

Mission: Stop C'Ron

GERMANY 8 WINS **HEAD TO HEAD** **PORTUGAL 3 WINS**
Played: 16
Draws 5

REUTERS, Gdansk

Germany know they must curb Portugal forward Cristiano Ronaldo's dizzying runs down the left in their Euro 2012 Group B opener on Saturday but their shaky defence has yet to show it is up to the task.

Coach Joachim Loew has a wealth of midfield talent but far fewer options in defence with a final decision on his centre backs still pending as Germany bid for a fourth European crown in a tough group that also includes Netherlands and Denmark.

While Holger Badstuber looks set to start at the heart of the German backline, speculation over his partner continues.

Fellow Bayern Munich defender Jerome Boateng is likely to switch to the right, a position he is uncomfortable with, to make way for central defender Per Mertesacker. Lars Bender could also be an option at right back, Loew said on Thursday.

The experienced Mertesacker, however, has hardly played since an ankle injury in February and looked completely out of place in the 5-3 friendly defeat by Switzerland in late May.

Captain Philipp Lahm will shift from his usual slot on the right to left back which is not his preferred position.

"We will need to talk a lot on the pitch and to support each other," Mertesacker said. "I am experienced in understanding what the team needs."

"We have angered him (Ronaldo) a few

times in the past and we must do it again. What we should not do is give him too many one-on-one situations."

The defence will rely on holding midfielders Sami Khedira and Bastian Schweinsteiger to get early tackles in on Ronaldo, though 'Schweini' is far from his best after nursing a nagging thigh problem for two weeks in a season sprinkled with injuries.

"We have to go to him (Ronaldo) early and take away any space he has," said his club team mate Khedira.

"Basically, we need to spoil his enjoyment. He is Portuguese and the Portuguese do not function that well when they do not enjoy themselves.

"I have never seen anyone else who has Cristiano's talent and confidence. He can just do everything. I think you can never completely shut out a player like Ronaldo."

For Portugal, the key to success against Germany will be how Ronaldo plays his part in his team's collective effort.

The forward has said Portugal's aim is to win the tournament after coming agonisingly close as hosts in 2004 when they were upset by outsiders Greece in the Lisbon final.



Germany fullback Philipp Lahm controls the ball during a training session in Gdansk on Thursday. Germany take on Portugal in a Euro 2012 encounter tonight. PHOTO: REUTERS

Ozil salutes Ronaldo

AFP, Gdansk

With Germany set to face Portugal on Saturday in their opening Euro 2012 match, German star Mesut Ozil has poured praise on his Real Madrid team-mate and Portuguese captain Cristiano Ronaldo.

Ronaldo will lead Portugal at Lviv, Ukraine, on Saturday in their first Group B match against Ozil's Germany with the two Real star midfielders set to go head-to-head and the German insists Ronaldo is 'simply a nice guy'.

"He is for me an extraordinary player, in every way," Ozil wrote in his column for German daily Die Welt online having joined Real after the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

"When I arrived at Real Madrid almost two years ago, I felt he really took care of me.

"He's not a loner, actually he gives a lot for the whole team.

"He acts as an example for the rest of the squad and now I know that he is simply a nice guy."

Ozil says Ronaldo shows his deep desire to win even in training with Real.

Japan thrash Jordan

AFP, Saitama

Keisuke Honda scored a hat-trick to lead Asian Cup holders Japan to a 6-0 victory over Jordan on Friday in the 2014 World Cup Asian qualifiers.

Shinji Kagawa, who recently agreed a big-money move to Manchester United from Borussia Dortmund, was also on the score sheet.

Honda set up the first goal with a corner which two-time J-League top goal scorer Ryoichi Maeda headed home in the 18th minute.

He bagged Japan's second goal when he cashed in on a pass from Gamba Osaka midfielder Yasuhito Endo just three minutes later, and Japan were given a further boost when Abdallah Deeb was sent off in the 27th minute for a second bookable offence.

Honda made it 3-0 on the half hour mark, with an easy finish after Stuttgart forward Shinji Okazaki's shot hit a defender.

With 10 minutes to go before half-time, Schalke defender Atsuto Uchida sent in a short cross for Kagawa who put Japan 4-0 up.

Most important game

DENMARK 7 WINS **HEAD TO HEAD** **HOLLAND 12 WINS**
Played: 29
Draws 10

REUTERS, Krakow

Wily Netherlands coach Bert van Marwijk believes Denmark know his side too well but is not about to fiddle with his tried and tested formula for a Euro 2012 Group B opener which he has labelled "the most important game". Germany and Portugal also await in the fiendishly difficult-looking Group B and World Cup runners-up Netherlands want a fast start against the modest Danes in Kharkiv on Saturday to get points on the board before the trickier encounters ahead.

Van Marwijk is aware however that 1992 winners Denmark are dangerous on their day and Morten Olsen's men have all the information they could ever need on their orange-clad foes.

"We have no secrets. A lot of their players play in Holland and also in other European leagues, their style of play is a little bit the same, both teams respect each other," Van Marwijk told reporters.

"For me it is the most important game."

The two sides met in the 2010 World Cup group stage with the Dutch winning 2-0.

Centre back Joris Mathijsen is almost certainly out of the Kharkiv match because of a hamstring problem so Ron Vlaar or Wilfried Bouma are likely to step in.

Otherwise Netherlands will unleash their

armoury of potent weapons including Arjen Robben and Robin van Persie, whose silky skills have been wowing the vast crowds at their training sessions in Krakow and helped destroy Northern Ireland 6-0 in their last friendly.

The Danes believe they offer enough of a threat themselves to stun the Dutch, especially with their defence looking shaky given Mathijsen's injury and left back Jetro Willems in line to pick up only his second cap.

"There are a lot of players who can take charge in midfield, and provide both goals and assists," said Denmark striker Nicklas Bendtner, who has six goals in his last eight internationals.

"It's looking good, we've been practising well and intensely. We just need the last technical and tactical details and we'll be on our way."

Christian Eriksen, of Dutch champions Ajax, will pull the strings for the Scandinavians in midfield as he looks to fulfil his promise and become one of Europe's most talked about players.

"I've known I'd be under pressure from the beginning. The more you play, the more focus and pressure there'll be on you - I hope it stays that way," the 20-year-old said.

"Of course, it's been a different kind of spotlight than that which I have been under before, but it's fine."

Mertesacker fit to play

AFP, Gdansk

German central defender Per Mertesacker has been given the all-clear to face Portugal in their opening Euro 2012 match on Saturday after suffering an injury scare in training.

The Arsenal centre-back, who was out for three months last season following ankle surgery in February, collided with team-mate Jerome Boateng from a corner in training on Thursday, but after initial concerns, was given the all-clear.

Mertesacker comes into the European Championship with just two games under his belt having played in last month's friendlies against Switzerland and Israel, but Germany assistant coach Hansi Flick said he is fit to play.

"There was some brief uncertainty about Per," said Flick here before Germany flew to Lviv, Ukraine, on Friday morning for their Group B match.

"After a corner, he collided with Jerome Boateng and he remained on the ground for a while, but it wasn't as dramatic as it first looked."

Dutch players abused

REUTERS, Krakow

Netherlands players heard monkey chants from the crowd at a Euro 2012 training session at Wisla Krakow's stadium this week, a team spokeswoman said on Friday, casting a shadow over what had been a near carnival atmosphere.

The build-up to the tournament being co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine was dominated by worries about racism among home fans.

Coach Bert van Marwijk, Dutch officials and many of the press did not hear any racist abuse during Wednesday's session but it has since emerged that a handful of the squad did.

"Some players did hear some monkey noises. That is why they moved to the other side of the pitch," the spokeswoman said.

The Dutch FA (KNVB) did not lodge a formal complaint with UEFA but was contacted by soccer's European governing body after reports of the incident appeared in local Dutch media.

"UEFA has now been made aware that there were some isolated incidents of racist chanting that occurred at the open training session of the Dutch team in Krakow," UEFA said in a statement on Friday.

"Should such behaviour happen at further training sessions UEFA would evaluate the operational measures to be taken to protect the players.

"UEFA has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to discriminatory behaviour and has given the power to referees to stop matches in case of any repeated racist behaviour."

UEFA has a film crew at all open training sessions but they did not pick up any racist chanting on their video.

Immediately after Wednesday's session, Van Marwijk had told reporters the atmosphere was fantastic with over 30,000 people turning up just to watch training.

Krakow is not staging any matches.

Netherlands captain Mark van Bommel told Dutch reporters on Thursday: "Open your ears. If you did hear it, and don't want to hear it, that is even worse."

UEFA president Michel Platini, under pressure after boldly handing the tournament to the two countries, said players should let the referee handle racist abuse after some players indicated they would walk off the pitch if it occurred in matches.

Italy's Mario Balotelli said last month he would "kill" anyone who threw a banana at him in the street during the European Championship.

Referring to racist chants, he added: "If it happened I would walk off the pitch and return home. We are in 2012. It's not possible."

The Polish and Ukrainian governments have worked hard to try to dispel any fears of racism but a BBC documentary suggested it was prevalent among certain fan groups.

World Cup runners-up Netherlands, who have a number of black players, open their Euro 2012 Group B campaign against Denmark in Ukraine's Kharkiv on Saturday.

What to WATCH

Maasranga TV
Euro 2012
Netherlands v Denmark
Live from 10:00pm
Germany v Portugal
Live from 12:45am (Sunday)

TEN Cricket
Sri Lanka v Pakistan
Second ODI
Live from 4:00pm

STAR Cricket
England v West Indies
Third Test, Day 3
Live from 4:00pm

NEO Sports
French Open
Women's Singles Final
Live from 7:00pm
Euro 2012
Germany v Portugal
Live from 12:45am (Sunday)

ESPN
Sportscenter India



Argentina superstar Lionel Messi (C) and midfielder Javier Mascherano (L) take part in a training session at the Red Bull Arena in New Jersey on Thursday. Argentina will play arch-rivals Brazil in an international friendly tonight. PHOTO: REUTERS

Bunga bunga OK but no booze

REUTERS, Warsaw

Poland coach Franciszek Smuda would rather turn a blind eye to his players enjoying "bunga bunga" than accept his players drinking alcohol, he said on Friday.

Smuda, whose side open Euro 2012 against Greece in the Polish capital later on Friday, has a strict no-alcohol policy and in April dropped Slawomir Peszko from the squad after the midfielder ended up in police custody following a night of drinking.

"It's better to have bunga bunga than to abuse alcohol," Smuda was quoted as saying by Polish daily Dziennik Gazeta Prawna. "Alcohol just blows my fuse."

"Bunga bunga" refers to the name that former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi bestowed on the wild parties he allegedly held with bevy of young starlets and prostitutes at his villas.

Commenting on the Peszko episode, Smuda said: "I will say it straight: you have to be a moron to do something like that."

Fiorentina keeper Artur Boruc and Legia Warsaw defender Michal Zewlakow have also been punished by Smuda's anti-alcohol crusade.

"If I gave players the impression that I'm a pushover, jelly or pudding, we would be done for. You can't show that," Smuda said.

Smuda was born in a village in Poland's southern Silesia region with strong historic links to Germany and has spent a large part of his life abroad, which helps explain why he can often appear at odds with the Polish language.

Smuda, who took the post in 2009 after Poland's failure to qualify for the World Cup in South Africa, sets the Borussia Dortmund's Polish trio - Lukasz Piszczek, Kuba Blaszczykowski and Robert Lewandowski - as the example to follow.

"In my opinion, in a moment they will be gone from Borussia," Smuda said. "Lewy is going to Manchester United, Kuba also somewhere in England, Piszczek to Real (Madrid)."

"They have a goal and they want to grow. I base the squad on them."

Mvila to miss England tie

AFP, Donetsk

France's highly-rated midfielder Yann Mvila is unlikely to have recovered from an ankle injury in time for their opening Euro 2012 clash with England on Monday, the team doctor said Friday.

The 21-year-old Rennes star - who is being courted by several big European clubs - injured his ankle in the warm-up match with Serbia on May 31 and while he has made speedy progress Fabrice Bryand said he wasn't optimistic about his chances of being fit for Monday's Group D game.

"Yann Mvila has a sprained ankle. We are trying to do our utmost to get him back as quickly as possible," said Dr Bryand.

"His progress has been spectacular but we don't want to be too over confident."

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Could the Tigers have played other formats before World T20s?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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www.twitter.com/dssport

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League
Arambagh v Farashganj
Time: 5:30pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Team BJMC v Mohammedan
Time: 4:00pm
Venue: Tangail Stadium
Soccer Club, Feni v Rahmatganj
Time: 4:00pm