

France top new-style FIFA rankings

● Germany slump to 15th spot

Reuters | Zurich

World champions France predictably shot to the top of the FIFA rankings published on Thursday while previous leaders Germany slumped to 15th after their humiliating first round exit in Russia.

The rankings were the first to be issued since France beat Croatia 4-2 in the World Cup final on July 15 and also the first since FIFA replaced its much-criticised previous formula.

France were followed by Belgium, the team they beat 1-0 in the semi-finals, with Brazil dropping one place to third after their quarter-final exit against the Belgians. Surprise finalists Croatia leapt from 20th to fourth.

Quarter-finalists Uruguay



Hugo Lloris lifts the trophy as France celebrate winning the World Cup

climbed nine places to fifth while England's run to the semi-finals took them up to sixth place from a previous twelfth.

Argentina dropped to 11th after a chaotic campaign which included a 3-0 group stage defeat by Croatia on the way to a last 16 exit against France where they lost 4-3.

Hosts Russia, who began the tournament at a modest 71st



The new FIFA ranking method, which is based on the Elo method of creating sports rankings, adds or subtracts points based on the result of a match rather than calculating an average. The amount added (or subtracted) is calculated based on the strength of the opponent and the importance of the match

place, leapt 21 spots after their surprise run to the quarter-finals.

FIFA said its new formula, approved by the FIFA Council before the World Cup, relied on adding or subtracting points, depending on the results of matches, rather than averaging points over a given period of time.

The global soccer governing body said the new system was developed over two years during which "a large number of different algorithms was tested and extensively discussed".

FIFA said the new system would no longer weight matches according to which region they were played in and this would provide "fair and equal opportunities for all teams across all confederations".

FIFA said the removal of an annual average point calculation, which was part of the previous formula, would have a number of benefits, including reducing the ability of teams to influence their ranking by avoiding friendlies.

Zverev loses after poor performance



Alexander Zverev

Express | Cincinnati

Alexander Zverev crashed out of the Cincinnati Masters with a surprising 5-7, 6-4, 7-5 defeat to Robin Haase.

Zverev, ranked No 3 in the world, has had a turbulent season and he struggled again with his opening match at a Masters 1000 event.

The German narrowly edged the first set 7-5 but was then broken once in the second to lose 6-4.

Both players then threw everything at the decider but it was Haase who took the ascendancy with an early break to lead 4-2.

Zverev bounced back by winning the next three games in a row to give himself hope of a turnaround.

But Haase broke again in the

11th game before serving for his second match point.

Haase will face either Bradley Klahn or Pablo Carreno Busta in the third round.

Meanwhile, Zverev will have plenty to ponder before he returns to action at the US Open later this month.

The 21-year-old has played little tennis during the American hard-court season as he also lost to Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Rogers Cup quarter-finals last week.

So it is looking highly unlikely he will finish the season strongly, although 1996 Wimbledon winner Richard Krajicek has recently tipped him to have a bright future.

"I like (Alexander) Zverev, who struggles a little bit in the Grand Slams," he said.

La Liga announces plans to play regular season games in US

Reuters | Madrid

La Liga's organising body announced yesterday that it plans to hold regular season Spanish top flight games in the United States in the future.

"LaLiga, Spain's top-flight soccer competition, and Relevant, a multinational media, sports and entertainment group, today announced a first-of-a-kind 15-year, equal joint venture to promote soccer in the U.S. and Canada," said a statement.

"As part of the agreement, LaLiga plans to bring a regular season club match to the United States, the first to be played outside of Europe."

La Liga did not give any details on when the first game across the Atlantic was set to take place and did not immediately respond to a request for information from Reuters.



Real Madrid's Gareth Bale in action at Hard Rock Stadium, Miami, USA

Spain's biggest clubs Real Madrid and Barcelona recently returned from pre-season tours in the United States. They played against top European sides such

as AC Milan, AS Roma, Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United in the International Champions Cup, a tournament organised by Relevant.

In July 2017, the two sides played each other in a friendly 'Clasico', selling out Miami's Hard Rock stadium.

La Liga president Javier Tebas has spoken on many occasions about his desire to play regular season games outside of Spain and mimic the NFL's highly successful policy of playing official games in London since 2007.

"We're devoted to growing the passion for soccer around the world. This ground-breaking agreement is certain to give a major impulse to the popularity of the beautiful game in the U.S. and Canada," Tebas said.

"Relevant has filled stadiums across the U.S. with the International Champions Cup, we're thrilled to partner with them on a joint mission to grow soccer in North America."

Ronaldo exit no excuse for Madrid - Casemiro

Reuters | Tallinn

Real Madrid cannot use the loss of Cristiano Ronaldo as an excuse for underachieving this season, midfielder Casemiro said after losing the UEFA Super Cup 4-2 to Atletico Madrid in Real's first competitive game since their talisman joined Juventus.

"Of course we miss Cristiano, but that's in the past now," Casemiro told reporters after his side were overpowered by their city rivals in extra time in Tallinn in coach Julen Lopetegui's first match since succeeding Zinedine Zidane.



Casemiro and Cristiano Ronaldo

"We cannot talk about Cristiano to cover things up, because any team would miss Cristiano. We are upset about losing a trophy but this is just the start.

We have total confidence in our coach and giving excuses is not what Real Madrid do."

Real have not yet signed a replacement for the man who

scored 451 goals and led them to four Champions League titles in the last five seasons.

The club received 105 million euros (\$119.4 million) from Juve for Ronaldo in July, but the only new recruit at the Bernabeu has been goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois from Chelsea.

Casemiro, however, said the loss to Atletico did not mean his side had to go out and make urgent signings.

"One result doesn't mean we have a better or worse squad, those in charge of the club will decide whether or not we need more signings," added the Brazilian.