

RONALDO 'STARES AT HIMSELF'

It seems the giant screens at the Bernabeu Stadium are just far too tempting for Cristiano Ronaldo. While tasked with marking the prolific Real Madrid forward, Wolfsburg defender Bruno Henrique said he noticed Ronaldo's tendency to stare at himself throughout the match. "Cristiano Ronaldo is one of the biggest players in the world. I never imagined that one day I would be marking him. It was exciting," he told Goal. "He is a great player, very skilled, strong and difficult to mark, but I did well, right?" "What I also saw differently is that he kept staring [at] himself in the big screen the whole time." Ronaldo is prone to admiring his athletic physique, posting images of his rippling muscles to his social media accounts. —INTERNET



Andy sets up semi clash with Stan

AGENCIES, Paris

Defending champion Stan Wawrinka held off a late charge by Albert Ramos Vinolas to storm into the French Open semifinals with a 6-2, 6-1, 7-6 victory on Wednesday.

The third-seeded Swiss, who got off to a slow start in opening rounds of the claycourt grand slam, steamrolled through the first two sets and resisted in the third on Court Suzanne Lenglen to set up a meeting with world number two Andy Murray after the Briton saw off Frenchman Richard Gasquet in four sets.

After breaking back in the third, he forced a tiebreak and even had a set point but Wawrinka saved it and raised his arms in celebration when Ramos Vinolas's forehand sailed long on match point.

After labouring through the first game, Wawrinka crushed Ramos Vinolas to take the first two sets in less than an hour.

He seemed en route to dishing out a drubbing when he broke in the third, but Ramos-Vinolas played longer balls, putting the Swiss on the back

foot to send the set into a tiebreak.

A string of unforced errors by Wawrinka meant the Spaniard had a set point at 7-6 but Wawrinka forced a backhand error and won the two remaining points.

Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic recovered from a mediocre start to reach the French Open quarter-finals on Wednesday with a 3-6, 6-4, 6-1, 7-5 rain-delayed victory over plucky Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut.

The world number one, chasing the only grand slam title to elude him, will take on Czech seventh seed Tomas Berdych, who defeated David Ferrer.

Meanwhile in the women's draw, Australian 21st seed Samantha Stosur reached the last four with a 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) victory over Tsvetana Pironkova of Bulgaria. Former US Open champion Stosur matched her best run at a Grand Slam since reaching the semifinals in Paris in 2012.

Stosur, runner-up at Roland Garros six years ago, will play Spanish fourth seed Garbine Muguruza, who moved into the last four with a 7-5, 6-3 win over Shelby Rogers of the United States.



Second seed Andy Murray set up a French Open semifinal clash against defending champion Stan Wawrinka after toiling to a 5-7, 7-6 (7/3), 6-0, 6-2 win over Richard Gasquet.

PHOTO: REUTERS

RIO OLYMPICS Professional boxers can compete

AFP, Lausanne

Professional boxers can compete at the upcoming Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the sport's governing body ruled in a landmark decision on Wednesday.

Meeting at an extraordinary congress in Lausanne, Switzerland, 95% of the AIBA delegates voted in favour of the controversial move.

"This is a momentous occasion for AIBA, for Olympic Boxing, and for our sport as a whole, and represents another great leap forward in the evolution of boxing," AIBA chief Wu Ching-Kuo said.

The decision is however unlikely to see boxing's biggest names in Rio because it is already too late to take part in a qualifying contest.

Deschamps 'bowed to racists'

STAR SPORT DESK

France's top scorer Karim Benzema on Wednesday accused coach Didier Deschamps of bowing to pressure from a "racist" political party by not choosing him for the country's Euro 2016 squad.

The Real Madrid striker, who is being investigated over an alleged sex-tape blackmail case, questioned whether Deschamps left him out because of his Algerian descent.

Benzema told Spanish daily Marca that Deschamps "bowed to pressure from a racist French party" in his selection, referencing the recent electoral success of France's far-right National Front.

"I do not know if this decision was only down to Didier, because I get along with him, with the president (of the French Football Federation, Noel Le Graet) and everyone," he said.

Benzema was suspended from international duty in December over a legal investigation into an alleged attempt by one of his friends to blackmail his teammate Mathieu Valbuena over a sex tape.

France's leading goal-scorer faces up to five years in jail over accusations he encouraged Valbuena to

pay the blackmailers.

"They said I cannot be selected, fine. But on a sporting level, I don't understand why," he said.

"At a legal level, I am still innocent until proven guilty. They should wait until the justice system has made its decision."

Benzema remains France's top striker, with 27 goals in 81 appear-



KARIM BENZEMA

have opposed any rehabilitation while the sex-tape inquiry goes on.

"The only person who knows what happened in this affair, who knows the truth, is Valbuena," Benzema told Marca.

"He played a role, he has not told the truth. I wanted to help him, nothing more, and the whole thing blew up in my face."



VINCENT KOMPANY

ances, despite the emergence of the younger Antoine Griezmann and Anthony Martial.

His path to the French Euro 2016 squad was cleared when legal restrictions stopping him playing on the same team as Valbuena were lifted.

But French Prime Minister Manuel Valls and other politicians

The exclusion of Ben Arfa and Benzema from the national squad has caused waves in France, which is struggling with racial tensions after two deadly terrorist attacks in Paris.

Ben Arfa, of Tunisian origin, had been hopeful of making the squad after relaunching his career at Nice, but instead had to settle for a place on Deschamps's standby list of eight

players.

Adding to the controversy, Cantona said in fresh comments published in Le Journal du Dimanche that without the two players, the squad does not reflect the France he loves.

Meanwhile, Belgium coach Marc Wilmots confirmed his 23-man squad for Euro 2016 on Tuesday, albeit a list depleted by defensive injuries.

The 47-year-old had already seen captain Vincent Kompany and Bjorn Engels ruled out of the tournament in France, with fellow defenders Nicolas Lombaerts and Dedryck Boyata were forced to pull out on Monday.

Wilmots tried to laugh off the problems with some black humour, saying: "I thought about killing myself yesterday," before clarifying that he was only "joking".

"It's sad for all the boys, but that's life," he said. "The defenders who I have at my disposal are still very good players."

Wilmots called up uncapped Genk defender Christian Kabasele on Monday.

Belgium, ranked second in the FIFA world rankings, open their Group E campaign on June 13 against Italy in Lyon, before also facing Sweden and the Republic of Ireland.

Will Messi end drought?

AFP, Los Angeles



Lionel Messi and Argentina will be targeting the country's 23-year title drought when the Copa America Centenario kicks off on Friday.

One hundred years after Uruguay clinched the inaugural four-team South American championship in Argentina, 16 teams from across the Americas are gathered in the United States for a special one-off edition of the tournament.

The three-week festival of football gets under way at the Levi's Stadium in California on Friday, when the United States face Colombia at the home of the San Francisco 49ers American football team.

The tournament will conclude with a final at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford on June 26, drawing a line under what is arguably the biggest tournament held in the United States since the 1994 World Cup.

Billed as a celebration of football across the Americas, 10 South American teams and six teams from the CONCACAF (North America, Central America and the Caribbean) region make up the field.

For organizers, the mere fact that the tournament is taking place at all is something of a triumph.

For several months last year the Copa faced an uncertain future after the arrest and indictment for corruption of several officials

from South America and CONCACAF responsible for dreaming up the tournament.

Messi and Argentina will be aiming to win the country's first major title since the 1993 Copa America after a series of recent near-misses.

The Argentines lost both the 2014 World Cup final and the 2015 Copa America in Chile. Messi, due in Spain this week to attend his trial for tax fraud, says it is time Argentina's talented players delivered.

"It has been a very long time since Argentina has won anything, and this group came very close in the World Cup and at the last Copa America," he told Sports Illustrated on the eve of the tournament.

"I think we deserve to be champions of an important competition."

Argentina open their campaign against Chile in Santa Clara next Monday. Panama and Bolivia complete Group D.

The United States meanwhile will aim to build on their encouraging performance at the 2014 World Cup, when they reached the knockout round, by progressing from a "Group of Death" which includes Colombia, Costa Rica and Paraguay.

Five-time World Cup winners Brazil will be favoured to safely navigate Group B, where they face Ecuador, Haiti and Peru.

The Brazilians open against Ecuador at Pasadena's Rose Bowl on Saturday -- scene of their victory at the 1994 World Cup final.

Mexico and Uruguay will be expected to progress from Group C, with Jamaica and Venezuela completing the field.

SQUADS

FRANCE

Goalkeepers: Hugo Lloris (Tottenham Hotspur/ENG), Steve Mandanda (Marseille), Benoit Costil (Rennes)
Defenders: Adil Rami (Sevilla/ESP), Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal/ENG), Eliaquim Mangala (Manchester City/ENG), Samuel Umtiti (Lyon), Patrice Evra (Juventus/ITA), Bacary Sagna (Manchester City/ENG), Lucas Digne (Roma/ITA - on loan from Paris Saint-Germain), Christophe Jallet (Lyon)
Midfielders: Paul Pogba (Juventus/ITA), Blaise Matuidi (Paris Saint-Germain), Morgan Schneiderlin (Manchester United/ENG), N'Golo Kante (Leicester City/ENG), Yohan Cabaye (Crystal Palace/ENG), Moussa Sissoko (Newcastle United/ENG)

Forwards: Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Dimitri Payet (West Ham United/ENG), Anthony Martial (Manchester United/ENG), Kingsley Coman (Bayern Munich/GER - on loan from Juventus/ITA), Olivier Giroud (Arsenal), Andre-Pierre Gignac (Tigres UANL/MEX)

ROMANIA

Goalkeepers: Ciprian Tatarusanu (Fiorentina/ITA), Costel Pantilimon (Watford/ENG), Silviu Lung (Astra Giurgiu)
Defenders: Cristian Sapunaru (Pandurii Targu Jiu), Alexandru Matel (Dinamo Zagreb/CRO), Vlad Chiriches (Napoli/ITA), Valerica Gaman (Astra Giurgiu), Dragos Grigore (Al-Sailiya/QAT), Cosmin Moti (Ludogorets Razgrad/BUL), Razvan Rat (Rayo Vallecano/ESP), Steliano Filip (Dinamo Bucharest)
Midfielders: Mihai Pintilii (Steaua Bucharest), Ovidiu Hoban (Hapoel Be'er Sheva/ISR), Andrei Prepelita (Ludogorets Razgrad/BUL), Adrian Popa (Steaua Bucharest), Gabriel Torje (Osmanlispor/TUR), Alexandru Chipciu (Steaua Bucharest), Nicolae Stanciu (Steaua Bucharest), Lucian Sanmartean (Al Ittihad/SAU)
Forwards: Claudiu Keseru (Ludogorets

Razgrad/BUL), Bogdan Stancu (Genclerbirligi/TUR), Florin Andone (Cordoba/ESP), Denis Alibec (Astra Giurgiu)

ALBANIA

Goalkeepers: Etrit Berisha (Lazio/ITA), Alban Hoxha (Partizani Tirana), Orges Shehi (Skenderbeu Korce)
Defenders: Arlind Ajeti (Frosinone/ITA), Naser Aljaji (Basel/SUI), Mergim Mavraj (Cologne/GER), Lorik Cana (Nantes/FRA), Elseid Hysaj (Napoli/ITA), Ansi Agolli (Qarabag/AZE), Frederic Veseli (Lugano/SUI)
Midfielders: Ledian Memushaj (Pescara/ITA), Ergys Kace (PAOK/GER), Andi Lila (PAS Giannina/GRE), Migjen Basha (Como/ITA), Odise Roshi (Rijeka/CRO), Burim Kukeli (FC Zurich/SUI), Ermir Lenjani (Nantes/FRA), Taulant Xhaka (Basel/SUI), Amir Abrashi (Freiburg/GER)
Forwards: Bekim Bala (Rijeka/CRO), Sokol Cikalleshi (Istanbul BB/TUR), Armando Sadiku (Vaduz/LIE), Shkelzen Gashi (Colorado Rapids/USA)

RUSSIA

Goalkeepers: Igor Akinfeev (CSKA Moscow), Guilherme (Lokomotiv Moscow), Yuri Lodygin (Zenit St Petersburg)
Defenders: Alexei Berezutski (CSKA Moscow), Vasily Berezutski (CSKA Moscow), Sergei Ignashevich (CSKA Moscow), Dmitri Kombarov (Spartak Moscow), Roman Neustadter (Schalke/GER), Igor Smolnikov (Zenit St Petersburg), Roman Shishkin (Lokomotiv Moscow), Georgy Shchennikov (CSKA Moscow)
Midfielders: Alexander Golovin (CSKA Moscow), Denis Glushakov (Spartak Moscow), Igor Denisov (Dinamo Moscow), Alan Dzagoev (CSKA Moscow), Oleg Ivanov (Terek Grozny), Pavel Mamaev (Krasnodar), Alexander Samedov (Lokomotiv Moscow), Oleg Shatov (Zenit St Petersburg), Roman Shirokov (CSKA Moscow)
Forwards: Artem Dzyuba (Zenit St Petersburg), Alexander Kokorin (Zenit St

Petersburg), Fedor Smolov (FC Krasnodar)

BELGIUM

Goalkeepers: Thibaut Courtois (Chelsea/ENG), Simon Mignolet (Liverpool/ENG), Jean-Francois Gillet (Mechelen)
Defenders: Toby Alderweireld (Tottenham Hotspur/ENG), Jan Vertonghen (Tottenham Hotspur/ENG), Thomas Vermaelen (Barcelona/ESP), Jason Denayer (Galatasaray/TUR), Jordan Lukaku (Oostende), Thomas Meunier (Club Brugge), Laurent Ciman (Montreal Impact/CAN), Christian Kabasele (Genk)
Midfielders: Moussa Dembele (Tottenham Hotspur/ENG), Radja Nainggolan (Roma/ITA), Marouane Fellaini (Manchester United/ENG), Axel Witsel (Zenit Saint-Petersburg), Eden Hazard (Chelsea/ENG), Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City/ENG), Dries Mertens (Napoli/ITA), Yannick Carrasco (Atletico Madrid/ESP)
Forwards: Mitchy Batshuayi (Marseille/FRA), Romelu Lukaku (Everton/ENG), Christian Benteke (Liverpool/ENG), Divock Origi (Liverpool/ENG)

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Goalkeepers: Shay Given (Stoke City/ENG), Darren Randolph (West Ham United/ENG), Keiren Westwood (Sheffield Wednesday/ENG)
Defenders: Cyrus Christie (Derby County/ENG), Seamus Coleman (Everton/ENG), Richard Keogh (Derby County/ENG), Shane Duffy (Blackburn Rovers/ENG), John O'Shea (Sunderland/ENG), Ciaran Clark (Aston Villa/ENG), Stephen Ward (Burnley/ENG), Robbie Brady (Norwich City/ENG)
Midfielders: Aidan McGeady (Sheffield Wednesday/ENG), David Meyler (Hull City/ENG), Jeff Hendrick (Derby County/ENG), Stephen Quinn (Reading/ENG), James McCarthy (Everton/ENG), Glenn Whelan (Stoke City/ENG), Jonathan Walters (Stoke City/ENG), Wes Hoolahan (Norwich City/ENG), James McClean (West Bromwich Albion/ENG)

Strikers: Shane Long (Southampton/ENG), Daryl Murphy (Ipswich Town/ENG), Robbie Keane (Los Angeles Galaxy/USA)

SWEDEN

Goalkeepers: Andreas Isaksson (Kasimpasa/TUR), Robin Olsen (FC Copenhagen/DEN), Patrik Carlgen (AIK)
Defenders: Ludwig Augustinsson (FC Copenhagen/DEN), Mikael Lustig (Celtic/SCO), Andreas Granqvist (Krasnodar/RUS), Erik Johansson (FC Copenhagen/DEN), Victor Nilsson Lindelof (Benfica/POR), Martin Olsson (Norwich/ENG), Pontus Jansson (Torino/ITA)
Midfielders: Jimmy Durmaz (Olympiakos/GRE), Albin Ekdal (Hamburg/GER), Emil Forsberg (RB Leipzig/GER), Oscar Hiljemark (Palermo/ITA), Kim Kallstrom (Grasshopper/SUI), Sebastian Larsson (Sunderland/ENG), Oscar Lewicki (Malmo), Pontus Wernbloom (CSKA Moscow/RUS), Erkan Zengin (Trabzonspor/TUR)
Strikers: Marcus Berg (Panathinaikos/GER), John Guidetti (Celta Vigo/ESP), Emir Kujovic (Norrkoping), Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Paris SG/FRA)

PORTUGAL

Goalkeepers: Rui Patrício (Sporting), Anthony Lopes (Lyon/FRA), Eduardo (Dinamo Zagreb/CRO)
Defenders: Cedric Soares (Southampton/ENG), Vieirinha (Wolfsburg/GER), Bruno Alves (Fenerbahçe/TUR), Ricardo Carvalho (Monaco/FRA), José Fonte (Southampton/ENG), Pepe (Real Madrid/ESP), Eliseu (Benfica), Raphaël Guerreiro (Lorient/FRA)
Midfielders: Danilo Pereira (FC Porto), William Carvalho (Sporting), Adrien Silva (Sporting), Joao Mario (Sporting), Joao Moutinho (Monaco/FRA), André Gomes (Valencia/ESP), Renato Sanches (Benfica)
Forwards: Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid/ESP), Nani (Fenerbahçe/TUR), Eder (Lille/FRA - on loan from Swansea City/ENG), Ricardo Quaresma (Besiktas/TUR), Rafa Silva (Braga)

EURO 2016 COUNTDOWN 8 DAYS TO GO

Muller, Platini & Basten

STAR SPORT DESK

On 18th June in 1972, West Germany won their first European title thanks to a magnificent performance from a modest Gerd Muller who later put his four goals -- two each in the semifinal and the final -- down to luck. But luck had nothing to do with a team that had won just one trophy and played in two finals; since their triumph in Belgium they have won three FIFA World Cups, EURO crowns in 1980 and 1996 and reached six other major finals. Muller's brace in 3-0 thrashing of the Soviet Union was the three-time finalists' worst performance in a lop-sided final where at one stage their opponents strung 30 consecutive passes together. It was a match that witnessed the destruction of an outdated packed defence by the first stirrings of 'total football.' It was a masterclass from the Germans and the first sight of a Soviet decline.



GERD MULLER

There have been many penalty shoot-outs in major tournaments over the years, but perhaps the most famous was the very first -- the 1976 UEFA European Championship showpiece in Belgrade. Twice Czechoslovakia led, twice world and European champions West Germany equalised, the second in the last minute. A half-hour later penalties were needed, and after Uli Hoeness had blasted West Germany's fourth effort over the bar, Antonin Panenka sensationally chipped the ball past Sepp Maier to seal a 5-3 shoot-out win for their

only European title.

In 1980, Italy became the first country to host the competition that saw the number of team increased from four to eight. However, it was the Germans who lifted their second title thanks to a non-descript late-bloomer Horst Hrubesch's sensation performance. At 23 Horst Hrubesch was playing lower league football, but six years on, the last minute entrant scored Germany's last-gasp winner against Belgium, who lost 1-2.

Few major tournament wins have captured the imagination like France's 1984 UEFA European Championship success on home soil. In an all-star team, the inspiration was captain Michel Platini, whose nine-goal tally in five games, including two hat-tricks, remains a finals record, capped by his opener in the decider against Spain in a 2-0 win. It was a special moment for Michel Hidalgo's side after

penalty heartbreak against West Germany in the World Cup semifinal two years earlier. If 1984 belonged to Platini, the next edition in 1988 was story of Marco van Basten. A hat-trick against England, a semi-final winner versus West Germany and a spectacular volley to see off the Soviet Union in the final scripted the Netherland's first European glory. Already the most promising talents in the game, Van Basten rose to the hall of fame with that spectacular volley from an acute angle in the final. His 88th minute winner against Germany also ended Netherlands 32 years wait.