

TOLUCA

Red Devils overcome coaching controversy

Toluca striker Jose Cardozo's record-setting season in Mexico's Torneo Apertura was overshadowed by a coaching controversy that almost derailed the club's bid for a seventh Mexican title.

Cardozo's streak of 15 straight games with at least one goal broke Cameroonian Francois Oman-Biyik's record of 11 for Club America in 1994-95. The Paraguayan finished with 36 goals in 25 games, smashing the record for goals in a season since the Mexican championship was divided into two seasons in 1996.

Jose Cardozo's record-setting season at Mexican club Toluca prompted brisk sales in Cardozo T-shirts back home in Paraguay.

But Cardozo's streak was overshadowed by a dispute between Toluca president Rafael Lebrija and the club's Uruguayan coach, Wilson Graneolatti, that led to a coaching

change before the semifinals.

Lebrija promoted Graneolatti from assistant to head coach after Argentine Ricardo Lavolpe quit as head coach in October to take over as Mexican national team coach.

After Toluca's lost to Guadalajara, 2-1, in the first leg of the quarterfinals, Lebrija asked the Mexican federation to loan Lavolpe for the second leg.

Unfortunately, Lavolpe was out of the country, scouting Mexico's U-21 team at the Central American & Caribbean Games in El Salvador. Toluca beat Chivas, 3-0, in the second leg, but Graneolatti quit after the game.

"I don't want to lose my decency," he said.

Argentine Alberto Jorge guided the Red Devils for their final four games.

They beat Santos, 5-3 and 2-1, in the semifinals and overcame a two-goal deficit to defeat Morelia, 4-2 on aggregate, in the final.

Morelia won the first leg, 1-0, to snap Cardozo's streak at 15 games and increased its lead 30 seconds into the second leg.

Cardozo had the third of the four unanswered goals in 33 minutes that gave Toluca the title.

