

LIVERPOOL STUN DORTMUND 4-3

SEVILA, SHAKHTAR DONETSK, VILLARREAL BOOK LAST FOUR

LONDON: Liverpool added another fairytale comeback to the history books as they fought back from 3-1 down against Borussia Dortmund to reach the Europa League semi-finals after Dejan Lovren's towering stoppage-time header secured a 4-3 win on Thursday. Lovren rose at the far post to rifle home his header in the first minute of added time, recalling memories of Liverpool's 2005 Champions League final comeback against AC Milan and propelling them into the last four with a 5-4 aggregate victory.

Liverpool, 2-0 down after nine minutes, will be joined in Friday's draw by holders Sevilla, who needed a penalty shootout to edge past Spanish rivals Athletic Bilbao. Spain will have two sides in the last four after Villarreal beat Sparta Prague 4-2 and 6-3 over the two legs, while Shakhtar Donetsk defeated Braga 4-0 at home to complete a 6-1 aggregate triumph. Liverpool's victory at Anfield was greeted by typically exuberant celebrations from manager Jurgen Klopp, who spent seven years at Dortmund and would have been no stranger to the quick-fire counter attacks that earned the visitors a 2-0 lead.

Liverpool might have felt they had a slight

advantage over Dortmund having snatched an away goal in a 1-1 first-leg draw, but the tables were turned in the blink of an eye after a whirlwind start by the Germans. Liverpool were slapdash in possession, Dortmund ruthless on the counter as they brutally punishing Liverpool's errors with both early goals starting from the hosts gifting them the ball. Dortmund played with the same intensity they did when Klopp led them to two Bundesliga titles and a Champions League final, harrying Liverpool all over the pitch and winning back the ball in dangerous areas.

The first goal arrived after five minutes as a rapid break ended with Simon Mignolet saving brilliantly from Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, only for Henrikh Mkhitaryan to sweep home the rebound. It was soon 2-0 as Marco Reus powered through the Liverpool midfield and fed Aubameyang to rifle his finish into the roof of the net, beating Mignolet at his near post. Having never lost at home to German opposition in 13 games, Liverpool were suddenly facing a mountainous climb back into the encounter, but they were given hope three minutes into the second half when Divock Origi raced through and poked his finish

past Roman Weidenfeller. Their spirits were swiftly dampened, however, when Reus made it 3-1 after 57 minutes, before being partially restored through Philippe Coutinho's curling effort.

Wonderful night

The Anfield roar went into overdrive when Mamadou Sakho leveled with a header from a corner with 12 minutes remaining and the final blow was delivered when Lovren rose to head home James Milner's cross. That sparked euphoric celebrations among the home support and left the visiting contingent holding their heads in disbelief. "It is difficult to explain. A wonderful, wonderful night at Anfield and to be honest the game was strange," an almost disbelieving Klopp said.

Liverpool are no strangers to titanic fightbacks with perhaps the greatest moment in their history coming when they came back from 3-0 down against Milan to win a fifth European title on penalties. Just as on that night 11 years ago, their opponents were left wondering how they had lost control of the match. "It was not logical. It was very emotional. At the end at 3-3 everyone here believed it was meant to be, it was destiny,"

Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel said. "If you have such a strong belief then things can happen."

Sevilla, who have made the competition their own in the last two years, lost 2-1 at home to Bilbao, but edged through on penalties. They fell behind when Aritz Aduriz scored his 10th goal in this season's competition and after equalising through Kevin Gameiro, were behind again when Raul Garcia found the net with a looping header 10 minutes from time. That leveled the tie at 3-3 on aggregate and forced extra time.

With the sides still level after 120 minutes, Sevilla sneaked through after Bilbao's Benat Etxebarria missed their fourth spot-kick and Gameiro scored to secure a 5-4 shootout victory. Shakhtar Donetsk cruised into only their second European semi-final with Darijo Srna opening the scoring from the penalty spot to mark his record-breaking 486th game for the club. Two own goals from Braga centre back Ricardo Ferreira either side of a goal from Viktor Kovalenko rounded off the scoring. Villarreal's Cedric Bakambu struck twice to take his tally in the competition to nine goals as they reached the semi-finals for the third time with a 4-2 win at Sparta Prague. — Reuters

ITALIAN LEAGUE PREVIEW

CRUCIAL INTER VISIT FOR TITLE-CHASING NAPOLI

MILAN: Napoli's Serie A title credentials face the acid test on a trip to Inter Milan today when record-chasing striker Gonzalo Higuain sits out the second of a four-game ban for the visitors. Higuain, whose 30-goal league tally so far leaves him just five short of Gunnar Nordahl's all-time Serie A record for AC Milan, was handed the untimely sanction two weeks ago after a spectacular meltdown at Udinese.

The former Real Madrid striker is only set to return in time for Napoli's final three games of the season, beginning with a home fixture against Atalanta on May 2. By then, the dream of a first scudetto in 26 years could be over for Maurizio Sarri's men, whose shock 3-1 defeat to Udinese two weeks ago left them six points behind leaders Juventus. Juventus are fully expected to stretch their unbeaten run to 23 games against a Palermo side that is in full crisis mode following yet another coaching switch that sees Davide Ballardini return to the Sicilian club.

Defeat for Napoli coupled with a win for Juve would

leave the champions nine points in front with five games to play and virtually secure a fifth consecutive league trophy for the first time since 1935. Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis on Wednesday broke the club's ongoing boycott of the media-following protests at unfair reporting in Italy but only to say: "I haven't received any offers for Higuain." But the mood at the club is said to be defiant ahead of the weekend's top fixture at the San Siro. Inter, in fourth at six points behind third-placed Roma, who hold the final Champions League qualifying spot, have not given up their hopes of reaching Europe's premier club event next season.

'Never easy'

Defender Danilo D'Ambrosio told Mediaset on Thursday: "It'll be a delicate game because they're (Napoli) fighting for top spot and we're aiming for third place. "It's never an easy match-it never has been-but we want to get the result and secure three points." In Higuain's absence, Manolo Gabbiadini hit Napoli's opener in a 3-0 defeat of Verona last week. Ahead of today, they also welcome Senegal defender Kalidou Koulibaly back from injury. While a win for Napoli would keep their faint hopes alive, it could spell the end of Inter's unlikely Champions League bid and give Roma extra incentive for a tough trip to Atalanta.

Roma are unbeaten in 11 games, since a 1-0 defeat to Juventus in late January, but Atalanta-one of Italy's best-supported teams-have won their past two home outings including a shock 2-1 defeat of AC Milan a fortnight ago. A Roma defeat would obviously be welcomed by Inter, but former Roma and Italy defender Vincent Candela believes the capital side can aim even higher and snatch the league's second, automatic Champions League spot from Napoli. "We have to win in Bergamo, no matter what happens with Napoli, and then we'll see what happens," he told RomaTV.

"If Inter win, then it's all down to us. I still believe we can finish second, it would be a great comeback after the difficult start to the campaign." Elsewhere, Cristian Brocchi makes his debut as Milan's new coach following the shock sacking of Sinisa Mihajlovic on Tuesday on a tough trip to Sampdoria. Brocchi, the club's former youth team coach, said he would "do things differently". He may have stolen the idea from Napoli coach Sarri, but he kept to his word by introducing a drone to their training session on Thursday. — AFP



A screen shows the clubs that will be facing each other during the semi-final draw for the UEFA Europa League at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon yesterday. — AFP

LIVERPOOL V VILLARREAL; SEVILLA V SHAKHTAR IN EUROPA SEMIS

NYON: Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool earned a Europa League semi-final against Villarreal from their heroic comeback against his former side Borussia Dortmund. Defending champions Sevilla face Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk in the second semi-final drawn yesterday. Liverpool, who hit back from 2-0 and 3-1 down to beat Borussia 4-3 and progress into the semis 5-4 on aggregate, have never played Villarreal before.

Sevilla ousted fellow Spaniards Athletic Bilbao on penalties in Thursday's quarter-final in their bid to win a third consecutive Europa League. The final is set for Basel, Switzerland, on May 18. The winners will get a place in next season's Champions League group stages. Liverpool are the only unbeaten side left in the competition, and goals from centre-backs Mamadou Sakho and Dejan Lovren completed one of the great Anfield comebacks against Dortmund.

The first leg will be played in Villarreal on April 28, with The Yellow Submarine heading to Merseyside for the return leg on May 5. The Spanish

outfit, currently fourth in La Liga, are looking to reach their maiden major European final, after Europa League last-four defeats in 2004 and 2011 and a Champions League semi-final loss in 2006. In stark contrast, Liverpool are attempting to win their ninth major continental trophy, and in the process, draw level with Sevilla as the competition's record four-time winners. Villarreal have not beaten English opposition in 10 matches, with six draws and four defeats, since beating Liverpool's city rivals Everton in qualifying for the 2005-06 Champions League.

But they will be confident that they can see off the Reds after an excellent season so far, in which they have beaten the likes of Real Madrid and Napoli, and drawn with Barcelona. "We'll try and win the home leg, without conceding an away goal to make it easier. Then we know it will be difficult away," said club representative and former mid-fielder Marcos Senna. "We are happy with the draw. We did not want to meet Sevilla, we want to meet them in the final." — AFP

Italian Serie A table

MILAN: Italian Serie A table ahead of weekend fixtures (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Juventus	32	24	4	4	58	17	76
Napoli	32	21	7	4	66	27	70
Roma	32	18	10	4	67	33	64
Inter Milan	32	17	7	8	42	30	58
Fiorentina	32	16	8	8	51	35	56
AC Milan	32	13	10	9	42	35	49
Sassuolo	32	12	12	8	40	35	48
Lazio	32	12	9	11	42	42	45
Chievo	32	12	8	12	38	40	44
Genoa	32	11	7	14	37	37	40
Empoli	32	10	9	13	36	43	39
Torino	32	10	9	13	41	44	39
Bologna	32	10	7	15	31	37	37
Atalanta	32	9	9	14	31	38	36
Sampdoria	32	9	9	14	46	49	36
Udinese	32	9	7	16	29	48	34
Carpi	32	6	10	16	29	50	28
Palermo	32	7	7	18	29	57	28
Frosinone	32	7	6	19	29	60	27
Verona	32	3	13	16	27	54	22

Note: Top two qualify for Champions League, third place into Champions league qualifying, next two into Europa League.