

14 Fall of All Blacks? Defeats pile pressure on coach and captain



15 Sounders roll on; Nashville, New England record upsets



15 SCC Divas shaking up Hong Kong's sleepy cricket scene



Juventus, Chelsea, Sevilla book last 16

Barca stroll into last 16 after thrashing Dynamo Kiev



RENNES: Rennes' French forward Sehrou Guirassy (2nd right) scores his team's first goal during the UEFA Champions League Group E football match between Stade Rennais FC and Chelsea FC on November 24, 2020. —AFP

PARIS: Juventus, Chelsea and Sevilla all claimed last-gasp wins as they qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday, while Martin Braithwaite grabbed a double in Barcelona's 4-0 victory at Dynamo Kiev as they also secured a place in the knockout rounds. They are the first teams to make it out of the group stage, doing so with two games to spare, on a night which saw Erling Braut Haaland, Neymar, Cristiano Ronaldo and Bruno Fernandes all get among the goals.

There was no Lionel Messi for Barcelona, with the Argentine rested for the trip to Ukraine, but Ronald Koeman's side got the job done to make it four wins from four in Group G. All the goals came in the second half, with Sergino Dest opening the scoring before Danish striker Braithwaite added another and then converted a penalty to make it 3-0.

On as a substitute, Antoine Griezmann wrapped up the win on the night young centre-back Oscar Mingueza, Brazilian midfielder Matheus Fernandes and teenage American winger Konrad de la Fuente were all blooded in the first team. "We've achieved our objective," said Koeman. "We looked hungry and scored four goals. Important players were able to rest and

the youngsters deserved their minutes."

Morata, Giroud strike late

Juventus joined Barcelona in qualifying from Group G but the Italian champions needed a stoppage-time header by substitute Alvaro Morata to beat Ferencvaros 2-1 in Turin and seal their progress. Albanian international Myrto Uzuni put the Hungarians ahead but Ronaldo drilled in the equaliser before half-time, meaning he has scored in 15 consecutive Champions League seasons.

Chelsea are through from Group E after edging Rennes 2-1 in France, with Olivier Giroud coming off the bench to head in an injury-time winner. Serhou Guirassy had cancelled out Callum Hudson-Odoi's breakaway opener. Last season's Europa League winners Sevilla will not get to defend their trophy as they advanced to the last 16 of Europe's elite club competition and did so with a 2-1 win over Krasnodar in Russia, in a rare game played before a sizeable crowd.

Ivan Rakitic's drilled strike put the Spaniards in front only for the Brazilian Wanderson to equalize, but Munir El Haddadi won it for Sevilla five minutes into added time. Sevilla and Chelsea are level

on 10 points but Frank Lampard's side go to Spain next week, when the winner will secure top spot. Manchester United are in pole position in Group H after a first-half Fernandes brace set them on their way to a 4-1 victory over Istanbul Basaksehir that made up for a 2-1 defeat in Turkey last time out.

The opener by Fernandes was a thunderous strike from outside the box, while the second was a tap-in after a horrible error by Mert Gunok in the away goal. Marcus Rashford added a penalty, but there was a fightback from the away side, with Deniz Turuc's free-kick crossing the line before David de Gea could claw it away. Edin Visca crashed a shot off the bar, but Daniel James made sure of the victory on the counter-attack. "It's a Champions League night at Old Trafford, you'd expect them to enjoy themselves," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said of his team. "We scored some very nice goals, I'm pleased."

Haaland's frightening record

Solskjaer's side are three points clear of both Paris Saint-Germain and RB Leipzig, after an early Neymar penalty gave the French side a 1-0 win over their



KIEV: Barcelona's German goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen warms up before the UEFA Champions League group G football match between Dynamo Kiev and Barcelona on November 24, 2020. —AFP

German visitors. PSG go to Old Trafford next week. Borussia Dortmund need just one more point to qualify from Group F following a 3-0 win over Club Brugge as the prolific Haaland netted twice either side of a Jadon Sancho free-kick in Germany.

Haaland has 16 goals for the season, and has now scored 16 Champions League goals in just 12 appearances. Messi had two goals and Ronaldo none

after the same number of appearances. "Erling is a fantastic player. He works hard on and off the pitch and he deserves everything that's coming his way," said Sancho. In the group's other game Ciro Immobile was on target twice, including from a penalty, as Lazio beat Zenit Saint-Petersburg 3-1 in Rome, a result which eliminated the Russians. Marco Parolo also netted for Lazio, with Artem Dzyuba scoring for Zenit. —AFP

Rivals to play in Arab tournament in Qatar

DOHA: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt will compete in the 22-nation Arab Cup tournament in Qatar in 2021, despite their political and economic boycott of Doha, FIFA said Tuesday. The competition, to be staged from December 1 to December 18, 2021, will be vital for Qatar to test key infrastructure ahead of the 2022 World Cup, opportunities for which have been limited by the coronavirus crisis.

"We are delighted that all 22 teams from across the Arab world have agreed to take part in the FIFA Arab Cup 2021, which will be held in FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums, and we are looking forward to seeing the region's best teams battle it out," said FIFA President Gianni Infantino in a statement. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, along with Bahrain which will also participate, abruptly broke off ties with Qatar in 2017 over their claims that Doha was supporting radical Islamist movements and backed Iran, denied by Qatar.

In 2017 the three Gulf countries opposed to Qatar boycotted a regional tournament due to be held in Doha, only participating after the venue was switched to Kuwait. However in 2019, the countries agreed to participate in the same competition in Qatar, reversing an earlier decision to stay away. Time to stage large-scale test events ahead of 2022 is running out. Qatar's delayed Education City stadium launched on June 15, not with a major test fixture but with a virtual inauguration and has yet to host a public match.

Of the eight grounds Qatar will use for 2022, only the new Al-Janoub stadium, inaugurated in May 2019, the refurbished Al-Khalifa International venue, and Education City have so far hosted major public fixtures. The Qatar Airways International Cup, a mini tournament of four European nations planned as a warm-up for Euro 2020, had been scheduled for late March but also fell victim to COVID-19. Qatar will host the coronavirus-delayed Club World Cup from February 1 to 11, 2021. —AFP

Guardiola, Klopp welcome COVID-19 fan-return plan

LONDON: Pep Guardiola and Jurgen Klopp on Tuesday welcomed the UK government's decision to allow fans back into stadiums, a move described by the English Football League chief as a "lifeline" for smaller clubs. Lower-league clubs, who do not enjoy the TV riches of the Premier League, have been struggling to make ends meet, with supporters shut out during the coronavirus pandemic. But under plans unveiled on Monday, up to 4,000 people will be able to return to outdoor sports stadiums, depending on levels of Covid-19 in the area, from December 2.

Manchester City boss Guardiola welcomed the potential limited return of fans. "If they believe it is the best, we will do it and hopefully it will work," he said. "If the government has decided, they must have listened to the scientists and doctors." Liverpool manager Klopp also welcomed the development, but said he had questions about the logic being applied to the numbers involved. "The

problem is, I just struggle to put faith in any kind of announcements," he said. "I don't understand why it is only 2,000 people in a 60,000 stadium. But I am not surprised. It's good news, good sign. I'll take it, 100 percent."

English Football League chairman Rick Parry told the BBC he was looking forward to getting fans back in more substantial numbers but it was a "welcome start". "At League One and League Two level (third and fourth tiers) it could be very significant," he said. "It's not just the money, it's a very welcome return to an atmosphere, and if we get 4,000 at League Two level it would be very welcome. It can be a very welcome lifeline."

The EFL is considering moving some of its fixtures scheduled for December 1 to the following day in order to get fans in. Premier League chiefs have welcomed Monday's announcement but made it clear that only a return to bigger crowds would ease the sport's financial problems. Brighton chief executive Paul Barber said the return of a small number of fans will be "more symbolic than financial" for Premier League clubs.

Barber believes Brighton's Amex Stadium needs to be at least 25 percent full with 7,500 fans before matches would start to become financially viable. "It's welcome news. It's a little bit earlier than we expected. But it's a good first step towards some degree of normality," he said. —AFP