

## FOOTBALLERS' ADVISERS UNDER SCRUTINY OVER TAX EVASION

**MADRID:** Cristiano Ronaldo under suspicion, Radamel Falcao investigated, Lionel Messi sentenced... Spain's courts have been busy tackling the alleged and real multi-million-euro tax evasion of football's greatest stars.

But while they may be aware of what they are doing, footballers rely on expert go-betweens like big banks to help them manage their finances, and the European Commission is looking into measures that would dissuade these intermediaries from assisting wealthy individuals in avoiding tax.

On top of their mammoth salaries and victory bonuses, the world's leading footballers earn millions by loaning their name and image for ad campaigns-be it sports equipment, underwear or yoghurt.

### AGENTS, ADVISERS UNDER SCRUTINY

FC Barcelona's Argentine forward Messi was handed a 2.1-million-euro (\$2.3 million) fine last year for avoiding paying taxes on part of the income he earned from image rights via companies

in Belize, Britain, Switzerland and Uruguay.

When it confirmed the sentence last month, Spain's Supreme Court rejected Messi's argument that he ignored how his wealth was managed but still expressed surprise at the fact that his tax advisors were not prosecuted. Monaco's Colombian forward Falcao, meanwhile, is suspected of having hidden 5.6 million euros in image rights from Spain's taxman when he played for Atletico Madrid in 2012 and 2013.

His Portuguese agent Jorge Mendes has been put under formal investigation in the case, and will be questioned by a judge on June 27.

Mendes, one of the most influential personalities in the football world, is also the agent of Ronaldo, who risks legal proceedings in Spain after prosecutors alleged this week that he evaded more than 14 million euros in tax through offshore companies.

If the Real Madrid star "is finally put under formal investigation, the judge will also have to ask how guilty the advisors and agents are," says Carlos

Cruzado, head of the Gestha union of civil servants who work for tax authorities.

### EU TO FIGHT BACK

In a bid to avoid specialised go-betweens from exploiting legal loopholes to pay as little tax as possible, EU Economics Commissioner Pierre Moscovici will on Wednesday unveil a new directive against "fiscal optimisation."

"So far little has been done to introduce disincentives for those intermediaries that help clients avoid paying their fair share of tax," a spokesman for the commission told AFP.

The directive aims to force those who advise people with lots of money or companies to declare the transborder products they propose to their clients to the taxman.

"Tax authorities will then be able to better-and much earlier-identify the regulatory weaknesses that allow some companies and individuals to substantially reduce their taxes," he said.

The commission is not targeting just sportspeo-

ple. But these often resort to tax experts to manage their wealth-be they individuals, private practices or international banks. "We're not talking about an adviser who helps you fill in your income tax return, but offices that are specialised in setting up opaque structures, and many are international banks," says Jose Mari Pelaez, a tax inspector who specialises in tax havens.

These offices can offer "made to measure" services, he adds. Last year, it was revealed that many of the 175,000 offshore companies registered in the Bahamas, a tax haven, between 1959 and 2016 were created by banks, according to information leaked to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

Without these intermediaries, it would be very difficult to access a tax haven. "But with a phone call and 500 to 800 euros, such an office can set up one or two shell companies with a bank account in Switzerland or in another tax haven," says Pelaez.

"It takes two or three days and hardly costs a thing." — AFP

## TIME RIGHT FOR SOCCEROOS AT CONFED CUP: CAHILL

**SOCHI:** Socceroos veteran Tim Cahill says the time is right for Australia to shock inexperienced Germany today and prove themselves at the Confederations Cup.

The ex-Everton midfielder, 37, is just three short of winning his 100th cap — a milestone he could reach in the three Group B games against Germany, Cameroon and Chile.

Cahill, who scored one of the best goals at the 2014 World Cup finals with a cracking volley against the Dutch, could also break the 50-goal mark for Australia in Russia. Despite the Socceroos' 4-0 thumping by Brazil in last week's friendly, Cahill sees this Confed Cup as Australia's great chance to build on their 2015 Asian Cup win - starting with the Germans in today's Group B match in Sochi. "The belief for me comes from over a decade with the Socceroos," he said. "As one of the elder statesman, I've seen it-three World Cups, three Asian Cups, second time at the Confederations Cup. "In the last two and a half years with this group, I've seen up to 60 players buy into a philosophy.

"We've gone onto the world stage and competed, not just going there and being physical. "The last World Cup in Brazil, we outplayed some of the best teams in the world for long stretches.

"Yes, we didn't win the games, but we evolved to the Asian Cup where we won it, a competition we weren't supposed to win. "Tomorrow is a big game for them as much as us, they'll need the points just as badly," added Cahill, who now plays for Melbourne City in the A-League. Germany's head coach Joachim Loew has left all of his stars at home and Paris St-Germain's attacking

midfielder Julian Draxler will captain the world champions. Cahill says this is a great opportunity for Australia to beat the Germans for the first time at a major tournament. "I know there is the thought of them coming in as underdogs, but Draxler is no small name," said Cahill.

"They know they have to produce. If we play the style (that) we know, we can definitely beat them." With an average age of just 24 years, four months, and a combined total of 179 international appearances, Germany have the most youthful squad of the eight Confed Cup teams.

However, Socceroos head coach Ange Postecoglou refuses to believe the Germans can be considered as inexperienced underdogs. "Let's dispell one myth-when the teams walk out tomorrow, if I had to guess, I reckon we'd be younger," he said.

"I don't buy into any of that stuff. "It's a great opening game for us, against the world champions, who want to win the World Cup next year.

"They have faultless during their qualifying. "It's a great test for us, but I am not buying into the idea we are playing a weakened team-I think that's a bit of a myth. "Do the maths. Look at their starting line-up and ours before kick-off." Being on the verge of 100 caps and 50 goals, Cahill can make history at this Confed Cup-whether he starts or not against Germany. "It's about contributing to the squad whether you start, come off the bench or don't even play," said Cahill.

"Being able to have the chance to get to either mark would be a massive honour in my career, but I would prefer to take success in this competition." — AFP



**KAZAN:** FIFA president Gianni Infantino (L) speaks with Colombia's former midfielder Carlos Valderrama (C) ahead of the 2017 Confederations Cup group A football match between Portugal and Mexico at the Kazan Arena in Kazan yesterday. — AFP

### SOCCER

## FIFA PANEL INVITES DEBATE ON 'RADICAL' 60-MINUTE GAME CLOCK

**ST PETERSBURG:** Football's rule-making panel wants debate on moving to 60-minute games and stopping the clock when the ball is not in play. Playing two halves each of 30 minutes' actual playing time would be a "radical change" to the Laws of Football, the FIFA-supported International Football Association Board acknowledged.

It features in a five-year strategy document of talking points and proposals with three goals - to increase respect, playing time and attractiveness of the game.

"The aim of this document is to generate discussion and take a 'fresh' look at how the Laws could make the game better," IFAB said in the document called "Play Fair!" Any changes would take years to enact after discussions and trials overseen by IFAB, which revises football's laws annually and comprises officials from FIFA and the four British football federations.

Fans have become frustrated that games of 90 regulation minutes plus time added for stoppages at referees' discretion typically produce "fewer than 60 minutes of effective (actual) playing time," IFAB said. On Saturday, there were

just 47 minutes of actual playing time in Russia's 2-0 win over New Zealand to open the Confederations Cup, according to FIFA. The game in St. Petersburg took less than 1 hour, 50 minutes from first whistle to last, which suggests a 60-minute, stop-start clock would take more than two hours to complete as football adapted.

The 60-minute, stop-start game clock proposal would take away the incentive for time-wasting by players, IFAB suggested. A stadium clock could show spectators and TV viewers when the referee accounted for play having stopped. A second idea is for referees to stop their watch as play pauses when timewasting is most likely - the final five minutes of the first half and the last 10 minutes of the second half.

Other talking points in "Fair Play!" to make games faster and fairer include: Letting players pass to themselves from a free kick or corner. Award penalty kicks for defenders using their hands or arms to stop a goal-bound ball. Abolish encroachment at penalty kicks by ordering play to stop after it is saved or rebounds from the post or bar. Pre-match hand-

shakes in technical area for the two coaches and referee "as a sign of respect. FIFA showed its determination to increase playing time and fairness by reminding Confederations Cup referees to enforce existing rules on timewasting. Referees in Russia also must monitor stoppages - including goal celebrations - more strictly by adding more additional time.

Marco van Basten, the former Netherlands and AC Milan great now leading FIFA's technical department, said on Thursday that referees typically add only one minute to the first half and three minutes to the second half.

Still, those were exactly the amounts of stoppage time added to the Russia-New Zealand game by referee Wilmar Roldan of Colombia.

FIFA has already signaled openness to radical change by Van Basten's suggestion this year that the offside rule could be abolished.

That idea was mostly met with confusion and derision, and Van Basten declined to discuss it when asked at a briefing in St Petersburg on the eve of the Confederations Cup.

"What is going to be in the future, that's not the point at the moment," he said. — AP



**KAZAN:** Mexico supporters pose ahead of the 2017 Confederations Cup group A football match between Portugal and Mexico at the Kazan Arena in Kazan yesterday. — AFP

## VILLA SCORES TWICE, NEW YORK CITY BEATS SEATTLE

**NEW YORK:** David Villa didn't let the rain bother him Saturday, scoring twice in leading New York City FC to 2-1 win over defending MLS champion Seattle. The Spanish striker scored his 50th and 51st MLS career goals in the second half as New York rallied for a win to move into third place in the Eastern Conference.

Seattle led at half time after Cristian Roldan's 40th-minute goal. But Villa tied it with a penalty kick in the 52nd. And 25 minutes later, he volleyed home Jack Harrison's cross.

At Toronto, Jozy Altidore and Jordan Hamilton scored second-half goals as league-leading Toronto FC beat D.C. United 2-0 to stretch its home unbeaten streak to nine games.

Sebastian Giovinco assisted on both goals. The game marked captain Michael Bradley's 100th in all competitions for Toronto. It also was the first opportunity for coach Greg Vanney to field all three designated players - Bradley, Altidore and Giovinco - since May 3 due to injuries and international duty.

And the three stars engineered the breakthrough goal in the 60th minute after Bradley broke up a D.C. United attack. He fed the ball to Giovinco, who split the defense with a perfect pass to Altidore. The US international pushed the ball ahead with a fine first touch and then calmly beat Hamid from the edge of the box for his seventh of the season.

Hamilton made it 2-0 on glancing

header in the 85th. In other games, Chicago retained second spot with a 2-1 win over New England, while the top three teams in the Western Conference had to share the points: Sporting Kansas City finished 0-0 with San Jose, FC Dallas was held 1-1 by Vancouver and Houston was held 2-2 by Los Angeles.

At Foxborough, Nemanja Nikolic and Luis Solignac scored as Chicago handed New England its first home loss of the season. Nikolic scored his MLS-leading 13th goal in the 18th minute, beating an off-side trap and, after having his initial shot blocked, firing in the rebound. Three quick passes found Solignac in front of the goal as he finished from close range in the 61st.

Alan Gordon went on in the 80th minute and scored nine minutes later to give Colorado a comeback 2-1 victory over Portland. Gordon headed in a cross over a defender for his second straight late winner in MLS play.

He ripped off his jersey and went into the crowd to celebrate, for which he was given a yellow card. On June 3, Gordon entered late and scored in the 86th in a 2-1 victory over the Columbus Crew.

Atlanta United had a 3-1 win over Columbus in a game delayed 22 minutes because of lightning, and Jonathan Spector scored in the fourth minute of stoppage time for his first MLS goal to give Orlando City a 3-3 draw with Montreal. — AP

### PREVIEW

## GREEN GERMANY EXPECT TOUGH CONFED CUP START

**SOCHI:** World champions Germany will pit an inexperienced line-up against Australia in their Confederations Cup opener today with striker Timo Werner anticipating a robust challenge from the Socceroos.

With an average age of just 24 years, four months, and a combined total of 179 international appearances, Germany have the most youthful squad of the eight Confed Cup teams.

Only three of the squad-Arsenal's Shkodran Mustafi, Matthias Ginter and Julian Draxler-lifted the World Cup in Brazil three years ago, but none of the trio played in the Rio de Janeiro final.

With the likes of Thomas Mueller, Manuel Neuer, Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng all left at home, Joshua Kimmich is the only Bayern Munich star in the Germany squad.

On the back of his breakthrough season with RB Leipzig, striker Timo Werner, 21, expects a fiery start in Sochi for the untested, green Germans. "We don't all know how fit we are after a long and hard season," admitted Werner.

"Now comes an unpleasant game in which the Australians will try, with their physiques and toughness, to take us on. "But we have a duty to win the three points. We need to get a quick goal and then exert some dominance."

A year out from the World Cup in Russia, there has never been a better time for the Socceroos to poach a first win over Germany at a major competition at the fourth attempt. The world champions have made no secret of the fact their goal is not to win the Confederations Cup, but to blood their next generation of stars.

"The first priority is to develop the team, the

second to win here," said team manager Oliver Bierhoff bluntly.

### PRESSURE ON DRAXLER

With the likes of key midfielders Mesut Ozil and Toni Kroos rested, the pressure falls on 23-year-old captain Draxler. With 30 caps,

the Paris St-Germain star has the most experience and is expected to lead by example in the attacking midfield role. World-class goalkeeper Neuer is recovering from foot surgery, so Bayer Leverkusen's shot-stopper Bernd Leno is tasked with keeping Australia's attack at bay. — AFP



**SOCHI:** Germany's midfielder Julian Draxler (L) and Germany's defender Jonas Hector attend a training session during the Russia 2017 Confederation Cup football tournament in Sochi yesterday. — AFP