

## HULK BURIES CONTROVERSY

Brazilian striker Hulk scored twice to bury the controversy of being axed from the World Cup draw as reigning champions Zenit St Petersburg cruised to a 4-1 win at Ural Yekaterinburg. Hulk had been set to feature alongside the likes of compatriot Ronaldo and Samuel Eto'o at Saturday's draw for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, just days after blasting the country's record on racism in the sport. However, his removal from the ceremony was attributed to him having to make the 1,000-mile trip to



# Nat'l football c'ships return this year

SPORTS REPORTER

Country's top footballers playing the professional football league are likely to be allowed to take part in the Sher-e-Bangla National Football Championship, which is all set to return after a nine-year hiatus.

The championship involving 64 district teams, which was last held in 2006, was once the most popular tournament across the country after now-defunct Dhaka Premier League, but it went into the freezer soon after the introduction of the Professional Football League in 2007.

The Kazi Salahuddin-led committee of Bangladesh Football Federation did not pay much attention to revive the national football championship either in their first four-year tenure, but the BFF boss is finally intent on reviving the championship with assistance from Sheikh Jamal DC president Manjur Kader, who is also the president of District Football Association's league committee.

The game's governing body is now funding the District Football Associations (DFA) to run the district football league, which has featured 39 districts. The return of the district football league has virtually inspired the DFA League Committee to organise the national football championship and the national under-19 football championship.

"Frankly speaking, I have returned to football after a long gap and I felt there is no

alternative but to pay attention to the district level football in order to produce a footballers like Kazi Salahuddin, (Sheikh Mohammad) Aslam, Enayet (Hossain), (Ashraf Uddin Ahmed) Chunnun, said Kader.

"The Sher-e-Bangla Cup and the Suhrawardi Cup (under-19) were once the two most popular tournaments from where a lot of players emerged. Besides, both these tournaments had created great enthusiasm at district level. I believe there is no alternative to district football if we want to develop country's football. It is not possible to develop football from Dhaka only," said the veteran organiser.

The DFA League Committee will sit in a meeting on August 3 to discuss about the ongoing district leagues and finalise the dates for the national football championship and the national u-19 football championship, which may get underway in the latter part of September.

"We want to hold both the tournaments after the completion of the professional league so that the players of Bangladesh Premier League can play for their respective district teams, which will definitely increase the attraction of the championship," said Kader.

According to BFF officials, a total of 50 districts sent their entries for the national football championship and 42 districts showed their interest to participate in the national under-19 championship. The BFF expects 60-team participation in each



Mexico players celebrate with the CONCACAF Gold Cup trophy after defeating Jamaica in the final in Philadelphia on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Romero joins United

AFP, London

Manchester United on Sunday confirmed the signing of Argentine goalkeeper Sergio Romero on a three-year deal.

The 28-year-old will replace Victor Valdes, who was shown the door at Old Trafford after apparently refusing to play for United's second team.

"To play for the biggest club in the world is a dream come true for me," said Romero in a statement on the club's website.

"Louis van Gaal is a fantastic manager and I cannot wait to get started on this new and exciting challenge in my career."

Romero made his senior debut in the Argentine Primera Division with Racing Club in 2007.

Since then he has played for his country on several occasions, and was part of Argentina's squad for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil where they finished runners-up to Germany.

He will already be familiar with the methods of Manchester United manager Van Gaal, who was coach during Romero's time at Dutch club AZ Alkmaar.

# Gold Cup Mexico's

AFP, Philadelphia



Mexico shook off two controversy-laden triumphs to defeat Jamaica 3-1 in Sunday's Gold Cup final, hoisting a record seventh trophy and shrugging off any notion of a tainted title.

Mexican captain Andres Guardado scored in the 31st minute, Jesus Corona added another in the 47th and Oribe Peralta scored in the 61st as two defensive blunders by Michael Hector doomed Jamaica's championship dream in the biennial North American regional football tournament.

"We're very happy," Mexico manager Miguel Herrera said. "We dominated the ball. We got the rhythm we wanted and controlled the play. It's a great satisfaction for all of us."

Jamaica, whose lone goal came from substitute Darren Mattocks in the 79th minute, settled for a runner-up finish after becoming the first Caribbean squad to reach the Gold Cup final, thanks to a 2-1 upset of the United States in the semifinals. The best prior "Reggae Boyz" showing was a share of third in 1993.

"For me this is not silver. For me this is gold," Jamaica manager Winfried Schaefer said. "Nobody gave us a shot. This team played all its matches over its head. I'm very proud to coach this team. Jamaica should be very proud."

Guardado, named Golden Ball winner as the tournament's top player, became the first player to score in three Gold Cup finals. Guardado, who has 10 career Gold Cup goals, also scored in a 2007 final loss to the USA and a 2011 victory over the Americans.

Mexico benefited from late foul calls that set up penalty goals in wins over Costa Rica

in the quarter-finals and Panama in the semi-finals, both losers asking the Confederation of North and Central American and Caribbean Associations Football (CONCACAF) to investigate the calls.

CONCACAF, with several former officials charged in the US federal bribery scandal involving FIFA, admitted referee mistakes but no darker conspiracy.

Asked if he worried corruption might one day be uncovered to blemish the title run, Herrera said, "Not really agreeing with that. There were errors on the field, with the referees. They made very grave errors (but) to judge of what you're speaking, we would have to prove something."

"On the field, we're still doing what we can," he added. "We would love everything to be roses, but there are always difficulties and we have to deal with them."

Salvadoran referee Joel Aguilar was not an issue in the final, staged before 68,930 spectators at the home stadium of the NFL Philadelphia Eagles.

"Best referee I saw in the tournament," Schaefer said. "Helped CONCACAF come back on the carpet very good."

"El Tricolores" were powered by the Gold Cup's most productive attack and humbled a Jamaican side that had been the event's top defenders, surrendering only three goals in five prior matches.

Guardado's left-foot volley of a Paul Aguilar cross put Mexico on top for good and Corona scored two minutes into the second half by stealing the ball from Hector and blasting it between defender Wes Morgan's legs and inside the far post.

"This goal was a killer goal," Schaefer said. Peralta scored after Hector flubbed a clearance attempt, the ball landing at his feet from point blank range.

## Ctg Abahani hold Farashganj

SPORTS REPORTER

Host Chittagong came from behind to hold Farashganj SC to a 1-1 draw in the Manyavar Bangladesh Premier League at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

After a barren first half in the battle between two bottom sides of the 11-team table, Peter Akinyele gave Farashganj the lead in the 58th, which was later cancelled out by Koushik of Chittagong Abahani three minutes from the end.

The stalemate left the port city side in 10th position with 11 points from 16 matches while Farashganj stayed at the bottom with six points from same number of matches.

## Marzia, Sanjida hit hattricks

SPORTS REPORTER

A hattrick each from Marzia and Sanjida powered Mymensingh to a massive 16-0 win over Khulna in the JFA U-14 Women's Football Championship at the BFF artificial turf yesterday.

Marzia, a member of the national under-14 team, struck five goals while her national teammate Sanjida scored four goals. Samsunnahar netted a brace for the winning side.

In the day's other match, Dinajpur and Satkhira played out a goalless draw.

## USA, Mexico to battle it out

AFP, Philadelphia

Newly crowned Gold Cup champions Mexico will battle the United States in Pasadena, California on October 9 for a place in the 2017 FIFA Confederations Cup.

CONCACAF, football's governing body for North and Central America and the Caribbean, confirmed the fixture shortly after Mexico captured their seventh Gold Cup regional title with a 3-1 victory over Jamaica in Sunday's final.

## Pirlo's debut delight

AFP, New York

David Villa scored twice to help ensure new team-mate Andrea Pirlo launched his Major League Soccer career in style with New York City FC's 5-3 victory over Orlando.

Pirlo, a 36-year-old World Cup-winning midfielder who enjoyed star turns at AC Milan -- where he won two Champions League titles and for the past four seasons at Juventus where he won four Serie A crowns -- was the centre of attention in the match at Yankee Stadium between the two MLS expansion clubs.

Chants of "We want Pirlo!" were answered in the 57th minute, when the Italian entered the game to a standing ovation from the crowd of 32,041.

"It was very emotional when I got on the pitch," Pirlo said.

# Real cruise past Inter

AFP, Guangzhou



Gareth Bale and Cristiano Ronaldo put on a scintillating first-half show as Real Madrid cruised past Inter Milan 3-0 in the International Champions Cup in Guangzhou Monday.

Jese, Raphael Varane and James Rodriguez got the goals for the Spanish giants on a hot and humid night, but it was the display of the two modern-day Galacticos that will live long in the memory of the 39,896 fans who packed the Tianhe stadium.

Real Madrid thumped Manchester City 4-1 in Melbourne on Friday and it always looked like they would hand out a similar hammering to Inter as they were quickly into their stride.

Karim Benzema, who has been suffering with a slight thigh injury, was not risked, giving Jese a chance to play in a three-pronged attack with the world's two most expensive footballers, Ronaldo and Bale.

And it didn't take long for Ronaldo to show his intent, a neat turn in the centre circle and darting run leading to Bale being sent clear on the left in the first minute but the Welshman's cross came to nothing.

Just a minute later Inter's Juan Jesus got away down the left with his cross just evading the head of the onrushing Mauro Icardi on the six-yard line.

But that was about as close as the Italian side came as Madrid took control, with Bale and Ronaldo at the heart of everything good.

# Froome wins 2nd title

AFP, Paris



Chris Froome said he felt "incredible" after winning his second Tour de France title on Sunday in a competition that has seen him accused of cheating, spat upon and doused with urine.

The 30-year-old Briton crossed the

"There were a few difficulties, a few extra stresses outside of the race but that's cycling in 2015."

Froome has faced accusations of cheating since his last victory at the Grand Boucle two years ago, and complained that a spectator had thrown urine on him while shouting "dope" during the 14th stage of this year's race.

His victory comes as doping accusa-

"Believe in me".

Germany's Andre Greipel won the final stage of the competition, his fourth this year and 10th in total, ahead of Frenchman Bryan Coquard and Alexander Kristoff of Norway.

Colombian Nairo Quintana finished second overall with his Spanish Movistar teammate Alejandro Valverde taking third, his best finish on the Tour at the age of 35.

"I'm not disappointed at all, I've confirmed my ability and my status within the team," said Quintana.

"I'm only 25 so I have many more opportunities to try to win the Tour. (Froome) is a great rival, he suffered a lot for his victory and was very strong -- he deserves it."

Rain had rendered the cobbles at the finish on the Champs Elysees dangerous so organisers neutralised the race from the moment it reached Paris.

It meant the official timing was stopped just after riders passed the finishing line for the first time ahead of 10 laps of the famous Parisian avenue.

It allowed Froome and his teammates -- wearing a black kit with the traditional blue stripe replaced by a yellow one in homage to their leader's feat -- to finish in a straight line, arm-in-arm, over a minute after the stage winner.

Having already won the Tour in 2013, crossing the finish line in the same way then because his lead over Quintana was also sufficiently large that time around, Froome became the first Briton to win the Grand Boucle for a second time.

Quintana finished at 1min 12sec overall with Valverde third more than five minutes back.

Last year's winner Vincenzo Nibali finished fourth overall, ahead of two-



Tour de France winner Christopher Froome of Great Britain celebrates his victory on the podium on the Champs-Elysees Avenue in Paris on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

line on Paris's Champs Elysees arm-in-arm with his Sky team-mates to clinch a second Grand Boucle crown following his 2013 success.

"This is such a great race, what can I say? I feel a lot of emotion," said Froome after finishing the 21st leg of the competition.

"Of course it was a very, very difficult Tour, both on the bike and off it. I'm so happy to be here in yellow.

tions have cast a shadow over the sport of cycling, particularly after Lance Armstrong, who won the Tour de France a record seven times, was stripped of his titles after a long-running scandal.

The British press toasted Froome's victory nonetheless in the Monday editions, with tabloid The Sun sporting the headline "I'm no cheat: Froome victory dig", while the Telegraph chose



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