5-star Bayern

AFP, *Berlin*

Holders Bayern Munich eased their way into the German Cup semifinals with a 5-0 rout of hapless Hamburg on Wednesday while Bayer Leverkusen suffered a shock quarterfinal exit.

Bayern's Croatiajn international striker Mario Mandzukic scored a hat-trick as Hamburg's defence capitulated in what could be Bert van Marwijk's last game in charge.

After setting an unwanted club record by losing all of their last six league matches, Hamburg were again trounced at their Imtech Arena with Mandzukic, Dante and Arjen Robben scoring Bayern's first three goals.

Croatia's Mandzukic then added two more in as many second-half minutes as Bayern finished with a flurry.

118TH IFA SHIELD

Sony draws attention

SPORTS REPORTER

Ahead of Saturday's final of the 118th IFA Shield Tournament in India, Kolkata Mohammedan SC must have been working on how they can stop Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club's striking trio of Emeka Darlington, Wedson Anselme and Sony Norde.

Moreover, for the latter they will have a different plan.

On their way to the final, Sheikh Jamal scored eight goals in four matches with Haitian duo Sony and Wedson scoring three goals each while Nigerian Emeka struck two and it is very much clear that the visitors will be hoping for one more spectacular performance from the three who are believed to be the main strength of the Federation Cup champions.

"The opponents [Sheikh Jamal] have been improving match by match and it will be unwise for us to take them lightly. Their three foreign strikers are dangerous, especially Sony who is very skilled and has drawn attention after scoring three goals. And definitely we will have a different plan for him and you will see it in the match," Mohammedan coach Sanjoy Sen was quoted as saying by a Bengali daily in Kolkata.

However, Sheikh Jamal president Manjur Kader is very confident of bringing the Shield home for the first time and the boys are upbeat after beating East Bengal and Mohun Bagan.

They had a training session yesterday.

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard (C) is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal against Fulham during their Premier League encounter at Craven Cottage on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

Dull draw at Emirates

Liverpool stage stunning fightback

AFP, *London*

Arsenal missed the change to go top of the Premier League as Liverpool moved to within four points of the summit on Wednesday ahead of their FA Cup clash with the Gunners.

Arsene Wenger's men were held to a goalless draw at home to champions Manchester United while Liverpool had to twice come from behind before Steven Gerrard's stoppage-time penalty sealed a 3-2 win away to bottom-of-the table Fulham.

Arsenal were left a point behind leaders Chelsea on a night when title rivals Manchester City saw their match at home to Sunderland postponed because of severe weather battering the north-west of England that also saw Everton's game against Crystal Palace called off.

And the draw did little for United's fading hopes of claiming a Champions League place, with David Moyes's side now 11 points adrift of the top four.

Tottenham Hotspur, who looked as if they would move to within a point of fourth-placed Liverpool, remained three behind the Merseysiders despite Emmanuel Adebayor scoring twice in a crushing 4-0 win away to Newcastle.

At the Emirates, a match of few early chances came to life in the final half hour.

Arsenal come close to breaking the deadlock on the hour mark when Per Mertesacker's goal-bound header was nodded off the line by Antonio Valencia.

Former Arsenal striker Robin van Persie nearly caused his old club fresh misery when Wayne Rooney's cross found him at the back post only for the Dutch forward's header to be brilliantly turned onto the crossbar by Wojciech Szczesny.

Liverpool, fresh from their stunning 5-1 win over Arsenal at Anfield, found themselves behind in just eight minutes at Craven Cottage when Kolo Toure sliced Kieran Richardson's cross over the head of Reds goalkeeper Simon Mignolet and into the net.

But four minutes before the break, Daniel Sturridge drew Liverpool level.

Gerrard's superb pass over the top of the Fulham defence released his fellow England international and the striker steered the ball past keeper Maarten Stekelenburg as he scored for the eighth successive match.

Fulham, after Luis Suarez hit the post, went 2-1 in front when Martin Skrtel, Liverpool's two-goal hero against Arsenal, made a mess of clearing a cross into the box and Richardson scored from just a few yards out in the 63rd minute.

However, Liverpool hit back in the 72nd minute when Philippe Coutinho curled a shot past Stekelenburg with the aid of a deflection off John Heitinga.

And just when Fulham were about to collect a precious point, the fifth minute of injury time saw Sascha Riether bring down Sturridge in the box and Gerrard score from the ensuing penalty.

At St James' Park, Adebayor put Spurs 1-0 up in the 19th minute after Newcastle keeper Tim Krul pushed Nabil Bentaleb's cross straight into his path.

Adebayor was involved again when Spurs doubled their lead in the 53rd minute.

Dutch keeper Krul couldn't hold Adebayor's shot and Brazil midfielder Paulinho, who'd played in the forward with a backheel, tapped in from close range.

Krul's night got worse eight minutes from time when he could only parry Andros Townsend's shot from the edge of the area and Adebayor slammed the rebound into the turf and over the keeper to make it 3-0 to Spurs.

And before the final whistle, Nacer Chadli added a fourth goal with a

RESULTS

Arsenal 0 Manchester United 0
Fulham 2 (Toure 8-og, Richardson 63)
Liverpool 3 (Sturridge 41, Coutinho 72, Gerrard 90-pen)
Newcastle 0 **Tottenham 4** (Adebayor 19, 82, Paulinho 53, Chadli 88)
Stoke 1 (Crouch 17) Swansea 1 (Flores 52)

Postponed
Everton v Crystal Palace (due to safety concerns after building damage)
Manchester City v Sunderland (due to high

Ribery out till March

AFP, *Berlin*

France winger Franck Ribery is not expected to return for Bayern Munich until March at the earliest after recovering from a buttocks operation, according to reports.

German daily Bild say the 30-year-old is set to miss Bayern's next three matches after surgery last Thursday to repair a burst blood vessel.

Ribery will miss two Bundesliga matches, as well as Wednesday's Champions League match last 16, first leg match at Arsenal.

Ribery is not expected to return until the home match against Schalke 04 on March 1 and only then if the injury heals according to plan.

Napoli blitz Roma

REUTERS, *Rome*

Two goals in three devastating second-half minutes helped Napoli reach the Italian Cup final on Wednesday with a 3-0 win over AS Roma in the second leg of their semifinal in Naples, to clinch the tie 5-3 on aggregate.

Rafael Benitez's side, who will face Fiorentina in the final, took the lead on the night and levelled the tie when Jose Callejon scored a close-range header from right back Christian Maggio's perfectly flighted cross after 33 minutes.

An attacking blitz from Napoli in the opening minutes of the second half saw Gonzalo Higuain double their lead from a corner and Jorginho net his first Napoli goal to seal their place in May's final.

Ireland name World T20 squad

AFP, *London*

Ireland squad announced on Thursday for the World Twenty20 in Bangladesh from March 16-April 6: William Porterfield (capt), Alex Cusack, George Dockrell, Ed Joyce, Andrew McBrine, Tim Murtagh, Kevin O'Brien, Niall O'Brien, Andrew Poynter, Max Sorensen, James Shannon, Paul Stirling, Stuart Thompson, Gary Wilson, Craig Young.

De Kruif eager to solve salary issue

Wants to start a national camp as soon as possible

SPORTS REPORTER

Dutch coach Lodewijk De Kruif wants to start the national camp for the March 5 FIFA friendly against India but the Dutchman wished that the issue of his unpaid wages with the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) would be resolved.

Kruif and Rene Koster, who returned to Bangladesh on Tuesday after spending seven weeks in the Netherlands following the Christmas and annual vacation, have not been paid their wages regularly. The Dutch coaches and BFF high-ups sat for a meeting in the presence of the Dutch Ambassador in Bangladesh last year, with the BFF representatives promising a resolution as soon as the political unrest died down.

"We weren't in the country for too long and there were a lot of problems with us and in the BFF. Now we are back and we have to talk to the (BFF) president (Kazi Salahuddin) and vice president (Kazi Nabil Ahmed) about how to continue because there are some unresolved issues," Kruif told the reporters at the BFF House yesterday.

"We can't work or function when there are some important things to discuss. When all is solved we can continue on the good way," said the 42-year old coach adding that they wanted to settle their outstanding salaries of three to four months.

"There has been a deadline to solve it but there is no hard feeling and anger from us as we think it is possible to solve the problem," said Kruif, adding that he expected to sit with the BFF president and vice president on Sunday or Monday to solve the problem.

After having heard of the FIFA friendly officially yesterday, Kruif wanted to start the national camp as soon as possible even though all the players are not available at the moment.

"The thing to focus on is the match against India. We have to talk to the players as there is a very short time to prepare. Besides, Sheikh Jamal are not in the country and they also have matches remaining in the ongoing league. So we can not use their players at the moment. But what we can do is make a shortlist of 30 players and start the camp immediately with the available players," explained Kruif, who also believed that the FIFA friendly is important for him to prove his worth.

There have also been whispers that BFF may be unwilling to continue the contracts when they review the coaches' performance at the end of the first year of the Dutch duo's two-year deal. Kruif preferred not to focus on that at this early stage.

"I don't want to think negatively as there is still one year and four months left to our contract and we are fully focused on the development of Bangladesh football. Everything is prepared and we are ready to start afresh," said Kruif, who has had precious little to do since the completion of the AFC U-19 championship in Iraq last October.

El Clasico finale

AFP, *Madrid*

Barcelona will face Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey final on April 19 after they drew 1-1 away to Real Sociedad on Wednesday to progress 3-1 on aggregate.

Lionel Messi continued his return to goalscoring form after netting twice against Sevilla on Sunday, with a fine solo run and finish to put Barca in front midway through the first-half.

The hosts were then thankful to a number of saves from Enaut Zubikarai to prevent Barcelona extending their lead on the night, but the Basques got some recompense for their efforts three minutes from time when Antoine Griezmann thumped Chory Castro's low cross past Jose Manuel Pinto.

Barca boss Gerardo Martino showed he wasn't prepared to rest on last week's 2-0 win in the first leg at the Camp Nou as he named a strong side.

The visitors managed to take the sting out of the game early on by dominating possession without overly threatening the Sociedad goal.

However, after Zubikarai had parried a long-range effort from Dani Alves, the 'keeper would have been disappointed to see Messi's low strike squeeze under his outstretched arm and trundle into the net.

At the other end Carlos Vela had Sociedad's best chance of the first half, but, after knocking the ball past Pinto, Dani Alves was on hand to clear off the line.

Barcelona continued to look the more likely to score after the break as Andres Iniesta fired just wide from the edge of the area before Zubikarai made a brilliant double save to deny Messi and Cesc Fabregas.

Zubikarai came to Sociedad's rescue again 15 minutes from time when he blocked Alves's shot after the Brazilian had been played clean through on goal.

And the 'keeper's heroics were rewarded with at least a draw on the night for his side when Griezmann finished off a fine team move involving Sergio Canales and Castro to register his 17th goal of the season.