

Valencia snatch a draw

REUTERS, Madrid



Valencia forward Helder Postiga headed an equaliser in the final minute of added time to snatch a 1-1 draw at home to King's Cup holders Atletico Madrid in an intense and entertaining last 16, first leg tie on Tuesday.

After Raul Garcia had nodded the visitors ahead in the 72nd minute, Portugal forward Postiga finally beat inspired keeper Thibaut Courtois when he was on hand to send a mis-hit Sofiane Feghouli cross into the net from close range after 93 minutes.

In new coach Juan Antonio Pizzi's second game in charge, a fired-up Valencia dominated possession at the Mestalla but fell behind when a fluffed clearance by keeper Vicente Guaita fell to midfielder Garcia.

Garcia also had Atletico's best chance of the first half but his rising effort was well saved by Guaita, while Valencia's Juan Bernat drew a fine save from Courtois with a low drive seven minutes after the break.

Courtois made three more brilliant saves as Valencia pressed for an equaliser, first leaping to tip a curling effort from substitute Sergio Canales around the post in the 76th minute.

The Belgium international, on loan from Chelsea, then denied Pablo Piatti in the 82nd before producing possibly his best stop of the night a minute later from Feghouli's close-range blast.

It looked as if Diego Simeone's Atletico side, who are level with Barcelona at the top of La Liga, would hold on to their lead ahead of the second leg at the Calderon in a week's time but Postiga struck in the final action of the game.

Nevertheless, with an away goal in the bank, Atletico, who beat bitter city rivals Real Madrid 2-1 in last season's final, will be favourites to advance to face Real Betis or Athletic Bilbao, who play on Wednesday, in the quarter-finals.

Atletico have won all their home matches this season apart from a 1-1 draw against Barcelona, who they play in La Liga on Saturday, in August's Spanish Super Cup first leg.

"I think we deserved more but we are content with the draw, the tie is still open and we will carry on fighting," Postiga said told Spanish television broadcaster Canal Plus.

"The intensity of the team was good and we have to continue in the same vein," he added.

"We were up against a great goalkeeper and a solid defence and we knew how tough it would be to score a goal against Atletico."

Courtois told Canal Plus the away goal could be crucial for next week's second leg.

"It was a great match and Valencia are always a great opponent and there was a fantastic atmosphere," he said.

"In the first half we hardly created anything and in the second I had a lot of work to do.

"We were hoping to hold out until the end but it wasn't to be but the positive thing is we've scored an away goal and that's important for the return leg."



Sunderland striker Fabio Borini scores the winning goal from a penalty during their League Cup semifinal against Manchester United at the Stadium of Light on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Man United keep losing

REUTERS



Sunderland gained the upper hand on Manchester United by deservedly winning their League Cup semifinal, first leg 2-1 on Tuesday to intensify the pressure on visiting manager David Moyes after a testing week.

Italian Fabio Borini scored a second-half penalty to give the Premier League's bottom club a one-goal lead ahead of the return at Old Trafford after a 52nd minute Nemanja Vidic header cancelled out Ryan Giggs's own goal in first-half stoppage time.

It was United's third straight defeat after they were beaten at home in the FA Cup third round by Swansea City on Sunday and by Tottenham Hotspur in the league the previous week, heaping pressure on Moyes in his first season in charge.

The second leg will be on January 22 to decide who will face either favourites Manchester City or West Ham United in the

final on March 2.

For beleaguered United manager Moyes, the League Cup has developed added significance with the club already out of the FA Cup, looking unlikely to retain their Premier League title and long odds to win the Champions League.

For the fans who booed them off the pitch following the loss to Swansea, there was little to perk up the spirits.

Moyes blamed the officials, who he criticised for awarding Sunderland the free kick that led to the first goal, rather than his players who he described as being "unbelievable".

"It looks as though we are having to play them (the officials) as well as the opposition at the moment," he said.

"I thought the players, our crowd were unbelievable, the players deserved to get a result. It's a two-legged game and I am really looking forward to the second leg."

Sunderland have only reached the League Cup final once, in 1985 when they

This was the first time since 1932 that United had lost their opening three games of the year.

And also the first time since 1992 that they had lost three times in a week.

lost to Norwich City, and their fans do not need reminding they were relegated from the top flight that season.

The knockout competitions have again provided Sunderland with their only moments of relief in a miserable campaign, having won all five home ties in the League and FA Cups.

There were rows of empty seats at the Stadium of Light but those who ventured into the cold saw them make a bright start.

They kept possession well in the opening minutes, subduing a United side for whom exciting Belgian teenager Adnan Januzaj provided a lone attacking threat.

'Qatar WC will not be in summer'

REUTERS, Paris

The 2022 soccer World Cup in Qatar will not be played in the summer months, FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke said on Wednesday.

"The dates of the World Cup will not be in June or July. I think it will be played between November 15 and January 15 the latest," he told France Inter Radio.

"If you play between November 15 and, let's say, the end of December, it's the time when the weather is the most favourable," Valcke added.

"You play with a temperature equivalent to that of a rather hot spring in Europe, you play with a temperature of 25 degrees (Celsius), which is perfect to play football."

In October, FIFA delayed making a decision on whether to play the tournament in the winter saying it was setting up a consultation process to decide when the finals should be held.

After Giggs rattled the bar with a dipping drive, the 18-year-old Januzaj had the ball in the net seven minutes before halftime only to be denied the opening goal by the offside flag.

In the end it was Sunderland who made the breakthrough in first-half injury time. Jonny Evans gave away a needless free kick and Seb Larsson's whipped set piece was diverted in by Giggs under pressure from former United player Phil Bardsley.

It was the first goal United had conceded in the competition all season.

The gloom among the travelling fans was briefly lifted seven minutes into the second half when Serb defender Vidic, returning to the side, drew them level with a towering far post header.

Yet it was Sunderland who displayed a resilience lacking for much of their league campaign, retaking the lead through on-loan Liverpool forward Borini from the penalty spot after Adam Johnson had been felled in the area by Tom Cleverley.

Di Maria in hot water over gesture

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid announced on Tuesday that they will investigate a gesture made by winger Angel di Maria during their 3-0 win over Celta Vigo on Monday.

Di Maria appeared to grab his genitals after being whistled by the crowd at the Bernabeu as he was replaced by Gareth Bale with 25 minutes remaining.

However, the Argentine has denied there was any malice intended in the gesture and said he welcomed the opportunity to explain himself to the club's hierarchy.

"I made a normal gesture as I was leaving the field," he told the club's website.

"I didn't mean it to be aimed at the fans nor the coach as people are saying. It was a normal gesture that any man would do, especially when you are running."

"It seems correct to me (that the club are investigating). Not just for them to open the investigation, but also for me to explain to them the situation and what happened."

Di Maria has seen his first team opportunities limited since the arrival of Bale from Tottenham Hotspur in September.

The 25-year-old has been linked with a move away from Madrid in the January transfer window with free-spending Ligue 1 side Monaco reportedly interested.



AC Milan's latest signing Japanese midfielder Keisuke Honda (L) poses with the club's director general Adriano Galliani during his official presentation at San Siro yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Honda wants to drive Milan

AFP, Milan



official unveiling by the Serie A giants on Wednesday.

Honda joined Milan on a three-year deal on a free transfer from CSKA Moscow following a three-year spell with the Russian Premier League club.

Milan, for the second successive season, have struggled to keep pace with the Serie A pacesetters and currently sit in 11th, 27 points off the pace of leaders Juventus and 17 behind the first Champions League qualifying spot.

However the Japan international, described in the club's official presentation as part of a "new breed of bolder Japanese players", has pledged to do his best in helping Milan over-

come their difficult period.

"I've never met a Samurai... but Japanese men are known for never giving up," Honda told a packed press conference at the club's San Siro ground.

"We have a strong mentality and good discipline, so I hope I can show that kind of spirit on the pitch."

"I have to train hard, from today. I feel a lot is expected of me here so I know I have to show what I can do. I will do my best, and I will give some special things to the team."

Honda, who becomes the club's first Japanese player, has been handed the number 10 shirt worn in the past by stars like Ruud Gullit, Dejan Savicevic, Zvonimir Boban, Rui Costa and Clarence Seedorf, among others.

Club CEO Adriano Galliani said it was "only natural" to think of bestowing it on Honda following the August departure of former wearer, Ghanaian Kevin Prince Boateng, to the German Bundesliga.

"When Boateng left the club in

August, we didn't think twice about who we would give it to," said Galliani, who had agreed terms with the player months before his departure from Russia.

"Former Ballon d'Or winners at Milan, like Gianni Rivera and Ruud Gullit, have worn it and it has also been on the shoulders of great players like Savicevic, Boban, Rui Costa and Seedorf.

"Keisuke is the first Japanese player to wear the Rossonero (red and black) shirt of our club and we want to give him a warm welcome here."

Known for his dribbling, goalscoring and dead ball skills, Honda could, in theory, provide the spark to an offensive line that has scored only 28 goals in 18 games so far this season.

Honda -- who was unhappy initially at CSKA because he was played out of position -- said he is itching to play in his preferred role just behind the strikers.

Bowlers give SL edge

AFP, Dubai



Sri Lanka owed it to their bowlers for taking the opening day honours against Pakistan in the second Test in Dubai on Wednesday.

A three-pronged pace and one-man spin attack helped Sri Lanka bowl out Pakistan for just 165 after Angelo Mathews won the toss and opted to bowl on a seaming Dubai Stadium pitch.

SCOREBOARD				
PAKISTAN: First innings				
Manzoor c Prasanna b Lakmal	73			
Shehzad lbw b Pradeep	3			
Hafeez b Pradeep	21			
Younis c Prasanna b Eranga	13			
Misbah c Prasanna b Eranga	1			
Shafiq c Silva b Lakmal	6			
Sarfraz c Prasanna b Pradeep	7			
Bhatti not out	24			
Ajmal c Silva b Herath	8			
Rahat lbw b Herath	0			
Junaid lbw b Herath	2			
Extras: (lb-7)	16			
Total: (All out in 63.5 overs)	165			
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-78, 3-107, 4-109, 5-118, 6-127, 7-129, 8-151, 9-151				
Bowler				
Lakmal	21	6	45	2
Eranga	14	4	25	2
Pradeep	18	2	62	3
Herath	10.5	3	26	3
SRI LANKA: First innings				
Karunaratne lbw b Junaid	32			
Silva not out	12			
Sangakkara not out	12			
Extras: (lb-1)	1			
Total: (For one wkt in 16 overs)	57			
To bat: Sangakkara, M Jayawardene, Chandimal, Mathews, P Jayawardene, Lakmal, Eranga, Herath, Pradeep.				
Fall of wicket: 1-40				
Bowler				
Junaid	7	1	26	1
Rahat	7	1	28	0
Ajmal	1	1	0	0
Bhatti	1	0	2	0
Toss: Sri Lanka.				
Umpires: Bruce Oxenford and Sundaram Ravi.				

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