

Sports

Martinez, Lukaku sink Slavia to keep Inter's knockout hopes alive

PRAGUE: A brace from Lautaro Martinez and a Romelu Lukaku goal handed Inter Milan a 3-1 win at Slavia Prague on Wednesday, keeping the Italians in contention for the Champions League last 16.

Inter are level with Borussia Dortmund on seven points each in Group F topped by Barcelona who clinched a last-16 spot after beating the Germans 3-1 at the Camp Nou. "The win is important for us, we had no choice but to win," said Inter coach Antonio Conte.

"We knew what to expect, the forward duo were decisive and I'm very happy for them," he added. In the last round of games on December 10, Inter face Barcelona at the San Siro while Dortmund host Slavia.

"We gave meaning to this match against Barca by winning," said Conte. "We are expecting a great match, hard, but we know that we can count on 80,000 people who will come to the stadium to push us. That was what we wanted." Martinez opened the scoring on nineteen minutes after Lukaku had picked up a pass, fought off two challenges and took the ball into the box before cutting it back to the unmarked Argentinian.

Martinez scored for the fourth consecutive Champions League game for Inter. Tomas Soucek levelled for Slavia from the penalty spot in the 37th minute after Stefan de Vrij had brought down striker Peter Olayinka in the box.

Polish referee Szymon Marciniak first ignored the foul and let play continue with Lukaku scoring on the counter-attack before seeing his goal chalked off as the video referee took centre stage. Lukaku added Inter's second nine minutes from the end after Slavia's last man Michal Frydrych slipped and let him round keeper Ondrej Kolar.

Martinez then volleyed home his second as Lukaku robbed the Slavia defence and provided him with a superb cross in the 88th minute.

Outside of the four goals, Slavia had the first sight of the target on five minutes when Josef Husbauer narrowly missed with a header. Inter's first shot came from Martinez whose low shot across the goal narrowly went the wrong side of Kolar's left post.

After Inter's opener, Slavia put the Nerazzurri under pressure, but Frydrych headed wide and Lukas Masopust just missed the top left corner of Samir Handanovic's goal. Inter were on the front foot early into the second half, but they failed to produce a decent chance at first.

On the other side, Handanovic had a hard time clearing a deflected Masopust shot over the crossbar and Slavia's second-half substitute Ibrahim Traore missed narrowly. Moments later, Lukaku sent his header onto the crossbar and Marcelo Brozovic then followed suit with a volley halfway into the second half.

Five minutes later Masopust intercepted



PRAGUE: Slavia Prague's Romanian midfielder Nicolae Claudiu Stanciu (L) gets the ball from Inter Milan's Uruguayan midfielder Matias Vecino during the UEFA Champions League football match SK Slavia Prague v Inter Milan in Prague, Czech Republic. — AFP

a pass and sprinted down the centre but failed to beat Handanovic one-on-one. "The game went the wrong way, we had many losses during the game and Inter, leaning on two excellent forwards, could

capitalise on that," said Slavia coach Jindrich Tрпиšovsky. "Inter's performance improved in the second half and ours was getting worse. In fact, they could have scored the decider much earlier." — AFP

Man City owners snap up Mumbai City as global empire grows

LONDON: Manchester City's parent company City Football Group announced yesterday that it had bought a majority stake in Mumbai City, expanding its global empire of teams. The Premier League club tweeted that CFG was delighted to welcome the Indian club to its "family of clubs".

"City Football Group (CFG) has agreed a deal to acquire a majority stake in its eighth club, Mumbai City FC in the Indian Super League, marking a major move into Indian football," the group said in a statement.

"CFG will become the 65 percent majority shareholder of the club, alongside existing shareholders, acclaimed actor and film producer, Ranbir Kapoor and Bimal Parekh who combined will hold the remaining 35 percent of shares."

Other clubs in the CFG stable include New York City, Melbourne City, Yokohama F. Marinos in Japan and Girona FC in Spain. "We believe that this investment will deliver transformative benefits to Mumbai City FC, to City Football Group and to Indian football as a whole," said CFG chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak.

"City Football Group is committed to the future of football in India and to the potential for Mumbai City FC within that future." Manchester City have won the Premier League title four times since Abu Dhabi United Group, the investment vehicle owned by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, took over the club. They have enjoyed 11 successive years of financial growth and earlier this month reported record revenue of £535.2 million (628.6 million euros) last season. They are sitting third in the Premier League table and reached the knockout stages of the Champions League on Tuesday. — AFP

Zenit deny Lyon chance to clinch last 16 spot

SAINT PETERSBURG: Lyon missed out on a chance to seal a Champions League last 16 place with a match to spare after losing 2-0 at Zenit Saint Petersburg on Wednesday.

A victory in Group G over the Russian Premier League leaders would have claimed a knockout spot for Rudi Garcia's men. Lyon are now third behind Zenit, level with the Russians on seven points, ahead of their final group match on December 10 against leaders Leipzig, who are three points clear at the top and assured of a place in the knockout round.

"Lyon are a really good team. But we were prepared well and did what we had to," Zenit midfielder Magomed Ozdoyev told UEFA.com. "Now it's all about the match in Lisbon and we will be ready for it." Bundesliga side Leipzig's last-gasp 2-2 draw with Benfica later in the day gave them a place in the last 16 for the first time leaving Lyon and Zenit in pursuit of the second qualifying spot.

"It's not over, we still have our last match to play and we're supporting Benfica (who face Zenit in the last round)," Garcia said.

West Brom thrash Bristol City to go top

LONDON: West Brom moved back to the top of the Championship with a thumping 4-1 victory over Bristol City at The Hawthorns. Leeds had gone top with victory at Reading on Tuesday, but Slaven Bilic's men restored their two-point lead in style. Grady Diangana was the key man for the Baggies, setting up Kieran Gibbs to open the scoring on 10 minutes with a smart backheel and then being brought down on the edge of the area

"What is certain is that we have to beat Leipzig, who I think are the best team in the group."

Zenit coach Sergei Semak kept faith in the starting lineup from the weekend's 2-1 league victory over Rubin Kazan, with Artem Dzyuba who scored that winner in that game leading the attack. Garcia, who replaced the sacked Sylvinho in October, was without injured midfielder Thiago Mendes and ill winger Martin Terrier after beating Nice on Saturday as 16-year-old attacking midfielder Rayan Cherki was named on the bench.

The best of the early chances fell to Sardar Azmoun on 35 minutes after Daler Kuzayev and Joachim Andersen were shown yellow cards in the opening half an hour. Iran forward Azmoun, broke through the French defence but his chipped shot hit the post before he was brought down by Anthony Lopes, with VAR deciding against awarding a penalty.

Dzyuba went one better than Azmoun seven minutes later to claim a lead for the Russian outfit. The Russia international headed in from a Douglas Santos corner as Lyon protested with referee Daniele Orsato for Dzyuba's tussle with Marcelo in the penalty area.

Captain Leo Dubois and fellow-wing back Marcal were shown yellow cards by Orsato for their complaints. Semak's men controlled a lacklustre second-half and Ozdoyev made sure of all three points with his third goal of the season in the 84th minute. — AFP

five minutes from half-time. Matheus Pereira took full advantage of the dangerous position to curl a left-footed free-kick over the wall and into the top corner.

Famara Diedhiou pulled a goal back for the visitors 10 minutes from time, but Hal Robson-Kanu made it 3-1 just two minutes later and substitute Charlie Austin completed the scoring in the 87th minute. Nottingham Forest moved up to fourth in the table with a 4-0 win at Queens Park Rangers, who had Lee Wallace sent off early in the second half. Tobias Figueiredo headed Forest in front after 15 minutes and the home side had a mountain to climb when Wallace was shown a straight red card for bringing down Joe Lolley. It took until the 82nd minute for Lewis Grabban to double his side's lead and further late goals from Joao Carvalho and Alfa Semedo completed a miserable evening for QPR. — AFP