

## Al Jazeera after EPL rights

AFP, London

Premier League clubs could be set for another huge cash windfall if the "realistic prospect" of Al Jazeera challenging rival Sky for the UK television rights comes to pass, according to a senior ESPN executive.

The English Premier League is the world's richest football league and its last three-year television deal, which runs out next season, brought in £3.5 billion (\$5.4 billion, 4.1 billion euros), of which £1.4 billion was paid by foreign broadcasters.

In Britain, Sky shows the lion's share of matches to a UK domestic audience, while fellow satellite station ESPN broadcasts a lesser number of live matches and the terrestrial BBC screens highlights.

Qatar-based Al Jazeera, best known for its news coverage of the Middle East, made rival television stations sit up and take notice when it beat Canal Plus to the French Ligue 1 and Champions League rights.

Ross Hair, ESPN's head of Europe, Middle East and Africa, believes Al Jazeera could challenge Sky for the next three-year contract -- a move which if successful would put a major dent in Sky's existing business plan.

## Podolski close to joining Arsenal

AFP, Berlin

Experienced German striker Lukas Podolski is close to joining English Premier League side Arsenal from Cologne German daily Bild claimed on its website on Tuesday.

The 26-year-old - capped 95 times and a veteran of two World Cups and Euro 2008 - has apparently already agreed personal terms with Arsenal, though, the two clubs have yet to agree a fee.

Podolski's contract with Cologne, a club he adores as he grew up in the city after his family moved there from Poland, runs till 2013 and the Bundesliga outfit had been trying to get him to sign an extension.

Although presently out injured he has scored 15 goals out of the 30 the club has netted in the Bundesliga, in which they lie fifth from bottom and battling against relegation.



Australia goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer (R) blocks a shot from Saudi Arabia striker Yahia Sulaiman Alshehri (C) during their 2014 World Cup qualifier in Melbourne yesterday.

# Saudis crash out

AFP, Melbourne



Australia scored three goals in five whirlwind minutes to come back from behind and dump Frank Rijkaard's Saudi Arabia out of 2014 World Cup qualification in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Australia trailed 2-1 at half-time but hit back with three second-half goals to run out 4-2 winners, as Oman leap-frogged the Saudis to claim the second Group D qualifying spots.

Oman's 2-0 home win over Thailand took them past the lavishly-funded Saudis into the March 9 draw for the final round of Asian group qualifiers.

Saudi Arabia will miss out on their second straight World Cup finals campaign after qualifying for four consecutive tournaments from 1994 to 2006.

The Saudis rocked the home side, scoring twice in the opening half and controlling possession, but Australia emerged stronger after German coach Holger Osieck's half-time team talk.

The road to Brazil has not been altogether smooth for Australia -- they lost in Oman in November and were lucky to scrape a win against Thailand four days later -- and skipper Lucas Neill admitted Saudi Arabia caught them off guard on Wednesday.

"It wasn't the best of first-half performances, we knew the Saudis would come at us, but it was a great response and a good talk at half-time and passing the ball around quickly in the second half opened them up a

little bit," Neill said.

"It's March 9 now and then we can look ahead and we can really focus in on what we have to do to get to Brazil, the games are going to get tougher than this and we're going to have to be at our best."

Young midfielder Salem Al-Dossari put the Saudis in front in the 19th minute with a brilliant goal, controlling the ball and eluding three defenders before unleashing a strike that beat Fulham goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer.

Australia gradually got more possession and equalised two minutes before half-time when the recalled Mark Bresciano put Alex Brosque clear and the Shimizu S-Pulse striker beat Waleed Abdullah from close range.

But the Socceroos paid for slack marking in first half injury time when Hassan Fallatah's cross found Nasser Alshamrani, who put the Saudis ahead for a second time.

Neill had a headed equaliser -- which would have been his first international goal -- flagged offside on 63 minutes, though replays suggested he was in line with the last defender as the ball was whipped into the box.

But the home side did finally equalise in the 72nd minute when the impressive Brosque laid on a ball for Harry Kewell to sidefoot home his 17th international goal.

The hosts then netted twice in quick succession to lead 4-2, with Brosque glancing home a Brett Emerton cross and Emerton scoring after an assist from the outstanding Bresciano to leave Rijkaard shaking his head in disbelief.

## Terry to return in a month

AFP, London

Chelsea defender John Terry hopes to be playing again within a month after undergoing successful knee surgery.

The 31-year-old centre-half was initially ruled out for up to eight weeks last week after a knee problem picked up in January failed to heal properly.

However Terry told The Sun on Wednesday that an operation to fix the problem had gone well and he was confident of returning to anchor Chelsea's faltering Premier League campaign.

"The operation went well and I'm feeling really good," he said.

"The surgeon has shaved off a bit of bone in my right knee that was rubbing and causing a lot of swelling."

"We're all confident the operation has solved the problem and it is looking good for a quick return."

"The medical staff say four to six weeks before I can play again. But, hopefully, it might be sooner."

"I'll definitely be back before the end of the season to help the team in the Premier League run-in and for the Euros."

# Lloris to lead France

AFP, Bremen



Lyon goalkeeper Hugo Lloris will captain France at Euro 2012, national coach Laurent Blanc announced here on Tuesday.

The France squad are in Bremen for a friendly game with Germany on Wednesday evening and at his pre-game press conference, Blanc was asked whether Lloris would lead his side in this summer's tournament in Poland and Ukraine.

"You can think that, yes," he replied.

Lloris made his international debut in a friendly game with Uruguay in November 2008 and has since won 30 caps.

"I think that Hugo offers the most guarantees in this role," explained Blanc.

"He'll wear the armband, but don't forget that he's not the only important one in the squad. He seems to have the control and the clarity that you need for the role."

"It's a real choice, not a default choice."

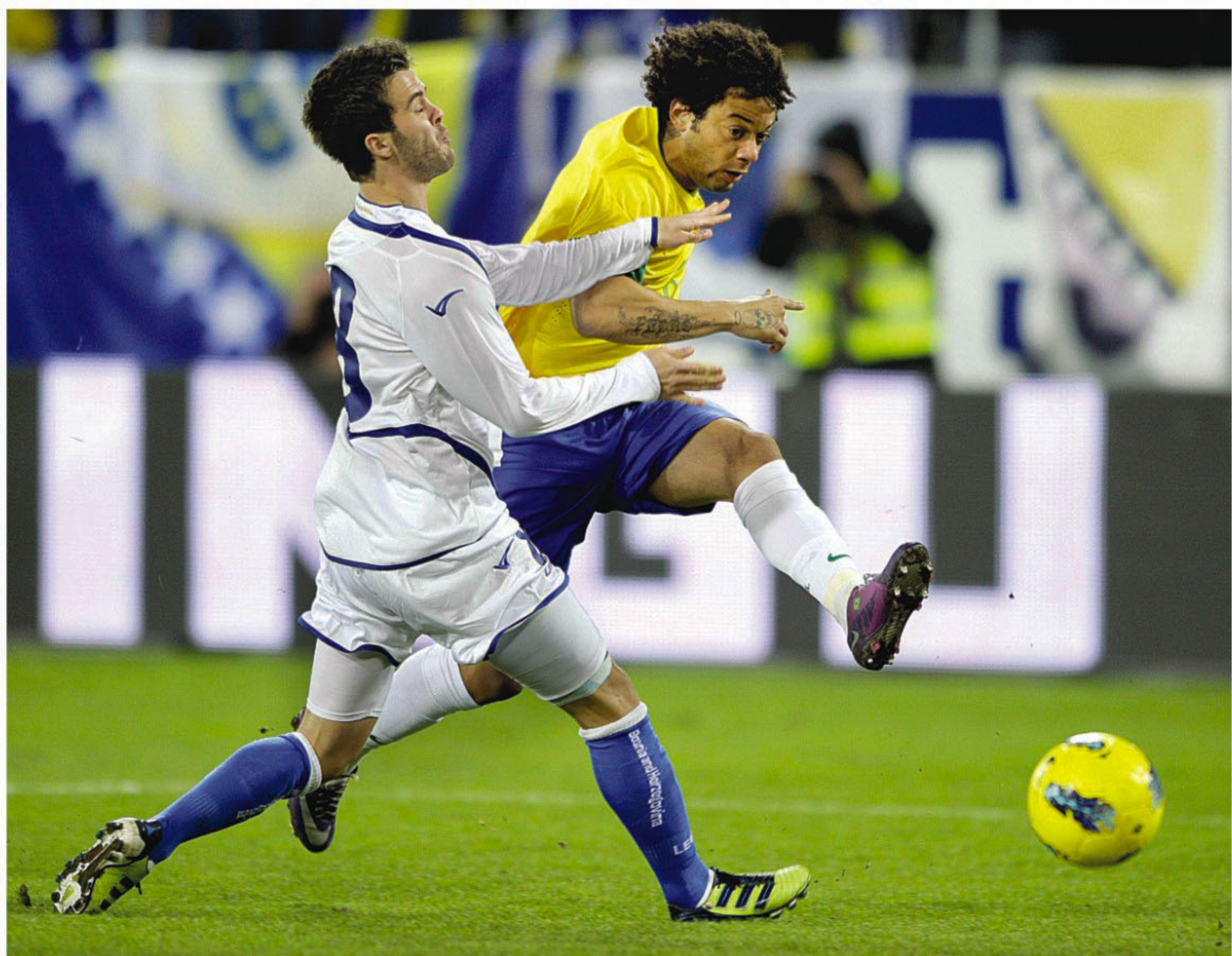
Blanc had revealed last week that Lloris, 25, was on a three-man shortlist to wear the armband, alongside AC Milan centre-back Philippe Mexes and Barcelona left-back Eric Abidal.

A member of the France team eliminated from the 2010 World Cup in South Africa at the group phase, Lloris joined Lyon from home-town club Nice in 2008 and was named Ligue 1 goalkeeper of the year in 2009 and 2010.

He has previously skippered France on six occasions under Blanc, having worn the armband for the first time in the 2-1 friendly victory over England at Wembley in November 2010.

Aside from Lloris, Mexes and Abidal, the other players to have captained France since Blanc took over from Raymond Domenech in 2010 are Alou Diarra, Florent Malouda and Samir Nasri.

Blanc expressed the hope that Franck Ribery would succeed in translating his fine form at club level for Bayern Munich to the international stage.



Brazil fullback Marcelo (R) scores the opening goal against Bosnia-Herzegovina during their international friendly in St-Gallen on Tuesday.

# Brazil edge Bosnia

Football

AFP, St Gallen

Brazil, thanks to a last gasp own goal, beat gallant Bosnia 2-1 in an international friendly here on Tuesday in the five time world champions' first run out of the year.

The 2014 World Cup hosts took a fourth minute lead when Marcelo burst forward to latch onto Dani Alves' pass, the Real Madrid back then finishing off the move in style, drilling the ball low into the far corner of Asmir Begovic's goal.

Bosnia though were back level nine minutes later.

Brazil were largely at fault when the error-prone Chelsea defender David Luiz gave the ball away, striker Vedad Ibisevic seizing his chance with Brazil keeper Julio Cesar unable to stop his rather weak effort.

Begovic, who plays his club football in England with Stoke, was instrumental in preventing the South American giants reclaiming the advantage in the 17th minute when he saved Leandro Damiao's attempt, with Bosnia defender Emir Spahic clearing the loose ball away to safety.

Despite enjoying much of the possession in an open-sided first half Brazil, with Ronaldinho and Neymar in their ranks but no Kaka, went into the break on level terms against the team that only just missed out on qualifying for Euro 2012.

Brazil's attack was missing its first half potency after the interval, with coach Mano Menezes replacing Flamengo veteran Ronaldinho with Ganso after the hour mark - Hulk came on for Hernanes shortly after.

And on 74 minutes the Santos starlet saw his curling shot into the far corner saved by Begovic in a move set up by Ze Elias.

Hulk fluffed a gilt-edged chance late on when he missed the ball completely after being set up by Alves.

But Brazil, who looked more dangerous following the introduction of Lucas Moura for Leandro late on, ended the night on a fortuitous high when Bosnia's Sasa Papac, who plays his club football for Scottish champions Rangers, turned the ball into his own net after Hulk had fired into the area.

## Tevez plays for City

AFP, London

Carlos Tevez played his first 45 minutes of football for Manchester City since ending his self-imposed exile from the Premier League leaders' when he appeared in a reserve match on Tuesday.

The Argentina striker had a run-out in the first half of the City elite development squad's home defeat by Preston reserves at Carrington.

The fixture was originally scheduled for Wednesday but City moved it to their training ground on Tuesday and played the match behind closed doors in a bid to reduce what would otherwise have been a large media contingent.

According to a City statement, quoted by the BBC, Tevez "saw plenty of action without getting a goal chance in his first 45 minutes back".

In his absence, the City side lost 3-1 to Preston's second string.

Tevez fell-out with Roberto Mancini after the City manager accused him of refusing to warm-up during a Champions League defeat away to Bayern Munich back in September.

## Del Bosque defends decision

AFP, Madrid

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque defended his squad choice for Wednesday's friendly against Venezuela, marked by the absence of off-form Chelsea striker Fernando Torres.

"We regret that important players have been ruled out but others benefit," del Bosque told a news conference on Tuesday on the eve of the match in Malaga.

"There are no favourites in the squad. Everyone is equal."

Torres, 27, who scored the winning goal for Spain in the Euro 2008 final against Germany, has struggled since joining Chelsea last year, failing to score in his last 24 outings for the Premier League side.

His absence marks the first time he has been overlooked by his country since he missed a friendly against Romania in November 2006.

Wednesday's friendly marks the final match for Spain before May, when Del Bosque is due to announce his squad for the Euro 2012 tournament in Poland and Ukraine.

Del Bosque has stressed he may still make changes before deciding upon his 23-man squad for the Euro.

For the Venezuela match, Valencia forward Roberto Soldado has been recalled for the first time since June 2007, in the absence of Barcelona's injured hitman David Villa.

Athletic Bilbao's highly-rated youngster Iker Muniain has received his first senior call-up and will vie with Bilbao teammate Fernando Llorente and Sevilla frontman Alvaro Negredo for a spot in attack.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Which youngster has impressed you the most in the BPL?

Visit the sports page of [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) to cast vote

Follow The Daily Star Sport on

twitter

[www.twitter.com/dssport](http://www.twitter.com/dssport)

What to WATCH

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm