

Sports

Besieged Bale scores as Real Madrid rally for friendly win over Arsenal

Asensio stretched off with serious looking knee injury

WASHINGTON: Gareth Bale shrugged off uncertainty over his Real Madrid future Tuesday, his second-half goal helping the La Liga giants rally for a friendly win over Arsenal. Madrid clawed back from two goals down to finish full time at 2-2, and prevailed 3-2 in the penalty shootout dictated by the International Champions Cup exhibition tournament format.

Welsh star Bale didn't play in Madrid's 3-1 loss to Bayern Munich in Houston on Saturday, manager Zinedine Zidane saying Monday he declined to dress for the match as the club pursued options for off-loading him. Zidane said at the weekend he thought it would be "best for everyone" if Bale's departure could be arranged quickly — comments Bale's agent branded "disrespectful" of a player who helped the side to a Spanish league title and four Champions Leagues since arriving from Tottenham six years ago.

Zidane insisted Monday he meant no disrespect, and Bale duly came in at halftime on Tuesday and made a statement. "He had a good game and I'm happy for him," Zidane said. "I do not know what's going to happen, for now he's with us. It did not change anything." First-half goals from Alexandre Lacazette — who converted a penalty in the 10th minute — and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang had put Arsenal up 2-0 at the break — by which time both teams were reduced to 10 men. Bale pulled one back in the 56th minute, latching onto a loose ball and slotting it home.

Marco Asensio drilled the equalizer three minutes later, blasting a low Marcelo cross past Emiliano Martinez. Minutes later Asensio was on the ground,

apparently injured with little contact to be stretchered off. Bale continued to offer reminders of his worth — clearing a goal-bound Aubameyang drive off the line following a goalmouth scramble, and missing just wide with a curling effort off his left foot 10 minutes from time. Eddie Nketiah, who scored three goals in Arsenal's two prior friendlies — a 3-0 win over Fiorentina and a 2-1 victory over Bayern Munich — missed two good chances late. Bale's fortunes dipped in the shoot-out, when he came up first for Madrid and saw his effort saved easily before the Spanish side prevailed.

Arsenal out fast

Arsenal had appeared on their way in the early stages at FedEx Field, home of the NFL's Washington Redskins. Madrid's Nacho, cautioned for a clumsy tackle on Sead Kolasinac in the first five minutes, received a second booking and was sent off for a deliberate handball in the eighth after sticking his arm out to stop a ball from Lacazette on the line.

Lacazette took the ensuing penalty, his attempt hitting both posts before crossing the line to put Arsenal up 1-0 with a man advantage. Lacazette then turned provider for Aubameyang, who doubled the score in the 24th minute.

But Arsenal's comfort level dropped in the 40th, when Sokratis Papastathopoulos was sent off for a second bookable offense — a foul on Luka Modric — minutes after he'd been shown a yellow card for yanking back Toni Kroos on the counter.

Arsenal had won the first three games of their North



LANDOVER: Real Madrid's Welsh forward Gareth Bale (L) celebrates with Real Madrid's Spanish midfielder Marco Asensio after scoring a goal during the International Champions Cup football match between Real Madrid and Arsenal at FedExField. — AFP

American tour, starting with a 3-0 win over Major League Soccer's Colorado Rapids and now head back across the Atlantic. Real Madrid take on Atletico

Madrid on Friday at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, home of the NFL's New York Giants and New York Jets. — AFP

Buffon saves Juve after De Ligt own goal in Inter friendly

NANJING: Matthijs de Ligt scored an own goal on his first start before veteran goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon rescued Juventus in a 4-3 penalty shootout win over Inter Milan yesterday. It may only have been a friendly between the Italian arch rivals, but tempers threatened to boil over at times, especially in a feisty second half in stifling Nanjing.

The game ended 1-1 after 90 minutes, with Cristiano Ronaldo drawing Juventus level with a deflected second-half free-kick following De Ligt's own goal on 10 minutes. Then the 41-year-old Buffon — more than twice De Ligt's age — sprang to the fore in the shootout, making a triumphant return to the Serie A champions after a year with Paris Saint-Germain. Dutch teenager De Ligt, who joined Juventus last week from Ajax for a reported 75 million euros (\$85 million), came on as a substitute during Sunday's 3-2 defeat to Tottenham Hotspur in Singapore.

New Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri named the 19-year-old to start in the "Derby d'Italia", but the central defender got off to the worst possible beginning, directing the ball past goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny with his knee to give Inter the lead. De Ligt, who



NANJING: Juventus's Cristiano Ronaldo runs with the ball during the International Champions Cup football tournament at the Nanjing Olympic Sport Center in Nanjing. — AFP

was one of the most coveted players in world football before sealing his big-money move, was largely untroubled for the rest of the half before being substituted at the break.

It was only a pre-season friendly as part of the International Champions Cup, but Antonio Conte's Inter dealt out some rough treatment to Ronaldo. Three times in the first half, in a match played in sweltering condi-

tions in eastern China, the Portuguese forward was sent sprawling to the turf. There was a flashpoint in the 51st minute when Juventus substitute Merih Demiral — who was to score the winning penalty — lashed out while waiting for his side to take a corner. Minutes later skipper Leonardo Bonucci talked himself into a yellow card as the referee struggled to regain control. — AFP

He's Asia's Beckham: Spurs boss hails Son

SHANGHAI: Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino heaped praise yesterday on Son Heung-min and said he regarded the South Korean superstar as Asia's answer to David Beckham. The 27-year-old forward was undoubtedly the focus of attention for fans in Shanghai, where Spurs play Premier League rivals Manchester United in a friendly today.

Pochettino's side, beaten by Liverpool in the final of the Champions League, arrived in China from Singapore, where Son was similarly feted. "We can see how people love Sonny in Asia, he's an icon. We joked a bit, but I compare him with David Beckham," said Pochettino. "But I'm not surprised and it's good to see how people love him and how important he is to people." The Argentine manager, who will be expected to mount a Premier League title challenge with his side this season, praised the way that Son bounced back from a difficult first year in England.

Son joined the Londoners from Bayer Leverkusen four summers ago, but

showed only flashes of his potential in his debut season and was linked with a move away from Spurs. But he has gone on to become a key player and last season was outstanding, scoring 12 goals in 31 Premier League matches and racking up seven assists. Pochettino praised Son's "fantastic mentality" and desire to keep improving, saying: "He is a good example for all the fans and people, not only here in Asia but in the whole world."

"His first season was tough, it was tough to adapt to England, to new football, new culture, new habits. "But after the first season his adaptation was unbelievable and he became a very important player for us." The affable Son, who was mentioned by some experts as a potential player of the year in the Premier League last season, said that he was proud to be a flag-bearer for Asian footballers. He said the Spurs players, among them striker Harry Kane, "deserved" to win a trophy this season — something that has eluded them under Pochettino since he arrived at the club in 2014.

"Seeing how hard the players work, how professional we are, I am so proud of this team," said Son.

"Until now we don't have anything, it's tough, but we are looking forward to being successful. "I am sure we can do better than last season." A torrential downpour struck towards the end of an open Spurs training session on yesterday morning and there is the possibility of more rain later in the day, and on the day of the match. — AFP

Messi given one-match ban for Copa red card

ASUNCION, Paraguay: Argentina star Lionel Messi was hit with a one-game suspension by South American football bosses over his dismissal during the Copa America third-place play-off against Chile earlier this month. However, CONMEBOL made no mention of Messi's "corruption" accusation against the regional governing body that he made after receiving his red card.

Messi was harshly dismissed in the first half of Argentina's 2-1 win over Chile after a clash with defender Gary Medel. Television images suggested Messi did nothing wrong as Medel appeared to repeatedly try, unsuccessfully, to headbutt the Barcelona forward. While most observers acknowledged that the Chile captain deserved to be sent off, Paraguayan referee Mario Diaz de Vivar controversially also gave Messi his marching orders.

CONMEBOL's disciplinary commission hit Messi with "an automatic one-match suspension," adding late on Tuesday that it could not be appealed by the Argentine Football Association (AFA). It means the 32-year-old five-time Ballon d'Or winner will miss the first of Argentina's qualification matches for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, due to be played in March. He was also fined \$1,500.

"Corruption and the referees are preventing people from enjoying the football and they're ruining it a bit," Messi said after the Chile match. Messi had also hit out at the organizers after Argentina's semi-final elimination against hosts Brazil in their previous match. "Brazil were the hosts and they're managing a lot in CONMEBOL these days, which makes it complicated" for everyone else, Messi had said after his side were denied what appeared like two clear penalties in a 2-0 defeat.

The CONMEBOL commission made no mention, however, of Messi's comments, for which he was expected to face harsher punishment. The announcement came after CONMEBOL, earlier on Tuesday,



SAO PAULO: In this file picture taken on July 6, 2019 Argentina's Lionel Messi gestures during the Copa America football tournament third-place match against Chile at the Corinthians Arena. — AFP

sanctioned AFA president Claudio Tapia for his blistering attack on Ecuadoran referee Roddy Zambrano, who had refused to consult VAR over the two Argentine penalty claims in their 2-0 defeat to Brazil. Tapia had hit out at "serious and gross refereeing mistakes" while questioning whether "the principles of ethics, loyalty and transparency" had been observed during the match. CONMEBOL stripped Tapia of his role as the regional body's representative on the FIFA executive committee.

In other news, Everton defender Yerry Mina has been charged with misconduct in relation to a breach of the Football Association's betting regulations, the FA has announced. It is alleged the Colombian international participated in an advertisement for betting activity that he is prohibited from engaging in.

It is understood the charge relates to an advert which Mina, who has until Friday to provide a response, appeared in for Betjuego in his home country of Colombia earlier this year. Stringent rules are in place with regard to sports betting in order to prevent, among other things, match-fixing and spot-betting. Last week, Daniel Sturridge was fined £75,000 (\$94,000) and handed a six-week suspension after being found guilty of breaching different betting rules. — AFP

Hoeness to step down as Bayern president

BERLIN: Uli Hoeness is set to step down as president of Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich with reports yesterday saying he will not stand for re-election in November. According to Germany's top-selling daily Bild and other media outlets, the 67-year-old will also quit as head of the club's supervisory board following its annual general meeting this autumn.

He is set to walk away after 40 years in charge of Bayern and reportedly has former Adidas boss Herbert Hainer, his deputy on the club's board, in mind as successor. Hoeness joined Bayern as a player in 1970, retiring nine years later to become the club's general manager and has overseen its fortunes ever since — apart from two years in jail for tax evasion, from June 2014 to February 2016.

The Bundesliga champions, who have just finished a tour of the USA, declined to comment when asked for confirmation by AFP subsidiary SID. "I once said, 'It's not over yet!', but the day is not far off when I say 'That was it,'" Hoeness recently told club magazine '51'. Bayern stars were stunned by the reports. "First of all, I was shocked, I wasn't prepared for that," admitted left-back David Alaba following Tuesday's 1-0 win over AC Milan in Kansas City. "I think it's unimaginable for FC Bayern to be without him. "Regardless of whether he has a post at the club, he will always have an influence."

Defender Joshua Kimmich was equally shocked. "I haven't heard the bomb drop yet, when is he going to quit?" After a knee injury forced the West Germany international into retirement, Hoeness became general manager in 1979 and 30 years later was promoted to club president in 2009. — AFP

Neymar will go to China with PSG despite tensions

PARIS: Neymar will travel on an upcoming tour of China with Paris-Saint Germain, the club said Tuesday, as the troubled Brazilian superstar's future remains up in the air amid mounting signs he is unhappy at the French champions. The 27-year-old, who has been repeatedly linked to a move to Barcelona, failed to show up to PSG's pre-season training on July 8, with his camp maintaining he had a prior agreement to stay away.

The club threatened to take "appropriate action" against the world's most expensive player, who said he had stayed in Brazil to attend a charity five-a-side football tournament run by his foundation. Neymar, who joined PSG in 2017 for 222 million euros (\$264 million at the time), rejoined the team a week later on July 15. He also didn't help the strained relationship by controversially saying that his best football memory was beating PSG when he played for Barcelona.

Just days before rejoining PSG, he cited as his favorite football memory his role in the 2017 Barcelona team that overturned a 4-0 first-leg deficit by winning 6-1 in the second leg of their last-16 Champions League tie. He also recently posted a 10-second video of himself in a Barcelona shirt and a quote from the Bible: "No weapon turned against you will prosper." It has been a troubled summer for Neymar. He missed Brazil's triumphant Copa America campaign on home soil due to an ankle injury and was also questioned by Brazilian police over allegations he raped a woman — accusations he denies.

PSG referenced the ankle injury in its statement naming the squad on Tuesday, saying that "daily physical work will continue and complete recovery and integration with the group is scheduled for training in China". It added that x-rays of the fracture showed "completely normal progress and a very good improvement". PSG land in Shenzhen, China, and will play friendlies against Inter Milan in Macau on Saturday and Sydney FC in Suzhou on July 30. — AFP