

PORTUGAL CROWNED CHAMPIONS

AP, MUNICH: Cristiano Ronaldo hoisted up the Nations League trophy and 'We Are The Champions' rang around the stadium after Portugal defeated Spain 5-3 in a penalty shootout in Munich on Sunday.

NATIONS LEAGUE

Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa saved Alvaro Morata's fourth penalty for Spain, then Rúben Neves converted his team's fifth to seal the win after their match finished 2-2 after extra time.

RESULT

Portugal 2 (Mendes 26, Ronaldo 61) Spain 2 (Zubimendi 21, Oyarzabal 45) aet

Portugal won 5-3 on penalties

Morata was the only player to miss after seeing every player score their spot kicks before him. He was inconsolable.

Ronaldo had kept Portugal in the game when he equalized in the 61st minute of regular time with his record-extending 138th international goal after Mikel Oyarzabal had given Spain a half-time lead.

Oyarzabal squeezed the ball past Portugal goalkeeper

DIOGO COSTA THE HERO AS SPAIN STUMBLE; RECORD-BREAKING RONALDO HITS 138TH



Portugal team celebrates after winning the Nations League final soccer match against Spain at the Allianz Arena in Munich, Germany

er Diogo Costa in the 45th after Pedri played him in.

"It's a shame and it's tough, but with time it will be more appreciated," Oyarzabal said. "We struggled more in the second half, we were tired. The substitutions helped them. But we are proud of

our team and we will fight to be close to winning a title again."

Spain, still the European champion, failed to display the cohesion and fluency in attack that put five goals past France in the semifinal on Thursday.

There was an element of fortune about the opening goal scored by Martin Zubimendi in the 21st when Portugal's defense failed to deal with Lamine Yamal's cross.

Nuno Mendes levelled five minutes later when he

drilled a low shot inside the far post. The 22-year-old left back was the player of the match — providing the cross that was deflected kindly for Ronaldo to score his equalizer, keeping Yamal in check, then confidently scoring his penalty

in the shootout.

Ronaldo was already off by then. He had gone off, exhausted, to standing ovations and a hug from coach Roberto Martinez in the 88th. In his previous game, Ronaldo led Portugal to its first win over Germany for

25 years.

For Mendes and Paris Saint-Germain teammates Gonçalo Ramos, João Neves and Vitinha, it was their second trophy in a little more than a week after winning the Champions League in the same stadium.

PLAYER OF THE MATCH: NUNO MENDES

- 1 goal
- 1 assist (deflected cross for Ronaldo's goal)
- Kept Lamine Yamal in check
- Scored in the shootout

Ronaldo deserves everything. He helps us a lot on the pitch and off it. He's got a winner mentality. He's a role model. We're happy we've got him — Nuno Mendes

COACH TALK

A captain with the type of experience he has is essential, to show the necessary values and personality. Spain was ahead on the scoreboard twice, but the captain has a lot of experience and we used his experience to show we are ready to win

— Roberto Martinez, Portugal coach

From this very moment we are already thinking about the next World Cup, which is our goal. With the way we approach things, we are sure to go far in the future. Our team is always in a position to win, there is a lot of commitment, a lot of roots. We will always be close to winning

— Luis de la Fuente, Spain coach

Ronaldo sheds tears of joy after triumph

AP, MUNICH: Another trophy for Cristiano Ronaldo. More records, more adulation.

The Portugal star shed tears after helping his team win the Nations League on Sunday.

Ronaldo scored to help Portugal draw level with Spain 2-2 in the final, then watched as his teammates won the penalty shootout 5-3.

"I have many titles with my clubs, but nothing is better than winning for Portugal," Ronaldo said. "These are tears. It's mission accomplished and so much joy."

The 40-year-old Ronaldo had been the first to run out onto the field for the pre-game warmup, sparking a huge roar from the Portugal supporters, including many wearing jerseys emblazoned with his

name.

His appearance prompted many supporters to pull out their cell phones to record the superstar while they could still see him in action. Ronaldo conceded Saturday that he won't be able to play forever.

That was three days after he helped Portugal to its first win over Germany for 25 years, scoring the winner for a 2-1 victory in the Nations League semi-finals.

On Sunday he was driving the team again, though it was initially a frustrating game as



NATIONS LEAGUE CHAMPION (AGE 40)

- Scored in the final to level the match 2-2
- Helped Portugal win 5-3 on penalties
- Emotional: 'Mission accomplished and so much joy'

RECORD-BREAKER

- 221st appearance for Portugal (all-time record)
- Key in semi-final: scored winner vs Germany for 1st win in 25 years

PLAYED THROUGH INJURY

- Felt pain in warmup
- 'For the national team... I would have broken my leg'

HERO'S EXIT

- Substituted in the 88th minute
- Received standing ovation and hug from coach Roberto Martinez

Uncertain Future

- Contract with Al-Nassr ends in June
- Posted: 'This chapter is over' after final league game

his chances were limited by Spain's hard-working defenders. Ronaldo, who had record-extending 221st appearance for

the country, eventually had to go off exhausted in the 88th to standing ovations from fans and a hug from coach Roberto Martinez.

Ronaldo said he was carrying an injury into the game.

"I had already felt it during the warmup, I had been feeling it for some time, but for the national team, if I had to break my leg, I would have broken it," Ronaldo said. "It's for a trophy, I had to play and I gave it my all."

Ronaldo's future is uncertain as his contract with Saudi club Al-Nassr only runs to the end of June. He posted this chapter is over on social media after the club's last Saudi Pro League game of the season.

India gear up for Hong Kong test in Asian Cup qualifiers

PTI, KOWLOON (Hong Kong): Seeking its first win in the tournament, the Indian football team will face another acid test when it takes on Hong Kong in a crucial AFC Asian Cup 2027 round three qualifier match here on Tuesday, at 5.30 pm.

As per reports in the local media, all 50,000 tickets for the match have been sold out, setting a new attendance record for Hong Kong football.

Manolo Marquez's men will have their task cut out as they face a Hong Kong side that has been revitalised under the guidance of manager Ashley Westwood, who knows a lot about Indian football and will certainly look to use his knowledge to the home side's advantage.

Placed in Pot 1 for the qualifiers, India, ranked 127th, got off to a slow start with a draw against Bangladesh in March.

Meanwhile, Pot 2 side Hong Kong, ranked 153, also managed only a point in Singapore, meaning there is still nothing to separate the four sides in Group C after the first matchday.

For Hong Kong, the day will be a historic. The game is not only a crucial qualifier in their search for only a second AFC Asian Cup berth in 59 years, but also the inaugural football match at the 50,000 seater Kai Tak Stadium, part of the Kai Tak Sports Park, the largest sports complex in Hong Kong.

Featuring a retractable

roof and constructed at a cost of HKD 30 billion at the site of the city's former airport, the stadium even features a flexible pitch system for other sports and entertainment events.

It will be India and Hong Kong's 25th meeting since their first in 1951.

India lead the head-to-head with nine wins, Hong Kong have eight, while seven have been draws.

However, the Blue Tigers have won only once on Hong Kong soil, a 2-1 friendly victory in 1957.

The previous meeting in 2022 is still fresh in the memories of many a 4-0 drubbing in a rain-lashed Asian Cup qualifier in Kolkata.

Defender Sandesh Jhin-

gan, however, reiterated that it's "all about now".

"It was quite a comfortable scoreline but since then, Hong Kong have changed a lot. They have a new coach and a lot of new players. So, it's not going to be as easy, and you cannot get complacent or take things lightly."

"Every game on the international stage is tough, especially on away soil. We are preparing in the best way, and we will go for the maximum points on Tuesday," said the 31-year-old Jhingan.

Since August 2024, Hong Kong have been coached by Westwood, a familiar name in Indian football. The Englishman led Bengaluru FC from 2013 to 2016 and also took charge

of ATK and RoundGlass Punjab FC later.

He also coached the Afghanistan side that defeated India in the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers last year.

Under Westwood, Hong Kong have only lost once in 12 matches 0-1 to Liechtenstein in a friendly. But only two wins have come against higher-ranked opponents, Solomon Islands and Philippines (both friendlies).

In preparation for the match against India, Hong Kong played a non-official friendly against Manchester United FC that they lost 1-3 on May 30, and then a FIFA friendly against Nepal on June 5, which was a scoreless affair.

Lallianzuala Chhangte shared his thoughts on the

opponents.

"Playing against Hong Kong is a significant challenge because they have a good defensive setup, and we know their coach as well. He has a lot of experience in India," Chhangte said.

"Hong Kong are a good counter-attacking team as well, and we have to be well aware of that. We have a plan, and it's all about executing. If we go into the game with the right mindset, attitude and hunger, we can win this game," said the winger, who celebrated his 28th birthday on Sunday.

Apart from the new coach, the Hong Kong squad also features many new naturalised and foreign-born players.

I'll not play for Poland while Probiez is coach: Lewandowski



AP, WARSAW (Poland): Robert Lewandowski will no longer play for Poland while Michal Probiez remains head coach, the Barcelona striker said.

The 36-year-old Poland captain, who has played a record 158 games for his country and is the leading scorer with 85 goals, cited tiredness from a La Liga title-winning season with Barcelona for pulling out of last Friday's 2-0 friendly win over Moldova and Tuesday's World Cup qualifier against Finland.

Probiez subsequently named Inter Milan midfielder Piotr Zielinski as the new captain.

The Polish soccer association said: "Piotr Zielinski has been named the new captain of the national team by head coach Michal Probiez. The coach personally informed Robert Lewandowski, the entire team and the coaching staff of his decision."

Lewandowski replied with a post on X: "Taking into account the circumstances and the loss of trust in the head coach of the Polish national team, I have decided to step down from playing for the national team for as long as he remains in charge. I hope I will still have the chance to play again for the best fans in the world."

Lewandowski suffered an injury to his left thigh on April 19 in a La Liga match against Celta Vigo and was sidelined for two weeks. He missed four games, including a thrilling 3-3 Champions League semifinal first leg against Inter in Barcelona.

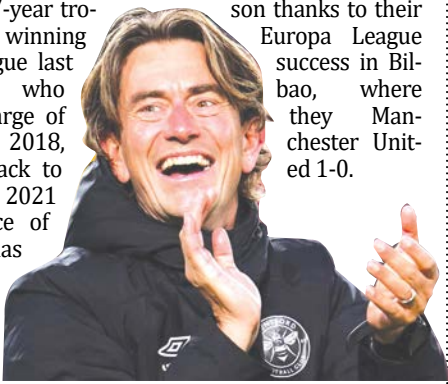
He recovered in time for the second leg and was used as substitute in a 4-3 defeat that sent Inter to the final.

Poland leads World Cup Group G qualifying with two wins from two games.

Tottenham closing in on Brentford's Frank

AFP, LONDON: Brentford manager Thomas Frank is the man Tottenham have targeted to replace Ange Postecoglou, according to multiple reports on Monday. Postecoglou was dismissed after two seasons in charge on Friday despite ending Spurs' 17-year trophy drought by winning the Europa League last month. Frank, who has been in charge of the Bees since 2018, led Brentford back to the top flight in 2021 after an absence of 74 years and has established the west London club in the Premier League.

Hiring the Dane, whose contract runs until 2027, would cost Spurs around \$14 million in compensation. The BBC reported that a formal approach from Tottenham is expected in the coming days. Spurs will play in the Champions League next season thanks to their Europa League success in Bilbao, where they Manchester United 1-0.



Saudis face uphill battle against Australia

PTI, JEDDAH: A Saudi squad that has scored six goals through nine qualifying games needs to beat Australia by a five-goal margin to earn a direct spot at the 2026 World Cup.

Head coach Herve Renard knows it's an extremely unlikely outcome for his Saudi team, but he's urging his players to go all in Tuesday in the last game of the third round of Asian qualifying for next year's global tournament.

"The door is closed but we have to try to qualify even if it is through the window," Renard said after his team's 2-0 win over Bahrain last week kept Saudi.

"Everything must go very well for us if we are to qualify; we have to score goals."

Anything less than a five-goal deficit means Australia — in second spot in Group C — qualifies for a seventh World Cup. The last time the Socceroos lost by such a margin was in successive 6-0 defeats against Brazil and France in 2013. The Australians have scored 14 goals and conceded six through nine qualifiers.

After successive World Cup qualifications through the playoffs, Australia is close to securing a direct route but coach Tony Popovic is taking nothing for granted.

"We need to do a job in Saudi," Popovic said. "We're in a great position, but we

need to finish it off."

Popovic has only been in the job since September, stepping in after Graham Arnold resigned after collecting just one point in the group's first two qualification games.

"It's been a really intense period since I've come in but everyone's embraced what we're aiming to do," he said. "And we're very close now to achieving our goal."

Asia has been allocated eight places at the 48-team World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The top two teams in each of the three groups in this

round advance directly. The third- and fourth-place teams in each group go into another round vying for two more places.

Japan was the first to qualify and will top Group C regardless of the outcome between Australia and third-place Saudi Arabia. Iran and Uzbekistan have qualified from Group A, and South Korea and Jordan have qualified from Group B.

If Saudi Arabia fails to win by five, it will join United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Indonesia and Iraq in the next stage of qualifying in October. Oman, meanwhile, is fourth in Group B, a point ahead of the Palestinian team in fifth place, with the two teams meeting in Amman on Tuesday.

2026 WORLD CUP QUALIFYING