

Sports

# England, France hammer minnows, Ronaldo shines for Portugal

## Turks thrash Moldova 4-0, Serbia beat Luxembourg

PARIS: England and Portugal both scored five goals while France scored three as they overcame lowly-ranked Kosovo, Andorra and Lithuania in Euro 2020 qualifying on Tuesday. Captain Ronaldo, making his 160th international appearance, scored four as Portugal won 5-1 in Vilnius and strengthened their position in Group B after a sluggish start.

For Ronaldo it was a second hat-trick in three internationals. The victory over Lithuania, 130th in the world rankings, kept Portugal five points behind Ukraine at the top of Group B. Portugal, who opened the group with home draws against Ukraine and Serbia, started their recovery with a victory in Belgrade on Saturday. They have a game in hand on all the other teams in the group.

"We were better, we are better, and we won because of it," said Fernando Santos, the Portugal coach. "We kept the pace after the win at Serbia, otherwise this triumph would make no sense, and we are closer."

Ronaldo's first goal was a penalty. The second, with the scores level after an hour, was a scuffed low shot from outside the penalty area which took a couple of stragglers off the artificial turf before it was parried into the air by the diving Ernestas Setkus. The dropping ball hit the back of the goalie's head before rolling in. The third was a clinical volley from close range. The fourth was a low shot into the corner.

Vytautas Andriuskevicius scored the hosts' only goal before William Carvalho added a fifth for the reigning champions at the end. Serbia beat Luxembourg 3-1, as Aleksandar Mitrovic netted twice, to solidify their grasp on third place. They are a point behind Portugal.

In Southampton, Gareth Southgate's England side trailed early on to Kosovo, ranked 120th in the world, when Valon Berisha scored after 34 seconds. England replied with a first-half goal binge that ended with Jadon Sancho scoring twice to make it 5-1 at the break.

### 'BIZARRE GAME'

The visitors claimed two back in the second half, including a second for Lazio midfielder Berisha, but the 5-3 victory put England three points clear in Group A, ahead of the second-placed Czech Republic, who beat Montenegro 3-0. "A bizarre game," said Southgate. "The outstanding parts of our play were obvious. The errors were obvious." In Paris, the world champions made light work of beating 136-ranked Andorra 3-0. It was Les Bleus' 100th match at the Stade de France.

Antoine Griezmann missed a penalty for his country for the second game running but Kinglsey Coman, Clement Lenglet, with his first on the international goal, and Wissam Ben Yedder clinched three points.



VILNIUS: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (C) vies with Lithuania's Saulius Mikoliunas (R) during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group B qualification football match Lithuania v Portugal in Vilnius, Lithuania. — AFP

"It is really annoying. I'll just need to keep working. You can't be on top of your game all the time," Griezmann said. Coman also scored two against Albania on Saturday. "It has been a very good week. It has gone well personally and collectively," Coman told television station TF1.

Cenk Tosun scored twice as the Turks beat Moldova

with ease in a 4-0 victory in Chisinau. But Iceland, who had been level with the top two, suffered a blow as they lost 4-2 in Albania.

That result meant Iceland dropped three points behind. It also changed the tiebreak, allowing Turkey to take first place from France. — AFP

### Euro 2020 qualifying standings

Euro 2020 qualifying standings after Tuesday's Groups A, B and H matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Group A							
England	4	4	0	0	19	4	12
Czech Rep	5	3	0	2	9	8	9
Kosovo	5	2	2	1	10	10	8
Montenegro	5	0	2	3	3	13	2
Bulgaria	5	0	2	3	5	11	2
Group B							
Ukraine	5	4	1	0	11	1	13
Portugal	4	2	2	0	10	4	8
Serbia	5	2	1	2	10	12	7
Luxembourg	5	1	1	3	5	8	4
Lithuania	5	0	1	4	4	15	1
Group C							
Germany	5	4	0	1	17	6	12
Northern Ireland	5	4	0	1	7	4	12
Netherlands	4	3	0	1	14	5	9
Belarus	5	1	0	4	3	10	3
Estonia	5	0	0	5	2	18	0
Group D							
Rep. Ireland	5	3	2	0	6	2	11
Denmark	5	2	3	0	15	5	9
Switzerland	4	2	2	0	10	4	8
Georgia	5	1	1	3	4	8	4
Gibraltar	5	0	0	5	0	16	0
Group E							
Croatia	5	3	1	1	10	5	10
Slovakia	5	3	0	2	9	7	9
Hungary	5	3	0	2	7	6	9
Wales	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Azerbaijan	5	0	1	4	5	13	1
Group F							
Spain	6	6	0	0	17	3	18
Sweden	6	3	2	1	13	8	11
Romania	6	3	1	2	13	7	10
Norway	6	2	3	1	11	8	9
Malta	6	1	0	5	2	13	3
Faroese	6	0	0	6	3	20	0
Group G							
Poland	6	4	1	1	8	2	13
Slovenia	6	3	2	1	12	5	11
Austria	6	3	1	2	13	6	10
North Macedonia	6	2	2	2	8	8	8
Israel	6	2	2	2	11	11	8
Latvia	6	0	0	6	1	21	0
Group H							
Turkey	6	5	0	1	14	2	15
France	6	5	0	1	19	4	15
Iceland	6	4	0	2	10	9	12
Albania	6	3	0	3	10	9	9
Moldova	6	1	0	5	2	17	3
Andorra	6	0	0	6	0	14	0
Group I							
Belgium	6	6	0	0	19	1	18
Russia	6	5	0	1	18	4	15
Kazakhstan	6	2	1	3	8	9	7
Cyprus	6	2	1	3	11	6	7
Scotland	6	2	0	4	5	13	6
San Marino	6	0	0	6	0	28	0
Group J							
Italy	6	6	0	0	18	3	18
Finland	6	4	0	2	8	4	12
Armenia	6	3	0	3	12	11	9
Bosnia-Herzegovina	6	2	1	3	12	11	7
Greece	6	1	2	3	7	10	5
Liechtenstein	6	0	1	5	1	19	1

## England's got talent, but errors must be cut out for Euros glory

LONDON: England's abundance of attacking talent has the Three Lions believing they can end a 54-year wait to win a major international tournament next year, when the Euro 2020 final will be hosted at Wembley. Raheem Sterling, Jadon Sancho and Harry Kane were in full flow as Kosovo, unbeaten in 15 matches prior to travelling to Southampton on Tuesday, were put to the sword with five goals in 38 first-half minutes.

That took England's tally in four qualifiers to 19 goals with mathematic qualification seemingly a formality. But there remains plenty for Gareth Southgate to perfect ahead of the European championships as Kosovo became the first visiting side to score three times in a qualifier in England for 12 years as the hosts edged an eight-goal contest 5-3.

"We've been saying international football is dull, that wasn't the case tonight," said Southgate, who did not hold back in criticising a sluggish start to the second-half that saw a 5-1 lead quickly cut to 5-3. "The small bit after half-time: ridiculous mistakes, poor deci-

sions, lack of covering back, so we made the game really uncomfortable for ourselves." Centre-backs Michael Keane and Harry Maguire, who became the world's most expensive defender after a £80 million move from Leicester to Manchester United last month, were at fault for all three goals conceded.

England's inability to close out the game after going in front has also seen them lose two semi-finals at the World Cup in 2018 and the Nations League in June under Southgate.

Attack may therefore be the best form of defence come the Euros with 19-year-old Sancho taking his sensational form for Borussia Dortmund onto the international stage with his first two England goals, alongside the established pairing of Kane and Sterling. The latter two have each scored six times in four qualifiers in Group A, with Sterling a man transformed in an England shirt over the past year. Prior to scoring twice in a 3-2 win in Spain last October, Sterling had not scored for his country in 27 games stretching back three years. — AFP

## Delight, chaotic scenes as Qatar held by India in WCup qualifier

DOHA: Hundreds of Indian fans launched celebrations after their team held World Cup 2022 hosts Qatar to a goalless draw in Doha in a preliminary qualifying match for the flagship tournament.

But some of the sparkle of India's achievement Tuesday was lost following chaotic scenes as visiting fans struggled to enter the stadium. There was jostling outside the South Stand around 10 minutes after kick-off when a crowd of several hundred Indian fans chanted and held up tickets while a phalanx of Qatari security held them back.

"What a shambles," said a British football fan who was also unable to enter the ground "even with a ticket". "What a unique way to do it," he said, noting that his group's tickets had been issued without gate numbers.

Security officers had increasingly heated exchanges with fans stuck outside but able to clearly hear the drama unfolding inside. Nearby, hundreds of others snaked around the car park. At half-time a surge of several hundred Indian fans attempted to bypass security and ticket control and rush through two of the stadium gates. The automatic doors were closed and the situation was brought quickly under control.

### 'CAN'T HANDLE THE CROWD?'

"If they can't handle the crowd they shouldn't give the tickets," said a 24-year-old Indian migrant worker who had

a ticket and was refused entry. "We are working day and night in the heat, we are paying our money and we have our tickets," he added, declining to be named as Qatari officials reinforced barriers around the area.

"If they are doing this at a (lower-profile) match, how will they handle a World Cup match? "We all live here, if foreigners are here how will they handle it?" Indians make up almost 22 percent of Qatar's population while Qataris are only 10.5 percent of the total, according to official statistics.

This led some Indian fans to complain that they were allocated just eight percent of tickets to Tuesday's game — the minimum quota permitted by international football rules. The 15,000-capacity Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium will not be used for the World Cup in 2022.

FIFA, contacted by AFP, referred questions to the Qatar Football Association who did not respond to requests for comment. "It's a bit of a disaster," said another British football fan based in Qatar who had travelled to Doha's western suburb of Al Sadd to watch the match.

Despite the disappointment of Indian fans forced to watch the action on a screen set up in the car park, there were jubilant scenes inside the stadium following the upset draw. Away fans chanted in unison and waved India's tricolour flag as the team toured the ground that is home to Qatar's domestic Al Sadd team.

India coach Igor Stimac highlighted the gulf between his team's modest facilities and the lavish infrastructure enjoyed by Qatar as he warned his players to keep their heads down following the surprise result. "We have two stopwatches and lots of willingness to learn everyday," he said at the post-match press briefing. The area around the stadium was quiet following the match however with the crowd dispersing quickly and calmly. — AFP



DOHA: Qatar's defender Assim Madibo (bottom) tackles India's midfielder Sahal Abdul Samad (C) during the FIFA world cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian cup China 2023 preliminary joint qualification round 2 match between Qatar and India, at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha. — AFP

## Arsenal's Mead wants to knock Lyon off Champions League perch

LONDON: Lyon remain the team to beat when the women's Champions League gets underway yesterday, but Arsenal and England forward Beth Mead believes the time is coming to knock the relentless French champions "down a peg or two".

Arsenal travel to Italy to face Fiorentina in the first leg of their last 32 tie on Thursday after a first English title in seven years. Mead was vital to that success last season, forming a prolific partnership with Dutch striker Vivianne Miedema, before starring in England's run to the World Cup semi-finals.

The Gunners are the only English side to win the top prize in women's European club football in 2007. But in the 12 years since, Lyon have become Europe's dominant force — winning the Champions League six times, including the past four seasons.

Having seen international teammates Lucy Bronze, Nikita Parris, Alex Greenwood and Izzy Christiansen all leave England behind to join Lyon's ever-burgeoning galaxy of stars, Mead is aware of the challenge facing anyone trying to end the French club's grip on the competition.

"When they buy a player it is one of the top-end players from any other team. They are a different class, I enjoy watching them," Mead told AFP. "As an English player you want to see an English team knock them down a peg or two. I want to see them knocked down. We'll see if someone

is able to do it one day soon. "In saying that, half the team now are English!" Mead admits that the facilities, conditions and success offered to Lyon's female stars makes them a dream destination. At just 24, she is likely to be a future target should her rise continue.

After scoring nearly a goal a game in six years with Sunderland, a move to Arsenal in 2017 opened the door to international recognition. A stunning strike to beat Brazil as England won the SheBelieves Cup earlier this year established Mead as a regular for her country. She was an ever-present as the Lionesses fell short at the semi-final stage for a third consecutive major tournament.

Two months on, defeat to the USA still hurts. After seeing off England, the Americans went onto lift a fourth World Cup against Miedema's Netherlands in the final.

Seven of the eight quarter-finalists in France came from Europe and Mead believes the developing European leagues, with the Champions League as the pinnacle, will see Europe's national teams surpass the USA.

"The USA are unbelievable but I actually think by comparison the European leagues are better," added Mead. "I think America just have an unbelievable mindset that they are going to win, and they do, so fair play to them. We are getting closer, but it's just small margins." — AFP

## Abram strikes late as Peru down Brazil

LOS ANGELES: Peru grabbed a slice of revenge for their loss to Brazil in the Copa America final on Tuesday, defeating the five-time World Cup winners 1-0 in a friendly in Los Angeles.

A headed goal from Argentina-based defender Luis Abram was enough to give Peru a hard-fought win over the Brazilians.

Brazil, who defeated Peru 3-1 in the final of the Copa America in Rio de Janeiro in July, never got going to the disappointment of a 32,287 crowd at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

The defeat brought an end to Brazil's 17-game winning streak, a run which started with a victory over the United States just over a year ago.

Brazil coach Tite meanwhile opted against starting Paris Saint-Germain star Neymar, four days after he had made a successful return from injury with a goal and an assist in a 2-2 draw with Colombia on Friday.

Tite, who had been reluctant to start Neymar in back-to-back games as the striker regains fitness, brought on the PSG forward after 63 minutes in place of Liverpool's Roberto Firmino.

Neymar attempted to up the tempo in attack, but was unable to break the deadlock, with Brazil, who were also missing Dani Alves and Thiago Silva, struggling to find their usual attacking rhythm.

Instead it was Peru who grabbed a winner, Abram rising to meet Yoshimar Yotun's free-kick to glance in the winner. — AFP