

## Sports

# Chelsea, Ajax draw European thriller as Liverpool win and Barca stumble

## Hakimi double seals stunning Dortmund win over Inter

**PARIS:** Jorginho scored two penalties as Chelsea came roaring back from 4-1 down to draw 4-4 with nine-man Ajax in a Champions League classic on Tuesday, while holders Liverpool claimed a narrow victory and a stuttering Barcelona were held.

There was also a rousing comeback win for Borussia Dortmund over Inter Milan and a big success for Valencia, but the greatest drama came at Stamford Bridge. Ajax appeared to be heading for a stunning victory when Hakim Ziyech set up Donny van de Beek to put them 4-1 ahead 10 minutes into the second half.

Before that, Jorginho quickly levelled from the spot after Tammy Abraham's own goal gave the Dutch champions a second-minute lead, but a Quincy Promes header and a Kepa Arrizabalaga own goal made it 3-1 at the break.

After conceding again, Cesar Azpilicueta poked in from close range for Chelsea to pull it back to 4-2, and then came the crazy moment midway through the second half which really gave them hope.

In one fell swoop, Italian referee Gianluca Rocchi sent off Ajax's Daley Blind and dismissed Joel Veltman for a second caution for a handball in the box seconds later. Jorginho then converted the resulting penalty.

Teenager Reece James made it 4-4, and Chelsea thought they had gone in front when Azpilicueta fired in, but that goal was disallowed for an Abraham handball. "I can't explain the game. For all the things we might analyse back, the madness of the game, we are here for entertainment I suppose and anyone who watched that has to say what a game of football. Respect to Ajax, what a spectacle," Chelsea boss Frank Lampard told BT Sport.

The result means Ajax, Chelsea and Valencia are level on seven points atop Group H, with the Spaniards coming from behind to beat Lille 4-1. Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen put Lille ahead at half-time, but Dani Parejo's penalty restored parity and Valencia then scored three times in the last eight minutes.

Adama Soumaoro's own goal was followed by a stunning Geoffrey Kondogbia strike and a Ferran Torres effort. Lille are eliminated.

### 'JOB DONE' FOR KLOPP

Liverpool won 4-1 in Genk two weeks ago and looked on course for another comfortable victory against the Belgians when Georginio Wijnaldum gave them the lead at Anfield. However, with manager Jurgen Klopp resting several players ahead of this weekend's clash with Manchester City, the reigning European champions were pegged back.

Tanzanian striker Mbwana Ally Samatta headed Genk level before the interval, and it took a fine strike by Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain to win the game. "The plan was to win the game and we did that, so job done," admitted Klopp.

Liverpool are top of Group E, a point above Napoli, who could have qualified for the last 16 with a win against Salzburg but were held to a 1-1 draw.

### HAALAND SCORES AGAIN

Erling Braut Haaland's early penalty — the 19-year-old's seventh Champions League goal this season — gave Salzburg the lead, before Hirving Lozano equalised. In Germany, Inter looked to be heading for a second straight win against Dortmund as they raced into a 2-0 half-time lead with Lautaro Martinez and Matias Vecino scoring.

Yet Dortmund fought back in the second half to win the game as Achraf Hakimi grabbed a brace either side of a Julian Brandt goal. It is a result that leaves Dortmund second in Group F, three points ahead of Inter and one behind Barcelona, who are still top despite a 0-0 draw at home to Slavia Prague.

### MESSI DENIED

Lionel Messi almost scored one of his finest goals, hitting the woodwork at the end of an exhilarating run

one ahead of Sevilla in fifth, albeit having played a game less due to last month's postponed Clasico.

"In football today, and in a team like ours, it's all about winning," said Valverde. "And if it can be emphatic, even better. It is never enough. "At the start of the season, it's not about winning one title, it's about winning three or four. So the frustration when you don't win a game is high."

When Valverde arrived in 2017, he took over a team in crisis, stunned by the departure of Neymar and stung by consecutive defeats to Real Madrid in the Super Cup. He brought stability and calm, and the team, steadied by his belief in discipline and hard work, won the league. A year later, they did it again, this time by 11 points.

But while initially some of the aesthetics, and players, remained, Barcelona's sense of identity fizzled. The reliance on Messi has grown heavier while success in Spain no longer excuses failure in Europe, particularly the kind seen against Roma and Liverpool.

"Barcelona have a history of fantastic collective play and then on top of that Messi made the difference," Arsene Wenger told beinSports on Tuesday night. "Today it looks like they wait for Messi to do something and the strength of the team-play has gone. It looks like they have lost their charisma."

Without the likes of Xavi and Andres Iniesta, Valverde may not be able to replicate the style of Pep Guardiola but he has Messi, Antoine Griezmann, Ousmane Dembele and Frenkie de Jong. The feeling is the style should be better than this.

"I would ask for patience," said Pique. "We are not playing at the level we expect. The results are not bad, but they could be better. We have to improve." But without a sense of direction, supporters are also less eager to wait.

"Pique asks for patience and we have it," wrote



**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah attempts a shot during the UEFA Champions League group E football match between Liverpool and RC Genk at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England.—AFP

in the first half. Barcelona had not failed to score in a home Champions League group game in seven years and this result followed a shock weekend defeat at Levante. "We haven't been convincing, either on Saturday or today, and we know there is a lot of pressure now on the team. We have to respond," said coach Ernesto Valverde.

RB Leipzig top Group G after goals by Diego

Demme and Marcel Sabitzer gave the Germans a 2-0 win at Zenit Saint Petersburg. Lyon are two points behind them in second following a 3-1 defeat of Benfica.

Joachim Andersen and Bertrand Traore scored for Lyon either side of a goal from Memphis Depay, who has now netted in all four Champions League games this season. Haris Seferovic scored for Benfica.—AFP

## Barca need fixing fast as patience with Valverde wears thin

**BARCELONA:** Ernesto Valverde tried to put the criticism down to high demands and snap reactions but Barcelona's malaise, underlined by a goalless draw at home to Slavia Prague on Tuesday, will be laid at the feet of their coach.

After losing 3-1 at Levante in La Liga on Saturday, Barca produced a performance that offered few assurances and even less encouragement this will be the year they, and Lionel Messi, win the Champions League again.

Messi hit the crossbar but was unable to deliver the goal at a restless Camp Nou that might have papered over the cracks and, at least, quietened the whistles at the finish. Gerard Pique and Valverde both pointed to the tables in the team's defence, with Barcelona sitting top of La Liga and first in Group F, still more than likely to go through, although with first place now up for grabs.

If they fail to win at home to Borussia Dortmund later this month, it could well be that Barca, Dortmund and Inter Milan are all within three points of each other going into the final round, when Valverde's side are away at the San Siro.

And in the league, they lead, but not with conviction. Level on points with Real Madrid, Barcelona are only



Ernesto Valverde

Mundo Deportivo on Wednesday. "But that doesn't mean continuing while wearing a blindfold," Valverde's contract ends next summer and although it contains an option to extend for another year, there might be an opportunity for an amicable conclusion.

Erik ten Hag, Xavi and Ronald Koeman could be possible successors. To stay longer, Valverde will likely have to win the Champions League but crash out early or fall away in La Liga, and he could go sooner too.

"Three days ago we were enjoying a winning streak and now everything has unravelled in a flash," said Valverde. "If you can fall into a hole in three days, in three days you can also climb out of it." But the whistles on Tuesday suggest the dip goes deeper. Barcelona need fixing and Valverde knows time is running out.—AFP

## Salzburg make Napoli wait for Champions League last 16 spot

**NAPLES:** Salzburg prevented Napoli from becoming the first team to qualify for the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday as the Italian side settled for a 1-1 draw in Naples. Norwegian teenage striker Erling Haaland put the Austrians ahead from the spot after 11 minutes before Mexican Hirving Lozano grabbed an equaliser just before the break with his first goal at the San Paolo stadium.

Liverpool's win over Genk at Anfield ensures the reigning European champions go top of Group E at the expense of the Italians, with nine points from four games. Napoli are still well on course to qualify as they are second with eight points, four points ahead of Salzburg, with Belgian side Genk on one point, with two games to play.

"It's a bit of an unlucky time for us," said Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne. "We tried everything. It's a great performance but we didn't manage to score enough. "We have to look up and keep working. If we play like tonight soon the success will return."

Carlo Ancelotti's side have been struggling in the league, slipping to seventh in Serie A after taking only two points from their last three games. Club president Aurelio De Laurentiis had ordered the team to be confined to their training camp this week after last weekend's 2-1 defeat to Roma.

Napoli had won 3-2 in Austria and could have qualified for the knockout stages if they had claimed all three points as Genk failed to beat Liverpool. But despite dominating for long periods the hosts proved wasteful in front of goal, with the stalemate a missed opportunity.

A clumsy Kalidou Koulibaly foul on South Korean forward Hwang Hee-chan earned the visitors an early penalty with Haaland, 19, slotting in for his seventh European goal this season.

Jose Callejon hit the post with a header and Lorenzo Insigne spurned a series of chances, with Piotr Zielinski and Fabian Ruiz also misfiring in front of goal. Napoli could thank Lozano who was their best player on the night and latched onto an Insigne cross for the equaliser.

But back after the break, despite changes made by both coaches there was more of the same with Napoli failing to take advantage of Salzburg's loss of momentum. Lozano went off to a standing ovation and was substituted by Fernando Llorente late with Arkadiusz Milik coming on for Dries Mertens.

Insigne clipped the bar with a long-range effort on 73 minutes, with Llorente also nodding wide just before the final whistle. Napoli next travel to Liverpool, who they beat 2-0 in Naples in September, but who now have to wait until the final round before sealing their berth at home against Genk in December.—AFP

## FIFA asks Iraq to host qualifiers elsewhere after protests

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq has been told to find neutral venues for this month's home qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asia Cup because of ongoing protests, officials said yesterday.

Iraq had been due to play the two games in Basra — against Iran on November 14 and Bahrain on November 19 — but the southern port city has been caught up in the anti-government demonstrations that have swept Baghdad and the south.

"FIFA informed us late Tuesday night that we must choose a new place, an alternative outside Iraq, for the scheduled match with Iran by Wednesday," the deputy head of the Iraqi football federation, Ali Jabbar, told AFP. The Iraqi federation has received a formal letter from FIFA and is "following up on the issue," another member of the federation confirmed.

A statement from FIFA said it had assessed "the current security situation in Iraq" and informed the local federation that upcoming matches "must be played on neutral ground."

"The Iraqi Football Association has been requested to nominate a neutral venue for the said matches, which is subject to confirmation by FIFA and the AFC," it said.

The decision is a major disappointment for Iraq, which had lobbied FIFA for years to reverse a ban on hosting home internationals because of instability. Following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the country was plunged into years of violence and no international games were hosted there.—AFP

## Lin Dan vows to plough on in pursuit of fading Olympic dream

**SHANGHAI:** Lin Dan yesterday scotched reports that he is set to retire and said he will not give up on his unlikely bid for a third Olympic gold.

The 36-year-old, arguably the greatest badminton player of all time, went out in the first round of the Fuzhou China Open to his fellow Chinese Chen Long.

It was another blow to his fading chances of reaching next summer's Tokyo Olympics, but Lin vowed afterwards to carry on despite Chinese media saying Fuzhou could be his farewell tournament.

"I didn't know about the rumours, I think it's too early to talk about retirement," Lin was quoted as saying by the Xinhua news agency.

"I won't give up trying to qualify for the 2020 Olympics until the last minute."

Lin, a five-time world champion and the 2008 and 2012 Olympic champion, won the first game against Chen, 21-19.

But Chen, the 2016 Rio Olympics gold medallist, came back to win the next two 21-12, 21-12 and send a wilting Lin home early.

Lin has now lost eight times in the first round of tournaments this year.

Once the world number one, his ranking has fallen to 18th. Chen and Shi Yuqi are third and fourth respectively and in pole position to represent China next summer in Tokyo, as long as they remain ahead of Lin at the April 2020 cut-off.

Shi is coming back from an ankle problem and more injuries for him could be Lin's best hope for making the



Lin Dan

China team for Tokyo.

Shi, the third seed, defeated South Korea's Son Wan-Ho 21-17, 21-17.

Lin, who earned the nickname "Super Dan" during his pomp, has always said that he wanted to end his career with another tilt at Games gold.

With that prospect looking increasingly remote, Chinese media had speculated that he could announce his retirement imminently.

On Tuesday, defending Fuzhou champion Kento Momota, the world number one from Japan, defeated Daren Liew when the Malaysian retired.—AFP