

Bayern leave it late

REUTERS, Munich



Bayern Munich needed a stoppage-time winner from Bastian Schweinsteiger to beat VfL Wolfsburg 2-1 and successfully kick off their Bundesliga title defence on Friday.

Bayern, who were missing injured winger Arjen Robben and striker Ivica Olic, were the liveliest side early on, with Franck Ribery in superb form.

With Germany coach Joachim Loew in the stands and the game seen in 197 countries, World Cup joint top scorer Thomas Mueller fired the hosts into the lead in the ninth minute after combining beautifully with Toni Kroos.

Last season's Bundesliga top scorer Edin Dzeko grabbed a deserved 55th-minute equaliser for Wolfsburg when he headed in a Zvezdan Misimovic corner to give fired-up former England coach Steve McClaren a reason to smile on his Bundesliga debut.

Bayern hit back deep into added time when an unmarked Schweinsteiger tapped in a Ribery cross at the far post.

Schalke 04, runners-up last season, take on Hamburg SV on Saturday while Werder Bremen, who finished third, visit Hoffenheim.

Bayern coach Louis van Gaal opted for a new-look central defence with Holger Badstuber partnering Daniel van Buyten,

leaving out Argentine Martin Demichelis, who angrily refused to sit on the substitutes' bench before the start of the game.

Ribery, after a troubled last season, looks to have hit top form at the right time and was a constant threat with furious runs down the left wing and some pin-point passing.

Yet it was Kroos, back this season after his loan spell at Bayer Leverkusen, who set up Mueller for the first goal.

Diego Contento came close to adding another when Ribery fed him inside the box but the defender was denied by Wolfsburg keeper Diego Benaglio.

McClaren brought on playmaker Misimovic in the second half to add pace and precision in midfield and two minutes after the restart Croatian Mario Mandzukic rattled Bayern's post with a beautifully-curved, low shot.

Dzeko saw his drive sail just wide a minute later as Bayern looked out of sorts.

McClaren, whose last encounter with Bayern was as a Manchester United assistant coach in their victorious 1999 Champions League final, was by now on his feet, yelling at his players to keep pressing.

They did just that and it was Dzeko who delivered when he rose above Van Buyten to head in the equaliser.

With Wolfsburg stretching forward for the winner, the hosts hit back in the dying seconds when Ribery sailed a deep cross from the left to Schweinsteiger, who tapped it in.

Fergie eyes revenge

AFP, London



Sir Alex Ferguson has backed Mark Hughes to become a success at Fulham, but has told his former player there is no chance of a shock win over Manchester United on

Sunday.

Ferguson will be looking to banish the painful memories of United's last two trips to Fulham when they visit Craven Cottage this weekend.

United crashed to a 3-0 defeat at Fulham last season, when Ferguson's injury problems were so bad he had to field midfielders Darren Fletcher and Michael Carrick in a makeshift defence, having lost 2-0 there the season before.

Now Ferguson is relishing the chance for revenge, even though he believes Hughes, a player who served him well at Old Trafford, has the ability to continue the progress Roy Hodgson made at the London club before joining Liverpool.

Ferguson said: "We have had a bit of a tough time at Fulham. We were down to nine men and then last season we had just gone too far with the makeshift players who had played at the back.

"That is the key to it when you put out fragile teams with players out of position -- when you lose a goal it becomes very difficult. We became frustrated despite starting very well.

"But Mark (Hughes) had a small squad at Blackburn and his experience there should be ideal for Fulham.

"You could say they are similar clubs in terms of size. Fulham almost created a miracle with a small squad last season.

"They played 59 matches starting in July and ended up in May in Hamburg (in the Europa

League final). It was quite a phenomenon.

"I think the thing that helped them was that the games came so thick and fast that they didn't have time to think about it.

"They just pulled the jersey on and played. They couldn't have done much training because it was a small squad that needed to keep its freshness.

"It was quite a season for them and it won't happen again, I am sure of that."

Hughes would love nothing more than to secure a victory over United in his first home game in charge since succeeding Hodgson.

Fulham's preparations for the match, however, have been overshadowed by Hughes's attempts to keep Australia goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer out of the clutches of Arsenal.

Schwarzer is doubtful with a back problem but Hughes is desperate to keep him at Craven Cottage and said a second bid from Arsenal has been rejected.

Hughes said: "Mark still has a problem with his back and he didn't train on Friday but we hope he will be available Sunday.

"There was an offer but it wasn't an improved offer -- it was the same as the one put forward in May, so that situation has not moved on because there has been contact but no improvement.

"There are plenty of things agents and managers can do to unsettle players -- obviously Mark is aware of the interest from Arsenal, and that's disrupting and a distraction.

"But there has been no improved offer and we would not encourage one."

Hughes could target Shay Given should Schwarzer secure a move to the Emirates Stadium, but Hughes added: "He's a talented keeper who I know very well, but he's a Manchester City player and it's not in my interests to discuss other people's players."

Neymar snubs Chelsea

AFP, Sao Paulo

A decision by Brazilian midfielder Neymar to renew for five years with home club Santos instead of signing a 35-million-euro offer from Chelsea dominated Brazilian sports pages Friday.

The 18-year-old's declaration overnight that "money doesn't equal happiness" served as the headline in the Estado de Sao Paulo daily as it and other Brazilian media hailed his choice.

Santos president Luis Alvaro Ribeiro, who announced the decision to reporters late Thursday with Neymar, criticized the "out-sized appetite of foreign teams" to snap up gifted Brazilian players.

"Neymar is an extremely rare talent" who already made his mark playing in Brazil's national side, scoring a goal against the United States in a friendly game last week, Ribeiro said.

By sticking with Santos, Neymar will see his annual salary of 1.1 million dollars (870,000 euros) generously sweetened with merchandising deals.

Chelsea had been offering the young midfielder 4.4 million dollars (3.5 million euros) per year.

"I feel very happy with Santos, that's why I'm staying," Neymar said.

He added that he had asked the advice of his father during the heady negotiations over his future.

"It would be easy to take Neymar to Europe. But it would be tough to live with that, given how young he is. His heart was telling him to stay. We just gave him the direction," said the dad, who is also called Neymar.

Brazil's media crowded at keeping a home-grown hero who turned down the golden offer so many players yearn for.

"Get outta here Chelsea, Neymar's staying," said the sporting daily Lance.

Britain's newspapers were less thrilled with the outcome, with The Sun tabloid calling it a "stinging snub" to Chelsea.



Bayern Munich midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal against Wolfsburg during their Bundesliga encounter in Munich on Friday.

Argentina recall trio

AFP, Buenos Aires

Interim Argentina coach Sergio Batista on Friday recalled Javier Zanetti, Esteban Cambiasso and Andres D'Alessandro to face world champions Spain in a September 7 friendly in Buenos Aires.

Inter Milan pair Zanetti and Cambiasso were left out of the World Cup squad by then coach Diego Maradona despite coming off a treble-winning season topped off by a Champions League triumph.

D'Alessandro also had a fine club campaign with Brazilian outfit Internacional, but the trio were not to Maradona's taste and missed out on the team's run to the quarter-finals in South Africa.

Spain, who landed their first World Cup win in July to add to their Euro 2008 success, won the countries' last meeting in a November 2009 friendly.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Sergio Romero (AZ Alkmaar/NED), Mariano Andujar (Catania/ITA), Agustin Marchesin (Lanus)

Defenders:

Martin Demichelis (Bayern Munich/GER), Walter Samuel, Nicolas Burdisso, Javier Zanetti (all Inter Milan/ITA), Gabriel Heinze (Marseille/FRA), Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City/ENG), Gabriel Milito (Barcelona/ESP)

Midfielders:

Javier Mascherano (Liverpool/ENG), Angel Di Maria, Fernando Gago (both Real Madrid/ESP), Ever Banega (Valencia/ENG), Esteban Cambiasso (Inter Milan/ITA), Mario Bolatti (Fiorentina/ITA), Andres D'Alessandro (Internacional/BRA)

Forwards:

Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid/ESP), Carlos Tevez (Manchester City/ENG), Sergio Aguero (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Lionel Messi (Barcelona/ESP), Diego

Demichelis wants out

AFP, Munich

Football

Argentine centre-back Martin Demichelis said on Friday he wants to leave Bayern Munich after being left out of the starting line-up for the opening Bundesliga match against Wolfsburg.

Bayern coach Louis van Gaal opted to select Daniel van Buyten and youngster Holger Badstuber as his centre-backs against Wolfsburg and Demichelis boycotted the match at Munich's Allianz Arena in protest.

"The truth is that a cycle is ending and it's better for both sides if we go separate ways," Demichelis told Bild newspaper.

"I don't think it is fair to remain with the team if the signs point to separation."

Demichelis caused a stir before the first German league game of the season by refusing to attend the match.

The 29-year-old played at the World Cup and was in the Argentina side that lost 4-0 to Germany in the quarter-finals.

"I made my decision and the player must accept it. He won the title last season, but now has been replaced and he must accept that, it's not easy," added van Gaal.

With Badstuber and van Buyten in the heart of his

defence, van Gaal opted to start 20-year-old Diego Contento at left-back.

Demichelis has been at Bayern since 2003, but chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge ruled out releasing him before the summer transfer window

closes on August 31.

"We need four players at centre-back," he said, and warned against hasty decisions.

"This is the season after the World Cup and we are all well advised to stay quiet until January. Things can change."



MARTIN DEMICHELIS

Mano reveals training squad

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

New Brazil coach Mano Menezes on Friday announced a get together of 22 European-based players for a training camp in Barcelona in September.

"We have decided on a week-long training camp to run through our current options," Menezes told reporters as he considers what he has at his disposal for the five-time world champions after a disappointing World Cup.

The first week of September is a FIFA-sanctioned window for friendlies but Brazil do not have any matches lined up so Menezes, who took over after the World Cup in place of Dunga, will use the time to work with his new charges.

Among those called up to the camp are Chelsea centre-back Alex, Barcelona right-back Dani Alves, Manchester City forward Robinho and AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato.

Menezes got off to a winning start earlier this month with a 2-0 friendly win over the United States.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Diego Alves (Almeria/ESP), Heurlho Gomes (Tottenham/ENG)

Defenders:

Alex (Chelsea/ENG), Andre Santos (Fenerbahce/TUR), Daniel Alves (Barcelona/ESP), David Luiz (Benfica/POR), Henrique (Racing Santander/ESP), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP), Rafael (Manchester United/ENG), Sandro (Hamburg/GER)

Midfielders:

Carlos Eduardo (Hoffenheim/GER), Douglas Costa (Shakhtar Donetsk/UKR), Fernandinho (Shakhtar Donetsk/UKR), Hernanes (Lazio Rome/ITA), Lucas (Liverpool/ENG), Ramires (Chelsea/ENG), Thiago Silva (AC Milan/ITA)

Strikers:

Alexandre Pato (AC Milan/ITA), Andre (Dynamo Kiev/UKR), Hulk (FC Porto/POR), Philippe Coutinho (Inter

Ireland 'forced out'

AFP, Birmingham

Football

Former Republic of Ireland midfielder Stephen Ireland says he is delighted to have moved to Aston Villa despite claiming to have been "forced out" of Manchester City.

After struggling to find any way to re-establish himself in manager Roberto Mancini's plans with City, Ireland was offloaded to Villa as part of the deal that saw England midfielder James Milner going the other way.

The 23-year-old Ireland went from being the Player of the Year at Manchester City for the 2008-09 season to playing little part under Mancini after the Italian took over last term.

"I thought that was really unfair. I was first in and last out of training and no one worked any harder than me," he said of claims he had a suspect attitude last season.

"I was always the best player in training so maybe I was not for him.

"I was forced out but I couldn't be happier than to have joined Aston Villa because as a young kid I was always fond of Villa.

"Watching Villa on television playing in Vienna this week it just felt that I had been here a long time because I have immediately felt at home."

The former Republic of Ireland international admits he needs to rebuild his confidence as he prepares to make his debut against Newcastle at St James' Park.

"For the last year or two it

wasn't easy to operate," Ireland added.

"If I had left two or three years ago it would have been more difficult than now. Leaving now it seems as if I

was never at City.

"It's a shame to leave behind people and fans with whom I had a good relationship. But I have been expecting to leave for some time.

"Under Mark Hughes at City everything appeared to be moving in the right direction.

"But then to make just 16 appearances last season was a massive drop for me. I want to kick on now because it was a big blow to my confidence."

While Ireland is eager to hit the ground running on Sunday it is another big game for caretaker boss Kevin MacDonald.

He seems certain to be a contender for the post on a permanent basis having guided Villa to a 3-0 win against West Ham and a 1-1 draw against Rapid Vienna in their Europa League play-off.

MacDonald believes owner Randy Lerner may seek a "big name" manager but he has seen at close hand the merits of promoting from within.

He said: "I was at Liverpool when they promoted from within. There was outstanding talent on the pitch and outstanding knowledge in the bootroom."

All that is occupying MacDonald's mind now is Sunday's clash.

"I am expecting a very tough game from Newcastle. It is their first game at home after getting back into the Premier League," he said.

"They have some very good players and although they lost at Manchester United last week they are on that roll from having won promotion so comfortably they will be hoping to push on this season."

Bremen sign Brazilian starlet

AFP, Bremen

Werder Bremen on Friday announced that they have reached an agreement with Santos over the transfer of Brazilian attacking midfielder Wesley to the German club.

Wesley, 23, will sign a four-year contract with Bremen, who finished third in the Bundesliga last season.

The transfer fee was not divulged but was estimated to be in the region of 7.5 million euros.

Wesley will join up with his new team-mates next week but will not participate in the second leg of their Champions League play-off tie with Italian side Sampdoria next Tuesday.

"It's always been my dream to play in a big championship for a big club, I'm super-happy," Wesley told the Werder Bremen website.

The Brazilian will be expected to fill the gap left by German playmaker Mesut Ozil, who joined Real Madrid earlier this week.

The deal would also appear to signal the end of Bremen's plans to sign French winger Hatem Ben Arfa, who is on strike at Marseille as he seeks to engineer a move away from the club.



PHOTO: AFP

Olympique Marseille's new signing French striker Loic Remy (C) poses with his team jersey flanked by coach Didier Deschamps (L) and club president Jean-Claude Dassiery during a press conference at the Velodrome Stadium on Friday. Remy's transfer from Nice to Marseille might be in doubt after a medical revealed what the club's doctor termed an "anomaly" in the player's heart.