

# Classic contest beckons in Cardiff

AFP, London



Only Zinedine Zidane's former club Juventus stand between the Real Madrid coach and football history in Saturday's star-studded Champions League final in Cardiff.

A head coach for only 17 months, the former France playmaker can become the first manager to win back-to-back European Cups in the post-1992 Champions League era.

Zidane had a hand in Madrid's ninth, 10th and 11th European triumphs -- as a player, assistant coach and head coach -- and the quest for the 'Duodecima' (12th) brings him up against an old flame.

"I played at Juventus for five years and I've got good memories of that time. It's a special final," said the Frenchman.

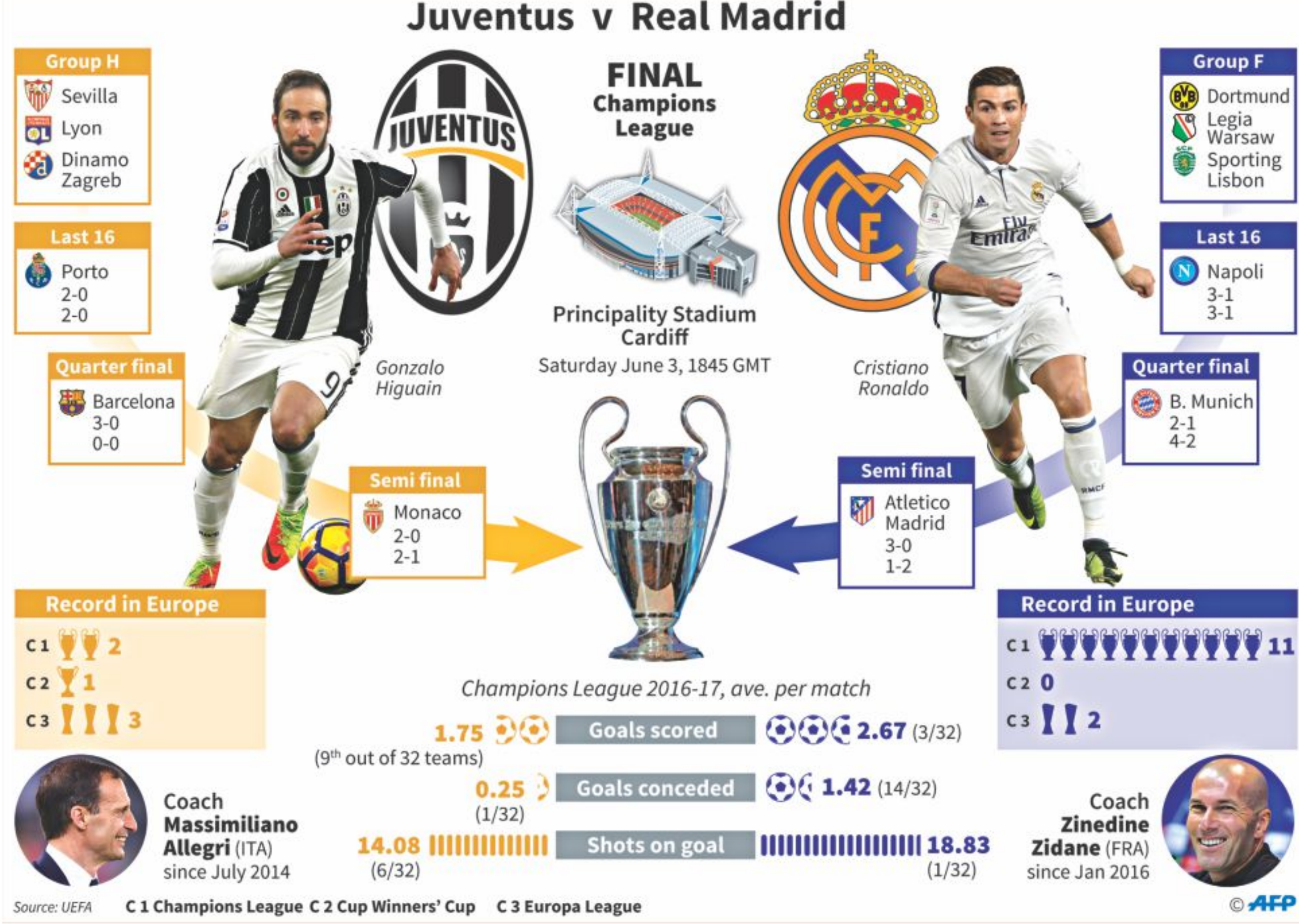
"We're very close to doing it (winning successive finals) and we're the first to be so close to doing it for so many years. But we haven't won anything yet."

Victorious against city rivals Atletico Madrid in the 2014 and 2016 finals, Real are chasing a third success in four seasons.

It would allow them to proclaim European dominance with a conviction they last possessed during Alfredo Di Stefano's five consecutive wins of the late 1950s.

Zidane, 44, has already led his team to glory in La Liga, ending a five-year league title drought, as well as the Club World Cup and European Super Cup.

Cristiano Ronaldo, meanwhile, can claim a fourth European crown, which would only enhance his chances of matching fierce rival Lionel Messi's haul of five Ballon d'Or successes.



of the tide.

A beaten finalist in 2003 and 2015, the 39-year-old Italy great dreams of adding the ultimate club honour to the World Cup winner's medal he collected in 2006.

"For the past three or four months, Real Madrid have been playing top-level football," Buffon said.

"But we're also in top form and that's enough for me."

To prevail, Juve must shed their status of perennial Champions League bridesmaids, having finished runners-up on a record six occasions and lost their last four finals.

Italian champions for the sixth year running and Coppa Italia winners, the Turin giants are also aiming to become only the eighth club to complete the European Treble.

They were pursuing the same milestone in 2015, when they lost 3-1 to Barcelona in Berlin, but coach Massimiliano Allegri says his streetwise side are now ready to take the final step.

"There's more conviction. Since Berlin, we've grown a lot -- everyone -- and that's reassuring," he said.

"We're in the eye of the storm now and we're happy to be here. For me personally, getting to the final is a great joy. I will feel lucky when I sit in the dug-out on Saturday."

While Madrid possess the competition's sharpest attack, Juve boast its meanest defence, having successively shut down the sparkling attacks of Barcelona and Monaco en route to Cardiff.

Beneath a closed roof at the Principality Stadium -- a first for a Champions League final -- a classic contest beckons.

## Toure given new contract

AFP, London

Ivory Coast legend Yaya Toure signed a new one year contract with Manchester City on Thursday, a reward for sterling performances after returning to favour mid-November.

The 34-year-old midfielder -- a four-time African Footballer of the Year -- had fallen out with City manager Pep Guardiola but regained his trust and has been retained unlike several other players who like him were out of contract and been allowed to leave.

"I'm delighted," Toure told the club website.

"I told myself the journey at City is not done and when I received a call from Txiki (Begiristain the football director) and talked to the manager I was very delighted."

"When I was first coming here (in 2010) I was trying to be part of a new story, of something special at this club.

"I am very lucky now to be part of a great club with great players around me who are helping me to achieve my targets."

Toure, who skipped Ivory Coast to their 2015 Africa Cup of Nations triumph over Ghana ending a 23 year drought, added the desire to win more silverware remained as keen as ever.

## QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition.

However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

**Messi to build brand in China with theme park**

Chinese fans will be able to celebrate the achievements of Barcelona soccer great Lionel Messi at a new theme park to be built in Beijing.

**Success is piece of cake for champ Muguruza**

Defending French Open champion Garbine Muguruza said she turns to baking in her spare time to help cope with the pressure of playing at Grand Slam tournaments.



## Cardiff transformed

AL-AMIN from Cardiff



The normally tranquil streets of Cardiff have taken on an extravagantly festive vibe as nearly 75,000 spectators, who will be packing the Principality Stadium for the Champions League final, overrun the streets ahead of the final on Saturday, a day now being called 'Cardiff Day'.

It is the first time that the normally sleepy town will be hosting such a big event and such is the rush in the town that some of the locals have left their abodes and are now renting places outside the city. Not only is their purpose to get away from the huge numbers polluting their quaint city, but also to make a quick buck from the tourists who are looking for accommodation.

Speaking of accommodation, a hotel room is nigh impossible to find at this time. A normal room at a standard hotel which would set you back about 60 pounds is now unavailable no matter how much you are willing to spend.

The city has also become a cultural hub

with its multilingual populace. As this reporter was walking down the streets of Cardiff, he heard people speaking on their telephones in Italian and Spanish, alongside the more common Welsh and English. It is clear to see which side they will be supporting come the final, with the fans labelling themselves clearly with either Real Madrid or Juventus kits.

Around the Principality Stadium, which has now got three names -- it is also known as the Millennium Stadium and the National Stadium of Wales -- fans abound.

The desperation being faced by the people who failed to acquire tickets for tomorrow's marquee final are clear as they have plastered signs on their chest reading: "Please give us tickets."

Interestingly, a lady was seen standing near the accreditation centre, holding a picture of local hero Gareth Bale, whose fitness remains a concern for Real Madrid.

When asked about the picture, the lady responded by saying that the Welshman needed all the publicity he could get so that his people would get to see their hero in the flesh.

## Zia seventh in India

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman finished seventh in the 10th KIIT International Chess Festival after playing out a draw against Tajik IM Khusenkhojaev Muhammad in the tenth and final round in Bhubaneswar, India yesterday.

Zia, along with four other players, earned 7.5 points each. Bangladesh's second GM had to be satisfied with a seventh-place finish through a tie-breaker.

GM Reefat Bin Sattar, who participated in the tournament after a long gap, finished 22nd while GM Niaz Murshed became 62nd with seven and six points respectively. FM Syed Mahfuzur Rahman Emon and FM Mohammad Fahad Rahman finished 98th and 104th with 5.5 and five points respectively, said a press release.

## Rafa, Novak into last 16

AFP, Paris



Nine-time champion Rafael Nadal lost just one game in a ruthless display to reach the French Open last 16 on Friday, but title-holder Novak Djokovic needed five sets to survive.

Nadal demonstrated why he is once more considered the overwhelming favourite at Roland Garros with a brutal demolition of Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili.

The Spaniard romped to a 6-0, 6-1, 6-0 win, narrowly missing out on becoming the sixth man in the Open era to record a "triple bagel".

"Perfection? I don't know about that," said Nadal, who plans to celebrate his 31st birthday on Saturday by watching Real Madrid take on Juventus in the Champions League final.

"I think I played very well today. The most important thing is to be through and I played my best match in a while."

Nadal will meet compatriot Roberto Bautista Agut for a spot in the quarter-finals.

Reigning champion Djokovic escaped trouble against Diego Schwartzman, the second seed rallying from two sets to one down to prevail 5-7, 6-3, 6-3, 6-1, 6-1.

The 12-time major winner was embroiled in a bitter spat with umpire

Carlos Ramos in the fourth set as Djokovic was warned for unsportsmanlike conduct after an earlier time violation.

But Djokovic eventually proved too strong and goes on to face Spanish 19th seed Albert Ramos-Vinolas in round four.

"I expected a tough match, there were lots of exchanges from the baseline and the conditions were heavy," said Djokovic.

"I congratulate Diego on a great battle. He played very, very well."

Reigning women's champion Garbine Muguruza gained further momentum in the defence of her title with a 7-5, 6-2 win over Kazakh 27th seed Yulia Putintseva.

The Spaniard closed out victory with an ace in a match that featured 11 breaks of serve in 20 games played.

"I think it's important with all the three matches that I played that are not easy at all."

Muguruza plays French 13th seed Kristina Mladenovic, who rallied from 5-2 down in the third set to beat American Shelby Rogers, for a place in the last eight.

Venus Williams cruised past Belgium's Elise Mertens 6-3, 6-1, while 2009 champion Svetlana Kuznetsova overcame China's Zhang Shuai 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, 7-5.

## Chittagong Abahani in maiden final

SPORTS REPORTER



An early strike from Mamunul Islam ensured Chittagong Abahani's maiden final berth in the Federation Cup with a single-goal win over dark horse Rahmatganj MFS in the first semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The port city outfit will play the final on Monday against the winners of today's second semifinal between holders Abahani and Sheikh Jamal DC.

History beckoned both teams to make it to the final for the first time and Chittagong Abahani came out on top, thanks to Mamunul's eighth minute strike, even though Rahmatganj won the hearts of a few hundred spectators with their pressing football that kept their opposition at bay throughout the game except for the first 10 minutes.

It was the Chittagong side, however, who took control of the match, with Zahid Hossain whip-



Chittagong Abahani skipper Mamunul Islam aims at the target under the challenge of a Rahmatganj defender during their Federation Cup semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

ping in a cross from the right flank for Nigerian Afeez Olawale Oladipo, who chested the ball down and cut it back for unmarked Mamunul. The Bangladesh skipper drove a powerful angular shot to beat Rahmatganj goalkeeper Mohammad Razib in the eighth minute.

Since that, it was a Rahmatganj's show which kept the Chittagong Abahani defence on their toes. Rahmatganj's three forwards -- Ismail Bangoura, Rashedul Islam Shuvo and Shahran Hawlader -- unsettled the backline but the Old Dhaka outfit could not beat goalkeeper

Mohammad Nehal, who made some brilliant saves to take his side to the final as the tenth team in Federation Cup history.

Shuvo drew huge attention with his movements inside the Chittagong Abahani territory and almost levelled the margin in the 19th minute but his angular shot from inside the box missed the target narrowly, with goalkeeper Nehal already beaten.

Guinean striker Bangoura also came close to levelling the margin on the half-hour mark but the former Mohammedan striker was late to

connect to a fierce cross from Shahran, who in the 58th minute, provided a nice square pass to Shuvo but the striker failed to drive on target despite beating a defender.

Rahmatganj kept pressing for the equaliser but Nehal stood tall to thwart a shot from Faisal Ahmed in the 67th minute before denying two more efforts from Bangoura and Shahran in the 69th minute.

Coach Kamal Babu brought two changes in the last moment but his charges failed to break the Chittagong Abahani defence.

## Record pay-out for Chelsea

AFP, London



English champions Chelsea received a record Premier League pay-out of more than £150 million (\$190 million, 172 million euros) this season, nearly £60 million more than their predecessors Leicester, after new TV deals came into force.

The broadcast deals, including a bumper domestic contract, ensured generous end-of-season payments for all 20 Premier League clubs who shared a total of £2.4 billion.

Figures on the league's website showed Leicester, who earned £93 million after their stunning title success last year, received £116 million this season, when they finished 12th.

Second-placed Tottenham Hotspur earned about £145 million -- slightly less than Manchester City and Liverpool owing to the difference in their "facility fees", awarded for appearances on TV.

Domestic rights to broadcast the Premier League were sold for £5.1 billion over three seasons, dwarfing the previous deal.

The league shares money from its central commercial deals and overseas broadcast rights on an equal basis, which means all 20 clubs got nearly £5 million each for the former and £39 million for the latter.

Even the three clubs who were relegated leave with large payments, including bottom-placed Sunderland who received just over £93m.

The Premier League also paid out nearly £220 million in "parachute payments" to eight teams relegated in recent seasons: Aston Villa, Cardiff, Fulham, Newcastle, Norwich, QPR, Reading and Wigan.

Villa, Newcastle and Norwich, who were relegated last year, got almost £41 million each, QPR £31 million and the other four more than £16 million.

Overall, the ratio between the highest and the lowest earning clubs in the Premier League was 1.61 to 1, the lowest among Europe's top leagues.

**Golfing great Roberto de Vincenzo dies aged 94**

Argentine golfing great Roberto de Vincenzo died in Buenos Aires at the age of 94, his son Eduardo said.

