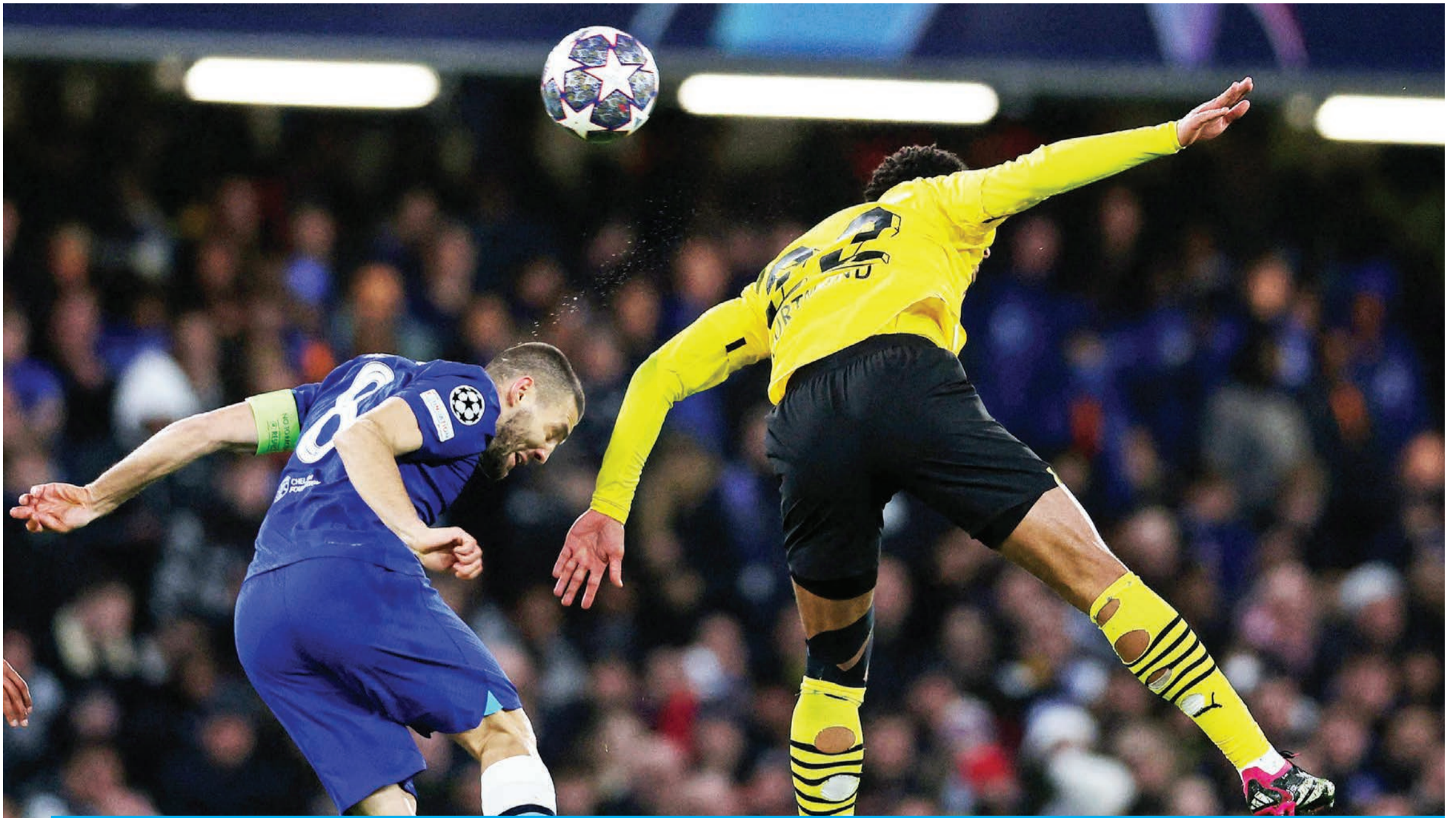


Chelsea book CL quarter-finals

Chelsea manager Potter breathes a sigh of relief



LONDON: Chelsea's Croatian midfielder Mateo Kovacic (left) and Dortmund's English midfielder Jude Bellingham vie to header the ball during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second-leg football match between Chelsea and Borussia Dortmund at Stamford Bridge in London on March 7, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Chelsea manager Graham Potter breathed a sigh of relief after his side finally delivered some return on a world record one-season spend in the transfer market on Tuesday. Chelsea kept their season alive by beating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 at Stamford Bridge to progress to the quarter-finals of the Champions League (CL) 2-1 on aggregate on Tuesday.

Raheem Sterling and Kai Havertz, with a twice-taken penalty, got the goals as the Blues relieved the pressure on manager Graham Potter. The Englishman's job was on the line after a season that has so far failed to deliver any return on a world-record injection of over £500 million (\$600 million) in one season on new signings. Chelsea had won just three of their previous 16 matches to fall to 10th in the Premier League and bow out early of both domestic cups.

But some of their expensive collection of stars showed up in time to remain in the hunt for a third European Cup. "There was a fantastic feeling in the

dressling room. We have been through a tough period and this competition means a lot for us," said Potter. "We wanted to progress and get into the last eight and it sets us up for the next few weeks."

Dortmund arrived in England on the back of a 10-game winning run in all competitions. But the visitors posed barely any attacking threat in the first half bar a Marco Reus free-kick that Kepa Arrizabalaga did brilliantly to palm to safety.

"We have to say, over the course of two games, Chelsea deserve to go through," said Dortmund boss Edin Terzic. "Both legs were very tight games. In this type of games inches and moments decide if you are going to the next round or not." Chances came and went frequently at the other end. Havertz smashed a volley off the inside of the post and then finally found the net via the underside of the bar only for the goal to be ruled out for an offside against Sterling earlier in the move.

The worst miss was to come as Kalidou Koulibaly miscued with an open goal from Ben Chilwell's free-kick and Felix's follow-up effort was blocked on the line. Potter was uncharacteristically animated on the touchline as he constantly whipped the crowd up to keep pushing his side forward. "There is a lot of emotion in the end," added Potter. "It was tense in the end but the boys played fantastic. "I am delighted for them to get the win and great for everyone here." The home fans finally had something to celebrate three minutes before half-time.

Sterling comes good

Sterling's first attempt was another one to forget as he swiped and missed Chilwell's low cross, but the England international composed himself to dribble past Reus and fire high into the net. "I had a little mis-kick with the first touch but it landed perfectly and allowed us to build on that for our performance,"

said Sterling. That was just Chelsea's third goal in the last eight games. Havertz's penalty early in the second half meant Potter's men scored more than once for the first time since December 27, but the German international needed two spot-kicks to make his mark. Marius Wolf was penalised for handling Chilwell's cross after a VAR review.

Havertz's first penalty came back off the post, but VAR came to Chelsea's rescue once more as Dortmund were further punished for encroaching. There was no second reprieve as Havertz coolly slotted the ball the same way, this time finding the corner of the net. Chelsea's spending spree may have ruled them out of the running for Jude Bellingham with the Dortmund midfielder expected to have his choice of Europe's top clubs this summer. But on his return to England, Bellingham missed Dortmund's best chance to take the tie to extra-time when he side-footed wide from close range. — AFP

Savea suspended over throat-slitting gesture



Ardie Savea

WELLINGTON: Wellington Hurricanes captain Ardie Savea has been suspended for a week after making a throat-slitting gesture towards an opponent during a fiery clash with the Melbourne Rebels. All Blacks star Savea was called before a judiciary committee on Tuesday evening after running his thumb across his throat following an argument with Rebels halfback Ryan Louwrens in Friday's game. The 29-year-old Savea, who had been shown a yellow card just before the incident, later apologized.

The loose forward said that, as a role model, he regretted the action that overshadowed his team's 39-33 win. The judiciary committee said it issued Savea with a warning for "unsportsmanlike play" after deciding that his action did not meet the threshold for a red card. However, it said the combination of the yellow card and the warning amounted to "persistent offending" by Savea.

The committee ruled that "an appropriate sanction" would be a one-week suspension. Savea, who has played 70 Tests for the All Blacks, including four as captain, acknowledged after the game that he lost control and revealed his father had given him a stern dressing down. "I got off the field and my old man called me and kind of groaned me off, so that's a lesson learned," he told reporters. — AFP

Benfica thrash Brugge 5-1 to book CL last 16

LISBON: Goncalo Ramos struck twice to help Benfica romp to a 5-1 Champions League (CL) last 16, second leg win over Club Brugge on Tuesday in Lisbon and a 7-1 aggregate victory. Ramos, who shot to global fame during the World Cup when he was selected ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo for Portugal and netted a hat-trick against Switzerland, set up the opener for Rafa Silva. The 21-year-old forward then produced two clinical finishes either side of half-time to ensure the two-time European Cup winners would reach the quarter-finals in consecutive seasons.

Joao Mario struck from the spot to score in his fifth consecutive Champions League match -- Portugal great Eusebio was the last player to manage the feat for the club. David Neres added the fifth for Benfica before Bjorn Meijer netted a spectacular late consolation.

Roger Schmidt's ruthless side finished top of a group containing heavyweights Paris Saint-Germain and Juventus, and made light work of Scott Parker's knockout stage novices. "It's always good (to score), a striker like me makes a living from that, but the most important thing was that we won and played well," Ramos told Eleven Sports. "Whoever we get (in the next round), we will play in the same way." Benfica have only been beaten twice all season across all competitions and dominated from the outset against the Belgian visitors.

Chiquinho, who has taken Enzo Fernandez's place in midfield after his Premier League record transfer move to Chelsea in January, returned from injury for the hosts. Parker picked Ukrainian striker Roman Yaremchuk against his former side, pairing him with Noa Lang to try and spring an unlikely comeback. Joao Mario, in sparking goalscoring form this season from midfield, netted after just two minutes with a glorious, flicked finish, but the goal was ruled out for an offside in the build-up. The Portugal midfielder was then foiled



LISBON: Benfica's Portuguese forward Goncalo Ramos (right) scores his team's second goal during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second-leg football match between SL Benfica and Club Brugge on March 7, 2023. — AFP

by Meijer, who hacked his goal-bound effort off the line. Eventually the hosts took the lead at the Estadio da Luz through Silva after 38 minutes, picked out well in the box by Ramos. Silva showed good close control to dig out some space and a deft finish to beat former Liverpool goalkeeper Simon Mignolet. Ramos steered home the second just before the break after being teed up by Joao Mario. He netted a brace on Friday against Famalicao to help the Portuguese league leaders maintain an eight-point advantage and was decisive in the box yet again.

Ramos surged inside from the left before firing back across himself into the bottom corner, leaving Mignolet with no chance, notching his 22nd goal of the season across all competitions. Close behind him on 20 is Joao Mario, enjoying the best goalscoring season of his career by a distance. The 30-year-old midfielder slashed a volley narrowly off target early in the second half. Brugge, who have now won just two of their last

17 games, were a surprise package in the group phase and helped eliminate Atletico Madrid, but were picked apart by the Eagles. Ramos netted his second before the hour mark with a clinical first-time finish from Alex Grimaldo's low cross. Then Joao Mario's coolly taken penalty added sheen to the scoreline after Abakar Sylila clumsily fouled Gilberto.

It was the midfielder's sixth goal of the tournament, pulling him level with Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior as the third top scorer, although five have come from the spot. Neres slotted home the fifth on a bruising night for Parker and his team, who pulled one back through Meijer, as Benfica proved they will be no pushovers in the next round. "The result hits us hard," said Brugge midfielder Hans Vanaken. "The way in which it happened was painful too, because we shipped the goals too easily. "I am emotional because we had a great campaign... you don't want to go out like that." — AFP