



Barcelona striker Alexis Sanchez (L) scores one of his two goals against Bayern Leverkusen during their Champions League second round encounter at the Bay Arena on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sanchez brace fires Barca

REUTERS, Berlin



Two goals from Chile forward Alexis Sanchez helped Barcelona to a 3-1 first-leg win at Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday that put the holders firmly in the driving seat in their Champions League round of 16 tie.

Barca, who are now unbeaten in 13 Champions League games and have scored in 28 consecutive matches in the competition, grabbed the lead in the 41st minute after a brilliant left-footed flick by Lionel Messi sent Sanchez racing through on goal.

The hosts levelled after 52 minutes when Michal Kadlec climbed high at the far post to nod in a cross from Vedran Corluka but Cesc Fabregas sent Sanchez charging clear again before he rounded the keeper to score in the 55th.

Messi then converted a right-wing cross for the third goal in the 88th minute as Barca avenged their 2001 defeat by Leverkusen, the last German club to beat them.

Leverkusen, without injured playmaker Michael Ballack, knew they would have to chase the Spaniards for the ball and with 80 per cent possession in the first half the visitors set the tone.

The Germans managed to keep Barca's scoring chances to a minimum until Messi sprang the offside trap and Sanchez ran on to slot the ball between the legs of keeper Bernd Leno.

Leverkusen perked up in the second half and Kadlec's header gave them hope.

Sanchez then beat Leno from a tight angle after dribbling round the keeper before Gonzalo Castro's low drive was expertly tipped on to the post by Barca keeper Victor Valdes who followed up by stopping a diving header from Stefan Kiessling.

Messi also hit the woodwork but the World Player of the Year finally put the game beyond Leverkusen with his late goal.

Tevez back in Manchester

AFP, Manchester

Carlos Tevez returned to Manchester on Tuesday insisting he wanted to end his long-running feud with Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini and play again for the Premier League leaders.

The Argentine striker, returning from his homeland, has not played for City since incensing Italian manager Mancini by refusing to warm-up while on the bench during a Champions League tie away to Bayern Munich on September 27.

Mancini has indicated his willingness to make peace with Tevez if the player apologises to him.

Tevez's return which saw him undergo a medical after spending an hour at their training complex appeared to receive the thumbs up from his fellow players.

"All I can say...is that all the players are excited to have Carlos, Kolo and Yaya back to help achieve our goal," tweeted centreback Joleon Lescott.

What to WATCH

Channel 9 & STAR Cricket
BPL T20

Barisal Burners v Chittagong Kings
Live from 2:00pm

Dhaka Gladiators v Duronto Rajshahi
Live from 6:30pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Action+

UEFA Europa League

Ajax v Man United

Live from 11:00pm

FC Porto v Man City

Live from 2:00am (Friday)

TEN Sports

UEFA Europa League

Lazio v Atletico Madrid

Live from 11:55pm

Stoke City v Valencia

Live from 2:00am (Friday)

DAY'S EVENT

BPL T20

Barisal Burners v Chittagong Kings

Time: 2:00pm

Dhaka Gladiators v Duronto Rajshahi

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket

Stadium, Mirpur

Premier League

Sk Russel v Arambagh

Time: 3:15pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National

Stadium

Win relieves Messi

AFP, Leverkusen

Superstar Lionel Messi admitted he was relieved to leave here with the 3-1 win over Bayer Leverkusen which puts Barcelona on the verge of the Champions League quarterfinals after the Round of 16, first-leg clash.

Holders Barcelona took a giant step towards the last eight on Tuesday with a convincing win following a slow start as maestro Messi put in an impressive display after a quiet first half in this David versus Goliath clash.

Goals either side of half-time from Chile's Alexis Sanchez put Barcelona into the lead before Messi claimed a late strike after converting a Dani Alves cross having initially set the Brazil defender free.

After Czech Republic defender Michal Kadlec had put Leverkusen level with a well-timed header at the start of the second-half, the hosts squandered chances to earn a draw before Messi's 88th-minute goal put the result beyond doubt.

"It was important for us to win this match, because under Pep (Guardiola the coach) we have never won the first match in the Round of 16," said Messi ahead of the return leg at the Nou Camp on March 7.

"We knew it would be complicated to play against the Germans."

"It's always nice to score a goal, but the important thing was the result for the team."

It was Messi's defence-splitting pass which led to the first goal as Alves and Sanchez sprinted side by side after the ball and it was the Chilean who arrived first to fire past Leverkusen goalkeeper Bernd Leno on 41 minutes.

Despite a plucky display by the hosts, Barcelona simply had too much quality in their ranks to be held up by the Germans.

"I think the second half was good, we used the space better after we took the lead," said Guardiola.

"We tried to improve our game, we had a few chances in the first half, but perhaps the final pass was missing."

"We can be happy with the performance we put in today, we have given ourselves a good chance now for the return leg."

"We know that the Germans play a good long-ball game, they use their height and Leverkusen really came at us in the second half and we know we have to be careful in the second leg."

Despite Barcelona dominating possession, Leverkusen fought until the final whistle and coach Robin Dutt praised his team, who have now won just one of their last eight games.

"The defence was good in the first half, but we were lacking a bit of courage," said Dutt.

"We gave them too much respect and were a bit anxious."

"It was a completely different story in the second half when we played our part in the game and caused Barcelona some problems."

Brazil reunite trio

Football

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil could field Ronaldinho, Neymar and Paulo Henrique Ganso, a key trio in their 2014 World Cup ambitions, when they meet Bosnia in a friendly in Switzerland on February 28.

Flamengo captain Ronaldinho and the Santos pair, striker Neymar and playmaker Ganso, were included in a 23-man squad named on Tuesday by coach Mano Menezes.

Menezes first fielded the trio against Ghana in September last year when Ronaldinho, 31, made his Brazil comeback but midfielder Ganso only played for a few minutes before being injured in the 1-0 win in London.

"When I called up Ronaldinho (for the Ghana game) I was asked if it was something temporary or was I thinking of him as a project, I said I thought of him as a project. I'm being coherent with what I said," Menezes told a news conference.

Ronaldinho, part of Brazil's 2002 World Cup-winning team but overlooked in 2010, was recalled by Menezes in September after a 10-month absence during which he missed the Copa America in July.

The Bosnia game in St Gallen gives Menezes another chance to see the trio in a key test for the 2014 Confederations Cup and 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil.

All three missed Brazil's last two friendlies in 2011, 2-0 wins over Gabon in Libreville and Egypt in Doha on a November tour, as they were involved with their clubs in the run-in to the Brazilian championship.

"(Against Bosnia) we're going to see a team very similar to the one that played against Mexico... but maybe with a small modification from the middle forwards," Menezes said.

Brazil beat Mexico 2-1 away in Torreon in October with goals from Ronaldinho and Real Madrid left back Marcelo.

"As a game plan and the way the players interpreted it, we go from there. I found something that pleases me and we must evolve, added Menezes.

Real Madrid's Kaka, who was called up for those two matches but missed them through injury, was not included on Tuesday. AC Milan's Robinho, dropped for that match, was also overlooked.

Brazil, not involved in the South American World Cup qualifiers as 2014 tournament hosts, also have friendlies against Denmark, the United States, Mexico and Argentina in the first half of this year.

Argentina pick Lamela

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

AS Roma teenager Erik Lamela and 31-year-old Napoli defender Hugo Campagnaro have earned their first Argentina call-ups for a friendly against Switzerland in Berne on February 29.

Liverpool winger Maxi Rodriguez also earned a recall in the 18-man squad of foreign-based players named by coach Alejandro Sabella on Tuesday, while Real Madrid's Angel Di Maria returns from injury.

The squad will be increased in the lead-up to the match with the inclusion of players from the local league, the Argentine Football Association said on its website (www.afa.org.ar).

The gifted Lamela has been in good form for Roma since his transfer from relegated Argentine giants River Plate in mid-2011.

SQUAD

Goalkeeper:

Sergio Romero (Sampdoria)

Defenders:

Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City),

Daniel Diaz (Getafe), Ezequiel Garay (Benfica), Federico Fernandez, Hugo

Campagnaro (both Napoli), Marcos Rojo (Spartak Moscow), Luciano

Monzon (Nice)

Midfielders:

Javier Mascherano (Barcelona),

Fernando Gago, Erik Lamela (both AS Roma), Maxi Rodriguez (Liverpool), Jose Sosa (Metallist Kharkiv)

Forwards:

Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Sergio Aguero (Manchester City), Angel Di Maria, Gonzalo Higuain (both Real Madrid), Rodrigo Palacio (Genoa)



Lyon pip APOEL

AFP, Lyon

Lyon secured a slender advantage in their Champions League last 16 tie with APOEL FC by beating the Cypriot underdogs 1-0 in the first leg at Stade Gerland on Tuesday.

APOEL are the first team from Cyprus to reach the knockout rounds and they defended stoutly in front of over 4,000 travelling supporters but were undone by an Alexandre Lacazette goal shortly before the hour.

Lacazette's strike, allied to what was only a second clean sheet in their last 12 games, puts Lyon in a commanding position to reach the quarterfinals prior to the second leg in Nicosia on March 7.

APOEL, however, finished ahead of Zenit Saint Petersburg, Porto and Shakhtar Donetsk in the group phase and their Serbian coach Ivan Jovanovic had said that his only wish was for his side to still be in with a chance after the away leg.

APOEL had charted their way through Group G by sitting deep and picking their opponents off on the break, and they stuck to their game plan in a first half that kicked off to a backdrop of glowing flares in the away end.

Lyon met APOEL's conservatism with a cautious 4-2-3-1 formation that relegated Bafetimbi Gomis, their top scorer in the competition, to the bench, and OL toiled to

find gaps in the visiting defence.

Ederson, Michel Bastos and Lisandro Lopez had all tried their luck with shots from varying range before Lacazette procured the first sight of goal on the half hour, cutting inside defender Kaka but shooting wastefully over.

It was Lacazette who drew the first save from goalkeeper Dionisis Chiotis as well, with a snap-shot from the right-hand apex of the area that the 34-year-old Greek palmed away.

Lyon almost caught their opponents cold in the opening moments of the second period, with Ederson breaking through and rounding Chiotis, only for his goal-bound shot to be blocked by a sliding Paulo Jorge.

The visitors would not survive another scare, however, and in the 58th minute the goal arrived with Cris at its unlikely source.

The Lyon captain strolled into the APOEL area before touching the ball left for Lacazette, who cut inside and beat Chiotis with a rasping shot that took a deflection off Paulo Jorge.

Chiotis saved from Bastos at his near post immediately afterwards, but the storm passed and Remi Garde was obliged to introduce Yoann Gourcuff to help his side hold on to possession and keep their opponents at arm's length.

There was one, late scare for Lyon, but substitute Gustavo Manduca's rising drive met its match in a finger-tip save from the otherwise untroubled Hugo Lloris.

Lyon forward Alexandre Lacazette (L) celebrates his all-important goal with teammate Lisandro Lopez during their Champions League clash against APOEL Nicosia at the Gerland Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Loew not panicking

AFP, Berlin

Arsenal defender Per Mertesacker has become the fourth Germany star forced out of the pre-Euro 2012 friendly against France because of injury, but coach Joachim Loew insists he is staying calm.

The towering centre-back picked up an ankle injury in the Gunners' 2-1 victory at Sunderland last Saturday and posted a picture of his swollen ankle on his Facebook page.

He looks to be out for several weeks and joins Bayern Munich's Bastian Schweinsteiger (ankle), Dortmund's Mario Goetze (groin) and Cologne's Lukas Podolski (foot) on the casualty list for the coming weeks.