

What to WATCH

STAR Cricket
England v Australia
Third Test, Day 1
Live from 4:00pm
TEN Sports
Zimbabwe v India
Fourth ODI
Live from 1:00pm



PHOTO: REUTERS

Barcelona star Neymar (C) shrugs off Lechia Gdansk midfielder Maciej Kostrzewa (L) during their friendly match in Gdansk on Tuesday.

Neymar makes Barca debut

REUTERS, Undated

Barcelona's new signing Neymar was denied a win on his debut when the Brazil forward came on as a second-half substitute in a 2-2 draw in a friendly at Polish side Lechia Gdansk on Tuesday.

The standout performer in his nation's triumph at last month's Confederations Cup, Neymar joined up with his new team mates on Monday and made the trip to Poland to feature in a Barca squad for the first time since joining from Santos.

He replaced Chile forward Alexis Sanchez in the 78th minute, just after World Player of the Year Lionel Messi had been substituted, and was welcomed with a series of robust challenges from the home players.

New coach Gerardo Martino did not make the trip to Poland and will make his debut on the bench when Barca host Neymar's former club in a friendly at the Nou Camp on Friday.

Aguero out of Italy friendly

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Striker Sergio Aguero is missing from an all foreign-based squad coach Alejandro Sabella named on Tuesday for Argentina's friendly against Italy in Rome next month.

Aguero, who is nursing an injury, will miss the August 14 match at the Olimpico in honour of Pope Francis who will receive the two squads at the Vatican on the eve of the match.

Leaving out midfielders Fernando Gago of Boca Juniors, who has a muscle strain, and Walter Montillo of Santos has opened the door for Inter Milan midfielder Ricky Alvarez.

The only player in the squad who does not play in Europe is defender Jose Basanta of Mexico's Monterrey.

Rubin Kazan fullback Cristian Ansaldi is recalled as cover for Sporting's Marcos Rojo who has been included despite being an injury doubt.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Sergio Romero (Sampdoria), Mariano Andujar (Catania), Oscar Ustari (Almeria)

Defenders: Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City), Hugo Campagnaro (Napoli), Ezequiel Garay (Benfica), Federico Fernandez (Getafe), Fabricio Coloccini (Newcastle United), Jose Basanta (Monterrey), Marcos Rojo (Sporting Lisbon), Cristian Ansaldi (Rubin Kazan)

Midfielders: Javier Mascherano (Barcelona), Ever Banega (Valencia), Augusto Fernandez, (Celta Vigo), Lucas Biglia (Lazio), Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid), Erik Lamela (AS Roma), Ricky Alvarez (Inter Milan)

Forwards: Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Gonzalo Higuain (Napoli), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Paris Saint-Germain), Rodrigo Palacio (Inter Milan)

MESSI in hot water?

INTERNET, undated

What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas... unless you're Lionel Messi. The superstar footballer has found himself in hot water after being caught eyeing up a stripper while on tour in Sin City.

The Barcelona striker, who last year became a dad, was pictured nuzzling the blonde dancer in a Las Vegas nightclub.

The photographs, published by Argentina's Pronto magazine, showed the £250,000 per week star with his hands wrapped around the woman's hips while looking at her chest.

The dramatic headline reads "The Photo That Puts Lionel Messi's Marriage At Risk".

It is claimed Messi is now in crisis talks with his girlfriend Antonella Raccuzzo, 25, after she saw the pictures.

A source close to the magazine said: "There is nothing to suggest anything more happened but still Antonella is furious.

"She can't believe he has been so stupid and feels very let down by Leo.

"Whether she'll give him the red card or not remains to be seen but it's fair to say the sofa may be getting a lot of use at the moment."

Alongside the pictures, Pronto wrote: "Lio and Antonella, the mother of his son Thiago, are today living through their most serious crisis."

Messi, 26, was reported to be in Las Vegas at the start of July to star as guest of honour at a party hosted by Brazilian legend Ronaldo at the Wynn Las Vegas & Encore Resort.

It is understood the photographs were taken that evening.

The footballer, who is preparing for next year's World Cup in Brazil, then headed off to Chicago for the last exhibition match in his 'Messi and Friends' benefit tour.

Valencia eye Torres

SOCCERNET

Fernando Torres could be heading back to La Liga with reports suggesting Valencia will attempt to replace Roberto Soldado with the Chelsea striker.

Soldado is nearing a switch to Tottenham in a £26 million deal, and with the role up front being vacated by the 28-year-old at the Mestalla, Valencia have been in contact with Chelsea over a possible deal.

According to Spanish newspaper Superdeporte, Valencia have been in contact with Chelsea over a possible deal.

Torres signed for Chelsea for £50 million in January 2011, but it is believed that Valencia will not offer more than half of that fee for the former Atletico Madrid man. It is not yet known whether Torres would be willing to head back to Spain, or whether Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich would be prepared to take a loss on the player.

With Chelsea set to continue their pursuit of unsettled Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney, it appears that Torres will not feature in Jose Mourinho's starting line-up.

Torres enjoyed his best season at Stamford Bridge during the last campaign, netting 22 times in 64 appearances.

Bale returns to training

AFP, London

Gareth Bale reported for training with Tottenham Hotspur on Wednesday, amid mounting rumours about a lucrative move to Real Madrid in a possible world record transfer deal.

The 24-year-old Wales winger, voted player of the year and young player of the year last season by his English Premier League peers, was seen arriving at the club's Enfield training ground, north of London, in a black Mercedes sports car, television pictures on Sky Sports News showed.

His return to training was being closely watched because of persistent questions about his immediate future.

Spurs manager Andre Villas-Boas said during the club's pre-season visit to Hong Kong last week that they were in talks with the highly rated player, who scored 26 goals last season, about a new contract.

He said he was optimistic of reaching agreement on a deal but fuelled speculation that Bale would leave the club after saying that there was currently no agreement.

Since then, the British and Spanish media have gone into overdrive, with Bale reportedly being given a price tag upwards of the record £80 million (\$122 million, 92 million euros) Real paid Manchester United for Cristiano Ronaldo in 2009.

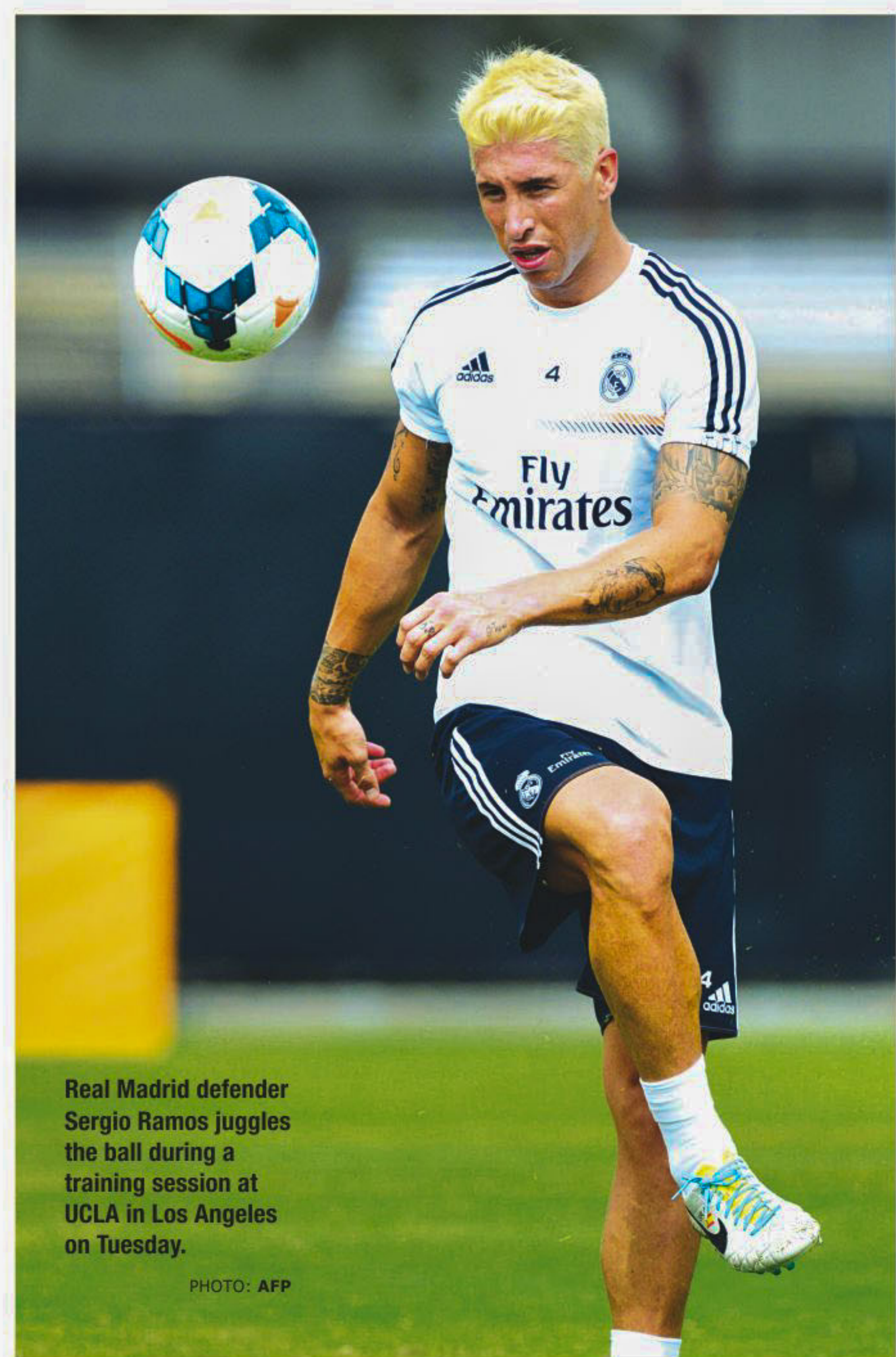
The Guardian said Real had indicated they were willing to pay a world record £100 million for Bale while Spanish sports daily Marca has claimed that Spurs have demanded a fee of £125 million for the player.

Spurs chairman Daniel Levy has also been reported as having set up a meeting with Real president Florentino Perez in Miami next week, where the Spanish club are due to play in a pre-season tournament, to broker a deal.

Bale's family were even said to have met Levy earlier this week to persuade him to allow the player to go, even though he has reportedly not submitted a formal transfer request.

The Daily Mirror claimed Levy was holding out for the best price for Bale and would be prepared to bring back Luka Modric, who left White Hart Lane for the Bernabeu last year in a similarly drawn-out transfer saga.

Real and Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas said that Bale would be welcomed as he was "one of the top three or four players in Europe".



Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos juggles the ball during a training session at UCLA in Los Angeles on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Metsu terminally ill

AFP, Paris

Former Senegal coach Bruno Metsu once told his players they were playing the match of their lives as he sought to motivate them, but now the 59-year-old cancer sufferer knows exactly what that feels like.

When he led unfancied Senegal on their World Cup debut during the opening match against champions France in 2002, few could have predicted what would happen next.

Not only did Papa Bouba Diop's goal defeat France in one of the tournament's greatest upsets but their unmistakable long-haired blonde coach guided the team to the quarter-finals where the fairytale finally came to a proud conclusion with a narrow defeat by Turkey.

Ten years later in October 2012, after feeling ill in Dubai and being rushed to hospital, Metsu was told he was in a terminal phase of cancer and suffering from the disease in his liver, lungs and colon.

"They gave me three months" he told sports daily L'Equipe this week after recently returning to France with his wife and three young children.

"It was an enormous shock. I was with Viviane, my wife and we were crying as we left the hospital. You think about your kids and everyone around you.

"I started chemotherapy almost immediately and when I went to the hospital I was in a wheelchair, I was so weak but there was no question of giving up.



"Often as a coach, you tell your players 'today is the match of your life'. But no, it isn't! Today, yes, I am playing the match of my life.

"I wanted to tell my story or rather my testimony. When I saw a programme on Eric Abidal, that gives strength and inspiration to others, that is a powerful thing," he said

about the French defender who has come back from a life threatening liver transplant.

Metsu enjoyed a modest playing career before an equally unspectacular start to life as a coach until his African adventure began in 2000 when he took over the Guinea helm for two years before moving to Senegal.

He led the country to their first and only African championship final, six months before the World Cup, where only a penalty shootout defeat in Mali against Cameroon denied them a historic triumph.

Now his own personal triumph is in defying modern science and battling to live as long as possible.

"When someone gives you three months, you fight to go further," said Metsu who has gained 2kg in recent weeks after losing 17kg since his diagnosis.

"You tell yourself, you, you're not going in three months and if you beat me, it won't be easy.

"In February, we didn't notice that I had pneumonia and I had chemo on top of it. I stayed 10 days between life and death. That was the most difficult fight that I have known.

"90 per cent of people don't survive this situation but I had an incredible desire to survive.

"I have learned a lot about myself and family values. Today I can watch my children grow up and I have had nine months of happiness at their side and it's so much better than football.

"These kind of challenges can also bring a lot too. You see things differently. You take on a completely new way of thinking and how to be strong, like Abidal."

Maxwell recalled

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari kept faith in his Confederations Cup winning squad by picking only one newcomer for the friendly against Switzerland in Basel next month.

Only Paris Saint-Germain left back Maxwell in the 20-man squad Scolari named on Tuesday was not involved in the Confederations Cup which Brazil won with a 3-0 victory over world champions Spain in the June 30 final at the Maracana.

Scolari picked all 11 of his first choice team including Barcelona's new signing Neymar despite the fact that most have only just returned from a belated holiday for pre-season training at their European clubs.

The August 14 game at Basel's Jakob Park stadium will be followed by more friendlies against Australia and Portugal in September on FIFA dates for qualifiers for the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Julio Cesar (Queens Park Rangers), Jefferson (Botafogo) **Defenders:** Thiago Silva, Maxwell (both Paris Saint-Germain), David Luiz (Chelsea), Dante (Bayern Munich), Daniel Alves (Barcelona), Jean (Fluminense), Marcelo (Real Madrid), **Midfielders:** Fernando (Shakhtar Donetsk), Hernanes (Lazio), Luiz Gustavo (Bayern Munich), Paulinho (Tottenham Hotspur), Oscar (Chelsea), Bernard (Atletico Mineiro), **Forwards:** Jo (Atletico Mineiro), Lucas (Paris Saint-Germain), Hulk (Zenit), Fred (Fluminense), Neymar (Barcelona)