

Sports

Dembele fires Barca past Real Sociedad to Copa semis

‘There are a lot of games that we can put to bed earlier’

BARCELONA: Ousmane Dembele's strike, capping a brilliant individual display, helped Barcelona beat Real Sociedad 1-0 on Wednesday, and reach the Copa del Rey semi-finals. The French forward struck in the 52nd minute to power the record 31-time cup-winners through against 10-man La Real, who had Brais Mendez sent off late in the first half.

Barcelona have enjoyed a strong start to 2023, winning the Spanish Super Cup and moving three points clear of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga, and continued it in a pulsating cup clash. Imanol Alguacil's Real Sociedad have thrilled in the league, sitting third, but were missing veteran playmaker David Silva and Mikel Merino through injury.

Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez, on his 43rd birthday, guided his team to a nervy victory, thanks to Dembele. The coach defended Dembele when taking over at Barcelona in November 2021, saying that with hard work he could be the best winger in the world.

“The most important thing is having the mentality that you will make the difference at Barcelona,” Xavi told reporters on Wednesday. “For me, Dembele is still one of the best in the world in his position. I am happy for him because he's a good guy and a good professional.”

“He has turned things around and that is not easy at Barca.” The Catalans came out of the blocks quickly and Robert Lewandowski had an effort blocked after the electric Dembele found him. At the other end Takefusa Kubo crashed a shot against the crossbar, as the game ebbed and flowed in entertaining fashion.

Barcelona fans frequently showed their ire towards referee Jesus Gil Manzano in the first half—he

was the official who sent off Lewandowski against Osasuna in November, resulting in a ban which the Pole is still serving in La Liga. However it was Real Sociedad midfielder Mendez who was sent off at Camp Nou on Wednesday, just before half-time. The Spaniard lunged in on Sergio Busquets, catching his compatriot with his studs above the ankle.

Decisive Dembele

Early in the second half, Barcelona broke the deadlock when Jules Kounde slid Dembele in down the right wing and he drove into the box and lashed the ball past Alex Remiro at the near post. It was the French forward's third goal in six games and another sign of his superb form under Xavi.

“It's hard to stop a player at such a level, in form and having a day like this,” said Alguacil. “We made things too easy for him in the first half ... I think we were afraid. If you give half a metre to Dembele, you're screwed.”

Now that Dembele has found a coach who believes in him—and signed a new deal last summer—he has become vital at Barcelona. “(Dembele) had a great game, we know what a great player he is,” Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo told Movistar.

“He helps us with goals, he's taking good decisions, that's the most important thing, something that maybe was tricky for him at the beginning.” Real Sociedad, despite their numerical disadvantage, battled well and should have levelled when Alexander Sorloth fired over from only a couple of yards out.

The Norwegian striker had netted five goals in his previous six games and looked aghast at his miss. Gavi struck the bar after more good work by Dembele as Barcelona tried and failed to seal the



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Pedri vies with Real Sociedad's Spanish midfielder Pablo Marin (L) during the Copa del Rey (King's Cup), quarter final football match between FC Barcelona and Real Sociedad. —AFP

win with a second goal. “There are a lot of games that we can put to bed earlier, we will try to work on that,” said Barcelona defender Alejandro Balde. “We are in very good form and we just have to kill off these situations.”

Barcelona survived two late scares after Marc-Andre ter Stegen gave the ball away but then saved

from Robert Navarro and produced another fine stop to deny Jon Ander Olasagasti. Elsewhere Osasuna earned a 2-1 win over Sevilla in extra-time to reach the semis for the first time since 2005, when they finished as runners-up to Real Betis. On Thursday Real Madrid host Atletico Madrid and Valencia welcome Athletic Club in the other quarter-finals. — AFP

City face Arsenal showdown, Reds eye revenge in FA Cup

LONDON: Manchester City and Arsenal take a break from an intense Premier League title race this weekend-only to face each other in a heavyweight FA Cup clash at the Etihad. Holders Liverpool will look to avenge their chastening recent defeat at Brighton, while Harry Kane could become Tottenham's all-time top scorer. AFP Sport picks out some of the highlights ahead of this weekend's FA Cup fourth-round ties.

Man City aim to halt Arsenal's momentum

Unexpectedly trailing in Arsenal's wake in the Premier League, Manchester City have the chance to slow the leaders' momentum in their first meeting this season. City are five points behind Arsenal, who have a game in hand, but the champions still have to play the Gunners twice in the league, making their FA Cup showdown a tantalising appetiser ahead of the main course. Arsenal are riding high after victo-

ries over Tottenham and Manchester United in the league, while City stayed in touch after responding to a blast from Pep Guardiola by beating Tottenham and Wolves. “At half-time the other day, Pep told us what he wanted, what he wasn't happy with. As players we were not at our best and we had to correct that,” City defender John Stones said of his side's fightback from two goals down to defeat Tottenham 4-2. It would be a major statement of intent from Arsenal if they are able to put Guardiola in another grumpy mood with a victory at the Etihad Stadium.

Fatigued Liverpool on revenge mission

Jurgen Klopp said he “couldn't remember a worse game” than Liverpool's woeful 3-0 defeat at Brighton, a performance so wretched that Jordan Henderson labelled it a “really low point” in an already traumatic season for the Reds. It is safe to say Liverpool's trip to the Amex Stadium on January 14 left some painful scars on Klopp and company. But the FA Cup offers them an unexpected chance to erase those bitter memories and get their campaign back on track. Liverpool return to Brighton languishing ninth in the Premier League, 10 points adrift of the top four. It is a remarkable fall from grace after they came within a whisker of winning an unprecedented quadruple last season.

city derby with Hertha Berlin.

“33 points halfway through (the season), that's exceptional. We have the derby coming up on Sunday, we have to be ready again.” Union took advantage of a 1-1 draw between Freiburg and Eintracht Frankfurt, both of whom could have joined the Berliners in equal second with a win.

Frankfurt's France striker Randal Kolo Muani scored just before halftime for a 1-0 lead, but Freiburg local boy Matthias Ginter equalised for the home side two minutes after halftime. Also on Wednesday night, Bayer Leverkusen won their fifth-straight Bundesliga game, beating Bochum at home ahead of Sunday's blockbuster clash against Dortmund.

Leverkusen took the lead early through an eighth-minute penalty to Edmond Tapsoba. A second-half goal by Czech striker Adam Hlozek, set up by teenage midfielder Florian Wirtz on his return to the starting XI from an ACL tear, saw the home side claim all three points. Elsewhere, Augsburg lifted themselves out of the relegation playoff places with a narrow 1-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Earlier on Wednesday, American striker Gio Reyna scored a last-gasp winner in Borussia Dortmund's 2-1 victory over Mainz, securing the

Admitting Liverpool are still mentally fatigued from their bid for sporting immortality, Spain midfielder Thiago Alcantara said: “It is not just about physical stuff, it is something psychological because we were so close to winning everything and we just touched it but sadly it went away.”

Kane eyes Spurs record

Harry Kane would love the chance to become Tottenham's record goalscorer at Preston on Saturday. Kane drew level with Jimmy Greaves on 266 Spurs goals when he netted with a superb strike in the team's Premier League win at Fulham on Monday.

Greaves' tally had stood untouched since 1970, but the England captain is now on the verge of sole possession of the record. With fifth-placed Tottenham in the midst of a fight to climb back into the Premier League's top four, Antonio Conte could rest his stars against second-tier Preston.

But, mindful of Tottenham's surprise defeat at Middlesbrough in the FA Cup fifth round last season, Kane is keen to play. “The FA Cup is important for us. It was disappointing to lose to Middlesbrough. We will see what the manager says but I will be ready,” said Kane, who is still looking to win the first major trophy of his career. — AFP



MAINZ: Mainz' Danish forward Marcus Ingvartsen vies for the ball with Dortmund's German midfielder Emre Can during the German first division Bundesliga football match. — AFP

three points deep into injury-time. The 20-year-old US international Reyna also scored the fourth in Dortmund's 4-3 home win over Augsburg on Sunday. On Wednesday he tapped in a header with a minute of injury time remaining, sinking a dogged Mainz. — AFP

Milan title defence crumbling as Napoli host rivals Roma

MILAN: With 86 minutes gone of their last Serie A home match AC Milan's title defence was very much alive, two goals to the good against Roma and set to maintain the five-point gap separating the champions and league leaders Napoli.

Less than three weeks later and their hopes of retaining the Scudetto are hanging by a thread after a sudden slump which has allowed Napoli to charge 12 clear almost completely unopposed, and led to them being knocked out of the Italian Cup and losing the Super Cup to Inter Milan.

Two quickfire goals from Roger Ibanez and Tammy Abraham snatched a shock draw for a dismal Roma that night at the San Siro, and since then Milan have looked a shadow of the team who last year snatched the title from neighbours Inter.

The partying which exploded last Spring in celebration of Milan's first league crown since 2011 felt like a distant memory on Tuesday night when Lazio demolished Stefano Pioli's side 4-0 and moved a point behind them in third place.

Pioli all-but conceded the title after a miserable display in Rome, admitting that “right now a lot of things aren't working” as previously reliable performers either get injured or underwhelm on the field. Director Paolo Maldini insisted on Tuesday that the season “doesn't seem like a huge disaster” but the Milan icon has been criticised for flop summer signings including Belgium attacker Charles De Ketelaere and Sergino Dest, whose display on Tuesday at left-back in place of injured Theo Hernandez was calamitous. — AFP

Today's matches on TV

SPANISH LEAGUE		
UD Almeria v RCD Espanyol	23:00	
beIN Sports Connect		
FRENCH LEAGUE		
FC Lorient v Stade Rennais	23:00	
beIN Sports Connect		

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adalya	22517144

Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
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Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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