

Sports

Bayern Munich eye sixth title after reaching Club World Cup final

European champions face Mexico's Tigres tomorrow

AL-RAYYAN: Robert Lewandowski says Bayern Munich are eager to claim their sixth title in a year after advancing to the Club World Cup final as his goals sealed a 2-0 victory over African champions Al-Ahly in Monday's semi-final. The European champions face Tigres in the final tomorrow after the Mexican club saw off Brazilian giants Palmeiras in Sunday's other semi-final.

"It was a very good match and we're ready for the final," Bayern striker Lewandowski told reporters. He gave Bayern the lead with just 17 minutes gone at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, a host venue for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

The Poland star then headed home a pinpoint Leroy Sane cross four minutes before the whistle to book Bayern's place in the final. Lewandowski, the Bundesliga's top scorer, has now scored 29 goals in 27 club matches this season.

Bayern are bidding to become only the second team after Barcelona in 2009 to win all six domestic and international titles up for grabs in one season. The German giants lifted the Bundesliga, German Cup, Champions League, German Super Cup and UEFA Super Cup trophies in 2020.

"We want to claim another title — title number six during this season," Lewandowski added. "This is a World Cup, which is always something special. I hope we can play even better in the final and that we will have more goalscoring chances."

The European champions ended Ahly's 32-match unbeaten run in all competitions under their

South African-born coach Pitso Mosimane. "You understand why they are number one at this point in time in the world and in Europe also," said Mosimane. "They regained the ball quicker, they pressed us quicker, they're more experienced. We could only do something on a break."

Early goal

The African Champions League winners struggled to get near the Bayern goal as the Germans enjoyed 70 percent possession. Despite the efforts of two defenders lunging to block his shot, Lewandowski put Bayern ahead with a crisp finish from a Serge Gnabry pass.

The Poland striker could have made it 2-0 towards the end of the first half when Joshua Kimmich drew the defense, but Lewandowski fired over the bar. Ahly grew in confidence at the start of the second half and created half-chances as the Bundesliga leaders showed signs of fatigue.

Heavy snow in Berlin on Saturday meant Bayern had a seven-hour delay to their flight to Doha and the Germans' tempo dropped after Lewandowski's early goal. "We travelled to Qatar because we want to bag another trophy," said Bayern coach Hansi Flick. "It was difficult to perform at first and we needed time to get into the run of the game. When we did, I think we dominated the match and deserved to score a second goal. We played well defensively, I'm very satisfied with my team."

With an eye on tomorrow's final in Al-Rayyan, Flick replaced forwards Mueller and Gnabry for



AL-RAYYAN: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski celebrates his second goal during the FIFA Club World Cup semi-final football match between Egypt's Al-Ahly and Germany's Bayern Munich at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in the Qatari city of Al-Rayyan on Monday. —AFP

the final half-hour. It was the fresh legs of Gnabry's replacement Sane which created space

to serve up a late cross that Lewandowski headed home to wrap up the win. —AFP

Doha drive-in delights expat footie fans at Club World Cup

LUSAIL, Qatar: A drive-in cinema opened during Qatar's coronavirus crisis to offer respite from strict distancing rules switched from horror films to football fever on Monday to show Bayern Munich's Club World Cup semi-final against Al-Ahly.

Egyptian expats cheering Ahly gathered alongside Doha's Bayern backers to watch on the big screen as the African and European champions slugged it out at the Ahmad Bin Ali stadium 25 kilometers (15 miles) away.

"Actually we did not choose the stadium because of (the requirement for) COVID-19 tests," said Egyptian Wael Abdelhady who has lived in Doha for 10 years. "The other option was watching it at home and we prefer to be here!"

Around him, food delivery drivers dropped off takeaway meals to hungry fans as they sat back in their pick-up trucks and off-roaders, watching Robert Lewandowski score twice to give Bayern a

2-0 win. The Germans will face Mexican side Tigres in the final tomorrow.

Bayern fan Jad Razek said the drive-in was "better to be with the family". "It's also a different experience than what we have at the stadium so it's a new adventure," he said as children ate popcorn from a bucket nearby.

'Smart idea'

The drive-in, which can host more than 150 cars, had previously shown Disney family favorites like "Bambi" and horror movies including "The Blair Witch Project" and the 1931 Boris Karloff classic "Frankenstein".

It launched in November during the annual Ajyal film festival when cinemas, as they are now, were subject to strict limits on attendance and tough distancing rules. "It's amazing, it's a very smart idea with the cars — even more with COVID and all. It's better," said Bayern supporting Frenchman Talal Saoudi as the brightly-lit skyscrapers of the new Lusail district twinkled behind the big screen.

The venue, which also showed Tigres' surprise win over Brazil's Palmeiras in the other semi-final on Sunday, charges \$40 per car which makes economic and practical sense for family groups who would all have to take a coronavirus test in order



LUSAIL, Qatar: Football supporters watch the FIFA Club World Cup semi-final football match between Egypt's Al-Ahly and Germany's Bayern Munich on a giant screen in Lusail, around 20km north of the Qatari capital Doha, on Monday. —AFP

to watch the match live.

"Bringing audiences together at safe social distances, the open-air experience of drive-in cinemas is a perfect way to bring the excitement of the game to the community at a time when it's challenging for many to go to a game," said Doha Film Institute chief executive Fatma Hassan Alremahi. —AFP

Suarez strikes twice but Atletico stumble against Celta

MADRID: Atletico Madrid slipped up in La Liga for the first time in nine games on Monday as Celta Vigo snatched a late equalizer to deliver a ray of hope to Barcelona and Real Madrid. Luis Suarez scored twice at the Wanda Metropolitano to overturn Santi Mina's opener for Celta, with Atletico on course to restore their 10-point lead at the top of the table.

But Facundo Ferreyra slid in to score in the 89th minute to earn a deserved 2-2 draw for the visitors, meaning Atletico's advantage at the end of the weekend is reduced to eight, still with a game in hand. "We played quite well but they had a strong finish and a draw was probably fair," said Diego Simeone.

Atletico still have a considerable cushion but after Madrid and Barca beat Huesca and Real Betis respectively, there is at least room for encouragement for the chasing pack. Suarez shows no sign of letting up, the Uruguayan now with 11 goals in his last nine games and 16 for the season. Those 16 goals in 17 games played for Atletico make him the fastest player to score that many for a La Liga club in the 21st century, one game faster than Cristiano Ronaldo after he joined Real Madrid.

Atletico have been hit hard by coronavirus in recent months, the club confirming another two positive cases on Monday afternoon. Thomas Lemar and Hector Herrera join Mario Hermoso, Joao Felix and Moussa Dembele on the list of those currently out after contracting the illness. "We have to make the best of it," said Simeone. "We have footballers who can take advantage of the opportunities and we hope that the boys recover."

Celta, who stay 10th, were the better side in the



MADRID: Celta Vigo's Argentine forward Facundo Ferreyra (left) scores a goal during the Spanish league football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and RC Celta de Vigo at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid on Monday. —AFP

first half, dominating possession and taking a deserved lead after 13 minutes when Hugo Mallo curled in a cross from the right for Mina to head in. Atletico rarely troubled Celta but managed to go in level, Suarez scoring with their first shot on target. Marcos Llorente's driven cross evaded four sets of Celta toes and found him at the back post.

Lucas Torreira came on at half-time for Felipe — Atletico reverting to a back four — and within five minutes they were ahead. Geoffrey Kondogbia

floated a ball out to the left and Renan Lodi volleyed it across goal, where the sliding Suarez arrived on his knees to finish. Celta almost had a second when Iago Aspas bundled through but Kondogbia darted back to make a superb tackle, just as the striker was about to shoot. Atletico were moments away but caved with one minute left, a brilliant through ball by Aspas freeing Augusto Solari, whose cross found Ferreyra two meters out. —AFP

Gladbach v Man City Champions League match moved to Budapest

PARIS: Manchester City's first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Borussia Muenchengladbach will be played in Budapest due to strict coronavirus entry rules imposed by Germany, UEFA announced Monday. The switch

of venue comes 24 hours after Liverpool's match against Leipzig next week was also relocated to Budapest for the same reason.

Pep Guardiola's City will play Gladbach at the Puskas Arena on February 24. "We have to presume that the travel ban for passengers from the UK to Germany, which is currently in place until 17th February, will be extended and that the Manchester City team will not be granted special permission to travel to Muenchengladbach," said Borussia CEO Stephan Schippers. "We have come to this decision based on several conversations with the relevant authorities, politicians, the DFL (German league) and UEFA over the past week."

UEFA's regulations stipulate the home side

must find a way of hosting the match or risk forfeiting it as a 3-0 defeat. Introduced late last month the new German rules, slated to last until at least February 17, ban travellers from countries hit by new, more contagious COVID-19 variants such as the one found in Britain. The regulations also apply to visitors from Ireland and Portugal. Though there are some exceptions for medical workers and others in key professions the new protocol contains no special provision for professional sportspeople.

"UEFA's regulations state that as the home side we are required to find an alternative venue. For several reasons, we have decided to play the game at the Puskas Arena in Budapest," said Schippers. "We would like to thank UEFA and

the Hungarian FA for their support regarding this matter. A last-16 Champions League tie is a huge event for Borussia Muenchengladbach, which we now cannot play in our own ground or with any fans in attendance. Nevertheless, we're pleased that we can play the game at all and we are conscious of the overall situation."

Leipzig, who face Liverpool in the first leg on February 16, are due at Anfield for the return meeting on March 10, while Gladbach are scheduled to travel to Manchester on March 16. Fellow Bundesliga side Hoffenheim could be affected in the Europa League by Norwegian restrictions. Their last-32 clash away to Molde is also likely to be moved after the Oslo government closed its borders to all non-residents. —AFP

News in brief

Biden invites Super Bowl champs

WASHINGTON: Super Bowl champions the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and their iconic leader Tom Brady got an invitation Monday to the White House, though it's far from certain when they'll be able to come — or if they'll accept. "We look forward to inviting the Buccaneers, as well as the 2020 NBA champions, the Lakers, to the White House," President Joe Biden's press secretary, Jen Psaki, told reporters. However she added a big caveat: the visit will be "when it is COVID-safe, but I don't know when that will take place yet." —AFP

Ohtani, Angels agree to deal

LOS ANGELES: Japanese star Shohei Ohtani has agreed a new two-year contract with the Los Angeles Angels taking him through to the end of the 2022 campaign, the team said Monday. The 26-year-old two-way player's deal is worth \$8.5 million and means the club avoid having to go to arbitration. Ohtani joined the Angels in 2017 and won Rookie of the Year honours in 2018 after a dazzling debut season which saw him club 22 homers and 61 RBIs while posting a 3.31 ERA from the mound in 10 starts. —AFP

Pogba sidelined for 'few weeks'

LONDON: Paul Pogba will be out of action for a "few weeks" after suffering a thigh injury during Manchester United's 3-3 draw with Everton, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said on Monday. The 27-year-old midfielder was forced off towards the end of the first half of Saturday's match, just days after being named the club's player of the month for January. Pogba's absence will be a blow to United as they battle to stay in touch with Premier League leaders Manchester City and with FA Cup and Europa League matches to come. Pogba was enjoying a resurgence in form but Solskjaer said he did not want to take risks with him. —AFP

Ref receives death threats

LONDON: Premier League referee Mike Dean has alerted police after his family received death threats following two controversial red cards he issued over the past week. Dean was criticized for sending off Southampton defender Jan Bednarek against Manchester United last Tuesday and West Ham midfielder Tomas Soucek in Saturday's match at Fulham. Both decisions have now been overturned on appeal. Reports said Dean had asked to be excused from duty next weekend although it is understood he will referee Wednesday's FA Cup fifth-round match between Leicester and Brighton. —AFP