



Cristiano Ronaldo (file pic)

## London

**C**ristiano Ronaldo insists he is the best player in the world because he proves himself "year after year" with Real Madrid and Portugal.

Speaking after winning Portugal's Best Player of 2017 - to go with the fifth Ballon d'Or which equalled Lionel Messi's haul - Ronaldo, 33, said he was determined to succeed for his children.

Ronaldo scored 42 goals in 46 games in 2016/17, helping

Real Madrid win La Liga and the Champions League. He has netted 37 goals in 35 games so far this term to help Los Blancos reach the Champions League quarter-finals, where they will face Juventus next month.

"I am grateful for this award to all those who are here, it is also an award for all my colleagues; 2017 was an excellent year, unforgettable both collectively and individually," said Ronaldo, who beat Rui Patricio of Sporting Lisbon and Manchester

City's Bernardo Silva.

"I also won my fifth Ballon d'Or and my second The Best award. I also dedicate it to my four children. That's another record - three children in three months.

"We have to defend what is ours because there is always a Portuguese in the fight.

"I always believe and say that I am the best, whatever they say, and then I show it in the field. We are in the fight year after year." (Eurosport)

## Rabada can play in third Test after ban reduced



Kagiso Rabada (file pic)

## Los Angeles

**S**outh Africa pace bowler Kagiso Rabada can play in the final two Test matches against Australia after he won an appeal to have his series ban reduced.

Rabada was given three demerit points after being deemed to have deliberately made contact with Steve Smith after dismissing him in the second Test. That took the 22-year-old to eight demerit points in a 24-month period an automatic two-Test ban.

But his punishment was reduced to one demerit point on appeal.

His fine was also brought down from 50 per cent of his match fee to 25 pc for the offence.

A statement from the International Cricket Council said Rabada had "been found not guilty of the charge of making inappropriate and deliberate physical contact with a player" and instead been "found guilty of conduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game". (BBC)

## Liam Smith to fight Ali for light-middleweight title



Liam Smith (file pic)

## London

**L**iam Smith will have a chance to regain the WBO light-middleweight title when he fights American Sadam Ali on 12 May. The 29-year-old from Liverpool, who has lost once in 28 fights - beaten by Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez in 2016 to lose the belt - will face Ali in New York State.

"I'm confident," said Smith who has won all three of his contests since that defeat. "I'm naturally the bigger man."

New Yorker Ali, 29, has also lost

just once, in 27 fights, and will be making his first defence of the title.

Ali won the title by beating former four-weight world champion Miguel Cotto in December 2017 after Alvarez had previously vacated the belt. Cotto retired after that defeat.

"I'm looking forward to pitting myself against a good fighter, a former Olympian and now world champion who is coming off the back of a good win against Miguel Cotto," said Smith. (BBC)

# Late contract talks could 'disturb' Bottas



Valtteri Bottas (file pic)

## London

**V**altteri Bottas believes he and Mercedes must avoid dragging out contact renewal talks to prevent the process becoming "a bit disturbing" during the 2018 Formula 1 season.

Bottas is preparing for his second year with Mercedes since replacing 2016 champion Nico Rosberg alongside Lewis Hamilton.

He won three grands prix in 2017 to earn a single-year contract

extension by mid-September, and hopes he will not have to wait too long before getting an answer about his longer-term future this season.

"For sure there will be a deadline to get to know what the future is going to hold," Bottas said at an event for Mercedes team partner Petronas.

"There's no point to drag things too late because as a driver you have a lot of things to think about

and to focus on, so contract talks can be a bit disturbing.

"The team knows [that] as well, so when the time is right we'll try to make the decision."

Bottas added that he did not see the "first three or four races as anything more special than the first half of the season" but acknowledged that performing better early on improved the chance of a quick contract decision. (Autosport)