

Tottenham knock Arsenal out of League Cup; Alli hit by bottle

Hazard fires Chelsea into League Cup semi-finals

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino called for Arsenal to take “responsibility” after Tottenham star Dele Alli was hit by a bottle thrown from the crowd during his side’s 2-0 League Cup quarter-final win on Wednesday. South Korea forward Son Heung-Min put Tottenham ahead and Alli increased their advantage as they won at the Emirates Stadium for the first time in 10 visits dating back to 2010. The England midfielder’s decisive contribution provoked a disgraceful reaction from an Arsenal fan, who threw a plastic bottle that struck Alli on the back of the head in the 73rd minute. Alli rubbed his head but appeared unharmed as he responded by gesturing towards the Arsenal fans to indicate the scoreline.

“It is what it is. It made the goal even sweeter, and the win,” Alli said with a smile. But Tottenham manager Pochettino wasn’t so sanguine about the missile throwing and demanded Arsenal find the “stupid person”. “Yes I saw. When we play a derby we hate each other in a good way, but that looks in a bad way when you want to damage some people,” he said. “One stupid person made a mistake. I respect the Arsenal fans. I hope that Arsenal take some responsibility. “Through the camera you can identify. It wasn’t a problem but it could be a big issue. I think they will identify the people.”

There also appeared to be other objects thrown by Arsenal supporters into the section occupied by Tottenham’s fans as the atmosphere turned toxic. The shocking incidents came after a Tottenham fan was banned for four years after being found guilty of throwing a banana skin at Arsenal’s Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang when the teams met in an acrimonious

clash earlier this month. It continued a worrying trend of fan behavior after the recent alleged racist abuse of Manchester City’s Raheem Sterling by a Chelsea supporter.

Arsenal are scanning CCTV to find the culprit and Gunners boss Unai Emery condemned the incident, saying: “If there is one situation like this, it is not good behavior.” The unsavoury issues in the stands took the gloss off a mature Tottenham performance that underlined why Pochettino has been installed as the bookmakers’ favorite to succeed the sacked Jose Mourinho as Manchester United’s next permanent manager. Pochettino has yet to win a major trophy in his four-year reign at Tottenham, or in his previous jobs at Espanyol and Southampton.

But if the 46-year-old does take charge of United at the end of the season, once Ole Gunnar Solskjaer finishes his spell as interim boss, he remains in with a chance of leaving with silverware back in the Tottenham trophy cabinet. Tottenham have not won a major prize since lifting the League Cup in 2008 and they will face London rivals Chelsea over two legs for a place in the final. Eden Hazard came off the bench to score Chelsea’s 84th-minute winner in their 1-0 victory against Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge. “Chelsea is a great team and it’s going to be very tough but we are excited,” Pochettino said. In the other semi-final, holders Manchester City take on third-tier Burton.

THRILLING SPURS

Against the run of play, Tottenham gave a thrilling glimpse of their class as they snatched the

departure earlier this season when Bayern were suffering from a dip in form. With Dortmund facing in-form Gladbach on Friday, Bayern can hope to make up further lost ground. “It is important to use such chances (from Dortmund’s defeat),” said Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. “Six points are still a lot but what will be important is the points we may get in Frankfurt.”

Kovac has some concerns with wingers Kingsley Coman and Serge Gnabry picking up injuries on Wednesday and injured defender Jerome Boateng still doubtful for Saturday’s encounter. Gnabry had to be taken off with a muscle injury after 28 minutes. “We will have to see with Serge what the tests show. Hopefully there is nothing damaged in terms of muscle.” Dortmund’s shock loss against promoted Fortuna Duesseldorf has rattled the leaders who are also almost out of central defenders for the game against Gladbach. Scoring goals has been no problem for Dortmund this season. But Gladbach are almost equally efficient up front, with the league’s second best attack, and Dortmund are missing injured defenders Manuel Akanji, Abdou Diallo and Dan-Axel Zagadou. Under-23 player Amos Pieper was brought in to train with the team on Wednesday but coach Lucien Favre has not yet decided on his backline. “He (Pieper) is an option,” Dortmund coach Lucien Favre said. “But we are still thinking about all of it. I cannot tell you yet how we will play.” “It was bound to happen,” Favre said of the defeat. “It was just a game. We must now be thinking only of Friday now. We hate losing.” —Reuters



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur’s English striker Harry Kane (left) and Arsenal’s French defender Laurent Koscielny (right) battle for the ball during the English League Cup quarter-final football match between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur on December 19, 2018. —AFP

lead with a lethal counter-attack in the 21st minute. When Lucas Moura’s aerial challenge deflected the ball into Alli’s path, the Tottenham midfielder instinctively clipped a superb pass over the Arsenal defense. Son anticipated the delivery with a perfectly-timed run behind the flat-footed Nacho Monreal and kept his nerve to slot a fine finish past Petr Cech. Aaron Ramsey was inches away from equalising when he met Alex Iwobi’s cross with a volley that cannoned back off a post.

Arsenal’s profligacy proved costly as Pochettino’s

men turned up the heat after half-time. Pochettino went for the kill as he sent on Harry Kane for his first appearance in the tournament since 2015. It was an inspired move as Kane played a key role in Tottenham’s second goal in the 59th minute. When Cech miskicked a clearance straight to Kane, the Tottenham striker floated a superb pass to Alli, who beat the off-side trap before clipping a majestic finish over the Arsenal keeper. Just 17 days after Arsenal’s 4-2 Premier League win against Pochettino’s team, this was a welcome early Christmas present for Tottenham. —AFP

Rejuvenated Bayern promise nail-biting yearender

MUNICH: Only a few weeks ago Borussia Dortmund looked unbeatable in the Bundesliga, with champions Bayern Munich languishing in sixth place and seemingly out of title contention. But with the final matchday of the year ahead of the winter break looming this weekend, rejuvenated Bayern could now move to within three points of the leaders, with a win at Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday. The Bavarians, who edged past RB Leipzig 1-0 on Wednesday, have now won their last four league matches, and are level on 33 points with second-placed Borussia Muenchengladbach. Dortmund, who on Tuesday suffered their first league loss of the season, are top on 39. “We used Dortmund’s assist to close in,” Bayern coach Niko Kovac told reporters.

“We showed a will to win against Leipzig. Now we must again use all our power on Saturday and get the three points in (Eintracht) Frankfurt,” he said of the first league meeting against his former club. Kovac has every right to be brimming with confidence given he was teetering on the brink of

Suarez and Messi rekindling magic

BARCELONA: It took Barcelona forwards Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez time to adjust to the loss of their third musketeer Neymar but they have forged on as a fearsome double act more prolific than the combined efforts of most other teams in La Liga. With Messi the top scorer in Spain’s top flight with 14 goals and Suarez joint-second on 11, only Sevilla, Levante and next opponents Celta Vigo have managed to score more than the deadly South American duo. Messi has come into his own in his last two outings, putting on an exhibition of free kick taking against Espanyol and ripping Levante apart in last week’s 5-0 thrashing with a hat-trick and two assists. Suarez, who endured a long goal drought last season as he struggled without the space Neymar’s dazzling runs used to open up for him, has rediscovered the sharpness which led to him scoring a remarkable 40 league goals in the 2015/16 campaign.

He broke the deadlock against Levante by volleying in a Messi cross and also struck against Espanyol, two of seven goals he has scored in his last six league outings, including a hat-trick against Real Madrid. “Luis and Leo are the best strike partnership in the world right now,” said Barca’s Gerard

Pique last week. “Luis has goals in his veins and we’ve already said everything about Leo. We have a lot of firepower up front.” The strikers’ combined 25 goals, more than half of Barca’s haul this season, have helped lift the Catalans three points clear of Sevilla and Atletico Madrid at the top of the standings and five ahead of Real Madrid.

Ernesto Valverde’s side will expect to preserve that gap after tomorrow’s game with Celta, typically tough opponents at their Balaidos stadium but who usually bring the best out of Barca, and particularly Messi and Suarez, at the Nou Camp. It was against Celta when Messi audaciously passed to Suarez to score from a penalty in a 6-1 thumping in 2016 in which the Uruguayan scored a hat-trick, while Messi struck twice in 5-0 thrashings of the Galicians in the league and Copa del Rey in the last two years.

Even when Celta managed to hold Barca to a 2-2 draw at the Nou Camp last December, Messi and Suarez both scored. Celta sacked manager Antonio Mohamed earlier this season and have shown signs of improvement under Miguel Cardoso, rising to ninth in the standings. Second-placed Sevilla visit Leganes on Sunday, while Atletico Madrid, rocked by reports that Bayern Munich have paid the release clause of their World Cup winning defender Lucas Hernandez, host Espanyol tomorrow. Real Madrid could lose ground as they are playing Al Ain in the final of FIFA’s Club World Cup tomorrow. —Reuters