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## Chile's Livingstone reflects on long Copa career

By Gideon Long

MENDOZA, Argentina, July 19 (Reuters) - When Sergio Livingstone says that the current Chile side is the best he has ever seen, it is quite a claim. At the age of 91 and having worked in football all his life, he has seen a few.

Livingstone was Chile's goalkeeper in the 1940s and 1950s. He appeared in six Copas Americas, playing 34 times - a record that stands to this day.

He also played at the 1950 World Cup in Brazil, captaining Chile against England in Rio de Janeiro's newly inaugurated Maracana stadium.

"We lost 2-0. Wilf Mannion and Stan Mortensen were the scorers," Livingstone, with a razor-sharp memory that belies his years, recalls of the game that marked England's World Cup debut. "It was a great England team. They had a fine goalkeeper, Bert Williams, and Billy Wright was their captain."

Six decades later and despite his age, Livingstone works as a lively and perceptive pundit for Chilean state broadcaster TVN.

He still goes to all Chile's matches. When he arrived at the stadium for their game against Peru last week, white haired and walking with the aid of a crutch, he was given a standing ovation by the Chilean fans.

More than 70 years have passed since Livingstone made his Copa America debut on home soil in 1941.

"There was no television, people didn't have cars and they took the bus to the stadium," he told Reuters in an interview at TVN's Copa America studios in

Mendoza. "There were no perimeter fences in the ground, and it filled up very early. There wasn't much else to do in those days."

Livingstone played in Copas in Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay between 1942 and 1953 but he missed the 1946 edition in Argentina.

"In December 1945 I injured my knee," he recalled. "The Copa started in January 1946 and I had to skip it. It's the knee that still gives me problems today."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, he regards the Brazil side of 1970 as the best he has ever seen, although he rates Argentine-born Alfredo Di Stefano above Pele.

"Di Stefano was a tremendous player, although of course he played before the television era and he never played at a World Cup," said Livingstone, who played (and conceded a goal) against Di Stefano in a 1-1 draw at the 1947 Copa America in Ecuador.

The grandson of Scottish immigrants, Livingstone remembers watching his father, John Henry Livingstone, play for Santiago National, a now-extinct founding member of the Chilean football league.

"He was a player and a journalist, he organised boxing bouts and swimming galas and he even went to the (1928) Olympics in Amsterdam as an official observer," he said.

Courteous and articulate, Livingstone is happy to talk about his past, but his eyes really light up when he talks about the current Chile side.

"This is THE Chilean side for me. I've seen many, some good, some bad, some that have finished as runners-up, some that have almost won the Copa, but in terms of their football, their mentality, their intelligence, I've never seen a Chile team like this before."

Despite having witnessed over 30 Copas Americas as a player, fan and journalist, Livingstone has never seen Chile win it. They have finished as runners-up four times.

This time, they reached the quarter-finals then fell to Venezuela 2-1 on Sunday, in line with Livingstone's pessimistic prediction.

"I'm always very sceptical, almost negative," he said before the game in San Juan. "I'm not like the youngsters who say 'We're going to win 4-0'. People are dreamers, and I don't dream.

"It would be great if they won the Copa America but I'm always fearful - of football, the future, the reality of life, the hard knocks that sport can sometimes give you."

Now that the Copa is over for them, Chile's next big target will be the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, where Livingstone played against the English all those years ago.

Will he make the return journey?

"By 2014 I'll be six feet under, looking at the plants from down below," he said with a chuckle. "It's not a date I'm thinking about."

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