

German League Preview

BAYERN OUT TO EXORCISE GLADBACH DEFEAT IN DERBY

BERLIN: Bayern Munich host Ingolstadt in the first Bundesliga derby between the clubs today full of respect for their Bavarian neighbors, but determined to bounce back from their shock defeat at Moenchengladbach. Pep Guardiola's Bayern crashed to their first German league defeat of the season last Saturday when they were humbled 3-1 by third-placed Gladbach. It was only Bayern's second loss of the season, following a Champions League defeat at Arsenal, and Bayern are determined to protect their five point lead in the table. "We have to play well and fight for everything, it won't be an easy game," said Robert Lewandowski, whose goals sealed a 2-0 win at Dinamo Zagreb on Wednesday with Bayern in the last 16 in Europe. "We have to keep our concentration and score the first goal, that should lay the foundations for us to have some fun."

Ingolstadt deserve Bayern's respect with a

symmetrical record of five wins, five draws and five defeats in their first season in Germany's top-flight and are 11th in the table with 20 points. Coach Ralph Hasenhuettl has kept most of the side which won last season's second-division title and they have drawn with top side Wolfsburg, Schalke and Moenchengladbach so far. "They deserve to be where they are in the league and I hope they stay up," said Bayern captain Philipp Lahm, who played alongside Hasenhuettl in the Bavarian youth football. "They don't just play defensively and don't just stand at the back." Between them Poland's Lewandowski and Thomas Mueller have scored 27 league goals so far this season, but the Germany forward expects a tussle. "We have a task today which will clearly be a difficult thing," said Mueller. Bayern are set to be without centre-back Medhi Benatia, who suffered a suspected torn left thigh in Zagreb. — AFP

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA TABLE

BERLIN: German Bundesliga table ahead of this weekend's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Bayern Munich	15	13	1	1	43	8	40
Dortmund	15	11	2	2	42	20	35
M'gladbach	15	8	2	5	31	23	26
Hertha Berlin	15	8	2	5	20	18	26
VfL Wolfsburg	15	7	4	4	24	17	25
Schalke 04	15	7	3	5	21	21	24
Mainz 05	15	7	2	6	23	21	23
Bayer Leverkusen	15	6	3	6	19	20	21
Hamburg	15	6	3	6	18	21	21
FC Cologne	15	5	5	5	15	19	20
FC Ingolstadt 04	15	5	5	5	11	15	20
SV Darmstadt 98	15	4	6	5	15	19	18
Eintr. Frankfurt	15	3	5	7	18	23	14
Hanover	15	4	2	9	18	27	14
Werder Bremen	15	4	2	9	15	29	14
FC Augsburg	15	3	4	8	18	25	13
VfB Stuttgart	15	3	2	10	19	36	11
Hoffenheim	15	1	7	7	16	24	10

Italian League Preview

SUPER-CHARGED SERIE A PUTS FOCUS ON INTER

MILAN: Napoli host Roma and Fiorentina are away to Juventus in a super-charged Serie A weekend in which all four title contenders will have one eye on leaders Inter Milan. Although designed to provide some pre-festive thrills, the penultimate round of games before the league stops for the winter break has been made even more enticing by the current state of affairs in Italy's top flight. Inter travel to Udinese today with a one-point lead on Fiorentina, with Napoli two points behind and Roma in fourth at five points off the pace. Champions Juventus are only one-point behind Roma in sixth.

Inter could go four points clear of Fiorentina with a win today but their trip to the Friuli comes with a twist, 38-year-old striker Antonio Di Natale hinting Wednesday it could be his last home game for the club that has been his home since 2004. "The fans are always behind us and always fill the stadium. I want to show my thanks in our last home game of the

year by giving them a special gift today," said Di Natale. Having seen Udinese lose to both Napoli and Fiorentina in recent weeks, either side of two wins against Sampdoria and Chievo, Di Natale expects no-frills Inter to be tough to beat today.

He added: "Their game is not exceptional, but they're winning consistently and conceding few goals. We've been working hard in the past days for this game." Inter have scored the fewest goals (18) from the top six teams, but Roberto Mancini's men have conceded only nine times in 15 games and their reverse at Napoli a fortnight ago was their lone defeat in nine successive outings. The visitors should welcome back Felipe Melo, who spent a night in observation last week after a head clash with teammate Gary Medel in their 1-0 win against Genoa.

"I'm fine, thank God. I don't remember much about the game but luckily I'm okay," said Brazil midfielder Melo, who does not expect an easy

run-in to the festive break. "It's important we finish this first half of the season strongly, but we know it's going to be tough at Udinese and against Lazio after that." Napoli host Roma tomorrow in the 'Derby del Sole', with the hosts firm favourites at the San Paolo three days after hammering Legia Warsaw 5-2 in the Europa League to record six wins out of six in the group stage.

Last week's 3-2 reverse at Bologna left scars, and Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri said: "There are a lot of title contenders this sea-

son, but that doesn't mean we have to settle for seventh place." Roma, unconvincing in a 1-1 Champions League draw at home to BATE Borisov on Wednesday that secured passage to the last 16, travel south on the back of a league defeat to Atalanta and last week's 1-1 draw at Torino-and likely to be without injury-hit Ivorian Gervinho. "We're going through a tough spell in the league," admitted Roma coach Rudi Garcia. "We have to recover quickly ahead of Napoli given that we put a lot in tonight." — AFP

BARCELONA AIM FOR 1 BILLION EURO GOAL

LONDON: Barcelona are aiming to become the world's highest earning club in the next six years and are determined to counter England's Premier League, club president Josep Maria Bartomeu said in an interview published yesterday. The Spanish giants will make about 600 million euros (\$658 million) this year but Bartomeu told the Financial Times newspaper he was aiming to lift this to one billion euros (\$1.1 billion) by 2021.

"We want to be the first club to reach one billion euros in revenues," said Bartomeu, who won an election for a six-year term in July after Barcelona overcame team divisions to win the Champions League. A Deloitte survey said that Real Madrid (549 million euros) and Manchester United (518 million) were the of top world football revenue earners in 2014. The president said he wants to increase Barcelona's presence abroad and embark on a 600 million euro renovation of the

93,000 capacity Camp Nou stadium. It has one overseas office in Hong Kong and plans to open more in New York, Sao Paulo and Shanghai by 2017, Bartomeu said.

Barcelona, which is owned by its 145,00 members, also wants to set up its own university and move into women's sports. But the Barcelona boss acknowledged that the shadow of England's Premier League hangs over his club's plans. "Our rival is the Premier League. It is not a specific club, it is the strength of the Premier League itself," Bartomeu said. He insisted that Barcelona has the financial power to hold off any English challenge for its three top stars Lionel Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez. But Bartomeu said Barcelona academy teenagers were being lured by big money English offers. "The 16-year-olds constantly receive offers from the Premier League that are very tempting. Every year there are some who go," the Barcelona chief said. — AFP

ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE

MILAN: Italian Serie A table ahead of this weekend's fixtures (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Inter Milan	15	10	3	2	18	9	33
Fiorentina	15	10	2	3	30	12	32
Napoli	15	9	4	2	28	12	31
Roma	15	8	4	3	30	18	28
Juventus	15	8	3	4	22	11	27
Sassuolo	15	7	5	3	19	14	26
Atalanta	15	7	3	5	18	15	24
AC Milan	15	7	3	5	19	18	24
Torino	15	6	4	5	21	19	22
Empoli	15	6	3	6	17	20	21
Chievo	15	5	4	6	20	16	19
Lazio	15	6	1	8	17	24	19
Udinese	15	5	3	7	14	20	18
Sampdoria	15	4	4	7	21	25	16
Bologna	15	5	1	9	16	21	16
Genoa	15	4	4	7	15	20	16
Palermo	15	4	3	8	13	23	15
Frosinone	15	4	2	9	14	26	14
Carpi	15	2	4	9	13	27	10
Verona	15	0	6	9	10	25	6



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Norwich City v Everton	15:45
West Ham v Stoke City	18:00
Crystal Palace v Southampton	18:00
Man City v Swansea	18:00
Sunderland v Watford	18:00
Bournemouth v Man United	20:30

SPANISH LEAGUE

Barcelona v Deportivo	18:00
Levante v Granada	20:15
Celta de Vigo v Espanyol	20:15
Sevilla v Sporting Gijon	22:30
Las Palmas v Real Betis	0:05

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Genoa v Bologna	17:00
Citta di Palermo v Frosinone	20:00
Sassuolo Calcio v Torino	20:00
Udinese v Internazionale	22:45
SV Werder Bremen v FC Koln	17:30
Darmstadt v Hertha Berlin	17:30
TSG Hoffenheim v Hannover	17:30
Bayern Munich v Ingolstadt 04	17:30
Wolfsburg v Hamburger	17:30
Bayer 04 v Monchengladbach	20:30

FRENCH LEAGUE

Stade de Reims v OGC Nice	18:00
Montpellier v Guingamp	22:00
Lille v Lorient	22:00
ES Troyes v Bastia	22:00
Nantes v Toulouse	22:00