

# Ronaldo-less Portugal on Cloud 9



## Kuruniyan injury sparks row

Calcutta: Mohun Bagan Super Giant are "furious" with the way Ashique Kuruniyan's injury was handled by the Indian physio during their King's Cup match against Iraq and have decided not to release their players for the upcoming Asian Games.

The reigning Indian Super League champions, who are slated to begin their AFC Cup group stage campaign on September 19, have two players — Liston Colaco and Ashish Rai — in the 22-member squad for the Hangzhou tournament whose football matches will begin on September 19.

The 26-year-old India midfielder sustained an injury around the hour mark and had to be replaced by Rahim Ali in their King's Cup semi-final against Iraq on September 7.

An MRI on Kuruniyan revealed an ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) tear and Mohun Bagan will form a medical board to address the issue, a Bagan official said on Tuesday.

"For five days, they neglected his injury and didn't even conduct an MRI. This is not something we'd expect from a Team India physio," he asserted.

"If they had performed an MRI, we could have started physiotherapy earlier and minimised the extent of the injury."

"In light of this episode, there is absolutely no consideration of releasing our players for the Asian Games," he said.

If it's a long-term injury then Mohun Bagan may also seek compensation, the team official further said.

PTI

EURO QUALIFIERS	
PORTUGAL	9
LUXEMBOURG	0

Lisbon: Portugal didn't need Cristiano Ronaldo to rack up their biggest-ever win in a competitive game.

A 9-0 rout of Luxembourg in European Championship qualifying on Monday was achieved without Ronaldo, who was suspended because of an accumulation of yellow cards in earlier Group J games.

In the absence of the five-time world player of the year and record scorer in men's internationals, Goncalo Ramos, Goncalo Inacio and Diogo Jota all scored twice along with goals for Ricardo Horta,



Andrej Kramaric celebrates with teammates after scoring Croatia's winner on Monday. (Reuters)

Bruno Fernandes and Joao Felix in the Algarve.

"It was a satisfactory aspect that, being 4-0 or 5-0 up, the team kept playing the same way as if it was 0-0," Portugal coach Roberto Martinez said. "When you get that, it shows you the values of the players and that the respect toward the team is essential — that was really good to see."

The 38-year-old Ronaldo missed a great chance to add to his haul of 123 international goals but there'll be four more opportunities in a group that Portugal are dominating with six straight wins. No other team has that many victories in qualifying.

Martinez's team stayed five points ahead of Slovakia and moved eight ahead of Luxembourg. The top two in each group qualify automatically.

Ramos scored two of the team's first three goals as Ronaldo's replacement, a role he seems to thrive in.

He did it notably at last year's World Cup in Qatar when — in a huge call by then-coach Fernando Santos — Ronaldo was dropped to the bench for the match against Switzerland in the round of 16.

Ramos scored a hat-trick in that game, announcing himself to the football world. He has since completed a move from Benfica to Paris Saint-Germain and might be the long-term replacement for Ronaldo, who now plays in Saudi Arabia, for Portugal's national team that is surely heading to Euro 2024.

Germany's 13-0 thrashing of San Marino in 2006 remains the biggest-ever win in Euro-



Goncalo Ramos (second from left) scores his second and Portugal's third goal against Luxembourg in the Euro qualifier match at Estadio Algarve in Almaral on Monday. (Reuters)

pean Championship qualifying.

In other matches in the group, Slovakia beat Liechtenstein 3-0 and Iceland defeated Bosnia-Herzegovina 1-0.

### Drone delay

In Group D, Croatia's 1-0 win over Armenia in Yerevan was delayed for about 70 seconds in the first half when a drone carrying the flag of Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway Armenian-populated region of Azerbaijan, flew over the field — to cheers and applause from many home fans, according to footage on social media.

The incident comes amid soaring tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with lawmakers in the region — which the Armenians call Artsakh — voting to elect a new separatist president on Saturday in a move that was

strongly condemned by the Azerbaijani authorities.

It is set to lead to a Uefa disciplinary case on the grounds of it being a political statement at a game.

In 2014, a drone with a political banner was flown into the stadium where Albania and Serbia were playing a European Championship qualifier in Belgrade, prompting clashes among players. Serbian fans also attacked Albania team members and threw flares onto the field.

That game was abandoned and Serbia initially awarded a default 3-0 victory by Uefa. The sanction was reversed by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Andrej Kramaric's early goal sealed the victory for Croatia that lifted the World Cup semi-finalists into first place in the group.

Their last win was also against Latvia in a Euro qualifier in Cardiff in March.

"I don't get bogged down with all that," Page said. "That's noise that I don't need. I know I am doing all right."

"I get that we've got to win games of football, of course we have. There's no point playing nice football and coming away from camp without any points."

Wales play Croatia, Armenia and Turkey in their final three Group D games.

The striker tapped in at the far post after a 13th-minute corner from Luka Modric deflected off an Armenia player and went straight to Kramaric, who stuck out a foot and diverted the ball in. The goal was checked for offside as it appeared Croatia defend-

er Josko Gvardiol got a touch, too.

After starting Group D with a disappointing 1-1 home draw with Wales, Croatia have won three straight matches and gone above Turkey on goal difference, having played one game fewer.

Wales won 2-0 in Latvia thanks to goals by Aaron Ramsey and David Brooks and joined Armenia on seven points, three behind Croatia and Turkey. It was a relieving win for Wales coach Robert Page, who has faced growing pressure after back-to-back defeats against Armenia and Turkey in the group.

AP/PTI

### KEY RESULTS

- Armenia 0 Croatia 1
- Latvia 0 Wales 2
- Albania 2 Poland 0

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## Win eases pressure on Wales boss Page

Cardiff: Wales coach Robert Page said he was proud of his players after they earned a 2-0 win over Latvia to keep them in the hunt for a place at Euro 2024, a victory which also eased the pressure on the manager after a poor run of results.

Captain Aaron Ramsey scored a first-half penalty for his 100th career goal and substitute David Brooks added another goal in stoppage time in Riga as Wales sealed only their second win in 14 games.

Monday's win moved

Wales level on seven points with third-placed Armenia in Group D but they are fourth on goal difference.

"The pressure came from the outside, understandably, but we never questioned it within the group," Page told reporters. "I'm extremely proud of the players. I've got a group of players in there who enjoy playing football for me."

"It feels good, it feels powerful, absolutely — that's a massive compliment to myself from the players."

"Pressure doesn't exist, it



Wales' Aaron Ramsey in a tussle with Roberts Savalnieks of Latvia in Riga on Monday. (Reuters)

is created from outside influence."

Page, who last year became the first man to lead Wales to

a World Cup since 1958, said he was not concerned by the "noise" after the team's poor run of results.

Wales play Croatia, Armenia and Turkey in their final three Group D games.

Reuters

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