



PHOTO: AFP
Werder Bremen midfielder Torsten Frings screams with joy after scoring the second goal against Sampdoria during their Champions League qualification play-off in Bremen on Wednesday.

Bremen wallop Sampdoria

AFP, Paris



German powerhouses Werder Bremen made light of the sale of midfield star Mesut Ozil as they walloped Italian side Sampdoria 3-1 in their Champions League play-off first leg clash on Wednesday.

Goals by Clemens Fritz, captain Torsten Frings and Claudio Pizarro will have eased some of the pain of losing Ozil to Real Madrid on Tuesday albeit they are 16million euros richer for the sale.

Israeli side Hapoel Tel-Aviv edged tantalisingly close to a place in the lucrative group stages with a 3-2 away win over Austrian outfit Salzburg.

The hosts never really recovered from the shock of going behind to a third minute penalty converted by Nigerian international goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama, who scored several from the spot for his club last term.

Salzburg - who have fallen at this stage on three of the past four seasons - kept their hopes alive with a second-half penalty of their own successfully

converted by substitute Roman Wallner.

Belgian giants Anderlecht also did their chances a huge favour with a 2-2 draw away at Partizan Belgrade with all four of the goals in the match coming in a manic 12 minute second-half spell.

Among the scorers were the hosts on-form striker Cleo - who grabbed his sixth of the campaign - while Roland Jusasz scored Anderlecht's second to give them a useful draw.

The other two matches ended 1-0 in favour of the home sides, debutants

Sporting Braga and Basel over Sevilla and Moldovan outfit Sheriff respectively.

The latter match was particularly bad-tempered with six players booked, five from Sheriff who also had Aleksandr Erokhin sent off for a second bookable offence.

Basel's match winner was Valentin Stocker, who headed home in the 54th minute, and gave them the upper hand as they bid to reach the group stages for the third time and deny Sheriff a cash bonanza yet again - the Moldovans have seen their hopes denied on the previous 10 campaigns.

However, the visitors will be heartened by how they ejected Croatian champions Dinamo Zagreb in the previous round.

Bremen are favourites to join fellow Bundesliga sides Bayern Munich and Schalke 04 in the draw for the group stages after their victory over Sampdoria - who gave themselves some cause for optimism with a late away goal by striker Giampaolo Pazzini.

"I am sure that we will score a goal in Genoa, but it is annoying that we conceded a goal late in the game," said Bremen's director of sport Klaus Allofs.

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RESULTS

Werder Bremen 3 (Fritz 51, Frings 67, Pizarro 69) Sampdoria 1 (Pazzini 90)

Braga (POR) 1 (Matheus 62) Sevilla (ESP) 0

Salzburg (AUT) 2 (Pokrivic 28, Wallner 66-pen) Hapoel Tel-Aviv (ISR) 3 (Enyeama 3-pen, Sahar 44, Shechter 53)

Basel (SUI) 1 (Stocker 54) FC Sheriff (MDA) 0

Partizan Belgrade (SRB) 2 (Cleo 57, Lejaks 64-og) Anderlecht (BEL) 2

Bayern open Bundesliga defence

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich will be without stars Ivica Olic and Arjen Robben for Friday night's Bundesliga opener as they begin their quest for their 23rd German league title - and target the treble.

Bayern host Wolfsburg at Munich's Allianz Arena without Dutch winger Robben, who is recovering from the leg injury he picked up just before the World Cup, while Croatia's Olic is struggling with a knee injury.

With Olic out, Germany striker Miroslav Klose is expected to start as the lone striker for Bayern, with Mario Gomez on the bench.

Bayern captain Mark van Bommel faces a race against time to be fit to face Wolfsburg as he also has a muscular injury. If he fails to make it, Danijel Pranjić will take over in midfield.

Only defeat in last season's Champions League final by Inter Milan prevented Bayern from winning the treble and van Bommel says the goal for this season is to add Europe's top domestic title to the league and cup double.

"That is the great challenge for this season," said van Bommel.

Wolfsburg will have Germany defender Arne Friedrich in the side after his transfer from relegated Hertha Berlin, while England coach Steve McClaren becomes the Bundesliga's first English manager.

"Bayern have a great squad with many world-class players," admitted McClaren.

There are question marks over Schalke centre-back

expecting the couple's first child.

McClaren is still trying to strengthen his Wolfsburg squad and is reported to be interested in signing both Liverpool's Ryan Babel and Brazilian playmaker Diego from Juventus.

Two of Bayern's main title rivals clash on Saturday night, when last season's runners-up Schalke are at Hamburg.

Germany defender Dennis Aogo, who has a trapped sciatic nerve.

South Korean striker Son Heung-Min is also out with a foot injury for Hamburg.

Fresh from their 3-1 win over Sampdoria on Wednesday night in the Champions League play-off round, Werder Bremen are at Hoffenheim on Saturday but without Germany playmaker Mesut Ozil, who signed for Real Madrid this week.

Tunisian striker Sami Allagui is likely to start, having joined Mainz during the off season, while Stuttgart have Christian Traesch in their side after he missed out on a World Cup place with Germany due to an ankle injury.

Germany star Michael Ballack is expected to start for his new club Bayer Leverkusen against Borussia Dortmund on Sunday night as he works his way back to full fitness after the ankle

TOP BUNDESLIGA TRANSFERS

Players	New Club	Old Club	(million €)
1. Simon Kjær	Wolfsburg	Palermo	12
2. Heiko Westermann	Hamburg	Schalke	7.5
3. Mario Mandzukic	Wolfsburg	Dinamo	7
4. Marko Arnautovic	Werder	Inter Milan	6.2
5. Gojko Karar	Hamburg	Hertha	5.5
6. Michael Ballack	Leverkusen	Chelsea	free
7. Toni Kroos	Bayern	Leverkusen	free
8. Raul Gonzalez	Schalke	Real Madrid	free
9. Christoph Metzelder	Schalke	Real Madrid	free
10. Sergio Escudero	Schalke	Real Murcia	2.4



"What could be better in the first game than to take on the champions?"

"It will be a great evening."

The Wolves will be without Swiss goalkeeper Diego Benaglio, whose wife is

Christoph Metzelder, who has an upper groin injury, while coach Felix Magath may give veteran Spain striker Raul more time to get match fit.

Hamburg have a few injury worries, namely

Nigerian striker Chinedu Obasi misses the game with a stress fracture of the shin for Hoffenheim.

Stuttgart are at Mainz on Sunday looking to open their Bundesliga campaign with a win.

FIXTURES

Friday
(Kick-off 1830 GMT)
Bayern Munich v VfL Wolfsburg

Saturday
(Kick-off 1330 GMT unless stated)
Hoffenheim v Werder Bremen, Borussia M'gladbach v Nuremberg, Cologne v Kaiserslautern, Freiburg v St. Pauli, Hanover 96 v Eintracht Frankfurt, Hamburg v Schalke 04 (1630 GMT)

Sunday
Mainz 05 v VfB Stuttgart (1330 GMT), Borussia Dortmund v Bayer Leverkusen

injury that kept him out of the World Cup.

Bayer fell away at the end of last season, having led the table for most of the year, and coach Jupp Heynckes will want no repeat from his side this term.

Masche won't go for cheap

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson has warned Javier Mascherano he will have to stay at Anfield for the rest of his contract unless a club meets his valuation of the Argentine midfielder.

Mascherano has told Hodgson he wants to leave Merseyside to be closer to his family and Inter Milan, managed by former Reds boss Rafael Benitez, are keen to sign the star.

"But he has also made it clear that he doesn't regard it as a hardship to play for Liverpool Football Club. In fact, it's the reverse. It's because of family matters that he wants to go."

"He is resigned to one of two possibilities -- either a club doesn't come along and offer us his valuation, in which case he stays, or we have an offer that meets his valuation, in which case he may go."

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Russian bid praised

Football

AFP, Moscow

A delegation of FIFA inspectors on Thursday praised Russia's bid to host the World Cup, saying they were particularly impressed by the commitment of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The inspectors' comments came after a four-day visit to Russia, the fifth stop of their two-month tour of nine candidates vying to host the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

"After four days of our visit we received all the necessary information that we needed to work out an objective and fair report," said Harold Mayne-Nicholls, the head of the six-man FIFA team.

"I'd like to praise Russia's bid committee on behalf of my colleagues and FIFA," said Mayne-Nicholls, who is also the Chilean Football Federation president.

"In all of the cities that we visited we've got full support and plenty of information."

The inspectors panel chief added that the meeting with Putin was very useful for the FIFA inspectors.

"He (Putin) gave us clear government guarantees in support of the bid to host the World Cup," Mayne-Nicholls said.

"We were all impressed with the commitment that the prime minister showed along with his knowledge of the country's bid book."

The inspectors have already visited Japan, South Korea, Australia and tested the joint bid of Netherlands and Belgium.

After their visit to Russia the team -- including FIFA event management chief Juergen Mueller and marketing head David Fowler -- next visits England, Spain, Portugal, the United States and Qatar.

It will draw up a technical report on the bids for FIFA's 24 executives, who are due to choose the hosts for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups on

Milner joins Man City

AFP, Manchester

England midfielder James Milner completed his transfer worth a reported 26million pounds from Aston Villa to English Premier League rivals Manchester City on Wednesday, according to the buying club's website.

Former Republic of Ireland midfielder Stephen Ireland moved in the other direction as part of the deal which has been on the cards for a while and saw Villa manager Martin O'Neill resign over a week ago as he was dissatisfied with the club continually selling their best players.

City had bought another of their midfield stars, English international Gareth Barry, in the close season last year.

December 2 in Zurich.

Japan, South Korea, Australia and Qatar, all members of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), have submitted bids for 2022 only, while the others are campaigning for both -- amid growing expectations Europe will get the 2018 edition after Brazil in 2014.

Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko also expressed his satisfaction with his country's presentations, adding he was hoping the FIFA panel report would be impartial.

"It was a serious business-like visit," Mutko said. "But the atmosphere of the visit was really pleasant. The FIFA inspectors are true professionals and, I believe, they gained some insight even after such a brief visit."

"We are all eager to get the right to host the World Cup," he added.

"We tried to present our opportunities and plans the best possible way and answer all the questions of the FIFA inspectors."

"And we once again confirmed all the guarantees that we are ready to undertake to hold the event at the top level."

The FIFA inspectors started their Russian visit in Saint Petersburg on Monday.

They also visited the Russian capital Moscow, Kazan -- the hometown of Russia's football champions Rubin -- and the southern resort city of Sochi, where the 2014 Winter Olympics will take place.

Internacional win Copa Libertadores

AFP, Porto Alegre

Internacional on Wednesday won the Copa Libertadores for the second time in their history after beating Mexico's Chivas de Guadalajara 3-2 in the second leg of the final.

The Brazilian side had already prevailed 2-1 in the away leg on August 11, giving them a 5-3 aggregate victory in the deciding tie of South America's most prestigious club tournament.

Inter, who won their first title in 2006, will now compete in the FIFA World Club Cup in the United Arab Emirates in December, when European champions Inter Milan will be one of their opponents.

As in the first leg, it was Chivas who struck first in Wednesday's game, with midfielder Marco Fabian's bicycle kick breaking the deadlock two minutes before half-time after sustained pressure from the Mexican side.

Inter attacked from the off in the second half though and drew level on 61 minutes through Rafael Sobis.

Celso Roth's men moved ahead on the night in the 76th minute when Leandro Damiao scored after striding forward from midfield.

Chivas's hopes of a comeback received a blow when Omar Arellano was sent off in the 85th minute, and Giuliano wrapped up Inter's triumph with an individual goal three minutes from time.

Football

AFP, Paris

France coach Laurent Blanc on Wednesday expressed his regret over the suspensions handed to four of his players for their roles in France's World Cup fiasco.

Nicolas Anelka was handed an 18-match ban by the disciplinary commission of the French Football Federation (FFF) on Tuesday, with Jeremy Toulalan, Franck Ribery and Patrice Evra banned for one, three and five games respectively.

Eric Abidal was also summoned by the commission, but avoided punishment. The players were punished for their roles in the infamous player revolt in South Africa, when the entire squad refused to train in protest at the FFF's decision to send Anelka home for swearing at coach Raymond Domenech.

"It's obviously not an ideal situation for French football, which will need all its top players when the qualifying games for Euro 2012 begin," said Blanc in a statement.

He added that he would nonetheless "ob-

serve the decisions... knowing that they could be open to appeals".

"I hoped to find a fresh situation at the end of August with the South African page definitively turned after the completion, at my suggestion, of a collective sanction that struck me as both necessary and sufficient," added Blanc, referring to his exclusion of all 23 members of France's World Cup squad for the 2-1 friendly defeat in Norway on August 11.

"That's not the case and there's no point dwelling on it. I'll therefore make my choices for the next matches within the context of what has been, or will be, imposed upon me."

"The only worry for my staff and myself now is to put together the best squad possible for the matches at the beginning of September against Belarus and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the hope of seeing the same spirit of initiative, the desire to go forward and play, that we saw (against Norway) in Oslo."

France were eliminated from the World Cup in the group stage after drawing with Uruguay and losing to Mexico and hosts South Africa.

They begin their qualification campaign for the 2012 European Championship at home to Belarus on September 3.

Ozil wants to emulate his hero Zidane

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's latest signing Mesut Ozil said Thursday he wants to emulate his hero Zinedine Zidane and taste success with the Spanish giants.

The 21-year-old quit the Bundesliga for Real on Tuesday when he signed a deal estimated to be worth 18 million euros (23.2 million US dollars).

Real's squad boasts the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Kaka, but the Spanish media have already dubbed him the 'German Zidane' and Ozil is flattered by the comparison with his French idol.

"The comparison is very flattering, but it suits me, because Zidane has always been a role model for me," said Ozil.

"As a little boy, I would admire his tricks on TV and try to reproduce them on the pitch."

The Real star Zidane retired in 2006 after being sent off in the World Cup final, but Ozil wants to walk in his footsteps by lifting the Champions League title.

Ozil has come to the Spanish capital to win more silverware, having already toured the Bernabeu Stadium and seen the Spanish giants' impressive trophy collection.

"Whether it's the championship or Champions League, we want to win every-

thing," said Ozil.

"The team has enormous potential. I moved to Madrid to pick up titles."

"We have a strong team, I'm hungry for success."

Ozil says a major reason behind his decision to move to Real was the impression left on him by Madrid's new coach.

"(It is) because of the manager Jose Mourinho," he said.

"For me, he's the best in the world and wanted to work under him."

"The conversation with him was crucial. Mourinho wanted me, he made that clear. And this is why I'm at Real now."

Ozil says he has no concerns about joining star-studded Real, where reputations count for nothing.

Stars like Arjen Robben and Wesley Sneijder were both sold by Real last year, but went on to dazzle for Bayern Munich and Inter Milan respectively, but Ozil says he has no worries about failing to impress in Madrid.

"I have competitive pressure at Werder and in the German national team," he said.

"Real stands for world-class players like Ronaldo and Kaka, but I'm not afraid of them."

Ozil will link up with fellow rising Germany star Sami Khedira.

"Before my move, I called him, he raved about Real. I am pleased that he is here."



PHOTO: AFP
Real Madrid midfielder Mesut Ozil (R) runs past coach Jose Mourinho during a training session in Madrid yesterday.