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MAGAZINE

WEEK 27




JUNE 2019

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Mexico 1 (5), Costa Rica 1 (4)

2019 Concacaf Gold Cup

It took penalties to decide a winner but Mexico beat Costa Rica 5-4 in a penalty shootout in a hard-fought Gold Cup quarterfinal on Saturday at NRG Stadium in Houston.

Raul Jimenez opened the scoring, a clinical finish to the bottom corner just before halftime. Just after the break, though, Costa Rica found an equalizer. After Luis Rodriguez brought down Joel Campbell in the box, Bryan Ruiz stepped up and sent Memo Ochoa the wrong way.

LA Galaxy forward Uriel Antuna got another start, as did teammate Jonathan dos Santos. Costa Rica started two MLS-ers, FC Cincinnati duo Kendall Waston and Allan Cruz.

After a deadlocked 90 minutes, the game went to 30 minutes of extra time. And after the teams failed to score, the game went to penalties. Raul Jimenez's penalty, the first taken, was saved by Leonel Moreira. Costa Rica held the edge until the third round, when Randall Leal missed the goal entirely, tying the shootout. Then, in sudden-death penalties, Keysher Fuller's attempt was saved by Guillermo Ochoa to push El Tri into the next round.



Mexico will face Haiti in the semifinals.

Goals

44' – MEX – Raul Jimenez
52' – CRC – Bryan Ruiz (PK)

Three Things

THE BIG PICTURE: Mexico, entering as tournament favorites, will be chastened by the near-miss, but the name of the game in a tournament is to survive and advance, which they did. For Costa Rica, the result is heartbreaking as they took El Tri to the very brink and acquitted themselves well.

MOMENT OF THE MATCH: In a mirror-image scene that echoed a disputed penalty that favored Mexico in the 2015 Gold Cup against Panama, the call against Mexico in this game could be discussed for years to come, especially with no Video Review at the tournament.

MAN OF THE MATCH: Guillermo Ochoa was up to the challenge when his team needed him, and he made four saves during the game plus the critical stop in the shootout to end it all.

Next Up

MEX: Wednesday, July 3 vs. Haiti | Gold Cup semifinal
CRC: Out of the Gold Cup

CREDIT: MLS SOCCER

Ochoa the hero as Mexico survive major Gold Cup scare... barely

Gerardo "Tata" Martino tucked the medallion his mother had given him before she passed away between his lips and asked for a favor from above. By that point of Saturday night, the Mexico coach had used up his substitutions and his tactical tweaks had been rendered irrelevant: El Tri were behind in the penalty shootout in their Gold Cup quarterfinal against Costa Rica, with the usually clinical Raul Jimenez seeing the first penalty of the shootout saved by Ticos goalkeeper Leonel Moreira.

El Tri's Gold Cup fate hung in the balance and thoughts may have flashed through Martino's mind about the backlash that would follow if Mexico crashed out of the tournament at the quarterfinal stage.

But exactly five years to the day since Arjen Robben won a controversial late penalty for the Netherlands to put Mexico out of the 2014 World Cup, Martino's petitions were answered favorably by the penalty gods.

Ochoa stretched to his right to deny Keysher Fuller in the sixth round of penalties to see Mexico eke out a win. The subsequent celebrations on and off the field, led by a relieved Jimenez, revealed the relief that Mexico had found a way past Los Ticos.

"I don't like using [the medallion] to ask for footballing favors, but for some reason I called on it and sometimes it can help me," explained Martino in the news conference after the game.

This is a Mexico team looking to regain the Gold Cup trophy as the minimum goal this summer and that has lamented not being involved in the Copa America at every opportunity. Going out at the quarterfinal would've been a bad look.

But Ochoa -- a player that had decided to play the Gold Cup despite his wife giving birth days before the tournament -- stepped up.

"Memo made the save of the game [from Jonathan McDonald in the 108th minute] and stopped the game coming to an end before penalties," said Martino.

This had been Mexico's most important test under the Argentine manager, the first knockout game in his spell in charge and a match that pitted El Tri against a team capable of causing problems. The four friendly wins against CONMEBOL opposition in 2019 -- scoring at least three goals in each -- were impressive enough but Costa Rica's spirit was a reminder that a knockout competition brings a completely different level of intensity.

"I'm totally satisfied with getting through, the penalties rewarded the team that deserved to win," said Martino. "I said that against Costa Rica it was an early final, it is an excellent team, but the reality is that we should've won the game inside the 90 minutes."

The Ticos exposed Mexico's weaknesses in a way that hadn't been seen under Martino, even in the underwhelming 3-2 victory over Martinique in the group stage. The fact goalkeeper Ochoa was the hero serves as a reminder of that.

Costa Rica deserve much credit. They hadn't shown much form at the Gold Cup, but were intense, pressed high at times, as coach Gustavo Matosas had promised, and produced a genuine attacking threat following a plan. They had as many shots on target as El Tri over the 120 minutes, broke up the rhythm with regular fouls (25 in total) and topped Mexico in terms of expected goals (xG).

Costa Rica was able to take advantage of the fact full-backs Luis "Chaka" Rodriguez and Jesus Gallardo push high and leave space in behind. And the penalty that led to Costa Rica's Bryan Ruiz equalizing highlighted some inefficient defending from the two full-backs, both of whom are converted wingers.

Meanwhile, Edson Alvarez grew into the game in the holding midfield role, but the fact he doesn't play in the same system with Club America was on display in his positioning at times. Costa Rica played a 4-4-2 formation with two strikers waiting for direct passes to expose a Mexico team taking risks and defending 1v1. It seemed Alvarez was at times unsure whether to drop back and become an extra player in defense, or to move up to provide numeric superiority in midfield.



US men's soccer team to play Jamaica in Gold Cup semifinal

The United States was outplayed during the second half by 79th-ranked Curacao but managed to advance to the CONCACAF Gold Cup semifinals with a 1-0 win Sunday night behind Weston McKennie's goal in the 25th minute.

The defending champion US extended its Gold Cup winning streak to nine and will play Jamaica on Wednesday at Nashville, Tenn., in the second semifinal, a night after Mexico faces Haiti at Glendale, Ariz. The US reached the semifinals for the 10th straight Gold Cup and 14th in 15 overall.

Christian Pulisic, the Americans' 20-year-old star midfielder, captained the US for the second time and fed McKennie for the goal. Pulisic cut in from a flank and crossed, and McKennie headed in the ball from 4 yards for his second goal in 12 international appearances.

Playing near his hometown of Hershey, Pulisic shot just wide in the second minute and was denied in the fourth when goalkeeper Eloy Room while falling to his left reached to his right to tip Pulisic's shot over the crossbar.

Curacao had 60 percent possession in the second half. American goalkeeper Zack Steffen, a native of suburban Coatesville, made a leaping save on Leandro Bacuna in the 84th minute.

The 30th-ranked Americans have outscored opponents 12-0 in the tournament, the championship of North and Central America and the Caribbean, and have held opponents scoreless for 405 minutes overall.

This will be the third straight Gold Cup in which the US and Jamaica meet in the knockout stage. The Reggae Boyz upset the US in the 2015 semifinals, and the Americans defeated Jamaica in the 2017 final.

Pulisic's only previous game as captain was in a 1-0 exhibition defeat to Italy last Nov. 20 under interim coach Dave Sarachan. New coach Gregg Berhalter has had nine different captains in 10 games.

Berhalter returned to the same starting lineup he used for the initial group stage matches against Guyana and then Trinidad and Tobago. With the US assured of advancing, Berhalter changed all 11 starters against Panama for the group stage finale against Panama.



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U.S. Women's soccer fans are chanting 'equal pay' ahead of quarterfinal match against France

The U.S. Women's National soccer team will take on France on Friday in the quarterfinal of the Women's World Cup. The two teams are considered top contenders to win the tournament; the U.S. is the defending champion, and France has a home-field advantage.

While all eyes will be on the pitch once the first whistle blows, the lead up to the game has also focused on some political elements of the squad's success. Co-captain Megan Rapinoe got President Trump's attention when she said she's "not going to the f---ing White House" if she wins the cup. But the entire team has been hoping to get everyone's attention regarding the disparity in pay between the U.S. men's and women's national teams. Players sued the U.S. Soccer Federation for gender discrimination in March over the pay gap, and on Friday, fans readying for the big game made sure not to lose sight of the alleged injustice.



The match is set to be a scorcher as France suffers its hottest-ever temperatures in some regions — Paris is a not-record-breaking-but-still-sweltering 90 degrees. The showdown is do-or-die, and whoever loses will be booted from the cup. Whoever wins will move on to face England, who trounced Norway on Thursday.

CREDIT: Summer Meza theweek.com

Haiti down Canada in historic Gold Cup upset



Haiti came back from two goals down at half-time to score three times in a superb second 45 minutes and knock Canada out of the Gold Cup 3-2 on Saturday.

Jonathan David and Lucas Cavallini, who between them had scored nine goals in their last three games, added another one each in the first half as Canada dominated the quarterfinal in Houston, Texas.

But the Haitians, who had won all three of their group games, moved into the semifinals with a blistering second half performance.

Herve Bazile scored Haiti's equaliser in the 70th minute. Matthew Ashton - AMA/Getty Images

The comeback began five minutes after the break when Duckens Nazon took advantage of a poor pass back from Marcus Godinho to score and then Herve Bazile equalised from the spot after 70 minutes.

Wilde-Donald Guerrier completed the turnaround six minutes

later when he latched onto a lovely pass from Nazon and superbly beat the goalkeeper.

Haiti, who last won the forerunner to this tournament in 1973, will face either Mexico or Costa Rica in the semifinal on July 2 in Glendale, Arizona.

CREDIT: Reuters

Jill Ellis coaching USWNT against the country that wouldn't let her play

Jill Ellis wanted to play. Of course she wanted to play. Her father coached soccer. Her brother played soccer. The entire family would gather around the television and watch soccer — she was an “all in” for Manchester United, she said.

She couldn't play though. Not organized soccer. This was the 1960s and she was a little girl on the South Coast of England. Females were essentially banned from playing in England (technically, they weren't allowed to play on men's federation grounds until 1971, but that was enough to snuff the game out).

“I had zero opportunity to play football over the years,” Ellis said.

All she had was “playing with the boys in the schoolyard, with my brother in the backyard,” she said. All she had was wondering what could have been.

On Tuesday at 3 p.m. ET Jill Ellis, now the head coach of the United

States women's soccer team, will match up in the World Cup semifinal against her native England, the country that robbed her youth of the sport to which she's dedicated her life.

Yes, that was a long time ago. No, the people involved aren't the same. Yes, England has come a long, long way — its team is now a legitimate global power.

But still ... the coincidence and significance of the match-up, played against her personal history, can't be lost on anyone.

Well, on Sunday at least, Ellis chose not to make this about her, her past or into any kind of an old revenge game — with Ellis at the helm of a juggernaut. Maybe human nature wins out in public, but at this point, it was just about preparing her team.

The U.S. team.

“She's 100 percent American now,” forward Alex Morgan said.

The Ellis family eventually moved to the United States where, free to play, Jill led her high school in Fairfax, Virginia to a 1984 state championship and became a third-team All American at William & Mary. She then followed her dad into coaching, eventually leading the University of Illinois, then UCLA and since 2014, the USWNT.

She boasts an 11-0-1 career World Cup record, including the 2015 title. She's two more away from another.

She's come a long way. So has the sport. There's still more to go, of course.

Ellis is the No. 1 coach in the world. Yet according to fiscal 2017 tax filings, the most recent available for U.S. Soccer, Ellis was paid just \$292,151 in total compensation. By comparison, men's coach Bruce Arena earned \$400,000 for just four months' work and men's assistant Andres Herzog made \$446,885. (Former men's head coach, Jurgen Klinsman, received a \$3.275 million settlement that year upon getting fired.)

Ellis signed a new contract since, presumably richer, although details aren't yet known. The pay scale part is the decision of U.S. Soccer, of course. Some of it is a byproduct of the marketplace — unlike with men's coaches, there aren't any wealthy bidders from top pro women's leagues, college programs or national clubs to drive up demand. Ellis has almost nowhere to go.

Much of that is because so many European countries wouldn't allow girls such as Ellis to play all those years. England lifted its ban about the same time as Germany and others finally took the game out of the shadows. Even then, while the U.S. was beginning to invest in women's sports due to Title IX, the rest of the world mostly ignored it.

To this day, this event, the World Cup, suffers. It's made up ground in terms of quality of play, but it's eons behind men's soccer in audience, revenue and commitment from FIFA. As such, so are salaries. So is everything.



Andre Blake, Jamaica back into third straight Gold Cup semifinal

Andre Blake and the Reggae Boyz are back in the semifinals of the Concacaf Gold Cup for the third straight time after the 28-year-old Philadelphia Union goalkeeper recorded his 14th career international clean sheet.

"It wasn't pretty, but that's football," Blake said after the match. "I'll take an ugly win more than a pretty loss all day. The boys did a great job tonight, again it wasn't our best game but we stuck to the task and defended our asses off and we're moving on, that's what's important."

Blake found himself in unfamiliar territory in the first half when he ended up coming way off his line to defend and made a tackle outside the box near the sideline.



"It was a turnover play and I figured we were outnumbered so I was just ready to make a play to do whatever I can," he said. "I was able to close him down, make the first save and at that point I knew my defenders would be giving cover so it would not make much sense to back off so I just kind of stayed with him and tried to close out the play."

Blake made a pair of saves on the day but Jamaica conceded a lot of the possession to Panama, which finished with 61 percent possession for the game.

"It was an emotional night for me, I felt the love from the fans," Blake said of playing at Lincoln Financial Field. "I'm just happy we were able to come up with the win."

The lone goal came from FC Cincinnati forward Darren Mattocks, who converted from the spot two minutes after checking in and heading his first touch of the ball off the hand of New York Red Bulls defender Michael Murrillo in the box.

Next up, the Reggae Boyz head to Nashville to face the U.S. on Wednesday. A win would mean a trip to the final on Sunday in Chicago and two more missed games in MLS for Blake. Jamaica knocked the U.S. out in 2015 to make it to the first of two straight finals, which they lost to Mexico in 2015 and the U.S. in 2019.



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