

RONALDO TO 'COME BACK STRONGER'

Cristiano Ronaldo has vowed to come back stronger for the coming season after suffering a knee injury in Portugal's triumphant Euro 2016 final earlier this month. The Real Madrid forward, who is in this year's Best Player in Europe shortlist, was carried off the pitch on a stretcher after 25 minutes in the final against hosts France. "I just wanted to thank all my fans," Ronaldo said in a video on his Instagram account. "I wanted to tell them that all is well and that I will come back much stronger. Thank you, long live Portugal." The 31-year-old, who racked up 51 goals in 48 games last season, scored the decisive penalty to seal Real's second Champions League final success over local rivals Atletico Madrid in three years. La Liga runners-up Real begin their 2016-17 campaign, in what will be manager Zinedine Zidane's first full season in charge, away to Real Sociedad on Aug. 21.

—REUTERS



Sprinters' dreams come true

SPORTS REPORTER



After being given wild card entries into the Rio Olympics by the International Olympic Council, Bangladesh's fastest man and woman, Mezbah Ahmed and Shirin Akter are ecstatic about the opportunity to represent Bangladesh.

With the inclusion of Mezbah and Shirin, the number of athletes for the Bangladesh contingent heading to the world's greatest sporting event, which is to be held in Rio de Janeiro on August 5, has increased to seven.

Shooter Abdullah Hel Baki, archer Shaymoli Roy, swimmers Mahfizur Rahman Sagor and Sonia Akter Tumpa had earlier received wild cards while golfer Siddikur Rahman qualified directly.

With their dreams of representing the nation in the Olympics coming true, both Mezbah and Shirin have set their sights on improving their personal records.

"I was tensed thinking of not getting the opportunity to run in the Olympics despite being the country's fastest man for four

times. Now I feel good as I got the opportunity to run in the biggest stage," Mezbah told reporters at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

"I want to break my previous best in the Olympics. I timed 10.72 seconds in the South Asian Games in India earlier this year. If I can produce 10.70 seconds in Rio, it will be an improvement," said Mezbah, who believes Bangladeshi sprinters need more facilities to close the gap with world-class counterparts.

Shirin had not given up hopes of getting the wild card despite the official deadline being over a few days earlier.

"When I came into athletics, there was this dream of taking part in top-level games like Olympics. Finally, I am going to participate in the Olympics," Shirin said.

"At one stage, it seemed that the chance was over, but I never gave up hope. And when the dream came true yesterday [Monday], that is when I learnt about getting the wild card, I had sleepless night after that."

Like Mezbah, Shirin also wants to improve on her previous best timing. Shirin's best clocks in at 11.99 seconds in the SA Games in India.



Shirin Akter and Mezbah Ahmed, the fastest woman and man of Bangladesh, were ecstatic after receiving their wild cards for the Rio Olympic Games late on Monday night.

PHOTO: STAR

IOC studies 'legal options' on banning Russia from Rio

AFP, Lausanne



The International Olympic Committee said Tuesday it will study "legal options" on banning Russia from the Rio Games and ordered disciplinary action against Russian officials implicated in a state-run doping system.

The IOC executive held emergency telephone talks after a World Anti-Doping Agency commissioned report said there had been state-sanctioned doping at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and other major events.

The IOC "will explore the legal options with regard to a collective ban of all Russian athletes for the Olympic Games 2016 versus the right to individual justice," said a statement.

But the Olympic leadership said it will have to wait for a Court of Arbitration for Sports decision expected Thursday on the case of 68 Russian athletes appealing against an IAAF ban.

The IOC also said it would have to study the bombshell report by Canadian law professor Richard McLaren which detailed the Russian cheating, organised by the Sports Ministry and using the FSB intelligence service.

A final decision would also depend on the WADA code and the Olympic Charter, the IOC said, giving an indication of the legal battle ahead.

The executive ordered a re-analysis of all samples by Russian athletes taken at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and action against the sports ministry.

The IOC said it had "started disciplinary actions related to the involvement of officials within the Russian Ministry of Sports and other persons mentioned in the report," said the statement.

The Olympic leadership also called for a halt to international events in Russia.

"Because of the detailed references to the manipulation of samples during the Olympic Winter Games Sochi 2014 the IOC asks all International Olympic Winter Sports Federations to freeze their preparations for major events in Russia," it said.

The IOC said this should include world championships, World Cups or other major international competi-

tions and said winter federations should "actively look for alternative organisers."

WADA led calls in support of Russia's ban, a position backed by the German Olympic body (DOSB) as well as anti-doping institutions from Canada to New Zealand.

But others called for caution, pointing to the ethical issues of punishing aspiring Olympians who have never tested positive for drug use.

Bach raised those concerns himself over a ban previously imposed against Russia by international athletics governing body IAAF because of doping in the country's track and field programme.

The Olympics chief and some international federations have called for a way for Russian athletes proved to be clean to compete in Rio.

Reacting to the McLaren report, the Association of Summer Olympic Federations said it was "important to focus on the need for individual justice" while noting "the gravity and extent" of the alleged cheating.

In China, the state-owned Global Times newspaper took the view that "Banning Russia will tarnish Olympic spirit".

The Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) vowed to fight "protect the rights of clean athletes," while seeking to undermine the credibility of McLaren's key witness, the dismissed former boss of Russia's anti-doping lab Grigory Rodchenkov, who admits he was central to the cheating scheme.

The ROC insisted that collectively punishing all Russian competitors based on Rodchenkov's evidence left "the integrity of the Olympic Movement...endangered."

McLaren said his team uncovered forensic evidence that proved Rodchenkov's claims.

The Canadian lawyer said the coverup started in 2010 after Russia's "abysmal" results at the Vancouver Winter Olympics and continued until 2015 after the Sochi Games. It included the 2013 World Athletics Championships in Moscow and 2013 World University Games in Kazan.

At Sochi, the FSB helped Rodchenkov's staff destroy supposedly tamper-proof urine samples that would have seen a Russian athlete caught doping and swapping them for clean ones, according to the report.

Shobukhova ordered to repay money

AFP, London



Disgraced Russian athlete Liliya Shobukhova will have to repay organisers of the London Marathon almost £400,000 (476,000 euros, \$527,000) a British court ordered Tuesday.

The 38-year-old -- who is banned for life from the London Marathon despite having served her official suspension of just over three years which was reduced by seven months -- is obliged to return the appearance money she was paid for the 2010 and 2011 editions in which she won and finished second respectively.

Shobukhova, who also had her three wins in the Chicago Marathon (2009/10/11) erased from the record books, was caught out when in April 2014 Russian authorities detected abnormalities in her biological passport.

Despite the court ruling on Tuesday the London Marathon organisers face the trickier route now of having the order enforced in Russia.

"The next step is to get the judgment enforced in Russia," said Nick Bitel, chief executive of the company London Marathon Events.

"It will be a long and difficult process but we will pursue it as we are determined that cheats should not benefit."

"Any money we get back will be redistributed to the athletes that Shobukhova cheated out of their rightful dues."

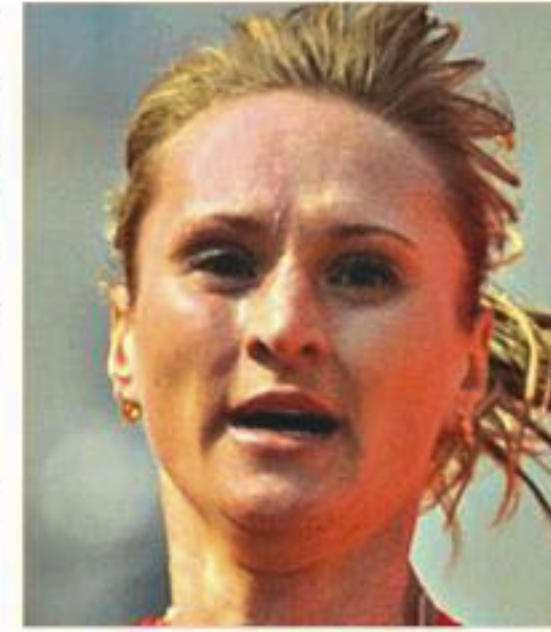
Bitel said that marathon runners these days faced increasing scrutiny and dope testing not only by the sport's world governing body the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF).

"We are determined to make marathon-running a safe haven from doping," said Bitel.

"We will continue to do everything we can to ensure cheats are caught and do not benefit from cheating."

"In addition to testing operated by the IAAF and national federations, the Abbott World Marathon Majors has set up one of the largest private testing pool of athletes in sport, with 150 competitors being tested out of competition a minimum of six times a year for their unique athlete biological passport."

Shobukhova is the athlete at the centre of the allegations that Papa Missata Diack, the fugitive son of the shamed former president of the IAAF Lamine Diack, and other IAAF officials blackmailed her over a positive dope test into paying 450,000 euros so she could run in the 2012 London Olympics.



This combination of pictures shows some of the top Russian athletes that may miss the upcoming Rio Olympics as the International Olympic Committee said yesterday it will study legal options on banning all Russian athletes from the Rio Games. Top row, from L: Sergey Shubenkov (men's 110m hurdles), Yelena Isinbayeva (women's pole vault), Vladimir Morozov (men's 50m freestyle), and Yuliya Efimova (women's 100m breaststroke). Second row, from L: Sofya Velikaya (women's sabre), Aliya Mustafina (artistic gymnastics), Dmitriy Muserskiy (L) and Dmitriy Ilinykh (men's volleyball), and Evgenia Kanaeva (rhythmic gymnastics).

PHOTO: AFP

Italy unveil Ventura

AFP, Milan

Giampiero Ventura was officially unveiled as Italy's new manager on a two-year contract on Tuesday designed to make sure the Azzurri qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Ventura replaces Antonio Conte, who led Italy to the quarter-finals of Euro 2016 before taking over at Premier League giants Chelsea, and is now tasked with steering Italy through a qualifying Group G that notably includes Spain.

A respected tactician, the 68-year-old Ventura has coached a number of clubs in Italy's top flight and comes to the post following a five-year spell with Torino.

His first game in charge of Italy will be a friendly against beaten Euro 2016 finalists France in Bari on September 1.

After admitting his "pride" at being appointed, Ventura was quick to pay tribute to his 46-year-old predecessor.

"I'm absolutely delighted to be here, but more than anything proud to have been chosen to lead one of the world's leading national football teams," Ventura told media.

Bruce in the race for England job

AFP, London



Steve Bruce is definitely a runner in the race to be England football manager as several media outlets reported Tuesday the Hull City coach had held talks with the Football Association.

The 55-year-old Englishman -- who like older compatriot and rival Sam Allardyce has yet to win any silverware during a long time in club management -- said prior to the talks he thought the job should go to a homegrown talent.

"I think the top of the FA in my opinion should be English. I've always said that, there's nobody more patriotic than I am," he told BBC Radio Humberside.

"I'm honoured to be linked with it. It's the pinnacle to go and manage your country. What bigger job in the world is there?" added Bruce, who has also managed, among other clubs, Wigan and Sunderland.

Hull, who Bruce guided to an immediate return to the Premier League with a play-off final win over Sheffield Wednesday in May, issued a statement confirming he had spoken with the FA.

"The club can confirm that manager Steve Bruce has held informal discussions regarding the England vacancy, although no official approach has been received from the FA," read the statement.

"We would hope to see the FA conclude their business quickly in order to avoid further speculation regarding Steve ahead of what is a season of huge importance for the club following our return to the Premier League."

Bruce, who enjoyed a successful playing career captaining Manchester United although without being capped internationally, and Sunderland boss Allardyce are thought to be on a four-man short list also comprising young Bournemouth manager Eddie Howe and the experienced USA coach and former German striker Jurgen Klinsmann.

The three-man FA panel -- which is made up of former Manchester United chief executive David Gill, FA technical director Dan Ashworth and chief executive Martin Glenn -- are seeking to find a successor to Roy Hodgson.

Rooney, de Gea return for MU tour

AGENCIES, Beijing

David de Gea and Wayne Rooney will return for Manchester United's tour of China, with a total of seven players being called up by Jose Mourinho after international duty this summer.

Mourinho has announced a 25-man squad ahead of the club's flight to China on Tuesday afternoon for two games in the International Champions Cup.

England's Chris Smalling and Marcus Rashford, Argentina's Sergio Romero and Marcos Rojo, and Northern Ireland star Paddy McNair will all be available following international duty at the European Championship and Copa America Centenario this summer.

They are added to 18 of the 22 players who appeared against Wigan Athletic in the 2-0 win at the DW Stadium on Saturday, with James Wilson, Joel Pereira, Tyler Blackett and Guillermo Varela the quartet left at home.

Borussia Dortmund are United's first tour opponents in Shanghai on Friday, with the club then travelling to Beijing to play City on Monday.