

BARCELONA OUT TO AVENGE ATLETICO

PSG, MAN CITY FACE OFF IN CL QUARTERS

NYON: Holders Barcelona and their feared attacking trident drew fellow Spaniards and 2014 finalists Atletico Madrid in the Champions League (CL) last night yesterday. Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar, Barcelona's feared attacking trio, will seek revenge for their 2-1 aggregate quarter-finals exit at the hands of Diego Simeone's formidable charges two seasons ago. "With Atletico Madrid everything is complicated," said Barcelona representative Javier Bordas, who was in Nyon for the draw. "Their strengths are well known. They are water-tight at the back and can hurt you in attack," he said of the side who have shipped just three goals in the competition so far.

"They are our number one rival in the Spanish league, I don't believe there was a tougher side we could have drawn. We know this is going to be really tough." Atletico eliminated Barca 2-1 on aggregate in the quarter-finals on their way to the 2014 Champions League final. That season Atletico went unbeaten in six games against Barca, but since then the Catalans have won all six meetings between the sides. But while Atletico coach Diego Simeone was unflinching he heaped praise on his rivals, and if he was worried he was not showing it.

"I have said before, they work more on set-pieces, they have more counter-attacks, Neymar has been there longer, the presence of Suarez, they are a different team with more options," he said. "Barcelona are the best in the world for

sure and what can be better for us than playing against the best in the world? It makes me very excited."

'Big European performance'

In another tantalizing pair up new money outfits Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain face off after Swedish

quarter-finals there are only good teams left. We have enormous respect for Manchester City, But I believe our players will produce another big European performance. I'm convinced we can keep up the pace that saw us overcome Chelsea and offer our supporters a first semi-final

Pep Guardiola in his last season before a switch to Manchester City, are unlikely to lose any sleep over the pair up. "We will have to remain very focussed, it's the quarter-finals, you don't take these matches lightly. After the group games you never have an easy match," said the Frenchman. "We need a good result in the first game at home. But it's a great draw for us," he said.

Zinedine Zidane's ten-time winners Real Madrid and the Champions League's runaway top scorer Cristiano Ronaldo (13 goals), drew Germans Wolfsburg, with the added comfort of playing at home in the second leg against the quarter-final debutants. Emilio Butragueno the Real Madrid director of institutional relations, warned against complacency however. "They are a German team, they are in the quarter-finals for the first time and they motivation in playing us will be huge.

"We know what it means in Europe to commit a single error and we hope to be back here for the semi-finals. There was conversely a sense of glee at Wolfsburg, whose directors beamed with delight as the draw was made. "We can't wait" said Wolfsburg coach Dieter Hecking. "For Wolfsburg, the fans and the club it's a wonderful draw. Real Madrid are a massive side but you've always got a chance." The two legs of the quarter-finals will be played between April 5-13, with the semi-finals on April 26/27 and May 3/4. The final will take place in Milan on May 28. —AFP



NYON: Result of the quarterfinal draw of the UEFA Champions League 2015/16 are displayed at the UEFA Headquarters in Nyon yesterday. —AP

giant Zlatan Ibrahimovic's side toppled Chelsea in the last round. It is a first ever quarter-finals for City. PSG president Nasser Al-Khelaifi was confident his side, fresh from wrapping up a fourth straight French Ligue 1 title in record time, can get to their first Champions League semi-final in twenty years. "In the

since 1995," he said.

Having overcome Juventus in a dramatic come back in midweek five-time European champions Bayern Munich will have been relieved to have drawn Portugal's Benfica. Bayern winger Franck Ribéry warned there was no room for complacency even if the Germans, led by

FIFA INKS DEAL WITH CHINESE SPONSOR LINKED TO BLATTER

ZURICH: FIFA signed its first World Cup sponsor since 2013 yesterday, agreeing to a four-tournament deal with a Chinese conglomerate that has links to Sepp Blatter. FIFA said the deal with property and cinema giant Dalian Wanda Group runs through the 2030 World Cup. The value of the top-tier partnership was not disclosed but is likely to top hundreds of millions of dollars. The firm's Wanda Sports Holding subsidiary is led by Blatter's nephew, Philippe Blatter. Sepp Blatter was forced out as FIFA president by a corruption crisis. Wanda Group chairman Wang Jianlin and Philippe Blatter were at FIFA headquarters yesterday to complete the deal.

FIFA last signed a sponsor 2 1/2 years ago when Russian energy giant Gazprom agreed to a deal. FIFA officials have often acknowledged that potential commercial partners were put off by the corruption scandals, and would wait until after the presidential election to replace Blatter before signing. The Wanda money will help fund the spending promises that FIFA President Gianni Infantino made before his election last month. On Thursday, FIFA committed to pay \$517 million more to national, regional and continental soccer bodies through 2018.

FIFA also upgraded its revenue forecast by \$1.2 billion to \$5.66 billion for a four-year commercial cycle tied to the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Wanda Group is not the first World Cup sponsor from China. Energy company Yingli Solar was a second-tier sponsor for the 2014 tournament in Brazil. On Thursday, FIFA said it banked only \$224 million last year from seven World Cup sponsors. That left 27 of the available slots to be filled for two-tournament deals covering 2018 in Russia and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. —Agencies

DORTMUND V LIVERPOOL 'A NIGHTMARE FOR KLOPP'

ZURICH: Juergen Klopp's Europa League nightmare came true on Friday when his Liverpool side were drawn to meet former club Borussia Dortmund in next month's quarter-finals. Sevilla, bidding to win the trophy for the third successive season, will tackle La Liga rivals Athletic Bilbao while Villarreal take on Sparta Prague and Braga face Shakhtar Donetsk.

After Liverpool knocked out bitter rivals Manchester United on Thursday, Klopp told reporters: "I hope we don't get Dortmund". The charismatic German spent seven seasons at Dortmund, leading them to two Bundesliga titles, German Cup glory and the 2013 Champions League final where they lost to Bayern Munich.

"He comes back!", said Dortmund playmaker Ilkay Guendogan on Twitter after hearing news of the draw. Liverpool, without a major trophy since they lifted the League Cup in 2012, will travel to Germany for the first leg on April 7 before hosting the return match at Anfield seven days later.

It is 50 years since the two teams

met in the final of the now-defunct European Cup Winners' Cup in 1966, Dortmund winning 2-1. The Germans reached the last eight by defeating another English club, Tottenham Hotspur, in the last 16.

Sevilla have won their last two La Liga fixtures against Bilbao 2-0 but

the teams have never met before in European competition. Villarreal and Sparta have also never been drawn together before while Ukrainians Shakhtar, who won the UEFA Cup in 2009, beat Braga of Portugal twice in the group stage of the 2010-11 Champions League. —Reuters



NYON: A screen displays the results of the quarter-final draw for the UEFA Europa League yesterday at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon. —AFP