

Sports

Felix double sends Atletico Madrid to La Liga top four

Atletico thrash Osasuna 5-0

PAMPLONA: Portugal youngster Joao Felix scored twice as Atletico Madrid moved into the Champions League places with a 5-0 La Liga thrashing of Osasuna on Wednesday. Felix, 20, was making his first appearance since the Spanish top-flight returned from its coronavirus hiatus having been suspended for the weekend's draw at Athletic Bilbao and had been suffering from an ankle sprain since May. "I felt good, coming back from injury after three months without playing and scoring two goals is very good for me," Felix told broadcaster Movistar.

The northerners remain in 11th after the defeat with an outside chance of making the Europa League but are also 10 points away from the relegation zone. The hosts' coach Jagoba Arrasate was without captain Oier and Adrian Lopez who scored the equalizer at high-flying Real Sociedad, who can go back above Atletico on Thursday with a win at Alaves. The visitors' coach Diego Simeone made four changes from Sunday's match in Bilbao including handing Felix, who joined the side from Benfica for 126 million euros (\$141 million) last summer, a start alongside Diego Costa in attack.

Felix will return to the Portuguese capital in August as UEFA announced the Champions

League will be completed in Lisbon with a 'final eight' format after Atleti knocked holders Liverpool out of the competition in March. Left-back Renan Lodi had the best of the early chances as his whipped effort in the eighth minute was straight at goalkeeper Ruben Martinez. Costa's claims for a penalty were ignored despite the former Chelsea striker complaining he had been held back in attempting to reach Lodi's effort.

Felix opened the scoring 20 minutes later after Lodi found space again down the left flank. Lodi played the ball back to Saul Niguez in the box, his shot was deflected to Felix's path who smashed the ball to the top corner. The hosts' best chance of an equalizer came six minutes before the break but David Garcia's long-range shot could only hit the advertising boards. Felix doubled his account 10 minutes into the second half. Costa was fed the ball in the area and he squared it to Felix who side-footed home with ease for his eighth goal of the campaign in all competitions.

Felix was substituted on the 69-minute mark as Simeone sent on holding midfielder Thomas Partey, who has been linked with a move to Arsenal. Despite Felix leaving the field his side made sure of three points as Marcos Llorente, Alvaro



PAMPLONA: Atletico Madrid's Portuguese forward Joao Felix (center) challenges Osasuna's Spanish defender Aridane Hernandez (left) during the Spanish league football match CA Osasuna against Club Atletico de Madrid at El Sadar stadium in Pamplona on June 17, 2020. —AFP

Morata and Yannick Carrasco scored in the final 11 minutes. The away side's Slovenia goalkeeper Jan Oblak became the first non-Spaniard to

reach 100 La Liga clean sheets with his performance. Atleti host Real Valladolid on Saturday and Osasuna travel to Valencia on Sunday. —AFP

Guardiola embarrassed by 'treatment' of black people

MANCHESTER: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said he is "embarrassed and ashamed" at the historic treatment of black people as the Premier League's return was marked by protests against racial injustice on Wednesday. Players and coaches from all four sides in action took a knee prior to kick off to show their support for the Black Lives Matter campaign. The action came in response to worldwide protests after the killing of African American George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis. Black Lives Matter was also emblazoned on the back of shirts instead of player names. "We should send a thousand million messages for the black people. It's more than 400 years we do what we do to these lovely people," Guardiola told Sky Sports.

"I'm embarrassed and ashamed of what the white people have done for the black people. Just because you are born a different color, how people can think they are different? All the gestures are good and positive. Everything we can do to make it conscious, it is not acceptable. We have to do a lot of things for the black people which we have not done so far." Raheem Sterling has been a leading campaigner in the fight against racism in football and the City winger backed the united front as a significant step forward. "I see it as a massive step for the Premier League to allow something like that to happen," said Sterling. "It shows we are going in the right direction." Sterling scored his first goal of 2020 to open the scoring as City restarted with a 3-0 win over Arsenal. The England international admitted his side took some time to get to grips with their new surroundings in front of an empty Etihad stadium and said he struggled to hold back from celebrating his goal too wildly with teammates. — AFP

Champions League to be completed with 'final eight' in August

PARIS: The 2019-2020 Champions League, suspended since March because of the coronavirus pandemic, will be completed in a 'final eight' format in Lisbon in August, UEFA said on Wednesday. Europe's top club competition will be decided by a series of one-off matches from the quarter-final stage beginning in the Portuguese capital on August 12, with the final on August 23, European football's governing body confirmed following a meeting of its executive committee. Similarly, the Europa League will be completed with a 'final eight' across four German cities, with the final in Cologne on August 21.

The closing stages of the women's Champions League will also go ahead in an eight-team straight knock-out tournament in Bilbao and San Sebastian, in Spain, from August 21 to 30. "Football is leading the return to a more normal life here in Europe," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin, but in all cases it remains to be seen if any supporters will be allowed to attend matches. Games around Europe are currently being played behind closed doors amid strict health guidelines, and Ceferin said no decision would be made on whether to let spectators in "until mid-July".

"If I would answer today then we don't think we could have spectators at the Europa League and Champions League quarter-finals, semi-finals and finals but things are changing rapidly," he said. "A month ago I couldn't even answer if we could play the competition. Now we will play it, hopefully." With the European death toll from the coronavirus easing and numerous EU countries this week opening their borders again to visitors, there is some hope that matches can be played before crowds. Ceferin added: "We don't know if (it would be) only the local fans, if no fans, or even if fans from different clubs could travel."

Istanbul awarded 2021 final

The men's Champions League final was initially due to be

played in Istanbul in May before the COVID-19 crisis took hold. The Turkish city will now host the 2021 final instead, with Saint-Petersburg, Munich and London hosting the following three years. UEFA said all matches would be split between Benfica's 65,000-capacity Estadio da Luz, and the nearby 50,000-seat Estadio Jose Alvalade, home of Sporting. Portugal's credentials to host the mini-tournament were boosted by the fact that it has not been as badly hit by the pandemic as other western European countries, and it has no clubs left in the competition. The Portuguese league recently resumed matches behind closed doors. "UEFA has shown the confidence it has in the Portuguese people," said Fernando Gomes, head of the country's football federation.

'No Plan B'

There are still restrictions in place in wider Portuguese society, as the country eases its lockdown, but UEFA is confident there will be no need for another change of plan between now and August. "For now things look well, and we hope everything will be fine until we organise the final eight. There is no reason to have a Plan B but we are assessing the situation, not week by week but day by day, and we will adapt when the time comes, if necessary," said Ceferin.

The draw for the Champions League quarter-finals will take place on July 10. There are still four last 16, second legs to be completed, and it is possible those games could also be moved to Portugal. Atletico Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain, RB Leipzig and Atalanta all qualified for the quarter-finals before the competition was suspended. The remaining last 16, second legs are: Juventus v Lyon; Manchester City v Real Madrid; Bayern Munich v Chelsea and Barcelona v Napoli. If needed, the games will be played in the Portuguese cities of Porto and Guimaraes.

As well as Cologne, the nearby German cities of Duisburg, Duesseldorf and Gelsenkirchen will be used for the Europa League final eight, starting on August 10. Before that there are a host of last-16 ties to complete. None of the second legs have been played, while the first legs between Inter Milan and Getafe, and Sevilla and Roma, were postponed too - those ties will now be played as a single leg at a venue to be confirmed. The Europa League final was supposed to be played in the Polish city of Gdansk, which will now host next year's final instead. — AFP