

Ronaldo accused of evading millions in taxes

Madrid

Spanish prosecutors yesterday accused Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo of evading 14.7 million euros in tax through offshore companies, the latest footballer to fall foul of fiscal authorities.

The 32-year-old -- the world's highest paid athlete according to Forbes magazine -- follows in the steps of FC Barcelona forward and Argentina star Lionel Messi, who was found guilty of the same offence last year although the sums involved were allegedly smaller.

If he too is put on trial and found guilty, he risks "a fine of at least 28 million" euros (\$31.3 million) and could potentially be jailed for three-and-a-half years, the Gestha union of experts at Spain's Inland Revenue said in a statement.

Ronaldo is accused of "four crimes against the public treasury between 2011-14... which involves tax fraud of 14,768,897 euros (\$16.5m, £12.9m)", Madrid's public prosecutor's office said in a statement.

"The accused took advantage of a company structure created in 2010 to hide income generated in Spain from his image rights from tax authorities, which is a 'voluntary' and 'conscious' breach of his fiscal obligations in Spain," it said.

Prosecutors accuse the Portugal international of evading tax via a shell company based in the British Virgin Islands and another in Ireland, known for its low corporate tax rate.

In addition, they say he only declared 11.5 million euros of Spanish-related income from 2011 to 2014, while what he really earned during that time was close to 43 million euros.

And finally, they accuse him of "voluntarily" refusing to include 28.4 million euros in income linked to the sale of his image rights for the 2015 to 2020 period to a Spanish company.

In a television interview last month when it was revealed that tax authorities had sent a report to prosecutors on Ronaldo's alleged fiscal evasion, the four-time World Player of the Year had said he was "very serene."

"I know these things will be resolved with the best decision, so I'm fine," he had said.

Football scandals

The football world in Spain has been rocked by charges of tax evasion or corruption pressed against some of its top stars.

Messi was sentenced to a 21-month jail sentence and 2.09-million-euro fine last year for tax fraud.

The prison term will be suspended as is common in Spain for first offences for non-violent crimes carrying a sentence of less than two years.

The 29-year-old and his father Jorge Horacio Messi were found guilty of using companies in Belize, Britain, Switzerland and Uruguay to avoid paying taxes on 4.16 million euros of Messi's income earned from his image rights from 2007-09.

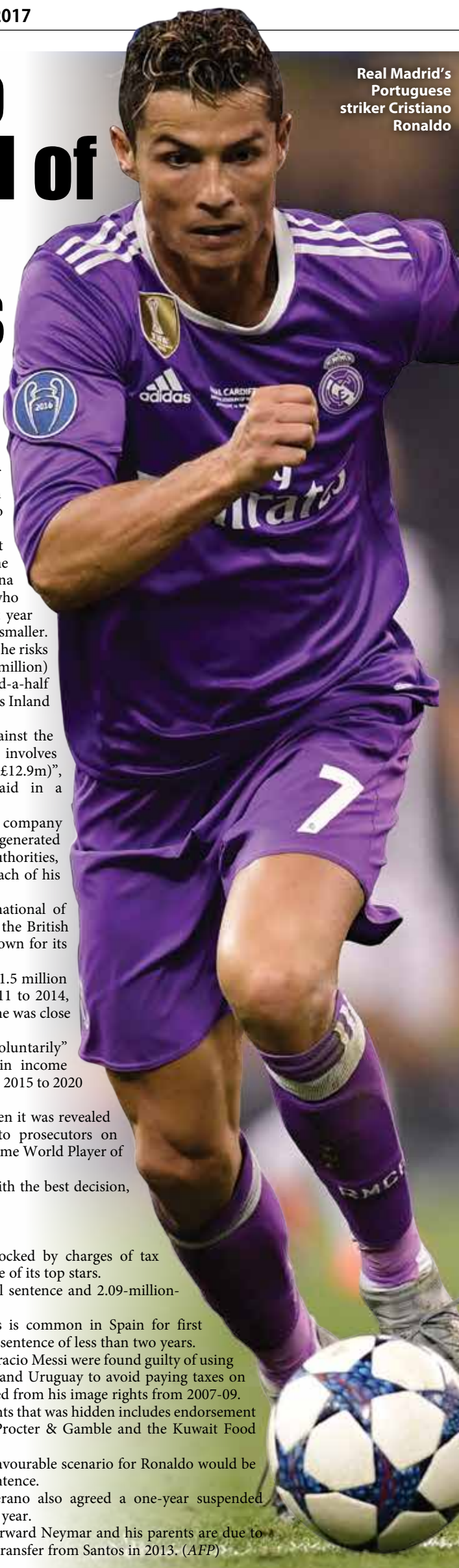
The income related to Messi's image rights that was hidden includes endorsement deals with Danone, Adidas, Pepsi-Cola, Procter & Gamble and the Kuwait Food Company.

In its statement, Gestha said the most favourable scenario for Ronaldo would be that he is also given a 21-month prison sentence.

Former Barca defender Javier Mascherano also agreed a one-year suspended sentence with authorities for tax fraud last year.

Meanwhile Brazil star and Barcelona forward Neymar and his parents are due to stand trial for alleged corruption over his transfer from Santos in 2013. (AFP)

Real Madrid's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo



Warbasse wins Swiss 4th stage, Caruso in yellow



Lausanne

American Larry Warbasse won yesterday's Tour of Switzerland fourth stage at Villars-sur-Ollon as Italy's Damiano Caruso pulled on the leader's yellow jersey.

Warbasse, 26, was the lone survivor from a 150km breakaway in the mountain stage, and reached the summit finish 40 seconds ahead of Caruso, who took the overall race lead from Australian sprinter Michael Matthews. The yellow jersey has now changed hands four times in four days, with BMC rider Caruso 15 seconds clear of Dutchman Steven Kruijswijk.

It was the first win of his career for Aquablue rider Warbasse, a former member of the now-defunct Swiss team IAM Cycling, after he found himself a minute clear of his fellow escapees with only 2.3km remaining.

"I love this race, I love Switzerland, I was on IAM for two years," an

emotional Warbasse said.

"It felt like a home race today. Everybody was yelling my name and I'm so happy."

AG2R La Mondiale's Domenico Pozzovivo finished four seconds behind Caruso and Kruijswijk on the day to move third in the overall standings. Wednesday's 222km fifth stage from Bex to Cevio is the longest of the nine-day Tour of Switzerland, which is one of two main pre-Tour de France warm-up events, despite losing prestige compared to the Criterium du Dauphine in recent years.

While the winner of the Dauphine went on to win the Tour in four out of five years from 2012 to 2016, the last time a Swiss Tour champion also claimed Grand Boucle glory was Belgian great Eddy Merckx in 1974 -- although disgraced American Lance Armstrong did that particular double in 2001 before being stripped of both results for doping. (AFP)

Results from the 150.2km fourth stage from Bern to Villars-sur-Ollon:

Stage

1. Larry Warbasse (USA/ABS) 3hr 48min 55sec,
2. Damiano Caruso (ITA/BMC) at 0:40,
3. Steven Kruijswijk (NED/LNL) 0:40,
4. Simon Spilak (SLO/KAT) 0:40,
5. Domenico Pozzovivo (ITA/ALM) 0:44,
6. Mathias Frank (SWI/ALM) 0:47,
7. Marc Soler (ESP/MOV) 0:59,
8. Miguel Ángel López (COL/AST) 1:07,
9. Mikel Nieve (ESP/SKY) 1:20,
10. Rui Costa (POR/EAU) 1:34

Overall

1. Damiano Caruso (ITA/BMC) 12hr 08min 35sec,
2. Steven Kruijswijk (NED/LNL) at 0:15,
3. Domenico Pozzovivo (ITA/ALM) 0:24,
4. Simon Spilak (SLO/KAT) 0:24,
5. Marc Soler (ESP/MOV) 0:31,
6. Mathias Frank (SWI/ALM) 0:33,
7. Mikel Nieve (ESP/SKY) 1:09,
8. Rui Costa (POR/EAU) 1:10,
9. Valerio Conti (ITA/EAU) 1:20,
10. Miguel Ángel López (COL/AST) 1:25.