

What to WATCH

**STAR SPORTS 1**  
England v India  
Second Test, Day 2  
Live from 4:00pm

**TEN CRICKET**  
Sri Lanka v South Africa  
First Test, Day 3  
Live from 10:30am



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# Germany claim top spot

Germany's charge to claim Sunday's World Cup title has seen them return to the top of FIFA's world rankings for the first time in around 20 years.

The latest list, published on Thursday, has Germany moving up one place on the strength of their 1-0 defeat of Argentina at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana.

Lionel Messi's Argentina are placed second, an improvement of three places, with the Netherlands leaping 12 rungs into third after their impressive World Cup third place finish.

The James Rodriguez-inspired Colombia move up to fourth (+4), ahead of Belgium (+6) and Uruguay while disappointing Brazil dropped four spots to seventh.

Deposed world champions Spain slumped seven spots to their new modest placing of eighth, with Switzerland and France (+7) completing the top ten.

Costa Rica's remarkable charge to the quarterfinals was rewarded with a jump of 12 places to 16th.

England's woeful first round exit resulted in Roy Hodgson's side plummeting down the ladder ten places to 20th, their lowest ranking for 18 years.

**TOP TEN**

1. Germany (+1)
2. Argentina (+3)
3. Netherlands (+12)
4. Colombia (+4)
5. Belgium (+6)
6. Uruguay (+1)
7. Brazil (-4)
8. Spain (-7)
9. Switzerland (-3)
10. France (+7)

# Iturbe joins Roma

Argentina striker Juan Manuel Iturbe left Verona for Serie A rivals Roma in a deal worth 22 million euros, the capital city club announced.

The transfer also includes performance-related bonuses worth up to 2.5 million euros.

The 20-year-old spent last season at Porto in Portugal, scoring eight goals in 33 games.

Iturbe is the second signing made by Roma this summer after last season's runners-up won the race to sign former England international left back Ashley Cole from Chelsea.

# Argentina's gift to pope

World Cup runners-up Argentina have sent their compatriot Pope Francis, a die-hard football fan, a jersey signed by the team, midfielder Maximiliano Rodriguez said Wednesday on Twitter.

The player posted a picture of himself holding up the sky blue and white jersey alongside national hero Lionel Messi, winner of the Golden Ball award for best player at the World Cup.

"This is the present the team sent to our Pope Francis!" Rodriguez wrote.

Francis is known as a lifelong football fan and card-carrying member of Argentine club San Lorenzo.

But the Vatican's chief of ceremonies, Guillermo Karcher, said the pope had refrained from watching Sunday's World Cup final in Rio de Janeiro -- in which Argentina lost 1-0 to Germany in extra time -- as "a matter of neutrality."

# Real snap up Kroos

Toni Kroos on Thursday became Real Madrid's first high profile signing for the new season, moving from Bayern Munich on a six-year deal just days after winning the World Cup with Germany.

The 24-year-old playmaker had an outstanding World Cup, scoring two goals in two minutes in the 7-1 semifinal rout of Brazil, en route to overcoming Argentina 1-0 in Sunday's final.

Spanish media said Real and Bayern agreed a deal worth between EUR25 million and EUR30 million (\$33-\$40 million). The two clubs said the transfer fee would remain secret.

Kroos is due to be unveiled by his new employers at a press conference on Thursday. His arrival could hasten the departure of fellow German Sami Khedira who risks losing his midfield place.

Real hailed their latest catch as "one of the most important players of the moment."

A Real statement described Kroos as "a playmaker capable of finding the best option in any situation, with a vision of the game enabling him to help his teammates, as well as an impressive kick."



Real Madrid's latest signing Toni Kroos

Kroos, whose contract with Bayern expired next season, sided with Real over alternatives such as Manchester United or Chelsea.

A Bayern statement confirmed it had made a deal with Real and that Kroos had signed a six year contract. "The two clubs have agreed to remain silent about the transfer fee," it said.

"We thank Toni Kroos for his time at Munich," said Bayern chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. "We have experienced great successes with him."

Kroos arrives at the Santiago Bernabeu

with 11 trophies already on his CV, the World Cup the jewel in a collection including the 2013 Champions League, Bundesliga titles and the Club World Cup.

He joined Bayern as a teenager in 2007, making his first team appearance at the age of 17. He became a regular after an 18-month loan spell at Bundesliga rivals Bayern Leverkusen.

This is the second high profile World Cup player to move to La Liga this month, following Luis Suarez's reported EUR95 million (\$128 million) transfer from Manchester City to Real's arch rivals Barcelona.

The path from the World Cup to Spain could also see Monaco's Colombia hotshot James Rodriguez join Kroos at Real.

The World Cup's top scorer with six goals told Spanish sports daily Marca on Monday: "I'd jump at the chance of going to Real Madrid."

Real have also been linked with a move for Keylor Navas, the goalkeeper whose heroics helped Costa Rica reach the World Cup quarterfinals. Navas plays with Levante in the Spanish first division and his arrival would increase pressure on Iker Casillas already criticised for his role in Spain's World Cup collapse.

# City land 5-yr Nissan deal

English Premier League champions Manchester City have landed a five-year sponsorship deal with Japanese automaker Nissan, both parties said on Thursday.

Financial terms of the deal, announced at Nissan's global headquarters in Yokohama, were not disclosed, but City called it the "most significant of its type in the Premier League".

Chevrolet, part of General Motors, sponsors City's bitter cross-city rivals Manchester United, swelling the club's coffers by an estimated \$70 million a season.

The partnership between Nissan, which owns Japanese club Yokohama F-Marininos, and City follows an initial agreement in May in which Manchester City's holding company City Football Group (CFG) took a minority stake in Yokohama.

City, who pipped Liverpool to the Premier League title last season in a dramatic run-in, are currently ranked as the world's seventh richest club by Forbes, with Spain's Real Madrid and Barcelona topping the list.

City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak hailed the tie-up with Nissan.

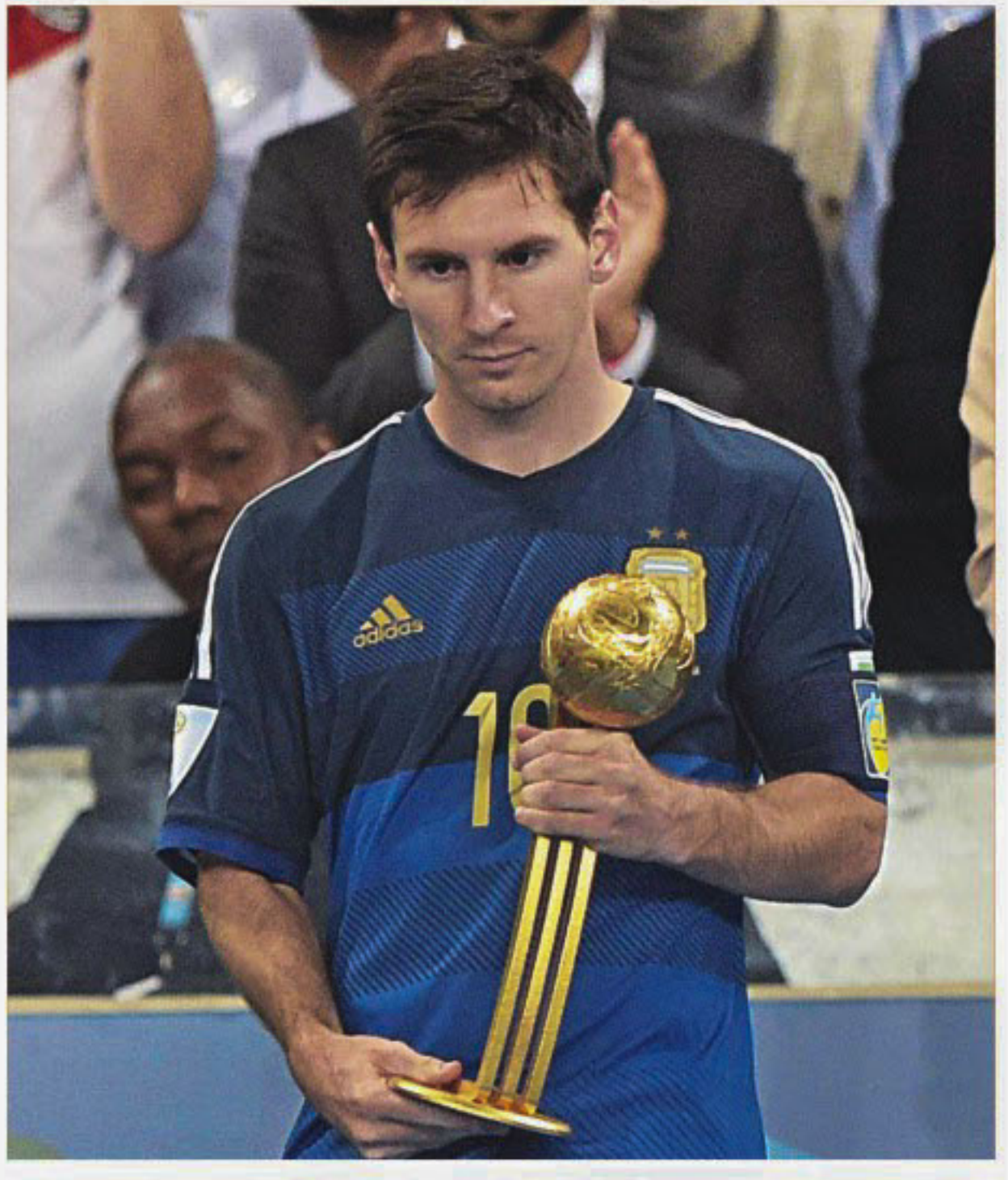
"Through our investment in, and support of, the Yokohama F-Marininos it has become very clear that Nissan and CFG also share a common passion and ambition for further growth and development," he said in a statement.

Nissan's chief executive Carlos Ghosn called the partnership a "key platform to further strengthen our brand globally".

City, bankrolled by oil tycoon owner Sheikh Mansour, head of the Abu Dhabi United Group, said Nissan would enjoy a "strong presence at the Etihad Stadium and on digital platforms" as part of the agreement.

As part of the deal announced Thursday, Nissan will see its electric vehicles used at the City Football Academy due to open later this year, City said on their website.

# 'Messi deserves Golden Ball'



ESPFCF.COM

Gerard Houllier has defended FIFA's controversial decision to name Lionel Messi the best player at the World Cup, telling Le Monde: "He fully deserves the Golden Ball".

There was a global outcry from media and fans after Messi, 27, was given the award following the defeat of his Argentina side to Germany in the 2014 World Cup final in which the Barcelona star had failed to live up to expectations.

Previously the result of a poll between the world's press and FIFA's Technical Study Group, Messi's surprise win was the consequence of analysis by the latter body solely after football's world governing body changed the voting process for the tournament in Brazil.

Even FIFA president Sepp Blatter admitted he was surprised by the decision, which led to fans jeering when Messi walked up the steps to receive his award at the Maracana, but Houllier -- a respected member of the Technical Study Group -- feels the choice was fully justified.

"I understand that it has surprised, because everyone only remembers the second half of Lionel Messi in the final. We, the commission, we look at all the games, and we judge that he was the most important man for his team. He went to the final, which is one of the conditions for the attribution of the trophy," the ex-Liverpool and Aston Villa boss explained.

"Moreover, Messi was more than decisive in the first four games. In the semifinal against the Netherlands, he took the first penalty and scored. The analysis also takes into account the fact he was the captain of a united team. A team that played well together. That's something we hadn't seen for a long time from Argentina. He was more than key in the squad and the way it was set up. For me, he fully deserves the Golden Ball given he took his team through to the final."

Critics claimed Dutch star Arjen Robben or the tournament's top scorer, Colombia's James Rodriguez, would have been more worthy winners. Houllier, however, explained neither had had a realistic chance.

He said: "Robben was exciting and very good, but he didn't carry so much weight with the team. He didn't score in either the semifinals or the quarters. Even though he won the penalty against Mexico, he was much less influential in his team's play."

"James Rodriguez stopped too soon, just like Neymar or the other key player in the Albiceleste's performance, Angel Di Maria. Di Maria might have been a very serious contender had he been able to go all the way. He was excellent, and very creative."

Houllier added that Germany's Thomas Muller, who struck five goals, had pushed Messi for the tournament's top individual prize.

He said: "There was a competition between Muller and Messi, but I repeat, we looked at all seven matches. The final counted, but only at the same level as the other games."

# Ozil helping 23 children

INTERNET

Prior to the World Cup, Germany midfielder Mesut Ozil promised to sponsor the surgeries of 11 Brazilian children in need as part of the BigShoe charity campaign.

But now that Germany has won the World Cup, Ozil has announced that he will sponsor the surgeries of 23 children -- one for every member of the German squad -- to show his thanks for the host nation's hospitality throughout the tournament.

Each player on the German team is expected to receive a bonus of €300,000 (\$405,778) for winning the country's fourth World Cup title.

So it seems Ozil, who became the most expensive German player of all time when he moved from Real Madrid to Arsenal last summer, will be reinvesting at least some of his prize money into the country that hosted one of the greatest moments of his life.

It also might help make up for the fact that Germany beat Brazil 7-1 in the semifinals.

# Romario demands clearout

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian footballing legend-turned-politician Romario on Wednesday stepped up criticism of Brazil's Football Confederation (CBF), demanding a clear out at the top.

During a World Cup which saw the five-times champions crushed in the semifinals by eventual champion Germany, 1994 champion Romario said the game's rulers were corrupt.

Now a lawmaker, he repeated his distaste for then in a speech to fellow lawmakers.

"Marco Polo del Nero is to lead the CBF for the next four years. Do you think this man is capable of overseeing change? I am sure he isn't," said Romario.

Del Nero will take over next year from Jose Maria Marin, but Romario thinks he is more of the same at the age of 73 -- even if he is a decade younger than the incumbent.

"This obscure and clandestine election needs to be annulled," said Romario of last year's naming of De Nero as the new man in charge.

# Real, Barca top Forbes rich list

AFP, New York

Spain may have been embarrassingly dethroned as World Cup holders, but Real Madrid and Barcelona are still champions at making money after they were named as the world's two richest sports franchises.

For the second successive year, Forbes business magazine tagged European champions Real Madrid, where Cristiano Ronaldo plays, as the number one sports team with a value of \$3.44 billion.

Barcelona, the home of Lionel Messi, Neymar and now the notorious Luis Suarez, are second in the chart with a current value of \$3.2 billion, while English giants Manchester United are ranked at three at \$2.81 billion despite their miserable season.

The only other football club in the top 10 are German champions Bayern Munich whose current value of \$1.85 billion is good enough for seventh spot.

The rest of the top 10 is from Major League Baseball and the National Football League.

The New York Yankees are number four,

## FORBES TOP 10

1. Real Madrid \$3.44 billion
2. Barcelona \$3.2 billion
3. Manchester United \$2.81 billion
4. New York Yankees \$2.5 billion
5. Dallas Cowboys \$2.3 billion
6. Los Angeles Dodgers \$2.0 billion
7. Bayern Munich \$1.85 billion
8. New England Patriots \$1.8 billion
9. Washington Redskins \$1.7 billion
10. New York Giants \$1.55 billion

valued at \$2.5 billion with the Dallas Cowboys, worth \$2.3 billion, holding the fifth place.

With 30 teams in the top 50, for the second consecutive year, the NFL occupies 60% of this year's list.

The full list also included six teams from MLB and four from the NBA.

The NFL's prominent standing on the list and the potential sale of the Los Angeles Clippers to former Microsoft head Steve Ballmer for \$2 billion shows the value of big market sports teams in the USA is higher than ever.



Ferran Soriano (R), CEO of City Football Group, gives a Manchester City shirt to Carlos Ghosn, CEO and president of Nissan Motor, during a press conference at Nissan's headquarters in Yokohama yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

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