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## Co-hosts Aus, NZ in same 2015 WC pool India, Pakistan also drawn together

Cricket World Cup co-hosts Australia and New Zealand have been drawn in the same group for the 2015 tournament, while title-holders India will face off against long-time rival Pakistan, officials said Tuesday.

The first match of the prestigious one-day tournament will be held in Christchurch, the New Zealand city devastated by an earthquake in 2011, when the locals take on Sri Lanka on February 14.

Later that day, Australia will face Ashes foes England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground -- also the venue for the day-night final match of the flagship tournament of the 50-over game on March 29.

"The 2015 tournament will mark 40 years since the first World Cup in 1975 and that history of great contests and heroes helps make the tournament what it is -- the most sought-after prize in our increasingly global game," said ICC chief executive David Richardson.

"I'm absolutely confident that the success of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2015 will further strengthen the status of 50-over

cricket as a successful and viable format alongside Tests and Twenty20 Internationals."

Australia and New Zealand, whose prime ministers attended launches at simultaneous events in Melbourne and Wellington, are grouped with England, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and two qualifiers in the contest, held once every four years.

Title-holders India are pooled with Pakistan, South Africa, the West Indies, Zimbabwe, Ireland and one other qualifying team.

Forty-nine matches will be played in 14 venues across the two host nations, with Australia staging 26 games at grounds in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

New Zealand will host 23 games in seven cities, including Christchurch where international cricket is set to return for the first time since the 6.3-magnitude quake which killed 185 people in 2011.

The tournament, which was last staged in Australia and New Zealand in 1992, will also visit the cities of Auckland, Dunedin, Hamilton, Napier, Nelson and Wellington.

The top four sides from each pool will go through to the knockout stage.

POOL A		POOL B	
1	ENGLAND	2	SOUTH AFRICA
4	AUSTRALIA	3	INDIA
5	SRI LANKA	6	PAKISTAN
8	BANGLADESH	7	WEST INDIES
9	NEW ZEALAND	10	ZIMBABWE
12	QUALIFIER 2	11	IRELAND
13	QUALIFIER 3	14	QUALIFIER 4

ICC chief executive David Richardson presents the pool draws for the 2015 Cricket World Cup in Melbourne yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Wrath of Maradona

Like the people who run with the bulls in Pamplona, the paparazzi in Argentina continue to tempt fate and risk their fertility by following Maradona around Buenos Aires.

In the latest incident, a photographer for a local celebrity magazine met the wrath of Maradona's foot and was worse off for it.

The "Gente" magazine photographer Enrique Medina filed a police complaint claiming the 1986 World Cup winner attacked him outside Maradona's father's house on Sunday night.

Medina told the Associated Press on Monday that Maradona ran at him "like he was taking a free-kick" and kicked him so hard in the groin and upper leg area that he "doubled over in pain".

## Juve kick off at Samp

Italian champions Juventus will kick off their bid for a third successive Serie A title with a trip to Sampdoria, following the announcement of next season's fixtures in a ceremony in Milan on Monday.

Title hopefuls AC Milan visit Hellas Verona, playing their first match back in the top flight in 11 years, while Walter Mazzarri's Inter Milan and Rafael Benitez's Napoli both begin with home matches against Genoa and Bologna respectively.

Promoted Sassuolo will play their first ever top-flight match away at Torino.

AS Roma, who start their campaign with a trip to rivals Livorno, will play their first home game of the season against Hellas Verona with the Curva Sud section of their stadium closed.

The club were handed the punishment after hardcore fans in that part of the Stadio Olimpico racially abused AC Milan striker Mario Balotelli during their last game of the season against Napoli.

Serie A will host five city derbies for the first time this season. The Rome derby between Roma and Lazio will take place in week four.

Other standout fixtures include Juve's trip to Inter in week three, while the champions host AC Milan in week seven and Napoli in week 12.

In late November, Hellas Verona will host neighbours Chievo in their first derby in 11 years and their third ever meeting.

## Lewandowski commits to Dortmund

Borussia Dortmund forward Robert Lewandowski pledged his commitment to the Champions League finalists on Tuesday despite failing in his bid to move to treble winners Bayern Munich.

Lewandowski, whose contract at Dortmund runs to 2014, had refused to sign an extension late last season and had said he hoped to be joining his "club of choice" very soon.

After a months-long transfer saga and with Lewandowski set to become the second Dortmund player to be poached by rivals Bayern after Mario Goetze, Dortmund blocked the move which would have brought in millions of euros.

"I will give everything I've got for Dortmund," Lewandowski told Bild newspaper. "It does not matter what happened. I am not interested about that on the pitch."

## MU grab second win

Manchester United saw off a spirited Kitchee 5-2 on Monday in Hong Kong to give David Moyes just his second victory as manager of the Premier League champions.

Danny Welbeck, Chris Smalling, Fabio Da Silva and substitute Adnan Januzaj put United 4-0 up after 49 minutes, but they took their foot off the pedal and plucky Kitchee gave the scoreline some respectability with two fine goals on a humid but dry night.

Substitute Jesse Lingard boosted his fast-growing reputation while putting the gloss on a satisfactory evening for United with a lovely curled shot with 10 minutes left in front of a sell-out 40,000 crowd at the Hong Kong Stadium and its "killer pitch".

United now head home after chalking up two wins, two losses and one draw on their pre-season tour of Asia and Australia.

"I thought our players played very well on a difficult pitch and made it look like a good pitch," said Moyes, who told a packed media conference that he had no updates on the Wayne Rooney transfer saga.

Chelsea are after the England striker, 27, but United and Moyes continue to say the forward -- said to be "angry and confused" -- is not for sale.

"I thought we played well and I thought it was an exciting game for the supporters to see as well," added the former Everton boss, who took over from Alex Ferguson on July 1.

"We move on. We talk about getting the players fit and ready for the start of the season. It was another hard workout in warm conditions. We head back to the UK now and get ready to go to Sweden to play there as well."

Moyes left star striker Robin van Persie on the bench until the last 10 minutes, while also resting Ryan Giggs and Rio Ferdinand. Several members of the squad did not come on the tour of Thailand, Australia, Japan and Hong Kong to give them more time off after the Confederations Cup.

Moyes has been chasing Barcelona midfielder Cesc Fabregas and is mulling a third bid after the previous two were turned down. He is yet to make a stellar signing.

"I'm taking away a great experience of my first trip with Manchester United and what the football club means around the world, but it was also a chance to get to know the players and try to settle into my new environment and for the players to get to know me as well," said Moyes.

"They've been working with a great man (Ferguson) for a long time... so it is going to take time, but I've enjoyed working with them."

"They are incredibly professional and I can see why they are champions because of the way they conduct themselves, the way they go about their business. I have been very impressed by them."

## Gago returns to his roots

Argentina midfielder Fernando Gago completed his transfer back to Boca Juniors from Valencia by passing a medical and signing a three-year contract on Monday.

Gago had already spent the first six months of the year in Buenos Aires on loan from Valencia to Velez Sarsfield but Boca stepped into bring the player back to the club where he made his first division debut in 2004.

"It's a nice feeling coming back to the club where I grew up as a person ... and now I want to enjoy this stage at Boca," the 27-year-old told a news conference.

"Boca always want to be (title) candidates, that's the goal. We have the obligation to fight for the title."

Boca had a poor 'Final' championship last season finishing one from bottom and will be gunning for the 'Inicial', the first championship of the 2013/14 season starting this weekend.

## Zidane keen on Bale

Real Madrid assistant manager Zinedine Zidane is keen for Gareth Bale to sign for Los Blancos "as soon as possible", with speculation the Tottenham star will move to the Bernabeu continuing to mount.

Gareth Bale scored Spurs' winner against Sunderland in the final minute, but they will be in the Europa League once again.

Madrid have publicly pursued Bale this summer and despite Spurs claiming time and again that their winger is not for sale, it appears the nine-time European champions are winning the race to sign him.

And Zidane is hopeful a deal can be wrapped up soon for the Welshman, who is also reportedly a target for Manchester United.

"We're not going to give up on Bale", Zidane told Le 10 Sport. "It's impossible to forget about a player of his quality."

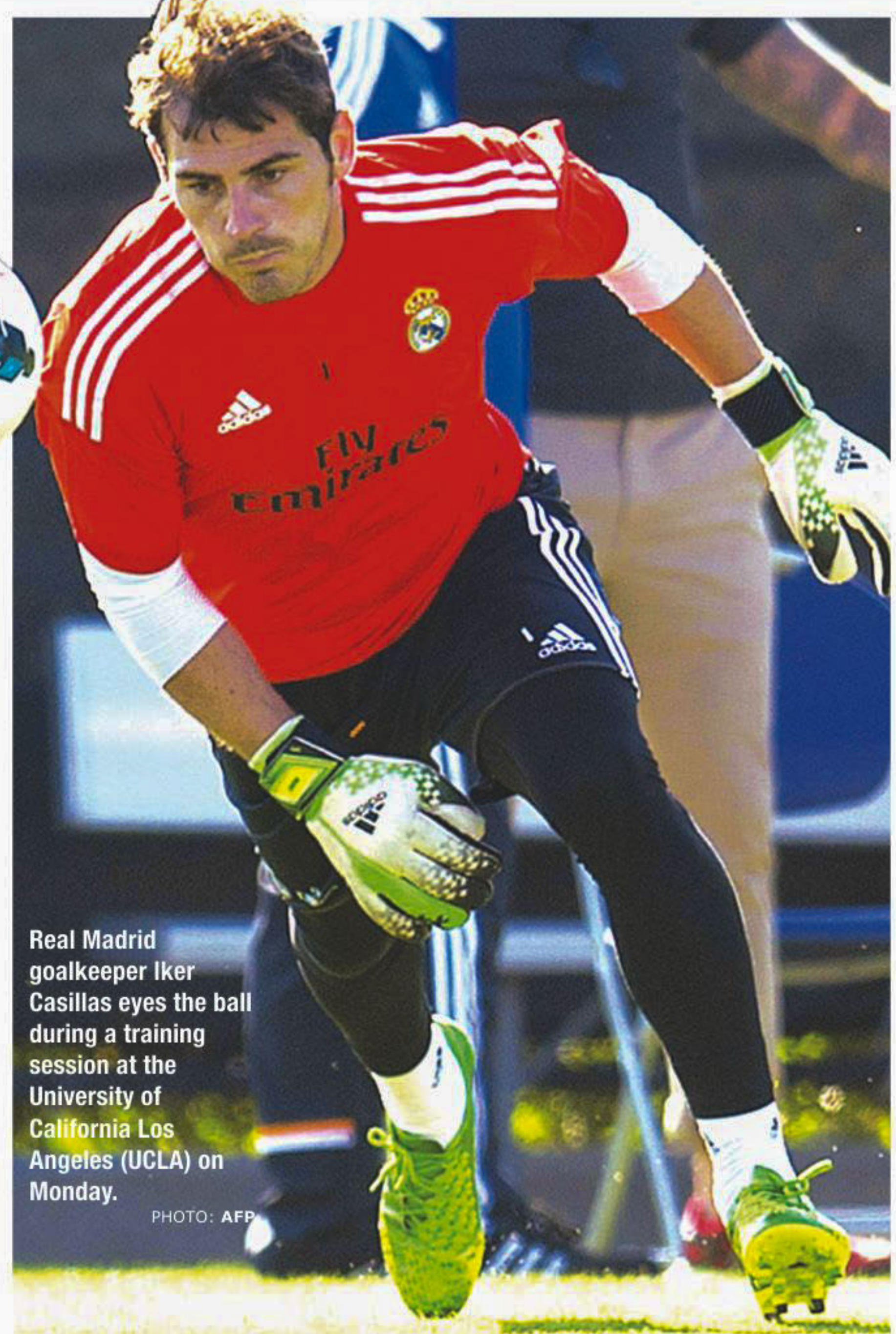
"It's only normal that Tottenham want him to sign a new contract but we've made it clear that he's one of our main objectives."

Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas also spoke about Bale's quality, describing him as "one of the three or four best players in the world" and someone "capable of changing a game".

Reports in the Guardian suggest that Bale shares Real's eagerness to push the deal through as soon as possible, and that the situation could turn sour should Spurs continue rejecting the Spanish club's advances.

The newspaper claims Bale's representatives will meet with Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy this week, and if talks don't advance then the 24-year-old could hand in a transfer request.

According to Spanish daily AS, Spurs are willing to negotiate with Madrid but they are apparently demanding €98 million plus full-back Fabio Coentrao. And with the Portuguese defender valued at around €20 million, it would mean Los Blancos will have to pay as much as €120 million for Bale's signature.



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