

## Sports

# Balotelli posts goal celebration video on social media mid-match

## Lyon thrash Toulouse to strengthen grip on top-three spot

PARIS: Mario Balotelli showed off a new goal celebration on Sunday as he took a selfie video with his Marseille teammates and posted it on social media during their 2-0 win over Saint-Etienne. The Italian scored his fourth goal in six Ligue 1 games since joining Marseille from Nice in January by hooking home Florian Thauvin's 12th-minute corner with an excellent acrobatic volley.

"Balotelli takes the pressure, he takes the limelight. He reminds me of (Zlatan) Ibrahimovic and he scored an Ibrahimovic goal," said Saint-Etienne coach Jean-Louis Gasset. "He has brought back the public, the confidence, and many of his teammates will raise their level of play."

As he celebrated his volley, Balotelli took a phone from the cameraman behind the goal before filming the video with his laughing teammates and posting it on his Instagram story. The 28-year-old then carried on playing. He was not the first player to produce a selfie-based celebration, after Roma great Francesco Totti took a picture of himself after scoring against Lazio in the capital-city derby in 2015. Marseille doubled their advantage nine minutes later through a Thauvin penalty and closed out the win with ease.

Rudi Garcia's men have now taken 13 points from their last five league matches to leapfrog Saint-Etienne into fourth, just five points adrift of Lyon in the race for the third and final Champions League spot.

Earlier on Sunday, Moussa Dembele scored twice as Lyon thrashed Toulouse 5-1 to strengthen their grip on a top-three spot. Bruno Gensio's Lyon, who are also through to the French Cup semi-finals and claimed a 0-0 first-leg draw in the Champions League last 16 against Barcelona, continued their strong season by moving six points clear of fourth-placed Saint-Etienne.

"Often this season, we haven't been calm under pressure, but against Toulouse it was a good match," said Lyon captain Nabil Fekir, whose 21-year-old younger brother Yassin made his Ligue 1 debut as a 79th-minute substitute.

"Playing with my brother was a huge pleasure." The home side took less than 10 minutes to break the deadlock at the Groupama Stadium as Memphis Depay fired home a wonderful individual goal.

Mathieu Dossevi levelled for Toulouse on the quarter-hour mark, but the visitors folded after Bertrand Traore restored Lyon's advantage in the 30th minute. Nabil Fekir netted a penalty five minutes later, and former Celtic striker Dembele compounded Toulouse's misery in the second half.

He powered through the pitiful away defence midway through the second period and slotted a left-footed shot into the corner, before tapping in his 13th goal of the season shortly afterwards from Fekir's low cross.

Traore also had another goal ruled out by VAR for offside, while Toulouse finished the game with 10 men as former Bastia midfielder Yannick Cahuzac was sent off for the 11th time in his Ligue 1 career.

### LILLE SEE OFF DIJON

Lille remain second behind Paris Saint-Germain after Christophe Galtier's men claimed a narrow 1-0 win over struggling Dijon. With PSG still 17 points clear at the top with a game in hand, Lille are well-placed to secure a return to the Champions League group stage for the first time since 2012.

Dijon, who remain five points from safety in 19th spot, made life tough for Lille at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy until Wesley Lautoa put through his own net in the 72nd minute. "We will continue to work to be able



MARSEILLE: Marseille's Italian forward Mario Balotelli (R) vies with Saint-Etienne's French defender Timothee Kolodziejczak during the French L1 football match between Olympique de Marseille and AS Saint-Etienne at the Velodrome Stadium in Marseille, southern France on Sunday. — AFP

to hold off the teams who want to take our place, qualifying for the Champions League is a dream we will try to achieve," said Lille forward Rui Fonte.

Elsewhere, Patrick Vieira's Nice boosted their hopes

of qualifying for next season's Europa League as Youcef Atal's 20th-minute strike was enough to see off Strasbourg 1-0. Nice are seventh in the table, four points adrift of Marseille. — AFP

## Reus urges Dortmund to write history against Spurs

DORTMUND: Marco Reus has called on Borussia Dortmund to write history today as the Bundesliga leaders attempt to turn around their Champions League tie at home to Tottenham Hotspur. After losing 3-0 to Spurs at Wembley in the first leg of the last 16, Dortmund face a monumental task against Mauricio Pochettino's team at Signal Iduna Park in the return fixture. Only three clubs, Barcelona, Roma and Deportivo La Coruna, have ever managed to progress in the Champions League knockout phases after losing the first leg by three goals or more. "I think there have already been some games in

the stadium where history has been written - we can do it," said Reus, Dortmund's top-scorer and captain who missed the first leg with injury.

"But we need a top performance and have to score at the right moment." Dortmund will be at near full strength, with only wing-back Lukasz Piszczek sidelined by injury. Spurs were the last team to win a Champions League game at Dortmund, in November 2017, when Son Heung-min and Harry Kane scored in a 2-1 group stage victory.

After Reus' defiant words, Dortmund head coach Lucien Favre offered a more modest perspective. "We know that it's going to be difficult, but you never know," said Favre. Signal Iduna Park has seen some big nights in Europe, most recently when Atletico Madrid were routed 4-0 in the group stage last October.

And no Borussia fan could forget Poland striker Robert Lewandowski, now at Bayern Munich, scoring all of Dortmund's goals when Real Madrid were routed 4-1 in the semi-finals in 2013. However, the home side

must bounce back from a dreadful run of results to have any chance of overhauling Spurs.

Having crashed to a shock 2-1 defeat at strugglers Augsburg in the Bundesliga on Friday, Dortmund have just one win in seven games. After four weeks out with a thigh injury, Reus says he is ready, and could even play the full 120 minutes if they force extra time.

"I feel good, it was clear I wouldn't play the 90 minutes against Augsburg," said Reus, who managed 66 minutes in Friday's defeat. "But we'll see how tomorrow goes, I am ready - ready to go for the 120 minutes."

Having been nine points ahead of Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga in December, Dortmund's lead has eroded and Bayern drew level on 54 points at the weekend. Dortmund only top the table on goal difference, but a win over Spurs-regardless of whether the Germans progress-would be a huge boost to confidence.

"We are very dissatisfied with the current results," said Reus. "We have to show more of our mentality and then we'll get out (of the current low) again." —AFP

## England bids farewell to WCup-winning keeper Banks

STOKE-ON-TRENT: Crowds of mourning fans joined luminaries of English football for a final farewell yesterday to Gordon Banks, a steelworker's son who became one of the world's greatest goalkeepers and will be remembered for his miraculous save against Pele.

Team mates from England's 1966 World Cup win and members of former clubs Stoke City and Leicester came to join a cortege from the Stoke stadium to the funeral for Banks who died aged 81 last month. "He was so humble, honest to God, he didn't really understand what he had achieved in life and why people made such a fuss of him," friend Terry Conroy, who starred with Banks and scored in Stoke's 1972 League Cup win, told Reuters.

Banks was best known for the stunning one-handed save from a Pele bullet header that bounced awkwardly in front of him during England's group-stage game against Brazil at the 1970 World Cup. "With the luck of the gods, the angle at which I'd managed to lift that ball was perfect, and it ballooned in the air and over the bar," the genial Banks said in one of the many recountings begged by fans and media. Footage shows Banks chuckling afterwards, as England's Bobby Moore jokingly chides him for not catching the ball. His achievements went far further than stopping Pele. Banks won 73 national caps, played nearly 500 times for Leicester and Stoke and won two League Cups, before a car crash blinded him in one eye. He remained in Stoke, a former mining and pottery city, where he would watch games, attend charity events and take a weekly walk round Trentham Gardens. "He donated his tie to a charity event I was involved in and we raised 200 pounds (\$265.56). Such a gentleman," reminisced Phillip Steele, 76, next to a statue of Banks at the hilltop stadium decked in flags, scarves and flowers.

Some 2,000 fans were at the Bet365 stadium to watch



STOKE-ON-TRENT: A statue of Stoke City and England's former goalkeeper Gordon Banks is pictured draped in scarves to honour England's World Cup winning goalkeeper, outside the Bet365 stadium in Stoke-on-Trent, central England yesterday, ahead of his funeral. — AFP

proceedings on a big screen. Others lined the route of the funeral procession, which was to stop outside the old Victoria Ground where Banks plied his trade before ending at Stoke minster for a religious service.

Goalkeepers Jack Butland, Joe Hart and Kasper Schmeichel were to be pall-bearers. Fellow World Cup winners Bobby Charlton and Geoff Hurst were also expected. In a largely working-class city obsessed with football, Banks was viewed as a reminder of simpler days before the Premier League's mega-millions.

Everyone had their favourite save. "Mine was a penalty he stopped against Geoff Hurst at Stoke's 1972 League Cup semi-final at West Ham," Conroy said. "If he hadn't saved that, we wouldn't have been in the final and won our first trophy in more than 100 years."

certainly wrapped up an eighth straight title for the unbeaten Turin giants who have 72 points out of a possible 78 with 12 games left.

Juventus raced into a 2-0 halftime lead after Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret was sent off in the 25th minute. The visitors then had Pjanic dismissed and Napoli's Jose Callejon pulled one back before Insigne let the Turin side off the hook.

The game hinged on an incident in the 25th minute when Napoli fullback Kevin Malcuit's back pass was intercepted by Cristiano Ronaldo, forcing Meret to come out of his penalty area and lunge at the Portuguese forward who went to ground.

The referee awarded a straight red card without reviewing the incident on the pitchside monitor. Replays, though, suggested that, although Ronaldo had to jump

over Meret's outstretched leg, no contact was made.

"The rules, as I understand them, say that Meret should be sent off whether he makes contact or not," said Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri. "The referee decided, as did the video assistant."

However, Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti said the referee should have seen the replay himself. "The game was influenced by a controversial decision - did Meret touch him or not, which direction was the ball going? It would have been easier if the referee had looked on the monitor, given that it is there," he said.

Meret's dismissal meant Napoli striker Arkadiusz Milik was sacrificed and replaced by substitute keeper David Ospina, whose first job was to pick the ball out of the net as Pjanic scored from the resulting free kick after 28 minutes. — Reuters



### Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
Borussia Dortmund v Tottenham Hotspur	23:00	beIN SPORTS HD 2
Real Madrid CF v Ajax Amsterdam	23:00	beIN SPORTS HD 1
FRENCH LEAGUE		
FC Girondins de Bordeaux v Montpellier HSC	21:00	beIN SPORTS HD 6

## 'Chaos' in Chinese football as new signings barred

SHANGHAI: Moves to boost Chinese football by introducing naturalised players have been thrown into disarray after clubs were ordered not to pick several new signings from abroad. China has previously resisted the naturalisation policies followed by other countries but the Chinese Football Association opened the door to foreign-born players of Chinese descent at the end of last season.

The change in approach could eventually bolster a national squad that is sorely lacking international-class players and has qualified for the World Cup only once, in 2002. However, four trumpeted new arrivals failed to take the field, with domestic media saying they had been barred for the first two games of the Chinese Super League season. "As for the specific reason, none of the parties responded publicly," the Beijing Youth Daily said last week. "It is reported that the Chinese Football Association has previously drafted a rule for guiding the legitimate naturalisation and deploying the naturalised players."

"However, until now, this rule has not been officially announced." The Shanghai Observer said there was confusion among the clubs over the naturalisation policy, leading to "complete disorder" and "chaos".

Beijing Guoan signed Norwegian-born John Hou Saeter and former England youth international Nico Yennaris during the January-February transfer window, saying it hoped they would eventually play for China.

Both have Chinese mothers, with former Arsenal midfielder Yennaris tweeting that it was "an exciting opportunity for me to play in the birth country of my mother and grandparents". Yet neither was involved in Friday's opening-day 1-0 win at Wuhan Zall, despite the 21-year-old Saeter coming on as a substitute the previous week in the Super Cup, the season's curtain-raiser.

Saeter, now known as Hou Yongyong, and Yennaris (now Li Ke) travelled to Wuhan but were not included in the squad at the 11th hour, Beijing Youth Daily said. Also missing from the first round of CSL matches was Gabon-born Alexander N'Doumbou, the former Marseille midfielder signed last month by Shanghai Shenhua and who also goes by the name Qian Jiegei. Defender Tyias Browning, the former England youth international who recently joined Guangzhou Evergrande from Everton, also failed to appear for his new club. Browning reportedly has a Chinese grandfather and Evergrande previously said they were in the process of having him naturalised.

Naturalisation is an attractive proposition for clubs because they are restricted to starting a maximum of three overseas players each game. But there are hints of disquiet over the initiative. Chen Xuyuan, chairman of CSL champions Shanghai SIPG, said naturalisation was tantamount to taking "a short-cut". "Personally, I'm not very fond of the idea of buying too many naturalised players," Chen said last week, vowing instead to focus on developing players from SIPG's youth ranks. "But if a player is of Chinese descent, he can still be developed," Chen added. Some football observers and fans online said it was more evidence of muddled thinking at the CFA, which regularly comes under fire for its running of the game. — AFP

## Juve win after two sent off, Napoli miss late penalty

NAPLES: Serie A leaders Juventus held on to win 2-1 at Napoli in a stormy top-of-the-table clash on Sunday which saw both teams have a player sent off and Lorenzo Insigne miss a late penalty for the hosts.

The win, courtesy of goals from Miralem Pjanic and Emre Can, took Juve 16 points clear of Napoli and almost