

# What to WATCH

**STAR Cricket**  
**England v Australia**  
 First ODI  
 Live from 3:15pm  
 TEN Sports  
**US Open**  
 Mixed Doubles Final &

**Women's Semifinals**  
 Live from 10:30pm  
 TEN Cricket  
**Zimbabwe v Pakistan**  
 First Test, Day 4  
 Live from 2:00pm  
 STAR Sports

**FIFA WC Qualifier**  
**England v Moldova**  
 Live from 1:00am (Saturday)  
**Sony Six**  
**FIFA WC Qualifier**  
**Germany v Austria**  
 Live from 12:45am (Saturday)



Chilean players jog prior to a training session in Santiago on Wednesday ahead of their 2014 World Cup South American zone qualifier against Venezuela.

PHOTO: AFP

## Coaches want window shortened

REUTERS, Nyon

Europe's leading soccer coaches want the transfer window to be shortened, contradicting the position of their clubs.

"The clubs like it as it is but the coaches are of the opinion that the market should be closed earlier," Tottenham Hotspur coach Andre Villas-Boas told reporters after a meeting at UEFA headquarters.

"The coaches need time to prepare their teams for the season," he added.

"Most coaches would like it to be open less time and closed earlier, obviously we will have to have further meetings."

## Ozil's arrival excites Podolski

AFP, Berlin

Injured Arsenal star Lukas Podolski has said he is relishing the chance to "rock" the Gunners alongside his Germany teammate Mesut Ozil after the latter signed a five-year deal.

Podolski is expected to miss the rest of 2013 after tearing his left hamstring in the Gunner's 2-0 win over Fenerbahce in last week's Champions League play-off but is relishing the chance to play for Arsenal alongside ex-Real Madrid star Ozil in the new year.

"Mesut and I are going to rock Arsenal," Podolski told German daily Bild.

"It's great that he's coming, he's a good friend and a brilliant footballer."

The 24-year-old Ozil joined Arsenal for 50 million euros (\$65.94 million) on Monday and left winger Podolski said he is relishing the prospect of linking up with Germany's midfield play-maker.

"He's a great fit for us. We're already playing great football, the only thing that was missing was the final punch, that element of surprise," said Podolski.

"That's exactly what Mesut will give us." Podolski has said he is glad that he will not be able to play alongside Ozil and their Germany teammate Per Mertesacker for the Gunners until the new year.

"It's extremely sad, I would have liked to have played with Mesut straight away, not watched him from the stands," added Podolski.

## Big guns eyeing Brazil

AFP, Paris



Some of Europe's leading nations can clinch qualification for the 2014 World Cup finals in a double-header of fixtures over the next week, starting on Friday.

Four-time world champions Italy, the Netherlands and Germany will all be in a position to book their flights to Brazil, while the situation in all of the continent's nine qualifying groups will become clearer before the final fixtures in October.

Cesare Prandelli's Italy have taken 14 points from a possible 16 in qualifying Group B without ever producing their very best form.

The Azzurri are four points clear of Bulgaria and five ahead of Czech Republic at the top of the group, so wins against both teams in Palermo and Turin in the next week will be

enough to confirm qualification.

The Netherlands have cruised through Group D so far, winning all six qualifiers, and that run appears unlikely to end when they go to Estonia on Friday and then Andorra next week, even with Rafael Van der Vaart out injured.

Wins in those games will see them qualify irrespective of what nearest chal-

### FIXTURES

Friday

(kick-off times GMT)

Macedonia v Wales (1700), Czech Republic v Armenia (1600), Italy v Bulgaria (1845), Republic of Ireland v Sweden (1845), Germany v Austria (1845), Romania v Hungary (1800), Estonia v Netherlands (1830), Northern Ireland v Portugal (1845), England v Moldova (1900),

lengers Romania and Hungary – who meet in Bucharest on Friday – can achieve.

Germany need other results to go their way if they are to stand a chance of sealing first place in Group C this month, with Joachim Loew's side currently five points clear of Austria, Sweden and Republic of Ireland.

Germany face Austria in Munich's Allianz Arena on Friday, and wins there and in the Faroe Islands on Tuesday will be enough if Ireland and Sweden slip up.

Elsewhere on Friday, reigning European and world champions Spain play their first competitive fixture since their Confederations Cup final defeat to Brazil when they face Finland in Helsinki.

Spain are top of Group I but, with a lead of just one point over France, they still need to win their remaining three fixtures to be certain of a return to Brazil next year.

## Fight for places

AFP, Montevideo



Argentina and Colombia will look to wrap up qualification for next year's World Cup as South America's battle for places at the finals in Brazil enters the home stretch.

Leaders Argentina have a bye for Friday's round of fixtures but will be able to guarantee their 11th consecutive World Cup appearance with victory over bottom team Paraguay in Asuncion next Tuesday.

Second-placed Colombia meanwhile will go level on points with the Argentines and stand on the threshold of a first World Cup appearance for 16 years if they defeat third-placed Ecuador in Barranquilla on Friday.

The Colombians' preparations for their clash with Ecuador have been disrupted by an injury to star striker Radamel Falcao, who twisted an ankle in Monaco's clash with Marseille in Ligue 1 last weekend.

Colombia team doctor Carlos Ulloa said Falcao was responding well to treatment but rated the forward as doubtful for Friday's showdown with their bitter rivals at the Estadio Metropolitano Roberto Melendez.

"We will take it day to day as to whether he will be fit or not," Ulloa said. "There's inflammation and pain," the doctor added, emphasizing Falcao would not be risked if not fully fit.

Friday's encounter is likely to be an emotion-filled affair with Ecuador returning to competitive action for the first time since the shock death of popular international Christian Benitez, who died suddenly of heart failure in July.

Benitez scored the winning goal in Ecuador's 1-0 victory when the two sides met in Quito earlier in the qualifiers, and coach Reinaldo Rueda said his grieving squad is still struggling to come to terms with the loss of the striker.

"These last three or four weeks have been very tough and intense, as well as extremely painful," Rueda, whose father passed away shortly before Benitez's death, told FIFA.com in a recent interview.

"I don't know if over time it will be different. Dealing with the grief has been difficult, but you just have to keep going."

With Ecuador and Colombia setting the pace behind Argentina, where along with Chile they are in pole position to secure one of the top four automatic qualifying places, behind them a fierce battle for fifth is unfolding.

Two-time World Cup winners Uruguay, beaten semi-finalists in 2010, are in a ferocious dogfight to qualify which leaves them with precious little margin for error as they prepare to face Peru in Lima.

## 'Real move was stressful'

REUTERS

Gareth Bale said his drawn-out move to Real Madrid for a world record transfer fee was "stressful to say the least".

The 24-year-old joined Madrid from Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday for 100 million euros (\$131.97 million), a fee which made him the world's most expensive player, the day before the transfer window closed and after months of speculation about his future.

"It was a long time. It was very stressful to say the least," Bale told BT Sport on Thursday.

"I knew their interest from the start and I was always confident the move would go through but obviously the chairman Daniel Levy had to do his business and do Tottenham well so I kind of understood that."

"But at the same time, thinking of myself, it was a hard time, it was stressful and I just had to be patient and try and focus."

Bale is currently preparing for Wales's upcoming World Cup qualifiers against Macedonia and Serbia after being unveiled at Madrid's Bernabeu on Monday.

He has not played since July and missed most of Spurs' pre-season training due to injury, so is unlikely to play the full 90 minutes in either Friday or Tuesday's qualifier.

"It's obviously been a whirlwind few days," the former Southampton player said.

## Messi repays taxman

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona star Lionel Messi and his father have repaid five million euros (\$6.6 million) owed to the taxman before facing court on tax evasion charges, according to a judge's ruling obtained Thursday. The tax fraud charges filed in June were a stunning blow to the prestige of Messi, long seen as a more humble figure than most top-class footballers -- in particular his fierce Real Madrid rival Cristiano Ronaldo.

The ruling by a judge in Gava, a Mediterranean coastal town near Barcelona, said the Argentine player's father Jorge Messi had deposited 5.02 million euros with the court on August 14 to cover more than four million euros in unpaid taxes, plus interest.

The judge rejected a prosecutors' request for the 26-year-old Argentina international

to be obliged to deposit a financial bond so as to ensure he pays any fine on the tax charges.

A bond was unnecessary "given the worldwide renown of professional footballer Mr. Lionel Andres Messi Cuccittini and his resulting solvency," the judge said, also citing the fact that the taxes had been repaid.

The judge said he was consulting with the prosecution before making a ruling on a separate request by Messi's lawyers for the planned September 17 hearing to be postponed.

Prosecutors have charged the four-time World Player of the Year and his father with defrauding the tax office of income related to the use of his image from 2006-2009.

Messi and his father are accused of trying to deceive the state by ceding the player's image rights to companies based in tax havens such as Belize and Uruguay so they would pay no tax in Spain.

## Gomez turned down Real

AFP, Berlin

Germany striker Mario Gomez has revealed how he turned down an offer to join Real Madrid before signing for Italian side Fiorentina.

Fiorentina paid Bayern Munich 15.5 million euros (\$20.4 million) last month for Gomez, who signed a four-year contract, after scoring 75 goals in 115 Bundesliga games for the Bavarians.

The 28-year-old quit European champions Bayern having spent most of last season on the bench and said his desire for regular first-team football made it an easy decision to turn down Carlo Ancelotti's Real.

"That's why I didn't join any other club," Gomez, who has already scored two goals in his two Serie A matches so far, told German magazine Kicker.

"If I had joined Real, I would have just been used off the bench with (France striker Karim) Benzema."

"Ancelotti was interested, that was a honour for me as my whole family are Real fans."

"I appreciated their interest and told my agent that I wanted to join Fiorentina."

With 25 goals in 59 appearances for Germany, Gomez is vying with Miroslav Klose for the single striker's berth in Friday's 2014 World Cup qualifier against Austria in Munich.

## Younis leads fightback

AFP, Harare



Veteran Younis Khan led a Pakistan fightback after his side lost three early second-innings wickets on the third day of the first Test against Zimbabwe at the Harare Sports Club on Thursday.

Pakistan were 168 for four at the close, a lead of 90 runs, with Younis unbeaten on 76.

Younis and fellow veteran, captain Misbahul Haq, ground out a fourth-wicket stand of 116 after their side, who trailed by 78 runs after the first innings, slipped to 23 for three against Zimbabwe's new ball bowlers Tinashe Panyangara and Tendai Chatara. It was slow going against accurate bowling on a pitch of occasional low bounce. The partnership occupied 48.4 overs and Pakistan were still in trouble when Misbah played too early at a slower ball from Shingi Masakadza and gave a simple catch to cover. Misbah made 52 off 157 balls, with four fours.

Younis and Asad Shafiq saw out the day and will resume on Friday, with a new ball due after 10 more overs. Shafiq was 15 not out.

They will aim to take their side to a total which will give off-spinner Saeed Ajmal a chance of bowling Zimbabwe out. Ajmal took seven for 95 in Zimbabwe's first innings of 327.

Ajmal took all three Zimbabwe wickets that fell on Thursday as the host nation added 46 runs to their overnight 281 for seven.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**PAKISTAN:** First innings 249 all out in 90.1 overs (Azhar 78, Misbah 53, Ajmal 49; Chatara 3-64, Panyangara 3-71, S Masakadza 2-40, Utseya 2-55)

**ZIMBABWE:** First innings 327 all out in 103.3 overs (Waller 70, Chigumbura 69, Raza 60, Sibanda 31; Ajmal 7-95, Junaid 2-71)

**PAKISTAN:** Second innings 168 for 4 in 70 overs (Younis 76 not out, Misbah 52; Panyangara 2-15, S Masakadza 1-41)



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