

14 Rugby ex-internationals to take legal action over brain injuries



15 Kuwait's League roundup: Qadisiya overpower Nasr



15 Jackson lifts Ravens over Cowboys in NFL matchup



Man United exit Champions League

Racism row interrupts PSG game; Juventus crush troubled Barcelona

The Bottom Line

No to racism



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A UEFA Champions League match between Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir Tuesday night was interrupted when players of both teams walked out of the field in protest against a racist remark that the fourth official allegedly made against a member of the Turkish side's coaching staff. The incident sparked outrage worldwide: the hashtag #notoracism quickly became the number one trending topic on Twitter following the incident on a night when European football giants Juventus and Barcelona were also playing a decisive match.

While this incident can be described as the latest episode of a racism problem that has plagued European football in recent years, what makes it even more outrageous this time is that unlike previous cases where racist comments were usually made by fans or players against opposing team members, the alleged racist remark on Tuesday was made by a referee that UEFA selected to officiate a high-profile match in the final round of the group stage of Europe's biggest annual football competition.

The Romanian fourth official, Sebastian Coltescu, appeared to describe Basaksehir's assistant coach Pierre Webo, a former Cameroon international player, as "black". He can be heard saying in Romanian: "The black one over there. This is not possible. Go and identify him. That guy, the black one," in reference to Webo. Basaksehir's Senegalese forward Demba Ba, who was sitting on the bench, could later be heard remonstrating with the official in English, saying: "When you mention a white guy, you never say 'this white guy', you just say 'this guy', so why when you mention a black guy do you say 'this black guy?'"

UEFA has promised a 'thorough investigation' into the matter, but it's safe to say that the latest case has dealt a huge blow to its efforts not only to eliminate racism from the sport, but also to prove that they have been taking serious steps to fight this problem. Giving the referee the benefit of doubt would be illogical - it is impossible to assume he would not recognize that the term he uttered wouldn't be taken as a major offense in today's interconnected world.

It wasn't too long ago when many athletes took a strong stand against racism, as Black Lives Matter protests flared around the world after the death of George Floyd during his arrest in Minneapolis in May. A football referee would have to be aware of that, as well as the negative connotations of his reckless choice of words.

But putting most of the blame on the referee would be wrong. UEFA follows strict standards when selecting the officiating teams for matches held under its umbrella. If the recent incident is any indication, it is proof that European football's governing body needs to start by upgrading those standards to make sure its representatives have zero racist backgrounds, and also possess the basic understanding of what behavior and language are considered racially offensive in a hyper-globalized world.

Among the widespread criticism of the incident - from players, football analysts and fans alike, there were still some remarks that unfortunately tried to downplay the event, saying that the referee made an 'honest mistake'. But what happened Tuesday night is bigger than just one incident. It brought into the spotlight an underlying racism problem that still causes severe injustices against minorities in Europe. Yet, there are many people - inside and outside Europe - who still don't see the huge racism problem that the continent suffers from as a big issue. Therefore, it is necessary that UEFA takes strict action that matches the severity of this problem.

Otherwise, it would send a message that fighting racism is still not a priority: a message that will transcend the boundaries of sports. Sport has historically been a place that brought people together regardless of race, religion or any other social category. The most recent incident shows there is still a long way to go to make sure it remains that way. Let us hope that UEFA takes a step in the right direction.



LEIPZIG: Leipzig's Dutch forward Justin Kluivert scores the 3-0 goal past Manchester United's Spanish goalkeeper David de Gea during the UEFA Champions League Group H football match RB Leipzig v Manchester United in Leipzig, eastern Germany, on December 8, 2020. — AFP

PARIS: Manchester United were knocked out of the Champions League after a 3-2 defeat by RB Leipzig on Tuesday, while Paris Saint-Germain's qualification for the last 16 was overshadowed by a racism row involving a match official that caused their game against Istanbul Basaksehir to be suspended for 24 hours. Cristiano Ronaldo scored two penalties as Juventus blew away Lionel Messi's struggling Barcelona 3-0 to wrest first place in Group G away from the Spanish giants.

Lazio also secured a spot in the knockout rounds for the first time in two decades following a tense 2-2 draw at home to Club Brugge in the pouring rain in Rome. Requiring just a point to advance, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side fell behind to an Angelino goal inside two minutes in Germany. Amadou Haidara soon added a second and United and were trailing 3-0 heading into the final quarter after a Justin Kluivert strike.

Bruno Fernandes's penalty and a deflected Paul Pogba header gave United a lifeline but Leipzig, who reached the semi-finals last term, held on to move top of Group H on 12 points. "We started too late. We showed great spirit to come back again, but you can't give a team a 3-0 lead and expect to come back," said Solskjaer.

Leipzig must wait until Wednesday to find out whether they finish first or second in the section, after the contest between last season's runners-up PSG and Turkish champions Basaksehir was interrupted with the score 0-0 in the 14th minute. Players walked off in Paris amid allegations of racism by the fourth official, in an unprecedented incident in European football's elite club competition. The row erupted after Basaksehir assistant coach Pierre Webo, the former Cameroon international, was shown a red card during a fierce row on the touchline with staff from the Turkish club appearing to accuse the official of using a racist term.

Television microphones picked up a furious Webo repeatedly asking why a racist term had been used to describe him. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he "strongly" condemned the incident, while UEFA announced it would open a "thorough investigation". In a statement, UEFA confirmed the game would, "on an exceptional basis", restart from where it was stopped on Wednesday at 1755 GMT, "with a new team of match officials". PSG, who advanced following United's loss, will claim top spot with victory.

Moukoko enters record books

Andrea Pirlo's Juventus avenged a 2-0 home loss to Barcelona in October when Ronaldo was



PARIS: Istanbul Basaksehir's French forward Demba Ba (right) gestures past Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar (left) and Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe after the game was suspended amid allegations of racism by one of the match officials during the UEFA Champions League on December 8, 2020. — AFP

sidelined with COVID-19, edging their opponents on head-to-head record and heaping more pressure on Ronald Koeman. "We're very happy. We knew it was almost mission impossible (to come top)," Ronaldo told Movistar. "It was a difficult task but we played well. The key was to start the match well and from there we saw it was possible."

Weston McKennie scored in between Ronaldo's two spot-kicks at the Camp Nou as Barca, off to their worst La Liga start in 33 years, were denied a sixth win from six in Europe. "Frankly, I was surprised at how we started, as if we weren't really hungry to win the match," said Koeman. Denys Popov's header earned Dynamo Kiev a 1-0 victory over their former star Serhiy Rebrov and Ferencvaros in the group's other game, offering them a place in the Europa League.

Borussia Dortmund striker Youssoufa Moukoko, aged 16 years and 18 days, became the

youngest player in Champions League history as he came off the bench in a 2-1 victory away to Zenit Saint Petersburg. Cameroon-born Moukoko, who made his European debut as a 58th-minute substitute in Russia, broke the previous record of Celestine Babayaro, who was 16 years and 87 days when he played for Anderlecht in November 1994.

Dortmund, who had already qualified for the last 16, equalized within minutes of Moukoko's introduction, with Lukasz Piszczek cancelling out Sebastian Driussi's first-half goal before Axel Witsel scored the winner. Jorginho spared Chelsea's blushes as his penalty rescued a 1-1 draw against Krasnodar in Group E following Remy Cabella's opener in London. Frank Lampard's side were already assured of finishing top, while goals from Jules Kounde and two Youssef En-Nesyri eased Sevilla to a 3-1 victory at Rennes. — AFP