

Sports

Chelsea swat aside AC Milan to revive Champions League bid

Chelsea level with third-placed Milan on four points ahead of a crucial trip to the San Siro

LONDON: Graham Potter admitted Chelsea's 3-0 victory against AC Milan was "really important" as they climbed back into contention for a place in the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday. Potter's side won for the first time in three Group E games as Wesley Fofana's first Chelsea goal was followed by second-half strikes from Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Reece James at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea had kicked off their Champions League campaign with an embarrassing defeat at Dinamo Zagreb the day before Thomas Tuchel was sacked, while Potter's first match ended in a draw with Salzburg.

But second-placed Chelsea are now level with third-placed Milan on four points ahead of a crucial trip to the San Siro to face the Italian champions again on October 11. With three games left for each team, group leaders Salzburg are one point above Chelsea after beating Dinamo Zagreb 1-0 on Wednesday.

"It was a good night. We needed to play well. The attitude and application of the players was fantastic. Their personality was good," Potter said. "It's a really important win but there's still a long way to go in the competition."

Progress in the Champions League is essential to Potter's bid to stamp his authority on a squad expensively assembled by Chelsea's new owners with immediate success in mind. While Chelsea still have work to do to reach the knockout stage, Potter will be encouraged by the most dynamic performance of his three games since replacing Tuchel.

"The boys have been really open, responsible and fantastic to work with. They realised they weren't at the levels (when he joined). That's great from a coach's perspective," Potter said. Milan manager Stefano Pioli added: "We weren't dangerous enough, we have to

give credit to the opponents, but it's also down to us. "We knew it would be a tough game but mentally we didn't play as a team." Potter has kept a low profile so far as he gets acclimatised to the first high-pressure job of his managerial career. The former Brighton boss had never attended a Champions League game before taking charge at Chelsea, so his first victory in the competition was a memorable milestone for the modest coach.

Knockout blow

Exposing Milan's weakness at set-pieces, Chelsea took charge from the moment Thiago Silva met Mount's free-kick with a header that Ciprian Tatarusanu tipped over. Moments later, Silva threatened again with another header that deflected wide for the corner that produced Chelsea's 24th-minute opener.

With Milan negligent in their marking yet again, Silva reached Ben Chilwell's corner with a thumping header that was parried by Tatarusanu. Ruben Loftus-Cheek scrambled the rebound towards Fofana and the French defender fired low into the far corner from six yards.

Fofana's memorable evening turned sour following a challenge with Rafael Leao that forced the centre-back to limp off late in the first half. Despite being outplayed for most of the half, Milan would have been level in stoppage time if not for a woeful piece of finishing.

Leao scythed through the Chelsea defence to set up Charles De Ketelaere for a shot that Kepa Arrizabalaga pushed out to Rade Krunic, who blazed high over the bar from close range. That narrow escape served to refocus Chelsea in the second half and they delivered the knockout blow in the 56th minute.



LONDON: AC Milan's Spanish midfielder Brahim Diaz (C) fights for the ball with Chelsea's English midfielder Ruben Loftus-Cheek (R) during the UEFA Champions League Group E football match between Chelsea and AC Milan at Stamford Bridge in London. —AFP

Former Chelsea defender Fikayo Tomori was caught out by James' cross and Aubameyang was on hand to volley home. It was Aubameyang's second goal in successive games after the Gabon striker bagged his first for the club in their win at Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Toothless in attack with former Chelsea striker

Olivier Giroud anonymous and far too careless at the back, Milan were in disarray and it was no surprise when Chelsea struck again six minutes later. Raheem Sterling fed the unmarked James with a perfectly-weighted pass into the Milan area and the defender slammed a fierce strike past Tatarusanu from a tight angle. —AFP

Nepal cricket star arrested on rape charges

KATHMANDU, Nepal: Cricket star Sandeep Lamichhane returned to Nepal and was immediately arrested Thursday, nearly a month after a court issued a warrant over the alleged rape of a 17-year-old girl.

Lamichhane, a poster boy for the growing popularity of cricket in Nepal, was taken into custody when he landed. Dinesh Raj Mainali, a spokesman for Kathmandu district police, told AFP. Wearing a white hoodie, black cap and black mask, he was swiftly escorted out of Kathmandu airport to a police van waiting outside.

Earlier Lamichhane had posted on his Facebook page that he was returning home to fight the accusations. "I will fully cooperate in all stages of investigation and will fight (the) legal battle to prove my innocence. Let the justice prevail," Lamichhane posted.

Lamichhane, 22, was suspended as Nepal's cricket captain after a court in the country issued the arrest warrant on September 8. It followed an accusation from the 17-year-old that the cricketer had raped her in a Kathmandu hotel room in August. But Lamichhane failed to return to Nepal from the West Indies where he was playing in the Caribbean Premier League.

Growing popularity

Cricket does not enjoy the same adulation in mountainous Nepal it does elsewhere in South Asia. But it has been growing in popularity, with Nepal given one-day international status by the world governing body in 2018.

Lamichhane has been a major part in this rise as the most sought-after Nepali cricketer in lucrative leagues around the world. The leg spinner's big break came when he was snapped up for the lucrative Indian Premier League, the world's richest cricket tournament, in 2018.

Lamichhane last month issued a statement on social media reiterating that the claims against him were baseless, and defended his decision not to return to



KATHMANDU, Nepal: Nepali cricketer Sandeep Lamichhane (C) is escorted by police after being taken into custody to face rape charges, at Tribhuvan international airport in Kathmandu. —AFP

Nepal. "News of the arrest warrant issued against me... made me mentally disturbed. I could not think what to do and what not to do," he wrote.

"My health condition is gradually improving and I am planning to return to Nepal as soon as possible to vehemently fight back (against the allegations)." Soon afterwards, Nepali police said they had sought help from Interpol with a "diffusion" notice asking member countries for their cooperation in bringing Lamichhane back to the country to face charges.

Victims speaking up

About 2,300 rape cases were reported in Nepal in the last fiscal year, according to police, but rights workers say many more assaults go unreported. Only a handful of women in Nepal spoke out during the global #MeToo movement and those accused have faced lit-

tle or no repercussions.

"Victims are now speaking up and there is hope in how the police is taking action. But laws are not enough... A lot needs to be done to push societal change," said Mohna Ansari, a former member of the National Human Rights Commission.

Public opinion on the case has been divided, with many supporting the hugely popular cricketer. The accusations against Lamichhane come after the conviction in early September of popular Nepali actor Paul Shah for sexual misconduct with a minor.

He was sentenced to two and a half years in prison and ordered to pay his victim compensation. In May, hundreds protested in Kathmandu for better laws and enforcement in cases of sexual violence after an aspiring model posted a series of TikTok videos detailing abuse when she was a teenager. —AFP

S Africa's Pretorius out of India ODIs, T20 World Cup

LUCKNOW: South Africa's Dwaine Pretorius has been ruled out of the ongoing one-day international series in India and the Twenty20 World Cup with a broken thumb, the country's cricket board said Thursday.

The bowling all-rounder sustained the injury during the third T20 on Tuesday, which South Africa won in Indore to avoid a white-wash with their 2-1 series defeat. Left-arm quick Marco Jansen has been added to the ODI squad and a further announcement on Pretorius' replacement for the T20 World Cup will be made in the coming days, Cricket South Africa said.

"The nature of the injury requires medical intervention and Dwaine will consult the Cricket South Africa designated hand surgeon on arrival in South Africa," chief medical officer Shuaib Manjra said in the statement. "Normal rehabilitation procedures will follow to ensure he speedily returns to playing cricket."

Qualifiers for T20's showpiece event in Australia will begin on October 16, followed by the Super 12 six days later. —AFP

Six charged over Indonesia stadium disaster

MALANG, Indonesia: Indonesia's police chief on Thursday said six people had been charged over a football stadium disaster that killed 131 at the weekend. "Based on the investigation and sufficient evidence, we have determined six suspects," national police chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo told a press conference. The six people charged with negligence causing death include three police officers and three people responsible for the match and its security, including the head of Arema FC's organising committee and one of the club's security officers, he said.

Two of the police officers under investigation ordered colleagues to fire tear gas, he said. The third police officer under investigation knew about FIFA's safety regulations that prohibit the use of crowd control gas at pitchside but did not prevent tear gas being used by colleagues, he said.

The suspects face a maximum sentence of five years in prison if found guilty. The Indonesian football association had earlier banned the Arema FC organising committee chief and a security officer from football for life. The announcement came as anger grew over the police response to a pitch invasion. Officers reacted by firing tear gas into packed stands as fans of Arema FC tried to approach players following their defeat to fierce rivals Persebaya Surabaya on Saturday evening. Hundreds of people fled for small exits, resulting in a crush that left many trampled or suffocating to death.

'Negligence'

Police described the pitch invasion as a riot and said two officers were killed, but survivors accused them of overre-



MALANG, Indonesia: School children walk past a banner placed in various places in Malang on October 6, 2022, as a call to investigate the stampede that killed at least 131 people in one of the deadliest disasters in football history. —AFP

acting. Officers responded with force, kicking and hitting fans with batons, according to witnesses and footage, pushing the spectators back into the stands where many would die after tear gas was fired. Several witnesses said police stood by and refused to help victims. Instead, bystanders rushed to help. Kiosk owner Edy Tanto said he saw people begin to pour out of the stadium when chaos erupted. He rushed to provide water from his shop to victims whose eyes were stung with the tear gas, which witnesses said police had fired into the stands. "I couldn't think straight," Tanto told AFP as he sat cross-legged on the floor of his shop.

"I just thought of helping them." Indonesian President Joko Widodo announced an investigation after the tragedy and called for a safety review of all stadiums. The Malang police chief was replaced Monday, nine officers were suspended and 19 others were put under investigation, according to police. But organisers of the match and club officials have also been blamed for the chaos. —AFP

Man City thrash Copenhagen

MANCHESTER: Erling Haaland only needed 45 minutes to add two more goals to a remarkable start to his Manchester City career as the English giants thrashed FC Copenhagen 5-0 in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Haaland now has 19 goals in 11 competitive games for City and was denied the chance of a fourth hat-trick in five home games after being rested for the second half by Pep Guardiola. City were already 3-0 up at the break as the Norwegian twice swept home from close range before David Khocholava deflected Sergio Gomez's shot into his own net.

"I've never witnessed anything like it in my life," said City midfielder Jack Grealish on Haaland's scoring streak. "For the first and second goal I was just laughing. I was like, 'how?' He's just always there."

"Their keeper said to me: 'this guy - he's not human.'" Riyad Mahrez took advantage of Haaland's absence to score his first goal of the season from the penalty spot before Julian Alvarez rounded off the scoring.

With maximum points from their opening three games, City are cruising towards the last 16 and can seal qualification with two games to spare should they win in the Danish capital in six days' time. Copenhagen are languishing in mid-table in their domestic league and in manager Jacob Neestrup's second game in charge came to the Etihad with damage limitation in mind.

But for Copenhagen goalkeeper Kamil Grabara, City could easily have surpassed the six goals they smashed past Manchester United on Sunday. "The reason we were consistent all these years is that after a derby and lots of compliments, we are able to play a Champions League game and play the way we played," said Guardiola.

Haaland only had 11 touches before being replaced at the break, but four of them were shots on target. The 22-year-old now has 28 Champions League goals in 22 appearances and struck for the ninth consecutive City game when he converted Joao Cancelo's cross after seven minutes.

Grabara then produced stunning saves to deny Bernardo Silva, Haaland and Grealish. But Haaland was predictably in the perfect place to pounce on the rebound when he parried Gomez's shot just after the half hour mark.

Another effort from the Spanish full-back was heading towards goal when it struck the unfortunate Khocholava and rebounded into his own net. With the points safely secured, Guardiola took the opportunity to withdraw Haaland with 10 more games to come before the World Cup break in just over a month's time.

Youngsters Rico Lewis and Joshua Wilson-Esbrand were handed their Champions League debuts off the bench as Cancelo and Silva were also given a breather. But City still added two more goals in the second period as Mahrez responded to Guardiola's call for the Algerian to get back to his best.

Mahrez sent Grabara the wrong way from the penalty spot after Aymeric Laporte had been hauled down. He then turned creator for Alvarez to grab his first Champions League goal with a simple finish from close range. —AFP