

Schalke coast to win

SOCERNET



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It's Ukraine v Germany

INTERNET, undated



Ukrainian football fans on Friday were slow to believe that European silverware might actually return to the former Soviet republic in the form of the UEFA Cup title. Dynamo Kiev meet Shakhtar Donetsk in an all-Ukrainian semifinal after they eliminated French sides Paris St Germain and Olympique Marseille, respectively, on Thursday.

The German Bundesliga will also have a team in the May 20 decider in Istanbul as SV Hamburg play Werder Bremen in the other semi. Hamburg ousted England's Manchester City in the quarters, and Bremen prevailed over Italian side Udinese.

If the two rivalries weren't big enough, Kiev and Donetsk as well as Hamburg and Bremen will in fact meet four times in total over the next weeks.

National cup semifinals between the sides take place on April 22 in Germany and Ukraine. The UEFA Cup semis are April 30 and May 7. Bremen host Hamburg in the Bundesliga on May 10 while Kiev and Donetsk clash in the Ukrainian league on May 26.

"No matter what happens, for the first time ever we will have a Ukrainian side in a European final," said veteran Dynamo Kyiv supporter Mark

Their leaky defence was evident as early as the fourth minute when Pander's left-footed shot from outside the box found the bottom left corner, and soon after only a fine save from Gerhard Tremmel kept out Levan Kobashvili.

In the 23rd minute Kuranyi laid the ball off on the edge of the box to Altintop, who unleashed a low shot into the bottom right corner to double the lead.

Jefferson Farfan shot wide on the half-hour mark and Tremmel made an excellent low save to deny Vicente Sanchez just before the break.

Sanchez was off-target early in the second half, but Jones made no mistake in the 60th minute when he was put through one on one with Tremmel.

It remained one-way traffic for the rest of the game, save for Cottbus' sole chance when Dimitar Rangelov shot straight at Manuel Neuer with four minutes remaining.

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Zahorodko. "We have been waiting for this a long time."

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Dynamo won the European Cup Winners' Cup as a Soviet Union team in 1975 and 1986.

"I think we could be seeing a beginning of a return of our days of greatness," said Dynamo owner Hryhory Surkis, in an Inter television interview. "But we have much work before us."

In keeping with a deeply-set Ukrainian sports tradition of never openly admitting things are going well, web comments often remain restrained.

"Great, now we have to play Dynamo five (sic) times in three (sic) weeks," complained AntiEvis, a pro-Shakhtar contributor on the ukrainian football website.

It is the first time in the UEFA Cup that two teams from one country meet in one semi-final and two teams from another in the other.

However, the German Bundesliga once provided all four semi-finalists, in 1980, with Eintracht Frankfurt eventually lifting the trophy.

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Bundesliga teams, by contrast, have met on 16 previous occasions, and there were also 17 matches between teams from East and West Germany. The last German UEFA Cup winners were Schalke 04 in 1997 and the last finalists Borussia Dortmund in 2002.

Walcott ready to learn

Football

AFP, London

As a season of fluctuating fortunes and injury woes approaches a thrilling climax, Arsenal winger Theo Walcott has begun to reflect on what has been a steep learning curve.

With Arsenal struggling for form over the first four months of the season, the England flier was bedevilled by a persistent injury to his shoulder.

No sooner had it been jarred by a tackle or collision than it popped out and would have to be slipped back into the socket by Walcott himself, causing untold agony.

The injury provided a fitting metaphor for Arsenal's autumn, when they were serene one moment and excruciating the next, apparently incapable of consistency.

But that is now little more than a bad memory.

The north Londoners have swayed into the Champions League semifinals and have almost certainly rubber-stamped their participation in next season's competition thanks to an 18-game unbeaten league run.

Fittingly, Walcott's troublesome right shoulder has also settled.

The 20-year-old underwent surgery last November after suffering a serious dislocation while training with England and has reported no ill effects since returning in March.

It is sweet relief for Walcott, who had struggled to remember a time when he did not have to play through the pain barrier.

Even his first Arsenal goal, in the 2007 League Cup final against Chelsea, was tinged by agony.

"I had a massive strapping on that day and it still popped out a few times," he recalled.

"I hid it quite well, but the pain was excruciating."

"The right shoulder was always the worst because it would pop out and pop back in - you know, like Mel Gibson in 'Lethal Weapon'."

It was not simply Walcott's muscles and joints that were hardened during his convalescence.

He returned a tougher character - less easily deterred and, in response to Wenger's urgings, more eager to grasp responsibility with Arsenal.

The French manager reaped the rewards when he was forced to ask four players under the age of 22 - including Walcott - to take penalties in the cauldron of Roma's Stadio

Olimpico, in the Champions League first knockout round. None missed.

"I'd never experienced a shoot-out before as a player," Walcott said. "I'm normally watching at home and want to see it go to penalties for the excitement."

"As a player, taking a penalty like that is hard. You walk up to take the kick and it's like walking in slow-motion: your throat goes dry, you can't hear anything."

"It was such a relief for me

to see it go in in Rome, but it showed how much strength of character we've got because we came through with young players."



THEO WALCOTT

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