

Sports

Germany draw 1-1 with Spain as Costa makes comeback

Germany stretch unbeaten run to 22 matches

DUESSELDORF: World champions Germany drew 1-1 with Spain in a high tempo friendly on Friday as they launched their preparations for a title defence in Russia while their opponents had striker Diego Costa making his long-awaited comeback as a substitute.

Germany's Thomas Mueller scored with a long-range strike in the 35th minute to cancel out Rodrigo Moreno's early opener. The hosts were made to work hard against the Spaniards, who are unbeaten under coach Julen Lopetegui, but still managed to stretch their own unbeaten run to 22 matches, one shy of the German record of 23 dating back to 1978-80.

They can now match it when they take on five-times world champions Brazil on Tuesday when Spain, the 2010 World Cup winners, host Argentina in Madrid. "I think it was a very good test for both teams because both teams combine well when they have possession," said Germany coach Joachim Low.

"Spain and us tried to increase the pressure, attack early, press early. It was a high intensity game and a good test to gain a lot of insight. We still have some room for improvement." The visitors, with captain Sergio Ramos earning his 150th cap, went ahead when Rodrigo timed his run perfectly to pick up a superb through ball from Andres Iniesta and beat keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen in the sixth minute.

“ We still have some room for improvement ”

The Germans, who at times struggled with their opponents' quick passing, managed to draw level with an unstoppable 20-metre strike from Mueller 10 minutes before the break. Keepers David de Gea and Ter Stegen were kept busy after the break and Mats Hummels hit the crossbar with a looping header from a clever Toni Kroos free kick as both sides carved out good chances.

"We have a good feeling after this game against the best team in the world," said Lopetegui, whose own unbeaten run with Spain is now 17 games. "We had chances to win the game. Germany are extremely fast and strong. We were fully motivated against the world champions." Spain's Costa made his comeback as a substitute in the second half after the combative forward missed out on playing late last year when he was unable to feature for his club because of a FIFA transfer ban for signing minors.

Atletico completed a 57 million pound (\$80.6 million) deal for Costa to rejoin them from Chelsea in September, but the move was delayed because the Liga club could not register new players due to the ban, which ended on Jan. 1. His return is good news for Lopetegui's team, one of the title contenders at the World Cup in Russia starting in June. The Germans have been drawn in Group F of the tournament, along with Mexico, South Korea and Sweden. Spain are in Group B and will play Iran, Morocco and Portugal. — Reuters



DUESSELDORF: Spain's forward Diego da Silva Costa eyes the ball during the international friendly football match of Germany vs Spain in Duesseldorf, western Germany, on Friday, in preparation of the 2018 Fifa World Cup. —AFP

Ronaldo's last-gasp two-goal show steals Salah limelight

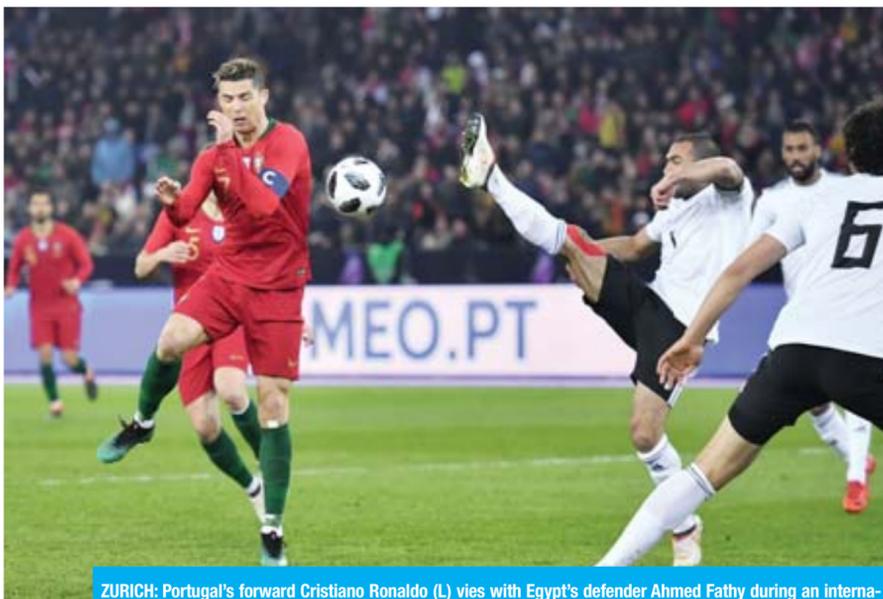
ZURICH: Cristiano Ronaldo hit two goals in stoppage time as European champions Portugal defeated Egypt 2-1 in a friendly international on Friday, winning his personal duel with Mohamed Salah who had put the seven-time African champions ahead. Ronaldo, appearing in his 9000th career match, made his mark to devastating effect as time ran out. First, he pulled his team level with a header from a Ricardo Quaresma cross, before adding the winner in almost identical circumstances in the fourth minute of injury time.

However, the 33-year-old Real Madrid star had to wait for the VAR system to validate his goal after a suspicion of offside. His two-goal salvo took his Portugal tally to 81. Earlier, Salah, who has shone at Liverpool this season with 28 Premier League goals, broke the deadlock in Zurich after 56 minutes. After a quickfire exchange of passes, Abdallah El Said found Salah in space for his teammate to beat Beto in the Portuguese goal with a sweetly-timed left-foot strike from the edge of the area.

"In the last minutes we were better, created four chances and showed great determination to turn it around. They showed that they did not want to lose," said Portugal coach Fernando Santos.

"And with Ronaldo, it's about a goal and another goal." Ronaldo had two first-half chances blocked as he tried to continue his impressive recent form which had seen him score 18 goals in his last nine La Liga games, including registering a 50th hat-trick. Salah was replaced late in the game by Shikabala and Portugal sensed a chance to grab a share of the spoils.

Quaresma, meanwhile, saw a 72nd minute attempt



ZURICH: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (L) vies with Egypt's defender Ahmed Fathy during an international friendly football match between Portugal and Egypt at Letzigrund stadium in Zurich on Friday. —AFP

saved by Mohamed El-Shenawy in the Egypt goal while Bruno Alves saw a close-range header from a corner drift wide of the goal. Shikabala had a fierce shot saved by Beto diving high to his right before Alves's frustrations boiled over late in the game with a yellow card. But with time running out, Ronaldo had the final say as the five-time Ballon d'Or winner moved into third place on the all-time

list of international goal scorers. Legendary Hungarian striker Ferenc Puskas scored 84 goals while Iran's Ali Daei leads the list with 109 goals in 149 internationals. Egypt, back at a World Cup for the first time since 1990, will play in Group A at the finals this summer with hosts Russia, Uruguay and Saudi Arabia. Portugal are in Group B and will face Spain, Morocco and Iran. — AFP

Impressive England break Dutch drought with 1-0 win

AMSTERDAM: England ended a 22-year win drought against the Netherlands thanks to Jesse Lingard's strike for a 1-0 triumph after a performance of composure and quality in a friendly on Friday.

Gareth Southgate's World Cup-bound England side were superior for much of the match, organised and in control even before Manchester United midfielder Lingard's 59th minute goal secured their first win over the Dutch since Euro '96.

The Netherlands, still smarting from missing out on this year's finals in Russia after a second straight failure to qualify for a major championship, were left with little to cheer at the start of reconstruction under new manager Ronald Koeman.

The home side got lucky soon after halftime when a clear foul on Marcus Rashford in the penalty area was waved away. But the visitors were soon rewarded for their control and some neat passing movements when a loose ball fell to Lingard, who swept it home with a clinical right-foot finish from just outside the box for his first senior international goal.

The result and, more importantly, the assured performances from some of Southgate's supposed fringe players gave encouragement to the England boss, who was in the team that last beat the Netherlands 4-1 at Wembley in 1996.

"It was a good test for us, we came away from home and controlled the game," he told ITV Sport. "We used the ball really well for 60, 65 minutes. Maybe more quality in the final third was required but we were very solid." He was also happy with the way his three-man defensive unit worked, even after he had lost Joe Gomez to injury in the opening 10 minutes and had to bring on Harry Maguire to join John Stones and Kyle Walker.

"The back three were excellent and the goalkeeper (Jordan Pickford) too, the way they were able to play from the back," said Southgate. "They played with real composure, and played with intelligence too."

He was delighted for his match winner Lingard too. "He's a player we've worked with for three or four years from the Under 21s and this year he is starting to finish the chances," the manager said. England captain Jordan Henderson enthused: "The three at the back, we look solid with that shape and it gives licence for us to pick up positions in midfield."

England, who had not won in Amsterdam since 1969, now have one more friendly against Italy on Tuesday before Southgate finalises his squad for Russia. — Reuters



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Hawally education zone team was crowned champion of Kuwait Martyrs Mini Goal Championship in a penalty shootout as the regulation time ended in a 1-1 draw. The event was held under the patronage of physical education director general at the Ministry of Education who was represented by Dr Istiqlal Al-Ragam. Former MP Yousuf Al-Zalzalah, former soccer players Saad Al-Houti and Mohammad Karam, media men and other dignitaries.

Dr Istiqlal Al-Ragam said she was happy with the success of the festival which carries the name of the martyrs in which

teams from various areas participated. She also lauded the administration of Iyas bin Muath and the organization of the championship. School principal Ali Hussein thanked the organizing committee which included Hassan Al-Khawajah, Salah Al-Mithen, Mohammad Al-Demkhi, Hassan Abdelrasoul, Hussein Al-Awadh and others. He said the success of the second Martyrs Mini Goal Championship reminds us of people who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of Kuwait and reminds our students of our martyrs in an attractive sport event. Mohammad Al-Khawaja spoke on behalf of the martyrs' children and thanked the family of Iyas bin Muath for this initiative which immortalizes the martyrs memory.

Hawally education zone wins Kuwait Martyrs Mini Goal championship

Alvarez temporarily suspended, Golovkin rematch threatened

LOS ANGELES: Mexican middleweight Saul "Canelo" Alvarez was temporarily suspended by Nevada boxing authorities on Friday over positive drug tests, putting his May 5 title rematch with Gennady Golovkin in

jeopardy. "Mr. Alvarez is temporarily suspended by the Nevada State Athletic Commission per the executive director for his adverse analytical findings, that being Clenbuterol, on February 17 and 20," a statement by commission executive director Bob Bennett said.

"A commission hearing is scheduled for April 10, 2018 to hear from Mr. Alvarez or for Mr. Alvarez to attend." According to the Las Vegas Review Journal, Bennett declined to comment on the status of the May 5 fight in Las Vegas.

Golden Boy Promotions, who handle Alvarez, reiterated their stance that the fighter hadn't intentionally taken a banned drug. "We respect the Nevada State

Athletic Commission's process and will vigorously present Canelo's case throughout," Golden Boy said in a statement issued by Stefan Friedman. "Over his career, Canelo has tested clean more than 90 times and would never intentionally take a banned substance."

Golden Boy had already acknowledged the fighter tested positive for banned Clenbuterol, blaming the result on tainted meat in Mexico, where the drug is sometimes used to fatten cattle. They said Alvarez would move his training camp from Mexico to the United States and would "submit to any number and variety of additional tests" deemed necessary in the build up to the May bout.

Golovkin promoter Tom Loeffler told the Los Angeles Times that the Kazakh "is still training like he's going to fight on May 5 and hopefully it's against Canelo". Loeffler said the Nevada commission had told him Alvarez's temporary suspension was mandated by their regulations until a hearing has been held.

"They told us Canelo has complied with follow-up testing and everything they've asked of him, but under their rules they had to issue a suspension," he said. "We've always said this is under the supervision of Nevada and this shows they are doing a thorough investigation and we commend them for that," Loeffler said.—AFP