

## OUTSPOKEN HULK DROPPED

Brazil and Zenit St Petersburg forward Hulk has been dropped from Saturday's star-studded lineup for the 2018 World Cup qualifying draw just 24 hours before the draw takes place, FIFA confirmed on Friday. The 28-year-old was set to feature alongside the likes of compatriot Ronaldo and Samuel Eto'o, but has been replaced by former Russia captain Alexey Smertin. Hulk has been an outspoken critic of the problems Russian football faces with racism and sug-



# Real destroy Man City

AFP, Melbourne

Cristiano Ronaldo was at his dazzling best as Real Madrid proved a different class to Manchester City winning 4-1 before a record crowd in the International Champions Cup at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday.

World footballer of the year Ronaldo showed his sublime skills and was among the goalscorers as Real demolished the 2014 English Premier League champions in a blistering first half performance before more than 99,000 fans at the vast stadium.

It was the MCG's biggest ever crowd for a football-only event.

The 10-time European champions revelled in the atmosphere, opening up Man City with dazzling touches, flicks and clinical finishing for three goals in the first half.

French striker Karim Benzema put the Spaniards ahead with a spectacular finish in the 21st minute.

Benzema hooked in Gareth Bale's cross over his left shoulder in a brilliant piece of finishing after a fine run down the right wing by Daniel Carvajal.

Ronaldo pounced four minutes later, getting a sublime first touch to bring down German Toni Kroos's long pass before poking home.

England goalkeeper Joe Hart was unable to keep the ball from crossing the line for a double Real sucker punch after piecemeal City defending as Ronaldo thrilled the crowd his trademark goal celebration.

It got worse for City when central defender Pepe scored Real's third with an unmarked thumping header off Isco's corner just minutes before half-time.

Deep in first-half stoppage time City got a penalty for a Sergio Ramos hand-ball as he jostled with Sterling.

Manchester United target Ramos remonstrated with Japanese referee Hiroyuki Kimura that Sterling had handled the ball first.

Yaya Toure slotted home the spot kick for City to trail 3-1 at the break.

Russian Denis Cheryshev made it four when he stabbed home an Isco cross with 17 minutes left.

City's night was further soured when new signing Fabian Delph injured his left hamstring and was carried off after just 18 minutes and was replaced by Jesus Navas.

Manager Rafael Benitez made four changes at halftime bringing off Benzema, Luka Modric, Carvajal and Pepe, while Manuel Pellegrini left his Man City team unchanged.

Ronaldo, the world football's highest paid player, turned on his party tricks for the appreciative MCG crowd, with his cheeky steppovers and flicks and was narrowly wide when he was released by Gareth Bale only to put an audacious attempt just wide.

Edin Dzeko, the subject of transfer speculation, got his first run of the tournament for City, coming on in the 64th minute as Toure, Ronaldo and Ramos came off at the same time.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (L) celebrates his goal with teammate Gareth Bale during their International Champions Cup match against Manchester City in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

## Under-19s to solve striker crisis?

SPORTS REPORTER



Even though scoring goals has long been a cause for concern for the national football team, the under-19 team is expected to be boosted by the find of a few promising strikers ahead of the SAFF U-19 Championship in August and AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers in September.

Mannan Rabbi, Shitol Rohit, and Rakib - all of the under-19 level -- are thought to be of high quality, with the former two already playing in the Bangladesh Premier League while the latter two belonging to the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) and the BFF Academy in Sylhet.

"No doubt there are some talented players in the under-19 squad called for the upcoming international engagements. They have not proven at the highest level due to lack of opportunity, but they do get a chance in the playing

eleven in competitive games, we can expect someone like Hemanta Vincent Biswas (who emerged from the U-19 team) to emerge," said Saiful Bari Titu, the head coach of the U-19 national team.

Titu has picked a 31-member preliminary with players from the BKSP, the BFF Academy and the professional clubs.

"Our philosophy is to follow the formation and style of the senior team and I have been doing so. But I will not be afraid to play in 4-4-2 formation in the upcoming tournaments, if I get quality strikers," said Titu adding that he has been providing necessary information to his strikers.

The game's governing body has been emphasising on the under-19 team, keeping their eyes on the final round of the AFC U-19 Championship as well as to use the under-19 team as the pipeline for the senior teams.

"I have been training with 20 to 22

players because the rest of the players are engaged with the Bangladesh Premier League. The boys of the camp have been improving day by day but the strength of the team will be increased once the players from the premier league join them," believes the former national footballer.

In the last edition AFC under-19 qualifiers, two national team players - Sohel Rana and Toklish Ahmed - participated while Hemanta Vincent Biswas made it straight into the national team after captaining that side in Iraq in 2013. However, this time there is no such national player in the under-19 squad, but there are eight to nine players, who have been playing top-flight football.

Before realising the dream of qualifying for the AFC U-19 final round, the charges of Titu will get an opportunity to test themselves against their sub-continent rivals in the SAFF U-19 Championship which will get under-

## Henderson still hurt

AFP, London

Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson has said the "embarrassment" of his side's 6-1 thrashing by Stoke at the end of last season is something that pains him even now.

What should have been a celebration of the final match of Anfield great Steven Gerrard's Liverpool career became a nightmare match, with the Reds already 5-0 down at half-time at Stoke's Britannia Stadium ground on May 24.

It was a desperate way for Liverpool to finish the season, but the Merseysiders will have a chance to atone when they begin the new Premier League campaign at the same ground next month.

Henderson, who has succeeded Gerrard as Liverpool captain, said he was still haunted by the result.

"It will be a day that many of us will never forget," he told several national newspapers in comments published Friday.

"The way we played, the result, the goals we conceded, everything, it went from bad to worse.

"At half-time in the dressing room, a few of us tried to say some things to get everyone going and get something back. But then full-time came and it was awful. It was a sickening feeling, really.

"It was embarrassing to go there as a Liverpool player and get beaten like that."

Hours after the defeat, the Liverpool squad were on a plane for Dubai as part of a celebration to say farewell to Gerrard.

But the nature of the Stoke defeat meant that many Liverpool players were in no mood to have a party.

"A lot of us didn't want to go to be honest," said Henderson.

"It had been organised for a number of months and it was especially for Stevie," he added.

"He has been such a huge role model for everyone who has been here and we'd wanted to make sure that we said goodbye to him properly off the field on a more personal level for him.

"If it was just a holiday, we wouldn't have gone. That is natural when that happens. It stays with you but then there comes a point when you have to move on."



FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke attends a press conference at a hall close to the Constantine Palace in St. Petersburg yesterday on the eve of the preliminary draw for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

PHOTO: AFP

## UEFA punishes Croatia

AFP, Lausanne



Croatia on Thursday were deducted one point from their Euro 2016 qualifying campaign after a swastika was scrawled on the pitch ahead of the 1-1 draw against Italy in June, UEFA confirmed.

After the penalty Croatia are on 13 points at the top of Group H, with Italy second, one point behind.

UEFA also ruled that Croatia's next two home matches will be played behind closed doors and have banned the team from playing qualifiers at the Split stadium where the incident occurred.

They were also hit with a 100,000 euros (\$110,000) fine, but escaped a ban.

Croatia have three days to appeal the ruling.

The swastika on the pitch at Split was removed by groundsmen at half-time of the draw between Croatia and Italy on June 12.

"We were hoping for such a decision but there was always some fear" to be expelled from Euro 2016, HNS vice-president Ante Kulusic told local media.

"This should be a big warning to all of us ... Today we did great, but if something similar happens again no one would save us."

The Croatian Football Federation (HNS) apologised for the incident which they said "brought prejudice against football and the Croatian State and labelled it an act of sabotage".

Last month Croatia's Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic had pleaded with UEFA not to expel his country from the European Championships because of the swastika incident.

Meanwhile, the federation said they were relieved although they were hoping for such a decision but warned that any similar incident in the future would mean far more severe consequences.

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## FIFA to meet sponsors

AFP, Saint Petersburg

FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke has announced that the troubled organisation is to meet with key sponsors who have voiced their displeasure at the corruption scandal engulfing world football's governing body.

Valcke, speaking in Saint Petersburg on the eve of the World Cup qualification draw on Saturday, said that Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Visa had sent letters voicing their dissatisfaction after corruption charges were filed against seven FIFA officials in the USA.

"There will be a meeting next month in August between all the FIFA partners and FIFA along with the legal and marketing departments," said Valcke.

"The issue is to make sure from their side that the reform process ongoing should be through an independent body."

"That was discussed with the presidents of the confederations, with (Sepp) Blatter and there will be more information about this taskforce and how it will act in the next weeks."

FIFA president Blatter confirmed earlier this week that he will step down after 17 years in the job when a new president is elected on February 26.

Blatter also outlined his reforms for the disgraced organisation including limits on

## Injury rules out Gayle till December

CRICINFO, Port of Spain

terms for leaders, tougher background checks on executive committee members and the publication of salaries of top officials.

However, VISA chief executive Charlie Scharf believes that meaningful reform can only take place once Blatter is removed.

"Two things need to happen to ensure credible reform," Scharf said in a statement on Friday.

"First, an independent, third-party commission led by one or more impartial leaders is critical to formulate reforms. Second, we believe no meaningful reform can be made under FIFA's existing leadership."

Valcke restated that he too will step aside when a new president is elected.

"Whoever the new president is should have a new general secretary," he added.

"If I was the next FIFA president I would take a new general secretary, so yes whoever becomes the next FIFA president should have a new secretary general because it is the most important relationship for any organisation."

"Whoever becomes the chairman of an organisation should appoint his CEO."

And Valcke said the current instability at FIFA meant it was unlikely that any new major sponsors would be signed up before February's election despite ongoing negotiations with two major international

## Eng, Wales top seeds

AFP, Saint Petersburg



England and Wales will take their place among the top nine European seeds for Saturday's World Cup qualifying draw in Saint Petersburg on Saturday.

The top seeds are based on the FIFA world rankings from June meaning previous World Cup winners Italy and France are only second seeds.

World champions Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Romania, Portugal, Spain and Croatia are the other top seeds.

Along with hosts Russia, 13 other European nations will qualify for the World Cup with the nine group winners from Saturday's draw being joined by the winners of four playoffs between the eight best second-placed teams.

Scotland and Northern Ireland will be in the third of the six pots, whilst the Republic of Ireland are in pot four.

The qualifying groups will take place between September 2016 and October 2017 with the playoffs in November 2017.

### SEEDINGS

Pot 1: Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, England, Wales, Spain, Croatia

Pot 2: Italy, Slovakia, Austria, Switzerland, Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Denmark, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Pot 3: Poland, Ukraine, Scotland, Hungary, Sweden, Albania, Northern Ireland, Serbia, Greece

Pot 4: Turkey, Slovenia, Israel, Republic of Ireland, Norway, Bulgaria, Faroe Islands, Montenegro, Estonia

Pot 5: Cyprus, Latvia, Armenia, Finland, Belarus, Macedonia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Moldova

Pot 6: Luxembourg, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Georgia, Malta, San Marino, Andorra

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