

FIFA's eastern surprise

Russia to host 2018 WC, Qatar get 2022 WC

Football

AFP, Zurich

Russia and the tiny Gulf state of Qatar were awarded the 2018 and 2022 World Cups Thursday after an acrimonious bidding war marred by allegations of corruption and illegal deal-making.

The bombshell conclusion to two years of frenzied lobbying saw world football supremo Sepp Blatter reveal the winners following a secret ballot of 22 FIFA executive committee members in Zurich.

The announcement means the World Cup will be staged in two countries which have never hosted the event before following the 2014 tournament in Brazil.

Russia prevailed in the 2018 race, upsetting England and joint bids from Spain and Portugal and Belgium and the Netherlands.

The outcome represented a stunning comeback for Russia, whose campaign had believed to be in trouble after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin declined to join the lobbying effort in Zurich.

Putin had also launched a stinging attack on England's bid on the eve of the vote, accusing the country's media of "smearing" officials.

But the shock of the day came in the 2022 race, where Qatar beat off stiff competition from the United States, Australia and Asian rivals South Korea and Japan in a remarkable result.

Qatar 2022 bid president Mohammed bin Hamad Al-Thani promised: "We won't let you

down. You will be proud of us, proud of the Middle East."

Qatar's win came despite serious reservations being raised about the logistical problems of staging the football tournament in the Gulf during the searing heat of the summer months.

Although the Qataris have promised to build an array of state of the art stadia which are climate-controlled, the technology has never been tested on a large-scale before.

The results brought the curtain down on the most controversial World Cup votes in years, with FIFA facing myriad allegations of corruption which led to two executive committee members being suspended.

FIFA president Blatter has acknowledged that the decision to stage votes for two tournaments at the same time was a mistake, making illegal horse-trading between bids inevitable.

An increasingly acrimonious climax to the campaign saw Spanish and Russian officials issue veiled attacks earlier Thursday as the respective bids made their final presentations to FIFA voters.

Spanish FIFA member Angel Villar Llona hit out at British media reports which exposed corruption within the organisation, describing them as "slander."

Meanwhile in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also hit out at perceived "intrigue and blackmail" surrounding the vote.

"We stand for world sport developing according to its own laws, independent of the political environment," Lavrov said. "And it should especially not be subject to intrigue and blackmail."

Marseille fail to capitalise

AFP, Paris



Marseille failed to capitalise on the chance to pull clear at the top of the French table when Didier Deschamps' defending champions were held to a goalless draw by Rennes at their Stade Velodrome on

Wednesday.

With qualification to the Champions League accomplished last week Marseille will have approached this held over fixture as an ideal opportunity to gain control in what is one of the tightest title fights in living memory.

The top eight sides are separated by just two points with Marseille leading the charge on 25 points, one clear of Lille and Brest.

A share of the spoils was a justified return for both sides in a balanced encounter.

Rennes, placed fifth, have only one win to show from their last seven games, and they were left to rue an early penalty miss by Jires Kembo Ekoko in the fifth minute.

The spot kick had been awarded when

Marseille keeper Steve Mandana brought down the goal-charging Rennes striker Victor Hugo Montano but Mandana redeemed himself by diving the right way to deny Ekoko.

Rennes coach Frederic Antonetti maintained Mandana should have been sent off.

"I thought after five minutes we were going to find ourselves at 11 against 10, why is it he would have been sent off elsewhere but not here? Mandana shouldn't have been allowed to stay on the pitch," he complained.

As for Marseille this was the first time they have failed to find the back of the net in the league this season, although Argentina international Lucho

will wonder how he missed a gilt-edged occasion in the closing stages.

In Wednesday's second match Saint Etienne were on target to end a seven match winless streak when Jeremy Rivere put them ahead against Valenciennes only for the hosts to strike back via Gael Danic 15 minutes from the end for a deserved 1-1 draw.

Unfancied Brest snapped a three-game winless streak on Tuesday with a 4-1 thumping of Lens to go joint top for 24 hours.

RESULTS

Marseille 0 Rennes 0
Valenciennes 1 (Danic 75) Saint Etienne 1 (Riviere 15)



PHOTO: AFP

Russian Olympic champion Yelena Isinbayeva arrives for the 2018 World Cup bid presentation at the FIFA headquarters in Zurich yesterday.



Juventus striker Alessandro del Piero is about to shoot during their Europa League encounter against Lech in Poznan on Wednesday. Lech qualified to the knockout stages after holding Juventus to a 1-1 draw.

'Ibra left the wrong year'

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan chairman Massimo Moratti on Wednesday reflected that former striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic "left Inter the wrong year" as the club completed a rare treble under Jose Mourinho while the player struggled to impress after joining Barcelona.

"I think he left to win the Champions League but he got the wrong year and the great satisfaction of his former teammates is to have won it in that way" without their former centre forward, Moratti told a press conference.

"I find Ibrahimovic a nice guy - I'm not going to criticise him," he added.

Swede Ibrahimovic is now plying his trade across the city at AC Milan after saying prior to his move to Spain that he believed he had progressed as far as he could at Inter.

Schalke keeping Magath

AFP, Berlin

Schalke 04 are to keep faith with embattled coach Felix Magath, the Bundesliga club confirmed after crisis talks late Wednesday.

Magath's future was in question after the Royal Blues were hammered 5-0 by Kaiserslautern last Saturday with one report suggesting former Tottenham boss Christian Gross was being lined up as a replacement.

But Schalke directors emerged from a two hour meeting with Magath to confirm they were sticking by their manager.

"Felix Magath explained to us what he has planned to improve our situation and he convinced us," Schalke president Clemens Tonnies said.

The directors also denied the report in the Die Zeit weekly of approaching Gross.

Despite having qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League, Schalke are 15th in the league table.

Schalke face Bayern Munich on Saturday in the German league.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think the selectors were too harsh on Shahriar Nafees?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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City canter into 2nd phase

AFP, Paris



Manchester City soothed their domestic woes with a resounding 3-0 defeat of FC Salzburg to book their place in the knockout round of the Europa League on Wednesday.

Roberto Mancini side have slipped steadily down the Premier League standings in recent weeks and they came into this penultimate round in Europe's second-tier competition looking to perform after a disappointing 1-1 draw with Stoke last weekend.

Salzburg had yet to win any of their four Group A matches, and the Austrians ultimately failed to improve those statistics in a match which looked decidedly one-sided.

Italian striker Mario Balotelli, a summer signing from Inter Milan, opened the scoring in the 18th minute, doubling his tally just after the hour mark to take his goals tally to five in what has been an injury-delayed campaign for City.

England winger Adam Johnson made it 3-0 for the hosts in the 78th minute.

"I like coming inside on my right foot to try and get shots off, and luckily tonight I got another goal," said Johnson.

"It was tough, in Europe it's slower than the Premier League and that showed tonight, but we got the result we wanted."

Elsewhere in Group A Italian giants Juventus remained winless after being held 1-1 by Lech Poznan, a result which handed the Polish side entry to the next round.

There was more woe for Italy's Serie A when PSV Eindhoven's Ola Toivonen produced two second-half goals to give the Dutch a 2-1 away win at Sampdoria.

The Dutch league leaders thus waltz into the last 32 with 13 points from four games, with Metalist Kharkov joining them from Group I, in which Sampdoria, on five points, have been eliminated.

Sampdoria opened the scoring in timely fashion when Giampaolo Pazzini headed home five minutes before the interval.

PSV, however, rose to the challenge and Toivonen levelled only six minutes after the restart when he headed home Ibrahim Afellay's cross when alone at the far post.

Sampdoria suffered a

blow late on when Guido Marilungo was dismissed following a second yellow card, and the Dutch giants duly forged ahead with Toivonen sweeping home a 90th minute winner

For drama, Young boys

took top honours, following VfB Stuttgart into the knockout round thanks to a thrilling, five-minute display of attacking football which handed the Swiss a 4-2 win over their German opponents.

The Berne-based side opened the scoring thanks to David Degen in the 34th minute and led until early in the second half when Pavel Pogrebnyak levelled four minutes after the restart.

The Germans looked to be heading for a victory that would have maintained their 100 per cent group record after taking the lead through Sven Schipplock, until Scott Sutter produced a 78th-minute equaliser.

Emmanuel Mayuka then scored a late double to hand the Swiss side a superb home win.

Elsewhere Bayer Leverkusen and Sporting Lisbon progressed after 1-0 wins over Rosenberg and Lille respectively.

For holders Atletico Madrid meanwhile it will all come down to their final Group B fixture after the Spaniards were shocked 3-2 at home by Aris Thessalonika.

With Bayer already qualified from Group B on 11 points, Aris and Atletico both have seven, four more than Rosenberg.

RESULTS

Lech Poznan (POL) 1 (Rudnevs 12) Juventus (ITA) 1 (Iaquinta 84)
Manchester City (ENG) 3 (Balotelli 18, 65, Johnson 78)
Salzburg (AUT) 0
Atletico Madrid (ESP) 2 (Forlan 11, Aguerro 16) **Aris Salonika (GRE) 3** (Koke 2, 51-pen, Lazaridis 81)
Rosenberg (NOR) 0 Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 1 (Sam 35)
Sporting Lisbon (POR) 1 (Polga 29) Lille (FRA) 0
Odense (DEN) 1 (Andreasen 90+2) Getafe (ESP) 1 (Rios 17)
Young Boys (SUI) 4 (D. Degen 34, Sutter 78, Mayuka 81, 82)
VfB Stuttgart (GER) 2 (Pogrebnyak 49, Schipplock 68)
Sampdoria (ITA) 1 (Pazzini 40)
PSV Eindhoven (NED) 2 (Toivonen 52, 90)
Zenit St Petersburg (RUS) 3 (Ionov 12, Bukharov 65, Huszti

Birmingham stun Villa

Football

AFP, London

Birmingham knocked city rivals Aston Villa out of the League Cup with a 2-1 victory at St Andrews on Wednesday.

But the result threatened to be overshadowed by a mass pitch invasion after the final whistle that saw thousands of City fans take to the field and confront Villa supporters, with missiles being thrown.

Nikola Zagic's goal six minutes from time saw Birmingham through to the last four and gave the Blues a measure of revenge over Villa manager Gerard Houllier.

Serbia international Zagic's deflected shot settled the tie after Villa's Gabriel Agbonlahor had cancelled out an early Sebastian Larsson penalty.

Houllier was Liverpool's manager when they defeated Birmingham in the 2001 League Cup final.

In Wednesday's other quarterfinal, under-fire manager Roy Keane guided second-tier Ipswich to a 1-0 win over Premier League side West Brom at Portman Road thanks to Grant Leadbitter's second-half penalty.

Birmingham will now play West Ham, 4-0

conquerors of holders Manchester United on Tuesday, in a two-legged semifinal next month when Ipswich will face Arsenal after the Gunners 2-0 win over Wigan.

The Blues' win over Villa was their first over their local rivals for five and a half years.

They went ahead against the run of play after Lee Bowyer was brought down by Villa captain Richard Dunne.

Larsson sent the resulting penalty low to beat American keeper Brad Friedel.

Birmingham thought they'd scored again after 28 minutes when Zagic's low shot was pulled back by Friedel when replays suggested it may have crossed the goal-line.

But a linesman's raised flag led to Liam Ridgwell being ruled offside.

Villa then cashed in when, after the half-hour mark, Agbonlahor latched onto Jonathan Hogg's through-ball and struck a powerful shot past Ben Foster.

Both sides had further chances to score before Cameron Jerome sprinted down the right and his low cross found Zagic, whose shot deflected off Luke Young and looped over Friedel.

Villa nearly pushed the tie into extra-time when Cianan Clark headed just over from Stewart Downing's cross.

RESULTS

Birmingham 2 (Larsson 12-pen, Zagic 84) Aston Villa 1 (Agbonlahor 30)
Ipswich 1 (Leadbitter 69-pen) West Brom 0

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v Zimbabwe
Second ODI
Time: 9:00am
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur

What to WATCH

BTV
Bangladesh v Zimbabwe
Second ODI
Live from 9:00am

STAR Cricket
Australia v England
Second Test, Day 1
Live from 6:00am

TEN Cricket
Sri Lanka v West Indies
Third Test, Day 3
Live from 10:30am

ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm