

# Loeb poised to lead another Dakar charge by Bahrain Raid Xtreme

Al Nasser manager Garcia presents French star with Cristiano Ronaldo shirt on visit to BRX in Saudi

● Loeb pursues another stage win in his BRX Prodrive Hunter when the rally resumes today

TDT | Manama

**S**ebastien Loeb is ready to lead another charge by Bahrain Raid Xtreme in the Dakar Rally, with a prized Al Nasser shirt carrying the name of superstar signing Cristiano Ronaldo safely tucked away.

The shirt was presented to Loeb by Rudi Garcia, manager of Ronaldo's new Saudi Pro League club Al Nasser, when he paid a visit to the BRX team at the end of the eighth stage from Al Duwadimi to Riyadh on Sunday evening.

Garcia then stepped inside the cockpit of Loeb's BRX Prodrive Hunter to check out the car which the nine-time World Rally Champion and co-driver Fabian Lurquin had earlier taken to their second stage victory of



Al Nasser manager Rudi Garcia presents a Cristiano Ronaldo shirt to Sebastien Loeb

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**It was a very good day, and a good way to end the first week. The feeling with the car was so good. It's really nice to be like this in the car, I have to say**

SEBASTIEN LOEB

the 45th Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia.

It was also the fourth day in a row that three Prodrive Hunters had finished in the top ten, with Guerlain Chicherit and Alex Winocq taking sixth and Vaidotas Zala with Paulo Fiua in 10th.

The result maintained a powerful climb up the rankings by Loeb following a succession



**With yesterday being a rest day in the Dakar, Loeb will be looking for another stage win, and more valuable World Rally-Raid Championship points, when the rally resumes with the 358km ninth stage from Riyadh to Haradh today**

of punctures and misfortunes which had dropped him from overall contention.

“It was a very good day, and a good way to end the first week,” said Loeb. “The feeling with the car was so good. It's really nice to be like this in the car, I have to say.”

With yesterday being a rest



Guerlain Chicherit and Alex Winocq in their Prodrive Hunter

day in the Dakar, Loeb will be to the finish in Dammam on Sunday.

The 67-strong BRX team in Saudi is helping drive alternative solutions for motorsport. The three Hunters being prepared for more action in Riyadh yesterday run on Prodrive EcoPower biofuel created by Coryton from sustainable sources. This produces 80% less CO2 than petrol.

## Messi and Ronaldo to meet in friendly between PSG and Saudi select

AFP | Riyadh

**L**ionel Messi and Paris Saint-Germain will play a friendly against a select side made up of players from Cristiano Ronaldo's new club Al Nasser and their Saudi rivals Al Hilal in Riyadh on January 19, the French champions announced yesterday.

PSG will travel to Saudi capital for the match at the King Fahd Stadium which will see Messi and Ronaldo renew their rivalry.

Messi returned to training



Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (L) walks past Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (file photo)

**As the coach of Al Nasser, I cannot be happy with this match. For development, to see PSG, to see the great Parisian players, indeed it is a good thing. But we have a championship game three days later**

RUDI GARCIA

with PSG last week after being given a fortnight off following Argentina's World Cup triumph in Qatar in December. Meanwhile Ronaldo, who will turn 38 in February, recently joined Al Nasser after agreeing a contract that runs until 2025 and is reportedly worth more than 200 million euros (\$214m). His arrival at Al Nasser, who are coached by Frenchman Rudi Garcia, comes as Saudi Arabia

seeks to improve the profile of football in the country ahead of a possible joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup along with Greece and Egypt.

Ronaldo and Messi have dominated the sport over the last 15 years, winning the Ballon d'Or 12 times between them. Their rivalry grew during nine years in which they came up against each other in Spain, when Messi was starring for

Barcelona and Ronaldo for Real Madrid.

Riyadh clubs Al Hilal and Al Nasser are Saudi Arabia's two most successful sides.

PSG have made a habit of travelling to Qatar in winter since the Gulf state bought the club in 2011.

However, this trip comes despite the Ligue 1 leaders having a French Cup tie scheduled for the weekend of January 21 and 22 against lower-league opponents yet to be determined.

## Roberto Martinez named new Portugal coach

Reuters | Lisbon

**F**ormer Belgium coach Roberto Martinez has been named the new manager of Portugal's national squad, the country's football federation (FPF) said yesterday.

“I appreciate the enthusiasm and ambition with which he (Martinez) received the invitation,” FPF President Fernando



Portugal coach Roberto Martinez during the presentation

**Martinez, from Spain, stepped down as Belgium's coach following his side's World Cup group stage exit, saying he had made the decision to end his six-year tenure some time ago and would have left even if they had been crowned champions**

Gomes told a news conference as Martinez stood next to him. “This is an important moment for the national team”

Martinez, from Spain, stepped down as Belgium's coach following his side's World Cup group stage exit, saying he had made the decision to end his six-year tenure some time ago and would have left even if they had been crowned champions.

## Mbappe defends 'legend' Zidane amid 'disrespectful' FFF boss comments

AFP | Paris

**K**ylain Mbappe blasted as “disrespectful” comments made by the head of the French football federation (FFF) concerning former international Zinedine Zidane with the PSG superstar describing his fellow World Cup winner as a “legend”.

“Zinedine Zidane, I wouldn't even have taken his call on the phone,” FFF president Noel Le Graet quipped dismissively in an interview on French radio when asked whether Zidane



Real Madrid's coach Zinedine Zidane beside PSG's Kylian Mbappe during a match (file photo)

**Zidane is France, we don't disrespect the legend like that...**

KYLIAN MBAPPE

had called him to express an interest in taking over as coach from Didier Deschamps.

Deschamps' contract expired after the World Cup in Qatar where reigning champions France lost to Argentina in a penalty shootout after a thrilling

final on December 18.

However, Deschamps on Saturday signed a new deal until the 2026 World Cup.

Asked whether Zidane, who won the 1998 World Cup as a player alongside Deschamps and was a runner-up in 2006, had called him in recent days, Le Graet dismissed the former Real Madrid coach as having been a potential candidate.

“I wouldn't even have taken his call,” Le Graet said. “To tell him what? ‘Hello sir, don't worry, look for another club, I just agreed a contract with Didier.’”

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