axed plans for 25 hotels to save 27 billion roubles (\$475 million) and last month reduced its limit on total spending on the tournament to 631.5 billion roubles, saving 30 billion roubles on accommodation.

A source close to the organising committee said planners had few other options to reduce costs, and had discussed using boats to provide temporary bed spaces in host cities that are near a river or the coast. "You can't cut the stadium, you can't cut the training grounds, but when you have 20-30 hotels of course there is flexibility there," the source said. But he warned that cutting back on hotels could mean fans have to make return trips of thousands of kilometres on match days. The World Cup will take place across 11 host cities, from Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea to Yekaterinburg, 1,700 km east of Moscow on the border where Europe meets Asia.

Organisers in Nizhny Novgorod, a host city about 400 km (250 miles) east of Moscow, plan to let fans stay in vacated university dormitories and say budget cuts will not diminish the accommodation on offer. "One legacy of the

Soviet Union is the Pioneer camps, used by children in summer time" said Maxim Podovinnikov, the region's deputy trade and industry minister, referring to the youth movement in which red-scarved boys and girls were brought up to revere Lenin and become good Communists. "In the woods, near the rivers, lakes and water areas, beautiful places. Those places would be available," he said.

During a tour of a construction site where a five-star hotel is to stand, he told reporters: "In Nizhny at least, we will have plenty of rooms for everyone who wants to come... We don't expect any problems. In fact, you could say we are ready now."

World Cup planners will be anxious to avoid the debacle with hotels at the Sochi Winter Olympics last year, when some rooms were being finished as athletes and journalists queued to check in. Since the Games, critics say luxury hotels have struggled to fill rooms in the Black Sea resort, which is also a World Cup venue. Sochi's mayor said this week that 20,000 additional rooms were built for the Olympics and hotel occupancy had been around 76 percent since 2014.

"We hope to have one million fans here for the World Cup," Mayor Anatoly Pakhomov told reporters. "We realise the significance of the World Cup and it can only be good for the city, its image, the tourist industry and the economy." There are signs that private operators, however, are reluctant to invest in Russia's struggling hotel market. Andrey Yakunin, founding partner of investment advisory firm VIY Management which has investments in luxury and regional hotel chains across Russia, said high interest rates made building hotels specifically for the World Cup unviable. — Reuters

STERLING COMPLETES RECORD MOVE TO MANCHESTER CITY

MANCHESTER: Raheem Sterling became the most expensive English footballer in history when he signed for Manchester City from Liverpool on a five-year contract, the England forward's new club announced on Tuesday.

The 20-year-old completed his move to the 2014 Premier League champions after passing a medical in a deal worth an initial £44million but could rise to £49 million (\$76 million, 68 million euro). "It's a good feeling and this is really happy time for me and my family," Sterling told City's official website late Tuesday. "I'm just glad it's all over and done with and I can't wait to get on the training field. "The thing that excites me the most is the world class squad we have and knowing we have a team that is capable of winning things year in, year out."

The forecast move away from Anfield appeared imminent at the weekend as Sterling stayed behind when Liverpool flew out for their tour of Thailand, Australia and Malaysia.

City manager Manuel Pellegrini rated his marquee signing as "one of the best attacking players in world football". The Chilean said: "He is a young player with outstanding ability, and I am sure the Manchester City fans will be very excited about seeing him in action for the team."

A statement released on City's official website, www.mfc.co.uk, confirmed: "Manchester City are delighted to announce Raheem Sterling has joined the club on a five-year deal.

"The 20-year-old England international's transfer is a club record fee for an English player and he also becomes City's record signing."

The Jamaican-born Londoner assumes the most expensive English footballer mantle from Andy Carroll, who moved from Newcastle to Liverpool for £35 million but never lived up to the tag. Sterling, who will wear the number seven shirt, is now second only to Welshman Gareth Bale on the all-time most expensive British player chart. The headline capture brings the curtain down on a long-running transfer saga involving the England international who was under contract at Liverpool until 2017. But he had rejected a £100,000-a-week deal to extend his stay at Liverpool, with the Reds finally accepting City's third bid of the close season.

Sterling joined Liverpool from Queens Park Rangers in February 2010 for an initial fee of £600,000, and the Loftus Road club will receive 20% of his fee.

Sterling's arrival follows the lifting of financial fair-play sanctions by UEFA against City, freeing the club's Abu Dhabi stakeholders of their financial shackles. Sterling will now fly out to meet up with his new team-mates on tour in Australia within the next 24 hours. News of his departure from Anfield was also confirmed by Liverpool in an announcement on their official website.

It said: "Liverpool Football Club can confirm Raheem Sterling has completed a transfer to Manchester City. The 20-year-old departs Anfield after 129 appearances and 23 goals for the Reds. "Liverpool FC wishes Raheem well." On



Liverpool: A picture taken on August 17, 2014 shows Liverpool's English midfielder Raheem Sterling celebrating after scoring a goal. — AFP

Monday Liverpool boss Brendan Rodgers had played down reports of a rift over the restless forward.

"Contrary to probably the last week or so in terms of what was written, Raheem and I have always remained very strong in our relationship and have been right up until we left. So there's no issue there," he said from Bangkok.

In March, Sterling's relationship with the Liverpool hierarchy became particularly strained when, in an interview with the BBC given without the club's approval, he confirmed he had

rejected the Reds' latest contract offer.

Sterling's agent, Aidy Ward, then added to the growing rift by saying his client would not sign a new deal with Liverpool even for "£900,000 a week". Merseyside Police meanwhile have confirmed they are investigating Twitter threats made towards Sterling and his three-year-old daughter. "The language used in these tweets is abhorrent," a Merseyside Police spokesman told the Liverpool Echo. "We are taking the incident extremely seriously and an investigation by detectives in Liverpool CID is ongoing. — AFP



France: The race director leads the pack as they emerge from a tunnel during the ceremonial parade at the start of the eleventh stage of the Tour de France cycling race. — AP

MAJKA WINS TOUR'S 11TH STAGE

CAUTERETS: Poland's Rafal Majka, last year's king of the mountains, won the 188km 11th stage of the Tour de France after a solo breakaway in the Pyrenees yesterday.

Ireland's Dan Martin came home second a minute later with German champion Emmanuel Buchmann in third at 1min 23sec. Briton Chris Froome finished ninth in a 10-man group just over five minutes back to maintain the race leader's yellow jersey.

American Tejay Van Garderen kept hold of second spot at 2min 52sec with Nairo Quintana third at 3min 09sec. It was Majka's third Tour stage win after a pair of successes in the mountains last year as he won the polka-dot jersey for the race's best climber.

He was part of an eight-man breakaway earlier in the day but attacked his companions on the hors category Col du Tourmalet climb with 50km to ride and never looked back.

Martin, who was not part of the initial seven-man breakaway but made up almost four minutes on his own to join the others, was initially dropped on the Tourmalet but came back strongly to overhaul Serge Pauwels for second spot. Belgian Pauwels cracked completely on the short third category climb just before the finish and was also overtaken by Buchmann. After Froome's decimation of his rivals on Tuesday it was a much calmer day in the saddle for the overall contenders, until a frantic last climb of the 6.4km third category climb on the way into the finish in Cauterets.

An acceleration by Bauke Mollema saw reigning champion Vincenzo Nibali dropped from the yellow jersey group and the Italian, who suffered badly on Tuesday, lost almost a minute to drop out of the top 10, replaced by

Mollema. French hopes suffered another miserable day as Jean-Christophe Peraud and Thibaut Pinot-second and third overall last year-were again distanced on the lower slopes of the day's toughest climb. — AFP



PAU: Poland's Rafal Majka celebrates as he crosses the finish line of the eleventh stage of the Tour de France cycling race. — AP