

Barca lodge complaint over pitch

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona on Thursday said they had complained to UEFA over the state of the pitch at the San Siro, after their goalless Champions League quarterfinal match with AC Milan.

"FC Barcelona has lodged a complaint with UEFA over the state of the pitch at the Giuseppe Meazza (San Siro) stadium during the Champions League match," the Catalan giants said on their website.

After Wednesday's match, Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola complained about the pitch, saying that "we adapt to everything, we come and we play. But it's a problem for the quality of the occasion. It's difficult when the pitch is in this state".

The match ended 0-0, making the return leg at the Camp Nou next Tuesday finely poised.

Wenger urges team to focus

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger on Thursday urged his squad to finish the job of securing qualification for the Champions League as they enter the critical phase of the season.

Arsenal's fortunes have been transformed in recent weeks after seven consecutive victories that have seen them transform a 10-point deficit to Tottenham into a three-point lead.

The Gunners' remarkable run has left them in third place and means that automatic qualification for the Champions League is in their hands, something that looked a forlorn hope in early February.

But despite his team's stellar run, Wenger has warned against the dangers of complacency as Arsenal prepare to travel to Loftus Road to face Queens Park Rangers on Saturday.

"This is the period where what we do matters the most, so we just want to keep our focus on this and not worry about anybody else's results," the Arsenal manager said.

"We have shown both footballing and mental qualities in recent weeks and now we need to continue our development."

The slender nature of Arsenal's lead over Tottenham meant there was little margin for error, Wenger said.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION

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What to WATCH

TEN Sports
South Africa v India
Commemorative T20I
Live from 9:30pm

TEN Action
West Indies v Australia
Second T20I
Live from 12:00am (Saturday)

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League
BJMC v MuktiJodha
Time: 3:30pm

Venue: Tangail Stadium
Farashganj v Brothers
Time: 4:00pm



AP, Milan



AC Milan held Barcelona to an entertaining 0-0 draw on Wednesday in the opening leg of the quarterfinals, the first time in 30 matches and more than two years that the Spanish team had been held scoreless in the Champions League.

Milan will find out in the return leg at the Camp Nou next Tuesday how much it will regret Robinho's woeful miss early on, while Barcelona should've had a first-half penalty when Alexis Sanchez was brought down by goalkeeper Christian Abbiati.

Lionel Messi, who has scored 55 times this season, had a goal rightly ruled out for offside at the San Siro.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who spent an unhappy season at Barcelona, was also kept quiet although he should have done better with two opportunities.

These teams also played each other in the group stage, with defending champion Barcelona beating Milan 3-2 in November in their last matchup. And the opening stages of this game appeared to promise a similar amount of goals.

Madrid forward Robinho should have scored in the third minute.

Milan attacker Kevin Prince Boateng's shot crashed off defender Gerard Pique and the rebound was headed on by Ibrahimovic to an unmarked Robinho just outside the six-yard box, however the Brazilian shot over the crossbar.

Milan was almost made to rue that missed opportunity immedi-

ately, Messi drilling the ball low across the face of goal.

Barcelona went close when Abbiati spilled Messi's shot but Antonio Nocerino managed to

FACTS

It was the first time Barcelona had failed to score in the Champions League since a 0-0 draw against Rubin Kazan in November 2009.

This is only the second time a match between these two European heavyweights has ended scoreless in

clear off the line with Dani Alves sliding to try and tap it into the net in the ninth minute.

The Spanish side should have had a penalty after a well-worked free kick came to Sanchez, who beat the offside trap, rode a tackle

from behind and was then brought down by Abbiati as he rounded the goalkeeper.

Ibrahimovic had his first sight of goal in the 20th minute, shooting straight at goalkeeper Victor Valdes. But Barca was starting to get into its stride to dominate possession as Milan struggled to carve out opportunities.

A lovely Barca move followed by a one-two between Xavi and Messi finished with the midfielder's shot being parried by Abbiati.

Milan was leaving itself dangerously exposed at times at the back, and was almost caught out when Sanchez raced half the length of the pitch with Luca Antonini in pursuit. The Milan defender managed to get in a last-ditch tackle in the middle of the box as the striker was about to shoot.

Ibrahimovic could have put

Milan ahead when he was picked out in a dangerous position by Massimo Ambrosini in the 57th, but the Sweden striker failed to control the ball and Barca cleared the danger.

As the match lost some of its frenetic pace, Barcelona defender Carles Puyol went close with a glancing header from a corner that only just went the wrong side of the post.

Barcelona could have won the match three minutes from time but Abbiati brilliantly stopped Messi's fierce effort, before Antonini cleaned up the rebound to clear the danger.

Messi felt aggrieved not to have been granted a penalty when he was muscled off the ball and brought down by two Milan defenders, but the initial contact looked to have been outside the box.

Bayern take control

AFP, Marseille



Bayern Munich took control of their Champions League quarterfinal against Marseille with a 2-0 win at Stade Velodrome on Wednesday that condemned OM to an eighth defeat in nine matches.

With Steve Mandanda suspended, Marseille coach Didier Deschamps chose to field third-choice goalkeeper Elinton Andrade but the move backfired in the 44th minute when the Brazilian allowed Mario Gomez's shot to slip beneath him.

The 32-year-old was making his first appearance since January 2011 and he was beaten again by Arjen Robben in the 69th minute as Bayern took a commanding grip on the tie ahead of next Tuesday's return leg.

It was a sixth consecutive success for Jupp Heynckes' side, whose thoughts may already be turning to a likely semi-final showdown with Real Madrid for the right to reach the May 19 final at their own Allianz Arena stadium.

Having seen their team beaten seven times in succession prior to Saturday's 1-1 draw at Nice, OM's fans unfurled several protest banners ahead of kick-off, including one that read: "Deschamps and your players, get lost!"

Deschamps had proclaimed Bayern "favourites" in Tuesday's pre-game press conference but it was his side who threatened first, with Loic Remy grazing the post after Manuel Neuer did well to parry Rod Fanni's header.

However, with former OM favourite Franck Ribery roundly jeered every time his bright orange boots touched the ball, Bayern began to boss possession and thread dangerous passes into the hosts' 18-yard area.



Bayern Munich striker Mario Gomez (L) is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Olympique Marseille during their Champions League quarterfinal at the Velodrome Stadium on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Fergie hits back at City

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson on Thursday hit back at claims by title rivals Manchester City that the defending champions received preferential treatment from referees.

Manchester City football development executive Patrick Vieira was widely quoted this week as saying that United and other top clubs around Europe were often given the benefit of the doubt by referees, particularly in home matches.

The former Arsenal and City midfielder pointed to United escaping what looked a clear penalty decision against them following a challenge by Michael Carrick on Danny Murphy late in

the 1-0 victory over Fulham on Monday.

City later insisted Vieira's remarks were taken out of context -- but Ferguson was in no mood to ignore the comments on Thursday, as the battle for the Premier League enters a tension-filled climax.

Ferguson said United themselves could have had a penalty in Monday's win over Fulham, insisting that decisions even themselves out over a season.

"I think we could have had a penalty on Monday night," said Ferguson.

"But you don't often get these ones when a wide player has crossed the ball and the player almost caught the ball between his arm and his body. We could have got a penalty but I wouldn't have expected one to be honest with you."

"I think that from the referee's position I could see why the referee didn't

give one when Danny Murphy was brought down because the ball was moved to the angle as Michael Carrick challenged him.

"From that position it wasn't clear but it was a good claim."

"But then City could have had a penalty kick against them at Stoke, as everyone saw, with Gareth Barry (challenge on Glenn Whelan). So you get breaks here and there."

"Every club gets good breaks, they get bad breaks that even themselves out over a season and that will never change."

"We've had some terrible decisions at Old Trafford, when Newcastle got a penalty kick. Tottenham could claim the same when Balotelli wasn't sent off and ended up scoring the winning goal (in City's 3-2 win)."

UEFA prefers extra refs



Football

REUTERS, Manchester

UEFA might stick with using extra assistant referees rather than introduce goalline technology in its Champions League and European Championship matches even if the use of technology is passed into law this year, UEFA general secretary Gianni Infantino said on Wednesday.

Infantino's comments are the broadest hint yet that UEFA will follow the line of its president Michel Platini who is staunchly against the introduction of goalline technology which is likely to be approved by the game's authorities in July.

The law-making International Football Association Board is holding final testing into two technology systems and both could be approved when IFAB meets on July 2.

"If the technology is approved on July 2 we have to see what is approved, how it will work, how complicated or not it will be - and then it will go to our executive committee," Infantino told reporters during the Soccerex business convention.

Platini has stood steadfastly against technology being introduced, saying he preferred the use of two additional officials in matches behind the goal to aid the referee.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who like Platini was once a staunch opponent of any technological aid, changed his mind after England's Frank Lampard had a clearly legitimate goal against Germany ruled out during the World Cup finals in South Africa two years ago.

Blatter had called for a halt to tests earlier that year but said they could go ahead again after the embarrassment of Lampard's ghost goal.

Let's eat them!

INTERNET, Undated

Prior to the first leg of Milan's Champions League quarterfinal against Barcelona, fans at the San Siro assembled a Pac-Man mosaic that featured the classic video game character chasing down a ghost in the colours of Barcelona's away kit. The text on the banner in the middle of the display read "Let's eat them!"

Though there wasn't much eating done during the scoreless match (except for some grass -- the pitch was terrible), it was a good showing from the supporters and one that was reminiscent of the Mario Bros. display in Chicago two years ago.

Spanish media slam ref

AFP, Madrid

Spanish media on Thursday rounded on Swedish referee Jonas Eriksson for his handling of the Champions League quarterfinal that saw Barcelona come away with a 0-0 away draw against AC Milan.

Eriksson was maligned for having missed two potential penalties as the Italian and Spanish champions played out the goalless draw at the San Siro on Wednesday, leaving next week's quarterfinal second leg finely poised.

"And what about this penalty?" Catalan sports daily Sport headlined on its front page alongside a photo of Barcelona's Alexis Sanchez, prostrate in the penalty box.

Barca coach Pep Guardiola was restrained in his post-match press conference, saying simply that Eriksson had not seen the foul by AC Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati on Sanchez.

"Eriksson missed a huge penalty for the Chilean," the AS newspaper countered.

Sanchez had been played into the box by Sergio Busquets in the 15th minute and rounded Abbiati before the keeper caught one of Sanchez's feet before the Chilean had the chance to fire off a shot.

Another penalty call came at the end of the match when Carles Puyol had his jersey tugged by Milan defender Djamel Mesbah at a corner.

"The referee played the ostrich and shut his eyes to several penalties, one on Alexis and the other on Puyol," said El Mundo Deportivo.

Marca added: "Barca had a right to complain about two penalties that were overlooked but the fact remains that Milan played very well and will try their hearts out come the return match at Camp-Nou."