

## RATTLED DORTMUND SEEK SOLACE AFTER BUS ATTACK

**BERLIN:** Borussia Dortmund face the difficult challenge of recovering from Tuesday's frightening bomb attack on their team bus as they prepare to host Eintracht Frankfurt in the Bundesliga this weekend. Players and staff alike were badly shaken after their team coach was rocked by three explosions on the way to Signal Iduna Park ahead of their Champions League tie against Monaco.

Defender Marc Bartra underwent emergency surgery on a fractured wrist and to remove glass that became planted in his arm after the blast shattered windows on the Dortmund bus. His team-mates also felt the psychological effects, losing 3-2 to Monaco after their quarter-final first leg was pushed back to Wednesday. Many in the Dortmund squad said they had not wanted to play, while manager Thomas Tuchel railed at the decision to reschedule the match less than 24 hours after the planned kick-off.

"Unless you experienced it, you can't understand how bad it was for us," said defender Sokratis Papastathopoulos. "I am just happy to be alive, it was the worst day of my life," he added, referring to the night of the attack. Tuchel accused UEFA of treating Dortmund as if only a "beer can" had been thrown at their bus. But European football's governing body rejected the claim, insisting that both clubs had agreed to play on Wednesday.

German police are still hunting the culprits and an officer was also hurt in the blast. Tuchel is sure to rotate his fourth-placed squad to try to help give those worst affected by the attack time to recover. "We must find a way of overcoming that. But we still don't know how that's going to happen," admitted Tuchel. "Everyone must face up to it in their own way. No one felt it in exactly the same way. "Some players saw the explosion... there were lots of different feelings and therefore many different ways of handling the trauma."

### LEWANDOWSKI BANNED

Germany winger Marco Reus, sidelined for the past six weeks by a hamstring injury, is set to return for Dortmund but Bartra faces four weeks out. Frankfurt were quick to extend their best wishes to the Spaniard, but solidarity aside, Niko Kovac's men need the points on Saturday having dropped to ninth following a run of nine games without a win. As a result of the Dortmund attack, authorities are beefing up security across the country ahead of this weekend's fixtures.

Runaway league leaders Bayern Munich, who are at Bayer Leverkusen, have for the first time introduced security checks at open training sessions. Bayern are 10 points clear of RB Leipzig but will again be without striker Robert Lewandowski, this time through suspension after he picked up his fifth yellow card last weekend.

The Poland star is the league's top scorer with 26 goals but missed Bayern's 2-1 defeat to Real Madrid in the Champions League with a bruised shoulder. Carlo Ancelotti will hope to have both Lewandowski and Mats Hummels (ankle) back in time for Tuesday's quarter-final return leg in Madrid. Leverkusen are desperately looking to stop their slide down the table after just one win in their last seven league games.

Second-placed RB Leipzig are edging ever closer to finishing their debut Bundesliga season by qualifying directly for the Champions League but have a tricky trip to Freiburg. Freiburg, last season's second division champions ahead of Leipzig, have exceeded expectations this term by challenging for a Europa League place. Ex-Bayern striker Nils Petersen equaled the Bundesliga record of 18 goals off the bench when he came on to secure their 1-0 win over Mainz last weekend. —AFP



**MILAN:** From left, David Han Li, Yonghong Li, and Marco Fassone, pose with AC Milan jerseys during a press conference to illustrate takeover of AC Milan soccer club by a Chinese consortium. —AP

## AC MILAN'S NEW OWNERS TARGET RETURN TO CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

**MILAN:** AC Milan's new owners are aiming to make the team a force in European soccer once more, and they want to do so with a mix of star signings and talented young players such as teenage goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. The takeover of Milan by a Chinese-led consortium was finally completed on Thursday, after several delays, ending Silvio Berlusconi's 31-year reign.

During Berlusconi's time in charge, the Rossoneri won trophies at home and abroad, including eight league titles and five Champions League titles. But the seven-time European champion has declined in recent years and is currently sixth in Serie A. It hasn't participated in the Champions League since the 2013-14 season.

"The aim of the next few years is to create a Milan side which is very competitive and very ambitious ... we think we can reach this in a short time," new CEO Marco Fassone said at a press conference yesterday. "We are Milan, we can't say 'slowly slowly and let's see what happens.' The idea is to get back to the Champions League as soon as possible, the aim is to be in it from the 2018-19 season ... UEFA has given us a small advantage with the decision that from 2018 Italy will have four teams in the Champions League, so from then I am certain Milan will be there."

### TRAIL BY DERBY

Currently only the top three in Serie A qualify for Europe's premier club competition. One of the immediate priorities for Milan's new owners will be tying Donnarumma to a long-term contract. The goalkeeper only turned 18 in February but has already played for Italy and is attracting interest from Europe's top clubs.

"We talked about it also at dinner last night with Berlusconi," Fassone said. "I can say that the new owners have all the consideration for Donnarumma that he deserves. "On our part there is

the desire to sort it out quickly and make Gigio (Donnarumma) a pillar of Milan's future." Fassone and the new owners are already planning for the next campaign and want coach Vincenzo Montella to have "60-70 percent" of his squad by the beginning of July and the start of pre-season training.

And they are keen to bring in experienced players to help Milan's talented youngsters take the team back to the top. "We would like to have at the club one or two really big-name players," Fassone said. "Between saying and doing there always has to be the willingness of the clubs and of the players, but we would like to go in that direction." Fassone also said the new owners plan - "in the medium term" - to address the issue of a modern stadium for Milan, which currently shares San Siro with Inter Milan.

Chinese businessman Yonghong Li, who will be Milan's new president, was present yesterday and spoke at length for the first time since his group Rossoneri Sport Luxembourg completed the purchase of the club for 740 million euros (about \$800 million). "Such a glorious club is now beginning a new chapter in its history and the success of this deal was made possible thanks to AC Milan supporters' deep love and expectations," Li said.

"Considering all the top players who have played in this team and all the victories of the past years, the fans are hoping to see the club at the top of European football once again." He added that "we want to go beyond supporters' expectations." The new owners' first match will be today's derby against Inter Milan, which is also owned by a Chinese company. Fassone, who also worked at Juventus, left Inter in 2015. "From an emotional and emotive point of view, I couldn't ask for anything better," he said. "My last match as a sporting director was Inter-Milan so it's nice that I'm starting again with another Inter-Milan." —AP

## BUM-PINCHING FOOTBALL BOSS GIVEN A LIFE BAN

**TUNIS:** The head of a Tunisian football club who pinched an assistant referee on the backside during a match has been banned from the sport for life. The Tunisian Football Federation (FTF) suspended CS Sfaxien President Moncef Khemakhem "from any activity in football" for abusing officials at a championship match last month, it said in a statement Thursday. It said Khemakhem had "violently assaulted" and bitten an assistant referee then pinched his buttocks in an attempt to influence the match's outcome.

Khemakhem later boasted on TV

that he had twice pinched the assistant referee on the backside during the match against Etoile de Sahel on March 1. Sfaxien won the game 3-2.

The FTF accused Khemakhem of verbally abusing match officials, "dangerous and unsporting behavior", "indecent assault" and "harm to good morals". It also fined him \$12,900 (12,000 euros), it said. The FTF statement did not say whether the judgment was open to appeal. In a video posted on YouTube, Khemakhem can be seen joining players' protests on the pitch Etoile equalized with a con-

troversial penalty. After grabbing the referee, the club president heads back to the sideline, raising his thumb at the linesman. He can be seen kissing the official, biting him below the left ear and pinching his cheek. The next day, Khemakhem appeared on public TV channel Wataniya and declared, smiling, that he had "twice pinched the backside" of the linesman "to cheer him up because he lost the match". "We decided to get our rights with our teeth and our fingers," he added, before concluding: "we have had our gift." —AFP