

<div> <div>What to</div> <div>WATCH</div> </div>	<div> <div>TEN Cricket</div> <div>TUESDAY</div> <div>South Africa v Pakistan</div> <div>First Test, Day 2</div> <div>Live from 12:00pm</div> <div>WEDNESDAY</div> <div>South Africa v Pakistan</div> </div>	<div> <div>First Test, Day 3</div> <div>Live from 12:00pm</div> <div>THURSDAY</div> <div>South Africa v Pakistan</div> <div>First Test, Day 4</div> <div>Live from 12:00pm</div> <div>FRIDAY</div> </div>	<div> <div>South Africa v Pakistan</div> <div>First Test, Day 5</div> <div>Live from 12:00pm</div> <div>ESPN</div> <div>TUESDAY</div> <div>FIFA WC Qualifier</div> <div>Italy v Armenia</div> </div>	<div> <div>Live from 12:45am</div> <div>(Wednesday)</div> <div>STAR Sports</div> <div>TUESDAY</div> <div>FIFA WC Qualifier</div> <div>England v Poland</div> </div>	<div> <div>Live from 12:45am</div> <div>(Wednesday)</div> <div>WEDNESDAY</div> <div>India v Australia</div> <div>Second ODI (D/N)</div> <div>Live from 2:00pm</div> <div>Sony Six HD</div> </div>	<div> <div>TUESDAY</div> <div>FIFA WC Qualifier</div> <div>Norway v Iceland</div> <div>Live from 11:00pm</div> <div>Sweden v Germany</div> <div>Live from 12:45am</div> <div>(Wednesday)</div> </div>	<div> <div>Chile v Ecuador</div> <div>Live from 5:30am</div> <div>(Wednesday)</div> <div>Sony Six SD</div> <div>TUESDAY</div> <div>FIFA WC Qualifier</div> <div>Uruguay v Argentina</div> </div>	<div> <div>Live from 5:30am</div> <div>(Wednesday)</div> <div>WEDNESDAY</div> <div>FIFA WC Qualifier</div> <div>Peru v Bolivia</div> <div>Live from 8:15am</div> </div>



England captain Steven Gerrard stretches during a training session in London Colney yesterday on the eve of their 2014 World Cup qualifier against Poland.

PHOTO: AFP

4 automatic spots up for grabs

AFP, Paris



Eight teams go into the final round of European zone 2014 World Cup qualifiers on Tuesday with hopes of securing the final four automatic spots in Brazil next year.

Holders Spain and Fabio Capello's Russia look all but assured of securing their berths at the expense of France and Portugal respectively, though, those two will get another chance in the play-offs for the best eight runners-up.

Spain need only a point at home to Georgia to qualify, regardless of France's result at home to Finland, while Russia, who have a three-point lead over the Portuguese, also need just a point away against Azerbaijan to book their ticket to Brazil.

French morale has hardly been boosted by a Sunday poll that found that their predecessors' past bad behaviour, largely at the 2010 World Cup finals where they mutinied and refused to train, still lingers with 82% declaring they had an unfavourable opinion of the national side and 76% thought they were just plain rude.

Portugal, for their part, will be without captain and playmaker Cristiano Ronaldo and influential central defender Pepe for their final game at home to minnows Luxembourg.

While victory should be a formality, the Russians are unlikely to slip-up away at the

Azeris.

For Bosnia-Herzegovina and perennial finals under-achievers England the scenario is more complicated with both being chased by Greece and Ukraine respectively.

England host Poland, with the latter now out of the reckoning for the finals but capable of producing an upset similar to the one they achieved almost 40 years to the day.

Then, a 1-1 draw at Wembley prevented the English going to the 1974 finals and brought to a close the golden era under Alf Ramsey's management that had yielded the one and only major trophy the national side have won, the 1966 world Cup.

The present England side would not be many people's idea of a future World Cup winner, but Roy Hodgson's team have at least developed a reputation for being tough to beat.

Realistically they will need to beat the Poles on Tuesday as Ukraine, who are just two points behind, are away at pointless San Marino.

FIXTURES

Italy v Armenia (1845), Sweden v Germany (1845),

Norway v Iceland (1800), Portugal v Luxembourg

(1600), Azerbaijan v Russia (1600), Lithuania v Bosnia

(1700), Greece v Liechtenstein (1700), England v

Poland (1900), San Marino v Ukraine (1900), Spain v

Cole out of Poland tie

AFP, London

Ashley Cole will once more be missing for England after officials confirmed Sunday he would be ruled out of the team's final World Cup qualifier against Poland at Wembley on Tuesday.

The Chelsea left-back's rib injury sidelined him from England's 4-1 qualifying win at home to Montenegro on Friday and the Football Association announced Sunday he remained unfit.

However, such was the performance of Cole's 'understudy', Leighton Baines, against Montenegro, England manager Roy Hodgson is unlikely to have any qualms about selecting the Everton defender on Tuesday.

England's win over Montenegro left them top of European qualifying zone Group H and a win over Poland will guarantee their place at next year's World Cup finals in Brazil.

'WC playoff seeding unfair'

REUTERS, Paris

France believe the seeding system is unfair for the World Cup playoffs in November and plan to ask soccer's ruling body FIFA to review it ahead of next week's draw.

World and European champions Spain are three points ahead in Group I and host Georgia in their final qualifier on Tuesday when second-placed France, who look certain to go through to the playoffs, entertain Finland.

The playoff seeds will be determined by FIFA rankings and 25th-placed France face a likely clash with another big footballing nation.

Les Bleus believe the system is flawed because fewer ranking points were available in five-nation Group I while the other sections all contained six teams.

"We're going to contact (FIFA)," French Federation president Noel Le Graet told the radio station RMC. "There is a little injustice between the group of five and the groups of six.

"Our rivals from other groups have been able to score more points ... that's a fact."

Uruguay resigned to play-off fate

AFP, Montevideo



Uruguay have all but resigned themselves to the idea they will need to beat Jordan in a play-off in order to reach next year's World Cup, even if they beat Argentina on Tuesday.

The top four teams in the South American qualifying section gain automatic passage to Brazil while the fifth-place finishers, currently Uruguay, go into a play-off against minnows Jordan.

It is a scenario that is far from unfamiliar to Uruguay, who have found themselves in this position in each of the previous three World Cup qualifying campaigns as well.

For the 2002 finals in Japan and South Korea, Uruguay overcame a 1-0 first leg loss to defeat Australia 3-1 on aggregate to reach the finals.

Four years later, though, and they faced the same opponents, only to lose 4-2 on penalties after both sides won their home leg 1-0.

Four years ago, they squeezed past Costa Rica 2-1 on aggregate but there can be no denying that in Jordan, they would face their least challenging opponents yet in such a play-off.

Avoiding that possibility seems highly unlikely as Uruguay trail both Ecuador and Chile, in third and fourth in the group, by three points, while those two face each other in Lima.

A draw between them would ensure both progress and while no-one is yet screaming about a stitch-up, there is the acceptance that a play-off spot, which is the least Uruguay will end qualifying with, is a near certainty.

Even Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez has been talking up the value of qualifying through that route, dismissing the possibility that his side could lose to Jordan, ranked 73rd in the world compared to Uruguay's seventh.

"I don't share the view that the play-off is an unworthy route to reach the World Cup," he said.

"We made it to South Africa that way in 2010 and ended up finishing fourth. We're not going to the World Cup through the window or the back door."

FIXTURES

Paraguay v Colombia (2330GMT), Chile v

Ecuador (2330GMT), Peru v Bolivia (0215GMT

Wednesday), Uruguay v Argentina (2330GMT)

That assertion perhaps comes from the knowledge that they could beat Argentina in Montevideo on Tuesday and see a winner in the match between Ecuador and Chile, and yet still finish fifth on goal difference.

In that respect they trail Ecuador by six and Chile by four having scored far fewer.

Knowing that a heavy defeat is the only likely way they would fail to progress automatically, neither Chile nor Ecuador can realistically be expected to take too many risks, particularly the hosts, who would have already qualified but for losing a 3-0 lead against Colombia on Friday to draw 3-3.

Had they held on, they would have joined Colombia and runaway group leaders Argentina as having already qualified.

Ecuador all but ensured their place by beating Uruguay 1-0 in Quito. They would need to lose 3-0 in Santiago and see Uruguay beat bitter rivals Argentina by the same score to drop into the play-offs.

Elsewhere, pride is all that is at stake as rock bottom Bolivia travel to Peru, as well as in Asuncion where second-bottom Paraguay host Colombia.

Michu happy with life

REUTERS, Madrid



Swansea City forward Michu says he is not thinking about the possibility of joining one of Europe's heavyweight clubs after finally breaking into the Spanish national team this month.

The 27-year-old, who moved to the Premier League from La Liga side Rayo Vallecano in 2012 for what has proved a bargain fee of around two million pounds (\$3.2 million), signed a new four-year contract with Swansea in January, according to club's website.

Vicente del Bosque called Michu into the world and European champions' squad for the first time this month to replace the injured David Villa and included him in the starting lineup for Friday's 2-1 World Cup 2014 qualifying win at home to Belarus.

He toiled for an hour without much success before being replaced by Alvaro Negredo but Del Bosque praised him afterwards for his efforts and suggested he would have another chance to prove he deserves to be in the squad for the finals in Brazil.

Spain play their final Group I qualifier against Georgia in Albacete on Tuesday and a point will be enough to make sure of top spot ahead of France.

"I am not thinking about that at the moment," Michu, whose full name is Miguel Perez Cuesta, said in an interview with Marca sports daily published on Monday when asked about the possibility of moving to a "top" club.

"I am enjoying myself very much at Swansea," he added.

"It's a modest team but we are competing in Europe and we already won a title last season, the first in the club's history."

Michu was Swansea's top scorer last term with 22 goals in all competitions.

Honduras get 2nd chance

REUTERS

Honduras get a second chance to seal their place in next year's World Cup when they face Jamaica on Tuesday in the final round of CONCACAF qualifying.

Honduras were just minutes away from qualifying on Friday when they beat Costa Rica and Panama scored an equaliser against Mexico.

Had Panama and Mexico drawn, Honduras would have joined the United States and Costa Rica as CONCACAF's three automatic qualifier.

But a spectacular late winner from Mexico's Raul Jimenez not only revived Mexico's World Cup hopes but also put the Honduras celebrations on hold.

Honduras need only a draw from Tuesday's match at Jamaica, who have yet to register a single win in the six-national final phase of CONCACAF qualifying.

Honduras could still qualify automatically if they lost and they retained a better goal difference than Mexico.

Mario tired of being at 'eye of cyclone'

REUTERS



Mario Balotelli is tired of being in the eye of a hurricane, the president of the Italian soccer federation (FIGC) said on Monday after the maverick international became embroiled in another row.

"It's a demanding period for Mario and we have to understand the media pressure on him is excessive," Giancarlo Abete told RAI radio, a day after the AC Milan forward allegedly pushed away a television camera during a media scrum at Naples railway station.

"He can't take one step, or write one word, without it being interpreted in any number of different ways. He's a bit tired of always being in the eye of the cyclone.

"He's a 23-year-old lad who needs to grow and improve but the pressure on him is too great."

There were chaotic scenes as Italy arrived in Naples by high-speed train on Sunday evening for their World Cup qualifier at home to Armenia on Tuesday.

The squad were greeted by a media scramble at the station and Balotelli, who has a habit of getting involved in controversial incidents, appeared to push away a TV camera after it apparently clipped him on the arm as he walked by.

The striker, who missed Friday's 2-2 draw in Denmark due to illness, is serving a three-match domestic ban after insulting the referee at the end of the 2-1 home defeat by Napoli.

Italy have already qualified for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.



Italy star Mario Balotelli (C) is welcomed by supporters prior to a training session in Quarto yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP