

Barca reach Wembley

1-1 draw sees off bitter rivals



AFP, Barcelona



Barcelona reached their second Champions League final in three years after a 1-1 draw with Real Madrid at the Nou Camp in their semifinal second leg clash here on Tuesday saw them progress 3-1 on aggregate.

Barcelona could now face Manchester United in a repeat of the 2009 final - which Barcelona won - as they hold a 2-0 lead over Schalke going into Wednesday's second leg in Manchester.

Needing to overturn a 2-0 home defeat Real had to attack but they never managed a sustained threat on the Barca goal and fell behind to a Pedro strike in the 54th minute.

Marcelo replied 10 minutes later but it was only a consolation goal for Real.

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola praised Real for a good performance but revelled in his side's qualification.

"It's a total success," said Guardiola, who in his maiden season in 2008/09 delivered

the treble including a Champions League success over Manchester United.

"These have been 20 very hard days, filled with tension. We have eliminated a superb team, a really great team."

Barcelona midfielder Andres Iniesta, who set up Pedro's goal, was ecstatic.

"It is a unique feeling, to once again be in the final," said Iniesta, who missed the first leg through injury.

"Winning a confrontation like this one deserves to be feted."

Real found it hard to be gracious in defeat with assistant coach Aitor Karanka saying a disallowed goal early in the second-half by Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain supported coach Jose Mourinho's controversial claims that Barcelona were favoured by referees.

"I think that after all that has been said this week, everyone saw what we had been going on about today (with regard to Higuain's goal)," said Karanka, who stood in for Mourinho in the dugout as he was suspended after being sent from the bench last week. "There is no need to say any more than

that, millions of people saw it."

Mourinho chose to stay at the team hotel and watch the match on television.

Barcelona as expected started both Iniesta and Carles Puyol, who were passed fit with the latter filling in at left back for his 100th Champions League appearance for the club.

The Real players knew that they had to hassle Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta to prevent them finding their passing range but when they did get the ball to Lionel Messi and Pedro they had the pace and trickery to do damage.

Ricardo Carvalho who missed the first leg through suspension went in the book after 11 minutes for bringing down Messi as he tore through the Real half, while there were several other borderline yellow card challenges.

An unmarked Sergio Busquets headed straight at 'keeper Iker Casillas from a corner but generally the game was simmering and it was Messi who threatened to bring it to the boil in the run up to half time.

The Real defenders were bunching up as they tried to halt his forays and he tested Casillas with a couple of shots from the

edge of the area. The shot-stopper then made an excellent stop to deny a curling David Villa strike.

After the break Real attacked with renewed vigour and Barca were looking edgy. In a strange decision by the referee Higuain's goal was ruled out for a foul by Ronaldo on Mascherano although he himself had been pushed by Gerard Pique.

The slippery conditions were also making it difficult for the Barca defence but the more Real attacked the greater chance they would be caught on the counter-attack and that is what happened.

Dani Alves ran down the wing and played the ball inside to Iniesta who found Pedro with a brilliant through ball and he finished calmly with just the keeper to beat.

The contest looked over but Real kept pushing and got their reward when Marcelo swept the ball home.

Di Maria nutmegged Mascherano and while he was unlucky to see his shot come back off the post, he kept his composure to set up Marcelo.

Bayern linked to City duo

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich are looking to strengthen their squad for next season after being linked to both Manchester City defender Jerome Boateng and striker Emmanuel Adebayor.

Munich newspaper the Muenchner Merkur claims German international Boateng, currently injured, has agreed terms to join Bayern for next season. Munich's director of football Christian Nerlinger refused to confirm the report.

Boateng, who has 13 caps for Germany, could cover at right back and play at centre half for Bayern.

"It's not correct that we've already agreed terms. We're keeping tabs on him, but that's difficult now because of his injury," Nerlinger told the Merkur.

Boateng's advisor Joerg Neubauer also played down the reports.

Ronaldo fuming

AFP, Barcelona

Real Madrid's Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo repeated coach Jose Mourinho's claims that bitter rivals Barcelona were favoured by referees.

"It (trying to overhaul Barcelona's first leg lead) was Mission Impossible 4," said the 26-year-old.

"We knew what was going to happen. We were used to it after the first leg. Higuain's goal was fine.

"Once again we have to live with that. Pique pushed me and I fell on top of Mascherano, who when he played in England would not have fallen to the ground like that, but here he does it like everybody else."

Braga aim to spoil party

AFP, Paris



EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

Sporting Braga have no European pedigree as such but on Thursday the minnows from Portugal are hoping to set that right by reaching the Europa League final in defeating Portuguese giants and two-time European Cup winners Benfica as they bid to overturn a 2-1 deficit in the second leg.

Should they succeed in doing so they will ruin the script for the final in terms of what the neutral observer would like to see in Dublin on May 18 - a clash between last season's Portuguese champions Benfica and their bitter rivals and the team who ran away with the title this season Porto.

Porto look all but assured of booking their tickets for Dublin as they go to Villarreal in Spain with a 5-1 lead from the first leg, and having not lost a match in a major competition this season it would be a huge surprise were Villarreal to deny them.

Braga have good reason to be confident of gatecrashing the final especially if they play at the same level they did during the Champions League group stage when they beat Arsenal 2-0 at home last November.

Braga have had another decent league campaign and lie third, though 14 points behind second-placed Benfica, but their battling midfielder Leandro Salino believes that league position will not count in what is to them the equivalent of a final.

Salino is confident that a combination of the away goal and their formidable home record in European competition this season - they have conceded just three goals, all in a Champions League match against Shakhtar Donetsk, and won six of their eight games.

"We may have lost the first leg but our goal is a real bonus and takes some of the disappointment out of the result," he said.

"We have an excellent opportunity to reach the final and we are confident that if we maintain our previous form at home we can do just that."

Benfica, though, are determined to salvage something from the season and beating Porto in the final would be huge consolation for failing to give Porto a run for their money in the title race - the leaders have a massive 21 point lead with two matches remaining.

Man for man they have a stronger line-up than Braga with the imposing Paraguayan striker Oscar Cardozo leading the line, though, he is much more than just a target man as he demonstrated with his superb

freekick in the first leg which proved to be the decisive goal in that match.

Their left sided Portuguese international midfielder Fabio Coentrao is under no illusions how difficult a task Braga will present.

"We wanted to win by more (in the first leg)," the 23-year-old told uefa.com

"But the reality is that we won 2-1 and we have a difficult game ahead of us in Braga. We have to arrive in Braga ready to achieve our objective and win."

Villarreal have nothing to lose in their home match and at least go into it having recovered some morale after a 2-1 home league win over Getafe last weekend.

However, they are really going to have to live up to their nickname of 'yellow submarine' if they are to torpedo Porto's chances and as they have to go out and attack from the start, the Portuguese champions Colombian striker Falcao has every chance of adding to his record haul in the competition this season of 16.

FIXTURES

Thursday

At Braga, Portugal
Sporting Braga (POR) v Benfica (POR)
At Villarreal, Spain
Villarreal (ESP) v Porto (POR)

Lippi wants a coaching return

AFP, Rome

Former Italy and Juventus boss Marcello Lippi says he is hoping for a return to coaching next season, preferably with a national team. "This year I've had many offers but I didn't accept any of them because I had decided to have a year off," he told Radio Monte Carlo.

"Those that I will have for next season I will consider carefully and if there's something interesting, like a country, we'll see."

"I prefer not to work in Italy any more, I've done what I needed to do. It's difficult to enjoy yourself in Italy."



What to WATCH

SET Max
Indian Premier League

Kochi v Kolkata
Live from 4:30pm
Deccan v Delhi
Live from 8:30pm

TEN Cricket
West Indies v Pakistan

Fifth ODI
Live from 7:30pm

ESPN
Sportscentre India

Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Action+
UEFA Europa League

SEMIFINAL, 2ND LEG
Villarreal v Porto

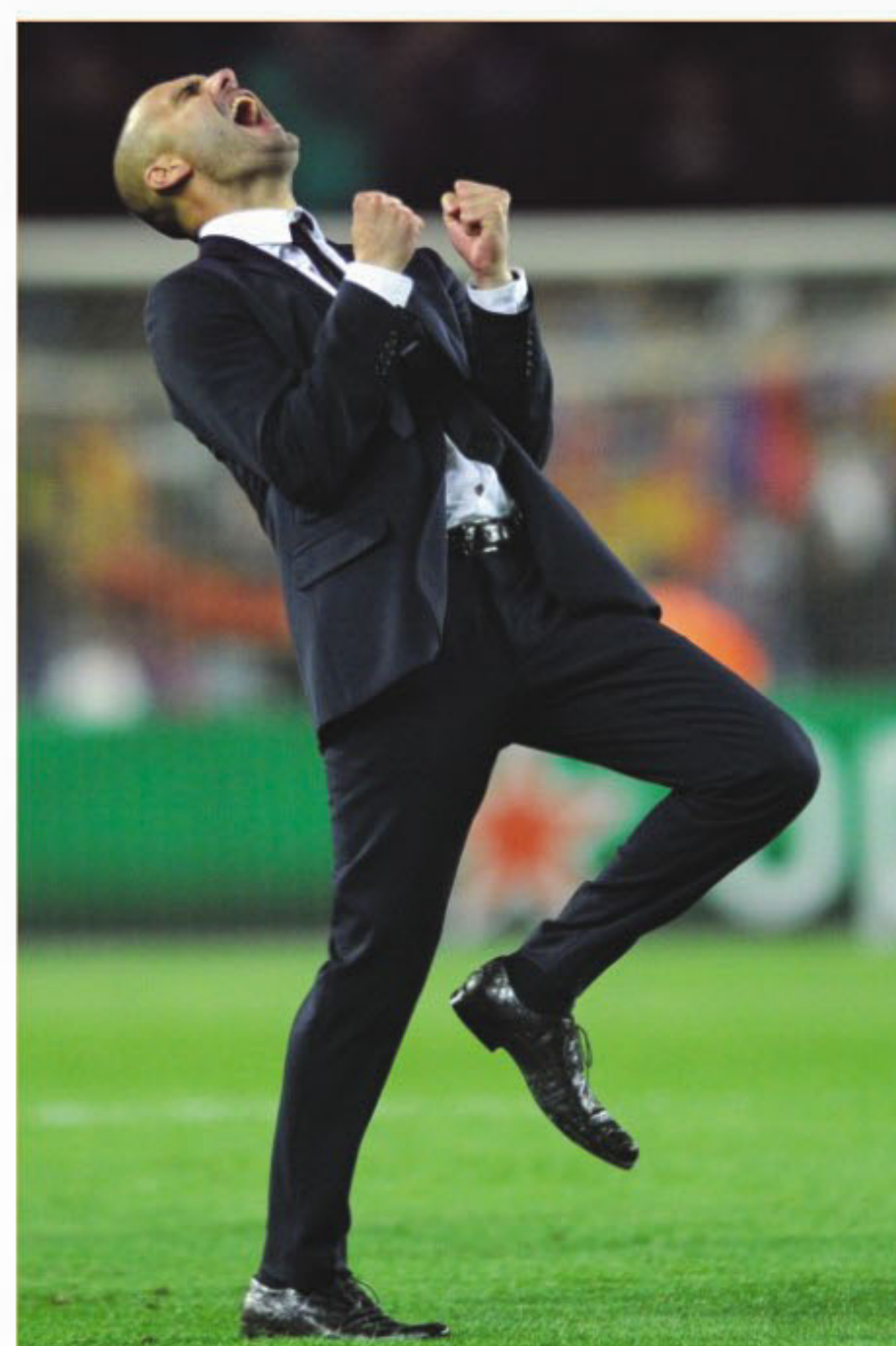
Live from 1:00am (Friday)

TEN Sports
UEFA Europa League

SEMIFINAL, 2ND LEG
Braga v Benfica

Live from 1:00am (Friday)

'Attacking football won'



PEP GUARDIOLA

AFP, Barcelona



EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

EUROPA LEAGUE

It was always going to be an extremely difficult task for Real to turn around their 2-0 defeat at home but they started with the intention to attack.

It was in the second half when they looked most dangerous, though, that Barca went ahead through Pedro Rodriguez. Real kept going and equalised through Marcelo but it was only a consolation.

"Football is coming home and I would like to congratulate my players for reaching the final," said

Guardiola, who was a player in the 1992 side which won Barca's first ever European Cup at the legendary Wembley stadium.

"Of course it is the new Wembley and so it is not going to be as special going back there. It is a chance for us to show our way of football, to keep hold of the ball and move it around as quickly as possible."

Barca could now play Manchester United who hold a 2-0 lead over Schalke going into their return leg and it would be a repeat of the 2009 final.

"We will be watching the game tomorrow (Wednesday) but it looks like it will be Manchester who go through."

"Manchester continue to be in the final stages of the competitions and reach the final. But we have the same desire, we will look to find their weak point and then attack," explained Guardiola.

The Barca trainer refused to comment on the contentious decision by the referee to rule out a goal for Real's Gonzalo Higuain due to a supposed foul by Cristiano Ronaldo.

"Everyone is free to think what they want and analyse it. You cannot say one person is right or another. We feel like we have eliminated an excellent side and one of the keys to our success is our humility. The players keep going and working hard," he added.

SPORTS POLL
Who do you think will be cricket's next chief selector?

Habibul Bashar 55.0%
Minhajul Abedin 24.0%
Akram Khan 21.0%

TOTAL VOTES: 429

WEEKLY QUESTION
Do you find interest in the IPL?

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

Follow The Daily Star Sport on [twitter](https://twitter.com/dssport)
www.twitter.com/dssport

DAY'S EVENT
Bangladesh League
Arambh v Brothers Union
Time: 5:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium