

Sports

Atalanta qualify for Champions League as Milan miss out

Fans bid farewell to captain and local hero Daniele De Rossi

ROME: Atalanta won at Sassuolo on Sunday to secure their first ever Champions League spot and Inter Milan joined them while ensuring Empoli were relegated after a frantic second half in the San Siro.

AC Milan ended up fifth despite winning at SPAL. Genoa and Fiorentina stayed in Serie A after a nerve-wracked goalless draw. The evening started with Inter, Atalanta, AC Milan and Roma battling for the two remaining Champions League spots and Empoli knowing that if they won they would survive.

Because their ground is being redeveloped, Atalanta had to cede home advantage and play at Sassuolo where they quickly fell behind. Duvan Zapata levelled before half-time. After Sassuolo lost their scorer Domenico Berardi, who received a red card for his part in the mass brawl that ended the first half, Atalanta comfortably sealed third as goals by Alejandro Gomez and Mario Pasalic completed a 3-1 win.

"It's been an extraordinary season," Atalanta president Antonio Percassi told Sky Sport. "My first hug was for (coach Gian Piero) Gasperini, for a lifetime. It's already a given that he'll still be here next season."

Milan took a two-goal lead at SPAL, with goals by Hakan Calhanoglu and Franck Kessie, but Francesco Vicari and Mohamed Fares replied. Meanwhile at the San Siro, after a goal-less first half, Inter brought on Keita Balde. The striker broke the deadlock with a solo goal six minutes later, earning a yellow card for ripping off his shirt in celebration.

The home team had a chance to increase their lead when Mauro Icardi tumbled over Empoli goalkeeper Bartlomiej Dragowski. After a delay for video review, Icardi missed the penalty.

A few minutes later in Ferrara, Kessie rolled in a

penalty to put AC Milan back in the lead against SPAL. They held on to win 3-2. Back at the San Siro, Salih Ucan's low cross from the right reached Hamed Traore unmarked in front of goal and he levelled to lift Empoli out of the relegation places and push Inter out of the top four.

Five minutes later, Radja Nainggolan changed that when he pounced on a rebound to put Inter ahead. In a frantic finish, Empoli came close several times with Inter centre-back Stefan de Vrij deflecting one shot onto his own bar.

In added time, with Dragowski in the Empoli attack, Inter rolled the ball into the empty net, but Balde had pulled Dragowski back in the build-up. The goal was disallowed and Balde earned a second yellow card. Yet the 2-1 win was enough to save Inter and doom Empoli.

The wins of the three teams above them meant Roma finished sixth despite beating visiting Parma 2-1. They also bid farewell to captain and local hero Daniele De Rossi who came off to rapturous applause with nine minutes to play.

Earlier on Sunday, Massimiliano Allegri ended his Juventus career in disappointing fashion as the champions were undone by two late strikes at Sampdoria to finish the Serie A season with a five-match winless streak. Despite a poor final few weeks they still finished 11 points ahead of second-placed Napoli, who ended their underwhelming campaign beaten 3-2 at Bologna on Saturday.

"I feel good because I ended five incredible years by winning the title ... tomorrow a new era begins," Allegri told broadcaster DAZN after the 2-0 defeat. He leaves having also won four Italian Cups and re-established the Old Lady as a force in Europe, reaching two



MILAN: Inter's Senegalese forward Keita Balde vies with Empoli's Ghanaian midfielder Afriyie Acquah (C) during the first goal of the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan vs Empoli at the San Siro stadium in Milan. — AFP

Champions League finals and signing Cristiano Ronaldo last summer.

"I'll come back to work when I have the opportunity ... I need to find a team with which I can enjoy myself and do a good job," he added. Sampdoria's 36-year-old

striker Fabio Quagliarella failed to add to his 26 goals but still finished as the Serie A top scorer, three ahead of Zapata. Torino finished their exciting campaign in seventh place, level on points with Roma, following a 3-1 win over Lazio. — AFP

KIB continues to shine at Al-Roudan's football tournament



The KIB football team at Al-Roudan's Football Tournament



Corner kick for the KIB football team



Some entertainment activities organized by KIB during the tournament

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently participated in the 2019 Late Abdullah Mishari Al-Roudan's Ramadan Indoor Football Tournament with a team of professional football players, working together to compete for the winning title. In its latest match, KIB's football team managed to score 2:1 against Al-Mudmar team and defeat Al-Barq after a 4:1 victory.

KIB's football team displayed a great show of sportsmanship and athleticism on the field, forging ahead in one of the most popular sporting events across the country. Long preparations and trainings

preceded the tournament, ensuring that the Bank's football team gives their best performance on the field during every match.

On this occasion, Senior Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "We are very proud of our team and the discipline, sportsmanship and team spirit they have shown throughout the tournament. Sports has always been at the heart of our social responsibility program, encouraging the community in all ways so they can shine in sporting events - locally and internation-

ally. For this reason, we have included a number of sports activities and events in this year's Ramadan program; thereby promoting sports across diverse segments of the local community."

KIB's football team has managed to achieve great achievements over the years, as a result of its focus on teamwork, sportsmanship, and fair competition. As part of its comprehensive Ramadan program, the Bank remains committed to supporting sports events and activities that encourage the local sports scene and cater to local youth.

Sarri on shaky ground as Chelsea challenge Arsenal for Euro glory

BAKU: When Chelsea meet Arsenal in the Europa League final on the shores of the Caspian Sea on Wednesday, it might be coach Maurizio Sarri's last match in charge despite what appears as a solid first year at Stamford Bridge.

Under the Italian, Chelsea have qualified for the Champions League next season and reached the final of the domestic League Cup before losing in a penalty shootout against Manchester City.

By contrast Arsenal, under Unai Emery in his first season in London, missed out on the four Champions

League spots on offer in the Premier League after a late slump in form.

The Gunners must now beat their city rivals in the Olympic Stadium in Azerbaijan's capital Baku to squeeze into Europe's premier competition.

Yet it is Sarri who seems to be on the shakier ground, not least because of Chelsea's record of hiring and firing managers - a dozen, including interim coaches, have come and gone since Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich bought the club in 2003.

Arsenal, by contrast, gave former manager Arsene Wenger 22 years in the job before he made way for Emery. Furthermore, Chelsea's third-place in the Premier league table might look impressive, but they finished 25 points behind runners-up Liverpool and were thankful that Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United, along with Arsenal, stumbled badly.

Some Chelsea fans have been very direct in their criticisms of Sarri's tactics and have made it clear to the club's hierarchy who they would prefer in the dugout next season by chanting the name of former midfield

hero Frank Lampard.

In his first season as a coach, Lampard has steered Derby County to Monday's second-tier playoff final against Aston Villa for a place in the Premier League.

'ARE THEY HAPPY WITH ME?'

Sarri, who has been linked with the vacant coach's position at Juventus, acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding his future in the run-up to the trip to Baku.

"I have to speak with my club after the final. I want to know if they are happy with me or not," he said.

"I think we had a good season with a lot of problems, of course. We lost two or three matches very badly but we had a good season in the end."

Sarri appeared to be on the ropes in February when Chelsea were thrashed 6-0 in the Premier League by Manchester City, not long after a 4-0 drubbing by Bournemouth. But Chelsea stabilised while Arsenal went on a miserable run of form late in the season, costing them the chance of leap-frogging bitter rivals Spurs into fourth place. — Reuters

Zamalek use penalty power to end 16-year African trophy drought

JOHANNESBURG: Brilliant penalties enabled Zamalek Sporting Club of Egypt to win the CAF Confederation Cup final near Alexandria yesterday and end a 16-year African trophy drought.

Mahmoud Alaa converted a 55th-minute VAR spot-kick to give Zamalek a 1-0 second-leg win over Renaissance Sportive Berkane of Morocco and leave the teams tied at 1-1 on aggregate.

With no extra-time in CAF club matches, the final went to a shootout and Zamalek converted all five penalties to win 5-3 before a near-capacity crowd in the 86,000-seat stadium. The regular-time penalty and those in the shootout were all expertly taken, with their power and placement giving Berkane goalkeeper Abdelali Mhamdi no chance.

Success came as a massive relief to the Cairo-based club, who play some fixtures at the Borg el Arab Stadium almost 200 kilometres (114 miles) north-west of the capital for security reasons. After winning nine CAF titles between 1984 and 2003, Zamalek failed to add another until the victory over Berkane in a match that kicked off late Sunday and stretched into Monday.

There was a mix of relief and joy for the predominantly Zamalek-supporting crowd after the shootout as they became the third most successful club in CAF competitions with 10 titles. Al Ahly, Cairo neighbours of Zamalek and their greatest rivals for more than a century, have won 19 African titles and TP Mazembe from the Democratic Republic of Congo 11.

It was the fourth time in 16 finals that a shootout decided the outcome with Hearts of Oak of Ghana, Stade Malien of Mali and MAS Fes of Morocco winning finals on penalties.

Zamalek coach and former Tottenham Hotspur manager Christian Gross became the second Swiss handler to lift the Confederation Cup after Michel Decastel in 2007 with a Tunisian club. The second leg result in Alexandria could have been different had Hamdi Laachir not squandered a clearcut early chance for Berkane, blazing over from close range.

Soon after, Zamalek came close to cancelling the 1-0 lead the Moroccans took into the return match when a Youssef 'Obama' Ibrahim lob beat the goalkeeper but went over the bar. The Ethiopian referee initially ignored Zamalek penalty appeals early in the second half, but was persuaded by players to review a goalmouth incident and ruled that Najji Larbi handled.

Alaa blasted the penalty into the net, setting up a tense second half with Berkane sensing that if they scored an away goal, they would almost certainly win their first CAF final. But an experienced Zamalek defence, backed by 31-year-old goalkeeper Mahmoud 'Gennesh' Abdel Rahim, held firm to force the penalty shootout.

Substitute Khalid Boutaib scored from the first spot-kick for Zamalek, then Laachir fired embarrassingly wide to immediately put Berkane on the back foot. It proved a crucial miss as Alaa, Abdallah Gomaa, Youssef Ibrahim, and substitute Ayman Sayed scored for the Egyptian White Knights to finally end their African title jinx.

Success for Zamalek confirmed the north African dominance of the Confederation Cup-the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League-with 11 winning club coming from the region. — AFP