

Sports

Barcelona's 'best game of season' as fightback reignites title bid

MADRID: Barcelona reignited their La Liga title push on Wednesday when they came back from a goal down to defeat Real Sociedad 2-1, with veteran defender and goal scorer Jordi Alba claiming it was the team's "best game of the season".

The win allowed Barcelona to move six points off the top of the table whereas defeat meant Sociedad lost their spot as leaders to be replaced by Atletico Madrid. However, Barca did it the hard way. Sociedad, without a point at Barcelona in 25 years, took the lead through Willian Jose in the 26th minute.

Spanish international Alba leveled four minutes later with Frenkie de Jong adding the second just before the break. "It was our best game of the season. We came into it knowing very well what we had to do," said left-back Alba. "We put pressure on them, especially in the first half. Tonight I saw a very good Barca. We are happy with the attitude. We knew how to suffer. This should give us more confidence for the rest of La Liga as there are a lot of games left."

Under-siege Barca coach Ronald Koeman played in the team which last yielded a home point to Sociedad in 1995. The Dutchman was fearing the worst when Willian Jose scored with his right foot from close range after a Portu corner.

Alba's equalizer arrived on the half-hour mark after a fine interchange of passes be-

tween Antoine Griezmann and Pedri. French star Griezmann hit the bar six minutes later after taking the ball past Sociedad keeper Alex Remiro.

De Jong then gave Barca a 42nd-minute lead with a right-foot drive for his first goal since February. The goal, however, was only allowed after a VAR consultation for a possible offside. Griezmann had back-to-back chances to increase the lead early in the second period. Lionel Messi required treatment on a calf injury as the second half wound down before Barca goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen denied Willian Jose from long range and then Alexander Isak.

On Tuesday, Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane hailed Karim Benzema as the best centre-forward in French history after his match-winning double against Athletic Bilbao put them into third place, level on points with Atletico and Sociedad.

Bilbao's Ander Capa had cancelled out Toni Kroos's thumping strike before Benzema, 32, struck twice late on, heading home a cross with 16 minutes remaining and finishing clinically in stoppage time from Luka Modric's pass.

Afterwards Zidane had no hesitation in declaring Benzema as France's best ever centre-forward, putting him at the top of a list that includes Thierry Henry, Kylian Mbappe, Jean-Pierre Papin and Just Fontaine.

The forward, sporting a striking new blue hairstyle, stepped up to power the spot-kick into the bottom corner. It took Tuchel's men 10 more minutes to secure victory, with Rafinha setting up Kean to grab his eighth goal since joining PSG on loan from Everton in the close season.

Yazici strikes again for Lille

Earlier, in-form Yusuf Yazici scored the winner as Lille eased to a 2-0 victory at Dijon, despite uncertainty behind the scenes at the table-toppers. Lille president and owner Gerard Lopez revealed earlier on Wednesday that he could sell the club to foreign investors, against the backdrop of a difficult financial situation exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. "I'm analyzing the takeover offer I received," Lopez said, adding that if a sale took place he would "completely withdraw" from the club.

But Lille continued their serene progress on the pitch this season, as Turkish international Yazici gave them a 19th-minute lead with his fifth league goal of the campaign on only his third Ligue 1 start this term. The 23-year-old calmly slotted home compatriot Zeki Celik's cutback to net for the 11th time in all competitions in a breakthrough season. Lille thought they had been awarded a late spot-kick for a trip on Burak Yilmaz, but the decision was overturned following a VAR review.

Christophe Galtier's men did double their advantage in injury time, though, wrapping up the three points as Timothy Weah, son of former Ballon d'Or winner George Weah, grabbed his first Ligue 1 goal since scoring for PSG in August 2018.

"We'll next host PSG in a massive match in an empty stadium (on Sunday)," said Lille coach Galtier. "The two teams will be tired and the Parisians might be slightly superior. But in one match, there is everything to play for."

Lyon were a goal down at half-time against Brest after goal-



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish defender Jordi Alba celebrates his goal with Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Real Sociedad at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Wednesday. —AFP

"For me, he's the best — it's very clear," said Zidane, the French midfield legend who won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 with Les Bleus. "He's proved it — he's played at

Real Madrid for a very long time, he has more than 500 appearances, all his goals... his record, all he's accomplished here speaks for itself," Zidane added. —AFP

Blue-haired Mbappe helps PSG keep pace with Lille ahead of Sunday clash

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe scored a penalty as Paris Saint-Germain cruised to a 2-0 win over 10-man Lorient on Wednesday, keeping the reigning champions just one point behind Lille ahead of their visit to the leaders this weekend.

Mbappe's second-half penalty, when Andrew Gravillon was sent off, and Moise Kean's strike helped PSG to victory after Lille, who host the Champions League runners-up on Sunday, beat Dijon by the same scoreline.

Lyon dropped to third place, a point behind PSG, after a dramatic 2-2 draw with Brest. Marseille, who have two games in hand on the top three, slipped five points behind the leaders after a 2-1 defeat at Rennes.

PSG coach Thomas Tuchel after the game said that Neymar, who sprained his ankle last Sunday against Lyon, could return this weekend. "For Neymar we will do everything — that is the good news," said the German. "I can't say 'No, he's not playing against Lille'. It is possible. We can try, we will try everything."

PSG had 81 percent of possession in the first half against struggling Lorient without creating many clear-cut chances, with Lorient's Teremas Moffi wasting the best opportunity of the opening period when he fired wide when clean through on goal. But the match was effectively decided less than five minutes after the break, as visiting full-back Gravillon was harshly sent off for a nudge on Mbappe in the box.



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring during the French L1 football match between Paris-Saint Germain (PSG) and FC Lorient at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Wednesday. —AFP

keeper Anthony Lopes's own goal, but Memphis Depay's penalty and a goal for Maxwel Cornet looked to have seen them keep pace with Lille. But Romain Faivre scored a re-taken spot-kick in the 93rd minute after Brendan Chardonnet's initial effort was saved by Lopes, who was off his line.

Marseille led at Rennes through Pape Gueye, but the midfielder was sent off in the 36th minute and goals from Hamari Traore and Adrien Hunou ended the home team's nine-match winless streak. Elsewhere, fifth-placed Montpellier slipped six points behind Lille with a 2-0 home defeat by Metz, while Monaco fell to a third straight league loss, beaten 3-0 at home by Lens. —AFP