


# Barca on the verge of last 8

REUTERS, Madrid

 Bayer Leverkusen face what looks to be the near-impossible task of putting three goals past Barcelona at the Nou Camp on Wednesday and to do so they will need to dethrone the undisputed passing kings of Europe.

Holders Barca, who won last month's Champions League last-16 first leg in Leverkusen 3-1, have conceded just five goals in 13 home La Liga games this season and let in only two at the Nou Camp in their three group matches in Europe's elite competition.

A big reason opponents find it so difficult to score against Pep Guardiola's side is that they rarely go a game without having the ball for at least 70 per cent of the time, their mesmerising passing game grinding teams into submission.

In Europe's top five leagues, Barca playmaker Xavi has completed by far the most passes in the opponents' half this season with 1,553, Barca's website (www.fcbarcelona.com) said.

Their World Player of the Year Lionel Messi, Champions League top scorer this term with seven goals, is second with 1,351 passes while fullback Daniel Alves is fourth on 1,215 - sandwiched between Real Madrid's Xabi Alonso with 1,271 and Arsenal's Mikel Arteta on 1,207.

"The fact that it is a tough prospect is clear to all of us but it's not over until it's over, as the saying goes, and we'll wait and see what happens," Leverkusen forward Stefan Kiessling said in an interview on the club's website (www.bayer04.de).

"We want to go there and do ourselves justice and look for our chances."

# Harry not interested

AFP, London

 Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp on Tuesday ruled himself out of the running to succeed sacked Chelsea boss Andre Villas-Boas.

Villas-Boas was sacked on Sunday, a day after his side suffered a 1-0 defeat to West Bromwich Albion. The loss was the latest in a string of league defeats that has left Chelsea off the pace in the race for a Champions League spot next season.

Pep Guardiola, Jose Mourinho and Rafael Benitez are among the favourites to succeed the 34-year-old Portuguese, though Redknapp has also been linked with the job.

But Redknapp, who is tipped to become the next England manager, admits that while the post at Stamford Bridge is an attractive one, he is not interested in a move to Tottenham's cross city rivals.

"It would be difficult. I wouldn't be able to come back to north London," he said. "So no, I will pass on that one."

Despite Roman Abramovich firing six managers since taking over in 2003, Redknapp believes the Chelsea job is one of the most appealing in world football.

"It's a club you can win a championship

at because the owner has spared no expense," Redknapp said.

"He has built the most incredible training ground, and they buy top-level players.

"They have top players so it's a dream job for someone to go there and make a success of it, whoever they take.

"So many people would love that job and the chance to work at a great club with the backing that the manager gets there."

Redknapp said he was sad to see Villas-Boas lose his job after just eight months, but conceded that Abramovich has every right to make a change.

"He owns it, he pays massive wages to the managers and if he doesn't get the success he wants then he is in a position where he is not going to sit back and do nothing," Redknapp added.

"Those are the rules you have to work under.

"When you go there you have to be successful. If not you are not, you're not going to last. That's how it works."


Redknapp thinks Mourinho, who won five trophies during a three-year spell at Chelsea, could return to Stamford Bridge, although luring the 49-year-old from his current employers Real Madrid may be difficult.



PHOTO: AFP  
Levante midfielder Xavi Torres celebrates his goal against Real Betis during their Primera Liga encounter at Ciutat de Valencia on Monday.

# Levante reclaim 4th spot

REUTERS, Madrid

 Levante continued to defy their humble status as Valencia's second club when they beat Real Betis 3-1 to reclaim fourth place in La Liga on Monday.

Athletic Bilbao and Malaga had leap-frogged Levante with victories at the weekend that lifted both clubs to 37 points from 25 matches, with Bilbao climbing into Spain's fourth Champions League qualification berth on goal difference and Qatar-owned Malaga in fifth.

Victory over Betis at their Ciutat de Valencia stadium put Levante back in fourth on 38 points, five behind city rivals Valencia, who won 1-0 at Granada on Sunday.

Midfielder Jose Barkero set Levante on their way with a 34th-minute free kick and a Xavi Torres header made it 2-0 in the 42nd minute.

Betis pulled a goal back two minutes later when Jorge Molina made the most of a defensive error to fire past Gustavo Munua before Arouna Kone sped clear to score six minutes after the break and make it 3-1.

Levante, the season's surprise packages, have one of the oldest squads in the Spanish top flight and an annual budget of only 20 million euros (\$26.5 million), compared with Real Madrid's of almost 500 million.

They beat Real 1-0 in September and briefly topped the standings before falling out of form and slipping down the table.

# Valcke says sorry

REUTERS, Brasilia

 FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke apologised on Monday for remarking that Brazil needed a "kick up the backside" to be ready for the 2014 World Cup as the government formally declared him unwelcome to visit for talks on the tournament next week.

Valcke's comment on Friday angered the South American soccer power, and prompted Sports Minister Aldo Rebelo to write to FIFA president Sepp Blatter to say they no longer wanted to deal with the Frenchman, who was due to visit on March 12.

After publicising its decision to write to Blatter, the government revealed a note from Valcke apologising for his remarks.

In the note, a copy of which has been seen by Reuters, Valcke said his remark had become much harsher in translation from French to Portuguese and only meant "speed things up".

He did, however, add there was "certainly an air of worry at FIFA" about the slow progress of tournament preparations.

Rebelo said in his letter to Blatter:

"The form and content of (Valcke's) remarks go beyond acceptable standards of harmonious coexistence between a sovereign state like Brazil and a centenary international organisation like FIFA.

"Faced with this fact, the Brazilian government can no longer accept Mr Jerome Valcke as an interlocutor in its dealings with FIFA during preparations for this World Cup."

Rebelo had already described Valcke's remarks as "offensive" and "unacceptable" at a news conference on Saturday.

FIFA has criticised Brazil for slow progress preparing stadiums and infrastructure and a delay in passing laws on the sale of alcoholic drinks at venues and for cheap tickets for low-income sectors of society.

On his last visit to Brazil in January, Valcke had praised progress at venues he visited.

Although apologising to Rebelo, Valcke described himself as the person ultimately responsible for the World Cup and that he was under pressure to ensure Brazil delivered the finals in good time.

He went on to tell Rebelo that he was "confident there is no problem that cannot be overcome with the efforts of FIFA, the local organising committee and the Brazilian authorities."

# FIFA to scrap Aug friendlies

REUTERS, UnDATED

World governing body FIFA said it had made progress on streamlining the international match calendar on Monday, saying it would recommend a UEFA-backed plan that would abolish unpopular international friendlies in August.

A working group from international confederations, players, clubs and professional leagues met at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich to discuss the post-2014 calendar.

The proposals include a maximum of 18 international matches per nation in a two-year cycle, split into nine double dates in March, September, October and November and every other June.

February friendlies, which are also unpopular because of the crowded domestic schedules at that time, would also have no place in the proposed new calendar.

# APOEL dream big

REUTERS, Nicosia



The GSP stadium is set to be rocked to its foundations by 20,000 frenzied APOEL Nicosia fans on Wednesday when the Cypriot side bid to extend their Champions League dream beyond the last 16 by overturning a 1-0 first-leg defeat by Olympique Lyon.

Unfancied APOEL caused the surprise of the group stage by topping a quartet also featuring Porto, Shakhtar Donetsk and Zenit St Petersburg and the club's expectant fans believe a team made up mainly of Brazilian and Portuguese journeymen can cause a Cypriot sporting stir only previously achieved by tennis player Marcos Baghdatis.

"This is what the Greek spirit can do when it's healthy," supporter Stefan Menelaou said.

"For me personally, it is pride and satisfaction that the Greek spirit still lives even in a team full of Brazilians, Portuguese and god knows how many different nationalities."

Lyon laboured to a first-leg victory in France with a second-half goal from Alexandre Lacazette and APOEL were strong at home in the group stage, beating both Porto and Zenit.

"It is something unprecedented for fans, not only those of APOEL," another fan, Panayiotis Hadjiapostolou, added. "Cypriot fans have never experienced such a thing before."

For the first time in some weeks, coach Ivan Jovanovic has a fully fit squad at his disposal and spirits are high after two league wins revived title hopes for APOEL who sit third in their domestic championship.

"We will face Olympique with our morale high. We will get our chances and we are going to chase them until the end," said Serb Jovanovic.

Lyon geared up for the return leg in the worst possible way, losing 2-0 at strugglers



PHOTO: AFP  
APOEL Nicosia forward Ailton Jose Almeida controls the ball during a training session at the GSP Stadium yesterday on the eve of their Champions League match against Lyon.

Nancy in Ligue 1 as their hopes of playing in the Champions League next season took another blow on Saturday.

It was Lyon's third defeat in their last four league games.

"It's a big disappointment but ... we need to get back on track mentally and not listen to all the negative comments," Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas told reporters.

"But the team usually play well in decisive matches."

Lyon will be without playmaker Yoann Gourcuff, who has been ruled out with a groin injury but has barely been playing lately after his form nosedived this season.

# Juventus lose key defenders

AFP, Rome

Serie A title contenders Juventus will be without key defenders Andrea Barzagli and Giorgio Chiellini for their next two league matches because of injuries the club announced on Monday.

Barzagli looks set to miss three matches - including Wednesday's match against Bologna where victory would see them go level on points with leaders AC Milan - because of a torn calf muscle and is likely to return on April 1 against Napoli.

Chiellini has a less serious calf muscle tear and while certain to miss the Bologna and Genoa match on Sunday should be fit to line-up against Fiorentina the week after.



<b>NEO Cricket</b> New Zealand v South Africa First Test, Day 2 Live from 3:30am (Thursday)
<b>TEN Sports</b> UEFA Champions League Apoel v Lyonnais Live from 1:45am (Thursday)
<b>TEN Action</b> UEFA Champions League Barcelona v Leverkusen Live from 1:45am (Thursday)
<b>ESPN</b> Sportscenter India Sports News



EDEXCEL exams

iGCSE/A level January 2012 results on Thursday 8 March 2012 at 11am

iGCSE/A level May/June 2012 registration continues until 11 March 2012

British Council offices will remain open on Friday 09 March to accept exams registration and fees in cash only

For result and registration:  
[www.britishcouncil.org/bangladesh](http://www.britishcouncil.org/bangladesh)

**British Council Dhaka**  
5 Fuller Road, Dhaka 1000  
T +88 02 861 8905  
**Hotline-01730303885**  
(saturday-Thursday from 9am to 5pm)  
e-mail: exams@bd.britishcouncil.org

**British Council Chittagong**  
Rafique Tower, 8th Floor, 92 Agrabad C/A, Chittagong  
T +88 031-2530015-21  
**Hotline-01713103639**  
(saturday-Thursday from 10am to 5pm)  
e-mail: chittagong.enquiries@bd.britishcouncil.org

**British Council Sylhet**  
Al-Hamrah Shopping City (Level 6)  
Zindabazar, Sylhet 3100  
T +88 0821 727343  
**Hotline-01730334023**  
(sunday-Thursday from 10am to 4pm)  
e-mail: sylhet.enquiries@bd.britishcouncil.org

[www.britishcouncil.org/bangladesh](http://www.britishcouncil.org/bangladesh)