



Cristiano Ronaldo (R) was his usual self in his comeback match, an international friendly against Ireland, in East Rutherford on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CR7 returns & impresses

AFP, East Rutherford

Cristiano Ronaldo had a hand in a goal and hit a post on his return as Portugal concluded their World Cup preparations with a 5-1 romp over the Republic of Ireland on Tuesday.

The Real Madrid striker, who missed his country's previous two warm-up games because of thigh and knee injuries, was not at his brilliant best for long periods of a one-sided friendly in the United States.

But coach Paulo Bento was just relieved to see his captain and talisman back after an injury layoff that had sparked fears that Ronaldo might not be fit for Brazil.

Ronaldo was substituted on 65 minutes, but it appeared to have been a planned change and there was no indication that he was suffering any ill effects from his injury problems.

He was replaced by Real teammate Pepe, a key defender and another whose World Cup preparations have been badly hindered by injury.

"Ronaldo played a good match, especially when considering that he has not played competitively for two weeks," said Bento.

"Players like him are important for any team, and that is the case with ourselves too. It's good to have him back."

Portugal, who were flying to Brazil immediately after the match, start their World Cup assault against Germany on June 16 in Group G -- the so-called "Group of Death" -- which also includes the USA and Ghana.

Raul Meireles also returned to the side after injury, giving Bento a full squad to choose from for the first time in the build-up to Brazil.

"The players are all fit and we have no concerns," said Bento. "That's very positive."

It took Ronaldo just 51 seconds to show what he can do, picking the ball up and powering towards goal, but his shot from outside the box was comfortable for Irish keeper David Forde.

With their next attack, on three minutes, Portugal took

the lead, as Silvestre Varela crossed from the right and striker Hugo Almeida rose unmarked to crash home a header.

Ronaldo's next contribution, on 10 minutes, was to slip awkwardly as he tried to turn, drawing gasps from the 46,000 crowd at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

But the 29-year-old, cheered every time he touched the ball, picked himself up off the turf -- no doubt to the relief of Bento and 10.5 million Portuguese.

Ronaldo was inches away from grabbing a second on 19 minutes, but his direct free kick from 20 yards pinged off the inside of Forde's post.

A minute later it was 2-0, as a Fabio Coentrao cross was deflected off the Irish boot of Richard Keough, the ball looping over Forde and beyond his outstretched glove.

On 37 minutes Ronaldo was heavily involved as the Portuguese went 3-0 up. His close-range header was saved by Forde but Almeida was quickest to rebound to net his second of the match.

An experimental Irish side showed greater appetite for the fight in the second half and scored the best goal of the night, as a quick free kick caught Portugal napping, setting James McClean free in the box.

He still had plenty to do, but did it brilliantly, slamming towards goal before unleashing a shot that gave keeper Rui Patricio no chance.

Portugal put gloss on the scoreline in the closing stages as Nani, a substitute, set up Veiirinha to thrash home and then teed up Coentrao for number five.

Nani, who impressed in his cameo, said it was "great" to have Ronaldo back.

"I think he showed he's good, he's well, and I think he showed he will be 100 percent," said the Manchester United winger.

"We are in a tough group but when you are in the World Cup you know you have to challenge the best teams. We are ready for that and we are confident."

COLOURS OF WORLD CUP



A Mexican fan is in his element on the Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

'Brazuca' is too light



AFP, Cotia

Columbia's goalkeeper David Ospina on Tuesday criticised the World Cup "Brazuca" ball made by Adidas as being too light.

Four years ago Adidas found themselves in the eye of the storm over their 'Jabulani' ball.

Goalkeepers in particular were harsh in their criticism of Jabulani with Italy's Gianluigi Buffon calling it "absolutely inadequate", Brazil's Julio Cesar comparing it to a "supermarket" ball and England's David James blasting it as "dreadful" and "horrible".

Ospina, who plays for Nice in France, claims the new Brazuca is hardly any better.

"We goalkeepers know that the passion in football comes from goals and we have to adapt to this new ball

technology," he said.

"The ball is super-difficult, it's very light, but we're working hard to adapt."

Adidas will be keen to avoid the negative headlines from South Africa in 2010.

The Jabulani was supposed to be the closest ball yet to a perfect sphere which would give it a truer flight through the air.

But when players started using it there was widespread condemnation.

Then Argentina coach Diego Maradona said: "the ball doesn't fly straight." Brazil's forward Robinho added: "For sure the guy who designed this ball never played football."

It was not all attacks however. Carlos Queiroz, then the Portugal coach who this time around will be leading Iran, said after a 7-0 thrashing of North Korea: "We love the ball!"

Manaus heat 'like a blow to the head'

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Former Brazil star Dada Maravilha has warned England's players that the heat will hit them "like a blow to the head" when they play Italy in Manaus on Saturday.

"It's very hot in Manaus," the 68-year-old former striker told AFP ahead of the World Cup Group D clash at the Amazonia Arena.

"If they (England) want to run more than the ball, they won't be able to cope with it. You have to rest, and circulate the ball, because up there the sun is like a blow to the head."

The Amazonian city of Manaus in northwestern Brazil will present unique challenges for the teams playing there, with stifling humidity and average June temperatures reaching 30 degrees Celsius (87 degrees Fahrenheit).

Dada Maravilha, real name Dario Jose dos Santos, played for several Brazilian clubs during an illustrious 20-year career and was a member of the Brazil squad that triumphed at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico.

'It can be Messi, Ronaldo's time'

GOAL.COM

Diego Maradona has hailed Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi as the two best players of their generation and believes there is still more to come from them at international level.

The Real Madrid and Barcelona stars have lifted the Ballon d'Or six times between them and dominated the game's greatest individual prize since Ronaldo was named the world's best player for the first time in 2008.

However, despite their incredible exploits at club level, critics have questioned their influence for Portugal and Argentina, but Maradona has backed both to shine at the World Cup in Brazil.

The Argentina great told the Times of India: "If an individual inspires the team with his brilliance, it helps immensely. That is why I believe the presence of Messi and Ronaldo will help Argentina and Portugal play better."

"These two are the best of this generation and both are yet to play at the best of their abilities in the biggest tournament. It is difficult for them to recreate the magic that they produce while playing for their clubs, but they have the ability to do so. A manager has to ensure an environment where the team's goals are never sacrificed. At the same time, he must ensure that the gifted individual gets the space to express himself."

Maradona - who famously inspired Argentina to World Cup glory back in 1986 - then spoke of the challenge posed by Louis van Gaal's Netherlands.

"The Netherlands have always produced exciting footballers. Arjen Robben is definitely one of them. Under Louis van Gaal, Robin van Persie has played well."

"But I was not happy with the football the Dutch played in the 2010 final. I expected skill to dominate, while they were intent on exerting physical power."

Suarez doing triple-shift

GOAL.COM

Cristian Rodriguez has revealed that Uruguay star Luis Suarez is training in "double and triple shifts" in a bid to speed up his return from injury ahead of the World Cup.

The Liverpool striker underwent surgery on a knee injury less than three weeks ago, and is now expected to be fit for his side's second group game - against England on June 19.

Suarez thanked those who supported him via a video message on Tuesday evening, citing his determination to be fit as soon as possible, and Rodriguez is keen to see his team-mate return as soon as possible.

"He is very focused. He is working in double and triple shifts and we hope to have him with us soon," Rodriguez told reporters.

Uruguay head coach Oscar Tabarez echoed his midfielder's sentiments, but admitted it is too soon to set a return date for Suarez.

Five techs to debut

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

The 2014 World Cup will represent the first time that goal-line technology has been used at football's showpiece event, but technological advances will also shape the tournament in other ways.

Here, AFP Sports identifies five new technologies that will aid players, officials and fans during the competition, which starts on Thursday:

VANISHING FOAM

In a bid to prevent teams from illegally gaining ground at free-kicks, referees at the tournament will be armed with small canisters of vanishing foam. The biodegradable white substance will be sprayed on the pitch to mark where free-kicks should be taken from and the 10-yard distance that the opposition's defensive wall must observe. Known as Aero Comex Futline, the substance dissolves within a minute. "Players respect it," says Australian referee Ben Williams. "It's a great innovation and I'm looking forward to using it."

THE 'TWITTERWALL'

The German Football Federation (DFB) has installed a specially designed 'Twitterwall' at the Germany team's hotel near Porto Seguro in the eastern Brazilian state of Bahia. Using the hashtag #aneureseite (#onyourside), supporters can send picture messages encouraging the team that will be displayed on the wall for the players to see. A similar idea was used at Frankfurt airport before the squad flew out to Brazil.

WHATSAPP

Uruguay's players have been keeping in touch with each other prior to the tournament by using the WhatsApp instant

messaging service on their smartphones. Striker Edinson Cavani revealed that he and his teammates used the app to share their thoughts on the World Cup draw, which saw the South American champions paired with England, Italy and Costa Rica. "It was a bit like 'Oh, Italy! Oh, England!'" Cavani told Britain's FourFourTwo magazine. "That messaging group is great for keeping us in contact because we're playing all around the world and we can support each other. In that moment, it went crazy!"

ULTRA HIGH DEFINITION TV

The 2014 World Cup will be the first tournament to be partly captured in Ultra High Definition (UHD), which boasts a resolution approximately four times higher than conventional High Definition television and requires a satellite network capable of handling 100 megabits of data per second. The tournament is seen as a trial run for the technology, which is not yet widely available.

iPADS

England's players have each been equipped with iPads containing personalised information about their group-stage opponents. The Football Association has designed a scouting app that allows Wayne Rooney, Steven Gerrard and their teammates to access personal data and video footage of the specific opponents they will come up against at the tournament. England have also been using heat chambers and wearing extra layers of clothing in training in a bid to replicate the humid conditions in the Amazonian city of Manaus, where they will play Italy on Saturday. "We've made progress," said midfielder James Milner. "We haven't left any stone unturned, and our preparation has been very good."



BRAZILIAN BAURU

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

JLO COMING FINALLY
Pop superstar Jennifer Lopez will perform at the World Cup opening ceremony after all, FIFA said Tuesday, two days after it announced "production issues" would prevent her travelling to Brazil.

Lopez, who recorded the official World Cup song "We Are One," with rapper Pitbull and Brazilian singer Claudia Lette, will perform it with them and Brazilian drumming collective Olodum as originally planned at Thursday's kick-off, FIFA said.

"FIFA and the Local Organizing Committee are delighted to announce that we will have the full line-up of stars," it said in a statement.

"The performance by Pitbull, Claudia Lette, Jennifer Lopez and Olodum will be the climax of the ceremony."

More than 60,000 people will be in Sao Paulo's Corinthians Arena to watch the ceremony and kick-off match between Brazil and Croatia.

Around a billion people are expected to tune in on TV worldwide.

PUT YOUR SHIRT ON PORTUGAL

You can put your shirt on Portugal not running out of team jerseys this World Cup -- all 1,000 of them.

With 20 outfield players in the 23-man squad, that averages out at a staggering 50 for each of them to sweat their way through in balmy Brazil.

They also like their cod, a national speciality, and have packed 200 kilos (440 pounds) of the stuff, the Portuguese FA said.

Also on the flight to Campinas will be 48 bottles of 10 years' old Tawny port -- but not for the players.

PITCH TROUBLE FOR ENGLAND, ITALY

The pitch at Manaus's Amazonia Arena, on which England and Italy will play their opening World Cup game on Saturday, was in a poor condition on Tuesday, an AFP journalist remarked.

The playing surface was noticeably dry and particularly bare around one of the goals, revealing large yellowing areas of turf.

The rest of the stadium appeared fully functional, but not completely finished.

In and around the changing rooms, naked power cables could be seen

dangling from the walls.

Outside the stadium, where workers were applying a final coat of asphalt, several security doors could be seen in their packaging, still waiting to be fitted.

INJURY-HIT CROATIA WAITING FOR FIFA CLEARANCE

Croatia are waiting on clearance from governing body FIFA to allow them to replace injured midfielder Ivan Mocinic with Milan Badelj, the national football federation said Wednesday on the eve of the World Cup finals opener with hosts Brazil.

Mocinic, 21, is the fourth player from the Croat squad to be forced to drop out because of injury but normally FIFA rules allow squads to replace injured players up to the eve of the kick-off of the tournament.

Mocinic suffered a recurrence of an ankle injury and is expected to be sidelined for up to three weeks.

"We have to take into account the interest of the squad but also the interest of both Mocinic and his club and that is why we have to send him home," said coach Niko Kovac in a statement published on the Croatian football federation's (HNS) website.

CAR ACCIDENT KILLS SCOLARI'S NEPHEW

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari's nephew has died in a car accident, the second death to hit his family as he oversees the team's final preparations for the World Cup.

Scolari, who left Brazil's base camp to attend his brother-in-law's funeral last month, will not be able to leave his squad again so close to Thursday's opening match against Croatia, sources close to the coach told AFP.

His nephew, 48-year-old Tarcisio Joao Schneider, died in a head-on collision with a truck after crossing into the oncoming lane while driving in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul.

The truck driver was not injured.

Schneider was Scolari's sister's son.

The coach's other sister lost her husband on May 27.

On that occasion Scolari left Brazil's training camp in Teresopolis, outside Rio de Janeiro, to attend the funeral, which was also in Rio Grande do Sul, Scolari's home state.

It's Cameroon again

AFP, Paris

From Cameroon's players refusing to board their plane for Brazil to Spain's massive offer, World Cup bonuses have already caused a stir before a ball has been kicked in anger.

As ever it was an African country, this time Cameroon, who kicked up the first fuss over bonuses.

In 2006 it was Togo while last time out in South Africa it was again Cameroon whose players threatened to go on strike.

This time Samuel Eto'o and his teammates initially refused to sign a bumper payday, with squad members reported to earn around 448,000 dollars if they go all the way.

Those may seem astronomical sums but they must be taken into consideration alongside the fact that FIFA will give 35 million

dollars to the winning federation, 25 million dollars to the runners up with the two losing semifinalists gaining 22 million and 20 million dollars depending on whether they win or lose the third-placed play-off.

Spain's massive bonuses should also be considered alongside the 600,000 euros they earned for winning Euro 2012 -- the World Cup is a bigger, more prestigious competition that generates far more money.

While the likes of Germany and Spain set out what their players will earn depending on what stage of the competition they reach, for others, such as Cameroon, bonuses are tied to simply being a part of the squad

INFO ZONE

BRAZIL	HEAD-TO-HEAD	CROATIA
2	MAICH	2
1	WIN	0
1	DRAW	1
0	LOST	1

RESULT OF THEIR LAST MEETING: BRAZIL 1-0 CROATIA (13 JUNE, FIFA WORLD CUP 2006)

KEY PLAYERS

NEYMAR

49

31

0

HEAD-TO-HEAD

75

8

0

LUKA MODRIC

75

8

0

TEAM FORMATION

4-2-3-1

Cosar

Alves, Luiz, Silva, Marcelo, Gustavo, Pulhinho, Hulk, Oscar, Neymar, Fred

4-5-1

Pletkocic

Sma, Lovren, Corukca, Pranjic, Vukojecic, Modric, Perisic, Rakitic, Kovacic, Olic

Robi SIMPLE INTERNET

Experience 3.5G Carefree

2G or 3.5G One Plan One Rate

Pack Starts at only Tk. 2

Details inside... To know your offer, dial *999#

Visit: RobiFanz.com or www.robicom.bd