



Villarreal forward Giuseppe Rossi (C) fights for the ball with Club Bruges defender Ryan Donk during their Europa League encounter at the Jan Breydel Stadium on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Dortmund crash out

AFP, Paris



Runaway German league leaders Borussia Dortmund crashed out of the Europa League on Wednesday as they were held 2-2 by Spanish side Sevilla in Spain in their Group I clash.

Dortmund - who exited their domestic Cup to third division Offenbach in October - needed to win to progress and deny their opponents a place in the last 32 but it was Sevilla who gained a much needed morale boost to end a run of five successive defeats, including three at home.

French title contenders Paris Saint Germain topped the group, ending their campaign with a 1-1 draw away at Ukrainian outfit Karpaty Lviv.

Napoli took the phrase last chance saloon to its limits also on Wednesday as a goal from in-form Uruguayan international striker Edinson Cavani in the third minute of time added on gave the Serie A side a 1-0 win over Romanian outfit.

The win lifted Napoli over the unfortunate Romanians and fill second spot behind group winners Liverpool, who drew 0-0 at home to Utrecht.

Dortmund had got the ideal start in Sevilla as Japanese striker Shinji Kagawa struck in the fourth minute.

However, Ivory Coast international Romaric drew the hosts level just after the half hour mark reacting first after the ball came off the chest of Brazilian team-mate Luis Fabiano.

Sevilla took the lead four minutes later in the 35th minute as Malian striker and club captain Fredi Kanoute headed home - however he had to leave the fray in the 41st minute injured.

The German visitors fought back to level the match in the 49th minute. Serbian international central defender Neven Subotic powered a header home, but chances were few and far between from then on and Dortmund were left to focus solely on maintaining their domestic league lead.

Greek side PAOK had gone into the final match requiring just a draw away over Croatian opponents Dinamo Zagreb, who needed a win to progress.

However, it was PAOK who took the second and last qualifying place in Group D with a hard-earned 1-0 victory.

Nasri now a man

AFP, London



Samir Nasri believes he has become a man while playing at Arsenal where he is currently enjoying a fine season as the Gunners push for the English Premier League title.

The 23-year-old France midfielder has scored 12 goals so far this season and although he could not prevent a 1-0 defeat at Manchester United on Monday, Arsenal remain well placed.

Although that result knocked the Gunners off the top of the table and meant Arsenal had failed to beat either United or Chelsea, English football's strongest teams of the last decade, in their last 11 matches against the duo, they beat Stoke on Saturday.

Nasri, who has been a major factor in Arsenal's push for a first major trophy since 2005, said an improved mental approach had been key to his form this season.

"I am playing higher up the wing now and the boss (Arsene Wenger) asks me to go in behind defenders because I have the ability to do it," said Nasri, who was a surprise omission from the French squad for the World Cup finals this year.

"Sometimes it is just something in your head, you think you can do it, you manage it once or twice and then you say 'yes, it is possible,'" added Nasri, who joined Arsenal two years ago.

"Now I go behind defenders more because I know I am able to.

"When I am in front of a goalkeeper, I am more relaxed now, before I felt too much pressure to score, I wanted it too much maybe.

"Now I don't worry as much, I am more at ease with the game and I am not looking for goals, I am looking to work for the team.

"If you feel like that, the opportunities come along naturally.

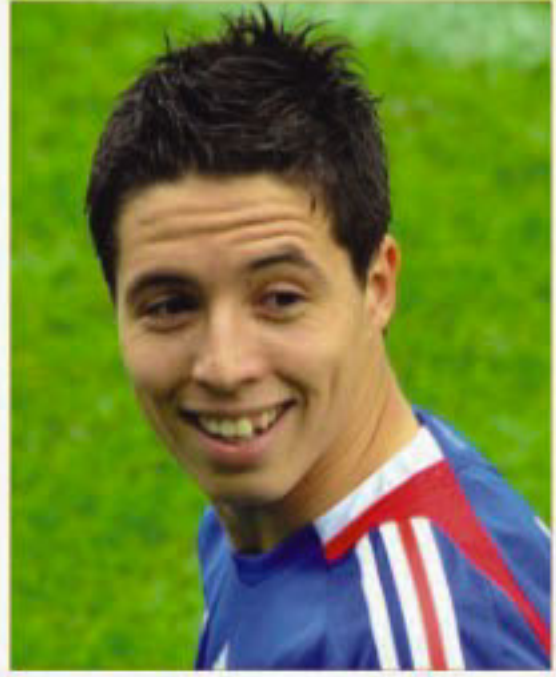
"I think more with my head - things are 90 per cent in your head and everything else comes after that.

"If you can see things earlier, you can anticipate the pass, the shot, everything like that."

And he said the whole experience of coming to England had toughened him up.

"Remember that before joining Arsenal, I was at Marseille where it was easy for me because I was with my family, I was born there and had played for them since I was nine," he said.

"I came here on my own and you grow up more quickly that way. It made a difference, because now I have become a man."



Diarra's Real future uncertain

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid midfielder Lassana Diarra said Wednesday his future at the Spanish club remains uncertain beyond the January transfer window despite having started during the past three matches.

"I'm at Real Madrid and I have a contract. A month ago the situation was more difficult, but I hope to play here. Currently I am thinking only of the next game, but I don't know if I will remain here," he told a news conference.

"I continue to work and I am at the club's disposal. I previously said I would assess my situation in January. I don't think much about playing or not. I just enjoy myself and try to help Real Madrid win," the 25-year-old French international added.

Diarra, who has played for English sides Arsenal, Chelsea and Portsmouth, in the past, has struggled for time on the pitch under Real's new Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho.

Shootouts unfair

Football

AFP, London

Football penalty shootouts give an unfair psychological advantage to the team that shoots first according to new research from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) published Thursday.

Now Professor Ignacio Palacios-Huerta, from the LSE's department of management, has suggested football chiefs switch to a tennis style tie-break system, during which players can have two consecutive serves, in a bid to make shoot-outs fairer.

Palacios-Huerta and co-author Jose Apesteguia, an associate professor at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, studied 2,820 kicks from shoot-outs in major national and international competitions between 1970-2008.

They found that the team that takes the first kick wins 60 per cent of the time and the team that takes the second 40 per cent of the time.

"Most TV channels cut to the commercial break when the coin is being tossed to decide which team takes the first penalty -- but our findings show that this could be the deciding moment after a drawn match," Palacios-Huerta said.

"The coin gives a 20 per cent advantage to the team that shoots first. The psychological pressure of 'lagging behind' clearly affects the performance of the team that kicks second."

The research, published in the American Economic Review, is said to be the first study of

its kind.

Palacios-Huerta and Apesteguia studied films of the penalty coin toss in 20 matches. In every case, except one, the winner of the toss chose to take the first penalty.

The exception was Italy-Spain in the 2008 European Championships -- Italy won the coin toss but opted to go second and Spain won the shoot-out.

The researchers also interviewed 240 players and coaches -- both professional and amateur.

Almost all said they would prefer to take the first kick and 96 per cent said this was to put pressure on the team kicking second.

"I suspect that the heads of FIFA or UEFA are not going to like the fact that the winner of the World Cup, the European Championship or the Champions League is decided, in part, on the 60-40 flip of a coin," Palacios-Huerta said.

His proposed solution for reducing the impact of the kicking order mirrors what happens in a tie-break in a tennis match.

Here the first player (A) takes the first serve, then the second player (B) serves twice, then the first player serves twice, then player B serves twice again and so on.

In a football penalty shoot out this pattern (ABBAABBAAB etc) would repeat until the ten penalties had been taken or the shoot-out won.

"This pattern of penalty taking would greatly reduce the unfair 'first mover' advantage since the second team is not always trying to play 'catch up' and the problem of leading or lagging would be compensated for," Palacios-Huerta said.

WC qualifier under cloud

AFP, Bochum

A defendant in the trial of four men accused of match-fixing across Europe claimed on Wednesday that the group bribed a UEFA referee to manipulate the result of a 2010 World Cup qualifier.

The defendant told the court here that Bosnian referee Novo Panic, who has since been banned for life by European football's governing body UEFA, helped fix the result of a qualifier between Liechtenstein and Finland in 2009.

"We manipulated the match by using Novo Panic," defendant Marijo C. told the trial which threatens to tarnish European football.

The defendant did not say whether the bribe was successful during the four-hour hearing.

The Group 4 game on September 9, 2009 in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, ended in a 1-1 draw as Panic awarded a 73rd-minute penalty to Finland and sent a Liechtenstein player off after the hosts equalised.

Inter sweep into final

Football

AFP, Abu Dhabi

European champions Inter Milan swept into the final of the Club World Cup with a convincing 3-0 semifinal defeat of Asian counterparts Seongnam Ilhwa here on Wednesday.

Argentine striker Diego Milito made one goal and scored another on his return from a five-week absence, as Rafael Benitez's underperforming side set up a meeting with surprise package Tout Puissant Mazembe in Saturday's final.

Inter, who last season won an unprecedented treble of Italian league, cup and Champions League titles, were 10 points behind Serie A leaders AC Milan when they left for Abu Dhabi, but they will now be expected to end the year with another piece of major silverware.

"It was a very hard win and it was difficult to control the game as Seongnam players were running a lot and they knew exactly what to do," said Benitez.

"It wasn't easy to start as well as we did as we lost (Wesley) Sneijder so quickly.

"The second goal made the difference for us and then towards the end we controlled the game."

He added: "I'm happy with my players as they did what we wanted of them. Seongnam are well organised and they have a lot of qualities but they had some difficulties tonight."

Seongnam Ilhwa coach Shin Tae Yong said: "I would like to congratulate Inter as they played really well today. The score might be 3-0

but our players gave their best until the end of the game.

"Our team did a lot of effective work but in the first half we conceded two goals and they had a slight advantage.

"If we compare the two teams, Inter's players were physically stronger.

"Also, their individual skills were better than us and that was one of the reasons why we lost tonight. Inter were good and they scored three goals but we were not bad ourselves and gave a good performance tonight."

Inter welcomed Julio Cesar, Cristian Chivu and Milito back from injury, but Sneijder had to go off after appearing to injure his left hamstring inside the first 30 seconds.

Sneijder had barely disappeared down the tunnel when veteran Serbian midfielder Dejan Stankovic put Inter ahead.

After Milito was crowded out on the edge of the Seongnam box, Stankovic displayed impressive balance and a cool head to steady himself and then roll the ball into the bottom-right corner with his left foot.

Seongnam were unable to react to the setback and in the 32nd minute Inter doubled their lead in stylish fashion.

Captain Javier Zanetti flicked the ball to Milito and drove into the box before receiving Milito's expertly directed back-heel and guiding the ball beyond Seongnam goalkeeper Jung Sung-Ryong.

Julio Cesar had to be alert to save a Dzenan Radoncic header as Seongnam sought a route back into the game, but the Brazilian goalkeeper was then beaten by a header from Chu Byung-Kuk as he advanced to claim a free-kick, only for the ball to go wide of the post.

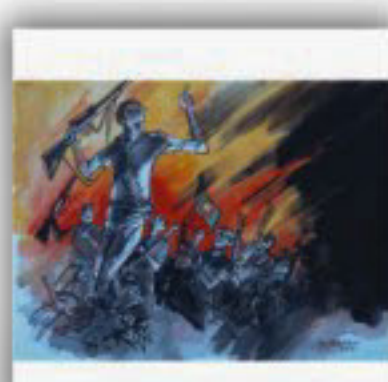
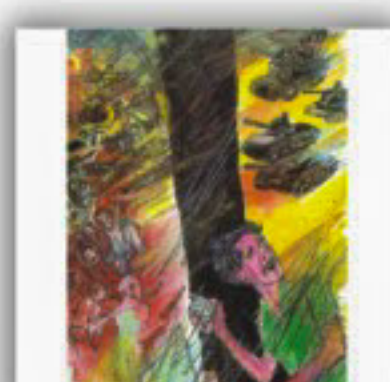


Inter Milan striker Diego Milito celebrates his goal against Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma during their Club World Cup semifinal at the Zayed Sports City in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP



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