

Sports

Neymar, Messi set for World Cup qualifiers' showdown

BRASILIA: Neymar will face his new clubmate Lionel Messi in a South American grudge match after being named to the Brazil team on Friday for three World Cup qualifiers. Coach Tite also called up six members of the squad that retained the Olympic title by beating Spain in extra-time on August 7.

Dani Alves, who captained the Olympic squad, is joined by fellow gold medalists Matheus Cunha, who scored in the final, Richarlison, the tournament top scorer in Japan, Bruno Guimaraes, Guilherme Arana and Claudinho.

Brazil lead the 10-team South American World Cup qualifying group after six matches and face a busy week as the tournament tries to catch up after two rounds were postponed in March in the face of a coronavirus spike and international quarantine rules.

Brazil start with a trip to Santiago to play Chile on September 2, then take on Argentina in a re-arranged match in Sao Paulo three days later before travelling more than 2,200 kilometers north to Pernambuco to entertain Peru on September 9.

Since March, Argentina have beaten Brazil in the final of the Copa America in July at the Maracana and Argentine captain Messi has left Barcelona and joined Neymar at Paris Saint-Germain. Tite's team have won all six of their matches so far, conceding just two goals, but despite scoring 16 goals have rarely been exciting. They also looked lackluster as they struggled to score in the knock-out stages of the Copa.

Tite told a virtual press conference that while he

was disappointed with the final outcome, he was happy at the way the squad had developed in the Copa. He said Brazil "set some objectives in the Copa America, one of them was the title and we didn't get it, but there were 23 athletes who participated in the competition" and the squad "modified its basic offensive structure."

Of the Olympic call-ups, only the 38-year-old Alves, one of three permitted over-age squad members in Japan, is older than 24. Tite said he was happy to promote younger players to the senior team. "When we have integration with the lower age groups, there is a similarity in the way players handle themselves, in the way we see football," he said. "The young player who looks at the national team and sees the examples of the professionals is very important."

Tite called up 24-year-old Leeds attacker Raphinha for the first time. "We have been monitoring Raphinha for a while," said Tite. "He has a very strong dribbling technique, several important goals, he is a decisive player, he is what we call 'the key to the goal'."

Tite will name his captain before the games. Neymar has led Brazil in the past. Thiago Silva captained the team in the Copa America. Casimiro has also captained the side this year. FIFA has extended the September and October international windows by two days to allow teams to catch up, much to the chagrin of European leagues, who dislike the long absences of their South American stars. — AFP



SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi (left) and Brazilian forward Neymar attend a training session at the Camp des Loges Paris Saint-Germain football club's training ground in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. — AFP

News in brief

Lorient upset Monaco

LORIENT: Lorient, who just escaped relegation last season, upset visiting Monaco 1-0 on Friday as Nigerian striker Terem Moffi converted a penalty he had won. Lorient made the most of opening the fixtures on the second weekend of the season by jumping to the top of the table with four points. Monaco, who finished third last season to earn a chance of a place Champions League, left a number of senior players on the bench ahead of their Champions League qualifying playoff first leg against Shakhtar Donetsk on Tuesday. Moffi was brought down by Monaco summer signing Ismail Jakobs after 31 minutes and took the penalty to score. Moffi was Lorient's top scorer last season with 14 goals, three of them against Monaco. — AFP

Italian league on YouTube

ROME: The clubs in Italy's Serie A football league agreed Friday to launch their own Arabic-language channel on YouTube to show matches in the Middle East and North Africa. The 20-member league "has decided to proceed with the creation of an Arabic-language channel on the YouTube platform", it said in a statement. It will show five matches for each match day, complete with their own commentary. The League agreed earlier this year for the bulk of its matches to be streamed by the DAZN platform. — AFP

Kuwait bags four medals

AMMAN: Kuwait's team has collected a single silver and three bronze medals at the fourth day of Arab the Table Tennis Championship, which will run until August 16. The Kuwaiti female players won the silver after beating Djibouti 3-0 and Qatar 3-2, while male players got the bronze by defeating Jordan 3-2. Kuwait's team is taking part in the game with 39 male and female players, in addition to teams from 15 Arab countries like the host Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Djibouti, Somalia and Comoros. The championship includes U-13,15,17 and 19 male and female players. — KUNA

Kuwait advances in qualifiers

MANAMA: Kuwait men's U-17 basketball team has moved into Asia cup qualifiers after winning the second place and the silver medal at the 16th Gulf basketball championship on Friday. Bahrain defeated Kuwait 59-53 today snatching the trophy. Vice President of Kuwait Basketball Association Khalil Ibrahim stressed keenness on backing the players to help them represent Kuwait in an honorable way in international arenas and make further achievements. He expressed appreciation to Bahrain, its government and people for hosting the championship on August 7-13. The event included Saudi Arabia and Qatar, along with Kuwait and Bahrain. — KUNA

Lewandowski strikes as Bayern draw Bundesliga season opener at Gladbach

MONCHENGLADBACH: Robert Lewandowski equalized as defending champions Bayern Munich were held to a 1-1 draw at Borussia Moenchengladbach in a hard-fought opening game of the new Bundesliga season on Friday. "It wasn't perfect football from us," Lewandowski told broadcaster Sat1. "We made a lot of mistakes, but the first game is over, now we can look ahead."

Gladbach deservedly took the lead when French striker Alassane Plea fired past Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer with just ten minutes gone. Lewandowski leveled just before the break from a corner, but both sides wasted second-half chances to grab the winner.

Only superb saves from home goalkeeper Yann Sommer repeatedly denied Lewandowski and the Bayern attack. At the other end, Gladbach substitute forward Marcus Thuram failed to connect with the goal at his mercy and later saw his appeals for a clear penalty waved away by the referee.

"There were fireworks from us in the first quarter of an hour," Gladbach captain Lars Stindl told DAZN and hailed Sommer's "world-class" performance. Bayern's new head coach Julian Nagelsmann is still waiting for his first victory after three defeats and a draw in pre-season friendlies. The 34-year-old is under pressure to deliver a tenth

straight Bundesliga title for Bayern in his first season.

'Crazy game'

"We have to live with the point, both sides had chances, it was a pretty crazy game for the fans to watch, not so easy for the coaches," Nagelsmann told DAZN. Borussia Park was a third full as Bundesliga clubs welcome back supporters on the opening weekend of the season.

Bayern were missing injured France defender Benjamin Pavard, whose place went to reserve left-back Josip Stanisic for only his second Bundesliga appearance. Gladbach tore open the Bayern defense after just six minutes when Patrick Herrmann sprinted clear and squared to Lars Stindl, who could not get a shot away.

Bayern fell behind when Canadian left-back Alphonso Davies lost the ball on halfway. The ball was moved to Stindl, who flicked his pass onto Plea, who was unmarked and fired past Neuer. At the other end, only a stunning reflex save by Sommer denied Lewandowski from point-blank range.

However, the Bundesliga's record goal-scorer for a single season struck just before half-time to make it 1-1 at the break. When Joshua Kimmich fired in a corner, Lewandowski slipped his marker and



MONCHENGLADBACH: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (right) and German defender Niklas Sule acknowledge the fans after the Bundesliga match against Borussia Moenchengladbach in Moenchengladbach, western Germany, on Friday. — AFP

fired past Sommer, picking up when he left off last season when he scored a Bundesliga record 41 goals in 2020/21.

Bayern had a golden period approaching the hour mark when only more superb Sommer saves denied Davies, then Lewandowski in quick succession. Gladbach won 3-2 when the sides last met at Borussia Park in January and the hosts again put up a fight.

Neuer did superbly well with a diving save to deny Stindl after Gladbach midfielder Hannes Wolf broke down

the wing and squared inside. With just over ten minutes left, Thuram came within a whisker of restoring the hosts' lead when he just failed to connect with the goal at his mercy.

Referee Marco Fritz then waved away Gladbach's furious calls for a penalty when Thuram appeared to be brought down in the area by new Bayern signing Dayot Upamecano. New Gladbach head coach Adi Huetter received a yellow card on the sidelines for his impassioned protest. Kimmich fired wide in added time. — AFP

Easy start for Al-Ahly in CAF Champions League

JOHANNESBURG: Al-Ahly of Egypt will launch an attempt to win the CAF Champions League a record third straight time against either Gendarmerie Nationale of Niger or Le Messager de Ngozi of Burundi in October.

Neither the Niger nor the Burundi champions have progressed beyond the preliminary round in two attempts each and it would be a sensation if either were to eliminate the record nine-time African champions.

The pairing is among 38 in the preliminary and first rounds of the elite African club competition after the draws for 2021-2022 qualifying were made in Cairo on Friday.

By late October 16 clubs will have survived one or two home-and-away ties and booked places in the group stage, where prize money kicks in with qualifiers guaranteed at least 550,000 dollars

(465,000 euros).

The Champions League, formerly called the African Cup of Champions Clubs, has been staged every year bar one since 1964, but no club has managed to win three consecutive finals. After lifting the trophy in 2005 and 2006, an Ahly side including stars like goalkeeper Essam el Hadary, defender Wael Gomaa, midfielder Mohamed Abou Trika and forward Emad Meteb also reached the 2007 final.

But after forcing a goalless away draw in the first leg against Etoile Sahel of Tunisia, they suffered a stunning 3-1 home loss in a packed 73,000-capacity Cairo International Stadium. Ahly had another chance in 2014 to win the competition three times in a row, but suffered shock away and home losses to Al-Ahly Benghazi of Libya in the final qualifying round.

Personal reason

TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo (twice), Enyimba of Nigeria and Esperance of Tunisia were other back-to-back champions who could not secure a third straight title. Apart from wanting to complete a historic treble, South Africa-born Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane has a per-

sonal reason for wishing to go all the way and win the single-match final next May.

Before guiding the Cairo Red Devils to success in 2020 and 2021, the 57-year-old won the Champions League with Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa five years ago. His three Champions League titles is a record for an African coach and puts him second overall behind four-time winner Manuel Jose from Portugal, all of whose triumphs came with Ahly.

Mosimane has been trying to strengthen his attack and Mozambican Luis Miquissone and South African Percy Tau have been linked with the Egyptian and African giants. Miquissone caught the attention of the South African when he starred for Simba of Tanzania in a shock group victory over Ahly last season and seems the likelier of the two targets to join the Red Devils.

Tau developed into a star under Mosimane at Sundowns and after several seasons in Belgium is now with English Premier League outfit Brighton, who have registered him for the 2021-2022 season. Most of the strongest challenges to Ahly could come from fellow north African clubs, particularly Moroccan sides Raja and Wydad, Esperance and Algerian team Entente Setif. — AFP

Valencia beat Getafe in season-opener

MADRID: Valencia overcame a third-minute red card to beat Getafe 1-0 in a bruising opening game in Spain's La Liga on Friday. Defender Hugo Guillamon was given a straight red for a dangerous tackle on Getafe's Serbian midfielder Nemanja Maksimovic.

After the referee consulted a video replay, it was the fastest sending off in the history of Liga season openers. The foul itself had been committed after just 39 seconds of the game. Eight minutes after

Guillamon's dismissal, Valencia were ahead. Russian winger Denis Cheryshev was brought down in the penalty area and Carlos Soler tucked away the spot-kick.

"It was not the game we wanted, because going a man down in the third minute is not the best situation," said Soler. "Hugo is not at fault. I don't know if it was a red. These are things that happen in football and you learn from them. When he left the pitch I told him that we were going to win for him, and we achieved that."

Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili, on loan from Dinamo Tbilisi, pulled off two fine saves late in the game to deny Getafe an equalizing goal. Getafe's misery was completed when Erick Cabaco was sent off for a second yellow card in the 76th minute. — AFP



VALENCIA: Valencia's Spanish defender Jose Gaya Pena (left) celebrates with Valencia's Georgian goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili at the end of the Spanish League football match between Valencia and Getafe at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on Friday. — AFP