

Sports

COVID-hit Bayern humbled at home by Moenchengladbach

Bayern Munich crash to a 2-1 defeat

BERLIN: COVID-hit Bayern Munich crashed to a 2-1 defeat at home to Borussia Moenchengladbach Friday with the Bundesliga leaders forced to name a makeshift team after nine stars tested positive for the coronavirus. Robert Lewandowski cracked in his 20th league goal this season to give Bayern an early lead, but Gladbach hit back with two goals in four first-half minutes by Florian Neuhaus and Stefan Lainer.

"Gladbach aren't our favorite opponents," said striker Thomas Mueller as Bayern had already crashed to a 5-0 defeat at Gladbach in the German Cup last October. "It is bitter to lose, but we have to swallow the defeat." Mueller refused to blame the loss on their depleted squad. "We had a lot of quality on the pitch and we shouldn't have given away

so much possession in the final third of the pitch," he said.

"The worst thing is we didn't put our chances away," Mueller admitted after he twice came close to grabbing a second-half equalizer. Despite the defeat behind closed doors in Munich, Bayern remain nine points clear at the top of the table, but second-placed Borussia Dortmund can trim the gap at Eintracht Frankfurt. Gladbach climbed three places in the table to 11th, but still remain only five points from the bottom three places.

With so many of his stars sidelined by COVID, Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann named a patched-up squad with six reserve team players on the bench while forward Malik Tillman, 19, started his first

Bundesliga match. He was replaced in the second-half by Paul Wanner, who at 16 years, 15 days became the youngest Bayern player to make his German league debut having been called up from the club's Under-19 team. Germany star Joshua Kimmich, who missed the previous two months with COVID, played at right-back with another defensive midfielder Marcel Sabitzer named on the left of defense.

Gladbach were also missing US defender Joe Scally and Swiss midfielder Denis Zakaria, who both also tested positive for COVID. Bayern took a deserved lead in wintry conditions when Lewandowski hammered an unstoppable shot inside the post past goalkeeper Yann Sommer with 18 minutes gone. Gladbach equalized when the visitors

unpicked the Bayern defence and moved the ball to Neuhaus, who fired past Bayern stand-in goalkeeper Sven Ulreich.

First-choice keeper Manuel Neuer is quarantining in the Maldives after testing positive for Covid-19 on holiday. Ulreich was again beaten from a corner soon after when Lainer flicked in a header with half an hour played. Neuhaus and Swiss striker Breel Embolo missed chances to extend Gladbach's lead while at the other end Lewandowski clipped the post with a stunning shot across the goal. Bayern dominated long spells of the second-half with Jamal Musiala, Mueller and Kimmich all going agonizingly close while Lewandowski again hit the woodwork, but Gladbach held on. — AFP

News in brief

Man City thrash Swindon

SWINDON: Manchester City shrugged off the absence of manager Pep Guardiola and seven first-team players due to coronavirus to ease past League Two Swindon 4-1 in the FA Cup third round on Friday. Rodolfo Borrell took charge of the English champions with Guardiola and assistant Juanma Lilo among 14 backroom staff affected by a major outbreak. "We were in touch at half time. There was not a massive change because everything was as planned as before," said Borrell on his contact with Guardiola. "He has great confidence in all of us. Not just me but all the backroom staff." City were still able to name a strong starting line-up featuring just four changes from their 2-1 win at Arsenal last weekend with England international Kyle Walker and captain for the night Ilkay Gundogan among those coming into the side. Seventy-one places separate the sides in the English football pyramid and the visitors' class quickly showed. — AFP

Terranova wins sixth stage

RIYADH: Argentinean veteran Orlando Terranova won the sixth stage of the Dakar Rally on Friday, driving his Prodrive car to a first stage victory since 2015. "It was a difficult stage because there were the tracks of the bikes, but some went in the wrong direction, so we had to stay very focused," said Terranova, competing in the Dakar for the 14th time. "In the end, we won the stage and that's a great feeling. The car is fantastic and we are going to carry on pushing because we know that there is still a long way to go and that we can put in some fine performances." Sweden's Mattias Ekstrom became the third of the Audi Sport team to climb onto the stage podium this year after Stephane Peterhansel and Carlos Sainz when he finished second, Imin O6sec off Terranova. Saudi driver Yazeed Al Rajhi came in third, at 1:49, a result that saw him take second place in the overall standings at the expense of France's nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb. — AFP

Khawaja torments England

SYDNEY: Usman Khawaja finessed his second century of the match to place Australia in a commanding position to chase down yet another victory over weary England in the fourth Ashes Test in Sydney yesterday. The Pakistan-born Khawaja has been in imperious form in his comeback from a 30-month Test exile, hitting 137 in the first innings before adding an unbeaten 101 to break English hearts. His domineering 179-run partnership with youngster Cameron Green set up a late declaration and left a beleaguered England having to defy history with a formidable target of 388. The tourists got to the close without losing a wicket for 30, with Zak Crawley on 22 not out and Haseeb Hameed on eight. They trail by 357. The highest winning run chase in the fourth innings at the Sydney Cricket Ground stands at 288-2 by Australia against South Africa in 2006. No touring team has gone past 200. — AFP

Arsenal against knife crime

LONDON: Arsenal will wear an all-white kit for today's FA Cup trip to Nottingham Forest as part of an anti-knife crime campaign titled 'No More Red'. Last year saw the highest number of teenage murders in a year in London since records began, the vast majority of which involved knife attacks. England internationals Bukayo Saka and Emile Smith Rowe were joined by actor Idris Elba and former Arsenal striker Ian Wright in a promotional video in which the Gunners swap their traditional red colours for white. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta also sported a white hoodie for his pre-match press conference on Friday. "We have been really involved as a club over the years with knife crime and we have the capacity to give exposure to that issue in London," said Arteta. "Everyone at the club has been extremely supportive, especially with the players and our sponsor Adidas who have been exceptionally good to come with some great ideas to support. I think it's very beneficial." — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Jet Ski championship, organized by Kuwait Sea Sport Club was concluded Friday near the Green Island area in the presence of Secretary Khalid Al-Foudary, and head of jet ski Committee Hussain Dashti. The first place went to Mohammad Albaz; Fahad Alrayes was second and Amer Einati took the third position. In the Beginner Category - Bu Rabea was first in the sitting category while Ahmad Alwuhab won the standing category.

Lewandowski, Messi and Salah finalists for FIFA Best award

PARIS: Robert Lewandowski, Lionel Messi and Mohamed Salah were named on Friday as the three finalists for the FIFA Best Men's Player award, while Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas was nominated for the women's prize. Poland star Lewandowski

won last year's FIFA award but had to settle for second in the 2021 Ballon d'Or voting behind Messi, winner of the accolade for a record seventh time. The awards ceremony will be held virtually from FIFA's headquarters in Zurich on January 17.

Putellas, Barcelona team-mate Jennifer Hermoso and Chelsea's Australian striker Sam Kerr are the finalists for the FIFA Best Women's Player award. The trio were also the top three vote-getters for the Ballon d'Or. The winner will succeed England's Lucy Bronze, who took home the previous award. The prizes for the best men's and women's player, coach and goalkeeper are voted for by the captains

and coaches of all national teams around the world, as well as an online ballot of fans and a select number of journalists.

Voting closed on December 10. Manuel Neuer, Gianluigi Donnarumma and Edouard Mendy are in the running for best men's goalkeeper honours, while Roberto Mancini, Thomas Tuchel and Pep Guardiola are the three nominees for best men's coach. Lluís Cortes, who led Barcelona's women to a treble last season, is up against Chelsea coach Emma Hayes and Sarina Wiegman, the former Netherlands boss now in charge of England, for top women's coach. — AFP

'Body got a shock': Osaka pulls out of Open warm up

MELBOURNE: Naomi Osaka pulled out of a warm-up tournament for the Australian Open yesterday, saying her "body got a shock" after playing her first matches for four months, opening the Melbourne Summer Set title door to Simona Halep. Osaka, the reigning Australian Open champion, hit the court this week for the first time since her tearful early exit at the US Open, after which she took a long break to deal with personal matters.

In Melbourne, she played three matches in quick succession and they took a toll. She withdrew before the start of her semi-final on Rod Laver Arena against Russian Veronika Kudermetova. "Unfortunately I have an abdominal injury which I need to rest and prepare for the #AusOpen," the Japanese superstar and top seed said in a statement released by the Australian Open on Twitter.

Osaka, who has fallen to 13 in the rankings, added on her own Twitter feed that it had been a tough

return and she didn't want to push too hard with the opening Grand Slam of the year starting on January 17. "Sad to withdraw due to injury from my match today, my body got a shock from playing back to back intense matches after the break I took," she said. "Thank you for all the love this past week I'll try to rest up and I'll see you soon."

The four-time Grand Slam champion had beaten France's 61st-ranked veteran Alize Cornet 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 in her first match back on Tuesday. She then demolished Belgium's Maryna Zanevska 6-1, 6-1 before blasting past Germany's Andrea Petkovic 6-1, 7-5 to make the semi-finals. Her withdrawal sent Kudermetova into the final with a walkover where she will meet Halep, who crushed Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen 6-3, 6-2. The win ensured the Romanian, whose season was plagued by injury last year, reached a WTA singles final for the 13th straight season.

Positive

"I'm really happy that I can play the final for the first tournament of the year. I'm feeling good, and I'm happy with the way I played," said the two-time Grand Slam winner and former world number one. "Last year definitely was the worst year that I ever had. The toughest mentally also. "But I want to forget about that. I just want to get the feeling

decision. Djokovic, who touched down in Melbourne on Wednesday night after a 25-hour trip via Dubai, had asked for a time to rest and consult his lawyers the following morning, his lawyers said. But after a border official initially agreed, his superiors successfully pressured Djokovic to allow them to take an immediate decision on his visa, the lawyers said.

Foreigners are still mostly banned from travel to Australia, and those granted entry must be fully vaccinated or have a medical exemption. The tennis star has been held since Thursday morning in a Melbourne detention centre "notwithstanding his requests to be moved" to another facility to train for the Australian Open, they added.

Although Djokovic has won a legal reprieve from deportation, it is unclear whether he will play in the January 17-30 tournament. If successful, he will be gunning for a 10th Australian Open crown and a record 21st Grand Slam title—a milestone that Spanish great Rafael Nadal is also chasing. In an



MELBOURNE: Naomi Osaka of Japan hits a return against Andrea Petkovic of Germany during their women's singles in the Melbourne Summer Set tennis tournament in Melbourne. — AFP

from now. I am positive. I am feeling fit on court. I'm moving well. I'm playing good." Halep missed Roland-Garros, Wimbledon and the Olympics last year with a calf injury and ended her season early due to a knee issue, which culminated in her ranking slumping to 20. There are two simultaneous WTA events being run as part of the Melbourne Summer Set in the lead-up to this month's Australian Open. — AFP



VIENNA: A man holds a placard reading 'Free Djokovic' as people demonstrate against the Austrian government's measures taken in order to limit the spread of the coronavirus during a protest yesterday. — AFP

internal video leaked yesterday, Tennis Australia chief Craig Tiley said his organization had done "everything they possibly could". — AFP