

Sports

Messi makes PSG statement as 'crazy' Sheriff shock Madrid

Atletico edge Milan; Inter still searching for first win

PARIS: Lionel Messi opened his Paris Saint-Germain account as the French side beat Manchester City while new boys Sheriff Tiraspol shocked Real Madrid in the Champions League on Tuesday. Messi's top-corner finish added to Idrissa Gueye's first half goal as PSG moved top of Group A with the 2-0 win over last year's runners up.

Pep Guardiola's side hit the bar twice in the first half with Portugal playmaker Bernardo Silva failing to score two meters out with PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma helplessly on the ground. "The important thing was to win, against an immense opponent, one of the contenders for the trophy," Messi told broadcaster Canal+. "I had only played here (Parc des Princes) once, but little by little I'm adapting and integrating to the team," he added.

In Group D, Sheriff, playing in just their second ever game in the group stage of the competition, upset record 13-time winners Real Madrid 2-1 in the Spanish capital. Uzbekistan winger Jasur Jakhshibaev put the Moldovans in the lead before the half hour mark as Karim Benzema equalized after 65 minutes to score for a 17th different season in the competition, a feat only also achieved by 34-year-old Messi.

But the hero for Sheriff, who are based in the region of Transnistria on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, was Luxembourg attacking midfielder Sebastian Thill. The 27-year-old Thill fired home a sublime half volley with 62 seconds of regular time remaining at the Santiago Bernabeu two week after Sheriff had beaten Shakhtar Donetsk earlier in the month in their opening group game.

"After this match we all went crazy. There are a lot of foreigners in the club, we come from all types of

countries. It's our strength," Thill told Canal+. "We played both matches to 100 percent. We're all happy now," he added.

Madrid's Casemiro rued his side's lack of efficiency in front of Sheriff's Greek goalkeeper Georgios Athanasiadis. "It's football, we had 20 shots or more and we scored one, they had two shots scored both," he told Movistar+. "We have to pay more



Liverpool put on 5-1 clinic

attention, especially defensively. We started well, we had total control of the game, we had opportunities to get ahead, but they scored a great goal at the end," he added. Earlier in the group, Serie A champions Inter Milan remain winless in Europe this season following the 0-0 draw at Shakhtar. Ukrainian Oleksandr Usyk was a spectator in Kiev days after beating Anthony Joshua on points to become just the third boxer to win both the cruiserweight and heavyweight world titles.

Salah, Firmino doubles

In Group B, Mohamed Salah and Roberto Firmino scored twice as Liverpool hammered Porto 5-1 and Luis Suarez claimed a 97th-minute winner



PARIS: (From left) Paris Saint-Germain's forwards Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe celebrate at the end of their team's UEFA Champions League first round group A football match against Manchester City at The Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Tuesday. — AFP

as Atletico Madrid edged AC Milan 2-1 in Italy. Jurgen Klopp's side wore black armbands after former Liverpool striker Roger Hunt died earlier in the day aged 83.

Milan played an hour with 10-man after Franck Kessie's red card, and the seven-time European champions were unable to claim a first win in the competition since 2013. Earlier, Ivory Coast striker Sebastien Haller took his tally to 10 goals in as many games this season as Ajax beat Besiktas 2-0

to stay top of Group C in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Netherlands winger Donyell Malen also scored for his new club as Borussia Dortmund overcame Sporting Lisbon 1-0 and trail the Dutch champions on goal difference. American Jesse Marsch lost his fifth game in nine matches in charge of RB Leipzig in the 2-1 home defeat to Club Brugge. Leipzig face a tough ask to reach the last 16 in a group alongside PSG and City. — AFP

Sheriff fire shot for less 'Super' clubs at Madrid

MADRID: Sheriff Tiraspol said they had not been overawed on their first trip to the mighty Real Madrid — and proved it by winning 2-1 late on in one of the biggest upsets in Champions League history. With all the talk of a European Super League for the elite, the minnows from the Moldovan league gave a timely reminder of the appeal of open competition.

"We came here to win," said Frank Castaneda, the Sheriff captain. "We didn't just come here to sit around. We know how good our players are and luckily for us Madrid weren't able to take their chances — and we took ours."

For Sheriff this was only a second match in the Champions League group stage and the estimated value of their entire squad is 12 million euros, about the same as the annual salary of Madrid defender David Alaba. Real dominated but Sheriff scored two excellent goals and had a third disallowed for offside, and now

have six points out of six.

Sebastian Thill, who has a tattoo of himself dreaming of playing in the Champions League, smashed in the winner in the 89th minute. "It's the best and most important goal of my career, that's for sure," Thill said. "The side were so brave with how we played and luckily enough I was able to score a bit of a stunner."

Florentino Perez, the Real Madrid president, has said he struggles to get interested in Champions League group games and he might have wished he had missed this one. Perez is one of the staunchest advocates of the aborted European Super League. But on the same day UEFA agreed to drop sanctions against the 12 clubs involved in the project, Sheriff reminded everyone that it's not just about the perceived big boys.

The Super League was intended to put an end to seemingly unbalanced matchups like these — and the occasional shock that comes with them — leaving a competition only for a self-selected elite. "It's football, we had 20 shots or more and we scored one, they had two shots, scored both," Real's Casemiro told Movistar+. "We have to pay more attention, especially defensively. We started well, we had

total control of the game, we had opportunities to get ahead, but they scored a great goal at the end."

'We all went crazy'

The romance of Sheriff's success is questionable given the club is owned by a conglomerate, called Sheriff, which effectively runs the pro-Russian separatist state of Transnistria, where the football club is based. Yet it is hard to begrudge players like Thill their moment of glory.

"After this match we all went crazy. There are a lot of foreigners in the club, we come from all types of countries. It's our strength," said Thill, who last season was playing on loan at FC Tambov in Russia, a club that was dissolved in May and had to declare itself bankrupt.

For Real Madrid, the path to the last 16 is still open, which points to the real weakness of the current Champions League: the format, not the teams involved. The biggest clubs rarely fail to get through to the last 16 and a few shock results can easily be absorbed. "We've missed out on three points and the group is wide open. We need to win our next game," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, adding: "It's small details that cost us this game." Real have been scoring plenty of goals and



MADRID: Sheriff's players celebrate their second goal during their team's UEFA Champions League first round group D football match against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Tuesday. — AFP

playing an exciting style of football since Ancelotti's return but he has complained about the defense, which was again caught napping.

For Sheriff, up next in the Champions League are Inter Milan, with qualification

now very achievable in Group D, where they sit top. "We aren't thinking about the last 16 yet as we still haven't done anything extraordinary, we're just going forward step by step," said Sheriff coach Yuriy Vemydub. — AFP

Klopp expects goal spree to end against Manchester City

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp admits he fears Liverpool's goal spree will come to an end in Sunday's Premier League showdown with Manchester City. Klopp's side crushed Porto 5-1 in the Champions League on Tuesday as Mohamed Salah and Roberto Firmino each netted twice in Portugal and Sadio Mane also scored.

It was the sixth successive match that Liverpool had scored three or more goals, only the third time in the club's history the feat has been achieved. They have scored 20 times in 17 days and have 26 goals in their first nine fixtures to equal a club record for a top-flight campaign set in 1922 and replicated only one other time in the 2016-2017 season. But Reds boss Klopp knows it will not be so easy to run riot when Pep Guardiola's Premier League champions visit Anfield this weekend.

"We play against Man City, I don't think now it makes too much sense to think too much about how many goals we can score against them," Klopp said. "We need a complex and complete

performance against them to have a chance only and that's it. But I'm really looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to playing at home again after a while. We have two days more (than the three Liverpool had between Brentford and Porto) to the City game, which will be helpful, and then we will be fresh again and then give it a go."

Liverpool are the Premier League's leading scorers with 15, but City, who have already scored five against Norwich and Arsenal, are not far behind and defensively they have conceded just once. City secured their first win at Anfield since 2003 last season with a 4-1 victory in front of an empty ground during Liverpool's run of six suc-

cessive home defeats.

But Liverpool are on an 18-match unbeaten run and Brazil midfielder Fabinho believes the win over Porto was just the confidence boost they needed before facing City, who lost to Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday.

"A performance like this just gives us more confidence for the future," Fabinho said. "The next game is against Manchester City at Anfield, so we know Anfield will have a really nice atmosphere. These are the kind of games every player likes to play. We just have to play our football, to give everything and we know the fans will be with us." — AFP

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