

## GERMANY HAILS ANCELOTTI

**MUNICH:** The German media poured praise on Carlo Ancelotti's Bayern Munich yesterday after their 5-1 drubbing of Arsenal allowed the Italian to step out of Pep Guardiola's shadow. "Big Bayern", "The Red Rush" and "Respect, Bayern" were the headlines here after the Bundesliga leaders dominated Tuesday's Champions League's last 16, first-leg, clash. Bayern extended their Champions League record run to 16 home wins by putting Arsene Wenger's Arsenal to the sword with three goals in 10 magical second-half minutes. Arjen Robben's early goal was cancelled out by an Alexis Sanchez penalty, converted at the second-attempt, as it finished 1-1 at the break.

Bayern hit top gear in the second-half with attacking midfielder Thiago Alcantara, who's performance Ancelotti dubbed 'perfect', leading the charge with two goals. Robert Lewandowski restored Bayern's lead by out-leaping the Arsenal defense on 53 minutes and 178 seconds later, his flick put Thiago behind the defense to make it 3-1. The Spanish midfielder then banged home, via a deflection, from outside the area to effectively slam the door shut on Arsenal's quarter-finals hopes.

Thomas Mueller simply completed the rout two minutes from time with a fifth goal off the bench. As Bayern captain Philipp Lahm put it, "before the penalty, we were very good, up until half-time we weren't really good, but after that we were sensational." Bild awarded Robben, Lewandowski and Thiago top marks, but arguably the biggest winner was Ancelotti.

Bayern's performance allowed him at least a step out of the shadow of predecessor Guardiola. Bayern raised their game when it mattered, shaking off below-par German league performances to hit top gear. "A horse jumps only as high as it needs to," wrote Munich-based TZ. "Against the Gunners, the Red steed had to leap. And it leapt, like Ancelotti said it would."

Bild pointed out, "Ancelotti has found his first-choice team" with the same line-up which floored nearest challengers RB Leipzig in the Bundesliga last December. Despite scoring, Mueller was a casualty on Bayern's big night. As ex-Germany captain Lothar Matthaeus pointed out, there is no room for misfiring Mueller in Ancelotti's vision for Bayern.



**MUNICH:** Arsenal's French midfielder Francis Coquelin (L) and Arsenal's French headcoach Arsene Wenger (R) speak together during the UEFA Champions League round of sixteen football match between FC Bayern Munich and Arsenal. — AFP

### SOCCER

## PRESSURE PILING ON WENGER AS NEVER BEFORE AFTER LOSS

**LONDON:** "Every good story has an ending. Au revoir Arsene," read the words on a sticker on display in Borehamwood, a commuter town where north London side Arsenal enjoy strong support. That sticker has been on display for several months and the words were positively polite compared to the torrent of criticism Arsene Wenger, Arsenal's manager for over 20 years, faced following the Gunners' humiliating 5-1 loss away to Bayern Munich in the last 16 of the Champions League on Wednesday.

Of course there is still a home leg to come but having seen their side lose in the last 16 in each of the past six seasons, even loyal Arsenal fans will have few hopes of a spectacular reversal of fortune when German giants Bayern arrive at the Emirates on March 7.

This defeat was compounded by a recent shock league loss to Watford and an ensuing, rather more predictable defeat by Chelsea that between them appeared to have scuppered Arsenal's hopes of a first Premier League title since 2004. Veteran manager Wenger, whose contract expires at the end of the season, has always previously appeared defiant in the face of criticism, so much so that some have suggested the best thing for those who want the 67-year-old Frenchman to leave Arsenal is to stay silent.

Yet what might hurt a proud man most was the evident pity behind the comments of those who reckoned his time was up after a Munich mauling where Arsenal, level at the break after Alexis Sanchez cancelled out Arjen Robben's opener, were swept away by goals from Robert Lewandowski and Thomas Muller either side of Thiago's double. "The fact that he hasn't been able to get a response from the players in the last few weeks might be the final straw," former Arsenal defender Lee Dixon told ITV.

### 'Too soft, too naive'

That Wenger was unable to get that "response" was, in the view of many observers, because he had signed too many of the wrong sort of players. "They (Arsenal) have only

two players of stellar quality in Alexis Sanchez, who scored and never stopped trying, and Laurent Koscielny, whose injury early in the second half gave Bayern even more space to plunder goals," wrote Henry Winter, The Times's chief football writer.

Winter added: "Ultimately the real blame lies with Wenger, who has built a squad with too few leaders, too soft, too naive." Wenger, whose ability to speak near flawless English from the moment he arrived at Arsenal in 1996 charmed the media and fans alike, won praise early on for his tactical sophistication, his success paving the way for an influx of foreign managers into the Premier League including bitter rival Jose Mourinho.

But as with many pioneers, there is a sense he has now been overtaken. His repeated insistence that Arsenal could no longer compete with the likes of big-spenders Chelsea and Manchester City because of the cost of their move from Highbury to the Emirates was already looking a thin argument even before 5,000/1 outsiders Leicester won the Premier League title last season.

Wenger's early successes, including domestic league and FA Cup 'Doubles' in 1997/98 and 2001/02, meant he could do no wrong in the eyes of the Arsenal board. Yet even since the takeover by Stan Kroenke in 2011 there has never been a hint of pressure from the Gunners' hierarchy regarding the manager's position.

Indeed Kroenke angered Arsenal fans when he made it clear last year he had no interest in matching the big-spending of City and Chelsea, who've won six Premier League titles between them since 2004, with the US businessman saying: "If you want to win championships then you would never get involved." For the time being, Wenger's future appears to be in his own hands. But when his most loyal supporters such as former goalkeeping coach Bob Wilson and the man between the posts during Arsenal's 1970/1 'Double' season, say even Wenger "can only take so much", perhaps the writing is on more than just a sticker. — AFP

## FA POST 360M TURNOVER DESPITE ENGLAND FLOP

**LONDON:** England's Euro 2016 campaign may have ended in a humiliating defeat by Iceland but that did not stop the national governing Football Association making a record £370 million (\$462 million, 435 million euros) turnover during the 2015/16 season. Figures released by the FA on Thursday in its accounts for the year to July 31, 2016 showed it made a profit of £7 million after tax, having lost £9 million in 2015.

Turnover was up £52 million to £370 million, allowing the FA to invest £125 million in the domestic game. Tournament years for the men's national side generally produce greater sponsorship and marketing revenue, with the figures published yesterday also a reflection of job cuts made by the FA and the refinancing of Wembley, the national stadium in London, and the St George's Park training centre. "We are delighted to be in such strong financial health," said FA chief executive Martin Glenn in a statement. "The FA is for all and this allows us to invest even more money than ever before back into every level of our national game." He added: "At the end of 2016 we announced key commercial deals, including the international broadcast rights for the Emirates FA Cup and the new 12-year deal with Nike, which means the FA is extremely well positioned to support English football for the foreseeable future."

The combined worth of the Nike kit deal and the overseas TV rights for the FA Cup will be nearly £170 million, but those agreements do not start until 2018. But all the encouraging financial figures will not ease the pressure on the FA, under fire for both the performance of the men's side and its own governance. Roy Hodgson quit as manager after England's Euro 2016 exit, with his successor Sam Allardyce overseeing just one game before stepping down in September as a result of incautious comments to undercover Daily Telegraph reporters. Meanwhile Britain's sports minister, Tracey Crouch, has threatened to withdraw millions of pounds in public funding for grassroots football from the FA if it does not reform its unwieldy governance structure. —AFP