

'I am motivated to work hard and do things well'

Coutinho makes good on 2nd chance with Barcelona

Lukaku scores 2, more misery for Maguire in Nations League

Italy extend unbeaten run to 19 games

REYKJAVIK, Iceland, Oct 15, (AP): Scoring freely for club and country, Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku could hardly have started the season any better.

For England defender Harry Maguire, things are going from bad to worse.

On a night Lukaku scored twice for Belgium in a win at Iceland to move to 55 international goals at the age of just 27, Maguire was sent off in England's home loss to Denmark for a reckless challenge that potentially raised questions about his state of mind since his high-profile offseason arrest on a Greek island.

Lukaku has netted three goals for Inter Milan in their opening three Italian league games this season, and has an identical record for Belgium in the Nations League, having scored in a 2-1 loss to England.

With his double in the 2-1 win over Iceland on Wednesday that moved top-ranked Belgium into first place in Group 2 after four of the six qualifying games, Lukaku is already up to No. 40 on the list of all-time leading international scorers. His 55 goals for Belgium have come in 87 matches.

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A century of international goals looks a realistic target for Lukaku, a milestone reached last month by Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo.

Portugal coped just fine without their best player, with his replacement - Diogo Jota - scoring twice in a 3-0 win.

Maguire's form has been poor for Manchester United this season, his last display for his club seeing him part of a defensive shambles as Tottenham won 6-1 at Old Trafford in the Premier League.

There are concerns that the center back - the world's most expensive defender - still hasn't fully gotten over an incident in Greece in August when he was convicted and handed a suspended 21-month sentence for assaulting a police officer in a late-night brawl. He has since been granted a retrial, and reclaimed his place in the England squad after initially being dropped.

However, he put in a worrying performance against Denmark, picking up an early yellow card for a crude tackle from behind and then getting a second booking for scything down Kasper Dolberg in the 31st minute after miscontrolling a pass.

Christian Eriksen, making his 100th international appearance, converted a penalty four minutes later to earn Denmark a 1-0 win at Wembley Stadium. Denmark are above England on goal difference but two points behind Belgium.

England also had right back Reece James sent off after the final whistle for dissent toward the referee. It is the first time England have had two players red-carded in the same fixture.

For the first time in 14 years, Italy



Belgium's Romelu Lukaku (centre), with a pass against Iceland during the UEFA Nations League soccer match between Iceland and Belgium at the Laugardalsvöllur stadium in Reykjavik, Iceland, on Oct 14. (AP)

2017 London Marathon champ Wanjiru banned

MONACO, Oct 15, (AP): Former London Marathon winner Daniel Wanjiru of Kenya has been banned for four years for doping.

The Athletics Integrity Unit said it was "highly likely" that Wanjiru used prohibited substances, citing abnormalities in his biological passport.

The 28-year-old Wanjiru's four-

year ban ends Dec 8, 2023.

Wanjiru, who had been provisionally suspended in April, won the London Marathon in 2017 and the Amsterdam Marathon in 2016.

A blood test from March 9, 2019, showed an "extraordinarily high" hemoglobin level, the AIU said.

"We therefore confirm our previous

opinion that it is highly unlikely that this profile is the result of a normal physiological or pathological condition, and it is highly likely that it was caused by the use of prohibited methods, with or without the use of prohibited substances," the AIU said in its findings.

Wanjiru's results from the date of his blood test are disqualified.

played a game in one of cities hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic. Before the game against The Netherlands, a delegation from the federations of the two teams laid two wreaths at a cemetery in the city in tribute to the victims and after the national anthems were played, the Azzurri players applauded the health workers and 243 mayors from the province who were among the 1,000 spectators invited to the match.

Italy extended their unbeaten run to 19 games with a 1-1 draw, with Dutch midfielder Donny van de Beek canceling out Lorenzo Pellegrini's opener.

That result allowed Poland, 3-0 winners over Bosnia and Herzegovina, to climb atop Group 1. Robert Lewandowski scored two of Poland's goals.

In a repeat of the 2018 World Cup final, France beat Croatia again.

Kylian Mbappe scored a 79th-minute winner in Zagreb as the French maintained their hold over the Croats, who have never won a match between the teams. France won a Nations League game last month and the World Cup final by the same score of 4-2.

After Antoine Griezmann put France ahead, midfielder Nikola Vlasic equalized midway through the second half.

Portugal and France both have 10

IOC gives assurance to sports bodies that Tokyo is on track



Denmark's Kasper Dolberg reacts after he was fouled by England's Harry Maguire during the UEFA Nations League soccer match between England and Denmark at Wembley Stadium in London, England on Oct 14. (AP)

points in Group 3, with two rounds remaining.

The winner from each group in League A qualifies for a final-four tournament next year in the second edition of the Nations League.

TOKYO, Oct 15, (AP): The International Olympic Committee tried to assure dozens of international sports federations on Thursday that the postponed Tokyo Games will open on July 23.

The IOC and Tokyo organizers have been holding on-line sessions this week with about 200 national Olympic committees, and with the more than 30 summer sports bodies that are represented on the program.

OLYMPICS

"We are very confident that the games in Tokyo next year will take place," IOC sports director Kit McConnell told delegates in the online seminar. "We are moving forward on this basis."

The sessions are not open to the media, and only opening statements are made available.

The IOC and local organizers have been campaigning for several months to rekindle interest among the Japanese public, and assure sponsors who have invested billions of dollars that the Olympics can take place during a pandemic.

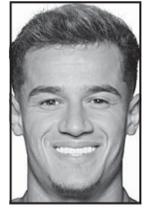
BARCELONA, Spain, Oct 15, (AP): Two months after helping Bayern Munich hand Barcelona their most humbling loss in decades, Philippe Coutinho is helping the Spanish club rebuild.

Coutinho has been through plenty since joining Barcelona from Liverpool in January 2018, burdened by the responsibility that went with his club-record club transfer. Besides his price tag of 160 million euros (then \$192 million), he had also been tasked to replace the irreplaceable Andrés Iniesta.

After a season-and-a-half of failing to meet the huge expectations placed upon him, his relationship with Barcelona hit a low point when he seemed to taunt the team's fans by plugging his fingers in his ears after scoring his finest goal with the team in a 3-0 win over Manchester United. Many were offended by his gesture, which they took to mean he was fed up with criticism.

with us," Koeman said about Coutinho after he scored in a 1-1 draw with Sevilla two weeks ago.

Coutinho has proven to be a key piece in Koeman's new-look Barcelona. The Dutch coach has moved on from the classic 4-3-3 of Barcelona and shifted to a 4-2-3-1 with Coutinho acting as the central playmaker behind Lionel Messi as striker. With Ansu Fati on his left, Antoine Griezmann on his right, and Frenkie de Jong and Sergio Busquets defend-



Coutinho

ing his back, Coutinho has a full range of passing options and orders to go forward.

Perhaps, too, it helped that with the COVID-19 crisis there are no fans in the stadiums to judge his every pass and dribble.

Gone was the player who looked uncertain and appeared to shrink from the action during long stretches of his first stint with Barcelona. Coutinho now seems to be in his ideal position, as the assists and goals have shown so far.

He set up Fati to score two goals in a 4-0 win over Villarreal to open the season and in a 3-0 win at Celta Vigo.

Coutinho then scored his first goal since returning to the team against Sevilla before a break for international matches, where he played well for Brazil in two World Cup qualifying wins.

Back from the national team, Coutinho will again likely be back in the heart of Barcelona's attack when they visit Getafe on Saturday. Known for their physical defending, Getafe are undefeated in two home games and have kept clean sheets in three of the four games they have played.

When asked about his transformation, Coutinho focused on what he considered the basics.

"I am motivated to work hard and do things well, to achieve important things for this club," Coutinho said after his goal against Sevilla. "That is what counts."

SOCCER

Hoping that a temporary move would be good for the player, and possibly the club's chances to eventually sell him, Barcelona loaned Coutinho to Bayern in 2019. At that point, it would have been difficult to imagine that in the last game of Coutinho who scored two goals against the club that owned his rights.

Those goals capped Bayern's eight-goal rout of Barcelona in the Champions League quarter-finals, assuring the club finished the season without a title for the first time in 12 seasons. While Barcelona went home broken, Bayern went on to win the European Cup.

His goals for Bayern, ironically, may have helped him regain his post in Barcelona. Incoming coach Ronald Koeman wanted Coutinho to come back and play, unlike a long list of players that the club sold or practically gave away to make way for new faces and reduce a heavy salary burden.

"Like any player, he needs the support and confidence of his coach, but this all starts with the player. He has demonstrated that he is a great player, and I am happy to have him

Zlatan returns for Milan derby

MILAN, Oct 15, (AP): There will be no smoke billowing across the stadium from ultras' flares, no fans taunting each other with chants and flags, no roars as the teams walk out.

It will still be the Milan derby, though.

A strange atmosphere at San Siro awaits on Saturday when Inter Milan host city rivals AC Milan with only 1,000 fans allowed in the 80,000-seat stadium because of the coronavirus pandemic. There were even some doubts last week about whether the derby would go ahead because of rising COVID-19 cases in both squads.

The virus has ruled out Inter players Ashley Young, Alessandro

Bastoni, Milan Škriniar, Radja Nainggolan, Roberto Gagliardini and Ionut Radu. Milan will be missing Léo Duarte and Matteo Gabbia.

One player who is almost certain to be on the field is Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimović, who returned to training this week after recovering from the virus.

Former Inter and Milan forward Christian Vieri believes Ibrahimović will be stronger than ever.

"He will have broken the treadmill every day," Vieri said in an interview with Gazzetta dello Sport. "Someone who says that COVID had a bad idea to challenge him, is mentally stronger than everyone."

"He'll play the derby with a cigarette in his mouth, trust me."

They are not expected to reveal concrete plans until later this year, or early in 2021. Still up in the air is how more than 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes can safely enter Japan, along with thousands of staff, technical officials, sponsors, media and broadcasters.

It's also unclear if fans will be allowed to populate venues, and if non-Japanese fans will be allowed to enter the country.

Earlier this month, local organizers announced cuts to the Olympic program amounting to about \$280 million - about 2% of the official budget. There have been no cuts to sports or the number of athletes.

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