



Player of the year? No contest

Gary Meenaghan

DUBAI // Football superstar Cristiano Ronaldo swapped his white Real Madrid shirt for a smart black suit last night to collect the Globe Soccer Player of the Year award at a glittering ceremony in Dubai.

The Portuguese forward had earlier appeared at the opening of the Real Madrid Caf  at The Walk, and was greeted to the annual football gala by a flash of camera phones and a standing ovation from the 2,000 guests.

"This is one more trophy for dedication and hard work," said Ronaldo, who was accepting the award for the third time and is the reigning world footballer of the year. "We had a fantastic season and won four titles, which was a real



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Cristiano Ronaldo won the Globe Soccer Awards honour for Best Player in 2011. Photo Courtesy / Globe Soccer Awards

Dubai set to host fifth Globe Soccer Awards

December 14, 2014 Updated: December 14, 2014 04:57 PM



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DUBAI // Some of the biggest names in world football will be gathered in Dubai on December 29 for the fifth Globe Soccer Awards, where the game's best clubs, players, coaches, agents and media will be recognised across 15 categories.

Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Juventus, Ajax and Basel are locked in a five-way battle for "Club of the Year" in the event to be televised live by Abu Dhabi TV from Atlantis, The Palm Dubai.

Other awards will go to Best Player of the Year, Best Coach, Best Agent of the Year and Best Media Attraction in Football.

The event, formally known as the Globe Soccer Awards – presented by Audi, is organised by Dubai Sports Council and BC Bendoni Communications.

"We will welcome to the red carpet great stars of our game," said Tommaso Bendoni, Globe Soccer founder and organiser.

The awards will come at a gala dinner at the conclusion of the second day of the Globe Soccer annual meeting, dedicated to leading football operators.

Winners of the awards will be chosen from a jury made up of representatives of the European Football Agents Association and European Club Association as well as other personalities from the world of football.

Two new awards have been added this year: Referee of the Year and Player Revelation of the Year.

Voting is now open for the Fan Favourite of the Year, with fans encouraged to choose their No 1 player on the Globe Soccer mobile phone app.

Last year, Franck Ribery of Bayern Munich was chosen 2013 Best Player of the Year, Bayern Munich were honoured as best club and Antonio Conte of Juventus best coach.

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Sport | Football

Coming to Dubai in December: Cristiano Ronaldo, James Rodriguez and the World Cup trophy

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Football stars jetting in as part of Dubai International Sports Conference at Atlantis

By Alaric Gomes Senior Reporter
Published: 18:23 December 18, 2014

GULF NEWS



Image Credit: AFP

High five, we're going to Dubai!

Dubai: The presence of Real Madrid stars Cristiano Ronaldo and James Rodriguez along with the Fifa World Cup trophy will be among the highlights at this year's Dubai International Sports Conference to be held at Atlantis The Palm on December 28-29.

Organised under the patronage of Shaikh Hamdan Bin Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman, DSC, details of this year's conference held under the slogan "Towards Smart Football" were disclosed by Saeed Hareb, General Secretary, DSC, on Thursday.

The German Football Association (DfB) has agreed to put the Fifa World Cup trophy on display at Atlantis, The Palm on both days of the conference, while Ronaldo and Rodriguez will be among the high-profile guests at the annual 'Dubai Football Gala Globe Soccer Awards'.

Other top-notch footballers who have confirmed their attendance are players from Real Madrid and AC Milan including Fernando Torres, Tony Kroos and Gareth Bale as they prepare for their exhibition match at The Sevens ground on December 30.

Organized in association with Globe Soccer, prominent among the speakers will be some of the biggest and best football entities including Italian giants AC Milan, who will have a special session delving on the success of the club that has so far won an amazing 41 international trophies so far.

Some of the stand-out speakers who will be involved with the two-day conference are Arjen Robben, Mario Goetze, Fabio Capello, Michel Platini, Filippo Inzaghi,

Fiorentino Perez, former star Patrick Kluivert and Stephan Al Shaarawy.

“We are not bringing in anything new here, but just continuing our long-term plan to achieve our targets and the targets set by our leaders. Only yesterday we had a message from His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai with his ‘Vision 2021’. It is now time for us to make a start and put things together to raise the level of football in the UAE and the region at large,” Hareb said.

Hareb was pleased to welcome the stars to Dubai simply because of the value the event and the individuals bring to the city. “Ronaldo has 130 million followers on Facebook, another 9 million on Instagram and a further 30 million on Chinese social site Weibo. This is an amazing advertisement for Dubai and the work that is being done by the Dubai Sports Council,” Hareb added.

Once again the Rashid Paediatric Centre, Dubai will be the charity partner of the event. With schools shut for the festive break, at least 50 children will be present at the gala night where they will perform before the celebrities.

Hareb was pleased with the manner in which the football fraternity has responded to the annual conference. “We have ensured to stick to our policy of bringing in only the best in the business. Being a keen sportsman, Shaikh Hamdan has been hands-on with the preparations for this conference. The end goal is to ensure Dubai benefits from having the cream of football right here and we are pleased with the way the players and clubs have responded,” he said.

football uae

Refocused Al Ain look imperious

analysis

Since the defeat that spelled their doom in the Asian Champions League, the Garden City club have hit their stride again at home, writes **Paul Frielend**

For teams all across the Arabian Gulf League, the sound is unmistakable. Drums, drums in the deep. Al Ain are coming.

The Al Ain of last season, who focused on the Asian Champions League while drifting well off the pace at home, is a distant memory. The chances of them finishing 21 points off the pace again are, at best, slim.

This Al Ain look far more ominous. Their 4-1 home win over Sharjah last night was the latest in a series of impressive performances that included sweating aside the likes of Al Wahda, who until recently topped the AGL table, and a resurgent Baniyas.

Al Ain are unbeaten in their past eight league matches. Since a 3-0 loss against Al Hilal in Saudi Arabia that all but sealed their exit from the ACL, the Garden City club have played 12 AGL matches, winning nine, drawing two and losing one - the latter a 1-3 defeat at Al Jazira just after the second leg against Hilal.

Last night's victory provided an example of what is both so surprising and, for the rest of the league, so unnerving about Al Ain's dominant form. They have surged to the top of the table without breacking that much of a sweat and without Omar Abdalrahman, their talisman and playmaker.

Abdulrahman has not played for the club since returning from international duty at the Gulf Cup of Nations. While UAE coach Mahdi Alhi has described him as "fine" and included him in his provisional squad for next month's Asian

Cup, the midfielder will not turn out in Al Ain colours again until late January at the earliest. In his absence, the rest of the Al Ain squad have picked up the slack. Asamoah Gyan is back to his predatory best, scoring six goals in his past five AGL matches and quickly clipping away at Jazira striker Mirko Vucinic's Golden Boot lead.

Gyan opened the scoring against Sharjah, heading in a corner kick by Mohammed Abdulrahman, who looked at ease in midfield in his namesake's absence. Miroslav Stoch and Lee Myung-joo also scored, as did Jires Kerro-Ekoko. The latter came on for Diaky Ibrahim, who has grown into the role of support striker.

Wanderley's 57th minute equaliser for Sharjah - a 30-yard rocket bound for the end-of-season highlight reel - ended up being a spectacular consolation.

Al Ain top the table with a game in hand, though Jazira can overhaul them should they beat Al Wasl tonight. The concern is who of the other contenders for Al Ain's crown can match Al Ain's new pace.

Wahda have fallen to earth with a thud after Al Ain ended their 20-match unbeaten run in the AGL. Jazira, entertaining as they are, have chronic deficiencies at the back that coach Eric Gerets has said will not be alleviated by a bunch of new signings. Injuries and internal turmoil have left champions Ahli stuck in mid-table.

Al Shabab may yet have a say in the title race. They showed plenty of fight in winning 2-1 at Al Dhafra yesterday, playing 80 minutes with 10 men after leading scorer Henrique Lovannor was sent off. Essa Mohammed's free kick staked Shabab to an early lead, with Carlos Villanueva scoring an 85th minute winner after Makbete Diop had equalised for the hosts.

There may yet be more twists in the tale of this season with only half the fixtures played. For now, though, the rest of the AGL must fall back on an old habit - looking up at Al Ain.

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Miroslav Stoch, right, was one of four foreign players to score for Al Ain in their victory over Sharjah yesterday. Anas Karim / Al Itihad

Al Jazira target first place to end the year

Overhauling back line will not be the answer, coach says

Amith Passola

ABU DHABI // Al Jazira finishing the year on top of the Arabian Gulf League is the objective of coach Eric Gerets when the team host Al Wasl tonight.

A goal in stoppage time from Ali Mabkhout gave Jazira a 4-3 away win over Al Shabab on Sunday, and Gerets said his players could take positives from that result to end the first half of the campaign on a high.

"The late winner in that game certainly has helped us a lot to raise the morale of the players," the Belgian said.

"If we can take this momentum forward, we have an opportunity to end the year and the first half of the league on top of the league table. This certainly is our objective."

Gerets also warned his players of the new-found confidence of their opponents since Gabriel Calderon took charge of Wasl in mid-October.

Wasl have won their past three games and have accumulated 14 points from seven games under the Argentine.

"I watched them play Fujairah [Wasl won 3-1] in the last game and the result matched their performance," Gerets said.

"They were excellent in the defence and they have players who are dangerous when they get inside the area. I can say we have a difficult game and I will need 100 per cent from my players for this game."

Jazira possess one of the AGL's best attacks, led by former Juventus striker Mirko Vucinic, the Argentine playmaker Manuel Lanzini, the Burkina Faso international Jonathan Pitroipa and the in-form UAE international Ali Mabkhout.

Defence has been a problem, though, and they have conceded the second-most goals in the league after last-place Kalba.

"I am aware of our strength

and weakness, but we will try to balance it when we play Wasl," Gerets said when asked of his team's strategy for the game.

"We are strong in attack, but the defence has been a bit of a problem. We need time to improve the weaker area because bringing down four new defenders will not be the answer."

There are injury doubts over Jazira goalkeepers Ali Kasheif and Khaled Al Senani.

"Kasheif is doubtful and Khaled has to pass a fitness test the morning of the match," Gerets said.

"If not, we will have to call up the third keeper for duty."

In today's early kick-off, fresh from their first top flight victory since February last year, Kalba travel to Ras Al Khaimah for a meeting with Emirates.

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at a glance										
Team	P	W	D	L	GD	P	Fixtures Today			
Al Ain	11	8	2	1	21	26	Emirates v Kalba 4.40pm			
Al Shabab	12	6	1	5	9	25	Al Jazira v Al Wasl 7.30pm			
Al Jazira	12	7	3	2	9	24				
Al Wahda	12	6	4	2	5	22				
Al Nasr	12	6	3	3	11	21				
Al Ain	12	5	4	3	6	19	Tomorrow			
Al Wasl	12	5	4	3	-1	19	Al Fujairah v Ajman 4.40pm			
Baniyas	12	5	3	4	8	18	Al Ahli v Baniyas 4.45pm			
Al Dhafra	13	2	6	5	-3	12	Al Nasr v Al Wahda 7.30pm			
Sharjah	13	3	3	7	-12	12				
Emirates	12	3	2	7	-9	11				
Ajman	12	2	3	7	-14	9				
Fujairah	11	2	3	6	-15	9				
Kalba	12	1	1	10	-21	4				
Results										
Al Dhafra 1	Al Shabab 2									
Diop 44'	Muhammed 38'									
	Villanueva 55'									
Al Ain 4	Sharjah 1									
Gyan 51'	Miroslav Stoch, Al Ain									
Stoch 64'	Wanderley 57'									
Lee 87'	Brahima Touré, Al Nasr									
	Anwar Omar, Al Wahda									
	Kerro-Ekoko 90+2'					Sebastian Tagliabue, Al Wahda 6				

Globe Soccer event designed with Dubai clubs in mind

Luminaries from Spain and Italy set to light up stage

Ali Khaled

This year's Globe Soccer conference will see some of the leading figures in world football descend on Dubai as speakers and guests of honour for the two-day event starting on December 28.

The likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Carlo Ancelotti and Michel Platini are just a few of the names talking from the ninth Dubai Interna-

tional platform for big names to deliver their views, but also a source of ideas and initiatives intended to benefit Dubai's sporting clubs and associations, as well as the general public.

Dr Aysha Al Busmait, board member of organisers Dubai Sports Council, revealed that the conference would follow a recent government decree by Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid, Vice President of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, to conduct a survey that measures the level of resident satisfaction regarding sporting facilities and events.

"Over the eight previous editions, we have had 110 recom-



and discuss his club's renaissance under Diego Simeone.

Germany's World Cup triumph will be highlighted by the man who scored the winning goal in the final against Argentina, Mario Gotze of Bayern Munich. The vice president of the German football association will also shed light on the long-term planning and faith in coaching staff that led to victory in Brazil.

Others present will be Fabio Capello, Arjen Robben, Patrick Kluivert, Robert Pires, agent Jorge Mendes and Fawaz Al Hasawi, the Kuwaiti owner of Nottingham Forest.

The organisers have the con-

tional Sports Conference at the Atlantis Hotel, which this year will focus entirely on football. Uefa president Platini will speak on his ideas to improve the game and is expected to showcase some opposing views to those of Fifa counterpart Sepp Blatter, especially in regard to the growing use of technology. The organisers are stressing that the conference is not merely

recommendations," she said. "This year we have a new initiative. The government has announced the Saada [Satisfaction] Index, and today we are launching the Saada Sports Index. It is targeting the clubs and fans. We will announce the results during the conference." With Real Madrid taking on AC Milan in the Dubai Football Challenge 2014 on December 30



Uefa president Michel Platini will be among the speakers in Dubai this month. Jean-Christophe Bonn / EPA.

at the Sevens ground, it is no surprise that the event has strong Spanish-Italian axis. The Spanish giants will be represented by president Florentino Perez, who will discuss the club's

10th Uefa Champions League triumph and what it means to them globally and financially. From AC Milan, new coach Filippo Inzaghi and strikers Stephan El Shaarawy and Fernan-

do Torres will be at the conference. Real Madrid's neighbours and Primera Liga title holders Atletico Madrid will also be present in the form of chief executive Miguel Angel Gil, who will dis-

ference will be beneficial for Dubai's football clubs, who will be represented at the event, which has not always been the case. "We have had big turnouts, but many of the intended targets at the clubs are the ones who have had disappointing showings," Dr Al Basmat said. "We are saving to them, this conference is for you." akhaled@thenational.ae

leading off

inside

Augusta likely to cross a century

Going by the number of contenders, the Masters could well invite over 100 players in 2015. **s8**

Kasheif to miss the Asian Cup

Al Jazeera's goalkeeper has been called for national service. **s9**



On the cover

Matt Knighton, the Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing crew's media member, documents work being done aboard Azzam. The American will travel around the world and witness the sailors' lives.

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The Kickabout podcast: Episode 9

Paul Oberjuerge and Paul Freeland discuss who could challenge Al Ain for the Arabian Gulf League title this season. Visit thenational.ae/sport

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Ibrahimovic ridicules list that put Borg top among Swedish sporting greats

Philip O'Connor

STOCKHOLM // Zlatan Ibrahimovic has dismissed his second-place finish on a list of Sweden's all-time sporting greats behind tennis master Bjorn Borg.

"Thank you, but to finish second is like finishing last," he informed the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper through his brand manager Mika Lepisto.

The Paris Saint-Germain striker was second in the list of 150 Swedish sports people, created by the newspaper as part of their 150th anniversary celebrations. Asked where he would have put himself in the rankings, Ibrahimovic said: "On that list, I would have been number one, two, three, four and five, with due respect to the others."

Instead, the newspaper jury selected Borg, who won 11 grand slam tournaments, including Wimbledon five times in succession through 1980, in a stellar career that Ibrahimovic acknowledged.

"Bjorn Borg is a cool person and a living legend," said the footballer, whose parents immigrated to Sweden from the Balkans.

In his career, Ibrahimovic, 33, has scored 51 goals in 101 games for Sweden and has won titles at many of Europe's leading clubs, including Ajax, Juventus, Inter Milan, Barcelona, AC Milan and PSG.

He never has been shy about his place in the world of sport.

A Google search for "Ibrahimovic bombast" returned 176,000 hits.

Ahead of the 2014 World Cup play-off with Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, the Swede said: "I think that the World Cup needs Zlatan more than Ronaldo. The excitement I can bring to the game and the goals I can score - nobody can rival me for that. I believe the fans would want to see me there above anybody."

He finished second in that competition, too.

• Reuters



*** today's list stars at globe soccer awards**

Football's elite can be seen live on Abu Dhabi Sports at the **Globe Soccer awards in Dubai on Monday**. Abu Dhabi Media announced yesterday. His Excellency Mohamed Ebraheem Al Mahmood, chairman and managing director of ADM, said the company's "exclusive partnership with Globe Soccer is testimony to our commitment to delivering leading regional and international sports events to audiences in the UAE and the region". Coverage begins at 7pm from Atlantis The Palm. **Five football figures who will be in attendance:**



Cristiano Ronaldo, Real Madrid

The Portuguese striker, honoured as "Fans Favourite Player" a year ago, was a central figure in the four trophies the Spanish club collected this year, including their 10th Uefa Champions League trophy. Ronaldo also won the Club World Cup with Madrid last weekend.



Carlo Ancelotti, Real Madrid coach

The Italian manager led the Spanish side to "La Decima", their long-awaited 10th European championship, with a 4-1 victory over Atletico Madrid. Ancelotti, 55, previously lifted two Champions League trophies at AC Milan and won league titles at Milan, Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain.



Michel Platini, Uefa president

One of the most powerful figures in world football, the Frenchman finished sixth in Fifa voting for player of the 20th century. He won league championships at Saint-Etienne and Juventus, and a European Cup at the latter. Some hoped he would run this year for the Fifa presidency.



Filippo Inzaghi, AC Milan coach

He scored 197 Serie A goals, most of them with Juventus and Milan, from 1991 to 2012. He won a World Cup with Italy in 2006, two Champions League trophies with Milan (2003 and 2007) and three league titles, one with Juventus and two with Milan.



Robert Pires, France winger

He won a World Cup and European Cup with France. His club career was spent at Metz, Marseille, Arsenal and Villarreal, and he was a key member of "The Invincibles", the London club's unbeaten 2003/04 team. He played this year for FC Goa in the debut season of the Indian Super League.

speaking with david warner

Ahead of Day 1 of **Australia's** third Test against **India**, tomorrow in Melbourne, their talkative opening batsman foresees no reduction of **the mental battles with opponents**, which he says does not rise to the level of 'sledging'.

The reputation

Australia's cricketers are known for conversations, not all of them cheerful, with opponents. The most prominent recent example was in the Ashes a year ago, when Michael Clarke warned England bowler James Anderson to "get ready for a broken ... arm".

Back at it

Observers have called for renewed civility on the pitch following the death of Australia's Philip Hughes, and it seemed to have an effect in the early part of the series with India, but back-sliding has been noticeable since Day 4 of the first Test.

Boomerang

Ashley Warner pictured

Distraction

Warner said: "If it requires a little bit of banter to get the other person talking, that's what is going to happen. Some players, they don't say anything at all, but then when they do, you know you've gotten into [their heads] and they're listening to you."

More of the same

Warner said India can expect to hear more from him during the third Test, which Australia enter with a 2-0 lead in the four-Test series. "I like to go at them, to try and get them to bite back at me when I go out there and bat," he said. "At the moment, it's working."

Trouble spot

He conceded that vanishing



9th Dubai International Sports Conference opens at Atlantis The Palm Hotel

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Saturday 27 December 2014



Last year's winner: Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo won the Globe Soccer Award last term.

f Mi piace

Condividi

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The ninth edition of the Dubai International Sports Conference will start at 9am [in Dubai] in the new setting of the Atlantis The Palm Hotel. The Dubai Sports Council will break a record by...

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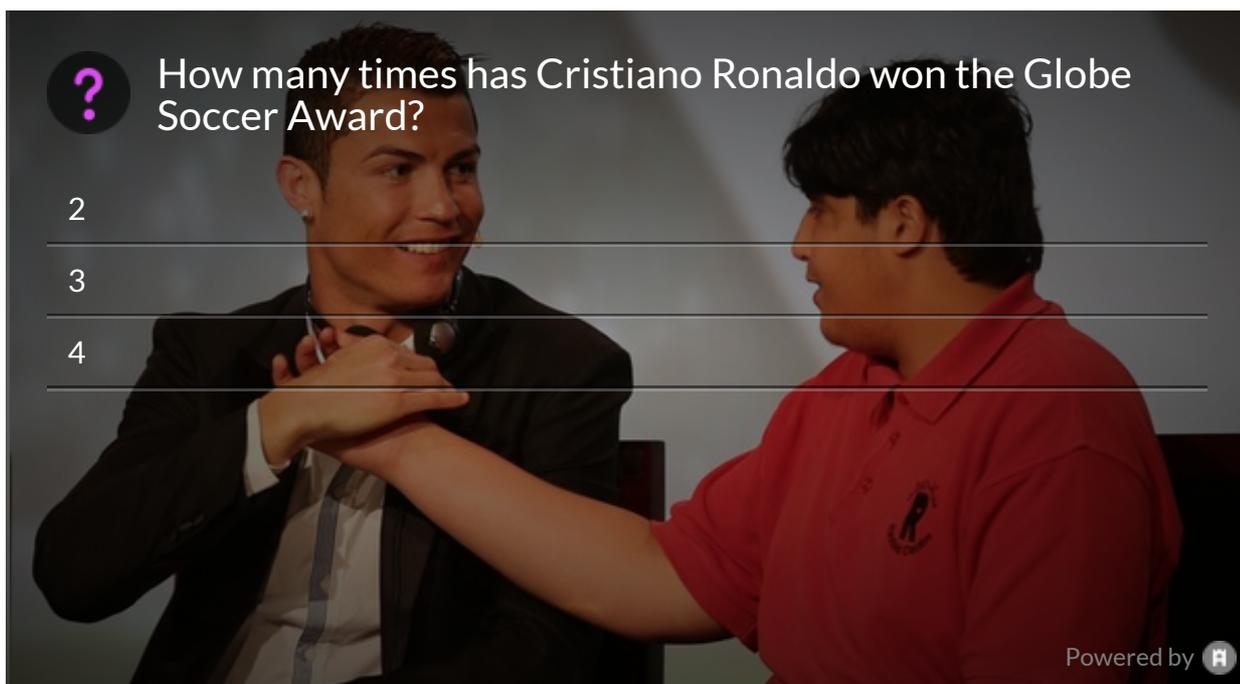
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For five years the formula has included Globe Soccer, and the last four editions have included the Football Awards at the end of the conference; which recognises those who enrich the world's most popular sport. On the evening of December 29, we will learn the names of all the winners, chosen by a jury from the shortlists drawn up by the relevant associations (ECA, the European club association, and EFAA, the association of FIFA agents) and the choices made by the chief refereeing officers (the candidates are the referees who were in charge of all the major finals played around the world in 2014).

The opening works, following the presentation by the organisers, will be left to Michel Platini, the UEFA President, as an acknowledgment of the European federation after the three successes at the most recent World Cups, won by Italy (2006), Spain (2010) and Germany (2014), with the first ever victory in South America and the taking of the lead over South America in terms of cups won (11 to 9).

The fact that Europe has understood the current reality is shown by the attendance in Dubai. The sponsors are here (Emirates has called up Real Madrid and AC Milan for a friendly - with 42,000 paying spectators - on December 30) and they arrive here from all parts of the world, all the more given the forthcoming Expo 2020 and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.



Also present here on December 29, will be the President of the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), Giovanni Malagò who has just announced Rome's candidacy to host the Games in 2024 and he will come to reiterate that goal in the city which, above all others, deserves to be studied given that Dubai promises a "Smart" Expo.

The opening will be solely for Michel Platini, on his second visit to Globe Soccer, with comment on all major issues, but with particular attention for the game itself and its needs. UEFA has stated it is against the introduction of video replays and probably its president, as a former

star player, will justify that position in technical terms, clarifying the grounds for not so much a conservative approach as a defence of the authentic spirit of football.



Moreover, if FIFA has now chosen to complicate the regulations with interpretations on the offside rule, this means that the search is on for doubt rather than for certainty.

Platini will have alongside him Pierluigi Collina, UEFA's chief refereeing officer, an excellent companion when talking about refereeing rules. The talk will return to the issue of goal line officials and the Brazilian timeout, and probably with a few new ideas on substitutions and yellow and red cards.

The first day will then see Andrea Agnelli, President of Juventus, open the second session. Juventus has won the championship for the last three years in Italy and has led the table for four. The ECA has nominated it for the best team of 2014, together with Real Madrid and Bayern Munich, considering Juventus' record of 102 points established in May, the absolute all-time record for European football.

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Michel Platini headlines Dubai Sports Conference

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Uefa president joins Patrick Kluivert, Fernando Torres, Fabio Capello and Filippo Inzaghi in annual football debate

By Ashley Hammond, Staff Reporter
Published: 16:12 December 27, 2014

GULF NEWS 

Dubai: Uefa President Michel Platini will headline an array of guest speakers at the ninth Dubai International Sports Conference at Atlantis, The Palm, hotel on Sunday and Monday.

The French 1984 European Championship winner and three-time Ballon D'Or recipient will be joined by past and present players and coaches such as former Holland and Barcelona forward Patrick Kluivert, ex-England manager and current Russia coach Fabio Capello, former AC Milan player and current Rossoneri coach Filippo Inzaghi and current AC Milan forwards Fernando Torres and Stephen Al Shaarawy.

Also in attendance will be renowned former referee and

current Uefa chief refereeing officer Pierluigi Collina, along with Uefa general secretary Gianni Infantino, Juventus president Andrea Agnelli, Atletico Madrid president Miguel Angel Marin and AC Milan director Umberto Gandini.

The two-day conference is organised by Dubai Sports Council and will conclude with the sixth Globe Soccer Awards presented by Audi, which recognises excellence in the football industry.

This year's conference and award ceremony act as added build-up to Tuesday's much-anticipated friendly at The Sevens stadium between record 10-time European champions Real Madrid and seven-time winners AC Milan.

Platini will open Sunday's first session discussing the future of football with Collina, before Agnelli discusses smart investment with Nottingham Forest's Kuwaiti chairman Fawaz Al Hasawi, UAE Pro League chief executive officer Suhail Al Arifi and Emirates Airline Group's senior vice president for airport services Mohammad Mattar. The third session will see Capello discuss AC Milan's formula for success with Inzaghi and Al Sharaawy.

In Monday's first session, Infantino will discuss smart administration with Gandini, president of the Italian National Olympic Committee Giovanni Malago, sports marketing expert Marco Bogarelli and vice president of the Japanese Football Association Tashima Kohzo.

Koch Rainer, vice president of the German Football Association, will then discuss Germany's 2014 World Cup success and Bayern Munich's dominance with Bayern's Moroccan centre-back Mehdi Benatia and

Bayer Leverkusen's team physician Karl-Henrich Dittmar.

The conference will then wrap up on a potentially awkward note, with Torres taking centre stage along with Atletico Madrid president Miguel Angel Marin and Kluivert. Torres has been linked with a return to boyhood club Atletico in the January transfer window after having scored just once for AC Milan since joining on loan from Chelsea in the summer.

Although the final debate is rather loosely focused around success stories from the perspective of clubs and players, Torres could be found dodging questions surrounding his poor form and the need to rediscover himself with a rumoured return to the Vicente Calderon Stadium this winter.

It had been thought Torres wouldn't be travelling with AC Milan due to his seemingly imminent return to Spain, but if he does land in Dubai this on-stage encounter could provide some clues as to his future.

Sunday's schedule

10.15-11.15am — First session: Future of Football

Michel Platini, President of Uefa

Pierluigi Collina, Uefa chief refereeing officer, View of Uefa

11.15am-12.15pm — Second session: Smart Investment

Andrea Agnelli, Juventus Chairman, Club Investment Strategy

Fawaz Al Hasawi, Nottingham Forest Chairman, Arab Investment in Football

Suhail Al Arifi, CEO UAE Pro League, UAE League Investment

Mohammad Matter, Emirates Airline Group, The Investments in the Sport Industry

12.30-1.30pm — Third session: AC Milan Formula

Fabio Capello, Russian National Team Coach, Modern Coach Football Strategy

Filippo Inzaghi, AC Milan Coach, Group Experience from player to coach

Stephan Al Sharaawy, AC Milan Player, Playing in AC Milan

leading off

* today's list the week ahead

The Premier League action keeps going, football's big names come to Dubai, Real Madrid take on AC Milan in the UAE, the big guns are out in tennis in Abu Dhabi and the Volvo Ocean Race gears up ahead of Leg 3. Graham Caygill looks at sport in the next seven days:

1 Premier League, tomorrow and Thursday

The busy festive programme continues in England. League leaders Chelsea face the toughest programme as Jose Mourinho, below, and his men travel to fifth-placed Southampton tomorrow and then face a London derby on Thursday at Tottenham Hotspur.



2 Globe Soccer, tomorrow and Monday

Some of the biggest names in football will be in Dubai for the Globe soccer awards two-day event. Michel Platini, the Uefa president, is to attend, along with Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo and coach Carlo Ancelotti, above, as well as many other famous faces. The awards ceremony takes place on Monday night.

3 Real Madrid v AC Milan, Tuesday

The Uefa Champions League holders and Primera Liga leaders Real Madrid, with players such as Ronaldo, below, Gareth Bale and Tony Kroos in their squad, will look to show what they are capable of when they face Serie A side AC Milan in a friendly at the Sevens Stadium in Dubai.



4 Mubadala World Tennis Championship, Thursday

The annual exhibition event at Zayed Sports City begins on Thursday with Andy Murray, above, facing Feliciano Lopez and Stan Wawrinka taking on Nicolas Pietrangeli, before defending champion and world No 1 Novak Djokovic and 14-time grand slam title winner Rafael Nadal join proceedings on Friday.

5 Volvo Ocean Race, Friday

The event's time in Abu Dhabi is drawing to a close, with the in-port race to take place on Friday with a scheduled 2pm start. Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing's Azzam vessel, below, won the latest in-port race in Cape Town in November and will be desperate to record a victory in home waters.

▷ gcaygill@thenational.ae



inside

Victory streak continues

Trainer Musabih Al Muhairi adds four more to his winners tally at Jebel Ali. **s6**

Full steam ahead for Comanche

Newcomer is off to a fast start in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. **s7**



On the cover

Chelsea striker Diego Costa celebrates scoring his side's second goal against West Ham United yesterday. Chelsea won 2-0 to remain three points ahead of Manchester City in the Premier League.

@ today on the web

Finger on the pulse

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lowdown brendan mccullum

The New Zealand captain was at his big-hitting best yesterday as he struck 195 against Sri Lanka in the first Test to cap a memorable 2014.



Hundred up

The Black Caps had been struggling at 88 for three during yesterday's first day of the Test at Hagley Oval in Christchurch when McCullum came to the wicket. His 195 runs came off just 134 balls with 18 boundaries and 11 sixes as he helped his side to 429 for seven by the close.

Landmark moments

McCullum reached his hundred in 74 balls, the quickest century by a Kiwi batsman, and also scored 26 in one over off Suranga Lakmal. As he looked to get to his double hundred with a six, he fell to an outfield catch by a diving Di-muth Karunaratne to give off-spinner Tharindu Kaushal his first Test wicket. McCullum has 1,164 Test runs in 2014, the first Kiwi to get to four figures in one calendar year.

Destructive

Craig McMillan, McCullum's teammate, said: "Even in your wildest dreams you would never have picked a day of Test cricket like that, especially when the pitch is a little bit on the green side and you lose the toss. I don't think I have enough superlatives to describe his innings. He has the ability to dominate, dismantle bowlers very quickly and change the tempo and the way an innings is heading very quickly. He's so destructive, I think, probably the most destructive and domineering player who has played for New Zealand."

Sixes galore

The 11 sixes McCullum struck mean he has 92 in Test cricket, only eight behind Adam Gilchrist, the retired Australia wicketkeeper, who holds the record for most maximums in the longest form of the game.

Vintage year

The innings capped a stellar year for McCullum who, in February, became the first New Zealander to score 300 in a Test innings, which he did against India at Wellington in March. He also has had two double hundreds in the past 12 months: 224 against India in Auckland in February and 202 against Pakistan in Sharjah last month.

Hughes tribute plan is taken to new heights

Planning is under way to place a bat that once belonged to Australian cricketer Phillip Hughes

Nepal had proposed the Everest idea. After Hughes' death, bats were left outside the front

fatal injury, Australian Associated Press reported. "So although we enter the festive season with heavy hearts,

with Phillip's management purely as a defensive registration to prevent others trying to exploit Phillip's memory." A CA



Abu Dhabi Media selected as official media partner of "Globe Soccer" Awards 2014

24/12/2014 04:22:00 PM

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ABU DHABI, 24th December, 2014 (WAM) -- Abu Dhabi Media (ADM), today announced that fans across the region will have the opportunity to follow their favorite football stars at the internationally recognised Globe Soccer Awards ceremony, which will take place within the Dubai Football Gala organised by Dubai Sports Council in partnership with BC Bendonni group.

The event, held annually in the UAE, will take place on December 29 at Atlantis the Palm, Dubai, to honour players, coaches, referees and football personalities for their achievements at one of football's most exclusive global events.

As Globe Soccer's official media partner, Abu Dhabi Media will conduct exclusive interviews with the worlds most renowned and influential football players, coaches and personalities throughout the conference.

Fans will enjoy exclusive coverage from Abu Dhabi Sports, which will begin with a special live studio analysis at 7:00PM. Live broadcast of the awards ceremony will also be taking place, providing in-depth analysis on the winners, in addition to exclusive interviews with the winners and attendees.

Additionally Star FM's 'Xtra Sport', presented by Haitham Obaid, will broadcast live from the event. Editorials as well as exclusive interviews will be on offer from both Al Ittihad and The National. Both publications will also be presenting a special video on its website showcasing the highlights from the event and conversation with a high-profile football star.

Abu Dhabi Media's audiences will have the chance to meet football stars and attend the awards ceremony through a joint competition organized by Al Ittihad, The National, Star FM and Abu Dhabi Sports. Soccer fans can participate in the competition by texting the word 'Sports' in to 3664.

Mohamed Ebraheem Al Mahmood, Chairman and Managing Director of Abu Dhabi Media commented: "ADM's exclusive partnership with Globe Soccer is testimony to our commitment to delivering leading regional and international sports events to audiences in the UAE and the region. Our extensive coverage of the Dubai International Sports Conference and live coverage of Globe Soccer's awards ceremony will showcase a remarkable year of achievements and exceptional coverage across ADM's multiple platforms. We look forward to continuing our tradition of excellence in covering football as we head into a New Year."

WAM/Hazem/AAMIR

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Other News of Sports

- ▶ [Dubai Chamber sponsors Dubai Police's 5th Sports vs Crime International Conference \(/en/news/sports/1395275463007.html\)](/en/news/sports/1395275463007.html)
- ▶ [Hamdan bin Rashid receives delegation from Newbury Racecourse \(/en/news/sports/1395275462768.html\)](/en/news/sports/1395275462768.html)
- ▶ [Sultan bin Zayed attends President's Cup for Junior and Young Riders \(/en/news/sports/1395275458586.html\)](/en/news/sports/1395275458586.html)
- ▶ [Oman aims for all-round success as host of GCC Women's Games \(/en/news/sports/1395275456559.html\)](/en/news/sports/1395275456559.html)

leading off

* today's list **tottenham hotspur v manchester united**

Tottenham carry a four-match unbeaten streak versus United into today's Premier League match at White Hart Lane. It is Spurs' longest unbeaten stretch versus United since 1987, when a 4-0 home victory capped a similar four-match run. A look at the past five match-ups:

1 Spurs 1-3 United, March 4, 2012

English striker Wayne Rooney scored just before half-time and compatriot Ashley Young, below, added two as United kept pace with City atop the league table. Jermain Defoe had a consolation goal for Spurs, who saw their Premier League record versus United fall to three wins, eight draws and 29 defeats.



2 United 2-3 Spurs, September 29, 2012

Clint Dempsey got the clinching goal in Tottenham's first victory at Old Trafford since 1989 in what probably was the high point of the regime under Andre Villas-Boas, above. Jan Vertonghen and Gareth Bale scored in the first half. Nani and Shinji Kagawa got United's goals.



3 Spurs 1-1 United, January 20, 2013

Tottenham outshot United 25-5 on a day when heavy snowstorms caused problems throughout the match, but Spurs seemed doomed to defeat until the 25th shot, a goal by American forward Dempsey, below, in added time, salvaged a point for the hosts. Netherlands star Robin van Persie had scored in the first half for United.



4 Spurs 2-2 United, December 1, 2013

Kyle Walker made it 1-0 and the Brazilian midfielder Sandro gave his side a 2-1 lead, with his only goal of the season, in the 54th minute. Rooney, above, scored two goals, twice bringing United level. The second was a penalty, gained when goalkeeper Hugo Lloris fouled Danny Welbeck in the box.



5 United 1-2 Spurs, January 1, 2014

Emmanuel Adebayor scored in the first half and Christian Eriksen in the second as Tim Sherwood's time leading Spurs hit a zenith and United's David Moyes fell under more pressure. The victory gave Spurs 10 points from a possible 12 with Sherwood, below, in charge.



► sports@thenational.ae

inside



Determination in Doha

Qatar 'will be ready to have a very good team' when they host the World Cup in 2022. **s4**

Late change for tournament

Ajmal, the Pakistan off-spinner, pulls out of World Cup. **s6**

On the cover

After a gruelling end-of-season schedule, Andy Murray made it to the ATP World Tour Finals in London and now is targeting the Mubadala World Tennis Championship.

@ today on the web

Which way will it go?

To read the explanations behind Gary Meenaghan's Premier League predictions for today's games, go to thenational.ae/sport

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lowdown cristiano ronaldo



Big in 2014

Ronaldo scored 51 goals in 47 appearances in 2013/14 and set a Champions League record with 17 goals in a single campaign as Madrid swept to their 10th European championship. In all competitions in the current season, he has 32 goals in 25 matches.

Even better?

"It would be a dream if 2015 was like 2014 or even better," Ronaldo said in an interview published yesterday in sports daily As. "It is possible to do it because Madrid is always a candidate to win competitions."

So far, so good

Madrid lead the Primera Liga by a point over Barcelona, with a game in hand, and are in the final 16 of the Champions League.

The quadruple

Madrid won four trophies in 2014: the Champions League, Club World Cup, the King's Cup in Spain and the European Super Cup. They were second in the league to Atletico Madrid.

Madrileno spirit

Ronaldo attributes part of his side's successes in 2014 to a will to win. He said: "We have a team spirit that can help us win the most titles and we will fight to the death to get them."

Ancelotti key

He said the accession of Carlo Ancelotti as coach played a significant role in their 2013/14 season, including "la decima", the 10th European title. "The coach has a lot of importance," Ronaldo said. "He is a great person."

In Dubai

Both Ronaldo and Ancelotti are expected to attend the Globe Soccer awards gala tomorrow night at Atlantis The Palm, Dubai, to be televised by Abu Dhabi Sports at 7pm. Ronaldo said: "We are a united family."

* Agence France-Presse

The Portuguese and Real Madrid star capped 2014 with the Club World Cup championship after winning the Uefa Champions League in May. Ronaldo, who is in Dubai to attend the Globe Soccer awards, looked ahead to 2015 in an interview with a Spanish newspaper.

Bucks are taking their revival prospects on face value

The new owners of the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks, Wesley Edens and Marc Lasry, have taken over one of the worst teams in the league and are looking for an

players as basketball players. "But the difficult piece of the puzzle is the psychological side of it," he said, "and not only psychological, character and personality issues, but also to an

One of the questions Bill often asks is: "How would your mother describe you?" He said it is not the players' verbal answer that matters, but rather their facial expressions when responding

"Nothing against Edum, but emotional resiliency, stability and an immediate, assured presence were all key considerations in selecting Parker," Smith said.



football

All about playing with the big boys

Hosts Qatar determined to prove homegrown talent can impress everyone at the World Cup in 2022, writes **John Leicester**

It is a cold, hard fact of football: countries with tiny populations generally do not beat big ones with deep wells of talented players.

So how embarrassing might the score be when Qatar - smallest hosts in World Cup history, with just 282,750 citizens - play the opening game of their 2022 tournament against, for example, titans Brazil or Germany? At best 5-0? At worst 10-0?

"Impossible, impossible," said Ivan Bravo, the former Real Madrid administrator working to prevent such a loss from dampening home-town excitement over the Middle East's first World Cup, in 2022.

"They will be ready to have a very good team, a competitive team."

Bravo is confident that the world will get behind the Qatari side that will represent the nation when they host the tournament.

"It's thrilling," he said. "There's always an underdog story, the little guy trying to punch above their weight story, and I think people will get behind it."

Qatar qualify automatically as hosts.

There's a bit of a misperception about everybody in Qatar: they're wealthy kids, they are wearing Rolaxes and driving SUVs. It's not the case

Ivan Bravo Former Real Madrid administrator

"The players know what an opportunity this is," said Hassan Al Thawadi, Qatar's chief World Cup organiser. "I'm sure they won't disappoint."

Aspire Academy is a source of such confidence. It trains local kids and others unearthed by a mammoth international scouting programme - named "Football Dreams" - that screens hundreds of thousands of teenagers from 16 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The reach and size of that talent search and Qatar's history of recruiting overseas athletes to represent it internationally led to suspicions it could naturalise foreign footballers in bulk for the World Cup.

Bravo insists that is not the plan. He said Qatar's ambition for 2022 is to field a team of Qataris and have "seven, eight, nine, 10" Aspire-trained recruits from Football Dreams playing for other nations.

Aspire's facilities rival those of Europe's best clubs.

Under a giant dome, it has a full-sized indoor pitch with an exhortation from Pele on one wall: "Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do."

Young Qatari players have been embedded with professional teams in Spain, Monaco, Austria and a club Qatar bought in Belgium to immerse them "in a professional football environment 24 hours a day", which is something Doha lacks, "because of the league, empty stadiums", Bravo said.

The 2016 Rio Olympics and 2018 World Cup in Russia, if Qatar qualify, will also be opportunities to hone players for 2022, as well as the Asian Cup next month, at which Qatar opens competition against the UAE on January 11.

While the pool of native Qataris is tiny - roughly only 4,000 boys are born in the country each year - Bravo says Aspire scouts see nearly all youngsters so no potential talent slips through.

Motivating them, though, can be challenging: thanks to the nation's oil and gas wealth, Qataris are the world's second-richest people per capita and - unlike slum kids in Brazil



Qatar celebrate their Gulf Cup victory after beating Saudi Arabia 2-1 in the final at Riyadh in November. Fayez Nureldine / AFP

on the rise

October 23 Winner, AFC U19 Championship *

November 26 Winner, Gulf Cup of Nations #

Next official match versus UAE, January 11, AFC Asian Cup

* Qualified for 2015 U20 World Cup

Third championship, first since 2004

or Africa - do not need football as an escape.

"You're in a country where even attendance to training can be difficult," Bravo said.

"There's a bit of a misperception about everybody in Qatar: they're wealthy kids, they are wearing Rolaxes and driving SUVs. It's not the case. A lot of our kids come from more humble or medium-income situations."

A breakthrough came in October when Qatar's Under 19 team beat China, Myanmar and North Korea to become Asian champions, qualifying them for the Under 20 World

Cup next year in New Zealand. All the players are Aspire products and, Bravo said, none were naturalised.

"There you have the proof of what we are trying to do," he said, "which is to do this with the local players, because that is what this country wants."

"It's amazing," said Qatar's sports minister, Salah bin Ghanem bin Nasser Al Ali. "We are the least populated nation in Asia, but we won. We are the champions of the most populated continent."

"Think about it." Qatar's senior team also won the regional Gulf Cup of Nations

in November, beating hosts Saudi Arabia - with a population more than 100 times greater - in the final.

Such successes are ammunition against critics who argue that World Cup organiser Fifa should not have picked such a football minnow as host.

"Because it's a small country they say, 'Why is the World Cup here?'" said Tareq Sulaiman, a midfielder on the championship-winning U19 team. "This is the chance for us to show them that Qatar will do something good."

* Associated Press

Platini to kick off Globe awards

Players, coaches and teams to be honoured in Dubai

DUBAI // Michel Platini will speak on the "future of football" as the first speaker at the annual Dubai Sports Conference, which begins this morning at Atlantis The Palm.

Six sessions over two days will lead up to the Globe Soccer awards, to be presented at a "gala dinner" tomorrow night. Cristiano Ronaldo, the Real Madrid star, is expected to be at the awards ceremony, but he is not part of any of the discussion panels.

The awards session will honour players, coaches, teams and agents in 15 categories, according to organisers, and will be televised live from 7pm by Abu Dhabi Sports.

Platini, a former France stand-out, is president of Uefa, the organisers of European football. Some hoped he would run



titled "Smart Investment" and features Enzar Al Hasawi, chairman of English Championship club Nottingham Forest, Suhail Al Arifi, chief executive of the Pro League Committee, which oversees the Arabian Gulf League, and Agnelli.

Tomorrow, potentially the most interesting session is the second of three one-hour events, entitled "Die Mannschaft" (the German team) which features Dr Rainer Koch, a vice president of the German Football Association, Dr Kai Dittmar of Bayern Munich and Mehdi Benatia, the Morocco centre-back who plays for Bayern Munich.

Germany have won four World Cups, the most recent at Brazil 2014.

The third session tomorrow is entitled "The Story of Success" and features Miguel Angel Marin, president of Spanish champions Atletico Madrid, and Fernando Torres, the former Liverpool and Spain stand-out, who, for the past few days, has been linked to a return to

Jimenez confident he will remain at Al Ahli

Ahmed Rizvi

Al Ahli playmaker Luis Jimenez has ruled out a return home to Chile anytime soon as he is confident of negotiating an extension to his stay at the defending Arabian Gulf League champions.

Jimenez, who is registered as Ahli's Asian player after getting Palestinian papers before the start of the 2013/14 season, has been linked to several Chilean clubs in recent weeks, including Colo-Colo and University of Chile, but the 30-year-old former Lazio, Inter Milan and Parma midfielder insisted such a move was not possible as he has no plans to leave the Rashid Stadium.

"I do not know where they have got this news from," the midfielder, who last played in the Chilean championship in 2002 for Palestino before moving to Bah, said in Chilean media. "The truth is it is impossible



Luis Jimenez is in demand. Raviindranath K / The National

not want to leave and the club management has promised to sit down with me in January to discuss a contract extension."

Meanwhile, Ahli have failed in their bid to bring in Peruvian striker Paolo Guerrero from Brazilian club Corinthians.

Guerrero, who at US\$4 million (Dh14.7m) a year is among the highest-paid football stars in the Americas, was reportedly offered a three-year deal, worth \$1m a year, by Ahli. Guerrero

against Sepp Blatter in next year's Fifa presidential election, but Platini has said he will not stand for football's top office.

He will be accompanied on the dais by Pierluigi Collina, the Italian widely considered the world's best referee before his age-mandated retirement in 2005, when he turned 45. Collina is now the Uefa chief refereeing officer.

Michel Platini, the Uefa president, will speak about 'the future of football' at the Globe Soccer awards in Dubai. Philippe Huguen / AFP

Also listed as speaking today, or participating in round-table discussions, are coaches Fabio Capello, the Russia national team coach, and Filippo Inzaghi, the former AC Milan player who now manages the club.

The Milan player, Stephan El Shaarawy, an Italian international whose father is Egyptian, and the Juventus chairman, Andrea Agnelli, also are on the schedule. The second session today is en-

Athletico, therefore leaving Chelsea, who had loaned him to Milan. Patrick Klauert, the Dutchman who played for Barcelona, Milan and Ajax, among others, is also set to be part of the panel. Viewing the sessions is by invitation only.

Agency
Lowdown on Cristiano Ronaldo, s2

for me to move to Chile at this moment."

Jimenez, who arrived at Ahli in 2011 after nine seasons in Italy, hopes to sit down with the management in January to discuss an extension to his contract, which expires at the end of this season.

"The truth is I am very comfortable here and the club treats me very well," Jimenez said. "I do

was expected to make the deal official in January.

According to the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo*, however, Guerrero has changed his mind since and rejected Ahli's offer, and the negotiations between the two parties have come to a standstill.

arivii@thenational.ae

leading off

* today's list liverpool's rise and fall

Liverpool complete a turbulent 2014 with the final Premier League game of the year against Swansea City tonight at Anfield. Here are some numbers from the Merseyside club's endeavours on the pitch in the past 12 months.

1

Win in six games in the Uefa Champions League, against Ludogorets in September, which meant that Brendan Rodgers's side, on their first appearance in the competition since 2010, were eliminated in the group stages and dropped into the Europa League, where they will face Besiktas in February.



14

Penalties scored by Liverpool in their third-round League Cup tie shoot-out with Championship side Middlesbrough in September for them to prevail 14-13, after the game had ended 2-2. Liverpool are in the semi-finals of the competition and face Chelsea next month over two legs as they look to win their first trophy since 2012.



96

Goals, in all competitions, that Liverpool have scored in 2014. Captain Steven Gerrard leads the scoring with 16 to his name, with Daniel Sturridge (14), Luis Suarez (12) and Raheem Sterling (12) next up. A total of 21 different players were on target for Liverpool, with a further seven goals classified as own goals.



117

Days into 2014 before Liverpool lost their first Premier League game of the year, 2-0 to Chelsea at Anfield on April 27. They were unbeaten in 16 games, winning 14 of them (11 of which were in a row) and drawing twice, as they challenged, unsuccessfully, for their first league title since 1990.

685

Minutes on the pitch in league games that striker Mario Balotelli has played for Liverpool since his €16 million (Dh91.4m) move from AC Milan in August without finding the net. His two goals for the club so far came in the Champions League against Ludogorets in September and then in the League Cup against Swansea City in October.



inside

New York Knicks are in a fix

The NBA team are finding life difficult under new president Phil Jackson. **s7**



Getting a flavour of the UAE

Feliciano Lopez prepares for the Mubadala event. **s8**

On the cover

Manchester United's dejected Wayne Rooney and Radamel Falcao walk off the pitch following their team's 0-0 draw against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane yesterday.

@ today on the web

Training in the rain

For a gallery of some wet-weather training for the UAE football team at Robina Stadium on the Gold Coast in Australia, go to thenational.ae/sport

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lowdown ernie els playing in abu dhabi

The South African sometimes known as "The Big Easy" has confirmed he will play in the 10th Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship, January 15 to 18 at the Abu Dhabi Golf Club. Els will seek to complete a collection of trophies from the three-week European Tour Desert Swing.



Major trophies

He is one of six golfers who have twice won the British Open (2002, 2012) and US Open (1994, 1997). He has flirted with a career grand slam. He was runner-up twice at the Masters, to Vijay Singh in 2000 and Phil Mickelson in 2004, and he was third in the US PGA, in 1995 and 2007.

Desert success

Els, 45, has been a regular at the Omega Dubai Desert Classic and has won three times, in 1994, 2002 and 2005. He won the Qatar Open in 2005. He has played the Abu Dhabi tournament once, in 2013, and finished 39th in the tournament won by Jamie Donaldson.

Comfort zone

"I've always felt at home playing in the Gulf," he said. "I won my first European Tour event in the UAE, way back in 1994, and since then I have loved playing in the region." He also designed the Els Course, in Dubai, where the Dubai Open was played this month.

Completing the set

An Abu Dhabi victory would give him a Gulf sweep. "I'm just one Falcon Trophy short of winning every Desert Swing title and I hope to rectify that in Abu Dhabi," he said. "That would be a great achievement, particularly given it's the championship's 10th anniversary."

His CV

In addition to his four major victories, Els has won 28 European Tour titles, seventh on the all-time list; 19 on the PGA Tour, most recently in 2010; and 16 on the South Africa-based Sunshine Tour, seventh all-time, his first in 1991 and his most recent in 2010.

Big guns

Els will play in a tournament that will feature four of the world's top-10 ranked players: Rory McIlroy (No 1), Henrik Stenson (2), Justin Rose (6) and Rickie Fowler (10). The prize purse is US\$2.7 million (Dh9.9m). Ticket information is at www.abudhabigolfchampionship.com.

* Agency

West winds Nets with a hefty blow in Brooklyn

NEW YORK // David West did not like it when Kevin Garnett blew in his ear, so he helped Indiana blow out the Nets.

too close and I didn't like it. It was just too much. I don't really play them games. We're out there to play basketball, so let's win basketball.



Stephen's

pressed. "I'm just here to play basketball, man," he said in May. "All the extra-curricular activities, I don't really get into." Asked if he had ever blown in



football

dubai international sports conference



Michel Platini, second from right, the president of European football's governing body, delivered his keynote speech twice yesterday at the Dubai International Sports Conference. Marwan Naamani / AFP

Running unopposed for a reason

Uefa president Michel Platini tells Dubai crowd he wants to combine conservatism and audacity, writes Gary Meenaghan

Implementing sin bins and restricting video technology remain two key objectives for European football, Michel Platini said in Dubai yesterday, just days after being confirmed as the sole candidate in Uefa's presidential elections next year.

The incumbent president of European football's governing body reiterated his vision for the future during the ninth annual Dubai International Sports Conference.

It was Platini's first public appearance since the three-month deadline for submissions of candidacy for March's presidential

elections passed on December 24. With no other names put forward, Platini will stand unopposed as he seeks a third four-year term.

The Frenchman has long championed the idea of giving referees the option of a third coloured card to be used when players simulate fouls. He has also been stubborn in his refusal to embrace video replays and was a vocal critic of goal-line technology before its implementation this year.

During an awkward appearance yesterday morning that saw him trip up on the stage and then

be forced to deliver his keynote speech twice after organisers failed to provide a French translator, Platini made his concepts clear. Frustratedly repeating his presentation in Italian to the 300-plus delegates, he said the future of football "must combine conservatism and audacity".

"Football is the most beautiful game in the world. It is so popular it is considered the only universal sport. We don't want to change it too much," he said.

"We have to change some of the bad aspects, but we don't want to make any substantial changes."

"We need to be creative but preserve the beautiful aspects of the sport, and Uefa are committed to doing this."

Platini, who was elected in 2007 and turns 60 next year, said one of the aspects hindering foot-

ball's growth and reputation is bad behaviour on the pitch, including play-acting and players aggressively surrounding the referee.

"This is not acceptable to those who do not love the game," he said.

Platini said that providing a referee with a white card would give officials the power to send a player off the field temporarily.

"There will still be yellow cards, but by creating another card, like there is in rugby, it could help the game grow among casual fans."

Platini, speaking alongside a host of former players and football figures at the two-day event, maintained the sport must refuse the urge to substantially implement video replays.

While the three-time Ballon d'Or winner accepted goal-line

technology has been a success since it was introduced at the Fifa World Cup last summer, he is wary of increased calls for more technology.

"Managers and directors who never played football always talk about technology, but former players never do," Platini said.

"We know that [shirt tugging] happens and TV doesn't give the certainty of a foul. It's about interpretation. It is much easier to use technology for goal-lines or offside, but when we talk about fouls, technology can't be very helpful."

Gianni Infantino, Uefa's secretary-general, also dismissed suggestions Platini standing unopposed at the March 24 presidential election might reflect badly on European football's governing body. Fifa president

Sepp Blatter ran unopposed for re-election in 2011 amid great criticism and the Swiss is likely to walk Fifa's presidential elections again on May 29.

Infantino was quick to distance the reputations of the two bodies and their respective leaders.

"Michel's record over the past eight years speaks for itself," Infantino said. "It is not a question of whether [one candidate elections] look good or not, but rather about the transparency of the organisation."

"When it comes to Uefa, nobody is opposing Michel Platini because everything is on the table and everyone sees what he's doing. Fifa is a matter for Fifa. We just have to make sure that at Uefa things run professionally."

► gmeenaghan@thenational.ae

Future for El Shaarawy is uncertain as January transfer window looms

John McAuley

DUBAI // Stephan El Shaarawy is the man to lead AC Milan's potential renaissance and is therefore not for sale, according to Filippo Inzaghi, the Italian club's manager.

El Shaarawy, 22, has been linked with a move away from the San Siro in next month's transfer window, with Roma, the Serie A title challengers, and Germany's Borussia Dortmund rumoured to be interested in obtaining his services. Liverpool and Arsenal, the Premier League pair, are also believed to be monitoring the striker's situation.

On Sunday, at the Dubai International Sports Conference, El Shaarawy was asked about a possible transfer, at which point his manager, sitting alongside him, interjected.

"I can answer for him: his future is with AC Milan," Inzaghi said. "Stephan is our flagship, one of our best players and his future is with us. He is trusted by us and by the president. He has been injured, but he is do-



Stephan El Shaarawy has emerged as a young star for AC Milan and his manager wants him to stay with the club. Marwan Naamani / AFP

2013. His Milan contract runs until June 2018.

"I have my personal goals, to come back and put in the best performance, and to score more goals," El Shaarawy said.

"I have been lucky enough to wear the Milan jersey from the age of 18. It was always a dream

The seven-time European Cup champions concluded the last domestic campaign eighth in the table, meaning they failed to qualify for Europe for the first time since 1997.

Speaking about the Champions League, Inzaghi, the seventh-highest scorer in the com-

Capello high on Rooney

Russia manager praised Van Gaal for midfield move

John McAuley

DUBAI // Fabio Capello, the former England manager, has backed Louis van Gaal's decision to deploy Wayne Rooney in midfield for Manchester United.

The England captain, typically a striker, has spent the past few matches for his club in a more withdrawn role and lined up against Tottenham Hotspur yesterday again as one of Van Gaal's two central midfielders.

Rooney excelled in a deeper position in Friday's fixture against Newcastle United, scoring two goals and assisting the other in United's 3-1 victory at Old Trafford. He was voted man of the match.

Speaking at the Dubai International Sports Conference at Atlantis, The Palm, Capello said he was not surprised Rooney has adapted so quickly to the new role.

"Rooney can play in every position," Capello said. "He's a fantastic player, who with me also played just behind the main forward."

"He's very good there, because he makes runs, has good vision and in every situation he always chooses the best solution - and he scores goals."

Capello said he believes Rooney, 29, can eventually fill the space in England's central midfield that was recently vacated by Frank Lampard - the on-loan Manchester City star retired this summer from international football - although the Italian said he preferred the United frontman to influence matches further upfield.

"For me, with a player like Rooney it's very important that he goes into the area," said Capello, who is the Russia national team coach. "If he wants to score goals, he needs to be there. Yes, when he arrives from deep it's easy because technical-

ly he's very good; he has a good shot. But if he wants to score more goals he needs to stay in the box."

Meanwhile, Capello revealed he once recommended Diego Lopez, the AC Milan goalkeeper, to Arsenal manager Wenger, although the Arsenal manager chose not to heed his advice.

In 2011, when England trained at the English Premier League club's London Colney headquarters, Capello spoke to Wenger about Lopez, whom Capello had managed at Real Madrid.

Wenger instead kept faith with Wojciech Szczesny.

"I spoke with Arsene Wenger and I told him 'buy Diego Lopez, buy Diego Lopez, because I know him very well and he is really good,'" Capello said. "But it never happened. Wenger said he did not have a problem and that his keeper was good."

► jmculey@thenational.ae

ing well. We all expect a lot from him. The new year will be the year of El Shaarawy."

El Shaarawy endured an injury-plagued 2013/14 campaign with Milan, featuring in only six Serie A matches.

He has played 12 league fixtures this season and last month scored in the 2-2 draw at Sampdoria to end a barren spell stretching back to February

for me, a dream come true. This is my fourth year at Milan and I have had some great times and troubled times. I hope to give a lot more to Milan and to Italian football."

El Shaarawy said Milan, who are seventh in Serie A, have set a target of a top-three finish this season and, with it, a return to next year's Uefa Champions League.

petition's history, said: "The Champions League is the natural habitat of AC Milan.

"Last year was very difficult. We have to bounce back this year when we can. The Champions League is something special, so it hurts for such a glorious club to be out of it, but we have only ourselves to blame. We have to get back there next year. We are working hard to do that."

The United captain was an integral member of Capello's squad during the Italian's four-year reign with the England national team between 2008 and 2012, where he often played as the lead striker or in the No 10 position.

At present, Rooney sits second in England's list of all-time scorers, with 46 goals in 101 matches. He is three short of Sir Bobby Charlson's record.



Fabio Capello listens during the opening session. Marwan Nassar / AFP

S Tuesday, December 30, 2014 www.thenational.ae

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Another trophy for the cabinet

Real Madrid's Carlo Ancelotti and Cristiano Ronaldo steal the spotlight at the Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai. **s3**



leading off

* today's list **football friendlies in the uae**

Real Madrid v AC Milan may be the most glamorous friendly played in the UAE, but it is not the first match between highly respected sides. A look at five previous matches played here between prominent clubs, going back 28 years, to when the country was barely 15 years old.

1
Liverpool v Celtic, December, 1986
Aware of the post-Heysel ban on English sides playing in Europe, Dubai invented a "British championship", pitting England champions Liverpool and Scotland champions Celtic. As 15,000 watched on at Al Wasl, Owen Archdeacon and Alan Hansen, below, scored goals, and Liverpool won a shootout.



2
Liverpool v Celtic, April, 1989
The final Dubai Cup was a rematch of the first and also was played at Al Wasl. As in 1986, it finished 1-1, on goals by Mark McGhee and John Aldridge, but Celtic won the shootout this time, 4-2. Pat Bonner, above, was big in goal for the Scottish side.



3
AC Milan v Hamburg, January, 2009
David Beckham, below, on loan from LA Galaxy, was the big draw and he made his Milan debut in the friendly versus the German side before a big crowd at The Sevens, in Dubai. Ronaldinho and Collin Benjamin scored goals, and Milan won a shootout. Beckham was not on the scoresheet.



4
PSG v Milan, January, 2012
Carlo Ancelotti, who is back in Dubai tonight leading Madrid, made his mid-season debut as coach of Paris Saint-Germain, replacing Antoine Kombouare, in a 1-0 loss to Milan at the Rashid Stadium. Zlatan Ibrahimovic's cross set up the lone goal, scored on a tap-in by Pato.



5
Manchester City v Al Ain, May, 2014
The Hazza bin Zayed Stadium's inauguration featured the Premier League champions against the President's Cup champions, and City won 3-0 in a game dotted with numerous substitutions. Marcos Lopes, Steven Jovetic and Jordi Hiwula scored for City.



inside



Seeing red over yellows

Richard Jolly on the aggrieved Jose Mourinho and his Chelsea side. **s5**

Pitching in a new direction

The LA Dodgers' new general manager Farhan Zaidi. **s8**

On the cover

Real Madrid's Carlo Ancelotti receives the Best Media Attraction in Football Award from Abu Dhabi Media chairman and managing director Mohammed Ibrahim Al Mahmood at the Globe Soccer Awards.

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lowdown lebron james's woes with cleveland



No sugar-coating

"We're not a very good team," James said. "As far as on the court, we're still trying to find our way, as well. We've won some good games, we've lost some games, but right now we're just not very good in every aspect of the game we need to be to compete every night."

More of the same

The four-time NBA Most Valuable Player and two-time champion has cautioned against expectations for most of the season. After a loss on Thursday, he said: "We're not that good right now." Despite a victory the next day he said Cleveland were playing "nowhere near championship ball".

Hearing from fans

The Cavaliers were booed off the court during a third-quarter time-out that came during Detroit's 88-52 surge over the final three quarters. "It seems like when we take these losses, we have a great first quarter and we get a little lax and teams start putting it on us," James said.

Coach to blame?

The Cavaliers have a coach, in David Blatt, who is in his first season as an NBA coach after a successful career in Israel, and James was asked if the new man was a factor in the unsteadiness. "I'm not answering you, man," he said to a reporter. "Don't try that."

Killer instinct?

Blatt said the Cavs need to follow through with their fast starts. "When you're losing those leads, it shows that we're not putting our foot down on our opponent and taking them out. That's a skill, too, to understand that you can't give the opportunity to get out and play."

In bad hands

One constant in the Cavs' woes has been James's proclivity to give away the ball: he is averaging a career-worst 3.7 turnovers per game, and Cleveland are 3-4 when he has five or more. He had seven against Detroit and said: "I was very careless with the ball."

The Cleveland Cavaliers were the pre-season favourites to win the NBA's Eastern Conference and reach the NBA Finals, but they lost their third successive home game 103-80 to the lowly Detroit Pistons on Sunday, and their best player expressed his concern at the state of the team.

Lemina is reluctant to commit to Gabon

Gabon have named their 23-man squad for the African Cup of Nations, but Marseille midfielder Mario Lemina has already said

I'm sorry but

ter account. "I will not go to [the African Cup of Nations]." Lemina, who helped France win the Under 20 World Cup last year, is still hunting for a club

ic Bulot, Gabon are in Group A at the finals with hosts Equatorial Guinea, Burkina Faso and Congo, their first appearance in the finals since 2012.



he will not honour his call-up.
 The French junior international, 21, was named by Gabon coach Jorge Costa for the January 17 to February 8 tournament in Equatorial Guinea, but he has declined the invitation.
 "All that is being said are just rumours, I'm sorry but there has been no agreement between Gabon and me," Lemina, who was born in Gabon, said on his Twit-

there has been no agreement

Mario Lemina on Twitter about playing for Gabon

to the French senior team and is unwilling to pin his colours to the Gabonese mast at this stage.
 Gabon are ranked 65th in the Fifa rankings, and their squad is headlined by Borussia Dortmund forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, but also has English Championship players in the form of Cardiff City defender Bruno Ecuele Manga and Charlton Athletic striker Freder-

They qualified automatically for the 2012 event, due to being co-hosts with Equatorial Guinea, and they reached the quarter-finals before they were knocked out on penalties by Mali, which matched their best run in the competition, having also reached the last eight in 1996.

◆ Agencies



Marseille midfielder Mario Lemina, left, hopes to play for France. AFP

Cristiano Ronaldo 'best player of the year' at Dubai football gala



By Staff writer | Al Arabiya News
Tuesday, 30 December 2014

Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo capped off a near-perfect 2014 on Monday as he picked up his third Globe Soccer Player of the Year trophy at the Dubai Football Gala on Monday night.

The 29-year-old captain arrived at the luxury hotel Atlantis The Palm to be greeted with a standing ovation and a swarm of camera phones.

When the star was reminded the last time he collected the Player of the Year award in Dubai he followed it up with the Ballon d'Or, football's most prestigious award, he said: "I hope it can be a good signal, but I am not worried about that."

"The people who vote know what they need to do. I feel happy. This is one more trophy for dedication and

hard work.”

Ronaldo broke the record this year for the number of goals scored in a single Champions Leagues “La Liga” season – he reached 200 league goals in just 178 games.

Ronaldo found himself among familiar faces as his Madrid teammates and staff completed a sweep at the annual awards ceremony. Colombian midfielder James Rodriguez, whom Madrid signed in the summer after a breakthrough World Cup in Brazil, was given the Player Revelation of the Year Award. Manager Carlo Ancelotti collected the Coach of the Year trophy. And Florentino Perez was chosen as the President of the Year. The awards ceremony is part of the Globe Soccer conference.

“I feel very honored to collect my first [individual] trophy with Real Madrid,” Rodriguez said.

“To win more with the club is very important in my career. I want to improve, I want to please the supporters and I want to win more with this prestigious club. It is that simple.”

Madrid, the 2014 Uefa Champions League winners, are in town for the annual Dubai Football Challenge, an exhibition match against AC Milan tonight at The Sevens. The side were awarded Team of the Year in recognition of their historic 10th European Cup in May.

“It was one of the biggest emotions this season,” Ronaldo said. “It was a special moment. Madrid were looking very forward to La Decima and I have to say, I am very proud. We did a fantastic season and won four titles, which was very important and we are one of the best teams in the world.”

Other winners on the night included Mehdi Benatia, who won Best Arab Player and Filippo Inzaghi, the AC Milan coach, who was presented the Player Career Award for more than 20 years as a professional.

The former Juventus and Milan striker was a member of the victorious Italian national team at the 2006 World Cup, while he also lifted three Serie A titles and two Uefa Champions League crowns. Inzaghi scored both Milan’s goals in the 2007 final victory against Liverpool.

“They were probably the best goals I scored because they were some of the most important,” Inzaghi said. “I am a lucky man because I’m now the coach of my home team. It’s a great team and a great emotion to coach them.

Last Update: Tuesday, 30 December 2014 KSA 15:27 - GMT 12:27

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Indifferent India tunes out Asian Cup

By Sudipto Ganguly | Reuters, Mumbai
Monday, 26 January 2015

While the cream of Asian football fights for glory in the region's biggest tournament, the indifference of Indian broadcasters to the Asian Cup is a major setback to those hoping to grow the game in the world's second-most populous country.

Described by FIFA President Sepp Blatter as a "sleeping giant" of world football, India, with its population of 1.2 billion, has no shortage of potential players.

However, the national side is languishing at a worst-ever ranking of 171 and the cricket-obsessed country has shown few signs of waking from its soccer slumber.

That is not to say there is no interest in the game.

There is huge appetite for England's Premier League and Spain's La Liga, while the franchise-based Indian Super League, with its cast of celebrity owners, foreign managers and a sprinkling of high-profile players, was very well received.

The ISL, which had its inaugural season last year, reached the television screens of 170 million Indians in its first week and many hoped its success would be a platform to build on.

However, with India failing to qualify for the showpiece Asian Cup, currently being held in Australia this month, the momentum has been lost.

Subrata Dutta, vice president of the All India Football Federation, told Reuters that the tournament held little interest for broadcasters without an Indian presence.

"The relevance is not there for the channels," he said. "The Asian Cup is now of little importance to us because India are not playing."

While Rupert Murdoch's Star Sports packaged the ISL with the right mix of promotion and presentation to grab viewers, the tournament also packed out stadiums and enjoyed a strong presence on social media.

The ISL semi-final second leg between FC Goa and Atletico de Kolkata last month was played at a sold-out 27,000-capacity Fatorda Stadium in Goa.

In stark contrast, last weekend's domestic football league opener at the same stadium sold 125 tickets.

India qualified for the last edition of the Asian Cup in Qatar four years ago by virtue of winning the AFC Challenge Cup, a tournament organised to allow lower-ranked countries play in continental competition.

The games were shown live and while India lost all their group matches they earned high praise for the fight they showed against higher-ranked Asian competition.

Instead of building on that, however, the national team's performances have nosedived and broadcasters showed no interest in buying television rights for this year's Asian Cup, instead hedging on the safety of cricket and Australian Open tennis.

"It is a setback, there's no doubt about it," Dutta added.

"For the commercialization of the game and for funds to support development, the visibility is of prime importance.

“The performance and participation of the national team in international tournaments is very important for the development and promotion of the game.”

Contrasting fortunes

While India’s fortunes in the world’s most popular sport continue to spiral downward, neighbouring China is beginning to show green shoots of recovery after years of underachievement and a string of match-fixing scandals plaguing the game.

The Chinese Super League is attracting top players and managers from around the world while spectators are flocking back to stadiums.

China’s national side, which went into decline after the 2002 World Cup, have performed above expectations in Australia, winning all three of their group matches before falling to the hosts in the quarter-finals.

“China played the World Cup a few years back, so they have risen to a certain standard and it’s not too difficult to get to that standard,” Dutta added. “We are targeting that level through our youth and grassroots development.”

Eager to shake India out of its malaise, FIFA has put a development strategy in place, part of which will see the country host the under-17 World Cup in 2017, which they hope will improve the infrastructure and develop youth football.

Some in India blame clubs for the lack of focus on grassroots development.

“We have missed the bus several times,” football writer Jaydeep Basu said. “It’s the clubs who are responsible for this state.

“From (David) Beckham to (Lionel) Messi, it’s always been the clubs who have unearthed talent and brought up players from the age groups.

“The major clubs in India have always neglected this aspect.”

Last Update: Monday, 26 January 2015 KSA 08:27 - GMT 05:27

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KT Images

Footballers honoured at Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai



Real Madrid's James Rodriguez (R) receives his 'Revelation of the Year' award from Dubai police chief Khmais al-Muzaiha during the Globe Soccer Awards Ceremony.

Published: Tuesday, December 30, 2014 - Khaleejtimes.com

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Real Madrid sweep the board at Globe Soccer Awards - Atlantis, Dubai

by Simon Foster [/author/17680/simon-foster]

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Tuesday 30 December 2014



Golden boys: Real Madrid's Carlo Ancelotti, James Rodriguez, Florentino Perez and Cristiano Ronaldo all received awards.

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Real Madrid were the big winners of the night with Cristiano Ronaldo leading the way.

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Ronaldo was at Atlantis, The Palm to collect his trophy with Carlo Ancelotti claiming the Manager of the Year prize, midfielder James Rodriguez given Player Revelation of the Year Award, Florentino Perez named President of the Year and the Champions League holders handed the Team of the Year for 2014 award.



Ronaldo, who will line up for Real Madrid against AC Milan in the Dubai Football Challenge at 7he Sevens tonight, now hopes this award can be replicated at the Ballon d'Or ceremony in Zurich on January 12.

"I hope that it can be a good signal but I'm not worried about that. The people who vote know what they have to do. I just feel happy it's one more trophy for my dedication and hard work," he said.

"I want to say thank you to the people at Real Madrid – the players, the coach – we had a fantastic season, we won four trophies and we are one of the best teams in the world. La Decima was a special moment as Real Madrid have looked forward to winning it.

"To win this award is one of the great pleasures, I am very proud."

Ronaldo scored 61 goals in 60 games for club and country and was leading scorer in last season's Champions League competition with 17.



? How many Ballon d'Or awards has Cristiano Ronaldo won?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

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The Portuguese is determined to win more silverware for Los Blancos with Madrid leading La Liga by a point ahead of Barcelona and are in the last 16 of the Champions League having remained undefeated in the group stages.

"I am happy, I do what I like, to play football, to score goals, to make assists and help show we are one of the best teams in the world," he added.

Other winners on the night were Bayern Munich and Morocco defender Mehdi Benatia, who was crowned Best Arab Player while Milan coach Filippo Inzaghi was the recipient of the Player Career Award.

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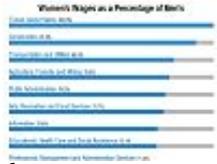
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Ronaldo adds another feather to his cap

Rituraj Borkakoty (Reporter/ Chief Sub Editor) / 31 December 2014

Many fans left with broken hearts after failing to catch a glimpse of Real Madrid superstar



Cristiano Ronaldo talks with Uefa president Michel Platini after receiving the Best Player of the Year award at the Globe Soccer Awards ceremony in Dubai. — AFP

Dubai — It was the most unusual night. The dreamy settings of the Atlantis demanded grandeur and the guests were more than happy to oblige, arriving for the Globe Soccer Awards gala in all their splendour. Their regal style and poise on the red carpet made it unbelievably difficult to know if some of them were celebrities or just invitees.

You could hear the splutter of laughter from the photographers once they realised that the stylish people who sent them into a frenzy were actually nobodies in public imagination.

Then there were also some like Michel Platini, one of the greatest midfielders ever and now one of the most powerful men in football. Non-football people could have been forgiven for thinking the Frenchman was some theatre personality.

Platini, who famously charmed the Old Lady in his heyday, is now in his late 50s. His mop of black hair still hasn't begun to turn grey. His graceful manners gave the impression as though he was some acclaimed actor on the stage, greeting people in a festive scene.

Pierluigi Collina was quite a contrast though. The bald Italian with frightening eyes could perfectly play the role of a Sicilian gangster in a Francis Ford Coppola classic.

What helped Collina win six Fifa Referee of the Year awards in a row? Maybe one long, hard stare at the impish divers was enough to make sure there was fair play and no wrong penalty. Here on a starry night, he was making heads turn and memories of Collina's intimidating presence as a referee on a football field faded away as he politely obliged to the selfie and autograph hunters.

Seeing these people on such an occasion could also be a learning experience. How you pay a price for marrying a famous footballer. Even if you are drop-dead gorgeous and a successful model like Jessica Lemarie, you could still be pushed into obscurity. All the footballing romantics wanted was a piece of Robert Pires, Arsenal legend and French World Cup and Euro winner. The Frenchman never lost his cool even when he was mobbed as Lemarie patiently looked at the madness her 41-year-old husband sparked among diehard fans. One man didn't set the hearts racing though. He was once a global superstar who enthralled fans with his flamboyance and diving volleys on the net. But on a Monday night in Dubai, Boris Becker was walking on crutches, only managing to draw a few glances from curious onlookers.

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Maybe Novak Djokovic has something to do with the limping German. Did the current world number one push the former world number one too hard in training? We will hopefully get an answer from the Serb on his current coach at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi later this week.

But what the photographers and the wide-eyed fans without an invitation card didn't get was a glimpse of Cristiano Ronaldo — the biggest attraction of the night. He was scheduled to arrive at 10pm and fans and photographers were waiting and waiting for their biggest moment until somebody with an Italian accent announced that the Portuguese superstar and his Colombian teammate, James Rodriguez, entered the Palm Ballroom through the back door.

Hearts were broken and to see some of those kids react to it was akin to seeing a little girl weep after losing her favourite toy.

Ronaldo didn't lose anything though. In fact, Real Madrid's most famous Galactico arrived to a standing ovation before departing with two awards in his hands. The first one was the Player of the Year award and the next was Marca Fans' Favourite Player award.

The Portugal captain now sets his sights on his third Fifa Ballon d'Or. "I hope that it (the Dubai Globe Soccer best player award) can be a good signal but I'm not worried about that. The people who vote know what they have to do," Ronaldo said about his chances of picking up his most favourite trophy on January 12 in Zurich.

"I just feel happy it's one more trophy for my dedication and hard work. I want to say thank you to the people at Real Madrid — the players, the coach. We had a fantastic season, we won four trophies and we are one of the best teams in the world. "To win this award is one of the great pleasures, I am very proud."

The unusual night ended with a familiar tale as one who rose from a humble background to become one of the most recognisable faces in the world added another feather to his cap.

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