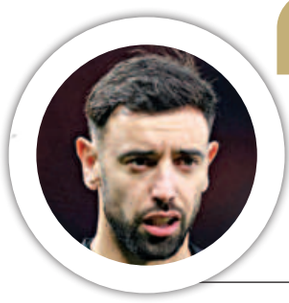
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SPORT



Thank you for the inspiration. It was a privilege to share great moments for our team with my childhood idol.

Portugal midfielder **BRUNO FERNANDES** on Ronaldo's retirement.

A FAREWELL MEASURED

BEYOND RECORDS



NABID YEASIN

"I spent my life working to become the best player in the world. Today, I realise that my greatest victory was earning the honour of representing the best country in the world. Thank you for these 23 years."

Those words formed part of Cristiano Ronaldo's lengthy farewell speech as the 41-year-old brought the curtain down on his 23-year international career with Portugal yesterday.

The sentiment perfectly captured the significance of the moment for a player who had spent much of his career chasing individual and collective greatness. Ronaldo never made a secret of his ambition to become the best in the world, and his fiercely competitive nature rarely allowed him to accept defeat – even in friendlies.

Defeats, however, were part of his journey, as were countless occasions when he fell short of his targets. What made this farewell different was the realisation, perhaps for the first time, that his greatest achievement extended beyond the staggering numbers he had accumulated over the years.

With 146 goals in 246 appearances, Ronaldo retires as international football's all-time leading scorer. He was also at the heart of Portugal's three major triumphs during his international career: the 2016 European Championship and the UEFA Nations League titles in 2019 and 2025.

He leaves as his country's leading World Cup scorer, with 11 goals in 26 appearances, and as the only player to have scored at six different editions of the tournament.

Yet those numbers, which meant everything to a player driven by goals, victories and trophies, now seem to carry a different significance. For years, Ronaldo made his ambitions clear through his words, expressions and relentless determination. Looking back, however, his career reveals a man who refused to settle for anything less than the top – and, in his own mind, was always there.

His first crowning moment with Portugal came at Euro 2016. By then, he had already won three Ballon d'Or awards, established himself as Real Madrid's all-time leading scorer and collected club honours that most footballers can only dream of winning.

But the significance of finally conquering Europe with his country was evident when he broke down in tears after being forced off the pitch in 25th minute of final against France.

Even then, the five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo refused to let his contribution end there. With his knee bandaged, he spent extra time pacing the technical area, shouting instructions, reacting to every moment and celebrating wildly when Eder struck the late winner.

Portugal also never missed a World Cup during Ronaldo's international career, with the 2014 qualifying playoff against Sweden providing one of his defining performances. With a place at the tournament in Brazil at stake, Ronaldo effectively carried his country through the two-legged tie. After scoring the winner in the first leg, he produced a sensational hattrick in the return fixture to seal Portugal's qualification.

Of his record 67 career hattricks, including 10 for Portugal – the most by any player in international football – perhaps the most memorable came at the 2018 World Cup against Spain. With Portugal trailing late in the game, Ronaldo stepped up for a freekick, bent the ball over the wall and beyond the goalkeeper to rescue a thrilling 3-3 draw.

As Ronaldo acknowledged in his farewell speech, those numbers and defining moments mattered immensely at the time. But beyond them lay something he perhaps only fully appreciated towards the end: the privilege of a boy from humble beginnings in Madeira wearing Portugal's number seven shirt. Through his achievements, he has elevated the significance of that jersey for generations to come.

His departure, however, has not been without controversy. It followed an ugly episode involving a fallout with the coach and a suspension after he walked out of Portugal's Nations League camp last month.

That episode will remain part of his story, but it will hardly define it. For all the goals, records and trophies, Ronaldo's greatest legacy in a Portugal shirt may ultimately be the pride he brought to a nation and the standard he set for those who follow.

The Portuguese Football Federation said it intends to organise a tribute to Ronaldo "in which the fans and the country can one more time applaud and celebrate a player who has given us so much."

RONALDO'S CAREER IN NUMBERS

234 APPEARANCES, 146 GOALS, 46 ASSISTS

- UEFA European Championship winner (2016)
- Two-time UEFA Nations League winner (2019, 2025)
- All-time leading scorer in men's international football (146)
- Most-capped player in men's international football (234)
- Portugal's all-time leading assister (46)
- Most goals in UEFA European Championship history (14)
- Most consecutive Euro tournaments scored in (5)
- Most hattricks in men's international football (10)
- Most wins in men's international football history (143)
- Only player to have scored in six different World Cups (2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022 and 2026)
- Portugal's leading scorer in World Cups (11)
- Oldest player to score in a FIFA World Cup knockout match (41 years and 147 days)

'Football is about people'

AGENCIES

Cristiano Ronaldo has announced his retirement from international football, bringing a 23-year journey with Portugal to an end. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner shared the news in an emotional Instagram post, reflecting on his career and what representing his country meant to him.

Addressing the Portuguese people, Ronaldo said: "The day has come to hand back the shirt and the captain's armband of the national team that belongs to all of us."

Describing the decision as difficult, he added: "Some decisions are not made with the head alone. They are also made with the heart."

Looking back on his journey, which began in August 2003, Ronaldo said: "I don't just see matches, goals, records, or trophies. I see people."

"I see immigrants who, for 90 minutes, felt a little closer to Portugal. I see millions of Portuguese people whom I never met personally, but who became part of my life."

He added: "Because, at the end of the day, football is much bigger than a game. Football is about people."

Ronaldo, Portugal's all-time leading goalscorer, said he had always pushed beyond his limits and given everything for the national team. Reflecting on the highs and lows, he wrote: "There were perfect afternoons and nights. There were victories I will never forget. There were defeats that still hurt to remember today."

He also acknowledged the support of his teammates, coaches, staff and family, saying: "I had the privilege of being your captain, but no captain walks alone, and you are all part of my story."

On the unity football brought to the nation, he recalled the moments when the national anthem played: "There are no clubs. There are no colours. There are no classes. There are no professions. There are no opinions. There is only one passion: Portugal."

Although his international career has ended, Ronaldo said: "I will continue to suffer, to feel the excitement, and to celebrate every Portuguese victory, just as I always have."

He concluded: "The number 7 shirt remains, but the pride of having worn it will be mine forever. Portugal will always be a part of me. Forever."

Como's historic high, Liverpool hit the wall

AGENCIES

Como produced a Champions League performance for the ages, thrashing Lens 9-1 to record the biggest away victory in the competition's history, while Liverpool suffered a stunning 3-2 defeat to Fenerbahce in Istanbul on Wednesday.

At the heart of Como's historic night was Argentine playmaker Nico Paz, whose brilliance helped Cesc Fabregas's side turn an already remarkable journey into an unforgettable European chapter.

Having played in Italy's fourth tier as recently as 2019, Como are now making waves in the Champions League just two years after reaching Serie A.

Their nine-goal demolition of last season's Ligue 1 runners-up showcased the attacking philosophy Fabregas has instilled in the side.

Greek striker Tasos Douvikas stole the headlines with a hat-trick, while Como's relentless attacking football left Lens helpless. The Italian side scored nine times from 15 shots, with



Real Madrid came from behind to beat AEK Athens 3-2, with Federico Valverde scoring a stoppage-time winner after Kylian Mbappe equalised. Jude Bellingham had earlier produced a spectacular backheel finish.

11 on target, becoming the first team to win a Champions League away match by an eight-goal margin.

Teenager Matteo Papaccioli added the final touch to the historic rout, scoring on his debut in stoppage time.

While Como celebrated a night that will live long in the club's history, Liverpool endured a nightmare in Turkey, surrendering a 2-1 lead to lose 3-2 against Fenerbahce.

The Reds appeared to be on course for a fourth consecutive Champions League victory after Alexander Isak scored his first goal in the competition for the club.

But Liverpool's defensive frailties proved costly as Archie Brown equalised before Vedat Muriqi headed home the winner in the 79th minute.

The defeat ended Liverpool's perfect Champions League record and marked their second consecutive loss. Former Liverpool favourite Dirk Kuyt, in charge of Fenerbahce on an interim basis, oversaw a memorable victory for the Turkish side, their first in the competition since 2008.

Elsewhere, Real Madrid came from behind to beat AEK Athens 3-2, with Federico Valverde scoring a stoppage-time winner after Kylian Mbappe equalised. Jude Bellingham had earlier produced a spectacular backheel finish.

Manchester City edged RB Leipzig 3-2, with Erling Haaland scoring the decisive goal, while Arsenal secured a 2-1 away win over Slavia Prague through Viktor Gyokeres, who scored and assisted.

Porto beat Napoli 4-1, Club Brugge defeated PSV 2-1, Borussia Dortmund edged Real Betis 2-1, and Viking claimed their first group-phase victory with a 4-1 win over Sabah.

After four matchdays, Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain remain the only teams with perfect records, while Como sit fourth following their extraordinary triumph.

JESÚS DE MIGUEL



Como's Nico Paz holds up a tribute shirt in memory of CD Tenerife forward Jesús de Miguel, who died after suffering a cardiac arrest following an on-field collision during a match in Spain. Paz dedicated his goal to De Miguel after scoring in the 40th minute of Como's historic 9-1 victory over Lens, the biggest away win in Champions League history. The Argentine also provided two assists in the emphatic triumph.

PHOTO: **REUTERS**