



Bayern Munich midfielder David Alaba celebrates his goal with teammate Mario Gomez during their Bundesliga match against Cologne in Munich on Friday.

Bayern rout Cologne

AFP, Berlin



Ten-man Bayern Munich ensured it would be cheery festive season in Bavaria with a 3-0 rout of visiting FC Cologne which took their lead over Bundesliga champions Borussia Dortmund to six points.

On Bayern's final league game ahead of the winter break the hosts were stunned when influential midfielder Frank Ribery was sent off after 33 minutes after being shown two yellow cards in the space of a minute.

However that failed to faze Jupp Heynckes' league leaders, who finished the first half with a flurry and took an early lead in the second as Mario Gomez claimed his 16th goal in 16 league games.

Cologne, who have been battling to get out of the bottom half of the table, were struggling to make the advantage count and their defence was found wanting when second half substitute David Alaba doubled Bayern's lead just after the hour mark.

Midfielder Toni Kroos made it three in the dying minutes as unconvincing Cologne's defence fell apart.

Billed as a contest between Gomez and Lukas Podolski, the Cologne striker who is attracting interest from Premier League side Arsenal among others, it was the former who snatched the bragging rights.

Neither team had produced solid goalscoring chances in the opening half, in which Ribery provided the best drama after the volatile Frenchman was sent off for two altercations with Portuguese defender Henrique Sereno.

But after the interval, and in spite of their numerical disadvantage Bayern came out flying.

The Cologne defence was nowhere to be seen when Thomas Mueller -- who had missed a great chance to open the scoring moments earlier -- latched on to a deep cross on the right flank.

Blatter vows to carry on

Football

AFP, Tokyo

FIFA president Sepp Blatter admitted on Saturday mistakes had been made but said there was no point living with regrets after a year of "ups and downs" for football's world governing body.

Speaking in Tokyo on the eve of the Club World Cup final between Barcelona and Brazil's Santos, Blatter, who faced calls for his resignation last month over his comments on racism, vowed to carry on and strive to improve FIFA.

Asked by AFP if he had any regrets and would do anything differently after a year in which the powerful organisation was bedevilled by accusations of corruption, he said: "Yes. But you can't live with regrets.

"You must look with a positive approach. I still have the energy to go forward. I believe myself that we can go forward."

He added: "I said (to fellow FIFA members) that you can't go back to the past and with regrets for the past.

That's what I've said."

It has been a turbulent year for FIFA with allegations of graft in the bidding for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups and former Asian football chief Mohamed bin Hammam's lifetime ban for allegedly trying to buy votes in the FIFA presidential election.

The 75-year-old Blatter, who has garnered a reputation for a long line of public relations gaffes, himself faced a storm of criticism when he said claims of racism on the pitch should be solved with a handshake.

He told media in the Japanese capital that the biggest mistake had been choosing the two World Cup hosts -- Russia in 2018 and Qatar for 2022 -- at the same time. That had been "totally wrong" and "not the best", he said.

"You can't change it, the past is the past," he said. "Now we need to look forward."

He said that in the first half of the year especially "our boat was not on still waters. Now we bring it back to port".

FIFA earlier this month said it had to delay plans to publish files related to its

relationship with former marketing partner International Sport and Leisure (ISL) because of a legal challenge.

Last year, BBC documentary Panorama claimed that ISL -- who had obtained exclusive marketing rights for the World Cup before being liquidated in 2001 -- had offered payments to three FIFA executive committee members, including Issa Hayatou, the president of the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

Blatter backed Hayatou -- who denies the claims -- as "a good member of the executive committee".

"FIFA needs to lay this to rest," he said.

The FIFA president, who was re-elected in June to another four-year term as FIFA's president after winning a vicious battle with his rival bin Hammam, said reforms of the world body would drive it forward.

FIFA needed to "take care of public opinion", he said, speaking after a committee meeting in Tokyo. "We will carry out if necessary the pertinent reforms," he said.



BTV
Bangladesh v Pakistan
Second Test, Day 2
Live from 9:30am

TEN Cricket
South Africa v Sri Lanka
First Test, Day 4
Live from 2:30pm

ESPN
English Premiership
QPR v Man United
Live from 6:00pm
Aston Villa v Liverpool
Live from 8:05pm
Man City v Arsenal
Live from 10:10pm

STAR Sports
English Premiership
Tottenham v Sunderland
Live from 9:00pm

TEN Sports
FIFA Club World Cup
Barcelona v Santos
Live from 4:00pm

TEN Action+
La Liga

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v Pakistan
Second Test, Day 2
Time: 9:30am
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur
National Cricket League
Time: 9:30am
Khulna v Sylhet, Day 1
Venue: Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium
Dhaka Metro v Rajshahi, Day 1

Mourinho remains defiant

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho remained defiant about his side's chances in three competitions this season, less than a week after a crushing La Liga defeat by arch-rivals Barcelona.

Real's 3-1 home defeat last Saturday left the Spanish giants second in the league, equal on points with the league leaders but with a game in hand.

Mourinho's side drew CSKA Moscow in the knockout phase of the Champions League Friday, and they won their first Spanish Cup game of the season against Ponferrada in midweek.

Real face FC Seville on Saturday and for Mourinho, the situation couldn't be going any better.

"At the same point last year we had a two-point deficit to the leaders (Barcelona). This year, in the worst case scenario we'll be joint leaders even if we lose to Seville," said the Portuguese.

"If we've got a problem, then the rest have a far bigger one."

Despite last week's defeat, Mourinho maintained he "did not need" to boost his team's morale.

"We're joint top of the Liga, in the Champions League we've won all our matches and we're through to the knockout phase," he added.

"And, we've started well in the Spanish Cup by beating Ponferrada (2-0). We're close to ten out of ten."

Mourinho, meanwhile, said he would be looking to add no new players to his squad in the January transfer window.

"Names are being banded about, but that's only normal," he added.

"But we've always said we want to finish the season with the same players we started it with."

Real's squad for Saturday's game will be missing defender Ricardo Carvalho (knee injury) and midfielder Fabio Coentrao (groin).

Trezeguet set for River Plate

AFP, Buenos Aires

Former France international David Trezeguet has agreed terms on a two and a half year deal with Argentine giants River Plate after undergoing a medical Friday, the club announced.

The 34-year-old former Juventus marksman's last club was United Arab Emirates side Bani Yas, for whom he signed after his contract with Spanish side Hercules expired.

River Plate, one of the country's most successful clubs with 33 first division titles, currently compete in Nacional B, the second division in Argentina's professional leagues after being relegated for the first time in their history last year.

For Trezeguet it is a kind of home-coming. He spent his youth playing for CA Platense in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, before being snapped up by French league side Monaco.

SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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CLUB WORLD CUP FINAL

Messi up against Neymar

Football

AFP, Yokohama

Santos take on Barcelona in the final of the Club World Cup on Sunday, pitting Lionel Messi against Neymar in what is being billed as a clash between two of the finest players on the planet.

The European champions Barca will be clear favourites against the Brazilians, who were sublime going forward but edgy at the back in their semifinal 3-1 defeat of Japanese side Kashiwa Reysol on Wednesday.

There was no such trouble in Japan for the Catalans, who thrashed Qatari side Al Sadd 4-0 on Thursday to set up the highly anticipated showdown with the South American champions and their highly rated young striker Neymar. But the easy victory came at a heavy price for Pep Guardiola's side, who lost prolific forward David Villa to a leg fracture that will see him out for up to five months. Guardiola has admitted his men were shaken by the injury.

The Barca coach, who has won every trophy going in his three-and-a-half years in charge including the Club World Cup in 2009, said he had told his players to expect Santos to play on the break.

"They are likely to counter-attack and they are dangerous because of Neymar," said Guardiola, also stressing that Santos were more than just

their 19-year-old talisman, and were a fast team packed with tall players.

"Rather than tactics, we want to control the game and have a good percentage of ball possession," said Guardiola, asked how the Spanish champions, widely regarded as one of the best club sides ever, would deal with the Neymar threat.

"Everybody talks about Neymar, but they have many good players. We must play a perfect game."

Midfielder Cesc Fabregas, who was on the bench in the defeat of Asian champions Al Sadd, said: "I don't think only about Neymar, I think about Santos. He is an excellent player, but he is not the only one we will face.

The former Arsenal man added: "He can play in any team in the world. He may score three or four goals tomorrow. We will welcome him if he plays for Barcelona, but he is an enemy tomorrow."

Neymar, who has been linked with every top side in Europe including Barcelona and Real Madrid, hit a superb first goal in his side's nervous win over Kashiwa, with fellow forward Borges and the defender Danilo also scoring.

Santos coach Muricy Ramalho said after the Kashiwa win that his side would need to defend far better against Messi and company.

The Argentine superstar was not at his brilliant best on Thursday, where he set up one goal but displayed only tantalising glimpses of his trademark mesmerising dribbling skills for a packed house of over 60,000 in Yokohama.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi warms up during a training session in Yokohama yesterday ahead of their Club World Cup final against Santos.

No decision yet on Suarez

AFP, London

The disciplinary panel hearing allegations of racism by Liverpool striker Luis Suarez has not reached a decision and will continue working through the weekend, the FA confirmed Friday.

The three-member panel was expected to issue its verdict on Friday after a hearing at an undisclosed location got underway this week.

However an FA statement issued late Friday said no verdict had yet been reached in the case. Suarez is accused of racially abusing Manchester United defender Patrice Evra during a Premier League match in October.

"The Independent Regulatory Commission has confirmed there will be no decision this evening and will continue working through the weekend," an FA statement said.

Morocco to host Club World Cup

AFP, Tokyo

Morocco will become the first African country to host the annual Club World Cup of continental winners, FIFA president Sepp Blatter announced on Saturday.

The north African country will host the 2013 and 2014 editions of the tournament, Blatter said after a meeting in Tokyo of the world footballing body's executive committee.

The 2011 Club World Cup concludes in Yokohama, next to Tokyo, on Sunday, when European champions Barcelona take on Santos of Brazil.

The United Arab Emirates is the other country to have held the showpiece, and it was hosted by Brazil in 2000 when it was called the Club World Championship.

The 2012 tournament will also be in Japan and Blatter said FIFA wanted the area hit by the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and ensuing tsunami in March to host some games.

"We are insisting they use a stadium in one of the areas affected by the natural disaster," he said. "We would like to play in that area."

A stadium in Sendai, the biggest city close to the area of northeast Japan hardest hit by the disaster, is one option and FIFA was helping to rebuild the ground there, Blatter added.