

Soccer

Brazilian soccer team’s plane crashes; 71 dead

By FERNANDO VERGARA AND JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

LA UNION, Colombia — Colombian authorities searched for answers Tuesday into the crash of a chartered airliner that slammed into the Andes mountains while transporting a Brazilian soccer team whose Cinderella story had won it a spot in the finals of one of South America’s most prestigious regional tournaments. All but six of the 77 people on board were killed.

The British Aerospace 146 short-haul plane declared an emergency and lost radar contact just before 10 p.m. Monday (0300 GMT Tuesday), according to Colombia’s aviation agency. It said the plane’s black boxes had been recovered and were being analyzed.

The aircraft, which departed from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, was carrying the Chapecoense soccer team from southern Brazil for Wednesday’s first leg of the two-game Copa Sudamericana final against Atletico Nacional of Medellin. Twenty-one Brazilian journalists were also on board the flight.

Colombian officials initially said the plane suffered an electrical failure but there was also heavy rainfall at the time of the crash. Authorities also said they were not ruling out the possibility, relayed to rescuers by a surviving flight attendant, that the plane ran out of fuel minutes before its scheduled landing at Jose Maria Cordova airport outside Medellin.

Whatever the cause, the emotional pain of Colombia’s deadliest air tragedy in two decades was felt across the soccer world.



Rescue workers place the bodies of victims of an airplane crash into a waiting helicopter, in La Union, near Medellin, Colombia, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2016. The plane was carrying the Brazilian first division soccer club Chapecoense team that was on it’s way for a Copa Sudamericana final match against Colombia’s Atletico Nacional.

Expressions of grief poured in as South America’s federation canceled all scheduled matches in a show of solidarity, Real Madrid’s squad interrupted its training for a minute of silence and Argentine legend Diego Maradona sent his condolences to the victims’ families over Facebook.

Brazil’s top teams offered to loan the small club players next season so they can rebuild following the sudden end to a fairy tale season that saw Chapecoense reach the tournament final just two years after making it into the first division for the first time since the 1970s. “It is the minimum gesture of solidarity that is within our reach,” the teams said in a statement.

Sportsmanship also prevailed, with Atletico Nacional asking that the championship title be given



In this Nov. 2, 2016 photo, players of Brazil’s Chapecoense team pose before a Copa Sudamericana soccer match against Argentina’s San Lorenzo in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

to its rival, whose upstart run had electrified soccer-crazed Brazil.

Rescuers working through the night were initially heartened after pulling three people alive from the wreckage. But as the hours

passed, heavy fog and stormy weather grounded helicopters and slowed efforts to reach the crash site.

At daybreak, dozens of bodies scattered across a muddy mountainside were collected into white bags.

College Football

Will Washington stop Colorado’s surprise comeback?

By PAT GRAHAM Associated Press

DENVER — For a team picked to be at the bottom, ninth-ranked Colorado sure made a quick ascent to the top.

No wonder the Buffaloes used “The Rise “ as one of their motivational mantras.

Coach Mike MacIntyre and the Buffaloes (10-2, 8-1 Pac-12, No. 9 CFP) have turned into one of the biggest surprises of college football this season. Picked last in the South Division during the preseason media poll , the resurgent Buffs reeled off six straight conference wins to earn a spot in the Pac-12 championship game Friday against No. 4 Washington (11-1, 8-1, No. 5 CFP).

That “Make CU Great again “ slogan plastered across the front of hats worn by Colorado players may need a little revising, because they’re well on their way.

“We’re getting there,” receiver Devin Ross said after beating Utah on Saturday. “We’re close. ... We still have a lot of work left to do.”

The Buffaloes play a Washington team that wasn’t a total surprise to win the North, even if Stanford was forecasted in the preseason poll. The Huskies sealed their spot in the league’s title game



Colorado quarterback Sefo Liufau, celebrates his run for a touchdown against Utah on Saturday.

AP Photo/David Zalubowski

by routing Washington State 45-17 in the Apple Cup last Friday.

“Hopefully we’ll show up and play our best game of the year,” Washington coach Chris Petersen said of the Pac-12 title game.

The Huskies go against a Colorado team led by a turnover-producing defense and gritty quarterback Sefo Liufau, who made a quicker-than-expected return from a severe foot injury he suffered a year ago. The Buffaloes finished last in the Pac-12 South in each of MacIntyre’s first three seasons in Boulder — winning a combined two league games — before this year’s transformation.

It was the first eight-win conference season in school history.

“The best word I can use right now is joy,” MacIntyre said. “Joy from the bottom of my toes to the top of my head for the players, the coaches, everybody involved with our program, all the fans that stayed with us and all the fans that came back.”

Here are things to know heading into the title game at Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara, California:

SEFO’S SUCCESS: Colorado wasn’t sure if Liufau would even be healed in time for the season after having surgery

PAC-12 Championship

#8 Colorado Buffaloes
(10-2, 8-1)

#4 Washington Huskies
(11-1, 8-1)

- Friday, 6 p.m.
- at Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara, California
- TV: FOX

last November to fix a Lisfranc injury , which usually involves a separation of ligaments and joints in the foot. The team courted graduate transfer QB Davis Webb, the gunslinger who announced he would be joining the Buffaloes soon after graduating from Texas Tech only to change his mind and head to California.

Liufau, who’s from Tacoma, Washington, has set or tied 87 school marks over his career.

BROWNING’S MOMENT: Jake Browning was deservedly in the Heisman Trophy conversation for most of the season. Then, he was quickly dropped after struggling in Washington’s loss to USC when he threw two interceptions.

Don’t discount Browning, though — his three-TD performance on Friday against Washington State may get him back into consideration. A big game against

the best pass defense in the Pac-12 just might get Browning to New York as a finalist. Browning has 40 touchdown passes this season, becoming just the third Pac-12 quarterback in league history to reach the 40 TD mark, joining Jared Goff and Marcus Mariota.

MAKING HISTORY: The Buffaloes are the fourth team to go from worst to first in the conference’s history. One of those was Washington, which accomplished the feat in 1959 when the Huskies followed up a 1-6 in ‘58 with a 3-1 mark in an abbreviated schedule.

TAILS NEVER FAILS: Colorado is 11-1 during the coin toss this season. The Buffs’ only loss on the coin flip was at USC on Oct. 8. That’s also the last time they’ve dropped a game.

HOME-RUN THREAT: The Huskies have 27 touchdowns this season of 25 or more yards and at least one in every game. The Buffaloes will want to keep a close eye on John Ross and Dante Pettis — either on offense or special teams — along with the running duo of Myles Gaskin and Lavon Coleman.

“Washington’s goal is to win the Pac-12 and our goal is to win the Pac-12. It’s going to be a great game,” MacIntyre said. “It’s going to be spectacular.”

HELFRICH: Just 22 months removed from National Championship Game trip

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No. 24 in the preseason AP Top 25, but lost 35-32 at Nebraska in the third week of the season, starting the team’s longest losing streak since 1996.

The Ducks had a brief revival with a 30-28 victory over then-No. 11 Utah in Salt Lake City two weeks ago, but they ended the season with a 34-24 loss to rival Oregon State in the 120th Civil War game this past Saturday. The loss snapped an eight-game Oregon winning streak in the series.

Afterward, Helfrich was asked about job security. “Nobody’s job is safe in college football,” he said. “That’s just the nature of the beast.”

Fan discontentment with Helfrich grew as the season dragged on and wins were scarce. Some questioned the wisdom of new assistant

Brady Hoke’s new defensive scheme, or the reliance on graduate transfers at quarterback for the past two seasons rather than long-term player development.

“Didn’t win enough games. I mean, that’s blunt. But that’s the fact. We have to own that part of it. And own the solution,” Helfrich said following the loss to the Beavers.

Whatever the reason, Oregon’s slide was a reminder of how hard it is to get good. And stay good.

When Helfrich was promoted into the job at the start of 2013, he had the daunting task of replacing enigmatic coach Chip Kelly, who orchestrated Oregon’s hyperdrive spread-option offense and led the Ducks to their first national championship game appearance in 2010. An affable native Oregonian, Helfrich had served as offensive coordinator under Kelly and

recruited future Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota.

Helfrich went 24-4 in his first two seasons, including a loss to Ohio State in the first College Football Playoff championship. But last year he was challenged with replacing Mariota. He lured graduate transfer Vernon Adams from Eastern Washington, but Adams struggled with injury.

The cracks were showing in that 9-4 season, the first with fewer than 10 wins since 2007. Losses to Michigan State, then at home to Utah and Washington State pushed Oregon out of the AP Top 25 for the first time since 2009.

The ultimate embarrassment came in the Alamo Bowl, when the Ducks surrendered a 31-0 lead and TCU staged the biggest comeback in bowl history to win 47-41 in triple overtime.

This season the Ducks

brought in another graduate transfer at quarterback, Dakota Prukop from Montana State. But after five starts, Prukop was benched in favor of true freshman Justin Herbert.

Herbert was one of the few bright spots in the dismal season, throwing for 1,936 yards and 19 touchdowns with four interceptions in nine appearances.

The overwhelming drag on Oregon’s success appeared to be the defense. The Ducks, who switched to a 4-3 scheme under Hoke, spent most of the season mired in the bottom of the NCAA defensive rankings. At times it appeared that the players didn’t know their assignments.

The defensive shortcomings were readily apparent in Oregon’s 70-21 loss at home to No. 5 Washington on Oct. 8. Huskies quarterback Jake Browning threw for six touchdowns in the victory,

which snapped a 12-game losing streak to the rival Ducks.

The issues on defense were again on display Saturday against the Beavers. The Ducks’ season ended without a bowl game for the first time since 2004. Oregon had finished every season ranked in the AP Top 25 since 2007.

Mullens said he waited until Tuesday to put some distance between the emotions of the final loss.

“No one wanted Mark to be more successful than me,” Mullens said. “We were not competing in a number of games and we were on a poor trajectory.”

In the statement Tuesday night, Helfrich thanked his wife and family, the campus community, the fans, and his coaches and their families.

“Finally, to the players thank you, and I love you,” he said. “The future is bright for this young,

talented team, and we will be supporting them and their new leadership.”

At a news conference following the announcement, Mullens said that Oregon will look outside the program for candidates, and the new coach will make decisions about the current staff. There is no timeline for a decision, but recruiting adds urgency to the process.

Mullens said he informed the players of his decision earlier in the evening.

“It was difficult,” he said. “Players were upset because they lost a family member.”

Outside sources point to Western Michigan head coach P.J. Fleck as a front-runner for the Oregon job, as well as Boise State head coach Bryan Harsin, Oklahoma offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley, and Central Florida head coach and former Oregon assistant Scott Frost as other possibilities.