

C'RON'S FLASHY PRANK

With the Portugal squad being together during the international break, arch pranker Cristiano Ronaldo hit international teammate Ricardo Quaresma with the mother of all pranks then Tweeted a photo of his handiwork to Quaresma, revealing that he'd covered every inch of the Porto winger's Bentley in tin foil in order to give it "a little more speed". Quaresma was suitably shocked at the whole thing, and tweeted back, "Seriously, Cristiano? Oh you better believe it. You've been hit, you've been struck by, a smooth, meticulously groomed and entirely hairless criminal!"

- INTERNET



Syria claim finals berth

SPORTS REPORTER

Syria emerged Group E champions in the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers to seal a berth in the 16-team final round after beating pre-championship favourites Uzbekistan 2-1 in their last match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The West Asian nation, which sits 80 places below their Central Asian counterparts, rode on two first-half strikes from their premier marksman Omar Kharbin to seal the outright qualification spot for the AFC U-23 Championship, which will be held in Qatar in January, 2016.

Kharbin, a 21-year-old international with five goals in 16 matches for the senior side, gave the Syrians the lead in the 28th minute with a nod at the far post after Mahmoud Albaher's header was parried back to his path by Uzbekistan goalkeeper Akmal Tursunbaev.

The stocky striker then converted from the spot in the stoppage time of the first half to notch his sixth goal of the campaign and put his side in a commanding position.

Uzbekistan, who needed a win in this match to seal the outright qualification spot, reduced the margin in the 57th minute, thanks to a perfectly-placed grounder from Abbosbek Makhstaliev.

The Uzbeks went close to an equaliser in the final minute of regulation time when Jamshed Iskanderov beautifully set up Sardor Rakhmanov on the edge of the box, but the Uzbek forward's drive was blocked by Tursunbaev.

The defeat means the highly fancied Uzbeks will have to wait for the other qualifying groups to finish to find out whether they can grab one of the five best runners-up spots for the final round.



Syria players celebrate their qualification into the AFC U-23 Championship after defeating favourites Uzbekistan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Ziaur in solo lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman maintained his solo lead in the open section of Asian Zonal Chess Championship at the close of the seventh round in Kathmandu yesterday.

Zia beat his compatriot FM Nasir Ahmed to earn 6.5 points from seven matches of the event, which is also a qualifying round of the World Chess Championship.

GM Abdullah Al Rakib was in the second position with 5.5 points while GM Niaz Murshed, GM Enamul Hossain, IM Mohammad Minhaz Uddin, FM Sk. Nasir Ahmed, Niraula Bhupendra and Jaiswal Rupesh of Nepal shared the third position with 4.5 points each.

In the women's section, WIM Shamima Akter Liza kept her lead with six points from seven matches while WIM Rani Hamid, WFM Nazrana Khan Eva and WIM Ranasinghe of Sri Lanka were joint-second with five points each.

Falcao equals landmark

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Radamel Falcao's miserable season took on a slightly brighter hue as his second-half penalty in Monday's 3-1 win over Kuwait saw him move alongside Arnoldo Iguaran as Colombia's all-time joint top scorer with 24 goals. The 29-year-old striker -- who has failed to impress at Manchester United scoring just four times since his loan move last summer -- said the goal was welcome but the most important thing about their wins over Kuwait and Bahrain, whom they beat 6-0 last Thursday, was the confidence it brought to the team.

"Good, I am happy to have scored but the most important thing is the victory for the team," said Falcao, who missed last year's World Cup finals after failing to recover in time from a serious knee injury.

"Today, we played a good team in the shape of Kuwait who created several chances and that helps us prepare for similar situations in future matches.

"These wins will help to build confidence for the Copa America (being hosted by Chile and gets underway on June 11 with Colombia drawn alongside Brazil -- who edged them in the World Cup quarter-finals last year -- Peru and Venezuela)," added Falcao.

Iguaran ran up his tally for the national side between 1979 and 1993.

No British teams at Rio Games

AFP, London

England's Football Association confirmed on Tuesday that plans to enter British men's and women's football teams at next year's Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro have been abandoned.

The FA wanted to enter teams for the tournament, but had to scrap the proposals after encountering opposition from the football associations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

"After careful discussion, The FA has decided not to enter either a women's or a men's team into the Rio Olympics 2016," the FA said in a statement.

"We are disappointed not to be able to go ahead, given the fantastic opportunity it would have afforded the players and the broader exposure it would have brought to the game in our countries."

Hiddink needs a bullet-proof vest

AFP, Noordwijk

Guus Hiddink joked he needs a bullet-proof vest to deal with the brickbats directed at him after an uninspiring start to life as Netherlands coach.

Hiddink took over from Louis van Gaal following last year's World Cup but the Dutch have underwhelmed during his tenure.

They are languishing in third place in their Euro 2016 qualifying group after just two wins from their five games so far.

The latest disappointment saw them draw 1-1 at home to Turkey on Saturday.

Asked how he would deal with the negative reaction, Hiddink was in jovial form on Monday.

"I've put my bullet-proof vest on," he joked.

"To tell the truth, I haven't really read the papers.

"I had training to prepare ahead of tomorrow's (Tuesday's) match (against Spain).

"I have paid attention to the shots directed at me. The media are very good at manipulating public opinion."

Halfway through Euro qualifying, the Dutch trail Iceland in the second automatic qualifying place by five points, while they are only two points ahead of Turkey in the battle for third place and a play-off spot.

Next up is a friendly against Spain and Hiddink is wary that the Roja will be out for revenge after they were humiliated 5-1 by



the Netherlands at the World Cup, a result which helped ensure the then reigning champions went home after the group stages.

"The Spanish will want revenge and will want to erase the memory of that World Cup defeat in Brazil," said Hiddink.

"It will therefore be a difficult match but one that will allow me to experiment.

"Because the crucial match will be the one against Latvia in June."

He added: "I was very disappointed with our defeat in the first match against the Czech Republic because I know from experience that the first match affects the rest.

"When you start well, on the whole good results follow.

"Here that wasn't the case and we're paying for that."

Stoichkov calls van Gaal scum

INTERNET

Hristo Stoichkov has launched a scathing attack on Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal.

Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss Van Gaal was appointed United manager last summer, and United currently sit five points clear of Liverpool in fifth place.

Some supporters had complained about a lack of tempo, flair and width from Van Gaal's side but a recent spike in performance has seen those complaints subside.

However, Stoichkov, who played under Van Gaal at Barcelona, blames the Dutchman for his exit from the Camp Nou, reports the Independent.

"I have no respect for him, he's scum," Stoichkov told L'Equipe.

"One day, when I was injured, I was with my wife at Camp Nou and Van Gaal went up to her.

"He asked her how it was possible that she married someone like me. She responded that I was a Ballon d'Or winner.

"My departure in 1998 was the fault of Van Gaal, for sure."

Youngsters make waves in rankings

STAR SPORTS DESK



Mitchell Starc may have made the biggest waves in this World Cup -- jumping to the number one bowling spot after collecting the man of the series honours -- but the Bangladeshis, especially the youngsters, made waves of their own as they jumped up significantly in the ranking. The team as a whole did not fare as well despite a historic World Cup campaign, stagnating on the ninth spot after reaching the quarterfinals of the World Cup for the first time.

There was only one representative of Bangladesh in the top-tens of any category after the World Cup though, with Shakib Al Hasan being regarded as the second best all-rounder. But he also fell three spots to become the tenth best bowler in the World, falling just short of Mome Morkel.

The experienced spine of Bangladesh's side faltered in the rankings: Mushfiq put in several solid performances, but still fell three spots to number 30 in the batting rankings. Tamim Iqbal had, barring



SOUMYA SARKAR

TOP 5s

BATSMEN

AB de Villiers
Kumar Sangakkara
Hashim Amla
Virat Kohli
Tillakaratne Dilshan

BOWLERS

Mitchell Starc
Imran Tahir
Saed Ajmal
Dale Steyn
Sunil Narine

ALL-ROUNDERS

Dilshan
Shakib Al Hasan
Angelo Mathews
Mohammad Hafeez
James Faulkner

his 95 against Scotland, an unspectacular World Cup and this led to him falling seven spots to 48th.

The only veteran who made a significant impact on the rankings was Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, the captain, who jumped 14 spots to secure 26th place in the bowling rankings.

Rubel and Anamul Haque, the latter suffering a tournament-ending injury, both played well in their games, but they still fell short. Rubel fell one spot into 62nd, while Anamul fell by six spots to 59.

The new recruits; Taskin Ahmed, Sabbir Rahman and Soumya Sarkar however, made huge strides. Taskin's pace-bursts moved him up 16 spots as he captured the 110th position in the rankings, but it was the batsmen who truly set the stage alight.

Soumya, a tactically sound player with the ability to play some ostentatious shots, moved up a staggering 116 places and now sits in the 129th position among batsmen. Sabbir, a hard-hitting, well-built machine displayed his power with some huge sixes as the world sat watching. He jumped from 218 to 109, smashing his way up 109 spots.

Mats eager to join MU

AFP, Berlin

Manchester United-target Mats Hummels has said if he ever transfers abroad it will only be to the Red Devils after telling Borussia Dortmund he is weighing up his future options.

Borussia's captain, 26, has a Dortmund contract until 2017, but has long been courted by United, whose current manager Louis van Gaal is looking for a defensive leader with the English giants poised to table a bid, according to UK media reports.

Germany centre-back Hummels told Monday's edition of German magazine Kicker that he "often thinks about moving abroad", but gave Tuesday's edition of German daily Bild a far stronger indication of his Manchester thoughts.

"If I was to transfer abroad at some stage, then it would only be to Manchester United," Hummels is reported to have said.

More even split of funds to come

REUTERS, Stockholm



UEFA said on Tuesday.

Champions League and Europa League revenue will be distributed more evenly next season, the European Clubs Association (ECA) and UEFA said on Tuesday.

The announcement came amid concern the gulf between the richest clubs and the rest was widening, with the result that domestic leagues and the Champions League are becoming increasingly predictable.

"ECA and UEFA have together developed a revolutionary distribution mechanism for the Champions League and Europa League aimed at sharing ... revenue growth more evenly among European clubs," ECA and UEFA said in a joint statement after an ECA meeting.

"A record funding pot of 2.24 billion euros (\$2.41 billion) will be divided (per season) with a new focus on solidarity.

"A greater proportion of funds than ever before will go to Europa League participants, to participants in the qualifying rounds and to clubs in medium/smaller championships.

"The concept means more funding for all because the new percentage-based system ensures every stakeholder will benefit proportionally from the competitions' contin-

ued growth."

ECA chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said he was pleased with the outcome.

"We have something like 220 clubs as members so we have big clubs like Real Madrid, mid-sized clubs like Porto and small clubs coming from Malta, Cyprus and so on," Rummenigge told Reuters.

"We have to care about club football as a whole and not just for the big and rich clubs. We are very happy with the outcome ... because it's very favourable for club football and once more a signal that club football is in very good shape.

"ECA is still a very young organisation and these achievements are an extraordinary success which will strengthen the solidarity among the clubs and our sense of responsibility for football," added Rummenigge.

The ECA said more money would also be distributed to clubs who release players for Euro 2020 and that, for the first time, the amount would be calculated as a percentage rather than a fixed figure.

"Clubs will receive eight percent of income from broadcast, commercial and ticketing/hospitality, with the minimum set at 200 million euros, a 50 million increase on the clubs' share of Euro 2016 revenues," said the ECA.

UEFA probing Russia and Montenegro

AFP, Paris

UEFA has opened disciplinary proceedings against Russia and Montenegro following incidents that forced a European Championship qualifier between the teams to be abandoned.

Friday's qualifier in Podgorica was called off halfway through the second period after a number of missiles had been thrown from the stands.

Russia goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev had to be carried from the field on a stretcher and taken to hospital after being hit on the shoulder by a flare.

The game was held up for half an hour and delayed again at half-time due to crowd trouble.

It was finally abandoned when a melee broke out between rival players and benches following a penalty awarded to Russia, which was missed.

A heavenly catch

NEW ZEALAND HERALD



Call it a windfall. Call it a gift from the heavens. Jamie Gough just calls it \$107,000 and change. And that is money he plucked out of thin air.

The 34-year-old Dunedin cricketer fan was one of seven people to take a one-handed catch during the "Tui Catch a Million" competition staged during the World Cup.

He made his grab during the Sri Lanka-Afghanistan fixture at Dunedin's University Oval last month. His share of the \$750,000 prize pool is \$107,142. He expects it to appear in his bank account later this week.

"It is an insane amount of money. It is a little overwhelming, to tell you the truth, and a little hard to believe."

He has had to retell the story countless times and he owes a few people a round of drinks.

He was given the tickets to the game and had to switch shifts with a colleague so he could attend.

"And then I was only in the ground for four deliveries when I caught it."

Had New Zealand managed to win the final, the prize pool would have risen to \$1 million and his share rocketed to \$142,857.

Gough attended the World Cup final in Melbourne and arrived back in New Zealand last night. He plans to catch up with family in Auckland before returning to Dunedin and, well, to work.

Interestingly, he is a physiotherapist who specialising in hand therapy.

Cue jokes about being in safe hands.