

PSG CAN COMPETE ON BARCA'S LEVEL: DI MARIA

MADRID: Paris Saint-Germain should have no fear of another Champions League clash with Barcelona despite a poor record against the Spanish champions ahead of their last 16 meeting on Tuesday, insists PSG winger Angel di Maria. Barca have held the upper hand in six previous meetings over the past five seasons, losing just once and progressing to the semi-finals from their two quarter-final clashes in 2013 and 2015.

However, ahead of Barca's latest trip to the French capital, Di Maria, who experienced plenty of El Clasico highs and lows against the Catalans in four seasons with Real Madrid, believes PSG now have the quality to compete with the Spanish giants for a first ever European crown. "PSG have players of enormous quality. People like Marco Verratti, who is wanted by Real Madrid and Barcelona, give the team something extra," Di Maria told Madrid sports daily Marca on Friday. "When he isn't there, the team feels (his absence). I think that PSG can easily compete with Madrid or Barcelona."

However, to make the last eight, PSG face the daunting task of restricting Barca's fearsome 'MSN' front three of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar. Suarez and Neymar did the damage in the last tie between the sides, scoring all five of Barca's goals in a 5-1 aggregate rout, but it is his Argentine international teammate Di Maria fears most. "Barca have great players. The MSN is the best attack right now," he added. "Leo is different from the rest. I think to stop him it requires the whole team because when he doesn't do something magical he leaves a teammate free." — AFP

AL ATTIYAH LEAVES TUNISIA TO GENEVE

TUNIS: Mr Nasser Al Attiyah - FIA Vice president left this afternoon to Geneva to attend FIA meeting, where he will discuss many files related to the promotion of motorsport internationally, besides holding many meetings with the heads of committees and heads of FIA clubs and federations all over the world.

Al Attiyah stated before leaving Tunisia that, Unisia motorsport needs more study as motorsport in Tunisia faces some technical affairs that actually needs more efforts and more hard work, in order to reach fair solutions, confirming meanwhile that the benefit of the motorsport is our target in FIA, he also said that all facilities are available in the best form in Tunisia. But it needs hard work to achieve the maximum benefit, as Tunisia is considered one of the pioneer countries in the field of motorsport in MENA. He continued to say "me personally as FIA Vice president and the first official in MENA work hard in order to reach the best conciliation between all parties, I am quite optimistic to reach it".

Regarding the coming meeting of FIA, Al Attiyah said that there is a self explanatory agenda for the meeting, the most prominent files will be discussed during the meeting, also a follow up program will be designed to follow the activities of the committees of the federation, on the other side.



LEICESTER: Leicester manager Claudio Ranieri speaks to players midway through extra time during the English FA Cup Fourth Round replay soccer match between Leicester City and Derby County at the King Power Stadium. — AP

FIGHT TO AVOID EPL RELEGATION IS AS INTENSE AS RACE AT TOP

LONDON: The fight to avoid relegation from the English Premier League is as intense as the race at the top. With 14 matches and four months of the season to play, the bottom six sides are separated by just two points: Sunderland (19 points), Crystal Palace (19), Hull (20), Swansea (21), Leicester (21) and Middlesbrough (21).

Bournemouth, on 26 points in 14th place but without a league win this year, could yet be dragged into the scrap. Reaching the 40-point mark is regarded as the target to ensure safety, although West Ham was relegated on 42 points in 2003. No team has ever got to 43 points and gone down. Sunderland finished one place above the relegation places in 2016 and 2013, on both occasions staying up with 39 points. In 2014, 36 points was enough for West Brom to stay up. Here is a brief look at the bottom six teams:

MIDDLESBROUGH (15th place, 21 points)

Boro, without a league win since mid-December, do not concede many goals but do not score many either having notched a league-lowest 19 so far. Manager Aitor Karanka signed strikers Rudy Gestede and Patrick Bamford last month in a bid to add potency to an attack led by Alvaro Negredo, who is top-scorer on just six. Boro, which plays Everton at home on Saturday, has been warm-weather training in Spain this week to help foster team unity.

LEICESTER (16th, 21 points)

The storm clouds were circling the champions until manager Claudio Ranieri received a vote of confidence this week, the club offering "unwavering support" to the Italian. The Foxes have won just five league games amid reports of increasing dressing room unrest and a rift between manager and players. A much-needed victory in its FA Cup fourth-round replay on Wednesday against second-tier Derby has at least given some cause for optimism. "The win in the Cup will give us more confidence and we have to keep going," Ranieri said. Leicester plays at fellow struggler Swansea tomorrow.

SWANSEA (17th, 21 points)

Paul Clement has been named the manager of the month for January after wins over Crystal Palace, Liverpool, and Southampton. Clement was appointed only in early January but seems to have galvanized the Welsh side which gave Manchester City a tough match in its last game, only to lose in injury time. On facing Leicester, Clement said: "We go into this game with a lot of confidence and a belief that we are going in the right direction. There will not be a team in that region of the table who don't think they can do it."

HULL (18th, 20 points)

Much improved since Marco Silva was appointed manager last month, Hull plays all the sides in the bottom six between now and the end of the season. A draw at Manchester United was followed by a home win over Liverpool, but the tough run of fixtures continues on Saturday with a trip to Arsenal. "We need to continue to do our work to progress our performances," Silva said. "The same spirit, the same attitude, and the same team performance

need to be shown."

CRYSTAL PALACE (19th, 19 points)

Palace has lost seven of its last 10 matches, and was jeered off in its last game after capitulating at home to relegation rival Sunderland 4-0. "I keep preaching the same thing: If you can't win, don't lose. But we keep losing! We need to get a result, got to pick points up," said manager Sam Allardyce ahead of Saturday's match at Stoke. "I haven't been relegated from the Premier League in my entire career, so it's the last thing I want. This team has a great chance of survival."

SUNDERLAND (20th, 19 points)

The impressive win at Crystal Palace brought some respite for manager David Moyes, who hopes for more of the same from on-loan Manchester United winger Adnan Januzaj. He created both of Jermain Defoe's goals last weekend and is relishing their partnership. "In the last few games, we've linked really well," he said. "We're enjoying playing together and hopefully he can score many more goals." —AP

FA WANTS DORTMUND SOUTH STAND BAN, FINE

BERLIN: The German football association (DFB) yesterday demanded a one-match ban for Borussia Dortmund fans from their south stand and a 100,000 euro fine after crowd trouble in several games including last week's win over RB Leipzig. The DFB's control committee said it had proposed the stand closure and fine given that Dortmund were repeat offenders and had received a suspended sentence last July for similar problems.

Fans last week unfurled banners attacking Leipzig, owned by energy drink makers Red Bull, as well as their sports director Ralf Rangnick and Red Bull owner Dieter Mateschitz. "Slaughter the bulls," read one, "Beer instead of soda" read another in refer-

ence to Leipzig's owner. Dortmund fans lit flares during the game, while outside the 80,000-seat stadium some fans attacked arriving Leipzig supporters. They had also caused trouble in three other matches this season, the DFB said.

Dortmund won the Leipzig game, but club bosses repeatedly apologised to Leipzig for their fans' behavior. "Such a defamation of individuals or clubs by using banners and chants is unacceptable and needs to be sanctioned," said Anton Nachreiner, head of the DFB committee. "The same goes for the flares," he said. The south stand, nicknamed the "Yellow Wall", is the largest standing stand in Europe with a 25,000 capacity.—Reuters