

## Denmark book World Cup ticket, England held

### Ronaldo completes 10th int'l hat-trick as Portugal cruise past Luxembourg



LOULE: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring a goal during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group A football match between Portugal and Luxembourg at the Estadio Algarve in Loule, near Faro, south of Portugal, on Tuesday. — AFP

PARIS: Denmark became the second team to qualify for the 2022 World Cup finals when they beat Austria by a single goal on Tuesday as England were frustrated by Hungary at Wembley. Joakim Maehle scored in the 53rd minute to send the Danes to Qatar as they build on their surprise run at Euro 2020 this summer when they reached the semi-finals.

"You can only dream about things like this," said Denmark midfielder Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg. "It's crazy. This is huge for me, it's huge for the team, for Danish football and for Denmark. With the age and quality we have, we will only keep growing."

The Danes join Germany, who qualified on Monday, in the finals. Host nation Qatar qualify automatically. England sputtered as a combative Hungarian side held them to a 1-1 draw. The match was marred by ugly scenes at Wembley as Hungarian supporters clashed with stewards and police.

Garth Southgate's side fell behind to Roland Sallai's disputed first-half penalty before John Stones stuck out a boot to score the equaliser in the 37th minute from Phil Foden's cross. Harry Kane

failed to score in a qualifier for the first time in 16 games and was substituted as Hungary's resolute defence kept a disjointed England side at bay.

"We did not play at the level we need to, simple as that," said Southgate. England defender Tyrone Mings called for harsher punishments for racism in football after it emerged the trouble at Wembley had flared after police had moved in to arrest a Hungarian supporter for what police called a "racially aggravated public order offence".

Mings said: "Every time we speak on racial abuse the punishments that follow never seem in line with what has happened. I sincerely hope that if that is the case, the punishments fall in line with what happened this time." England will be sure of reaching next year's finals if they take four points from their final qualifiers against Albania and San Marino in November.

#### Ronaldo hat-trick

Poland are second behind England in Group I after a stormy win in Albania. Play was halted and the teams left the pitch as fans threw bottles after Karol Swiderski scored the winning goal in the 77th minute. The teams later returned to complete the game.

Cristiano Ronaldo scored two penalties in six minutes and completed the 10th international hat-trick of his career in the 87th minute as Portugal thrashed Luxembourg 5-0. Bruno Fernandes and Joao Fernandes were the other scorers in the romp, but Portugal remain a point behind Serbia in Group A after the Serbs beat Azerbaijan 3-1 at home.

Dusan Vlahovic, the 21-year-old Fiorentina player who is starting to attract the interest of Europe's biggest clubs, scored twice and Dusan Tadic hit Serbia's third goal. Sweden stayed two points

ahead of Spain in Group B thanks to a 2-0 win against Greece.

Scotland got a desperately-needed 1-0 win over the Faroe Islands, meaning they need one more victory from their last two games to secure a playoff spot as they seek to reach a World Cup finals for the first time since 1998.

Lyndon Dykes scored for the Scots for the fourth game running, as he connected untidily with a Nathan Patterson cross to finally break the resistance of the minnows. Switzerland stayed in contention for Qatar when they eased to a 4-0 win in Lithuania with Breel Embolo scoring twice.

The Swiss are equal with Italy on 14 points in Group C, but second on goal difference. Ukraine were held to a goalless draw by Bosnia-Herzegovina and lie second in World Cup holders France's Group D, just a point ahead of Finland.

Teemu Pukki scored twice as the Finns beat Kazakhstan 2-0 to become his country's all-time leading international goalscorer with 33 goals, overtaking Jari Litmanen. France, who won the Nations League on Sunday by beating Spain, will not be in action again until November. — AFP



#### Scotland needs win to secure playoff spot

## Fans return to Soweto stadium as restrictions ease

SOWETO: "Welcome back," speakers blasted from the entrance of South Africa's main sports stadium in Soweto as excited football fans — vaccination cards in hand — arrived for the first time in 18 months. "Please make sure you sanitize your hands," the metallic voice reminded the 2,000 spectators lucky enough to get their hands on the first tickets sold since coronavirus hit.

The match, a World Cup qualifier between South Africa and Ethiopia, sold out in two hours. "It has been a long journey, we have all been waiting for this for a long time," said Bafana Bafana supporter Paul Nkosi, 49, in a blue hard hat mounted with a crown of metallic multi-colored South African miniature flags. "When I managed to grab a ticket I thought: Jesus, I'm so lucky," he exclaimed, clutching a gold papier-mache trophy, eyes tearing with emotion.

Inside the stadium rules are strict: no booze, no hugging. Keep a seat between your neighbor and a face mask on at all times. Vuvuzela horns, a hallmark of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, were also banned to avoid droplets spraying. "I'm not so happy about that," admitted law student Anita Gwente, 26, the South African flag draped over her shoulders, matching the red in her hair. She is relieved that at least singing is allowed.

A group of Ethiopia supporters sulked nearby. Unable to buy tickets online, they arrived four hours early in the hope of finding a way in. "We haven't even had lunch because we want to watch," said Adisse Tagsse, 41, a Johannesburg-based Ethiopian businessman.



JOHANNESBURG: South African national football team supporters react in the stands during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualifying round Group G football match between South Africa and Ethiopia at the FNB Stadium in Johannesburg on Tuesday. — AFP

Scuffles broke out later as they tried to force their way through, breaking through a barrier before being stopped by security.

South Africa eased coronavirus restrictions this month, allowing fans back into stadiums. Stadiums opened just days after the rollout of electronic COVID-19 vaccine certificates, although most people still only had paper proof. The country, grappling with vaccine hesitancy, particularly among men, hopes the requirement will spur more people to get jabbed. Around a quarter of the targeted population has been vaccinated so far.

"This is a pilot project," head of Stadium Management South Africa, Bertie Grobbelaar. If successful, it will pave the way for stadiums to gradually resume full capacity. South Africa is continent's hardest-hit by the pandemic, recording over 2.9 million coronavirus cases, of which more than 88,300 have been fatal.

Inside the colossal 95,000-capacity FNB Stadium in Soweto, which hosted the 2010 World Cup final, fans cheered loudly as the teams walked in, shouting the national anthem at the top of their lungs, lyrics muffled behind masks.

Ushers glancing over their shoulders at the match reminded spectators to keep their distance and faces covered. "It is empty but I still feel so overwhelmed," said student Sakhile Ngoni, 30, sharing a packet of crisps with friends before kick-off.

"We are not going to be able to enjoy it like we normally do but it's better than nothing," he said. Live sport was cancelled in March 2020 as the nation went into a hard lockdown. Play resumed five months later in empty stadiums, dealing a severe financial blow to the most popular sports — cricket, football and rugby. — AFP

## Kenyan athlete Tirop found dead with stab wounds

NAIROBI: Record-breaking Kenyan distance runner Agnes Tirop was found dead yesterday with stab wounds to her stomach in a suspected homicide, athletics officials said. Tirop, 25, was a fast-rising athlete — a double world 10,000m bronze medallist and 2015 world cross country champion who also finished fourth in the 5,000m at the Tokyo Olympics this year. Only last month, she smashed the women-only 10 km world record at the Road to Records Event in Germany, with a time of 30:01, slicing 28 seconds off the previous record, Athletics Kenya said.

Tirop also made history in 2015 when she became the second-youngest ever gold medalist in the women's cross country championships after South Africa's Zola Budd. She was found dead at her home in the high altitude training town of Iten in western Kenya. "Kenya has lost a jewel who was one of the fastest rising athletics giants on the international stage, thanks to her eye-catching performances on the track," Athletics Kenya said in a statement. "We are still working to unearth more details about her demise."

#### 'A Kenyan hero'

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta paid tribute to the young athlete and urged the police to track down those

behind her death. "It is unsettling, utterly unfortunate and very sad that we've lost a young and promising athlete who, at a young age of 25 years, she had brought our country so much glory through her exploits on the global athletics stage," he said in a statement.

"It is even more painful that Agnes, a Kenyan hero by all measures, painfully lost her young life through a criminal act perpetrated by selfish and cowardly people," he said. On Saturday, another Kenyan long-distance athlete Hosea Mwok Machariyang, a member of the country's record-breaking world cross country team, died of what Kenyan athletics officials said was suicide.

Machariyang, 35, was found in his home in West Pokot in western Kenya. "He was such a brilliant athlete, committed to the sport where he competed for Kenya for many years in both cross country and the 5,000m and 10,000m races," Jackson Pkemoi, the West Pokot representative of Athletics Kenya, told AFP.

Machariyang made a record eight appearances, and won three consecutive titles for Kenya in the World Cross Country Championships from 2006 to 2008. Kenya is the most successful country in the cross-country championships, having won 49 team and 27 individual titles. — AFP