



Arsenal striker Lukas Podolski (R) scores one of his two goals against West Ham during their Premier League encounter at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

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Podolski on the double

AFP, London



Arsenal came from behind to keep alive their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League as Lukas Podolski's double inspired a vital 3-1 win over West Ham on Tuesday.

Arsene Wenger's side are in danger of failing to reach Europe's elite club competition for the first time in 17 years after a miserable run saw them surrender fourth place to Everton.

The Gunners needed a victory over their London rivals to climb back into fourth, but their European bid looked in dire straits when Matthew Jarvis struck for the visitors late in the first half at the Emirates Stadium.

That shock revitalised a previously lethargic Arsenal and German forward Lukas Podolski equalised minutes later before France striker Olivier Giroud put them ahead soon after the interval.

Podolski's second in the closing stages sealed Arsenal's first victory in their last five league games and lifted the north Londoners one point clear of Everton, although Roberto Martinez's men are still in pole position as they will reclaim fourth place if they draw or win at home to Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

Wenger had made five changes from the team that just barely got past Wigan on penalties in Saturday's FA Cup semifinal, with Swedish midfielder Kim Kallstrom making his first start and Laurent Koscielny returning from injury.

But the Gunners had been underwhelming for long periods of that Wembley win over Championship opposition, prompting Wenger to suggest his team were guilty of complacency at times, and there were few signs of any improvement in the early stages against the Hammers.

When they did get behind the West Ham rearguard thanks to Santi Cazorla's defence-splitting pass, Giroud, back in the starting line-up after being left out of that marathon Cup semi-final, could only flick a tame effort straight at Adrian.

It was a costly miss as Dortmund went 2-0 up 72 seconds later when Germany playmaker Marco Reus found Lewandowski unmarked and he slammed his shot into the top left-hand corner to reach his milestone.

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squandered a golden chance to put his side back in the game 15 minutes from the final whistle when he fired over from the goal at his mercy.

Wolves' ex-Bayern

midfielder Luiz Gustavo then hit the post in the dying stages after Malanda had a shot saved by Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Weidenfeller.

The night ended badly for the Belgian as he

had to be helped off after being injured in a goal-mouth collision.

There was more good news for

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midfielder Ilkay Gundogan

signed a one-year extension to keep him at

Borussia

until 2016 despite having last

played in August due to a back injury.

No room for veterans

AFP, Milan

FIFA WORLD CUP Brasil
Italy coach Cesare Prandelli on Tuesday ruled veterans Francesco Totti, Luca Toni and Antonio Di Natale out of his World Cup squad for Brazil as he backed Giuseppe Rossi and a clutch of emerging younger players.

Totti and Toni had notably harboured hopes of travelling to Brazil for what would have been a last World Cup hurrah -- Toni's dreams boosted by his 17-goal tally so far in Serie A this season.

However Roma captain Totti, Verona striker Toni and Udinese forward Di Natale were all ruled out by Prandelli after the coach assembled a group of 42 players from which he will select his final 23-man squad.

"I have a huge amount of respect for these players, and they deserve a much fuller explanation than they're going to get here," said Prandelli.

"But they will only be called up in case of emergencies."

Rossi, who was leading the league scoring charts before suffering a knee ligament

injury in early January, from which he is still recovering, has always had the backing of the 56-year-old coach, who appeared to leave the door open to the Fiorentina striker.

However, Prandelli said Rossi's World Cup future could depend entirely on the outcome of scheduled fitness tests.

"On Rossi I can't say anything. The tests he undergoes must be analysed and then compared with the old data we have on him," added Prandelli.

"I don't want to put any pressure on him. He needs peace to recover."

Rossi is expected to make the trip to Brazil alongside number one forward pick Balotelli.

But younger, emerging talents like Mattia Destro of Roma and Torino's Ciro Immobile, who tops Serie A scoring on 19 goals -- one more than Carlos Tevez -- are also in the reckoning.

"We 'provoked' a number of younger players recently, they've silenced their critics and reacted positively," said Prandelli.

"There's no truth to the suggestion that they both can't be in Brazil."

The Azzurri coach, meanwhile, sent a clear message to the players whose bad attitude, he says, does not belong in this summer's showpiece.

Lewandowski hits 100

AFP, Berlin

FIFA WORLD CUP Brasil
Poland striker Robert Lewandowski hit his 100th goal for Borussia Dortmund to book their place in next month's German Cup final in Tuesday's 2-0 semifinal win over VfL Wolfsburg.

Lewandowski, who joined Dortmund four seasons ago from Polish side Lech Posen, brought up his landmark goal when he scored his team's second shortly before half-time.

The 25-year-old Pole could well face his future club Bayern Munich -- whom he joins at the end of the season -- in the final as the holders play second tier Kaiserslautern at Munich's Allianz Arena on Wednesday in the second semi-final.

Lewandowski, who scored a hat-trick in the 2012 Cup final when Dortmund routed Bayern 5-2, has vowed to leave the club having delivered silverware this season and he certainly played his part in getting them nearer achieving that aim.

Dortmund took an early lead when midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan cut in from the right and unleashed a superb shot just inside the near post, past Wolfsburg

goalkeeper Max Gruen and three defenders on 12 minutes.

With half-time approaching, Belgium Under-21 international Junior Malanda hit the post for Wolfsburg and compatriot Kevin de Bruyne fired the rebound wide for the visitors.

It was a costly miss as Dortmund went 2-0 up 72 seconds later when Germany playmaker Marco Reus found Lewandowski unmarked and he slammed his shot into the top left-hand corner to reach his milestone.

Malanda squandered a golden chance to put his side back in the game 15 minutes from the final whistle when he fired over from the goal at his mercy.

Wolves' ex-Bayern midfielder Luiz Gustavo then hit the post in the dying stages after Malanda had a shot saved by Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Weidenfeller.

The night ended badly for the Belgian as he had to be helped off after being injured in a goal-mouth collision.

There was more good news for Dortmund before kick-off when injury-hit Germany midfielder Ilkay Gundogan signed a one-year extension to keep him at Borussia until 2016 despite having last played in August due to a back injury.

Tevez denies Messi rift

AFP, Buenos Aires

Juventus striker Carlos Tevez has denied suggestions that a falling out with Lionel Messi is behind his ongoing absence from the Argentina side, saying that the two players "get on well".

"I don't know where they got such nonsense from! Everyone publishes it but the truth is that we get on well. We have shared moments together, training sessions, matches and there has never been a problem. He is a charming and very polite person," said Tevez in an interview with the Argentine daily Cronica on Wednesday.

"This should be his World Cup and I hope that is the case with all my heart because he is a marvellous player. He and Cristiano (Ronaldo), with whom I played at Manchester United, are the best players in the world."



PHOTO: AFP

High demand as WC tickets sales open

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

FIFA WORLD CUP Brasil
Governing body FIFA on Tuesday opened the final sales phase for World Cup tickets and reported 126,837 of 199,519 available for 54 of the 64 matches were snapped up within four hours.

Brazilian nationals bagged two thirds of the latest sales, FIFA said, accounting for 80,496 tickets with 46,341 tickets going to fans outside the host nation on a first-come, first-served basis via the FIFA website.

FIFA added its ticketing pick-up centers in the 12 host cities would open from Friday, save for Brasilia and Porto Alegre, where they will only be available from next month.

Small-scale unrest continues

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

FIFA WORLD CUP Brasil
Several hundred people marched through Brazil's biggest city on Tuesday in a peaceful protest that was the latest in a series of small demonstrations against the upcoming World Cup.

Brazil will host the June 12-July 13 tournament for the first time since 1950 but there is unrest among locals who believe too much money has been spent on preparing for the global showpiece to the detriment of public services such as health, education and transport.

Protesters braved the torrential rain and a heavy police presence to chant, "There's Not Going To Be A World Cup" and "FIFA Go Home".

Such protests are small but frequent and follow a more widespread wave of demonstrations that took place during last year's Confederations Cup when more than a million people took to the streets to protest what they contend is insufficient social spending.

The protests continued after the tournament ended but the appearance of increasingly violent elements saw the numbers attending plummet. Tuesday's demonstration was peaceful.

With the kick off less than two months away, three of the stadia are still unfinished and several airports and public transportation projects are late, scaled back, or have been abandoned altogether.

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