

2017 FIFA Confederations Cup

Match Reports

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CHILE GO COLD AS GERMANS PREVAIL

Germany became Confederations Cup winners for the first time, as they saw off Chile 1-0 in an intriguing final in St Petersburg. Chile's wastefulness and inability to put away their chances finally told, as Germany continued to pose a threat on the counter and dug out a hard-fought victory over ninety-five minutes.

Chile's manager Juan Antonio Pizzi selected the same eleven that saw off Portugal on penalties in the semi-finals. Germany made only one change, bringing in centre-back Shkodran Mustafi – who was rested in their 4-1 victory over Mexico. After an extremely passionate and lengthy national anthem recital from Chile, the match got underway.

Big guns Alexis Sánchez and Arturo Vidal missed from range early on, before the latter created the first clear-cut opportunity. The Bayern Munich midfielder played an audacious ball to catch the run of Charles Aránguiz. The Bayer Leverkusen man's first touch was excellent, but Roma defender, and Chelsea target, Antonio Rüdiger showed the attacker his quality, with an expert block to nullify the threat. Aránguiz, on the floor, was able to tap the ball back to Vidal for a shot, but Marc-André ter Stegen blocked well with his legs. Germany needed to regroup. The Chilean old guard were running the match.

A looped ball forward was intelligently knocked down for Eduardo Vargas by his strike-partner Sánchez. But former Napoli and Valencia striker Vargas was unable to find the net, volleying over with his first touch. Chile continued to carry a threat, and were partly helped by German nerves forcing errors. Eduardo Vargas profited from one such steal, twisting inside and out of Germany's Leon Goretzka, before shooting low into the grateful arms of a diving ter Stegen. Vidal could fire on target just minutes later, and the bounce on the ball confused ter Stegen, forcing the Barcelona keeper into a nervous parry. Aránguiz and Sánchez came ghosting in for the rebound, but Arsenal's Sánchez's shot was a poor scuff, and Germany cleared easily.



Next came a moment of despair for *La Roja*. Midfielder Marcelo Díaz of Celta Vigo has been every bit as instrumental and consistent in Chile's rise to the top of international football, but the midfielder, last man in the situation, simply did not see Germany's forward closing him down. The midfielder took a touch too many, and there to nick the ball was Red Bull Leipzig's Timo Werner. The tournament top-scorer drew in Claudio Bravo, before unselfishly passing sideways for Lars Stindl. Stindl tucked the ball away to join Goretzka and Werner on three goals for the tournament, and the hunt for the Golden Boot. More importantly, Germany took an undeserved and purely gifted lead, thanks to Díaz's unsightly and horrific error.

For the entire tournament, Chile's right-back Mauricio Isla has produced outstanding crosses and first-time passes as an incredibly consistent supply. The full-back did so again, as Chile searched for an instant reply. In came Aránguiz, but the midfielder never looked as though he truly felt he would score, and, indeed, he didn't, as the ball scuffed off his toe and Germany cleared. Germany then missed two golden opportunities – Goretzka volleying just wide on the angle, and captain Julian Draxler placing the ball wide, after it looked as though he may simply lash it. Another suicidal error at the back from Chile, this time from the experienced Gonzalo Jara, played Germany in again. But Goretzka did not enjoy the gift, shooting straight at Bravo having taken an unnecessary second touch. At half-time, Germany were ahead by one goal to nil.

The second period began, and continued, in a much less productive and intense way. It was not until the seventy-second minute when the first side – Chile – could conjure up a serious scoring chance. A crowded six-yard box was approached by Sánchez. The ball rolled free for him, and a wonderful dummy from him saw him able to evade a sliding challenge. Out of nowhere came ever-present Bayern signing Sebastian Rudy, to block Sánchez's eventual shot. Chile come coming at the Germans, and when Eduardo Vargas managed a squirm out a shot on the turn, the net could easily have bulged, but ter Stegen held on well. Chile's most glorious chance of the match followed. A Jean Beausejour cross reached Alexis Sánchez. The Arsenal forward took advantage of a poor piece of play by Rudy to take possession in the box. Falling over, the ball rolled back to Vidal – no more than seven yards out. The Munich striker smashed the ball over when he should really have hit the target. He smacked the pitch in frustration. The score was still 1-0, and Chile had not scored.



Germany celebrate winning their first ever FIFA Confederations Cup title. Twenty-three-year-old Julian Draxler lifts the trophy as captain.

Germany. The World Champions will go to the World Cup in Russia [provided they qualify] as many people's favourites to win it, aided, of course, by their victory in this tournament. It ended Germany 1-0 Chile in a packed St Petersburg Stadium.



PORTUGAL DIG DEEP TO BAG BRONZE



Pepe rescued Portugal in stoppage-time, to send his side into extra-time, where they eventually prevailed over their more free-flowing, yet ill-disciplined, opponents Mexico. Both sides had a man sent off in extra-time, which also saw Adrien Silva's penalty secure Portugal the third-place finish.

The European Champions' manager Fernando Santos gave starts to defender Luís Neto and winger Gelson Martins. With Cristiano Ronaldo having left to be with his newly born twins, André Silva spearheaded Portugal's attack alone. Javier Hernández, Carlos Vela and Oribe Peralta formed a frightening three-man Mexican attack, and manager Juan Carlos Osorio decided to rest dos Santos brothers Jonathan and Giovani for the first time in the tournament.

Portugal started excellently, and when André Silva looked to be bundled over in the box, the referee, maybe predictably, decided to consult VAR. The immediate decision was to award Portugal a penalty. Up stepped the earner André Silva, but his corner-bound strike was stopped excellently by Mexican mainstay Guillermo Ochoa. Portugal were unable to celebrate a goal; it remained 0-0. Nani missed a close-range header and midfielder Pizzi struck wide. Portugal created all of the first-half chances, but had nothing to show for it.

Mexico grew into the game, and Rui Patrício was needed to keep Portugal in it – especially from Hernández's excellent turn and drive. Full-back Néelson Semedo then flung the ball on target, only to see Ochoa able to parry away the danger. An unorthodox Gelson Martins cross almost saw striker Oribe Peralta, back defending, put the ball into his own net, but maybe fairly, at the break it was still level at none each.

Any Portuguese dominance in the second half was quickly cancelled out and bettered when Mexico took the lead. Bayer Leverkusen's Javier Hernández, under pressure, was able to dig out a scruffy cross. Patrício came for it and then left it, which seemed to confuse his entire backline. Defender Luís Neto was the unfortunate man in the wrong place, as the ball rebounded off his leg and into the net. Every Portuguese defender looked at another to blame, but Mexico were blaming no-one, rather, *claiming* the lead.



Portugal were desperate to respond, and when Gelson Martins rose for a header, the afro-bearing youngster looked favourite to score. But, out of nowhere, Ochoa leapt to make a crucial save and help his defence to avert any danger. Mexico were hanging on. Nani missed another gaping goal in the air, as Portugal began to look decidedly restless. But in stoppage-time, Portugal's Pepe stepped up to equalise, and pump anguish and regret into the tired-looking Mexican defenders. He leapt highest to stab an ugly volley past Patrício from a superb Ricardo Quaresma cross. The match went to extra-time.

Osorio's Mexico searched desperately for the lead, and were only denied by a ridiculously unlikely Patrício save, when substitute Hirving Lozano ran free from a corner knock-down. But, Portugal's trickery and experience told when Martins' fast footwork saw Miguel Layún produce an unintentional handball. The referee had no other option, and awarded Portugal a penalty. Ronaldo wouldn't have let anyone else near the ball if he had been playing, but in his absence, Sporting Lisbon's Adrien Silva, a target for Tottenham Hotspur, stepped up to take the penalty. His strike was much better than the three saved by Claudio Bravo in Portugal's semi-final defeat. Ochoa dived the wrong way, and Portugal took the lead at 2-1. Tempers started to boil over, and Néelson Semedo was dismissed, followed by substitute Raúl Jiménez just minutes later. There was time late on for midfielder Héctor Herrera to smash a volley on target, but Patrício again saved brilliantly, and Portugal held on to claim third place after a 2-1 win after extra-time.

DEUTSCH



DOMINANCE DUMPS

MEXICANS OUT



Leon Goretzka scored twice in the first eight minutes, as Germany sent home an otherwise impressive Mexico team from the Confederations Cup. Joachim Löw's side face Chile in the final on Sunday, and will be looking for their second major trophy since the millennium.

Matthias Ginter, Benjamin Henrichs and Timo Werner all retained their places in Germany's team from the win against Cameroon. Mexico continued to trust defenders Oswaldo Alanís and Néstor Araujo, who came into the first team late in the group-stage.

The match had barely got going, before Mexico had already conceded. Henrichs crossed for Leon Goretzka, who was ghosting into the danger area. The Schalke man swung a boot at the ball, and it nestled into the net with ease, squirming past the grasp of Guillermo Ochoa. Not two minutes later, Werner played Goretzka through, who went one-on-one with Ochoa. The Málaga goalkeeper the most insignificant of touches on Goretzka's shot, but the ball again nestled into the goal. In just over a minute, Goretzka had fired himself to the top of the list – as the tournament's outright top goalscorer with three goals.

Werner was then denied from a similar situation to Goretzka's second goal, before Mexico finally took a foothold, and steadied the ship. The North American side sent an abundance of crosses into the box without really testing the World Champions' defence, before Julian Draxler was caught napping, and was dispossessed by a rather more rushed Giovanni dos Santos. The former Barcelona midfielder scuffed an effort way wide; he had rather more time than he felt he had. Javier Hernández missed an almost 'sitter', before Héctor Herrera sent a flashing free-kick over the bar – aided in its journey by Marc-André ter Stegen's glove. The whistle went, and Germany looked as though they were holding on to a precious two-goal semi-final lead.

Germany continued in perfect form, as they had begun – scoring twice early in the match. Draxler played a beautiful pass through to left-back Jonas Hector – Germany's first-choice in the position since 2015. The Cologne man drew in Ochoa, before cutting back to Werner – faced with an open goal. The Red Bull Leipzig man tucked the ball away with ease for 3-0. Remarkable things happen, but it was game over for Mexico.



The Latin side, though, looked in the mood to at least hit the back of the net, and nearly did when Porto's Miguel Layún forced a superb save from ter Stegen. Mexico came closer and closer, and it became obvious that it simply was not to be their day, when striker Raúl Jiménez clipped the bar with a wonderful, goal-worthy header from a clever cutback. It was fitting though, that when the Mexicans [so impressive in the tournament in general] *did* score, it was the best contender so far for goal-of-the-tournament. Mexico earned a free-kick around thirty-five yards from goal. A short free-kick was taken, and as the German team switched off, midfielder Marco Fabián pinged an absolute scorcher into the top corner, beyond ter Stegen who had no chance whatsoever. Fabián plays his club football in Germany with Eintracht Frankfurt, and reminded his common opponents what he can do with a monstrous strike from thirty-five yards. It took them eighty-nine minutes, but the CONCACAF Gold Cup winners finally beat the Barcelona goalkeeper.

Joachim Löw's side looked possessed as they tried to make certain of the win in stoppage-time, and they were able to add some real gloss to the scoreline when substitute Amin Younes of Ajax capped off a brilliant international break for him, netting his second goal in two weeks for Germany. Emre Can found the midfielder, who slid the ball away for 4-1. Germany will face Chile in the final – the only opponents to have been able to deny Germany victory in the tournament so far.

BRAVO SHOWS HIS CLASS WITH SUPER STOPS IN SHOOTOUT



Chile overcame European Champions Portugal to reach the Confederations Cup final in their maiden appearance at the tournament. Manchester City goalkeeper Claudio Bravo ended his dreadful season in a richer vein of form, as he saved all of Portugal's penalties in the shootout.

Portugal veteran Bruno Alves retained his place in Portugal's starting eleven, after impressing at full-back in the heavy win against New Zealand. Chile's eleven remained exactly the same to that which struggled to deal with Australia on Sunday.

After a weak Ronaldo effort proved no problem for Claudio Bravo, Alexis Sánchez put Eduardo Vargas through on goal for Chile. Portugal's long-term goalkeeper Rui Patrício came rushing out of goal, and stopped Vargas' similarly weak effort well. Ronaldo then put fellow striker André Silva through on goal – although Silva's chance comparatively looked much easier to tuck away. Bravo came out well, and thwarted the striker, saving his shot and ending the threat. Charles Aránguiz drifted a header from Mauricio Isla's cross just wide, and Chile looked to have the ascendancy. Aránguiz then volleyed wide from a lovely position, after Arturo Vidal's mishit overhead-kick had fallen his way. At the interval, Chile had not conjured up the lead; the deadlock was still intact.

Chile again looked most likely to score early in the second period, with Vidal blasting a header over the bar from a fine Jean Beausejour cross. Eduardo Vargas then produced a ridiculous moment of quality, leathery an acrobatic bicycle kick on target from a semi-cleared corner. Patrício scrambled to just about deal with it. Portugal nearly took the lead a while later, but Ronaldo's rather selfish drive was parried well by Manchester City's Bravo.

Vidal looked set to steal the headlines when he lined up a thirty-five-yard strike on the break. The Bayern Munich talent looked on in disbelief as the shot rose just over the bar with admirable power. Ronaldo then had three chances in quick succession to break the deadlock, firing over, wide, and being denied by a block, as the score remained none each.

At full-time, the deadlock had still not been broken. Extra-time would be needed to separate the most recent European Championship and Copa America winners.



André Silva volleyed over, before Sánchez headed marginally wide from another delicious Isla cross. Vidal nodded the ball into Patrício's arms, and the referee blew for half-time in the added period. The biggest chance of the match came late in the second period, when substitute Francisco Silva crossed for Arturo Vidal. The midfielder took a snapshot early, and it so nearly paid off. He wrapped his foot around the ball, and it whipped in the air – and off of the post. The ball came back off the upright, and fell the way of fellow substitute Martín Rodríguez. The midfielder flung a foot at the ball from a gaping open-goal. The ball slipped onto the crossbar, and Juan Antonio Pizzi's team looked on in desperation.

The match went to penalties. Vidal smashed in an emphatic penalty, before mercurial talent Ricardo Quaresma was denied by an Bravo. Aránguiz scored too, before Bravo produced a carbon copy of his first save to deny João Moutinho of Monaco. Sánchez scored to make it 3-0, before an inspired Bravo denied one final Portugal player – Nani – to send Chile into the final, and claim one of the rarest commodities in football – a penalty shootout cleansheet. It ended 3-0 to the South Americans on penalties, after an eventful, yet goalless, 0-0 draw.

POSITIVES FOR POSTECOGLOU BUT CHILE SQUEEZE THROUGH



Australia were not lucky to draw – rather, *unlucky* not to win, as Chile needed substitute Martín Rodríguez to save them from an embarrassing defeat and confirm their place in the semi-finals. Ange Postecoglou's Australia were left to rue missed opportunities, and bowed out after two draws and their marginal opening defeat to Germany.

Chile recalled José Fuenzalida, and started Francisco Silva and Paulo Díaz for the tie against the Socceroos in Moscow. Manchester City goalkeeper Claudio Bravo made his first appearance of the tournament between the sticks. Veteran Tim Cahill and defender Ryan McGowan started for the first time. Cahill was making his one-hundredth appearance for his country – and looking for his forty-ninth goal.

Chile looked as though they would take an early lead when Alexis Sánchez went racing away from the Australian defenders, goal-side. Just as the Arsenal man was about to shoot, defender Mark Milligan intervened with a superb last-ditch tackle. The striker complained to the referee for a penalty, but VAR correctly concluded that Milligan's intervention was perfectly legal. Claudio Bravo then put a teammate in a huge position of vulnerability with an awful pass out from goal. Australia managed to gain possession, and countered in numbers. Robbie Kruse played a one-two with advanced defender Trent Sainsbury, before spotting James Troisi unmarked. The forward, unattached after his releasing by Melbourne Victory, showed unbelievable composure – chipping the ball over Bravo, and putting the Socceroos into an unlikely lead against the fourth best team in the world. The half of football so no more notable action, and the score at the break was 1-0 to the Australians.

Chile looked to fight back, and after Eugenio Mena's cross was headed half-clear, Eduardo Vargas won an aerial battle to feed substitute Martín Rodríguez a chance. Against the run of play, the twenty-two-year-old volleyed in via Mathew Ryan's hand and the post. The Cruz Azul player showed unbridled joy at scoring his first international goal – in just his fourth cap. Vargas then headed agonisingly wide of the target from an almost open goal, as the South Americans looked to find themselves in the lead for the first time, in Moscow.



Young substitute Jamie Maclaren volleyed wide somehow, after Troisi's floated pass found the Socceroo perfectly. Both sides had chances to seal a win, but neither did. Chile overcame high amounts of pressure to just about get away with a much poorer performance than in their first two games. They do however receive a sort of punishment for their failure to win, as they face Ronaldo and Portugal in the semi-finals in Kazan on Wednesday. Ange Postecoglou and Australia's journey ends after a 3-2 defeat to Germany, a 1-1 draw with Cameroon and finally in Moscow, where it ended Chile 1-1 Australia.

GERMANS JOYFUL AMIDST MORE VAR MAYHEM



The sending off of the wrong culprit became the talking point of a game that saw much more quality on the ball, than it did from the match officials. Striker Timo Werner scored twice to send Cameroon out, and the World Cup winners through as group winners.

Marvin Plattenhardt, Kerem Demirbay and Timo Werner all started for Germany, whose line-up has changed quite dramatically from game to game in the tournament so far. African Cup of Nations winners Cameroon made no changes from the side that drew with Australia on Thursday.

The Indomitable Lions began better, but it was the Germans that created the first scoring opportunity. Julian Draxler's ball inside fed Liverpool midfielder Emre Can. The former full-back, capable of scoring from long-range, released a powerful curled strike that only just evaded the post. Diving goalkeeper Fabrice Ondoa was beaten. Germany pushed for the lead, and Plattenhardt's cross was sent wide from a yard out by Joshua Kimmich, who went diving in to try to convert. Werner then nearly *did* convert a Plattenhardt, only to see his close-range toe-poke expertly stopped by Cameroon's Ondoa. The match then entered an unlikely period of Cameroon dominance. Scorer against Australia, Marseille's André-Frank Zambo Anguissa, volleyed the ball towards goal, only to be denied by a superb Marc-André ter Stegen save. At the break the deadlock was yet to be broken.



Some lovely play in the middle between Draxler and Kerem Demirbay led to the latter dribbling the ball towards goal. The Hoffenheim star expertly lashed the ball right out of the top draw and into the top right corner. Ondoa was not to blame; he had no chance. Germany continued to pile on the pressure, and when Ondoa looked exposed out of his goal, Kimmich attempted to find the net beyond him. The Gimnàstic keeper was just that, as he recovered to palm the ball behind. Big Cameroon striker Vincent Aboubakar looked every inch a striker still searching for his first goal of a tournament, as he slipped at the final moment and saw his shot trickle wide. His face showed distress at the shot, and the fact that as things were, his nation was bowing out in last place.

Next came moment of all-round chaos. A ridiculous high-foot challenge from defender Ernest Mabouka was correctly spotted by the referee. The man in the middle initially gave the wrong culprit, Sebastien Siani a yellow card, before consulting VAR. After the VAR, amazingly, the referee decided to upgrade this to a red card, but *didn't* spot that it was again to the incorrect player. Referee Wilmar Roldan looked sheepish, before finally sending off Mabouka, and condemning Cameroon to a count of ten players to Germany's eleven. Timo Werner seemed desperate to all but confirm the victory, when his diving header beat Ondoa and doubled the lead. A beautiful cross deserved a good finish, and it certainly got it from Leipzig's Werner. Cameroon were quick to respond, and found an unlikely goal with ten men against the world champions, with an attack started off by substitute Moumi Ngamaleu. The number seven found himself on the ring-wing, where he drifted a cross into the box. Aboubakar came ghosting in, and benefitted from yet another German goalkeeping error at the Confederations Cup. Manuel Neuer was rested for the tournament to let Germany's others stars between the sticks get a feel of competition internationals. But Marc-André ter Stegen followed [goalkeeper against Australia] Bernd Leno, when he let Aboubakar's weak header drift through his hands, and into the net to half his side's lead. An otherwise misfiring, by his standards, Vincent Aboubakar, can finally say he hit the target at the tournament having netted in their [arguably] most difficult game.

Germany wrapped up a deserved win when Timo Werner scored his second – an almost carbon copy of Lars Stindl's goal, the first against Australia. Substitutes Julian Brandt and Benjamin Henrichs combined, before Henrichs, of Ghanaian descent, pulled the ball bag for Werner. The striker netted his second Germany goal of, both his career and, the game, as his side-footed strike flew just past Ondoa's reach and into the net. The Cameroon goalkeeper deserves to have earned at least one clean-sheet at this tournament; his side haven't kept any. The match ended, and Germany went through top of Group B. Cameroon go out with a better record than only New Zealand, after claiming just one point despite some gutsy and committed performances. It ended in Sochi, Germany 3-1 Cameroon.

AKINFEEV ERROR SENDS HOSTS CRASHING OUT



Goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev continued his poor luck in FIFA tournaments with another mistake on the international stage. Striker Hirving Lozano took full advantage to send Mexico through to the semi-finals, and hosts Russia out at the group phase.

Star players Javier Hernández and Guillermo Ochoa returned to Mexico's starting line-up, whose opponents Russia again started with striker Aleksandr Bukharov rather than the more youthful Dmitri Poloz.

Mexico received the first chance of the match in Kazan, as Hirving Lozano cut inside from the left-wing to shot low, into the hands of CSKA Moscow keeper Igor Akinfeev. Russia recovered, and could have had a penalty when former Chelsea player Yuri Zhirkov looked to have been tripped in the box by defender Héctor Moreno. The referee did not look at all convinced, and waved play on. Zhirkov was again in the action, when his taking of a chance left him able to shoot at goal. He produced a volley, but the ball crept outside of the post, rather than in. Fyodor Smolov then came closer than anyone, absolutely lashing a long-range strike against the post from a quick Russian break-away. It was not long after that Russia took the lead. Aleksandr Golovin's cross was met well by fellow Aleksandr, Erokhin. The midfielder accidentally produced an air shot, before calmly passing wider to winger Samedov, yet another Aleksandr. The Spartak Moscow man made his finish look easy, coolly slotting into the far corner, from a decent way out. Russia's fans and players alike celebrated a goal that could send them into the semi-finals of a major tournament for the first time since Euro 2008. PSV midfielder Andrés Guardado tried to come up with an immediate response, but his free-kick was well seen and saved by Akinfeev.

Soon after this, Mexico did equalise. A long ball into the box landed perfectly on the head of defender Néstor Araujo. The Santos Laguna player rose well to attempt what looked like a headed pass back across goal to Diego Reyes. Nevertheless, his header worked perfectly as a looping header which deceived Akinfeev, and dipped into the net for a priceless Mexico leveller. The half petered out, and at the break both teams had scored once.



Russia flew into the ascendancy early in the second forty-five. Samedov dinked the ball over Ochoa and into the net, but his wry smile said it all, as he was flagged offside. Then came a moment of contrasting extremes. A looped ball forward was chased down by playmaker Hirving Lozano. Forward and out of his box came Akinfeev to attempt to avert the danger. A much too sheepish and unconvincing attempt to punch the ball away was bettered by Lozano's majestic leap, and aerial win. Both players ended up on the floor; the ball ended up in the net. Lozano ran away in celebration. The score was 2-1 Mexico, and they were now going through instead of Russia. Mexico even scored again, before VAR cancelled it out for a marginal offside. The night got even worse for Russia when Zhirkov cynically elbowed his opponent as both players waited for the ball to land. The referee showed Zhirkov a second yellow, and any Russian hope was suddenly dashed.

A highly forgettable night for the hosts was capped off when substitute Igor Smolnikov volleyed way over the crossbar from extremely close in. The match died out and the contest was over. The game, and Russia's title hopes, ended with a result at Mexico 2-1 Russia. Juan Carlos Osorio's side sail on to the semi-finals. Their opponents will be determined tomorrow, as the final round of group games are played in Group B. For Russia, friendly preparation is all that can follow now. Their true quality will be determined when they host the greatest show on earth in just one year's time.

RAMPANT PORTUGAL REACH SEMIS



Four of Portugal's most talented attackers scored in their 4-0 demolition of New Zealand in St Petersburg. The European Champions continue to the semi-finals, whereas the All Whites go home after three straight defeats in Russia.

Young full-back Nélson Semedo started for Portugal, whose team also included midfielder Danilo Pereira and veteran Bruno Alves for the first time in the tournament. New Zealand's very own veteran defender, Andrew Durante, also started – for the third and final time for the Oceanians – already eliminated through their defeat to Mexico.

As was obvious from the start, Portugal were the better side, and when Cristiano Ronaldo's header came crashing back off of the bar, keeper Stefan Marinovic must have felt he was in for a long afternoon. Not too long later, the Real Madrid man had another chance. A Ricardo Quaresma cross corner seemed to take the New Zealand defence by surprise, and the striker planted a well reached header down and into Marinovic's grasp. Fernando Santos' men continued to push for an advantage – Danilo's header being blocked wide of the target by Macclesfield-born Tommy Smith. The resulting corner saw Danilo bundled over by two New Zealand defenders tracking the Portugal man, and the referee could only award a penalty. Cristiano Ronaldo took full advantage of the opportunity, and sent the ball high into the net for his seventy-fifth international goal, and Portugal's lead.

Portugal then doubled their lead, when Manchester City signing Bernardo Silva took advantage of some fantastic work on the wing from Eliseu to convert his first of the tournament. At the break, Portugal had been utterly dominant, and were good worth for their two-goal lead.

New Zealand's better half of football was the second, and that was epitomised by their gaining of the first opportunity of the half. A fantastic low cross from Thomas Doyle looked begging to be put into the net. But some close attention from the Portuguese defence left striker Chris Wood able to shoot from a much tighter angle than he would have wanted. The Leeds United man stuck a leg on it, but defender Bruno Alves was alert to block before it even managed to reach goalkeeper Rui Patrício. The chance was lost, and the next ended up falling to Portugal. Striker André Silva found himself one-on-one with goalkeeper Marinovic. The New Zealand stalwart has been the nation's best country at the Confederations Cup, and he produced an unlikely save to deny the twenty-one-year-old AC Milan signing an eighth goal in international football – in just eleven caps. New Zealand continued to press for a way back into the game, and Kosta Barbarouses' shot was blocked by Pepe, which saw Portugal's goalkeeper Patrício able to gather easily.

Cristiano Ronaldo came off, having scored his second goal of the tournament, and was replaced by Nani [who replaced the Real Madrid forward as captain]. Not one minute later, Nani had a brilliant opportunity to wrap up Portugal's victory. Work on the right wing from Semedo saw the full-back cross for Valencia's Nani. The winger's shot deflected off two All Whites, before it was saved acrobatically by a desperately readjusting Stefan Marinovic. The midfielder could not believe it. Marinovic had kept New Zealand in the game yet again. Their captain Chris Wood was then denied by Patrício from range, before André Silva *did* wrap up the victory with a goal. Quaresma pounced on some dallying on the ball by New Zealand. The midfielder played in Milan's Silva, who fired the ball into the roof of the net to confirm Portugal's place in the semi-finals.

New Zealand were still confident they could ruin the statistic that says they have never scored a Confederations Cup goal against a European side. Michael Boxall nearly profited from a costly drop of the ball by Patrício, but the Sporting Lisbon keeper atoned for his error with a good save. Nani absolutely finished the All Whites off in stoppage time, as his low edge-of-the-box drive found the corner of the net rather than Marinovic's hand. Barbarouses missed another opportunity at the end to rub salt into the wounds, but for Portugal it was a day to remember. It ended New Zealand 0-4 Portugal.

RECORD BREAKER SÁNCHEZ SENDS WARNING TO LÖW



Alexis Sánchez became Chile's all-time top goal scorer, as the tournament's two highest-ranked sides drew in the Kazan Arena. Germany continued their long unbeaten run, when Jonas Hector's cross was stabbed home by Lars Stindl.

Barcelona's Marc-André ter Stegen replaced Bernd Leno as Germany's goalkeeper for the match against Chile. Celta Vigo's Pedro Pablo Hernández started in midfield for the South Americans.

The marquee match of Group B started at a ferocious pace. It became obvious that both sides backed themselves to win. Germany had possession in their own half. Arsenal man Shkodran Mustafi tried to pass the ball out, but club teammate Alexis Sánchez had other ideas. Bayern Munich's Arturo Vidal stopped the ball and it ran the way of Sánchez. The little magician passed back to Vidal, who was upended by a keen-to-recover Mustafi. The midfielder was able to toe forward a vital touch, which put Sánchez through on goal. Under pressure from Sebastian Rudy, the Arsenal striker managed to put one of *his* toes on the ball, and his shot came off of the post and rippled the back of the net. Chile took the lead against world champions Germany, and their experience meant it was likely to be difficult to the Germans to find an easy route back.



Chile continued to pressurise their opponents, and after Vidal went down outside the box, striker Eduardo Vargas turned and unleashed a flashing drive towards goal. The ball flew in the air and beat ter Stegen with no issues at all, before crashing back off the post, and onto the welcoming head of defender Mustafi. Germany, like Chile, are confident and capable enough to pass their way out of tight spaces, and when they managed to do so, Liverpool's Emre Can carried the ball upfield. The midfielder played a lovely pass in behind Mauricio Isla, and into the path of fullback Jonas Hector. The Köln man dug out a superb cross, that the close attention from Chilean defenders could not stop Lars Stindl profiting from. The Borussia Mönchengladbach midfielder stabbed the ball into the back of the net, and Germany – after one chance – were level. Alexis Sánchez found the space to have one final effort on the German goal before the break, but ter Stegen was alert, and able to get a strong hand to the powerful drive along the ground. At the break, it was 1-1.

The Copa America winners took full advantage of the ball in the first half, and continued to use it effectively at the beginning of the second. Arsenal's Sánchez sent a free-kick dangerously close to the goal, but which landed on the roof of the net.

Chile were getting all the opportunities to regain the lead, and Arturo Vidal was unlucky not to hit the target with two fine headers from Charles Aránguiz crosses. Sánchez's first-half goal saw him become Chile's all-time top goal scorer, but two goals behind him is his strike partner Eduardo Vargas. The UANL forward has always shown a similarly rare quality when playing for his country, and that was on show as he produced a precise outside foot shot, which very nearly crept on target.



Towards the end of the game, Chile's ageing team started to show slight weaknesses. Defender Gary Medel was taken off through a hamstring injury, and Joachim Löw's Germany came into the game a little more. Stindl had a chance to further increase his status as the tournament's top scorer [thanks to two in two games], as he fired at goalkeeper Johnny Herrera from a tight angle. Emre Can had a weak effort blocked by Gonzalo Jara in stoppage-time, but the action ended there. Chile's early lead could not be added to, and it ended in Kazan, Germany 1-1 Chile.

STALEMATE IN ST PETERSBURG IS BAD FOR BOTH



Cameroon's goal in first-half stoppage-time looked as if it would be enough for the African side to beat Australia. But Mark Milligan converted a needlessly conceded penalty to put extreme pressure on both sides to now qualify out of Group B.

Australia again started Tim Cahill on the bench for their second group match against Hugo Broos' Cameroon. If Cahill came off the bench, he would make his 99th appearance for his country. Australia brought in left-sided players Alex Gersbach and Robbie Kruse, the latter of which came on as a substitute against Germany in the 3-2 defeat.

Cameroon started well, and their pace was causing the Socceroos a lot of problems. One of the fastest players in the *Indomitable Lions'* line up is winger Christian Bassogog. The Henan Jianye midfielder placed two free-kicks both wide and high of the target early on. Celtic's Socceroo Tom Rogic then had his own opportunity from a free-kick, but he too sent the ball far too high. The African side seemed better for the whole first half, and captain Benjamin Moukandjo began a break out. He played a lovely pass into striker Vincent Aboubakar, who back-heeled the ball back to the Lorient winger. The captain then sprung a quick snapshot, which Mathew Ryan saved well. Cameroon found themselves able to take a long succession of corners late in the half, one of which saw a blocked shot attempted by midfielder Arnaud Djoum.

The referee awarded just one minute of injury-time, and it looked as if the score at the break would be 0-0, but Cameroon conjured up one final opportunity. A smart ball in behind was able to expose Australia's backline. The ball floated over Aboubakar, but fell kindly for midfielder André-Frank Zambo Anguissa. The twenty-two-year-old player from Marseille got the softest of toes on it, and looped the ball cleverly over an angry Mat Ryan. Zambo Anguissa was the only player in the starting line-up not to have featured in Cameroon's African Cup of Nations triumph, but managed to open his international account in style, with the last kick of the half. At half-time in St Petersburg, it was 1-0 to Cameroon.

Broos' side began the second period with same speed and urgency that they finished the first. Unpredictable striker Aboubakar fired wide from a gaping open goal. The forward, from Porto, scored nineteen goals this season whilst on loan at Beşiktaş. On the sixty-minute mark, a foray into the Cameroon box from Australia saw defender Ernest Mabouka dive in with a rash tackle from behind. The referee blew his whistle, before consulting VAR. The decision did not take long to be made, and Australia were awarded a penalty, and a lifeline. Up stepped Mark Milligan – veteran of three World Cups – to tuck the ball well into the corner, thus claiming his sixth international goal. Ange Postecoglou's side were level with half-an-hour remaining.



Aboubakar fired a seemingly easy volley miles over, before Tim Cahill was introduced for his ninety-ninth international cap.

The Cameroon striker Vincent Aboubakar kept receiving big opportunities, but he was unable to take any, heading over from another scoreable distance. Cameroon attacked again, and Bassogog's cross met the Porto man perfectly. The striker attempted a flying bicycle volley, but miskicked the ball, and it went harmlessly wide of Ryan's near post.



Neither side are assured by any means of a return to Russia in twelve months' time, and it showed with neither side's ability to wrap the game or, or indeed even win it. The referee Milorad Mažić of Serbia blew his whistle for the last time, and the match concluded. Neither side should expect to qualify from the group now, but both Hugo Broos and Ange Postecoglou can be proud of their teams' claiming for at least one point from their Confederations Cup campaigns of 2017. It ended, in the St Petersburg Stadium, Australia 1-1 Cameroon.

TEMPERS FLARE AS MEXICO BEAT ALL-WHITES YET AGAIN



Mexico won their sixth game in a row against New Zealand since 2010, in Sochi. The Latin side's two strikers both converted one second-half chance each, as Mexico leapfrogged Portugal and Russia to first place in Group A. The match, though, was marred by ugly scenes in injury-time.

Thirty-four-year-old Alfredo Talavera started in goal for Mexico, whose coach Juan Carlos Osorio made wholesale changes to the side that stole a draw with Portugal in Kazan on Sunday. Javier Aquino and Jürgen Damm, both of Mexican club UANL, started on either wing, and Oribe Peralta started as the striker instead of Sunday's hero Javier Hernández.

Mexico started better, but their gifting of opportunities to New Zealand became a theme throughout the encounter. An injury inside his own box to Carlos Salcedo was ignored by the referee, and play continued. This seemed to distract Mexico's players, and New Zealand's Chris Wood went through on goal. He shot low, but Talavera pulled off an unbelievable save. The save though did not deny the annoyance of manager Osorio, whose heated discussions over the situation to New Zealand's assistant managers and the assistant referee left him having to apologise after the game.

Those involved composed themselves, although there was more angst and annoyance for the Mexicans soon after, as New Zealand gained a highly unlikely lead. Midfielder Clayton Lewis played a lovely threaded pass through to Leeds' Wood. The target man stuck the ball over the floor-bound Talavera and into the net. New Zealand celebrated the lead, and a rare goal in such a major tournament as the Confederations Cup. At half-time, Mexico were better, but New Zealand were winning.

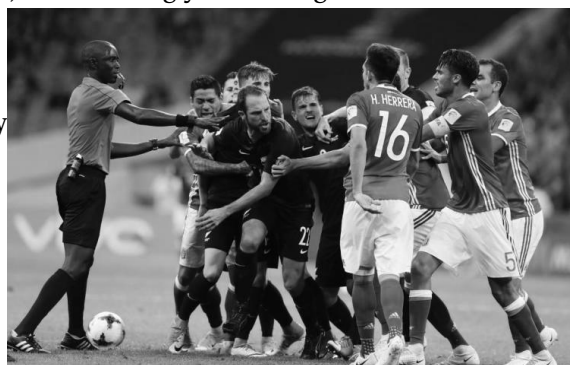


In the second half, Mexico again had the first chance. One of about six one-on-ones in the match for Chris Wood ended, like all but one did, in a victory for the goalkeeper. Wood attempted to deceive Talavera, but the goalkeeper was wise to Wood's plans, and thwarted the opportunity well. Mexico quickly regained control, and regained equality on the scoreline too. Some brilliant work down the left wing from Javier Aquino saw him pass inside to central midfielder Marco Fabián. He then swivelled, and laid off to forward Raúl Jiménez, a Benfica substitute. The striker looked every inch as good as Benfica's first-team players as he fired the ball into the top corner whilst on the turn. Finally, Mexico were back level, in a game where their defending had been poor, but their attacking - stylish.

Not twenty minutes later, they were ahead. More quality from winger Aquino saw the UANL man on the by-line. He pulled back to striker Peralta - not as well-known as his [usual] partner Hernández, but every inch as prolific for his country. The attacker swept the ball home via the post, and keeper Marinovic's outstretched hand. Mexico led 2-1.

Soon after this, winger Jürgen Damm found himself alone in a speedy counter attack for Mexico. He beat two New Zealand defenders before weaving inside a third, and shooting marginally over the bar. Mexico could have wrapped up a deserved win there and then. But, New Zealand carried on strongly, and young star Ryan Thomas smashed a beautifully struck effort against the bar late on. Damm and goal scorer Jiménez were both denied by blocks on the line in stoppage time, before the ugly scenes began.

New Zealand defender Michael Boxall carried the ball forward. He had his shirt cynically pulled by defender Diego Reyes, before sliding in on substitute Héctor Herrera with his studs showing. The Porto midfielder understandably felt angry about this, and reacted by facing up to the All Whites' Boxall. All the players present began a mass brawl, which looked certain to be a project for the team of video assistant referees. Gambian referee Bakary Gassama consulted them after a long delay where it started to look as if he would not. It appeared inevitable that at least one or two players would be dismissed, but Gassama simply showed Reyes [for the original shirt-pulling] and Herrera [for the reaction] yellow cards. The match fizzled out, and it ended in Sochi - Mexico 2-1 New Zealand.



RONALDO RUINS RUSSIA'S RUN



Cristiano Ronaldo ignored all the rumours of his possible transfer by netting the only goal, as Portugal beat the hosts Russia. Portugal moved above Russia in Group A's table with the victory, as they drew with Mexico in their opener.

Manchester City signing Bernardo Silva started for Portugal, and veteran defender Ricardo Carvalho did too. Russia made a few changes, resting striker Dmitri Poloz, and bringing in Dmitri Kombarov amongst others.

The match started with Portugal in the ascendancy. Left-back Raphaël Guerreiro whipped in a beautiful cross for Ronaldo to attack. The Real Madrid man rose highest to nod past goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev. After just eight minutes, Russia were off to the worst possible start. Twenty minutes later, the captain got his next chance. Two Portuguese teammates moved out of the Russian all to offer Ronaldo an area to aim his free-kick. The striker hit the ball front on, but Akinfeev caught the ball easily.

At half-time Ronaldo's two chances had been the only real talking points of a half of football that the hosts were simply not at the races for. It was 1-0 Portugal.

Striker André Silva received the first chance of the second half. Cédric's cross met the striker right on the head. Silva's header looked sure to find the net, but Akinfeev produced an outstanding acrobatic save to keep the score at 1-0. Cédric then had a chance himself to score, unleashing a piledriver from a long way out, that Akinfeev parried because of its venom.

Bernardo Silva had a header also saved, before Ronaldo missed another – from an open goal.

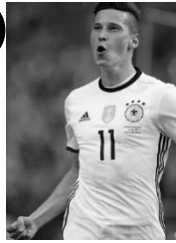
Cherchesov made several changes for Russia, who, after these changes, ended up with the same eleven that started the opening match against New Zealand. The hosts ramped up the pressure, and Portugal's missed chances looked as though they could quite easily have been very costly indeed for the European Champions.

Midfielder Georgi Dzhikiya produced a cross that took the wind and was flying into the top corner. Goalkeeper Rui Patrício saved well. Striker Fyodor Smolov then received the ball on the right wing deep into stoppage time. The striker is more of a target man in the middle, and that showed as the cross he produced was much too close to the goalkeeper, and ended up in the grateful arms of Patrício. From Russia's last corner, Dzhikiya headed just over, and Russia became more and more worried that the equaliser would not come. One final chance did. The final counter-attack saw Denis Glushakov lay off extravagantly for Smolov. The big striker took the wrong option, shooting wide from twenty yards. Manager Cherchesov was furious, and disappeared down the tunnel when the final whistle went.

As Portugal are strong favourites to beat New Zealand in their final game, Russia must beat Mexico to guarantee a place in the semi-finals. At full-time, thanks to Cristiano Ronaldo's simple early header, the score was Russia 0-1 Portugal.



YOUNG GERMANS KEEP OUT SAVVY SOCCEROOS



Two goalkeeping errors from Germany's Bernd Leno gave a way back into the match for Australia. Inevitably though, the young German players had enough talent and quality to take home all three points from an entertaining opener for the two teams in Sochi.

Bernd Leno, Lars Stindl and captain Julian Draxler all started for Germany, whose squad for this competition excludes many regulars including Thomas Müller and Jerome Boateng. Australia manager Ange Postecoglou started with goalkeeper Matthew Ryan, who has recently become newly promoted Premier League side Brighton's record signing.

Joachim Löw's Germany started well, and inside the first five minutes, the world champions gained the lead. Bayer Leverkusen's youngster Julian Brandt did wonders down the entire right wing, faking a cross before pulling back. The ball hit a bobble and, on the volley, forward Lars Stindl swept home confidently. The Germans continued their pressure, Sandro Wagner just wide with his diving header from the promising Leon Goretzka's cross. The two were at it again just minutes later. Goretzka's inviting chipped ball forward landed at Wagner's feet. The forward took a few too many touches, screwing the ball just wide of Ryan's goal.

The next few minutes were slower, but Germany's next chance arose when Brandt swung in a smacked effort on his side foot – from twenty-five yards out. Ryan parried well to keep Australia in it. Australia then missed a vital and rare chance. A free-kick for the Socceroos was horrifically defended by Germany. Defender Trent Sainsbury found himself one-on-one with Leno, but the bouncing ball came off the side of his head, and fell agonisingly wide for the Aussies. Draxler then sent in a low cross the Wagner would have found easy to convert, but conventionally attacking defender Mathew Leckie, who plays in Germany for Hertha Berlin, somehow avoided converting the ball home himself, deflecting it brilliantly over the bar.

Draxler was the beginner of that attack, and played the same role in the next chance – which fell to Australia. Draxler gave the ball away to Huddersfield's Aaron Mooy, who was able to feed Celtic playmaker Tom Rogic. The attacker shot against Shkodran Mustafi. The shot was going wide, but the block meant the ball fell kindly for Rogic again. He volleyed from range, and the ball somehow went through Bernd Leno, and into the net. A piece of double luck helped Australia to equalising in unlikely circumstances, just before the break. Germany were not ruthless enough, and at the break it looked as if it was going to be 1-1. But, Draxler received back a one-two before being fouled by a Massimo Luongo challenge. The referee had no other option, and the Germans had a chance to regain the lead just three minutes later. Julian Draxler converted Germany's penalty, and at the break they led 2-1.

After the restart, Löw's side started in the same rich vein of form that they both started and ended the first period. On forty-eight minutes, the lead was improved. Joshua Kimmich of Bayern Munich played a lovely ball forward for Goretzka. The midfielder checked Ryan's whereabouts, before placing a volley beyond the goalkeeper for 3-1. The world champions took a dominant lead. Eight minutes of flat football followed, before another Leno mistake gifted Australia the lead. Aaron Mooy's free-kick came back off the German wall, before Rogic sent in a low volley. Goalkeeper Leno easily gathered, before the ball fell out of his grasp. Striker Tomi Jurić added to his two goals that helped gain a vital win over Saudi Arabia a week earlier, by tapping home Australia's second.



The Socceroos needed just one more goal to be equal. Substitute Timo Werner came close for Germany late on, wriggling his way through the defence of Australia, before unleashing a low effort that came back off the post. Twice this happened, and twice Werner was applauded by the crowd for his persistent one-man mission to goal. Australia got one more chance. Tomi Jurić did all the work, before releasing substitute Robbie Kruse. The striker looked for a moment as if he would try to play in fellow substitute Tim Cahill, but instead shot. Leno got down, and saved with relative ease. Germany saw out the match well enough, and after an intriguing and extremely close encounter in Sochi, the final score was Australia 2-3 Germany.

VAR LEAVES BOTH SIDES FUMING



South American champions Chile scored twice in the final ten minutes to beat Cameroon in Moscow. Both sides were left frustrated after the VAR disallowed one goal each, but Chile eventually prevailed in an overall even tie.

Chile rested star player Alexis Sánchez for their tie with the African Cup of Nations winners Cameroon. Edson Puch replaced the Arsenal man, alongside striker Eduardo Vargas – formerly of QPR.



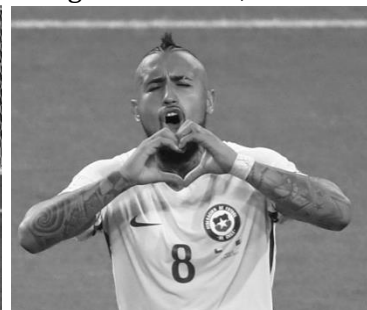
It took no time at all before Cameroon took a surprise lead. A great delivery from their free-kick saw striker Vincent Aboubakar, of Porto, head past onrushing keeper Johnny Herrera – thirty-six years of age. Chile's linchpin Arturo Vidal went down under a weak challenge from Aboubakar. Tragically for the African nation, the referee bought the decent, and disallowed the goal. An unlikely and surely priceless Cameroon lead was chalked off.

In an interview between Chilean players this week, many players and managers agreed that Edson Puch could prove Alexis Sanchez's Chilean replacement. The youngster looked every bit as good as he danced his way into a shooting position, before forcing a quality save from equally promising goalkeeper Fabrice Ondoa. It became obvious that Ondoa's Cameroon were only really going to threaten from counter-attacks. Man of the Match in their AFCON final victory, midfielder Benjamin Moukandjo began one such attack. The Galatasaray target chose the selfish option of shooting. His shot flashed just wide, but increased the pressure on the South Americans to take a firmer grip on the game. Just minutes before the break, Chile did finally look to have taken the lead. A beautifully weighted pass from Bayern Munich's Vidal reached striker Vargas. The forward has been lethal in international football, and cleverly chipped an otherwise excellent Ondoa. Chile's players celebrated, but after awarded the goal, referee Damir Skomina consulted the video assistant referee. The goal was correctly disallowed for a marginal offside. Cameroon were riding their luck, but after a goal was cancelled for both sides, the score remained 0-0 at the break.

Cameroon came into their own in the second period. The Africans tightened up their defence and the match became an even contest. Moukandjo whipped a free-kick inches wide. Both sides took time to look for the winner, but neither were able to successfully penetrate the opposition defence. Sánchez came on for Chile, replacing, his deputy, Puch.

A corner late on for Chile saw defender Mauricio Isla head just wide from a well-placed position. It was looking like it was not going to be Chile's night. Then, after a poor Sánchez cross was cut out, a much better one came in. The defender chose not to come, and after Vidal headed the ball into the net, his decision looked a bad one. Chile took the lead.

Just into stoppage-time, a lovely pass through the Cameroon backline left Sánchez through one-on-one. He twisted and turned but delayed his shot. Two Cameroon defenders replaced the beaten Ondoa on the goal line. The Arsenal man finally shot, looking for all the world as if he was about to become Chile's all-time top scorer. But the defender made an amazing diving block to deny the little Chilean. There to convert the rebound was Vargas. He looked at the linesman with his thumbs held aloft, desperately pleading that at least his second goal be allowed. In almost heartbreak he sank to the floor as the linesman held his flag up. Skomina, the referee, referred yet again to the VAR. It became clear that the tight call was not on Vargas but on Sánchez's initial run to receive the pass. The referee reversed the fourth official's original decision, and the goal was given. Chile celebrated a goal that *was* awarded by VAR as if it was a World Cup winning goal. For the most part, the newly trialled technology was right - and it denied both teams a first-half goal. Sánchez did not play well [for him] by any means, but good players still produce when they are not on top form, and the 'Chilean Messi' helped himself to two assists in his thirty minutes of play, as Chile eventually ran out 2-0 winners over a spirited and talented Cameroon.



PERSISTENT MEXICO PUNISH PORTUGAL



Javier Hernández's Mexico twice drew level with Portugal in a lively match in Kazan. Both sides play possession-based football, and that made for a well contested and highly entertaining match.

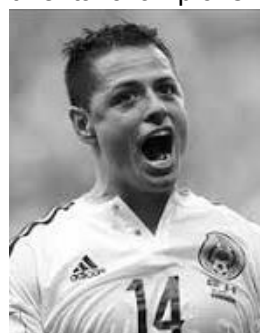
Mexico and Portugal got their Confederations Cup campaigns off and running in Kazan on Sunday. The spotlight was again on Cristiano Ronaldo after the tax-related transfer request allegations; he started as a lone striker, helped by wingers Ricardo Quaresma and Nani. Mexico started Javier Hernández, but left Giovanni dos Santos and Oribe Peralta on the bench.

Mexico started the match with the most possession. But as Portugal looked to counter, it was they that had the first chance. Ronaldo struck a free-kick into the Mexico wall. The ball bounced around off of a few Portuguese heads before arriving back to Ronaldo. The [currently] Real Madrid man struck an audacious volley, which clattered powerfully off Guillermo Ochoa's crossbar. Barcelona's André Gomes volleyed in a low shot on the rebound. Ronaldo's Madrid teammate Pepe ran across the goal, and the ball hit the back of the net. For the first time in the tournament, the referee referred the decision to his video assistant referees. The VAR team decided Pepe had either converted the ball from an offside possession, or had distracted play. The goal was disallowed – it was a huge decision.

Mexico pushed for a firmer grip on the game, and Real Sociedad's Carlos Vela, formerly of Arsenal, whipped a free-kick just wide. The ball probably didn't have enough conviction to truly scare Portugal's goalkeeper Rui Patrício. Mexico's quality then took a turn for the worse, and defender Carlos Salcedo nearly headed a William Carvalho cross into his own net. Ochoa tipped the ball over excellently. Ronaldo, moments later, went through on goal. The forward got the ball stuck between his feet, but managed to pass to the unmarked and unseen winger Quaresma. The Beşiktaş faked a shot coolly, sending Ochoa onto the floor. The goal was left gaping, and Quaresma tucked the ball away for 1-0. The ball had originally been won from Salcedo – it was a half of football to forget for him. Mexico looked increasingly outclassed, but a rare chance brought a priceless equaliser. A looped ball to Vela looked as if it was going to be volleyed home by the forward. Instead, Sociedad's servant volleyed in a cute ball, and Javier Hernández was able to bullet the ball into the back of the net with his forehead. At half-time, the score was 1-1.

Giovanna dos Santos came on for Mexico, and youngsters Adrien Silva and Gelson Martins entered the field for Fernando Santos' Portugal. Silva was immediately part of the action, placing a brilliant header to the extreme corner of the net. Ochoa, amazingly, clawed it away. The match entered a period of little chances for the most-part of the second half, but on eighty-six minutes, Portugal scored what they hoped would be the winner. Some good work from Gelson Martins led to Héctor Herrera passing an attempted cut-out right into the path of Southampton defender Cédric Soares. Cédric fired a poor shot goalward, which Herrera deflected in, past his keeper Ochoa. Salcedo made two mistakes in the first period, and Herrera may have cost Mexico the game with two in the second. Cédric celebrated his first Portugal goal.

One Héctor was Mexico's villain but, in stoppage-time, another became their hero. Jonathan dos Santos' corner proved a last-resort for Mexico. Awful Portuguese defending left Héctor Moreno free, and he nodded the ball into the net off the post. Roma's new signing salvaged a point for Juan Carlos Osorio's Mexico. Portugal and Ronaldo were left to rue missed opportunities, as three seemingly bagged points were quickly turned into just one. It ended in Kazan – Portugal 2-2 Mexico: between Europe's and North America's continental champions.





HOSTS KICK OFF WITH WINNING



START



Russia kicked off the 2017 FIFA Confederations Cup with a deserved 2-0 victory over Oceanian champions New Zealand. The hosts of the ever-approaching World Cup scored in either half in St Petersburg.

START

Vladimir Putin, Gianni Infantino and Brazil legend Pelé were all in attendance as hosts Russia kicked off the so-called 'World Cup dress-rehearsal' inside the St Petersburg Stadium. Both sides played experienced goalkeepers in Igor Akinfeev and Stefan Marinovic. Fyodor Smolov and Yuri Zhirkov were the old heads in the home side's line-up. Youngsters Aleksandr Golovin and Dmitry Poloz looked to impress new boss Stanislav Cherchesov. Anthony Hudson's New Zealand were playing their meanest opponent in four years, even if Russia are ranked lower than ever before at 63rd.

Golovin is considered the brightest young talent in an otherwise dull and lacking period in Russian football. The midfielder dribbled through the New Zealand defence, firing the ball at keeper Marinovic early on. The ball wobbled, and the goalkeeper punched behind nervously. New Zealand's real threat comes from set-pieces. Players such as All Whites' captain and Leeds United striker Chris Wood are areal threats. And a Wood knock-down led to their first chance on ten minutes. Ipswich Town's Tommy Smith received the ball from a tight angle, misplacing a volley across the goalmouth. Russia's favourite ball all afternoon was long into target man Smolov. The Krasnodar striker looked to be bundled over by Marinovic for a penalty, but even with the possibility of VAR, the referee waved play on. On the half-hour mark, the better side took the lead. Denis Glushakov went one-on-one with the goalkeeper, whom he lobbed acrobatically. Glushakov followed the ball's path as it hit the post. The close attention of two New Zealand defenders only helped the ball find its way in, and centre-back Michael Boxall ended up the unlucky receiver of an appearance on the scoresheet: at the wrong end.

At half-time, Russia led 1-0.

Russia started equally well after the break. Winger Aleksandr Samedov whipped the ball in, and onto the head of Dmitri Poloz. The FC Rostov forward headed at goal, producing a wonderful save from Marinovic – hero of the Oceanian Cup final and one of the main reasons why New Zealand are here. Golovin started yet another counter attack later on, and passed to Poloz on his left. The striker placed the ball to the bottom corner, but Marinovic was alert to divert away. In came Smolov sensing a tap in on the rebound, but promising All Whites youngster Ryan Thomas, of Dutch Eredivisie club PEC Zwolle, was able to get a crucial touch, denying Smolov the chance to follow up. Smolov felt his chance would come – and it did.

Fyodor Smolov gained possession and started yet another Russian counter attack. The Russian Premier League's two-time top-scorer faked a long-range effort before a disguising a pass out wide to the ever-available winger Samedov. The Spartak Moscow man whipped in a fine low cross that the defence made a meal of. The ball ran to the producer Smolov, who acceptingly tapped home for his first and Russia's second. Russia looked convincing, and deserving of their two-goal advantage.

New Zealand became desperate for some sort of a reply. Thomas found himself free on the edge of the box, and he thumped the ball at keeper Akinfeev, who saved well. The ball went for a corner, and the following set piece was defended poorly by the hosts. Tommy Smith was left free to attempt to convert at least one of his two chances on the night. The midfielder hurled himself at the aerial ball. Zhirkov's knee denied Hudson's side a way back into the match. Russia had on last chance to well and truly wrap up the victory in added time. An awfully defended Russia corner fell to substitute and rather unprolific striker Aleksandr Bukharov. The ball fell to his feet, and Bukharov knocked the ball goalward. Marinovic produced another unlikely save, tipping an almost floor-bound shot over the ball, and prompting full-time at two-goals-to-nil. Russia came to win and set down a marker. New Zealand came to attempt an upset that never truly looked possible nor probable. The Confederations Cup is underway, after hosts Russia beat tournament minnows New Zealand 2-0 in St Petersburg.

