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Wigan v Maribor

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UEFA Europa League

Swansea City v St Gallen

Live from 1:05am (Friday)

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FORBES

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# Wenger praises Ozil

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger believes his club record swoop for Mesut Ozil has revitalised Arsenal after the Germany midfielder inspired a 2-0 win over Napoli with his first goal for the Gunners.

Wenger splashed out £42.5 million (\$68.9million) to lure Ozil from Real Madrid on transfer deadline day and the midfielder's arrival in north London has coincided with a remarkable revival in Arsenal's fortunes.

An opening day defeat against Aston Villa looked set to spark unrest among unhappy Gunners fans, but Wenger has managed to get Arsenal back on track in emphatic fashion and he gives much of the credit to Ozil.

Although they were already improving before his arrival, Ozil's presence has given real belief to both his teammates and supporters frustrated by Arsenal's eight-year trophy drought.

Arsenal have won five of their six matches since Ozil's debut at Sunderland last month and Wenger agreed that Tuesday's impressive Champions League win over Napoli was their most dynamic display in recent memory.

"It was an outstanding first half for Ozil, with individual skill, finishing and the final ball. I just sat there and enjoyed it," Wenger said.

"I loved him in Madrid. I thought he was great there, we are just lucky to have got him.

"He enjoys playing and he has integrated

very quickly. He came at a period when we are doing well and that made it easier.

"We got so much stick at the start of the season and now I am a bit cautious to get excited, but of course he gave a lift to everyone around the club and belief as well. Belief is part of success."

Ozil opened the scoring in the eighth minute with a superb finish that showcased his immaculate technique and he then turned provider to set up Olivier Giroud for the second goal seven minutes later.

That was enough to maintain Arsenal's 100% start after two Group F fixtures but, with last year's runners-up Borussia Dortmund next up in back to back fixtures, Wenger isn't getting carried away just yet.

"We play Dortmund now. The group looks very tight and the key game is certainly us against Dortmund here," Wenger said.

"It will be difficult for us to go to Napoli as well. It is still a big fight.

"We are here to win trophies and there is a long way to go, but we have a good base. We have belief and a good spirit."

Wenger has enjoyed many high points during his illustrious reign at Arsenal and brushing aside one of the best teams in Italy was a fitting way to mark the 17th anniversary of his arrival at the club.

That Wenger regarded it as one of the best first half displays he had seen during his time at Arsenal said everything you need to know about the quality of Ozil, Giroud, Aaron Ramsey and company.

"Certainly at home the first half is one of the best we have played for a long time," he said.

Arsenal playmaker Mesut Ozil eyes the ball during their Champions League clash against Napoli at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Mercuries beckons Siddikur

ASIAN TOUR.COM

Siddikur Rahman will face a stern test of his title credentials when he steps up to the tee at the 600,000-dollar Mercuries Taiwan Masters which begins at the Taiwan Golf and Country Club today.

With over 30 Tour champions and players representing 20 countries in the starting field, Siddikur knows a good result against the best will be the perfect tonic for a series of high profile events coming up.

The Mercuries Taiwan Masters will offer a lucrative winner's prize purse of 120,000 dollars.

## T&T thump Chennai

SPORT DESK

Trinidad & Tobago topped points table in Group B of the Champions League Twenty20 after thumping Chennai Super Kings by eight wickets in New Delhi yesterday. A rare batting collapse by the much vaunted Super Kings batting line-up saw them get bundled out for a paltry 118 in 19.4 overs, which was overtaken quite easily by Trinidad & Tobago, with eight wickets and 29 balls to spare.

## Chelsea bounce back

AFP, Paris

Arsenal did not let down Arsene Wenger on what was his 17th anniversary as manager on Tuesday, easing to a 2-0 win over Napoli and taking a huge step towards the Champions League knockout stages.

First-half goals by record signing Mesut Ozil and in-form Frenchman Olivier Giroud, his sixth this season and coming a day after his 27th birthday, gave the Gunners their 10th successive win.

While they took a firm grip on their group with six points from two games, London rivals Chelsea got their campaign back on track, after an embarrassing opening home defeat to Basel,

with a 4-0 rout of Romanian side Steaua Bucharest.

Elsewhere Barcelona have a firm grip on their group with maximum points after a 1-0 win over a gallant Celtic, who played the last half hour with just 10 men as captain Scott Brown was sent off.

Barca have a two-point lead over AC Milan, who face them next in a double header, after the Italian side salvaged a 1-1 draw in Amsterdam with a Mario Balotelli penalty four minutes into stoppage time.

Barca's Spanish rivals Atletico Madrid displayed the grittiness that their coach Diego Simeone displayed during his playing career to come back and beat Porto 2-1 away and top their group on six points, leaving them unbeaten on the field of play this season.

Chelsea midfielder Ramires scores one of his two goals against Steaua Bucharest during their Champions League match at the National Arena Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

### RESULTS

Basel (SUI) 0 **Schalke (GER) 1** (Draxler 54)  
Steaua Bucharest (ROM) 0 **Chelsea (ENG) 4** (Ramires 20, 55, Georgievski 44-og, Lampard 90)  
**Arsenal (ENG) 2** (Ozil 8, Giroud 15) Napoli (ITA) 0  
**Borussia Dortmund (GER) 3** (Lewandowski 19, 80-pen, Reus 52) Marseille (FRA) 0  
FC Porto (POR) 1 (Martinez 16) **Atletico Madrid (ESP) 2** (Godin 58, Turan 86)  
Zenit Saint Petersburg (RUS) 0 Austria Vienna (AUT) 0  
Ajax (NED) 1 (Denswil 90) AC Milan (ITA) 1 (Balotelli-pen 90+4)

Arsenal hold a three-point lead over both Napoli and last season's beaten finalists Borussia Dortmund, who beat Marseille 3-0 and will provide a stern test for Wenger's men in the upcoming double header.

His Dortmund counterpart Jurgen Klopp had to watch his side win from the stands because of a UEFA ban, but he was delighted with what he saw as two goals from Polish striker Robert Lewandowski and another from Marco Reus saw them to an easy win.

Chelsea recovered from an early blow of Fernando Torres limping off with Brazilian Ramires playing the major role by grabbing a double, although German international Andre Schurrle was the player to take the eye.

Chelsea next face two games in succession against Schalke, who will go into the first match top of the group thanks to impressive young German international Julian Draxler's second-half goal that saw off Basel 1-0 in Switzerland.

## De Kruif defends coaching staff

SPORTS REPORTER

National football team's Dutch coach Lodewijk de Kruif yesterday denied allegations of indifference or failure brought against him and his coaching staff by the fact-finding committee of Bangladesh Football Federation on the wake of the debacle in the SAFF Championship.

"The fact-finding committee is, in my opinion, not a judging committee. They had an impression; they heard something from here, something from there. That is not hundred percent truth. You can talk hundred percent only if you were there," De Kruif said..

De Kruif defended fitness trainer Muhammet Yamali, who has been blamed for the poor fitness of the players and was recommended to be released by the fact-finding committee, "I can polish up and clear the name of Yamali because what he did was from his own side, from his experience, talking with the players, talking with the doctor and reports of hospital. We talked to the players who said I want to play, take me to the SAFF, coach I want to fight for the country. Mamunul's (Islam) MRI scan found nothing as there was no series injury, only pain. Sohel Rana got injured just two days before we left the country. So there was no time to scan. The mentality of the players was that they wanted to go. What could we do," questioned the coach.

The fact-finding committee also found that De Kruif himself was a bit reluctant as he made a short trip to the Netherlands from Thailand while the team came home and then failed to accompany the players to Nepal.

"The suggestion that I was not attentive at training is nonsense. The guy who told this about me doesn't know anything. We got stuck in strike on way to the airport and there is nobody to blame," said De Kruif.

"If the players are happy with our training, we will stay here. If they are not happy, then we will leave but I know every player is very happy with us except for only one player," said the 43-year old coach.

De Kruif, however, admitted that in the end he is responsible for the performance of the team and takes all responsibility.

## Mumbai in last four

PTI, New Delhi

Riding on skipper Rohit Sharma's blistering half-century, Mumbai Indians cruised into the Champions League Twenty20 semifinals with a crushing six-wicket victory over Perth Scorchers in their must-win final group match at Feroz Shah Kotla in Delhi on Wednesday.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**PERTH SCORCHERS:** 149 for 6 in 20 overs (Agar 35, Cartwright 28, Whiteman 51 not out; Coulter-Nile 3-19, Ojha 2-17)  
**MUMBAI INDIANS:** 152 for 4 in 13.1 overs (Smith 48, Sharma 51 not out, Pollard 23; Hogg 2-28)  
**Result:** Mumbai Indians won by six wickets.

## Rugby cries for a ground

SPORTS REPORTER

Rugby organisers have appealed for a permanent ground for them ahead of the Cooline AC School Rugby Tournament which gets underway at the Mohammedan Club premises today.

Eight schools, split into three groups, will be taking part in the fourth edition of the tournament, sponsored by Abarani International Limited. Sponsors will provide Tk 1.5 lakh out of an estimated budget of 1.8 lakh.

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