

# Germany more unified: Lahm

AFP, Berlin



Ahead of Tuesday's World Cup qualifier against Sweden, Germany captain Philipp Lahm has admitted the atmosphere in the national squad is better than during their failed Euro 2012 campaign.

After Germany's vice-captain Bastian Schweinsteiger had recently said the squad was divided during June's Euro 2012 campaign, Lahm has said things have improved.

Germany routed Ireland 6-1 in Dublin on Friday to leave them in control of Group C and in pole position to secure an automatic berth for Brazil 2014 ahead of Tuesday's qualifier at Berlin's Olympic Stadium with Sweden.

Lahm was suspended for the win at Dublin's Aviva Stadium and says Schweinsteiger was right to draw attention to the lack of harmony which affected the team in June.

"The mood is better than it was at the Euro, but there wasn't a bad atmosphere," Bayern Munich's Lahm told German magazine Kicker.

"(Schweinsteiger) is an experienced player who has spent many years in the national team and has every right to address things which strike him.

"That's all part of it.

"Perhaps some people think back on whether they have done everything right and done the best for the team."

There were murmurs of disharmony in the German squad during Euro 2012 as some of the younger players -- particularly Bayern Munich midfielder Toni Kroos -- voiced frustration at their lack of game time.

Schweinsteiger also noted that not all the substitutes celebrated when Germany scored a goal at Euro 2012.

"It was certainly the case that some players were unhappy, some with great talent, but you have to put that aside for a tournament," added Lahm.

"And a player like Bastian Schweinsteiger can address that with some authority, because he can challenge players.

"If a player like that brings something up, everyone opens their ears and questions it. I see all this as a very positive thing."



Germany midfielders Bastian Schweinsteiger (R) and Mesut Ozil (L) eye the ball during a training session in Berlin on Sunday ahead of their 2014 World Cup qualifier against Sweden.

PHOTO: AFP

# Spain-France tops bill

AFP, Paris



After assembling handsome victories in Friday's matches, Europe's leading nations are likely to have their work cut out when the 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign continues on Tuesday.

The Group I clash between Spain and France in Madrid is the headline clash, while the matches between Italy and Denmark, Germany and Sweden, and England and Poland could all have surprises in store.

The meeting in the Spanish capital is a repeat of the Euro 2012 quarter-final in Ukraine, which saw Spain progress 2-0 en route to victory in the final over Italy.

The two sides go into the match level on six points but their preparations have been contrasting; while Spain were ambling to a 4-0 victory in Belarus on Friday, France were losing 1-0 to Japan in a friendly match at Stade de France.

Les Bleus largely bossed proceedings against the Japanese before falling to a late goal, and Didier Deschamps

has called for more sang-froid in front of goal against the reigning world and European champions.

"When you don't score, there's always a possibility for your opponents," said the France coach.

"We let ourselves get punished (against Japan). But there will be a totally different balance of power on Tuesday."

Spain, for whom Pedro Rodriguez scored a hat-trick in Belarus, have won their last 24 matches in qualifying for the World Cup and European Championship, but they have not faced an adversary as dangerous as France in that period.

"Against France on Tuesday, we are playing a complicated opponent, because they have a great squad with very good players and strikers who play deep," said coach Vicente del Bosque.

"On top of that, they have some very physical players. It is going to be a demanding match."

England crushed San Marino 5-0 on Friday and will look to tighten their stranglehold on Group H by defeating Poland in Warsaw.

The one-sided win at Wembley took England three points clear of

Montenegro and Poland, and although the sides immediately below them all have a game in hand, striker Danny Welbeck says it is important they hammer home their advantage.

"We're all really looking forward to the Poland game," said the Manchester United forward, who scored twice against San Marino.

"We are top of the group now. That's where we want to be, that's the main aim, and that's where we want to finish as well."

England will be without Theo Walcott and the Chelsea pair of Frank Lampard and Ryan Bertrand due to injury, but captain Steven Gerrard returns after serving a suspension.

Like England, Germany enjoyed a routine success in their last outing as they routed Ireland 6-1 in Dublin to inflict the heaviest ever home defeat on Giovanni Trapattoni's beleaguered side.

Tuesday's opponents Sweden had to come from behind to win 2-1 against the Faroe Islands, but Germany captain Phillip Lahm knows that the encounter in Berlin will be one of his side's most taxing assignments of the qualification process.

# Uruguay's La Paz test

AFP, Paris



After consecutive comprehensive defeats on their travels, Uruguay will try to conquer their away struggles in the high altitude of La Paz when they take on Bolivia on Tuesday as the South American 2014 World Cup qualifying competition enters its second half.

The reigning Copa America champions currently occupy the fourth and final automatic qualification spot for Brazil 2014, but find themselves level on points with fifth-placed Chile and just one ahead of sixth-placed Venezuela.

Having conceded seven goals in away defeats to Colombia (4-0) and Argentina (3-0), La Celeste's defence will be stretched further in the Bolivian capital with captain Diego Lugano, Diego Godin and Martin Caceres all ruled out through suspension.

Oscar Tabarez's side have collected just one point away from Montevideo's Estadio Centenario, but Benfica full-back Maxi Pereira says a victory on Tuesday is essential.

"We have to win in Bolivia, there is no

alternative."

Lugano, who helped guide Uruguay to the semifinals in South Africa two years ago, echoed those sentiments, saying: "Now every game for us is like a final because our World Cup qualification is in danger."

Uruguay will have little time to adjust to the altitude -- the Estadio Hernando Siles is some 3,600 metres above sea level -- but Pereira says that can't be used as an excuse.

"I played in the altitude in the last campaign, coming on in the second half. At first it sets you back a bit, but after you can bear it."

However unlike Ecuador, who have turned their Quito stadium into a fortress, Bolivia's home qualifying record is far less impressive with just one win from four matches.

Xabier Azkargorta's men realistically need three points on Tuesday to keep their quickly fading hopes alive.

Argentina, unbeaten in their past six qualifiers, can take another step towards clinching their place in the finals when they face a depleted Chile in Santiago.

Elsewhere, Venezuela have genuine ambitions of qualifying for the World Cup for the first time.

# Marcelo out for 3 months

REUTERS, Madrid

Brazil and Real Madrid full back Marcelo has fractured the fifth metatarsal in his right foot while on international duty, his club said in a statement on Sunday.

The Brazilian Football Federation said in a separate statement they estimated the player would be out of action for around three months.

Marcelo picked up the injury while training with Brazil in the Polish city of Wroclaw ahead of Tuesday's friendly against Japan.

He will return to Madrid immediately where a decision would be taken on the treatment required, Real said.

# Khedira doubtful

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany holding midfielder Sami Khedira is doubtful for their 2014 World Cup qualifier at home to Sweden on Tuesday after picking up a muscle injury, coach Joachim Loew said.

"We have just one problem at the moment, the question of Sami Khedira," Loew told reporters on Monday. "We do not know 100 per cent whether Sami will be fit to play as he was treated today and will continue this evening."

The Real Madrid player was injured in Germany's 6-1 win against Ireland in Dublin on Friday.

Germany top Group C with nine points from three games with Sweden in second place on six.

Loew will have captain Philipp Lahm back in the squad after serving his one-match suspension.



**STAR Cricket**  
Champions League T20  
Sydney Sixers v Yorkshire  
Live from 5:30pm

Chennai Super Kings v Highveld Lions  
Live from 9:30pm

**STAR Sports**  
FIFA WC Qualifiers  
Qatar v Uzbekistan  
Live from 6:30pm

Iraq v Australia  
Live from 8:30pm

Iran v Korea Republic  
Live from 10:30pm

**TEN Action**  
FIFA WC Qualifier  
Spain v France  
Live from 1:00am (Wednesday)

**Sony Six**  
FIFA WC Qualifiers  
Germany v Sweden  
Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)

Chile v Argentina  
Live from 6:00am (Wednesday)

**ESPN**  
SportsCentre India

# Ronaldo set for 100 caps

REUTERS, Lisbon

When Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo picks up his 100th cap against Northern Ireland on Tuesday, he will reflect on a career which started in central defence and was marked by early shyness before an explosion of attacking flair made him one of soccer's greatest players.

"It was on August 20th, 2003, against Kazakhstan, that I put on our national shirt for the first time. It was one of the most memorable moments of my life and a path which I am proud of," Ronaldo wrote on his Facebook page.

He came on as a substitute for Luis Figo in what was, in retrospect, a symbolic handover from one Portuguese hero to another.

Ronaldo, the future 2008 world player of the year, took 2001 world player Figo's mantle and helped inspire Portugal to third place in FIFA's world rankings even if a first major international trophy is still elusive as he struggles to shrug off accusations he goes missing in really big games.

At 27, he will become one of the youngest European footballers to reach 100 caps behind Germany's Lukas Podolski and Estonia's Kristen Viiikmae.

He is Portugal's third most capped player of all time behind Figo with 127 and centre back Fernando Couto with 110.

"On Tuesday, I will reach my 100th cap next to my people and only with a victory in mind. I would like to thank all of those who helped me reach this point and will pack the stadium cheering for us," Ronaldo wrote.

Indeed he has many to thank, starting with his first coach, Madeira primary school teacher Francisco Afonso.

"He took his chances and always had the desire to learn and go further," Afonso was quoted as saying by Portuguese daily o Jogo. "Curiously, he started playing as a centre back. But, because he wanted to organise everything his way, he eventually went up

field and became a forward."

Ronaldo's club record with Manchester United and Real Madrid speaks for itself. He won Spain's La Liga last season and the Copa del Rey the campaign before after collecting three Premier League titles, a Champions League crown and an FA Cup with United.

Former Sporting coach Laszlo Boloni, who brought Ronaldo to public attention by giving the teenager several first-team starts at the Lisbon club, ranks the forward above other Portuguese idols from football to music.

"I was asked how could I say that Ronaldo was going to be better than Eusebio after he had played just five matches. I answered that Cristiano was exceptional, better than Eusebio and (Fado singer) Amalia, who are part of Portugal's heritage," he told o Jogo.

Ronaldo is now world renowned for his confidence, some would say arrogance, but most of those around him in his early years mentioned his humbleness and hard-work ethic.

"I remember his shyness in the first practice with Portugal's senior team," Portugal sports director Carlos Godinho said.

"He was very young, 18, and he integrated very well in the Portugal squad. He wanted to show everything he had, he would not stop. So much so that the older guys would tell him to breath a little. He'd get really tired because of his lack of experience."

At Euro 2004, Ronaldo came agonisingly close to glory but Greece shocked the hosts in the final. Young Ronaldo was left in tears but Figo, captain at the time, said those events strengthened Ronaldo's resolve.

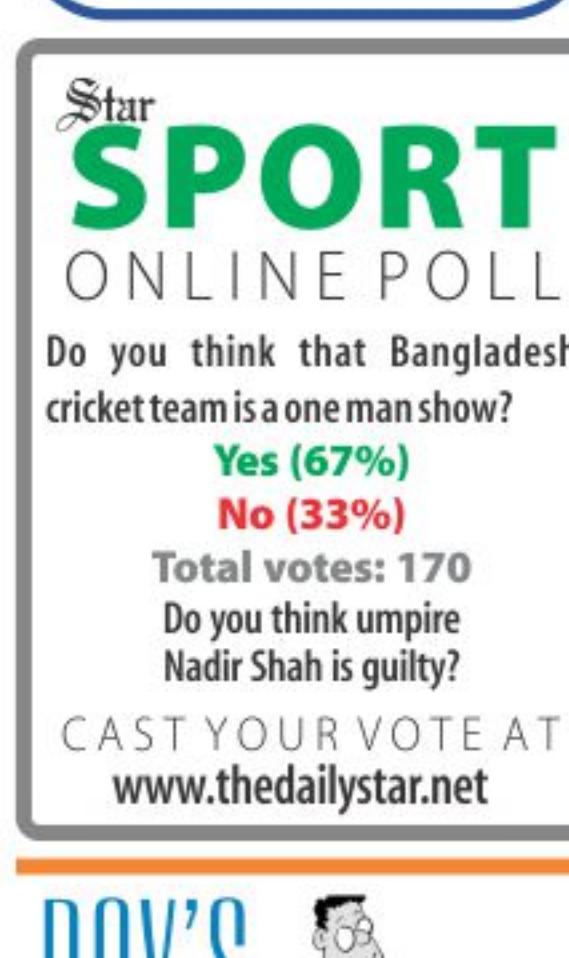
"The 100th cap is a round number, behind which many sacrifices are hidden, many joys, and also the constant desire to always move forward," Figo said.

Ronaldo will captain Portugal at home to Northern Ireland on Tuesday as they try to bounce back from Friday's 1-0 defeat at Group F leaders Russia.

The Portuguese are second in the group, three adrift on six points from three games, and in need of more match-winning magic from their proud leader.



PHOTO: AFP



## ONLINE POLL

Do you think that Bangladesh cricket team is a one man show?

Yes (67%)

No (33%)

Total votes: 170

Do you think umpire Nadir Shah is guilty?

Yes (67%)

No (33%)

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GP Federation Cup QUARTERFINALS

Sk Russel v Soccer Club Feni

Time: 3:30pm

Mohammed v Team BJMC

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National