

## Salah heads to Spain for treatment

AFP, Cairo

Liverpool and Egypt star Mohamed Salah will travel to Spain today for treatment on the injured shoulder that wrecked his Champions League final bid and threatens his World Cup participation.

Egypt's football federation (EFA) said Salah's entourage had chosen Spain for a rehabilitation programme that Egyptians will hope helps Salah return in time for next month's World Cup in Russia.

According to an EFA statement Salah will be accompanied by Liverpool's medical staff "for the duration of the treatment period", having "started his rehabilitation on Sunday".

Salah, who hit a stunning 44 goals for Liverpool last season in all competitions, was forced out the Champions League final in tears on Saturday clutching his left shoulder after being wrestled to the ground by Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos.

It was feared the injury had ruled Salah out of the June 14-July 15 World Cup, but on Sunday the Reds' striker said he was "confident" he would be back in time.

"It was a very tough night, but I'm a fighter. Despite the odds, I'm confident that I'll be in Russia to make you all proud," Salah wrote on his Twitter account on Sunday.

Egyptian federation officials meanwhile are set to pay Salah -- described by the EFA as "the symbol of Egypt" -- a morale-boosting visit on Wednesday.

Egypt, who were drawn in Group A, open their World Cup campaign against Uruguay on June 15, before facing hosts Russia and Saudi Arabia.

The Pharaohs play a first warm-up match, against Colombia, in Bergamo, Italy on June 1.



Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos (R) kisses the Champions League trophy held by teammate Marcelo at the Cibeles Square in Madrid on Sunday as they celebrate their third title in a row. (Inset) Superstar Cristiano Ronaldo looks relaxed as he is pictured with the trophy.

PHOTOS: REUTERS

## Ronaldo happy as Real celebrate

AFP, Madrid



As Cristiano Ronaldo milked every last drop of his moment on the microphone at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday night, it was hard to imagine this was a player about to leave Real Madrid.

Real's players were introduced one-by-one onto the podium and when Ronaldo's moment came, a gap left after "Cristiano" for the delirious fans to fill, he predictably made the most of it.

A Portugal flag draped over his shoulders, Ronaldo pirouetted before counting out on his fingers to five, the number of Champions League titles he now owns.

He pulled out the badge on his shirt and kissed it, twice, before blowing a few more kisses to the crowd. By now they were chanting "Cristiano" and some of the Real players were joining in.

Even when Marcelo, the next one out, emerged, the grinning Ronaldo strutted back down the walkway to welcome him with the pair's familiar celebratory dance.

This Ronaldo was almost unrecognisable from

the one that had, less than 24 hours before, been prickly and restless, as he insisted he could leave Real, despite them just beating Liverpool to mark a third consecutive European triumph.

Even amid wrangling contract negotiations, a frosty relationship with president Florentino Perez, a perceived lack of support in his row with Spanish tax authorities and perhaps even jealousy over Real's courting of Neymar, his timing was inexplicably bad.

Zinedine Zidane had summed up the mood. "I'm not thinking about that now," he said.

Microphone in hand, however, Ronaldo was back at the centre of things on Sunday and this time his message was different.

"What can I say?" he said over the supporters' cheers. "You have given us so much love in every single match. It's an honour to play for the biggest club in the world, that's the truth, it's an honour."

As the fans roared, Real's players bounced around Ronaldo, chanting "Cristiano, quede", "Cristiano, stay", and soon the whole stadium was singing too.

When Ronaldo resumed, the big screen briefly catching a stony-faced Gareth Bale next to a

beaming Casemiro, he said: "Thank you, this is very important to me. I am so happy with your passion, the passion of the players and coaches.

"What I like most is winning. So for one last time, one, two three - Hala Madrid!"

Earlier, in the Plaza de Cibeles, he had signed off a more modest speech with: "Thank you guys and see you next year."

At euphoric events like these, there must always be a pull to draw the biggest cheer, but Ronaldo's behaviour at least suggests Real could satisfy the 33-year-old if they want to.

He reportedly seeks a new deal in line with Lionel Messi's at Barcelona and Neymar's at PSG.

But Perez was not impressed by Ronaldo's posturing on Saturday. "We hear the same every summer," Perez said. "And then nothing happens."

In 2012, Ronaldo said he was "sad" and last year, Portuguese newspaper A Bola claimed the forward wanted to leave, unhappy with the club not backing him in the face of tax investigators.

Perez and Ronaldo need each other, but neither will want to be seen to have lost the argument. At the very least, Real's celebrations showed nothing has been decided yet.

## A look into the 'Group of Death'

AGENCIES, Kiev



At every major tournament, teams hope to avoid being drawn in a 'Group of Death'. The sinistrous moniker is used to describe a group that is felt to be particularly difficult.

Perhaps the most obvious 'Group of Death' in Russia is Group D, which features Argentina, Iceland, Croatia and Nigeria. While there are varying degrees of talent present in each squad they all have the capacity to take points off each other and push for a top-two finish.

Two-time World Cup winners Argentina, who were finalists in 2014, possess Lionel Messi in their ranks and they will be favourites to win the group.

Croatia may not have achieved much at the World Cup since finishing third in 1998, but they are undoubtedly one of the best technical teams in Europe, equipped with players such as Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic.

Similarly, Nigeria are one of the strongest teams in Africa and they have reached the last 16 of the tournament on three occasions, most notably at the previous World Cup, where they qualified from a group that also contained Argentina.

## Wawrinka falls at first hurdle

AFP, PARIS

Former French Open champion Stan Wawrinka was dumped out in the first round by Guillermo Garcia-Lopez yesterday, a defeat which will send his world ranking plummeting while late evening rain halted Rafael Nadal's first match in his pursuit of an 11th Roland Garros title.

Play was called off just as world number one Nadal was 6-4, 6-3, 0-3 ahead of Italian lucky loser Simone Bolelli.

The downpours also prevented two-time champion Maria Sharapova from starting her opener against Richel Hogenkamp of the Netherlands.

But there were no such problems for 2016 champion Novak Djokovic or Australian Open winner Caroline Wozniacki who both cruised through to the second round before the rains came.

Wawrinka, who lost to Nadal in last year's final and won the 2015 title, was beaten in a five-set thriller 6-2, 3-6, 4-6, 6-7 (7/5), 6-3 by the Spanish world number 67 on Court Suzanne Lenglen.

The 33-year-old has been plagued by a knee injury and arrived at Roland Garros having won just one match on



PHOTO: AFP

Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka reacts after losing the men's singles first round match against Spain's Guillermo Garcia-Lopez in the French Open at Roland Garros yesterday.

thing else at the beginning of the first set, and that's why I had to ask," he said.

The 23rd seed found his rhythm from nowhere after a poor first set, crunching two massive forehands to break for a 3-1 lead in the second.

Serbian star

Djokovic had little trouble in reaching round two, though, seeing off Brazilian world number 134 Rogério Dutra Silva 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

The 12-time Grand Slam champion dropped serve three times and will have to markedly improve to challenge Nadal in the latter stages of the tournament, but he was still far too good for Dutra Silva on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"It was good to start this year with a win. I wasn't at my best, he played with a lot of spin. I didn't play very well, but I won in three sets," said the 20th seed, who will next face Spanish qualifier Jaume Munar.

Former world number one Victoria Azarenka's return to Grand Slam tennis lasted just two sets as the Belarusian slumped to a 7-5, 7-5 loss to Katerina

clay in Geneva last week, his first event in three months.

The defeat means that the three-time Grand Slam champion will slip from 30th in the world to outside the top 250 after the tournament, having failed to defend the ranking points he gained in 2017.

There were worrying signs for his fans when he pulled up and called for a medical timeout after just six games, but he played down fears he had caused further damage to his already troublesome left knee.

"My knee is good. I blocked some-

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