

Lionel Messi scores 2 in Argentina's World Cup qualifying win over Peru; Brazil's Neymar injured

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Online Desk: Lionel Messi scored twice in Argentina's 2-0 win at Peru in a World Cup qualifier on Tuesday, playing the entire match for his national team. The 36-year-old appeared fit after he was sidelined for several matches with his club Inter Miami because of muscular pain

Also Tuesday, Brazil — the archrival of the defending World Cup champion — took two serious blows at Uruguay. Brazil lost 2-0 to the hosts, its first defeat in 37 World Cup qualifying matches, and saw its star Neymar leave the Centenario Stadium in Montevideo on crutches with a left knee injury.

Elsewhere, Venezuela beat Chile 3-0. Yeferson Soteldo opened the scoring shortly before the break, Salomón Rondón added a goal in the 72nd minute, and Darwin Machis scored seven minutes later. Last week, Venezuela earlier had a 1-1 draw against Brazil.

Ecuador and Colombia had a scoreless draw, and Paraguay beat Bolivia 1-0 on Antonio Sanabria's goal in the 69th minute.

Argentina leads South American qualifying with 12 points in four matches. Uruguay, Brazil and Venezuela have seven points and are separated by goal difference. Colombia has six points, and Ecuador, Paraguay and Chile have four each. Peru has one point and Bolivia has zero.

The next World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada will include 48 teams, meaning direct entry for the top six teams in South America. The seventh-place team will contest an intercontinental playoff for a berth.

Two more rounds of South American World Cup qualifying will be played in November. Brazil and Argentina will face off at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on Nov. 21.

ARGENTINA 2, PERU 0

Messi increased his total to 106 goals in 178 international appearances, moving within two of Iran's Ali Daei for second on the career list behind Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo at 127.

The defending World Cup champion never faced risks at Lima's National Stadium against a Peruvian team that has yet to score in four qualifying matches. Argentina's confident performance could be traced to Messi finally playing as a starter and appearing fully healthy.

The 36-year-old made it 1-0 after a counterattack in the 32nd minute. Enzo Fernández passed to Nico González on the left. A low cross found Messi at the edge of the box, and he shot it to the left angle of goalkeeper Pedro Gallese.

Messi scored again 10 minutes later after Enzo Fernández found him nearly at the same spot. Messi shot it on Gallese's right corner. He later had a goal disallowed for a low margin offside caught by video review in the 57th minute.

"Yes, we have a good group and a good environment in our dressing room and things are much easier. We enjoy being together and playing together," Messi said. "After we won the World Cup we got confidence, we are more united and firm. I hope we can keep growing."

Peruvian and Argentinian fans tried to invade the field after the match to hug Messi, who led the World Cup champions to their eighth straight victory since they won last year's title in Qatar.

Last Thursday, Messi played for almost an entire half of Argentina's 1-0 victory over Paraguay.

URUGUAY 2, BRAZIL 0

After a slow start to the match in Montevideo, Maximiliano Araujo easily beat Marquinhos on the left flank and crossed the ball to Darwin Núñez, who headed it into the net.

The second half started with Brazil still doubtful and Uruguay ready to counterattack. One of those transitions was enough for a close-range finish by Nicolás de la Cruz in the 77th minute.

"In the short run we need to be realistic, we need to improve," Brazil captain Casemiro said. "For Neymar to leave the match it is surely something serious. But I hope it isn't at the end. He has had those injuries whenever he starts picking up his pace again, it is hard."

With and without Neymar, Brazil had its worst performance under new coach Fernando Diniz, who will remain in the job at least until next year's Copa America.

Uruguay, now coached by Argentinian Marcelo Bielsa, had its first win against Brazil in 22 years.

"We had to play against a tough and direct rival," Núñez said. "Today we made history."