

Spurs see off Milan

AFP, London

Tottenham survived a barrage of pressure from AC Milan to reach the Champions League quarterfinals as Wednesday's 0-0 draw in the last 16 second leg at White Hart Lane secured a 1-0 aggregate victory.

Harry Redknapp's side were under the cosh for long periods of a tense encounter, but Milan were unable to find a way past a Spurs defence superbly marshalled by William Gallas and Michael Dawson.

While Spurs were unable to recapture the flamboyant attacking play that dazzled earlier in the competition, their progress to the last eight more than made up for a slightly nervous display.

It was especially sweet because, while north London rivals Arsenal will spend the rest of the season watching the Champions League from their sofas after Tuesday's exit against Barcelona, Spurs can still dream of a fairytale run to the final at Wembley.

Peter Crouch's winner in the San Siro meant Redknapp's team needed just a draw to extend their impressive first season in Europe's elite club competition.

Redknapp resisted the temptation

to stifle Milan as he sent out an attacking line-up, with Dutch playmaker Rafael van der Vaart back after a calf injury.

Van der Vaart almost gave Spurs a dream start when he stabbed wide from the edge of the penalty area.

After his horrific foul on Vedran Corluka in the first leg, it was hardly surprising Milan's former Arsenal midfielder Mathieu Flamini was subjected to constant boos on his return to north London.

Gennaro Gattuso's first-leg touchline row with Spurs assistant Joe Jordan also ensured there was an extra intensity to an already frenzied sell-out crowd.

But the raucous atmosphere was never likely to ruffle such an experienced team as Milan and Massimiliano Allegri's side began to exert sustained pressure after Zlatan Ibrahimovic's free-kick forced Heurelho Gomes into a sprawling save.

The Italian league leaders went even closer when Gomes was unable to stop Alexandre Pato after needlessly rushing off his line.

Pato squared to Robinho and his scuffed shot looped goalwards off Benoit Assou-Ekotto, only for a superb goal-line clearance from Gallas to spare Gomes's blushes.

Van der Vaart curled a free-kick just over the crossbar moments later, but it was Milan, looking far more dynamic

than in the first leg, who continued to carry the greater threat.

Pato's clever runs were causing problems for Spurs and the Brazil forward surged onto Ibrahimovic's pass for a low shot that Gomes smothered.

After spending most of the first half on the back foot, Tottenham wasted an opportunity to take control immediately after the interval when Crouch completely mistimed his header from Aaron Lennon's cross.

There was more menace about Spurs now and Flamini tried to stem the tide with a ferocious lunge on Assou-Ekotto that recalled his Corluka foul and earned a booking from referee Frank De Bleeckere.

Having survived that flurry of Spurs pressure, Milan went back on the attack and Robinho met Ignazio Abate's pass with snap-shot that forced a scrambled clearance after Gomes's block.

Redknapp responded by sending on Gareth Bale for van der Vaart and the Wales winger, just fit after a back injury, was immediately barged over by Flamini, who nonetheless escaped a red card.

Pato came desperately close to sending the tie into extra time when his shot whistled past Gomes's near post in the closing minutes but Spurs, who beat Inter Milan in the group stage, had done enough to claim another Italian scalp.



Tottenham Hotspurs midfielder Rafael van der Vaart attempts a volley during their Champions League second round encounter against AC Milan at White Hart Lane on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Schalke reach last 8

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Schalke 04 brushed off reports coach Felix Magath will be dismissed at the end of the season on Wednesday to beat Valencia 3-1 and book their place in the Champions League's quarterfinals.

This is only the third time Schalke have reached the Champions League's last eight and is all the more remarkable given their lowly ranking of 10th in the Bundesliga as they sealed a 4-2 win on aggregate.

After drawing the first-leg 1-1 in Valencia a fortnight ago, goals either side of half-time by winger Jefferson Farfan and striker Mario Gavranovic sealed the home win.

The hosts fought back after Valencia took an early lead through Ricardo Costa.

There was a difficult build-up as the Gelsenkirchen-based team woke to reports in the German media that Magath will leave the club at the end of the season at the latest.

Magath, who has won the Bundesliga as coach of both Bayern Munich and VfL Wolfsburg, has steered his team to this season's German Cup final in May and now the last eight of the Champions League.

But the Royal Blues have had a disappointing Bundesliga campaign and are currently 31 points adrift of leaders Borussia Dortmund.

The Schalke faithful have begun to despair of the authoritarian Magath, whose contract was due to run out in 2013, but there were only smiles at Schalke's Veltins Arena after the win over the Spaniards.

Valencia took the lead when former Wolfsburg defender Costa scored with an early header on 17 minutes.

But Schalke drew level when Peruvian winger Farfan curled his free-kick into the top right-hand corner on 40 minutes.

The Royal Blues then took a 3-2 lead on aggregate when Swiss striker Mario Gavranovic -- deputising for the injured

Klaas-Jan Huntelaar -- marked his Champions League debut with his first goal for the club on 52 minutes.

Gavranovic squandered a golden chance to put the result beyond doubt when he fired wide in the 80th minute with the goal at his mercy.

But Farfan put the result beyond doubt as he netted in the 94th minute after Schalke had dominated the closing stages of the game.

Schalke's Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer was again outstanding and kept his team in the game with a string of fine saves.



PHOTO: AFP

Schalke striker Jefferson Farfan (R) celebrates one of his two goals with teammate Edu during their Champions League second round clash against Valencia in Gelsenkirchen on Wednesday.

Fabregas out of MU clash

AFP, London

Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas will miss Saturday's FA Cup quarterfinal against Manchester United after suffering a recurrence of his hamstring injury.

Fabregas returned ahead of schedule to play in Tuesday's Champions League clash at Barcelona, but the gamble backfired as he was forced to come off midway through the second half and the Gunners eventually crashed out.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger confirmed on Thursday that the Spain midfielder won't feature at Old Trafford this weekend and he could also miss the next Premier League match against West Bromwich Albion on March 19.

Asked if Fabregas would play on Saturday, Wenger told reporters: "No, he had a recurrence of his hamstring and will be out for the next game, maybe for the next two games."

Shakib's time

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think and talk about him, his every move closely followed.

Shakib is as much part of modern Bangladesh as most of us are and judging by his ambition and achievements so far, it is fair to say that this is one talent we can trust and be proud of. Some of his characteristics have pleasantly surprised many and his approach to the game has been a refreshing change, but there is something about Shakib that doesn't quite go with the wider image of a Bangladeshi.

Unfortunately for the No 1 all-rounder in the world, this is not the time or the right place to have a love-hate relationship with the people. But it is time to be the first cricketer in this country to deliver under this sort of pressure.

Enough

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has been with us and used to the conditions. It could have been worse," he said.

Having scored a couple of centuries against Bangladesh, Strauss easily has the best record against the home side but he found it a challenge since it will be the first time he plays an ODI in this country.

"I have had a few scores against them but I haven't played against them in Bangladesh. It will be a new scenario for me. But as a left-handed batsman against their left-arm spinners, it gives me a lot of advantage," said Strauss.

Arteta limps out

AFP, London

Everton playmaker Mikel Arteta faces several weeks on the sidelines after limping out of the Toffees 1-1 draw with Birmingham at Goodison Park.

Spanish midfielder Arteta was substituted within the opening 10 minutes of Wednesday's drab Premier League encounter, which saw Birmingham inch out of the relegation zone on goal difference.

Arteta left the field with what looked like a hamstring injury, and his likely absence gives Everton manager David Moyes another headache with Marouane Fellaini and Tim Cahill already on the casualty list.

"It looks like a hamstring injury," Moyes told evertonfc.com. "It's too early to say - I'm not sure but I'm guessing he will be out for a few weeks."

An injury to Arteta would be a bitter blow as the inspirational playmaker had just started to show glimpses of his best form in recent weeks.

Arteta's absence for much of Wednesday's encounter was keenly felt by the home side, who salvaged a point through John

Heitinga shortly before half-time after Jean Beausejour had given Birmingham the lead.

Although Everton dominated possession in the second half, they rarely looked like grabbing a winner, and Moyes admitted that Arteta being replaced so soon had hurt his team.

"It was a big blow for us because we needed some creativity and I knew that if we didn't have him, we would be struggling to create too much," Moyes said.

"Leon Osman did, but we were struggling otherwise really to make anything happen. It was a bit frustrating," Moyes said.

"We didn't play well enough probably to win the game, but we had a few half-chances."

Birmingham boss Alex McLeish was satisfied with a hard-earned point.

"I think that is an apt way to describe it - a battling point," McLeish said. "We started very brightly and got the opening goal. Then the players showed that tremendous resilience that they have."

"We tried to be a little bit more predatory, but we never really had the composure in terms of the passing in the second half."

"But sometimes you need to get points in an ugly fashion."

Cometh the hour

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To find out a solution, the Bangladesh think-tank are considering a change in the batting order as wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim may go back to his customary number six position to pave the way for Rokibul Hasan but Shakib defended Mushfiqur's performance at the number four slot.

"Mushfiq batted at number four and has performed. You can't say that he batted badly as scoring in two out of three matches is a sign of consistency. But still we are yet to decide about tomorrow's game," said Shakib, who saw the absence

of two vital English players Kevin Peterson and Stuart Broad as an advantage for them, even though he praised Eion Morgan highly.

And in the end the Bangladesh captain should be the man to lead his team from the front because everybody knows just how vital his left-arm spin and batting in the middle is to Bangladesh's success.

Surprisingly though, Shakib was satisfied with his performance.

"I think everything is fine with me but I am still working on the things where there is room for improvement," opined Shakib.

Klopp rules out Bayern job

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp on Wednesday ruled himself out of the soon-to-be vacant top job at Bayern Munich, where coach Louis van Gaal is set to leave at the end of the season.

"If Bayern ring me, then I will tell them that I have a contract at Dortmund until 2014," Klopp, 43, told German daily Bild.

Klopp, who has guided his team to a 12-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga, lost out on becoming Bayern coach in 2008 when ex-Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann was appointed trainer of the Bavarian giants.

On Monday, van Gaal was informed by Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge that his contract will be terminated at the end of the season after three straight defeats and with his team fifth in the Bundesliga.

The German media have been scrambling to predict who will succeed van Gaal and Turkey coach Guss Hiddink, ex-Tottenham Hotspur boss Martin Jol and current Germany coach Joachim Loew have been linked to the job.

Cole escapes charges

AFP, London

England and Chelsea defender Ashley Cole will not be prosecuted for accidentally shooting a work placement student with an air gun, police sources said Thursday.

Sources said officers were "highly unlikely" to pursue enquiries any further after contacting Chelsea over the incident.

The Blues left-back shot 21-year-old sports science student Tom Cowan with a pellet from a .22 air gun that the player brought into the club's training ground in Cobham, southwest of London, on February 20.

Cowan, who is on a one-year work placement with the English Premier League champions, has no plans to press charges against the star.

Cole, who reportedly did not realise the gun was loaded, shot him in the side with a lead pellet. Chelsea's medical staff reportedly treated the bleeding wound and he did not require hospital treatment.

The Blues vowed to take "appropriate action" but did not comment further.

FIFA probes 6 officials

Football

AFP, Paris

FIFA on Wednesday opened disciplinary proceedings against six referees and match officials amid an investigation into match-fixing in two international friendlies.

World football's governing body were alerted to unusual betting patterns on two games - Bolivia versus Latvia and Estonia against Bulgaria - which were both held at Antalya, Turkey last month.

FIFA said in a statement: "FIFA has opened disciplinary proceedings against six match officials in relation to the international A friendly matches Bolivia v Latvia and Estonia v Bulgaria played in Antalya (Turkey) on 9 February 2011.

"The proceedings were opened following an evaluation of all documentation and information received by FIFA, in relation to a possible match-fixing situation in these matches.

"The FIFA Disciplinary Committee will be in charge to deal with the matter."

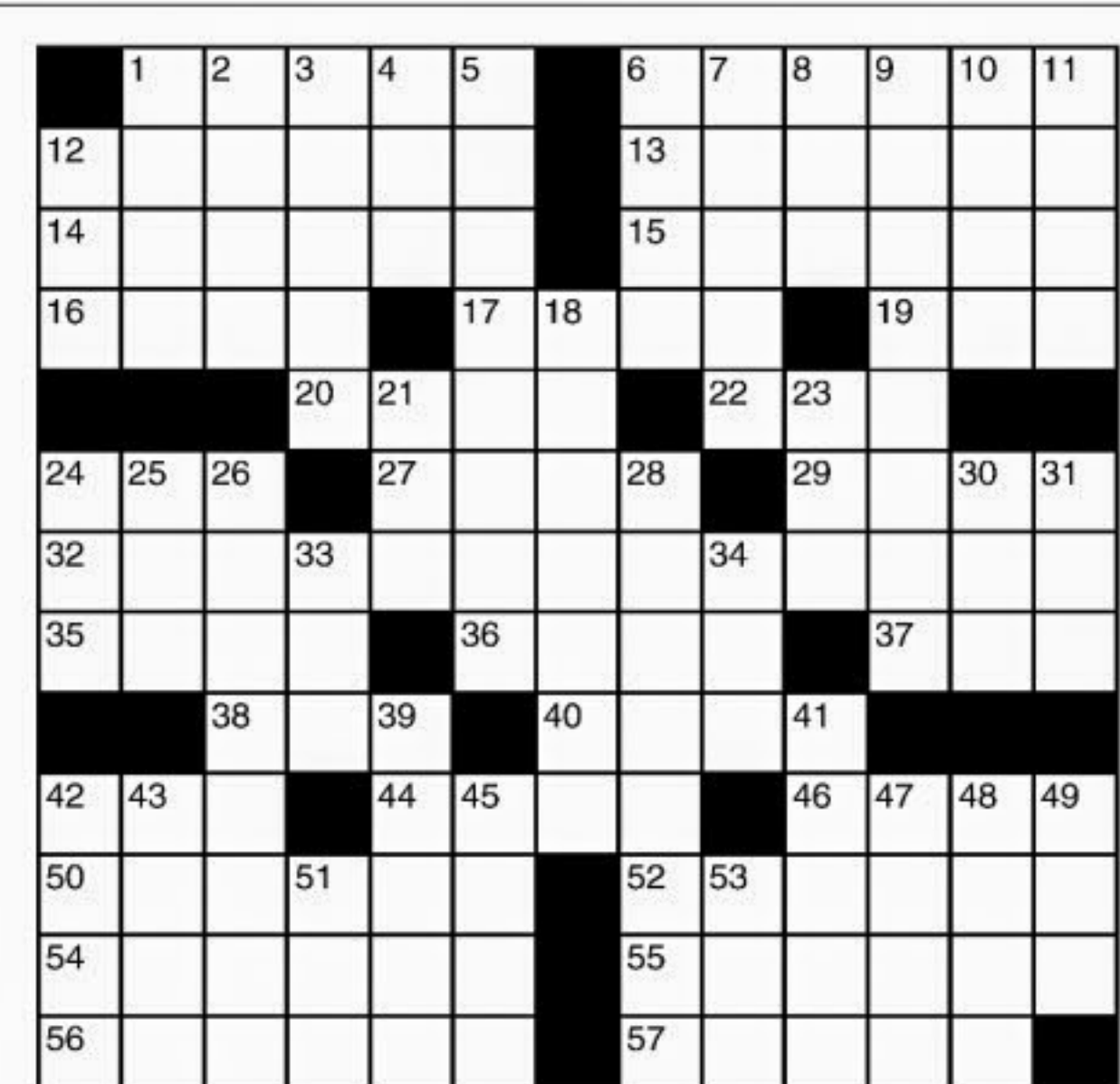
Both matches were organised by a Thai company that holds rights to organise matches and they were refereed by three Hungarians who do not feature on the official list of FIFA's international referees.

Estonia drew 2-2 against Bulgaria and Bolivia beat Latvia 2-1. All seven goals were scored through penalties, which led to suspicions of match-fixing.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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