Ferguson says Man United must pick 'best players' after Ronaldo benched

Ronaldo scored five times in first six games back with United

LONDON: Alex Ferguson has added to the growing pressure on Ole Gunnar Solskjaer by criticizing the Manchester United manager's decision to use Cristiano Ronaldo as a substitute against Everton. Solskjaer surprisingly left Ronaldo on the bench for the first 57 minutes of Saturday's damaging 1-1 draw at Old Trafford. United were leading 1-0 when the Portugal star was introduced, but Andros Townsend equalized to leave Solskjaer's misfiring team with only one win in their past four games in all competitions.

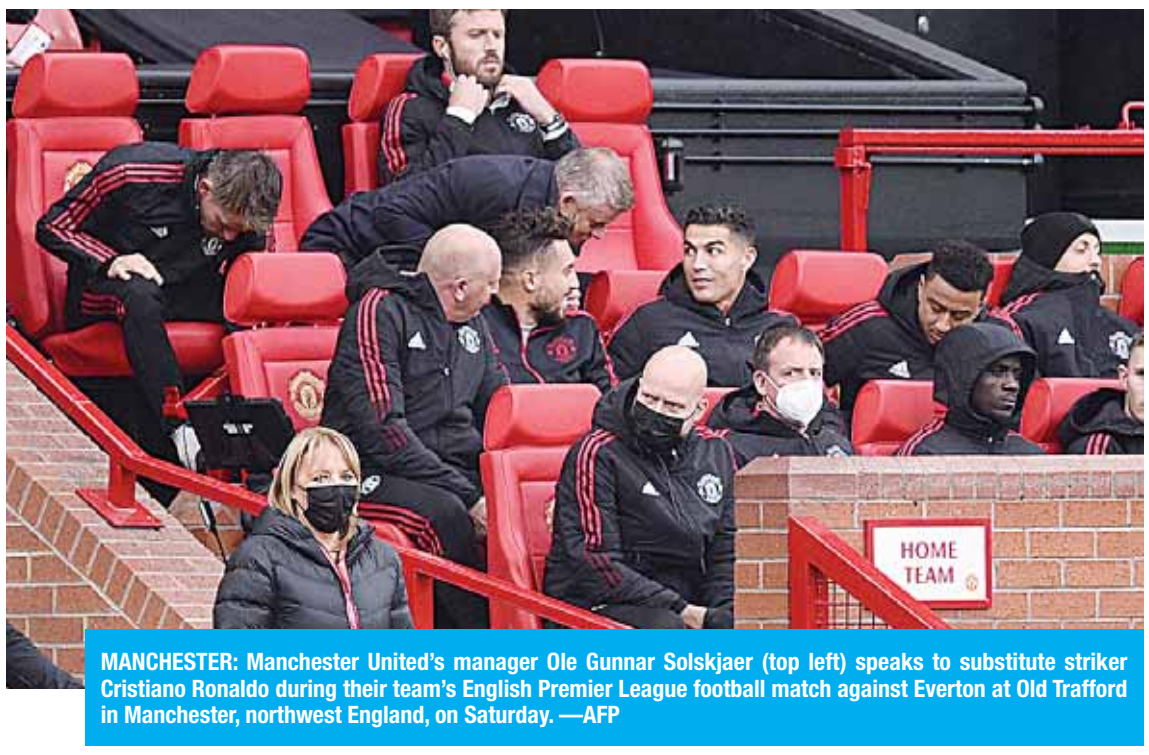
Ronaldo has been in fine form since rejoining United, scoring five times in his first six games, including the late winner against Villarreal three days before the Everton match. The 36-year-old looked frustrated, muttering to himself and shaking his head when he walked off the pitch at full-time on Saturday. Solskjaer was already under fire after United's recent struggles left them two points behind Premier League leaders Chelsea. Now his old boss Ferguson has inadvertently increased the scrutiny on the Norwegian.

In a conversation with former UFC champion Khabib Nurmagomedov in the directors' lounge at Old Trafford, United legend Ferguson was filmed saying "you should always start with your best players". In the video, posted on Nurmagomedov's Instagram account on Sunday, Ferguson suggested Everton got a boost "when they saw Ronaldo wasn't playing".

Ferguson played a key role in Ronaldo's blockbuster return to United in August, making a phone call to his former player to convince him to snub an offer from Manchester City in favor of an emotional move to Old Trafford. The Ronaldo deal, combined with the high-profile signings of England forward Jadon Sancho and France defender Raphael Varane, have raised expectations of a United title challenge this term.

United two points behind leaders Chelsea

Speaking after the Everton game, Solskjaer defended his decision to rest Ronaldo. "Me and him, we understand more than the experts," he said. "It's about picking the right moments to play him, to not play him. He's not a young puppy anymore but he's as professional as ever and ready to come on and he came on with energy and attitude." Solskjaer, who played under Ferguson from 1996 to 2007, is still waiting to win his first trophy since taking over in December 2018. United finished second in the Premier League last season and lost the Europa League final against Villarreal on penalties. They last won the Premier League in Ferguson's final season in charge in 2013 and have not won any silverware since 2017. —AFP



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (top left) speaks to substitute striker Cristiano Ronaldo during their team's English Premier League football match against Everton at Old Trafford in Manchester, northwest England, on Saturday. —AFP

Ranieri takes ride on Watford's managerial carousel

LONDON: Claudio Ranieri is taking his turn on the Watford managerial carousel as the popular Italian embarks on a fourth spell in the Premier League. The former Chelsea and Leicester boss was hired by Watford on Monday following the sacking of Xisco Munoz.

If leading 5,000-1 outsiders Leicester to their astonishing Premier League title triumph in 2016 is unquestionably Ranieri's greatest feat, then surviving more than a season in the Vicarage Road hotseat might come a close second.

The 69-year-old is Watford's 13th permanent manager during the reign of the Pozzo family, who took control in 2012. Munoz led Watford to promotion from the Championship last season and the Hornets were outside the relegation zone when he was ruthlessly axed on Sunday after just 10 months in charge.

The club, in 15th spot in the Premier League, cited the "negative trend" of performances this season, with Saturday's 1-0 defeat at Leeds leaving Watford without a win in their past three games in all competitions. Even if Ranieri can keep Watford in the English top-flight this term, it is impossible to know whether that would be enough to satisfy the capricious Pozzos.

Ranieri will at least be fortified by decades of experience and an innate ability to win over players and employers with his disarmingly eccentric personality. The new job is the 22nd appointment of an itinerant managerial career that started with Italian amateur side Vigor Lamezia in 1986.

Ranieri's wanderlust has taken him on a 35-year rollercoaster ride, featuring stops at some of Europe's grande dames in Chelsea, Juventus, Inter Milan and Atletico Madrid. He hoisted the Coppa Italia with Fiorentina and the Copa del Rey and the UEFA Super Cup at Valencia.

In four years at Chelsea, he earned the nickname of "Tinkerman" for a compulsive desire to reshuffle his starting line-up each week. At that time, foreign managers were still a relative novelty in England and Ranieri had to work hard to win over a skeptical squad. By the time he left in 2004, he had established Chelsea in the Champions League, setting the stage for the success of the Roman Abramovich era.

Charm offensive

But it was 11 years before Ranieri returned to the Premier League and by then his appeal had worn off in some quarters. Being sacked by Greece after losing to the Faroe Islands was seen as conclusive proof that the Italian was past it.

Former England star Gary Lineker, a noted Leicester fan, greeted news of the Italian's 2015 appointment with a scathing tweet that read "Claudio Ranieri? Really?" But he immediately went on a charm offensive, rewarding his players with pizza and champagne after victories and entertaining the media with his whimsical press conferences.

Revealing that he used an "imaginary bell" in training to keep his players focused, Ranieri's "dilly ding, dilly dong" description became the quirky catchphrase that defined Leicester's incredible title success. The brilliance of N'Golo Kante and Jamie Vardy also had plenty to do with Leicester's glory, but Ranieri was the architect of the transformation for a team that barely avoided relegation before he arrived.

Voted manager of the year by both the Premier League and the League Managers Association, Ranieri was also named a Grand Officer of the Order of Merit in Italy. But he had little time to bask in the acclaim as his fairytale turned sour.

Leicester struggled to adapt to their status as champions and by the time Ranieri was sacked the following February with talk of a player revolt, the Foxes were languishing just above the relegation zone.

Ranieri has never scaled the heights again, with his most recent spell in the Premier League perhaps serving as an indication of the issues he will face at Watford. Charged with keeping lowly Fulham in the top tier in the 2018/19 season, Ranieri won just three of his 17 matches and was dismissed before the west Londoners were eventually relegated.

Ranieri left Sampdoria at the end of last season and has been out of work since. But at an age when many of his contemporaries have eased into retirement, he could not resist one more shot at defying the odds with Watford. —AFP

Italy, Spain open Nations League Final Four

MILAN: Italy and Spain will again face off in a semi-final tonight when they take to the field at the San Siro for the Nations League Final Four opener, a replay of their epic Euro 2020 semi-final. Spain finished on the losing side back in July's European Championship semi-final as the Azzurri prevailed on penalties and went on to win the tournament, beginning an unforgettable summer of sport for Italy.

Roberto Mancini's Italy are on a world-record run of 37 matches without defeat and have a squad predictably stuffed full of players who took part in their run to glory in the Euro final over England at Wembley.

"We'll be facing a great Italy team: They deservedly beat England in the final of the Euro and they've kept their long unbeaten run going," said Spain coach Luis Enrique after announcing his squad on Thursday. "But like our psychologist says, defeat comes to every team. And that means that they're closer to losing, that time is getting nearer."

Mancini admitted that "Spain were the team we struggled against most during Euro 2020". "They are a good team with good players. It will be a good match," he told uefa.com. The only different face from the Euro crowd was supposed to be in-form Roma midfielder Lorenzo Pellegrini, who on Sunday scored his sixth goal of the season in all competitions.

However injuries in the run-up to and during the weekend's Serie A fixtures mean Juventus striker Moise Kean, AC Milan defender Davide Calabria and Inter Milan youngster Federico Dimarco have all been drafted in at the last minute.

The trio have respectively come on board in place of Italy's usual starting center-forward Ciro Immobile and Atalanta's Rafael Toloi and Matteo Pessina. For Dimarco it's a first ever call up and comes from the man who in 2014 gave the 23-year-old his debut at Inter Milan, where he has impressed so far this season.

Similar philosophies

The match will also see the return of Gianluigi Donnarumma to the San Siro after leaving AC Milan on a free transfer to go to Paris Saint-Germain this summer. Asked whether he might be harangued by Milan fans following a move which left a bad taste in the mouth of supporters, Donnarumma said: "It would be sad if that happened. "I always gave everything for Milan and I hope the subject can be put to one side," he added.

Luis Enrique has too had injury problems with club matches coming thick and fast between last month's international break and the Final Four. Teenage sensation Pedri will not take part after getting injured for the second time in less than a month, missing out on similarly young squad to the one which surpassed expectations at the Euro.

Pedri was one of the best performers of the tournament and gave a celebrated Italy midfield of Jorginho, Marco Verratti and Nicolo Barella a tough time for much of their thrilling semi-final. Tottenham's Bryan Gil has also been brought in after Marcos Llorente picked up a thigh injury during Atletico Madrid's 2-0 win over Barca at the weekend, while the Catalan giants' 17-year-old midfielder Gavi has been picked despite only having four la Liga appearances to his name.

Former Barca coach Luis Enrique was lauded by the Italians after he heaped praise on them despite what must have been a painful defeat at Wembley, and he continued his charm offensive ahead of what promises to be a worthy opener to the Final Four. "We could have beaten them but we didn't manage to do it, we're two teams with a similar philosophy and we hope to take part in another exciting match," he said. —AFP

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I, Jose Mathew holder of Indian Passport No. U0196249 having permanent address VIII-79, Vattoly (H), Near East Church, Angamaly, Ernakulam, Kerala - 683572. Residing in Kuwait at present Mangaf, Block-4, Street 23, Bldg-123 Kuwait, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name - Jose Mathew and Surname - Jovi. **(C 0958)**

I, FARUK SULAIMAN Sulaiman DOB: 01.06.1980 residing at 161A 1102, Pallivasal Street 1 Kalamarudur, Villupuram, Tamilnadu - 606102, declare that I have changed my name and hereafter I shall be known and called as MUBARAK SULAINAN only. **(C 0957) 5-10-2021**

I, Kasturi Myneeswaara, Indian Passport No. K46526841 have decided to change the name as KASTURI MUNISWARA.

I, DAVID KINGSTON BRITTO HAGGAI, Indian Passport No. T5328063 have changed name to KINGSTON BRITTO HAGGAI. **(C 0956)**