



Goalkeeper Federico Villar led the celebrations for Atlante Champions League title (Mexsport)

Atlante claims inaugural CONCACAF Champions League crown before home crowd



Atlante held off Cruz Azul for a 0-0 draw to win the inaugural CONCACAF Champions League on Tuesday, prevailing on 2-0 aggregate to win its first confederation crown in 26 years. After winning the first leg in Mexico City on April 22, los Potros de Hierro (Iron Colts) had to wait 20 days before claiming the trophy in front of a home crowd at Estadio Andres Quintana Roo. The second leg, originally scheduled for April 29, was postponed due to concerns over swine flu.

Goalkeeper Federico Villar denied a handful of chances by Cruz Azul to help earn the title for Atlante, which allowed only seven goals in 12 games in the Champions League.

The title overcame a disappointing league season for Atlante, which finished 14th in the 18-team Mexican league. It also ended a dismal campaign for Cruz Azul, which completed the Mexican season with a 10-game winless streak and in last place, the worst showing in its history.

"It feels very good," Atlante manager Jose Guadalupe Cruz said. "It feels like we accomplished what we wanted to. We know, however, from now on, that the task will be much greater, because we will not only be representing Atlante, but Mexican soccer and CONCACAF. We have to show how we've grown."

Despite appearing to have the advantage early, Cruz Azul seemed unwilling to press the issue despite trailing on aggregate. Atlante had the better of chances, but with a two-goal lead, was content to play a risk-averse game. The championship series marked the third time in four years the CONCACAF club championship final was an exclusively Mexican affair.

Cruz Azul was trying for a sixth crown and first since 1997 while Atlante, playing in its first final since 1994, earned the second title in its history and a trip to the Club World Cup in the United Arab Emirates in December.

"Without a doubt it's going to be an important experience for all of us," Cruz said. "We will grow and learn by playing against the best clubs in the world. We will have to prepare ourselves very well. The goal is to perform as well as possible and represent the area of CONCACAF."

Gold Cup Calendar

First Round

Friday, July 3 – Los Angeles

Canada vs. Jamaica, 5 p.m. (8 p.m. EDT)
Costa Rica vs. El Salvador, 7 p.m. (10 p.m. EDT)

Saturday, July 4 – Seattle

Honduras vs. Haiti, 4 p.m. (7 p.m. EDT)
Grenada vs. USA, 6 p.m. (9 p.m. EDT)

Sunday, July 5 – San Francisco/Oakland

Panama vs. Guadeloupe, 2 p.m. (5 p.m. EDT)
Nicaragua vs. Mexico, 4 p.m. (7 p.m. EDT)

Tuesday, July 7 – Columbus, Ohio

Jamaica vs. Costa Rica, 7 p.m. (7 p.m. EDT)
El Salvador vs. Canada, 9 p.m. (9 p.m. EDT)

Wednesday, July 8 – Washington DC

Haiti vs. Grenada, 7 p.m. (7 p.m. EDT)
USA vs. Honduras, 9 p.m. (9 p.m. EDT)

Thursday, July 9 – Houston

Guadeloupe vs. Nicaragua, 7 p.m. (8 p.m. EDT)
Mexico vs. Panama, 9 p.m. (10 p.m. EDT)

Friday, July 10 – Miami

Costa Rica vs. Canada, 7 p.m. (7 p.m. EDT)
El Salvador vs. Jamaica, 9 p.m. (9 p.m. EDT)

Saturday, July 11 – Boston

USA vs. Haiti, 7 p.m. (7 p.m. EDT)
Honduras vs. Grenada, 9 p.m. (9 p.m. EDT)

Sunday, July 12 – Phoenix

Panama vs. Nicaragua, 2 p.m. (5 p.m. EDT)
Mexico vs. Guadeloupe, 4 p.m. (7 p.m. EDT)

Quarterfinals

Saturday, July 18 – Philadelphia

Group A winner vs. Group B runner-up, TBA
Group B winner vs. Group A/C third-place, TBA

Sunday, July 19 – Dallas

Group C runner-up vs. Group A runner-up, TBA
Group C winner vs. Group A/B third place, TBA

Semifinals

Thursday, July 23 – Chicago

Philadelphia quarterfinal winners, TBA (z)
Dallas quarterfinal winners, TBA (z)

Final

Sunday, July 26 – New York/New Jersey
Semifinal winners, 3 p.m. (3 p.m. EDT)

Costa Rica beats USA to claim U-20 Championship



Josue Martinez scored a pair of second-half goals to lead Costa Rica to its second CONCACAF Under-20 Championship, pacing a 3-0 victory over the USA.

Martinez scored in the 69th and 80th minutes after Diego Estrada gave Costa Rica the lead in the 41st. It was the first goals allowed by the United States in its five games in the tournament. The Ticos, which had scored only three goals in its four previous games combined, won its first CONCACAF U-20 title since 1988.

This was the first time since 1996 CONCACAF staged the tournament in a single country to determine a champion.

Earlier Reinieri Mayorquin scored in the 90th minute to give Honduras a 2-1 win over host Trinidad and Tobago and third place. All four teams which reached the semifinals had qualified for the U-20 World Cup in Egypt September 24-October 16 in Egypt.

The United States has qualified a CONCACAF record 12 times for the U-20 World Cup, but has never won the title.

Honduras' victory caps a tournament in which it was the last nation to qualify in the eight-team field, claiming its place with a playoff victory over St. Vincent & the Grenadines four days before the opening kickoff.

After playing 120 goalless minutes before losing on penalties to Costa Rica in its semifinal on Friday, Honduras needed another 46 minutes to score against Trinidad. Roger Rojas scored his fourth goal in six games in the 46th minute, but the Young Warriors, who also lost on penalties Friday to the United States after a goalless draw, responded 12 minutes later with a goal by Qian Grosvenor.



Costa Rica won its second CONCACAF U-20 crown and first since 1988.

World Cup berths left to satisfy U-17 championship hopefuls



United States coach Wilmer Cabrera pictured his team in a hostile environment. He thought about the whistles, jeers and chants directed against his team by a rowdy and partisan capacity crowd. The stands would be a swath of green.

That was the scenario Cabrera and host Mexico were hoping for in the final of the CONCACAF Under-17 Championship.

"We want that ambiance for our kids, to experience in a full stadium filled with people wearing green jerseys, with everyone screaming for Mexico," Cabrera said after the USA had clinched a semifinal berth with its second group-stage victory. "We hope that when that happens, we're prepared for it."

The USA perhaps was prepared, but that scenario will not play out, for now.

The qualifying tournament for the World Cup in Nigeria was cut short, ending without a confederation champion. Confederation officials cancelled the semifinals and championship match when concerns of a swine flu outbreak in Mexico prompted governmental officials to close schools nationwide.

That left questions of what could have been for the remaining teams who qualified to the World Cup slated to begin in October.

The United States was scheduled to take on Costa Rica, while Mexico was paired against Honduras in the semifinals April 29. The final was slated for May 2.

The four qualified teams leave Tijuana with World Cup berths, and the unresolved issue of who is the best.

The Americans and Mexico finished undefeated and were on pace to meet in the final.

Led by striker Jack McNerney, who finished with a tournament-leading five goals (nine in six international matches this year), Cabrera's squad dominated Group A, beating Cuba 5-0, Canada 4-2 and Honduras 3-0.

The United States is the only nation to qualify for every U-17 World Cup.

Despite losing to the Americans, Honduras qualified with four points after Cuba upset Canada 2-1 in the final group match. The Canadians finished last with one point from a 1-1 draw against Honduras.

Mexico finished atop Group B along with Costa Rica, ending El Tri's frustration in age-limited tournaments, having missed out on qualifying for the 2007 U-17 World Cup, the 2008 Olympics and the 2009 U-20 World Cup.

"We knew about the responsibility we had coming into this tournament," said Mexico coach Jose Luis Gonzalez, whose team outscored opponents 11-0.

"Winning this type of tournament is important and we definitely shook off some pressure, but there is still plenty to look for."



Stefan Jerome (grey) helped the USA extend its streak of qualifying for every U-17 World Cup.

2009 Beach Soccer Championship Rescheduled



The CONCACAF Beach Soccer Championship will be played June 17-21 in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, rescheduled after initial plans for the tournament were postponed due to swine flu concerns. The United States will open the tournament on June 17 against the Bahamas in Group B at Unidad Deportiva Agustín Flores with host Mexico facing Canada in Group A in the second game of a doubleheader. Costa Rica in Group B and El Salvador in Group A will begin play on June 18, with round-robin play concluding on June 19 before the semifinals and finals on June 20 and 21. The tournament originally was to be played April 29-May 3 in Puerto Vallarta, but an outbreak of swine flu in Mexico in late April resulted in government officials closing schools nationwide for a week. CONCACAF then canceled the semifinals and finals of the Under-17 Championship in Tijuana and postponing the second of the Champions League final in Cancun and the Beach Soccer Championship in Puerto Vallarta.

Gold Cup favorites USA, Mexico have challenging summer ahead



Both Mexico and the United States will have multiple challenges this summer, and that doesn't even take

into account another potential meeting for the CONCACAF Gold Cup title.

The two are in the midst of the final round of World Cup qualifying, with Mexico having to adjust to Javier Aguirre, the team's fourth different manager in less than a year. In addition to qualifying, the USA also must play in the Confederations Cup, and all of this on top of the biennial CONCACAF nations championship.

"We have a challenging summer ahead of us with three major international competitions going on, so it will be an excellent opportunity to further scrutinize our player pool as we continue to build our team towards qualifying and competing in the 2010 World Cup," USA manager Bob Bradley said.

By comparison, Aguirre must stabilize a team that has won only three of its last 10 matches, two of the victories coming in friendlies and its only competitive victory at home.

"This year's Gold Cup is key for the Mexican national team," Aguirre said. "Apart from being the most well-known competition in the region, it will be part of a very important summer for our team, which has not only the Gold Cup, but also two World Cup qualifying matches and friendly games, finishing with a World Cup qualifying game against our archrival, the USA, at the Estadio Azteca on August 12."

At the Gold Cup, Mexico will open against Gold Cup debutante Nicaragua and then face Central American champion Panama on July 9 in Houston, where it should have overwhelming support and likely will have its toughest first-round test.

"We have faced Panama's national team on many occasions. This team has grown a lot in the past years, and it plays well," Aguirre said. "In a stadium like Houston, where there are a lot of fans, it will be important to get a good result in order to not leave everything up to the third game."

The Americans will face Grenada, Honduras and Haiti in Group B, opening on July 4, American Independence Day, in Seattle. The city, which was home to a team for 10 years in the old North American Soccer League, has seen a revival of the sport this year with the launch of the latest team in Major League Soccer, the Sounders FC.

"We are thrilled with the opportunity to open the Gold Cup in Seattle," Bradley said. "The city has a great soccer tradition, and it has been very exciting to how the community has embraced the Sounders. We often speak of the pride and humility we feel in representing the United States, and there is no better way to start the tournament then on a day that all Americans share in those feelings."

This year's Gold Cup will be the 10th since the tournament was inaugurated in 1991, and for the first time will be played in 13 cities across the United States, beginning in Los Angeles July 3 and finishing July 26 outside New York.

Those wishing to purchase tickets may visit www.goldcup.org and click on the city, date or games desired.

Warner, Blazer both to return to the FIFA Executive Committee

CONCACAF President Jack Warner and General Secretary Chuck Blazer both will return to their seats on the FIFA Executive Committee for another four years, having been nominated without opposition to the world body's most powerful panel.

Warner, who was first elected to the Executive Committee in 1983, will retain his post as FIFA vice president and CONCACAF's Caribbean representative until 2013.

Similarly, Blazer will return to the post as the representative from North America for another four years, a position he has occupied since 1996. The two will formally begin their new terms at the conclusion of the FIFA Congress in the Bahamas on June 3, two days after the XXVI CONCACAF Ordinary Congress on the Atlantic Ocean archipelago.



Chuck Blazer (L) and Jack Warner (R) remain on the FIFA Executive Committee through 2013



In 2007, the United States celebrated their second straight Gold Cup title, and fourth overall.

GOLD CUP 2009 GROUPS	
Group A	
	Canada
	Costa Rica
	El Salvador
	Jamaica
Group B	
	Grenada
	Haiti
	Honduras
	USA
Group C	
	Guadeloupe
	Mexico
	Nicaragua
	Panama

Around the Confederation

HART RETURNS AS INTERIM HEAD COACH OF CANADIAN NATIONAL TEAM

Stephen Hart, who led Canada to the semifinals of the 2007 Gold Cup, will return as manager of the team through the end of the year, the CSA announced Friday.

"I've been asked to step in on interim basis and to look after the team for the Gold Cup and whatever other projects there are for 2009," Hart said during a media conference call.

The 49-year-old Hart, who will continue in his existing role as the Canadian Soccer Association's technical director, fills the coaching void left after Dale Mitchell was fired in March.

Canada, ranked 89th by FIFA, failed to advance past the semifinal round of World Cup qualifying, going winless in six matches including four losses. Hart was the first assistant coach on the men's national team.

This stint will be the second for

Hart, who was interim head coach between 2006 and 2007 after Frank Yallop resigned to coach the Los Angeles Galaxy of Major League Soccer.

AGUIRRE REPLACES ERIKSSON AS MANAGER OF EL TRI

Javier Aguirre has returned as manager of the Mexican national team after a seven-year absence, replacing Sven-Goran Eriksson after the Swede was fired amid a streak that included only one victory in six World Cup qualifying matches.

Aguirre, who was released as manager of Spanish club Atletico Madrid in February after a three-year tenure, last coached El Tri for a two-year run ending in 2002, guiding Mexico to the final of the 2001 Copa America.

The 50-year-old Aguirre, whose playing career included two stints at Mexico City giant America as well as the Los Angeles Aztecs in the old North American Soccer League and Chivas de Guadalajara, began his managing career in 1995 with Atlante of the

Mexican league, a team he had played for nearly 10 years earlier. He went on to also manage Pachuca, and Osasuna and Atletico Madrid in Spain in addition to the Mexican national team.

LATAPY TAKES CHARGE AS PLAYER-MANAGER OF

Forty-year-old midfielder Russell Latapy has assumed the job as interim manager of Trinidad & Tobago's national team, replacing Francisco Maturana who resigned from the position.

Latapy, who has more than 70 caps for the Soca Warriors, will work as a player-coach and be assisted by Zoran Vranes, who qualified the country's junior team in March for the FIFA U-20 World Cup later this year in Egypt.

Latapy, who has played professionally in Scotland since 1998, has participated in Trinidad's last six World Cup qualifying campaigns, scoring nine goals in 40 games. He also played in the 2006 World Cup finals, when Trinidad became the smallest nation to qualify for the quadrennial championship.

The 2009 CONCACAF Gold Cup coming to 13 USA cities in July
For tickets visit - www.goldcup.org or www.copaoro.org

