

STAR SPORTS2
Indian Super League
Delhi Dynamos v FC Pune City
Live from 7:30pm

SONY SIX
Armenia v France
Int'l Friendly
Live from 10:00pm
Euro Qualifiers
Germany v Ireland

Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)
TEN ACTION
Japan v Brazil
Int'l Friendly
Live from 4:45pm

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Spain striker Diego Costa (2nd from L) celebrates his goal with teammates during their Euro 2016 qualifier against Luxembourg at the Josy Barthel Stadium on Sunday. This was Costa's first goal for his adopted country.

PHOTO: AFP

Costa breaks duck

REUTERS, Luxembourg



Diego Costa's long wait for an international goal ended when the Brazil-born forward netted the third goal in an uninspiring 4-0 win for Spain away to minnows Luxembourg in Euro 2016 qualifying Group C on Sunday.

Costa had failed to find the net for his adopted country in six previous appearances but broke a duck lasting more than 500 minutes when he struck from close range in the 69th minute in a rain-lashed Luxembourg City.

David Silva opened the scoring in the 27th minute with a fine long-range drive and set up Paco Alcacer to make it 2-0 three minutes before halftime before substitute Juan Bernat added the fourth two minutes from the end.

The European champions, facing a team ranked 127th in the world, hardly dispelled doubts about their form following Thursday's surprise 2-1 loss in Slovakia, their first defeat in a qualifier for a major tournament in eight years.

However, the easy win put them back on track to qualify from a pool that also includes Ukraine, Belarus and Macedonia.

"It was really annoying me not being able to score but now I can turn the page and hopefully things will go well for me," Costa said in an interview with Spanish television.

Slovakia top the group on nine points after they won 3-1 in Belarus. Spain and Ukraine each have six points, with

Macedonia on three and Belarus and Luxembourg on one each.

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque made four changes, with David De Gea replacing decorated captain Iker Casillas in goal the most eye-catching.

Casillas, a fixture for Spain for more than a decade, committed another blunder against Slovakia and there were widespread calls for De Gea to be given a chance to show he can reproduce his fine form for Manchester United.

De Gea had little to do as Spain controlled possession for long periods but looked solid when called into action.

Alcacer joined Costa in attack with Cesc Fabregas relegated to the bench and Dani Carvajal and Marc Bartra were deployed in defence in place of Juanfran and Raul Albiol.

After a patient start when Costa and Alcacer both went close, Silva made the breakthrough when he controlled a bouncing ball just outside the penalty area and lashed a rising shot into the top corner.

Costa sliced an effort wide when through on goal four minutes later before Alcacer made it 2-0 when he controlled Silva's neat layoff and hooked a shot into the corner.

It was the Valencia striker's third goal in four appearances for La Roja and Bernat added a fourth when he ran on to a pass from fellow substitute Rodrigo and slipped the ball past Luxembourg goalkeeper Jonathan Joubert.

Spain's next outing is against Belarus in Huelva on November 15.

Benzema, Mangala doubtful

AFP, Yerevan

France striker Karim Benzema and defender Eliaquim Mangala are doubtful for the friendly against Armenia on Tuesday, while goalkeeper Hugo Lloris is ruled out, coach Didier Deschamps revealed on Monday.

Marseille's Steve Mandanda looks set to continue in goal with captain and first-choice keeper Lloris still recovering from a groin problem.

"For Hugo, he is a lot better but he won't play tomorrow (Tuesday)," said Deschamps, about the Tottenham keeper, who could also hand a first international appearance to Rennes custodian Benoit Costil.

Real Madrid marksman Benzema, who scored the opener during Saturday's 2-1 victory over Portugal, may be replaced by in-form Marseille striker Andre-Pierre Gignac who is the early top scorer in Ligue 1 with nine goals in nine matches.

"Karim took a knock on his right foot and Eliaquim felt a problem in his thigh, so they didn't train on Monday afternoon and a decision will be made in the evening on whether they will play," said the 45-year-old Deschamps, who opened the door for a starting spot for Gignac.

Milan refute Essien Ebola rumour

AFP, Milan

AC Milan have "categorically denied" that Ghanaian midfielder Michael Essien has contracted Ebola while on national team duty.

Reports in Ghana over the weekend claimed Essien was being treated after contracting the deadly virus.

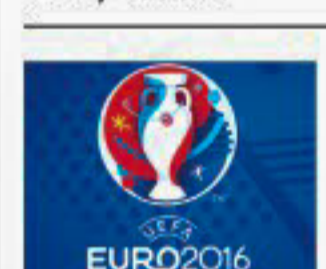
However the player's Serie A club released a statement which said: "AC Milan categorically denies the alleged reports from abroad about its players.

"Such reports are totally without foundation and what is more were never confirmed by any employee of the club."

"I'm very fit and very healthy, no truth in the internet rumours that I have contracted Ebola. I'm well & will be training as usual tomorrow," said Essien.

Roy defends decision

AFP, Tallinn



Roy Hodgson insists Raheem Sterling's complaints about tiredness left him with no choice but to rest the Liverpool midfielder for England's spluttering 1-0 win over Estonia.

Sterling, 19, was dropped to the bench for Sunday's Euro 2016 qualifier after telling England manager Hodgson he felt below his best both mentally and physically during training 24 hours before kick-off in Tallinn.

But Hodgson's decision to go along with Sterling's wishes -- selecting Liverpool's Adam Lallana instead -- proved a significant problem as England laboured to break down Estonia, a lowly 81st in FIFA's world rankings, for long periods of a scrappy encounter, even after the hosts had captain Ragnar Klavan dismissed in the 48th minute.

Eventually, Hodgson sent on Sterling for the final 27 minutes and he responded by winning the free-kick that produced Wayne Rooney's 73rd minute winner.

Yet Hodgson, who had already angered Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers when Daniel Sturridge suffered an injury on international duty earlier this season, was adamant it was the right move to rest Sterling because he doesn't want the youngster to suffer from burnout.

"We were just about to have a light session at the Grove and he (Sterling) said, 'I feel tired and I don't think I am in my best

form at the moment'," Hodgson said.

"I admire his honesty for telling me. It was two days after the San Marino game when we did a lot of running then because we had a lot of the ball.

"I had two players - one was telling me he is tired, a little bit jaded, and the other is full of beans so we put the one on that is full of beans and left the other as sub."

After Sterling's breakthrough campaign last season went into overtime at the World Cup, Rodgers recently admitted he was concerned about putting too much burden on the teenager, who he rested for Liverpool's defeat against Aston Villa last month.

When asked whether he, rather than Rodgers, should always be the one who rests Sterling to help him recover, Hodgson said: "We do have to take players' workload into consideration, and there are going to be times in top teams where players suffer from some sort of physical and mental fatigue.

"But I think it's a bit unfair if all the expectations to give the player a little bit of a break fall on my shoulders.

"He broke into the Liverpool team, had a fantastic season and then went to the World Cup. He is only a 19-year-old.

"It is not as simple as the training you are having may be taking a bit of juice from your legs.

"There is an awful lot going on in your head as well, so perhaps it is quite simply that the season has not started as well for Liverpool, he is in the spotlight for England and Liverpool."

Kramer out of Ireland clash

REUTERS, Frankfurt

Germany midfielder Christoph Kramer has been ruled out of the World Cup winners' Euro 2016 qualifier against Ireland in Gelsenkirchen with a stomach virus, coach Joachim Loew said on Monday.

Kramer joined a long list of absent players, including Bastian Schweinsteiger, Marco Reus and Mesut Ozil, as the Germans look to bounce back after Saturday's surprise 2-0 defeat in Poland.

"Everyone is at our disposal apart from Christoph Kramer and not because he was injured in the game but last night had flu symptoms and he had fever and some sort of stomach bug," Loew said. "So we will send him home."

Loew could opt for a more attacking option to replace the World Cup winner on Tuesday, with Max Kruse the only out-and-out striker in the 18-man squad.

Northeast Utd edge Kerala

GOAL.COM



Northeast United FC started their Indian Super League (ISL) campaign on a perfect note as they edged past Kerala Blasters 1-0 at the Indira Gandhi International Stadium, Guwahati on Monday evening.

Koke scored the winner in the 45th minute as the youngest side of the ISL registered three points. Ricki Herbert lined-up his side in a 4-4-1-1 formation with marquee signing Joan Capdevila operating as a left back as they beefed their defense with star goalkeeper Alexander Sorvas.

On the other hand, David James started between the sticks for Kerala Blasters with Iain Hume and CS Sabeeth starting upfront as Michael Chopra was benched due to being unfit.

It was the north east side which started better of the two as the sides played cautiously in order to avoid conceding an early goal. James Keene did well upfront as he held the ball up on a couple of occasions but his attempted pass for Zohmingliana Ralte was intercepted.

In the 16th minute, Hume thought he had done enough to put his side ahead as he tapped in a perfect Stephen Pearson cross but was rightly flagged offside.

The breakthrough came in the 45th minute when Koke put the home side ahead. Aibor Khongjee took a throw-in towards David Nghaite however, Gurwinder Singh's attempted clearance went as far as Koke. The Spaniard didn't need to take a second touch as he smashed it on the half volley to the right of David James which gave him no chance whatsoever.

Irish eye rare win

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

The Republic of Ireland travel to face besieged Germany in Tuesday's Euro 2016 qualifier with Martin O'Neill's side looking for a first win over the world champions in 20 years.

Ireland enjoyed a 2-0 win over Germany in May 1994 when Tony Cascarino and Gary Kelly scored either side of half-time in a Hanover friendly and the Republic are hoping to catch their hosts off-guard again in Gelsenkirchen.

Joachim Loew's Germany are in a vulnerable state following Saturday's shock 2-0 defeat to Poland in Warsaw -- the Poles' first win over their neighbours at the 19th attempt -- which left the Germans fourth in Group D after two matches.

In contrast, the Irish are in buoyant mood having crushed minnows Gibraltar 7-0 in Dublin to go second in the group behind leaders Poland.

Ireland's captain Robbie Keane wrapped up a hat-trick within 18 minutes of kick-off and says the goal fest gave his side a welcome confidence boost.

"There is no reason why we can't go there and get something out of the game," said Keane.

"It's going to be tough, they are the world champions and it will be completely different from the game against Gibraltar, but we are going there with confidence."

Keane's tally left him with 65 international goals as he also set a new record of 21 goals in European qualification matches, but even he is not sure of his place against the Germans.

O'Neill did not involve Glenn Whelan, Stephen Quinn, Jon Walters or Shane Long against Gibraltar as he used the depth of his squad and the 34-year-old Keane insists he is more concerned about the result than facing Loew's world champions.

"Everyone wants to play, there's no question, but the manager has to pick what's right for the team," said Ireland's captain.

"As long as we get a result, I couldn't care less."

Dunga denies drug slur

AFP, Singapore



Brazil coach Dunga denied on Monday insinuating drug use in the Argentina camp after he was filmed pinching his nose and pointing at the rival bench during the weekend win in Beijing.

Dunga, questioned over the incident during Brazil's trip to Singapore, said he was making reference to severe pollution in the Chinese capital which gave players blocked noses.

Saturday's "Superclasico" friendly was anything but, as a fired-up Brazil won 2-0 to restore pride against their fierce rivals following a poor World Cup campaign on home soil.

"I never mentioned that the players were using drugs. This kind of statement came from the media," Dunga told reporters in Singapore, where Brazil play Japan on Tuesday.

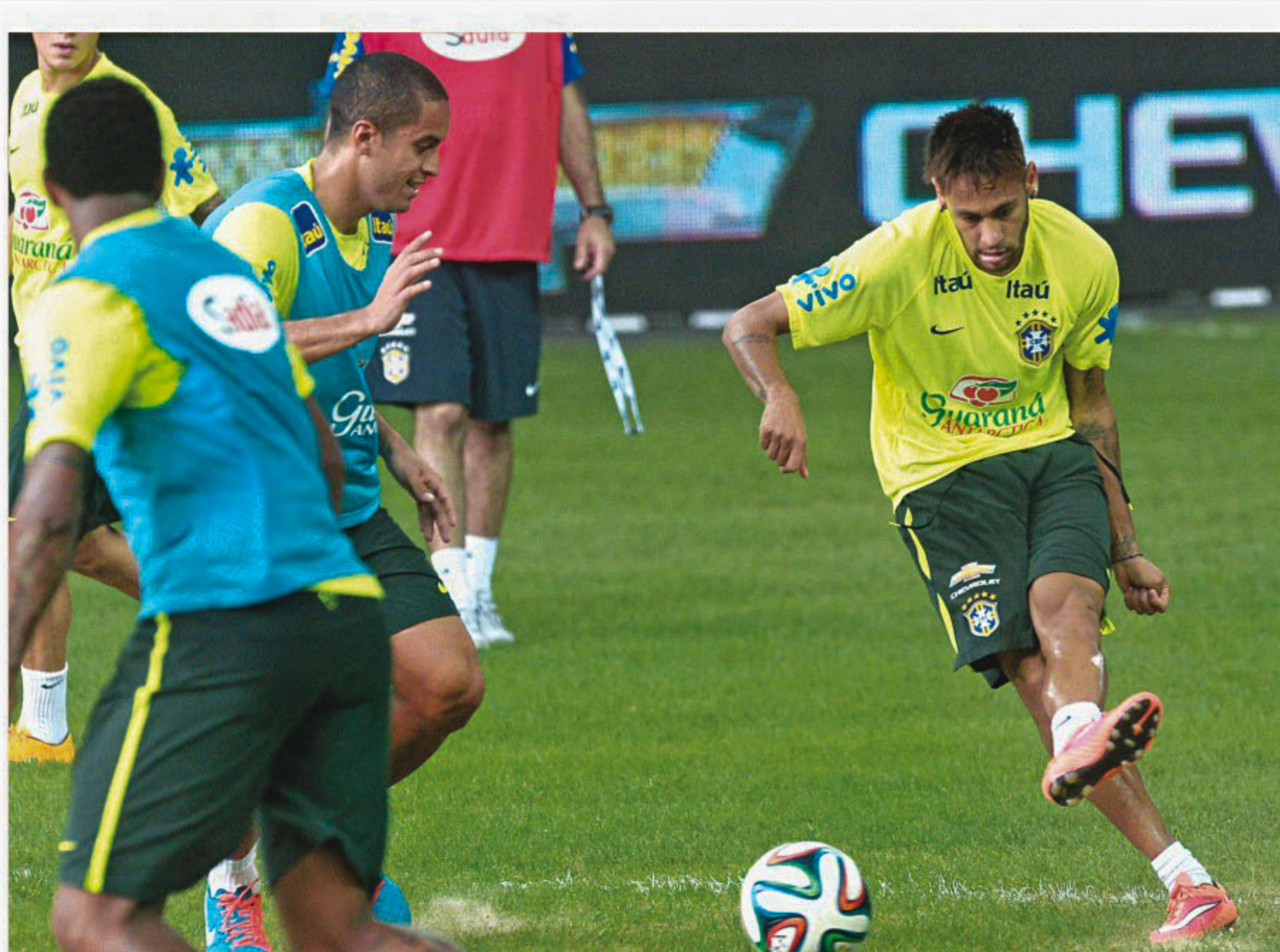
"Maybe it's due to the pollution in China that players had blocked noses all the time."

Media interpreted Dunga's repeated gesture as a "cocaine nose", implying drug use. Argentine legend Diego Maradona has endured well-publicised struggles with cocaine.

"If Brazil wants a competitive team we have to go for new tactics," Dunga said, defending his animated behaviour.

"Otherwise the players will be playing calmly and I think this is not what Brazilians expect for the Brazilian team."

Dunga added there may be a higher risk of injuries on a threadbare pitch at Singapore's new, 55,000-seat national stadium, complaining "most of it is sand".



Brazil star Neymar (R) takes a shot during a training session at the National Stadium in Singapore yesterday. Brazil will play Japan in an international friendly here today.

PHOTO: AFP

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