

Sports

Holdings Bayern, City book Champions League last 16

Sloppy Liverpool beaten at home by Atalanta

PARIS: Robert Lewandowski set Bayern Munich on the way to a 3-1 Champions League win over Salzburg on Wednesday as the holders joined Manchester City in qualifying for the last 16 with two group games to spare, while Liverpool went down to defeat and Marseille are now the owners of an unwanted record.

On a night when clubs marked news of the death of Diego Maradona by holding a minute's silence in memory of the Argentine before all Champions League games, Bayern eased to a record-extending 15th straight win in the competition. Lewandowski scored the opener just before half-time at an empty Allianz Arena, his 14th goal of the season and also his 71st altogether in the Champions League, leaving him level with Real Madrid great Raul in third place on the all-time list behind Cristiano Ronaldo (131) and Lionel Messi (118).

Kingsley Coman scored Bayern's second and then crossed for Leroy Sane to head in their third, before Mergim Berisha pulled a goal back for the Austrian champions. Marc Roca was sent off for Bayern, but they have a maximum 12 points and are guaranteed to advance as Group A winners, while Atletico Madrid sit second but continue to toil in Europe this season after being held 0-0 at home by Lokomotiv Moscow.

Pep Guardiola's City earlier secured progress as Phil Foden swept in from a Raheem Sterling back-heel to secure a 1-0 win away to Olympiakos in Greece, their fourth win out of four in Group C. City had 21

attempts on goal and their bluntness in attack is a source of concern, even if their European progress provides a tonic to their mediocre Premier League form. "It will come, we would love to do more, but one day it will come and will break everything," said Guardiola, whose side now just need a point from their final two matches to top the group.

Second-place Porto are on the brink of joining them in qualifying after a 2-0 win at Marseille, which was the French side's 13th consecutive defeat in the competition stretching over three campaigns going back to 2011-12. The Nigerian Zaidu Sanusi gave Porto the lead six minutes before half-time and Sergio Oliveira scored a second-half penalty after on-loan Liverpool midfielder Marko Grujic had been sent off for the Portuguese side.

Marseille, who had defender Leonardo Balerdi sent off, cannot now qualify for the last 16. "We have hit rock-bottom," said Marseille coach Andre Villas-Boas. Six-time European champions Liverpool are not yet sure of progressing to the next round after going down 2-0 to Atalanta at Anfield. Three weeks after beating the same side 5-0 in Italy, Liverpool struggled with a weakened starting line-up, and Josip Ilicic put Atalanta in front on the hour mark before German international Robin Gosens got the second goal.

"A deserved defeat in a difficult game," was how Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp summed up the game. Liverpool are top of Group D on nine points,



LIVERPOOL: Atalanta's Dutch midfielder Marten de Roon (left) tackles Liverpool's Portuguese striker Diogo Jota (center) during the UEFA Champions League football match between Liverpool and Atalanta Bergamo on November 25, 2020. —AFP

two points clear of Atalanta and Ajax, who were 3-1 winners at home to Midtjylland. Second-half goals by Ryan Gravenberch, Noussair Mazraoui and David Neres boosted Ajax's hopes, with Awer Mabil

getting a consolation from the penalty spot for the Danes who had captain Erik Sviatchenko sent off late on and are yet to register a point. Ajax go to Liverpool next week. —AFP

Perfect storm brewing over Schalke as chaos reigns supreme

BERLIN: Schalke 04 have been staring down a dark tunnel for months with no light in sight but this week things could get even worse for the Royal Blues. With in-form Borussia Mönchengladbach waiting for them tomorrow, Schalke desperately need to get their act together if they are to have any chance of slowing down their free fall. Club bosses on Tuesday suspended Amine Harit and Nabil Bentaleb over disciplinary issues while the contract of veteran Vedad Ibisevic will be dissolved at the end of December, the decision coming following a spat with an assistant coach on the training ground this week.

The club said Ibisevic's row had nothing to do with the decision but it is indicative of the prevailing atmosphere among players. They are frustrated by a disastrous run in the Bundesliga in 2020 that has seen them go 24 consecutive league games without a win. "I could sit in the changing room and cry," said Schalke's Mark Uth after last week's 2-0 loss to VfL Wolfsburg. "We are steps too late, never go into one-on-ones, don't even get booked. I don't know how we can win a football game like that." —Reuters

Ahly, Zamalek face off in historic 2020 CAF League final

CAIRO: The 2020 CAF Champions League final in Cairo today between Egyptian giants Al Ahly and Zamalek will be the first pitting fierce rivals from one country against each other. The match, to be held under the slogan "no to fanaticism", will bring together two of the clubs whose clashes have long dominated local and continental competitions. Former Arab League chief Amr Moussa once described Ahly and Zamalek as Egypt's "two largest popular parties".

Ahly have won the Champions League eight times and been crowned Egyptian Premier League champions on 42 occasions. Zamalek won the premier African club competition five times and have been Egyptian champions 12 times. Despite their popularity and wide fan bases, Egypt's most successful player, Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah, never played for either club, lining up with Al Mokawloon Al Arab instead.

Egyptian sports minister Ashraf Sobhi has called on the teams to face off at the Cairo International Stadium under the slogan "No to fanaticism". It is likely that fans will have to watch the match in clubs or youth centers, but not in popular neighborhoods or cafes. Security services have yet to decide how many supporters can attend the final amid fears of coronavirus and rioting. Ahly and Zamalek's historic rivalry has peaked in recent years, especially on social media after they met in the 2019 Egyptian Super Cup, a match Ahly won 3-2.

Supporters of Ahly then took to the street in several regions to celebrate before being "infiltrated" by fanatics, who were arrested. "Ahly and Zamalek

are like brothers and, unfortunately, the fanaticism is only among fans," said retired Zamalek and Egypt star Hazem Emam. "(FIFA's) decision on holding the FIFA Club World Cup in Doha next February has raised the intensity of the confrontation," said former Ahly player Walid Salaheldin.

Coronavirus fears

Coronavirus fears have loomed large after the infections of Ahly's Walid Soliman, Mahmoud 'Kahraba' Abdelmoneim and Saleh Gomaa and Zamalek's Mahmoud 'El Wensh' Hamdy and assistant coach Medhat Abdelhady. Two other Zamalek players, Hazem Emam and Mohamed Hassan, have recovered from Covid-19. Former star Emam says Ahly have switched to "collective football" since South African coach Pitso Mosimane took over in September, while Zamalek's recently hired Portuguese coach Jaime Pacheco has changed little.

Mosimane has previously beaten Zamalek in a final-guiding Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa to a 3-1 aggregate victory in 2016. The South African will rely on goalkeeper Mohamed el Shennawy, star Mohamed 'Afsha' Magdy, Tunisian Ali Maaloul, Malian Aliou Dieng and Nigerian Junior Ajayi. "Mosimane has freed the players from restrictions imposed by former coaches, which tips the scales in his players' favour against Zamalek's players and their individual skills, especially (Achraf) Bencharki and Ferjani Sassi," said Salaheldin.

Pacheco, who returned to Zamalek six years after first coaching the White Knights, said he trusted his players, their strong personalities and ability "to please the fans". Zamalek won the Egyptian Super Cup last February against Ahly after a penalty shootout. The Zamalek stars include veteran Tarek Hamed, Tunisian Sassi, Moroccan Bencharki, Ahmed 'Zizou' Sayed and Mostafa Mohammed. Ahly reached the Champions League final by defeating Wydad Casablanca of Morocco 2-0 away and 3-1 at home while Zamalek overcame the other Casablanca giants, Raja, 1-0 away and 3-1 at home. The Cairo clubs faced off in the Champions League in 2005, 2008, 2012 and 2013 with Ahly winning five matches and the other three drawn. —AFP