

HIDDINK WARNS CHELSEA NOT TO TAKE CUP PROGRESS FOR GRANTED

LONDON: Guus Hiddink has warned Chelsea not to take victory for granted after Manuel Pellegrini vowed to go through with his threat to send out a weakened Manchester City team in the FA Cup fifth round today.

With City due to make the long flight to the Ukraine on Monday ahead of their Champions League last 16 first leg tie at Dynamo Kiev on Wednesday, Pellegrini had pleaded with the FA not to bow to demands from television networks to move the Chelsea game from its original Saturday date.

But Pellegrini's request was ignored and City, who also have to prepare for next weekend's League Cup final against Liverpool, have been forced to head to Stamford Bridge 24 hours later than they

wanted. In response, the City boss has promised to field a starting line-up comprised mostly of untested youngsters. "We always try to play with a strong team in every competition, every competition is important, especially the FA Cup," Pellegrini said.

"We are very interested in continuing in this cup. But I said a couple of weeks ago if you want to protect the English team in the Champions League the game was played on Saturday.

"For different reasons we couldn't play that day. We must prioritise the Champions League, so we'll see what is the best team we can put on the pitch for the FA Cup."

At first glance, it appears Pellegrini has handed Chelsea a gift-wrapped place

in the quarter-finals because Hiddink, whose side played their Champions League last 16 first leg tie against Paris Saint German earlier this week, can afford to send out a stronger team this weekend.

But the Blues' interim manager believes the City kids could pose a significant threat because they will be so motivated to make the most of a rare moment in the spotlight.

Hiddink is also concerned City have been stung by damaging successive defeats against Premier league title rivals Leicester and Tottenham and will be desperate for a morale-boosting win.

"A big team always reacts. We are warned. We'll take ourselves and them very seriously," said Hiddink, who will be

without injured captain John Terry.

"Hypothetically, if City play a younger side they will go to 120 per cent effort so it does not always work in your favour. Let's see what happens today."

FORMALITY

Despite Hiddink's caution, what appeared at the time of the draw to be the tie of the round could be transformed in a formality by Pellegrini's stance.

The Chilean has been accused of disrespecting the famous old competition, but he knows City's Abu Dhabi-based owners would much prefer success in Europe rather than a first FA Cup triumph since 2011.

Pellegrini, who will be replaced by Pep

Guardiola at the end of the season, would also prefer to leave with the Champions League trophy as a reminder of his talents.

And he points to a lengthy injury list as another reason why he will rest the likes of Joe Hart, Yaya Toure, Vincent Kompany, David Silva and Sergio Aguero.

"The priority is usually the next game but maybe we are going to make an exception now because of the amount of players we have injured," Pellegrini added.

City's lack of experience today could provide Chelsea midfielder Eden Hazard with a golden opportunity to play his way back into form after Hiddink called on the under-achieving Belgian to raise his level. — AFP

FIFA REJECTS DEMAND FOR TRANSPARENT VOTING BOOTHS

ZURICH: FIFA has rejected a demand from a presidential candidate to use transparent voting booths at next week's election to ensure delegates do not photograph their ballot papers when they choose the head of soccer's world ruling body.

The request came from Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein of Jordan, who said he would take his case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), sport's highest tribunal. Prince Ali wanted to ensure that transparent booths were used at the Feb. 26 election "to safeguard the full transparency of the electoral proceedings", he said in a statement released by his French-based lawyer.

FIFA's 209 member national associations (FAs) each hold one vote at the election where Prince Ali is among five candidates standing to replace outgoing President Sepp Blatter, who is banned for eight years amid a graft scandal that has shaken soccer's global governing body. Under FIFA statutes, voting is secret.

The statement said Domenico Scala, head of FIFA's electoral committee, had admitted to Prince Ali in correspondence that the voters could produce evidence of

their vote by using a mobile phone.

Scala rejected transparent booths, however, and said members would be reminded that voting is secret and told to hand over mobile phones and cameras before doing so.

"He (Scala) has said it is enough just to tell them they must not do so, and has rejected Prince Ali's request to use transparent voting booths," the statement said, adding that there was an "absence of any dedicated system to detect potential violations of this rule."

A spokesman for the electoral committee declined to comment. Jerome Champagne, another presidential candidate, said this week that FAs were under pressure to vote for certain candidates and some had been asked to provide evidence of their vote. Prince Ali has also said that FAs face reprisals if they fail to tow certain political lines. "Development projects mysteriously stall; tournament hosting bids are suddenly compromised or withdrawn; national teams start to mysteriously face less favourable fixtures or and even referees," he said last week. — Reuters

GRIFFITHS DOUBLE SENDS CELTIC SIX CLEAR AT TOP

GLASGOW: Leigh Griffiths grabbed a double as Celtic extended their lead over Aberdeen at the top of the Scottish Premiership to six points with a 3-0 defeat of Inverness Caledonian Thistle at Parkhead yesterday.

Celtic had to wait until the 53rd minute to open the scoring thanks to a deflected Gary Mackay-Steven strike, and Griffiths added two more to take his tally for the season to 32 goals.

The result, Celtic's fifth consecutive home win, gives Ronny Deila's side some breathing space between themselves and Aberdeen, whose game with Partick Thistle on Friday was postponed due to a waterlogged pitch at Firhill. "In the first half we didn't create enough and we were too slow," the Celtic manager said.

"But in the second half we were more direct and got them on the back foot and got more chances." Meanwhile, Inverness manager John Hughes, the former Celtic defender, said his players had given their all in defeat.

"I felt our shape was very good and we gave as good as we got in the first half," said Hughes, whose side had lost only one of their previous 11 games, including beating Aberdeen 3-1 in the Highlands on Monday. "I told them not to get complacent so to lose a goal 10 minutes into the second half was bitterly disappointing but it was the second goal that killed us."

After a cagey start it was Inverness who threatened first with defender Gary Warren somehow heading wide with the goal gaping after Celtic keeper Craig Gordon had failed to deal with an Iain Vigurs free-kick. Moments later Griffiths' strike from outside the box was spilled by Owain Fon Williams after it bounced awkwardly in front of him but the Inverness defence cleared the danger. The home crowd then breathed a sigh of relief when Ross Draper's deflected shot whistled inches wide as Inverness came close to an opener.

EXPLOSIVE

What the first half lacked in action the second half made amends for with an explosive start.

Once again it was Inverness who blew a golden chance to take the lead when Jordan Roberts beat Erik Sviatchenko for pace to race in on goal but the striker saw his strike blocked by the out-rushing Gordon. The visitors were left to rue that miss in the 53rd minute when Mackay-Steven gave Celtic the lead with a deflected strike from the edge of the box after some good build-up play.

Inverness barely had time to regroup when Griffiths doubled Celtic's advantage in the 59th minute. The Scotland striker showed some good touches to make room for himself in the box before lashing an angled strike into the bottom right-hand corner of the net.

The two-goal cushion allowed Deila to throw on teenager Ryan Christie to face his former side while on-loan Manchester City player Patrick Roberts was handed his Celtic debut.

With the match deep in stoppage time Griffiths nabbed his second of the match with a low shot into the bottom left-hand

corner to finish a sweeping move. Elsewhere, Dundee United claimed a vital 2-1 victory over Hearts at Tannadice thanks to a late Paul Paton winner, although the Tangerines remain a huge 11 points adrift at the bottom from Kilmarnock, who were held to a goalless draw by Dundee.

Ian McShane got the winner as fourth-placed Ross County beat Hamilton Academical 2-1 while Tam Scobbie struck late to give St Johnstone a 2-1 win at home to Motherwell.— AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLAND FA CUP		
Blackburn Rovers v West Ham	17:00	beIN SPORTS 11 HD
Tottenham v Crystal Palace	18:00	beIN SPORTS 8 HD
Chelsea v Manchester City	19:00	beIN SPORTS 2 HD
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Rayo Vallecano v Sevilla	14:00	beIN SPORTS 3 HD
Malaga CF v Real Madrid	18:00	beIN SPORTS 3 HD
Bilbao v Real Sociedad	20:15	beIN SPORTS 12 HD
Granada CF v Valencia	20:15	beIN SPORTS 3 HD
Atletico v Villarreal	22:30	beIN SPORTS 3 HD
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Atalanta v Fiorentina	17:00	beIN SPORTS 4 HD
Torino FC v Carpi	17:00	beIN SPORTS
Genoa v Udinese Calcio	17:00	beIN SPORTS 1 HD
Sassuolo v Empoli	17:00	beIN SPORTS 9 HD
Frosinone v Lazio	20:00	beIN SPORTS 4 HD
AS Roma v Citta	22:45	beIN SPORTS 4 HD
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Bayer 04 v Dortmund	17:30	beIN SPORTS 5 HD
Schalke 04 v Stuttgart	19:00	beIN SPORTS 5 HD
Hannover 96 v Augsburg	19:30	beIN SPORTS 1 HD
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Marseille v Etienne	16:00	beIN SPORTS 6 HD
Caen v Stade Rennes	19:00	beIN SPORTS 6 HD
Lille OSC v Lyonnais	23:00	beIN SPORTS 6 HD



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's striker Thomas Mueller (R) and Darmstadt's midfielder Florian Jungwirth (L) vie for the ball during the German Bundesliga first division football match FC Bayern Munich vs SV Darmstadt 98 in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday. — AFP

MUELLER'S BRACE RESCUES BAYERN AGAINST DARMSTADT

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller netted twice yesterday as Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich came from behind to beat Darmstadt 3-1 in their last match before their Champions League clash at Juventus. With second-placed Borussia Dortmund playing on Sunday, Bayern took their chance to go 11 points clear in Germany's top flight but Mueller had to dig them out of trouble at the Allianz Arena before Robert Lewandowski added their third goal.

Against the run of play, Pep Guardiola's Bayern went behind when Darmstadt's Munich-born striker Sandro Wagner headed home midway through the first half.

It was only the fifth time this season Bayern had gone behind. But using their 81 percent possession to fire in a total of 36 shots on goal to Darmstadt's six, Guardiola's side roared back to claim their 19th win in 22 league games this season.

Serdar Tasci made his debut at centre-back in a makeshift Bayern defence also featuring Rafinha, Joshua Kimmich and David Alaba. Darmstadt went ahead when Wagner powered

his header past Manuel Neuer on 26 minutes, but Bayern were back level four minutes into the second half when Mueller chested down and slammed his shot into the right-hand corner. He added a superb second-half 17th league goal of the season by chipping down Arturo Vidal's cross and hitting a bicycle kick into Darmstadt's net on 71 minutes. Lewandowski added the third on 84 minutes when he converted Franck Ribery's low cross after the Frenchman came off the bench for only his third appearance of the season.

YOUNGEST COACH

It was Lewandowski's 22nd goal of the season in 21 league games to leave him as the league's top scorer ahead of Bayern's Champions League last 16, first leg in Turin on Tuesday.

Elsewhere, fresh from their 3-2 Champions League win at Gent in midweek, Wolfsburg picked up a point in the capital with a 1-1 draw at Hertha Berlin. Wolves took the lead at the Olympic Stadium when Marcel Schaefer converted Vieirinha's cross on 53 minutes.

But Salomon Kalou equalised with his 11th

goal of the season by drilling home a clearance off the line from Wolfsburg's Naldo on the hour mark. Julian Nagelsmann, the Bundesliga's youngest ever coach at 28, steered Hoffenheim to only their third win of the season on his second match in charge with a 3-2 victory at home to Mainz.

Colombia striker Jhon Cordoba scored his first goal for Mainz in his tenth Bundesliga match when he slotted home early on. But the hosts roared back as Nadiem Amiri levelled, then striker Mark Uth netted twice.

Hoffenheim remain 17th, but are now only three points from safety after Werder Bremen, who are 16th, lost 2-0 at Ingolstadt. Cologne fans protested about the price of away tickets at Borussia Moenchengladbach as the hosts sealed a 1-0 win thanks to Mahmoud Dahoud's first-half goal.

Gladbach move up to fifth ahead of today's matches when Dortmund are at Bayer Leverkusen, Schalke play Stuttgart away and Hanover host Augsburg in a key match in the relegation battle. — AFP

ALBION STAR BRUNT PELTED WITH COINS BY OWN FANS

LONDON: West Bromwich Albion defender Chris Brunt was pelted with coins by his own club's fans after their surprise FA Cup fifth round defeat at Reading yesterday.

Brunt had gone over to applaud Albion's travelling fans following their 3-1 loss to the second tier side, but the mood turned sour and he went down clutching his face as coins rained down from angry supporters. Northern Ireland international Brunt then confronted a group of Albion fans before being led away by captain Darren Fletcher after giving his shirt to a supporter.

The 31-year-old said a coin had been thrown at him and was quick to condemn the fans' behaviour. "I was walking towards our supporters at the end, and they thought it was okay to throw a coin at their own players. I'm disgusted," Brunt told BBC Sport. "If they want to come forward and say they don't like what they've seen then that's fine. Fans are frustrated we were 1-0 up and lost."

"They paid a lot of money to come, but a small minority spoil it. There were young kids there. I was absolutely disgusted and ashamed." — AFP



READING: Reading's English defender Michael Hector (C) heads the ball past West Bromwich Albion's Swedish defender Jonas Olsson to score during the FA cup fifth round football match between Reading and West Bromwich Albion at Madejski stadium in Reading yesterday. — AFP