

Napoli look to seal 2nd

AFP, Milan

Napoli have all but given hope of snatching the Serie A title from Juventus, but have no intention of giving up a coveted runners-up spot that would guarantee their return to the Champions League next season.

With an 11-point cushion on Napoli and requiring only four points from their last five games, Juventus are virtually assured what would be their 29th league title, their second under coach Antonio Conte.

The Bianconeri even have the chance to secure the championship on Sunday if they prevail over city rivals Torino and Pescara do the unthinkable and defeat visiting Napoli.

Juventus defender Giorgio Chiellini, for one, does not expect Juventus to break open the bubbly this weekend.

"I don't believe Napoli will slip up, they're in the hunt for second place," said Chiellini. "Honestly, I don't think (Walter) Mazzarri's team will have any problems."

Having suffered only four defeats away from home, from five in total this season -- while the biggest of Pescara's six wins came away to Fiorentina -- Napoli are expected to account for Pescara at the Stadio Adriatico.

Arguably the bigger question on the Napoli fans' minds, however, is how well they would fare in next season's Champions League without star striker Edinson Cavani.

Uruguayan international Cavani tops the Serie A scoring charts with 23 goals from 30 appearances, five ahead of inform Udinese veteran Antonio Di Natale.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Saturday

Atalanta v Bologna, Cagliari v Udinese (both 1600), Pescara v Napoli (1800)

Sunday

Chievo v Gerona, Palermo v Inter, Parma v Lazio, Roma v Siena, Sampdoria v Fiorentina, Torino v Juventus (all 1300), AC Milan v



Maasranga TV & TEN Cricket

Bangladesh v Zimbabwe
Second Test, Day 3
Live from 2:00pm
SET Max
Indian Premier League
Rajasthan v Hyderabad
Live from 4:30pm
Mumbai v Bangalore
Live from 8:30pm
ESPN
English Premiership
Stoke City v Norwich City
Live from 8:00pm
Serie A
Cagliari v Udinese
Live from 10:00pm
Pescara v Napoli
Live from 12:00am (Sunday)
ESPN
English Premiership
Man City v West Ham
Live from 5:45pm
Wigan v Tottenham
Live from 8:00pm



BD U-19s v SL U-19s

Fourth Youth ODI
Time: 10'00am
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

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APRIL 27, 2013
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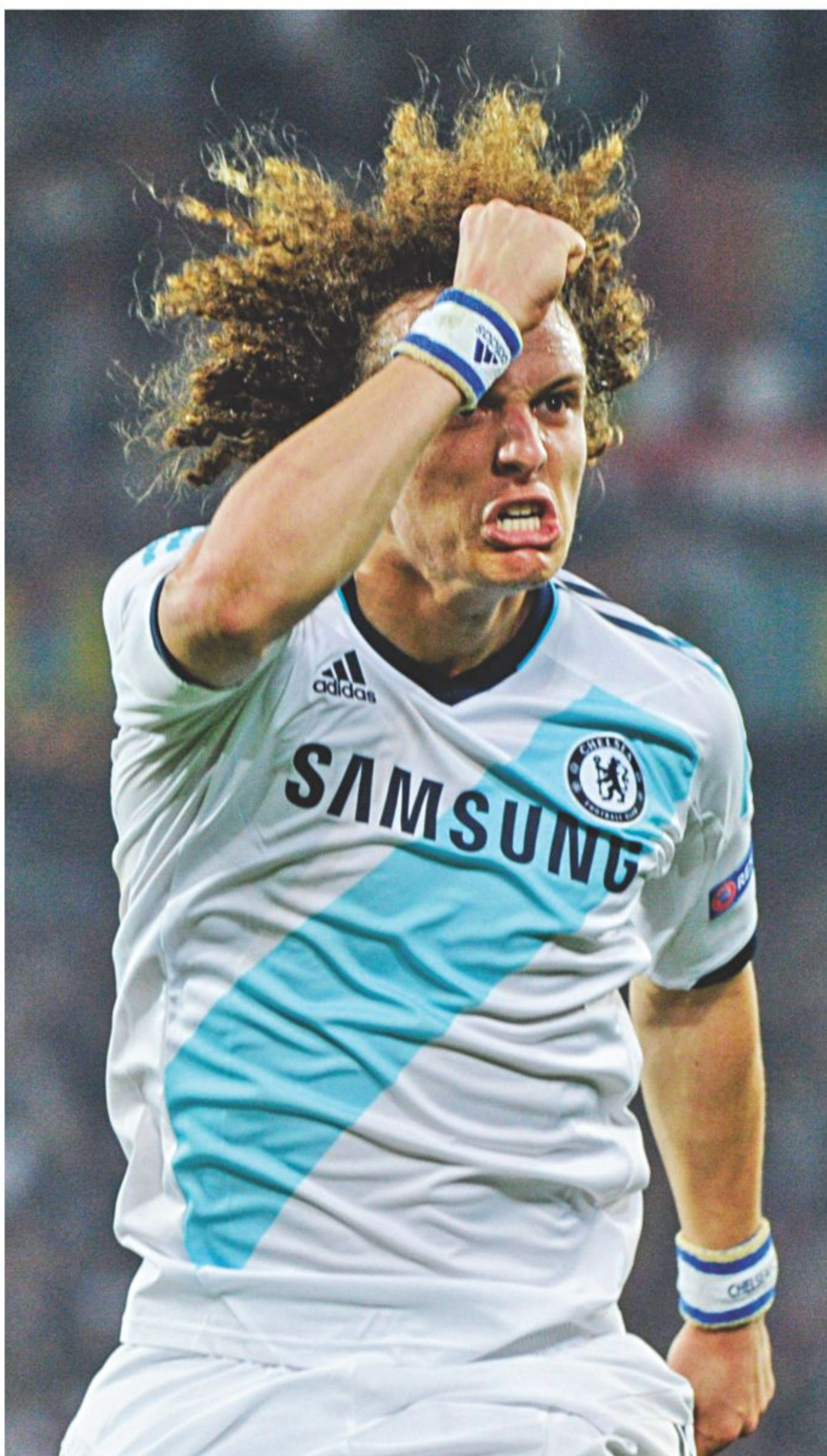


PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea defender David Luiz is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal against Basel during their Europa League semifinal at St Jakob Stadium on Thursday.

Luiz lifts Chelsea

AFP, Basel



David Luiz scored with the very last kick of the game to earn Chelsea a dramatic 2-1 win at FC Basel in the first leg of their Europa League semifinal on Thursday.

Basel, who were appearing in their first European semifinal, looked set to earn a draw after a contentious 87th-minute penalty from Fabian Schar cancelled out Victor Moses' early opener.

However, deep into injury time, Luiz drove a 25-yard free-kick beneath the Basel wall and into the bottom-right corner to put Rafael Benitez's side in control ahead of next week's return leg at Stamford Bridge.

In the end, the only sour note for the visitors was a yellow card for Ashley Cole that rules him out of the second leg, although Basel will also be without centre-back Aleksandar Dragovic for the same reason.

Chelsea had welcomed Cole back after a three-week absence due to a hamstring injury, but their wariness was demonstrated by interim coach Benitez's decision to deploy centre-back Luiz in a midfield holdingrole.

Basel eliminated Tottenham Hotspur on penalties in the quarter-finals, having knocked Manchester United out of last season's Champions League, and they served early notice of their threat when Mohammed Elneny curled a cross onto the roof of the Chelsea net.

It was Chelsea, however, who took the lead in the 12th minute, to the disappointment of watching Basel native Roger Federer.

Frank Lampard drew a smart save from Yann Sommer with a near-post volley and from the resulting corner, the England midfielder's cross struck Moses and ricocheted into the roof of the net.

Basel responded immediately, briefly forcing the visitors onto the back foot.

Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech tipped a stinging Schar free-kick over the bar, while Valentin Stocker hit the outside of the post with a drilled cross from the right.

The away side finished the half strongly, though, with Sommer producing a sharp reflex save to repel Ramires' half-volley from close range.

Eden Hazard might have doubled Chelsea's lead shortly before half-time, but a last-ditch challenge from Park Joo-Ho put him off just as he was about to take aim at the exposed Sommer.

In the opening exchanges of the second period, both sides hit the woodwork with chances that would have greatly altered the face of the game.

First, Stocker rolled a low shot against the base of Cech's right-hand post, before Fernando Torres saw a left-foot snap-shot crash back off an upright after a bold run down the Chelsea left from Hazard.

Basel coach Murat Yakin introduced Marcelo Diaz and Jacques Zoua from the bench, and the hosts saw Fabian Frei and then Zoua shoot narrowly wide from just outside the box.

Cech saved at the feet of Salah, but after several nervous moments in the Chelsea area, the hosts' pressure told when Czech referee Pavel Kralovec penalised Cesar Azpilicueta for making contact with Stocker from behind.

Schar duly drilled his spot-kick down the middle, before Sommer produced a stunning point-blank save to deny John Terry, only for Luiz to strike in the fourth minute of added time to end Basel's unbeaten home record in this season's competition.

In the other semifinal, Fenerbahce hit the woodwork three times against Benfica but finally prevailed through a 72nd-minute Egemen Korkmaz goal to procure a 1-0 advantage ahead of the second leg in Portugal. Korkmaz headed home powerfully from a corner at the Sukru Saracoglu Stadium to give Aykut Kocaman's hosts a wafer-thin victory as they bid to reach their first ever European final.

RESULTS

FC Basel (SUI) 1 (Schar 87-pen)

Chelsea (ENG) 2 (Moses 12, Luiz 90)

Fenerbahce (TUR) 1 (Korkmaz 72) Benfica (POR) 0

Bundesliga on the rise

AFP, Stuttgart



The emphatic nature of both Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund's Champions League semifinal victories over Spain's top sides only confirms the rise of the Bundesliga, according to the boss of the German football association.

Bayern were the last German team to win the Champions League in 2001 and the Bavarians are on course to reach the Wembley final on May 25 after flooring Barcelona 4-0 at Munich's Allianz Arena in Tuesday's semi-final, first-leg.

Dortmund, who were European champions in 1997, then posted another advert for the Bundesliga 24 hours later when they hammered Real Madrid 4-1 at Signal Iduna Park as Poland's Robert Lewandowski scored all four goals.

Germany daily Bild allowed for some gloating under the headline: "Germany 8, Spain 1: Bayern and

Dortmund have over run all of Europe!"

While an inquest has begun in Spain as to why Barcelona and Real fared so badly against Bundesliga opposition, Germany is dreaming of "Der Klassiker" should Bayern face Dortmund in the final at London's Wembley stadium on May 25.

"Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund have handed out first-class business cards for German football," said German Football Association (DFB) president Wolfgang Niersbach.

"Everyone saw Germany is a top football address in Europe.

"This applies to the Bundesliga, the individual clubs and, of course, the national team.

"We can now dream of an all-German final at Wembley."

Germany coach Joachim Loew said with 14 of his national players still involved in the competition, including Real's Mesut Ozil and Sami Khedira, the experience can only help ahead of next year's World Cup in Brazil.

"It was very impressive how

organised and dominant Bayern and Dortmund played," said Loew, Germany's coach since 2006.

"The results and margin of victory were richly deserved.

"You have to pay both (Dortmund coach) Jurgen Klopp and (Bayern trainer) Jupp Heynckes a big compliment for preparing their teams."

Bild also measured the German teams success compared to the failure of the four English Premier League sides, Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal and Manchester City, to make the quarter-finals.

Having last won silverware in May 2010, Bayern have smashed a host of Bundesliga records on their way to winning this season's league title and the Munich squad show no sign of letting up.

The Bavarians have made no secret of their desire to become the first German team to win the treble of European, league and cup titles and they ran 112 kilometres (69.5 miles) as a team, compared to Barca's 106 in the first-leg, match statistics indicated.

Wenger plots an upset

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger insists he has no problem asking his Arsenal players to form a guard of honour for Manchester United on Sunday, but the Gunners boss is determined to send the newly-crowned champions home empty handed as the race for the top four heats up.

With United ending Manchester City's reign as champions on Monday, the focus this weekend turns to the tense battle to qualify for the Champions League.

City are well set in second place, so the pressure is on third-placed Arsenal, who take on United at the Emirates Stadium, fourth placed Chelsea, who face Swansea at home on Sunday, and fifth placed Tottenham, who travel to Wigan on Saturday.

Arsenal are one point ahead of Chelsea and two in front of Tottenham and their

hopes of cementing that position may have been aided by United having wrapped up the title already.

Some Arsenal fans are upset with Wenger's decision to mark United's title triumph with a guard of honour before the match, returning the respect shown by Alex Ferguson's men when they did the same soon after George Graham's Gunners team were crowned champions in 1991.

Those supporters, irritated by the presence of former Gunners captain Robin van Persie in the United line-up, plan to turn their backs on the pitch during the guard of honour.

But Wenger is keen not to rile United unnecessarily and he said: "We will respect the players that have played for us a long time as we

always have done and treat them well before and after the game.

"What I want is for us to have a good game and to beat them, it doesn't matter what kind of status they come with."

Bayern deny Lewandowski rumours

AFP, Munich

Champions League semi-finalists Bayern Munich on Friday denied reports they have signed contract agreements with Borussia Dortmund striker Robert Lewandowski.

German daily Bild had reported 24-year-old Lewandowski, who made Champions League history on Wednesday by scoring all four goals in Dortmund's 4-1 semifinal win over Real Madrid, had signed two deals to join the Bavarians.

According to reports, one contract would have allowed Lewandowski to join Bayern in July, the other would have been in the event of him joining on a free transfer when his Dortmund contract expires in June 2014.

But Bayern quickly denied there is any truth in the reports.

"Bayern refers to various reports about the player Robert Lewandowski and clarifies in this regard: FC Bayern has no contract with Robert Lewandowski," said media director Markus Hoerwick.

Having scored 34 goals this season, including ten in the Champions League, Lewandowski has refused to sign a contract extension with Dortmund and had been also linked to Premier League side Manchester United.

Zanetti meets Pope Francis



Football

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan's Javier Zanetti said Thursday he felt "emotional" after an audience with Pope Francis, at which the Nerazzurri veteran offered a number of football-related gifts to his fellow Argentine.

Pope Francis became the first Pontiff from Argentina when he was elected on March 13.

Zanetti, who like the Pope was also born in Buenos Aires, was given an hour-long audience at which they discussed "key issues and the hard work done by Inter Campus", according to the Italian club.

Zanetti, who has made over 600 appearances for Inter since 1995, told inter.it: "It was an emotional meeting because when he was elected, the first thing I wanted to do was meet him.

"Today I had the opportunity to do so and it was a real privilege. I found him to be a straightforward man, with a big heart, who will do everything in his power to help believers."

Inter said Zanetti offered the Pope, known to be a fan of Argentine side San Lorenzo, "a number of gifts" including the player's number four shirt and a captain's armband with the flags of Italy, Argentina and the Vatican City embroidered on it - along with Zanetti's and the pope's initials.



Pope Francis (R) receives an Inter Milan jersey from Argentine defender Javier Zanetti during a private meeting at the Vatican on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Suarez won't appeal ban

AFP, London

Liverpool forward Luis Suarez has not lodged an appeal against a 10-match ban for biting an opponent, England's Football Association (FA) governing body said on Friday.

Uruguay striker Suarez, 26, was suspended on Wednesday after he was shown to have bitten Chelsea's Branislav Ivanovic on the arm last weekend.

The Anfield club had said they were shocked at the severity of the ban, which rules him out for the rest of the season and into the next, and had until 1100 GMT on Friday to lodge an appeal.

But the FA said on its website: "Liverpool forward Luis Suarez has not appealed the suspension issued to him by an Independent Regulatory Commission this week."