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# Lewandowski eager to face Germany

AFP, Warsaw



Poland striker Robert Lewandowski says he is relishing taking on world champions Germany in Warsaw this Saturday in a Euro 2016 qualifier which pits him against several of his Bayern Munich teammates.

The 26-year-old hot-shot, who was the top scorer in the Bundesliga last season, will lead Poland's attack against Joachim Loew's Germany at the National Stadium in a key game in Group D.

"Maybe they will be too confident after winning the World Cup. Maybe they will oversleep a little and we will be able to take advantage. I hope so," said Lewandowski in quotes reported by UEFA.com.

"We know their qualities, but we will not park a bus in our penalty area."

Poland started their campaign last month with a resounding 7-0 win against minnows Gibraltar, in which Lewandowski scored four times, while the Germans enjoyed a nervy 2-1 win at home to Scotland.

Lewandowski will come up against several of his Bayern colleagues, including goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, who will captain the world champions with Bastian Schweinsteiger injured.

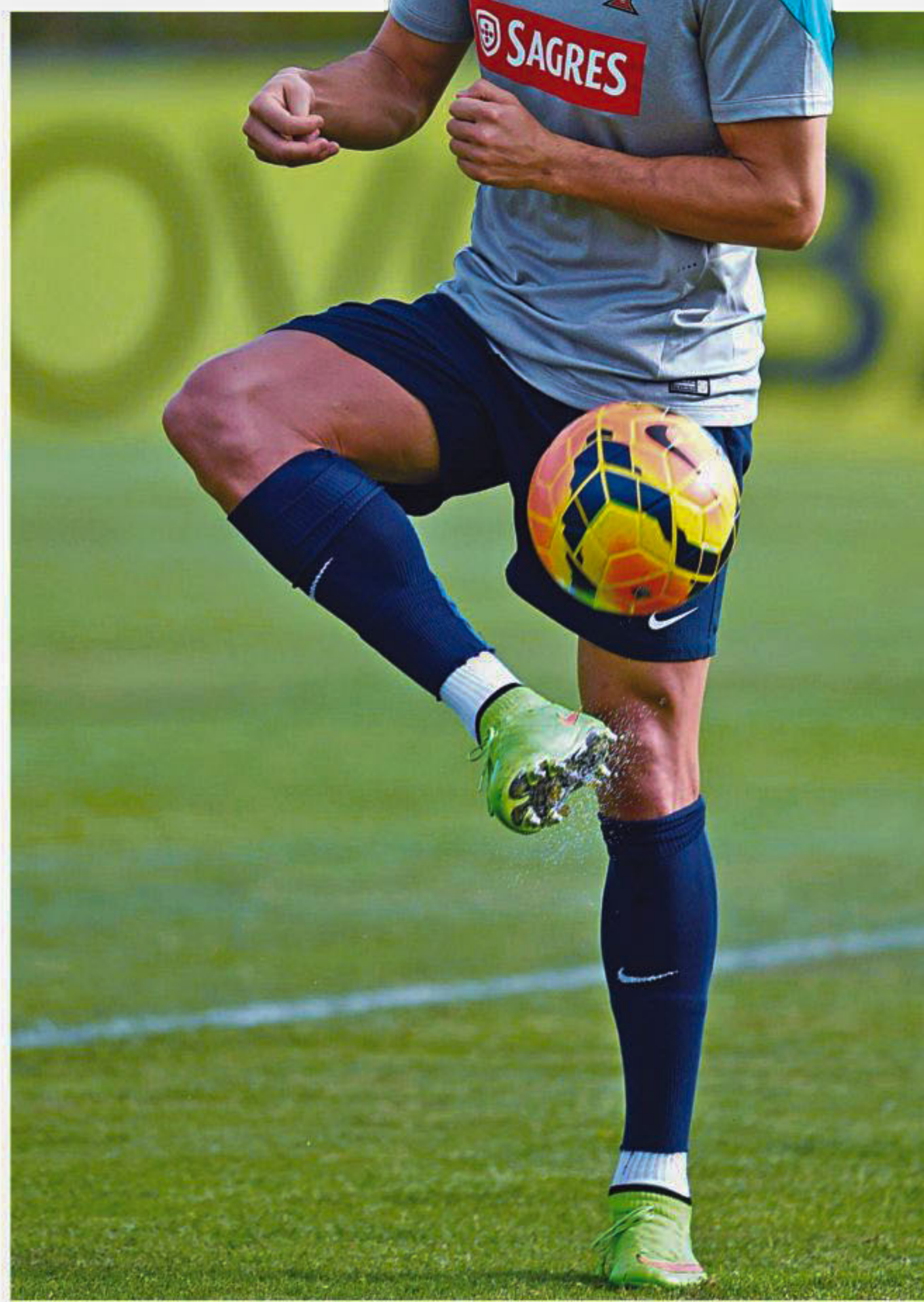
"I have good memories of my many games against Manuel," said Lewandowski, previously of Borussia Dortmund.

"I remember only too well that I scored my first Bundesliga goal against Schalke, with Neuer between the posts.

"I gave an interview to German television and they asked me a lot about it, but it is Poland v Germany and I would be equally happy if any of my team-mates scored. It does not have to be me.

"Will this match be special for me? I would not say special as such, just different.

"I know most of Germany's players - I played with some at Dortmund and now I play with some more at Bayern."



Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo controls the ball during a training session at Praia del Rey on Tuesday in preparation for their international friendly against France tomorrow.

PHOTO: AFP

# 'Ronaldo won't rejoin MU'

ESPFC.COM



Real Madrid attacker Cristiano Ronaldo has no intention of ever rejoining Manchester United, his agent Jorge Mendes has told Spanish radio station Cadena Cope.

Ronaldo, 29, spent six years at Old Trafford earlier in his career, and has been heavily linked with a return through recent months.

Reports in the British media that a deal was being put together ahead of a summer 2015 transfer had led many United fans to grow increasingly hopeful of the transfer taking place, with one group even hiring a plane to fly a "come home Ronaldo" banner over the El Madrigal stadium as Madrid won 2-0 at Villarreal last month.

The current Ballon d'Or holder's phenomenal 13 goals in six league games this season have only helped build optimism in Manchester over the move.

However his representative Mendes has told the programme El Partido de los 12 that his client was not interested in leaving the Estadio Santiago Bernabeu club, so there was no point in any other clubs even picking up the phone to enquire.

"[Ronaldo] is loved by United because his heart was there for six years," the Portuguese super agent said.

"But now he is just thinking about Real Madrid and he will stay here forever. He could not be happier. He respects the people who remember him, but he is with Madrid to the death.

"I do not receive offers because people

know it is impossible to take Cristiano out of Real Madrid, so it is not worth calling to ask about him."

Ronaldo's most recent hat-trick during Sunday's 5-0 dismantling of Athletic Bilbao took him to a record mark of 22 trebles in La Liga, alongside legendary figures Alfredo Di Stefano and Telmo Zarra.

The Portugal captain now has 269 goals in 257 games for Madrid, within reach of Di Stefano's total of 307 and Raul's club record of 323.

His current contract, signed just over 12 months ago, runs until June 2018, and pays around 20 million euros a year. Mendes suggested his client was keen to stay much longer at the Bernabeu, overcome all the available challenges there, and potentially play for Madrid for another decade or more.

"You are never going to find another like him," he said. "He is getting better every day, and will be maybe better until he is 40.

"Cristiano is very happy at Real Madrid and has always been very happy. He will beat all the records there are to beat at the Blancos club and he will retire here."

The Gestifute agency chief was equally fulsome in his praise of Ronaldo as a player and a person.

"As well as being the best player, he is the best athlete in the world," Mendes said. "You cannot compare him with anyone.

"There will be nobody like him in the next 500 years. He is a very humble and family-focused person. A spectacular father. He is the son any mother would want to have.

"He worries about other people. He has so many good things it is impossible to describe him."

# Lloris in doubt for Portugal tie

AFP, Paris

France goalkeeper and captain Hugo Lloris is a doubt for his country's friendly at home to Portugal on Saturday because of a groin problem which forced him to miss training.

The Tottenham Hotspur keeper had already worked apart from the rest of his international colleagues on Tuesday and his absence from Wednesday's behind-closed-doors session casts further doubt over his chances of featuring against Portugal.

# Cantona gave £16000 to teammates

THE TELEGRAPH

Roy Keane has recalled the day Eric Cantona stunned his Manchester United teammates by handing over £8,000 each to Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt for taking part in a dressing-room bonding session.

"In my early years at United, there was a players' pool and each of us would get about £800 out of it at the end of the season for the work we'd done for the in-house magazines, the club videos," Keane said in his autobiography.

"We were all on decent money and eight hundred quid wasn't going to make or break us, so one time, we decided to put all the cheques into a hat and the last cheque out, whoever's name was on it, got to keep all of the cheques.

"We all put our cheques in except a couple of the younger players.

"They opted out. They were new on the scene and didn't have the money to spare, but Scholesy and Nicky Butt put their cheques in.

"I think I was the third last name out, so I got a run for my money, but the last cheque out -- Eric Cantona. He'd won about sixteen grand.

"He came in the next day, there was plenty of but he had got somebody to cash the cheques and he split the money in two and gave it to Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt because, he said, the two of them had the guts to go into it when they couldn't really afford it."

# Italy aim to keep winning

AFP, Milan



Borussia Dortmund striker Ciro Immobile insists absent compatriot Mario Balotelli won't be missed when new-look Italy host Azerbaijan for the first of two Euro 2016 qualifiers on Friday.

Immobile's positive start to life in the Bundesliga since joining the German side from Torino has coincided with a recall to the national squad in the wake of a disastrous World Cup campaign.

His impressive club form is in stark contrast to that of Balotelli, who is struggling to make an impact at Liverpool since quitting AC Milan and has fallen out of favour with new Italy coach Antonio Conte.

Immobile is expected to start up front alongside Sassuolo striker Simone Zaza when Italy host Azerbaijan at the Stadio Barbera in Palermo.

Italy team manager Gabriele Oriani says the national team selectors will maintain a "revolving door policy", but Immobile said the current crop of players rightly deserve their selection.

"There are other strikers here who are playing very well. If they're here, it's because they deserve to be," Immobile told reporters at Italy's Coverciano training camp on Wednesday.

"I know Mario very well. He's a good lad, but it's the coach who picks

the squad."

Conte said earlier this week: "Mario has started afresh, so it's not easy. I think we need to give him time to settle at Liverpool.

"I make call-ups, not exclusions. Those are two very different things."

Immobile was part of the Italy squad that failed to get past the first round in Brazil where Cesare Prandelli's side lost to Costa Rica and Uruguay having opened their campaign by beating England.

Defender Leonardo Bonucci complained last week Italy's World Cup preparations suffered because their "team base was a little too holiday-like".

But any thoughts of an easy ride under Conte are likely to have dissipated immediately after his appointment.

Conte previously led Juventus to three consecutive Serie A titles and is known for his no-nonsense disciplinary approach.

Indeed this steely attitude was in evidence as he said that any bitterness or tension still hanging over the Juventus and Roma players after the Turin side won their bad-tempered Serie A game last weekend 3-2 was to be left for afterwards.

Bonucci had helped to stoke the fires with an inflammatory tweet earlier this week.

"Once you cross the door at Coverciano, all other tensions remain outside," warned Conte.

"Bonucci was wrong, and he knows he is wrong. Here, we all play for the same team. If it happens again, there will be consequences."

One of the benefits to come out of the Juventus and Roma match was the return from injury of veteran playmaker Andrea Pirlo, who seems set to line up on Friday in his usual central midfield role.

Following an opening 2-0 win over Group H rivals Oslo in Norway, where Balotelli was also absent, Italy are looking to make it three wins from three and will be encouraged that they can achieve that as Azerbaijan coach Bert Vogts has lost several key players for the game.

The German will be without defender Mahir Shukurov and forward Vagif Javadov, who both started in the 2-1 defeat to Bulgaria last month.

Striker Cihan Ozkara and injured skipper Rashad Sadygov are also missing, meaning a number of younger players have been brought in.

After the Azerbaijan clash Italy fly to Malta for their second match in four days and the clash at the Ta'Qali Stadium is perhaps more of a concern for Conte.

Malta coach Pietro Ghedin, once part of Italy's managerial staff under Cesare Maldini, Dino Zoff and Giovanni Trapattoni, said he is brimming with confidence.

"The important thing is that my boys are improving all the time and are getting there. I am very confident," Ghedin told UEFA.com.

# Bale wants Euro qualification

REUTERS, London



Gareth Bale believes qualifying for Euro 2016 with Wales would rank alongside the achievement of winning the Champions League with Real Madrid last season.

Wales have not reached a major tournament since they qualified for the World Cup finals in 1958.

The following years have been a tale of near-misses as great players such as Ryan Giggs, Mark Hughes and Ian Rush have tried and failed to steer Wales through a series of ultimately disappointing qualifying competitions.

The expansion of the European Championship to 24 teams (up from 16) has given Bale and an ever-improving Wales side perhaps their best opportunity to compete among Europe's elite.

"It would be right up there with it (Champions League) and hopefully we can do it," Bale told the BBC.

Wales have been drawn in a favourable qualifying group that includes Bosnia, Belgium, Israel, Cyprus and Andorra, with a top-three finish giving them a chance of reaching the finals.

The top two in each group qualify automatically along with the best third-place finisher, while the remaining eight third-place teams go into a playoff.

Bale, who became the world's most expensive player when he joined Real Madrid from Tottenham Hotspur a year ago for some 100 million euros (\$130 million), believes this European Championship offers Wales a great chance to end the long wait.

"It's the ultimate honour for me to play for Wales," he added.

"For me I want to try my best. I want to try and make history with the team and qualify for a major tournament and that's something we are all aiming for.

"We firmly believe that we are all pushing in the right direction.

# 'Messi will leave Barca'

GOAL.COM

Former Argentina international Gabriel Heinze does not believe that Lionel Messi will retire at Barcelona, claiming that a return to Newell's Old Boys is inevitable.

Rosario native Messi represented his hometown club as a kid before leaving for Catalunya at the tender age of 13.

The prolific attacker has since developed into one of the best players in the world and Heinze is confident that he will return to the club where it all started for him before he hangs up his boots.

"Messi will retire at Newell's, there's no need to convince him of anything," Heinze told reporters.

"I don't see him wearing any other shirt in Argentina than that of Newell's and he will retire at Newell's."

Like Messi, Heinze also started his career with Newell's and retired at the Argentine side this year, bringing the curtain down on a career that also took in stints with Sporting CP, Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester United and Real Madrid.

# Fantasy final on Saturday

AGENCIES



Many wanted this to be the 2014 World Cup Final, but that didn't happen thanks to Brazil's capitulation against Germany in the semifinals.

Argentina went on to reach the Final but they could also not get it right and beat Germany as Mario Gotze's injury time strike won the trophy for the Germans.

Since their World Cup heartache Brazil have played two friendly matches and won them both. First they beat Columbia 1-0 with Neymar getting on the score sheet before beating Ecuador by the same margin with Willian this time finding the back of the net.

Argentina, on the other hand, have only played one friendly and believe it or not that was a World Cup Final rematch against Germany in Dusseldorf.

This time Argentina were not going to be denied as they ran out 4-2 winners in a game they led 4-0 after 50 minutes. Manchester United star Angel di Maria was in fine form as he scored once and was heavily involved in the other three.

Brazil will face bitter rivals Argentina in Beijing on 11 October and then Japan in Singapore on 14 October.

This clash should be one for the ages with the likes of Neymar, David Luiz, Oscar and Robinho lining up for Brazil, while Argentina will have the likes of Di Maria and Lionel Messi running at them, with the fans finally getting to see the dream match-up again after the 1-1 draw in November 2012.

# German FA to release WC film

AFP, Berlin

Germany's Brazil 2014 victory will be shown on the silver screen next month when the German Football Association (DFB) release a 90-minute film of their World Cup triumph.

Entitled "Die Mannschaft" (The Team), the film goes behind the scenes of the entire campaign from their pre-tournament training camp in South Tyrol to their dramatic extra-time win over Argentina in the Rio de Janeiro final and celebrations in Berlin.

DFB team manager Oliver Bierhoff says the film will include footage shot by players and will go on release in German cinemas from November 10 after its premier in Berlin, before being shown on television here.



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The Daily Star



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