



PHOTO: AFP
Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during their 2014 World Cup qualifier against Azerbaijan at the AXA Stadium in Braga on Tuesday.

Focused on winning

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo says he is focused on winning for Real Madrid and not on his contract, beating down speculation that he is unhappy with his reported 10-million-euro (\$13 million) salary.

Ronaldo shocked fans last week by declaring he was "sad" at the Spanish league champions without explaining why, except to insist later that it had nothing to do with money.

"I would like to reaffirm, without being concerned about contracts, that my focus is solely on winning every game and every available trophy with the essential company of my teammates and all madridistas," Ronaldo said on his Facebook account on Wednesday evening.

Spanish media have speculated that Ronaldo's real gripe is his level of pay compared to other top players worldwide.

Top-selling Spanish sports daily Marca said this week that Real Madrid president Florentino Perez was ready to offer him a "substantial" pay increase

and an extension in his contract, without citing its source.

Marca said Ronaldo wanted 15 million euros a year, also without providing a source.

The paper says the star forward now earns 10 million euros and is 10th in the list of the world's best-paid footballers, with Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o of Russian side Anzhi Makhachkala on 20 million euros and new Paris Saint-Germain recruit Zlatan Ibrahimovic on 14.5 million euros.

Ronaldo, who joined Real Madrid on July 1, 2009, still has three years to run on his initial six-season contract.

Speculation that Ronaldo was unhappy with his salary did not go down well with fans in Spain, which is in a deepening recession with one in four workers unemployed.

A cartoon on a rival Barcelona fans' Internet site shows two men sitting at a bar.

One says to his friend: "Poor Cristiano, he's never had the luck to work in construction or in a mine." His friend replies: "If I wasn't unemployed I would scrape together some money for him."

The 27-year-old Ronaldo confessed to being "sad" when asked why he had not celebrated either of the two goals he

scored in Real Madrid's 3-0 win over Granada on September 2.

Ronaldo has still not explained why he is unhappy, saying only that it was for professional, not personal reasons.

"People know why," he said.

Asked if he was upset because Barcelona midfielder Andres Iniesta was crowned UEFA Best Player in Europe, he replied: "No, it's not that. There are more important things."

Last week, the forward took to his Facebook page and Twitter to deny financial motives for his misery.

"That I am feeling sad and have expressed this sadness has created a huge stir," Ronaldo said. "I am accused of wanting more money, but one day it will be shown that this is not the case."

Madrid coach Jose Mourinho has refused to comment.

"I am not going to say anything about that," the Portuguese coach said when asked about his compatriot's troubles during an interview with sports daily AS published last week.

"I am ready to talk about everything. I have answered in depth and sincerely. But don't ask me about Cristiano. You have to understand. Please don't insist."

Iniesta out for 2 weeks

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona midfielder Andres Iniesta will be out for between 10 days and two weeks after suffering an adductor injury while playing for Spain in mid-week, the Catalan club have announced.

Iniesta, who was recently named UEFA's Best Player in Europe for 2012, was hurt during Spain's 1-0 World Cup qualifying win in Georgia and will miss Saturday's trip to Getafe in La Liga, as well as the Champions League meeting with Spartak Moscow next Wednesday.

The 28-year-old is also a doubt for the league game against Granada scheduled for September 22.

Meanwhile, Barcelona also has a concern over the fitness of left-back Jordi Alba, who returned from international duty with Spain suffering from flu.

PSG leave out Lavezzi

AFP, Paris

Argentina forward Ezequiel Lavezzi has been left out of Paris Saint-Germain's squad for their home game with Toulouse on Friday after playing for his country in mid-week.

The former Napoli player is eligible to play after serving a two-match suspension, but PSG coach Carlo Ancelotti opted to leave him out after he featured in Argentina's World Cup qualifying matches against Peru and Paraguay.

Summer signing Thiago Silva, centre-back Diego Lugano and central midfielder Mohamed Sissoko have also been omitted from the squad to face Toulouse at the Parc des Princes.



ATN Bangla
Bangladesh v South Africa
Third Women's T20I



Bangladesh v South Africa
Third Women's T20I
Time: 10:00am
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

Wenger to get new deal

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger is set to be offered a new contract with Arsenal despite the club's seven-year trophy drought, Gunners chief executive Ivan Gazidis hinted on Thursday.

Wenger has been unable to find a solution to Arsenal's fall from grace since they won their last trophy, the 2005 FA Cup, and a host of top players, including Robin van Persie and Cesc Fabregas, have left the club in frustration at their failure to compete for major honours.

It is eight years since Arsenal were last crowned English champions and Wenger has increasingly seemed to settle for qualifying for the Champions League via a top-four finish in the Premier League rather than battling Manchester United, Manchester City and Chelsea for first place.

But Gazidis is adamant the 62-year-old, who is under contract until 2014, remains the right man for the job.

"It's not a sense of sentimentalism, not a reward for our services, it's a belief that we have an incredible manager who loves this club and is the best man to lead us forward,"

Gazidis told The Daily Mirror.

"We're really confident about the direction that the club is heading. We're coming through strongly and we believe we're really well placed."

"We hope and believe that Arsene will be a part of that as we move forward. He is written into our DNA."

Despite his recent struggles, Wenger is regarded as Arsenal's greatest ever manager, having led the club to three Premier League titles and four FA Cups since arriving in north London in 1996.

And Gazidis insisted that Wenger's impact on Arsenal has been so significant that his eventual successor will have to hold a similar footballing philosophy to the Frenchman.

"The values that Arsene has brought to the club, together with the values the club had before Arsene, are what will inform us -- and I don't want to give any indication that this is happening -- and give us the framework as to who might take over from him in the longer term," Gazidis said.

Wenger, who has reportedly turned down top jobs with the likes of Real Madrid and England to remain with Arsenal in the past, responded to Gazidis's glowing tribute with a more cautious stance.

He claimed he will always be an "Arsenal man" but is in no hurry to open talks over a new contract with such a busy schedule of matches coming up, starting with Saturday's clash against Southampton.

"I have two years to go. What is important for me is Southampton and I think I have shown my commitment to this club in the past," Wenger said.

"At the moment I am not in the mood to think about the long-term future. We want to do well this season, that's all."

"I am an Arsenal man. I think I have always shown that. I have to consider if I do well or not. If I don't do well, I have to consider my future."

"I have been at the club long enough to have confidence in the people I work with, but I will assess my own performances and then make a decision. At the moment we are not there."

"Two years is a long time in my job. I just want to do well for the club as long as I can and accept all the rest."

"I have to consider that at my age, you always have to assess if you have the fitness, the desire, the commitment that this job demands."

Real's Sevilla test

REUTERS, Madrid



Sevilla president Jose Maria Del Nido has been the most vocal critic of the stranglehold the big clubs exert over TV rights income and his side can also make a point on the pitch when they host Real Madrid on Saturday.

The lack of a collective bargaining system in La Liga means Real and Barcelona account for about half the TV pot of 600 million euros (\$773.31 million).

That helps make them the world's richest clubs by income, with annual earnings close to 500 million euros, and means they can afford to buy the best players and pay the highest wages.

Del Nido has called La Liga "a load of rubbish", saying only the big two have a realistic chance of winning the title, and there is widespread support among other clubs for the introduction of a revenue sharing system like those used in rival European leagues.

However, Real and Barca have shown little sign they are prepared to cede to such demands as they look to protect their status as dominant powers.

Real, who dropped five points in their opening three games this season, have put 15 goals past Sevilla in their last three league meetings including a pair of crushing 6-2 victories in the Andalusian capital.

Under coach Michel, a former Real player, Sevilla are undefeated this term but in recent years have looked a shadow of the side that

won consecutive UEFA Cups in 2006 and 2007 and are not even in European competition this season.

Del Nido issued a rallying call to Sevilla fans this week, urging them to get behind the players for the Real clash at the Sanchez Pizjuan (2000 GMT) while Michel said on Thursday it was a chance for the team to kickstart their campaign.

"I would give my contract if that is what it takes to get a win against Real Madrid and that turned into the start of a positive run," Michel told Sevilla's TV channel.

Barca, who visit Sevilla at the end of the month, have won their opening three matches and are two points clear at the top on nine points, five ahead of Real.

New coach Tito Vilanova will be without Andres Iniesta for Barca's trip to Getafe (1800) on Saturday after the Spain playmaker returned from international duty with a muscle strain.

Barca have slipped up several times in recent years in their first game after an international break but Cesc Fabregas is confident it will not happen this time.

"You are away from home for 10 days and sometimes there are long journeys and then you have to get back into training again," the Spain midfielder told Barca TV.

"I think we are in good shape and we are returning after a win (1-0 against Georgia in Tbilisi) which is always positive mentally."

Also on Saturday, Malaga host Levante and Valencia are at home to Celta Vigo while on Sunday Athletic Bilbao visit Espanyol and Atletico Madrid entertain Rayo Vallecano.

Robben not fully fit

REUTERS, Berlin



Bayern Munich winger Arjen Robben could miss Saturday's clash against Mainz with a minor groin injury as the Bavarians seek to maintain their early season advantage over champions Borussia Dortmund.

Robben returned from international duty with an injury suffered during the warm up of the Netherlands' 2014 World Cup qualifier in Hungary earlier this week but medical checks in Munich on Wednesday revealed the problem was a minor one.

While he is not expected to be out for long, Bayern said they could be without their influential winger on Saturday.

The Bavarians lead the standings with maximum points from two games and after failing to win a single trophy last season, Bayern are eager to take control of the title race.

Coach Jupp Heynckes, however, may opt to leave Bundesliga record-signing Javi Martinez on the bench as he did in the previous game against Stuttgart.

"Obviously, from a footballing viewpoint he is a great asset for us but Javi still needs to work and fight his way into the team with performances," Heynckes said of the 40 million euro (\$51.55 million) signing.

"Who plays depends on a lot of things. I would not want to decide this now."

Leaving the Spaniard on the bench has so far not stalled Bayern's charge to the top of the standings following their nine-goal spree in the opening league games.

"It was good to shoot out of the blocks like that," Heynckes told the club website. "The team is hungry and it has helped physical preparations."

Dortmund breathed a collective sigh of relief on Wednesday when medical checks confirmed in-form forward Marco Reus had not been seriously injured in Germany's 2-1 win over Austria a day earlier and would be fit to face Bayer Leverkusen.

Reus, the back-to-back champions' most expensive summer signing, is in fine form, having scored against Austria and also netting one goal in the league.

Kagawa learns good lesson

AFP, Tokyo

Manchester United star Shinji Kagawa has vowed to take better care of himself after being sidelined by a back injury that he said may have been caused by "travel and fatigue".

Kagawa, forced out of Japan's 1-0 win against Iraq on Tuesday by a minor back strain, admitted he needed to strengthen his body to prevent further problems. It is unknown when he will return for his new club.

"It may be due to travel and fatigue," Kagawa told reporters on Wednesday, before boarding the 12-hour return flight to England. "I can get by if I take good care of my body," he added. "I've learned a good lesson from this."

The attacking midfielder felt a "twinge" in his back during training and despite treatment, he was eventually withdrawn from Japan's team just before kick-off in Saitama.

Kagawa, 23, has not been known to suffer any back problems since starting his professional career in 2006, with J-League side Cerezo Osaka.

But he said joining Manchester United, in a high-profile summer transfer from German champions Borussia Dortmund, had shown him he needed to improve his physique.



Zenit St. Petersburg's latest recruit Brazil striker Hulk arrives in St. Petersburg yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Totti doubtful for Bologna clash

AFP, Milan

Francesco Totti could be a doubt for Roma's home fixture against Bologna at the Olympic Stadium this Sunday after suffering an ankle knock in training.

Roma said on their website Thursday that Totti, who inspired his side to a 3-1 away win over Inter Milan two weeks ago, "withdrew from training early after bruising his ankle".

Although Zdenek Zeman's side are not considered as title contenders in Serie A, their display against Inter at the San Siro suggested they could be one of the surprise packages this season.

Argentine-born Italian Pablo Osvaldo has scored twice in two games so far and scored both goals in Italy's 2-2 draw against Bulgaria in a recent World Cup qualifier.

After two league games the Giallorossi sit fifth on four points having drawn at home to Catania in the opening day of the season.

Only four teams -- champions Juventus, Napoli, Lazio and Sampdoria -- have won both of the first two games so far.