

Sports

'Betrayed' Ronaldo faces uncertain future after swift Man Utd divorce

'They are not my friends', football star blasts Neville, Rooney

LONDON: Cristiano Ronaldo's Manchester United reunion was trumpeted as the return of Old Trafford's prodigal son, but it ended Tuesday in a divorce precipitated by his stinging tirade against the club. Two days ahead of Portugal's opening game at the World Cup, United said they were severing ties immediately with a player who was once the hottest property in football.

The Portugal forward told Piers Morgan on TalkTV last week that he felt "betrayed" by the Premier League club and had no respect for manager Erik ten Hag. He also hit out at the club's US owners, the Glazer family, stating they care far more about the money-making potential of United than results on the pitch. The 37-year-old even fired a broadside against former teammates Gary Neville and Wayne Rooney, saying "they are not my friends" after recent criticism of him from the pair.

The club were cautious in their initial response, but eventually decided there was no way back for an all-time great who burned his bridges. Ten Hag reportedly told United bosses that Ronaldo should not play for the club again after his outburst, a demand met by those in charge and one that ultimately suits both parties. His immediate release means Ronaldo is free to look for a new club, but it is not certain there will be a suitable landing spot for the player, despite his status in the game.

The veteran, who recently scored his 700th club goal, had angled for a move in the summer window after United failed to qualify for this season's Champions League. But Premier League and European giants opted not to move for the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, leaving him stuck at United. They will likely be even more wary now, having wit-

nessed Ronaldo's behavior. He said he was offered a two-year deal worth 350 million euros (\$360 million) by a Saudi Arabian club and remains insistent there is interest from Europe's top clubs.

Not only is Qatar surely his last chance to win the World Cup, it is also now a prime opportunity to show he can still perform at the highest level. He has been linked with a return to Sporting Lisbon, where he came through the youth ranks, but agreeing a financial package could be a stumbling block for a player who was on a reported weekly pay packet at United of around £500,000 (\$593,000). Should a European side not come calling, a move to MLS is a possibility as well.

Fading force

While there is much uncertainty about the future, what is clear is that Ronaldo struggled to accept his reduced status in the game at a club that has fallen from the pinnacle of English football. In 2009 he left a United side who were one of the top teams in Europe, but the club he rejoined in the summer of 2021 limped to a sixth-place finish in the Premier League despite his 24 goals in all competitions. Ronaldo made his name in his first spell at Old Trafford, developing from a prodigiously gifted teenager when he arrived in 2003 into one of the deadliest attackers in world football.

He won his first Champions League trophy and first Ballon d'Or during a trophy-laden spell under Alex Ferguson. He left United after six years for Real Madrid, where he became the club's greatest-ever goalscorer, winning the Champions League four more times and scoring 450 goals in 438 games. Ronaldo spent three more prolific years at



AL SHAHANIA: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo takes part in a training session at Al Shahania SC, northwest of Doha on November 23, 2022. —AFP

Juventus from 2018 before a return to Manchester, where he proved he was still a force to reckon with. But the feverish excitement generated by his second coming is now a distant memory.

The forward was a peripheral figure this season in an improving side under Ten Hag and was recently disciplined for refusing to come on as a substitute. Ronaldo, who has scored just three goals this

season, had returned to the team in recent weeks and even captained the Red Devils in a 3-1 loss at Aston Villa, which turned out to be his final appearance for United. In 2018 he was voted by Manchester United fans as the club's best player of the Premier League era but his explosive words brought about a sad exit after his homecoming turned sour. —AFP



Zain joined in awarding the winners.



The company introduces sports fans to its latest offers.

Zain the 'strategic' sponsor of GulfRun

KUWAIT: Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, joined in awarding the winners of GulfRun, the most popular motorsport event in the GCC. The event was held at Kuwait Motor Town, and Zain was the strategic sponsor for the fifth time. Zain's support to this unique event came as part of its continuous efforts to contribute to developing the youth and sports sectors in Kuwait. The company is keen on encouraging initiatives that offer the nation's youth a safe and professional setting to unleash their talents and pursue their passions.

This year, GulfRun featured a number of engaging activities at Kuwait Motor Town (KMT), attended by masses of fans and motorsports enthusiasts. Various races were held in different categories, featuring pro racers from Kuwait and the GCC. A car show was also held for fans to take a close look at their favorite sports and luxury cars. A market festival was also organized for visitors, featuring top local and global brands, cafes, and restaurants, with special social activities, children zones, and more. Zain was present in the event via its dedicated booth to introduce sports fans to its special World Cup offer.

Zain's continuous support to GulfRun comes in line with its keenness on encouraging the various efforts that contribute to developing the youth and sports sectors. The company puts the support of



Fun and engaging activities at the event.

Kuwait sports at the forefront of its priorities under the umbrella of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy, and Zain's support of local champions results in many achievements that the company is proud of year after year.

GulfRun provided an ideal and safe alternative to street racing, which threatens the lives of many peo-

ple, many of them young drivers. Motorsport enthusiasts were able to showcase their talents within professional and certified grounds at the Kuwait Motor Town's race circuit, in addition to having taken advantage of the opportunity to gain valuable insights with the help of qualified trainers and experienced professional instructors.

Man Utd owners consider sale as Ronaldo exits

MANCHESTER: Manchester United's owners said Tuesday they were ready to sell the club, potentially bringing down the curtain on an acrimonious 17 years under the Glazer family. On a tumultuous day for the English giants, it was earlier revealed that star player Cristiano Ronaldo has left the club with "immediate effect."

Weeks of turbulence appeared to have come to an end when United announced Ronaldo's contract had been terminated by mutual agreement to bring to an end his second spell at Old Trafford. That dramatic announcement was eclipsed just hours later by the news the US-based Glazer family could also be on their way out. "The board will consider all strategic alternatives, including new investment into the club, a sale, or other transactions involving the company," United said in a statement.

The Glazers have been unpopular with supporters ever since a £790 million (\$934 million) leveraged takeover in 2005 burdened the club with huge debts.



MANCHESTER: An aerial view shows Old Trafford stadium, home ground of Manchester United football team, in Manchester, northern England, on November 23, 2022. —AFP

Frustration towards the Americans has only grown during a nine-year decline in results on the pitch since Alex Ferguson's retirement as manager in 2013. The Red Devils have not won the Premier League title since Ferguson's final campaign in 2012/2013 and have failed to win any trophy since 2017.

United currently sit fifth in the Premier League, 11 points behind leaders Arsenal. "We will evaluate all options to ensure that we best serve our fans

and that Manchester United maximizes the significant growth opportunities available to the club today and in the future," added Avram and Joel Glazer, the club's executive co-chairmen and directors. The statement also recognized the need for investment in stadium redevelopment. Old Trafford remains the largest club stadium in England with a capacity of 74,000 but has not had a significant upgrade since 2006. —AFP

Tomoooh Sport Club Chairwoman lauds Qatar's efforts

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairwoman of Kuwait Tomoooh Sport Club and UN expert on the disabled rights Rihab Buresli thanked Qatar for supporting and caring for the disabled through the World Cup Qatar 2022. Buresli said this during the opening of the hall in which World Cup matches can be watched at the club. The participation of Ghanim Al-Moftab, one of the disabled, in the opening of the Mondial, which was watched by eight billion people around the world was an unprecedented message to draw the attention to this group of people, and their creative ability. Buresli appreciates Qatar's efforts.



Rihab Buresli

Tiger tops PGA Tour bonus list again to earn \$15 million

MIAMI: Tiger Woods, who has played only nine competitive rounds in 2022, topped the PGA Tour's Player Impact Program for the second consecutive year to claim a \$15 million bonus, the tour announced Tuesday. Woods, whose 82 PGA triumphs shares the all-time record with Sam Snead, led the analysis of global media exposure with top-ranked FedEx Cup winner Rory McIlroy second and Jordan Spieth third.

McIlroy, a four-time major winner, took home \$12 million while Spieth, a three-time major champion, made \$9 million. The second-year impact program paid money to 23 players, the top 20 as planned plus three additional players who would have made the list under tweaked 2023 criteria — Japan's Hideki Matsuyama and Americans Cameron Young and Sam Burns. Each will be paid \$2 million.

The program, designed to reward those who delivered greater interest in the PGA, uses data measurement of internet searches, news article mentions, weekend television sponsor exposure, popularity measurement and social media reach and engagement. Woods, a 15-time major winner who turns 47 next month, continued to recover this year from severe leg injuries suffered in a February 2021 car crash. Woods finished 47th at the Masters in his return to competition, making the cut and battling through the walk over 72 holes at hilly Augusta National.

He made the cut in May at the PGA Championship at Southern Hills but withdrew due to leg pain after three rounds. Woods missed the cut at the British Open in July at St Andrews. Woods has announced he will play in next week's Hero World Challenge, an invitational which he hosts in the Bahamas. He also will partner with McIlroy against the US duo of Spieth and Justin Thomas, this year's PGA Championship winner, in "The Match", a 12-hole exhibition under lights next month at Pelican Golf Club in Belleaire, Florida. There is also a chance that Woods will make a third consecutive appearance with son Charlie at the father-son PNC Championship in Orlando on December 15-18. —AFP