

ZLATAN FACES BAN

Paris Saint-Germain's volatile star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic could face a four match suspension over comments he made about his host country which one French minister called "insulting". The French league will study the Swedish player's latest outburst at a meeting on Thursday and a source close to the dossier said he could face up to a four match ban. However, the punishment would not be imposed on Thursday as they would decide then whether or not to summon him to a hearing over the incident and that would be within three weeks.

- AFP



Sunderland appoint Advocaat

AFP, London

English Premier League strugglers Sunderland on Tuesday named former Dutch national coach Dick Advocaat as their new manager.

Sunderland quickly made the appointment after sacking Gus Poyet on Monday after a stinging 4-0 home defeat to Aston Villa. The 67-year was named as coach for the rest of the season in a club statement.

Sunderland chairman Ellis Short said: "Dick has an incredible CV and vast experience of managing at the very highest level. We have one aim only now -- to climb the table and everyone is fully focused on the task ahead of us."

Advocaat said: "Sunderland is a big club and I am very much looking forward to the challenge ahead. We must now concentrate on Saturday as a priority and I can't wait to get started."



Manchester City players jog during a training session in Manchester yesterday ahead of their do-or-die Champions League round of 16 encounter against Barcelona.

PHOTO: AFP

Historic task for Man City

AFP, Barcelona



Manchester City face a huge challenge if they are to reach the last eight of the Champions League for the first time ever by overturning a 2-1 first leg deficit when they travel to an in-form Barcelona on Wednesday.

The English champions were outplayed at home for the second season in a row at this stage of the competition three weeks ago and could have been even further behind travelling to the Catalan capital had Joe Hart not saved a Lionel Messi penalty in stoppage time at the Etihad.

Both sides also come into the game at the Camp Nou in contrasting form domestically. City's title challenge appears all but over after a shock 1-0 defeat at relegation threatened Burnley on Saturday, whilst Barca have soared to the top of La Liga in recent weeks on a run of 16 victories in their last 17 games.

Yet, City boss Manuel Pellegrini is insistent that his job is not on the line should elimination at the Camp Nou all but seal a trophyless season.

"I have no sense whatsoever that my job's at risk," the Chilean told The Guardian.

"The Champions League is very important but it can't distort everything."

Pellegrini was criticised by many for his over-eager attacking intent in the first leg, which allowed Barca's star front three of Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar to prosper.

However, he believes that philosophy is what still gives them a chance despite the daunting prospect of having to win at the Camp Nou.

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Bhutan stun Lanka

India through; Pakistan game postponed

AGENCIES



The world's lowest-ranked team, Bhutan, pulled off a seismic shock on Tuesday when they overcame Sri Lanka to reach the second round in their first ever World Cup qualifying campaign.

"Two goals from "the Ronaldo of Bhutan," Chhencho Gyeltshen, ensured a 2-1 win in the second leg and a shock 3-1 aggregate victory, sparking wild celebrations in the capital Thimphu.

The striker opened the scoring on five minutes and he was mobbed by his teammates when he coolly struck the winner in the 90th minute, sealing Bhutan's progression.

The victory at Changlimithang Stadium follows last week's 1-0 win in Colombo and comes after ex-Sri Lanka captain Ashok Nawgalage even questioned the point of playing Bhutan.

Theirs was not the only fairytale win as East Timor, one of the world's youngest and poorest nations, sent Mongolia crashing out 5-1 on aggregate in chilly Ulan Bator.

Sleeping giants India made it through thanks to a 0-0 draw with Nepal in Kathmandu, following last week's 2-0 victory in the east Indian city of Guwahati.

But Pakistan's home leg against Yemen in Lahore was postponed and shifted to an as-yet-unnamed neutral venue after a deadly Taliban attack on churches in the city.

The move was another blow to sport in Pakistan, who trail 3-1 from the first leg, after a 2009 attack in Lahore put tours by international cricket teams on hold.

Cambodia and Chinese Taipei were the two other teams booking their place in the main qualifying round.

The draw for the second round will be held on 14 April 2015 in Kuala Lumpur and will consist of 40 teams divided into eight groups with teams ranked 1-34 in Asia playing against the six teams from the first round.

Foster out for a month

AFP, London

West Bromwich Albion's England international goalkeeper Ben Foster has been ruled out for at least a month after injuring his knee, the Premier League club announced on Tuesday.

Foster, 31, damaged cartilage in his knee during his side's 1-0 win over Stoke City on Saturday and was forced off early in the second half.

The news means he will not be available for England's 2016 European Championship qualifier against Lithuania and friendly against Italy later this month.

"It's rotten news for Ben because he's been so consistent," West Brom manager Tony Pulis told the club website.

A lucky Henderson strike

AFP, Swansea



Jordan Henderson's fortuitous goal earned Liverpool a 1-0 win at Swansea on Monday as they moved within two points of fourth-placed Manchester United ahead of an eagerly-anticipated showdown against their bitter rivals.

Henderson scored for a third successive Premier League game to make it five successive top-flight victories for Brendan Rodgers' team as their charge for the Champions League continues to gather pace.

Yet there was more than a stroke of luck about Henderson's second-half winner after Swansea defender Jordi Amat's attempted clearance ricocheted off the onrushing Liverpool midfielder and looped over goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski.

That will be of little concern to Liverpool's former Swansea manager Rodgers on what was a happy return to the Liberty Stadium that means his team

can leapfrog old foes United should they defeat them at Anfield on Sunday.

They certainly have momentum following what has been a remarkable turnaround in recent months following a sluggish start and that this was a sixth successive away clean sheet for the first time since 1972 merely added gloss.

The result was harsh on a Swansea side who had already defeated Arsenal and United at home this term, yet they were ultimately left to rue a series of first-half missed chances.

There was no place for Mario Balotelli in the Liverpool squad due to illness, while Steven Gerrard - available for the first time since February 10 following a hamstring problem - had to settle for coming on as a second-half substitute.

One player who did make the starting line-ups, however, was Swansea forward Bafetimbi Gomis, who was declared fit 12 days after collapsing on the pitch during the loss at Tottenham.

The France international showed no signs of any ill-effects from his

recent scare and he was denied a 21st-minute opener when he headed Wayne Routledge's cross goalwards only for Martin Skrtel to clear off the line.

Another typically slick Swans move soon followed with Ki Sung-yueng's raking ball out wide to Neil Taylor controlled superbly by the left-back as he got the better of Emre Can.

Taylor fed the ball inside to Gylfi Sigurdsson who, with back to goal, rolled former Swansea star Joe Allen with a sharp turn only to bend his shot beyond the right-angle of the post.

The midfielder found that very corner perfectly minutes later with a brilliant instinctive effort which Simon Mignolet, at full stretch, superbly tipped around his post.

The danger was far from averted, though, as Jonjo Shelvey was picked out from a short-corner routine and, connecting cleanly with his first-time strike, he looked set to be celebrating against his former club until his shot inadvertently deflected off Adam Lallana and away for another corner.

Reading book Arsenal semi showdown

AFP, Reading

Reading booked an FA Cup semifinal clash against holders Arsenal after romping to a 3-0 victory over 10-man Bradford in their quarterfinal replay on Monday.

Steve Clarke's Championship side had been held to a goalless draw by their third tier opponents in the first meeting at Valley Parade.

But Reading avoided the same fate as Chelsea and Sunderland, the two Premier League teams dumped out of the competition by Bradford this season, as they easily moved into their first FA Cup semifinal since 1927.

Mahmudullah

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Of Mahmudullah's inclusion, the Herald wrote, "Mahmudullah mauled the New Zealand bowling, the first to do so in this tournament and his dashing 128 not out is enough to oust Faf du Plessis.

Mahmudullah has now hit two centuries in a row and his bowling (68 ODI wickets) helps with selection."

Although it is an unofficial list, Mahmudullah must be proud -- as are his fans -- to be included in a side alongside such illustrious names, although the right-handed batsman's performances certainly merit such an inclusion.

Klopp plots an upset

AFP, Dortmund



Borussia Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp is confident his side can reach the Champions League quarterfinals and in the process record their first ever home win over Italian opponents Juventus on Wednesday.

Dortmund, who beat Juventus to secure their sole Champions League trophy in 1997 in Munich, trail 2-1 after the first leg but Klopp is upbeat about them avoiding the fates of their predecessors on the three previous occasions they have hosted the Italian champions and lost.



JURGEN KLOPP

Klopp's side have taken 14 points from a possible 18 in the league recently, but have been held to goalless draws in both of their last two games, latterly Saturday's home match with Cologne.

"One should not see this result too negatively," said Klopp.

"The only good thing from the Cologne result was that we saw what didn't work.

"We can do better, we have already shown that.

"The aim remains to reach the Champions League's quarterfinals and the

boys can do it."

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri is waiting on his playmaker Andrea Pirlo, who is rated as doubtful with a calf injury, which forced him off in the first-half of the first leg clash.

Allegri is set to use a 3-5-2 formation with Patrice Evra, Paul Pogba, Claudio Marchisio, Arturo Vidal and Stephan Lichtsteiner in defence.

Juventus received a boost on Saturday when defender Andrea Barzagli made his first start, in the win against Palermo, after a long injury lay-off.

Juventus are looking to reach the quarterfinals for only the second time since 2006, exiting at the last eight stage in the 2012/2013 campaign at the hands of Bayern Munich, who went on to beat Dortmund in the final.

But Juve have a strong record over two legs against German opposition and have won 12 of their 15 European matches with three defeats.

They will look to the experience of Argentinian striker Carlos Tevez to get them across the line.

The Argentinian scored three of Juventus' seven goals in the group stage.

Similarly Klopp will need his attacking duo of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Marco Reus, who scored Dortmund's goal in Turin, firing on all cylinders.

Aubameyang has scored five goals in his last seven matches, while Reus has shown superb form since recovering from two ankle injuries before Christmas.

Robert Lewandowski's departure for Bayern Munich last season left some big shoes to fill in the striking department at Dortmund.

While he has failed to make a mark in the Bundesliga, Italy striker Ciro Immobile has been a different player in the Champions League, scoring four times in five group stage matches.



Liverpool midfielder Jordan Henderson (R) celebrates his all-important goal against Swansea City during their Premier League clash at the Liberty Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Roma's hopes over

AFP, Milan



Goals by Lorenzo Di Silvestri and Luis Muriel secured a stunning 2-0 win in the Italian capital as Sampdoria virtually ended 10-man Roma's hopes of the Serie A title on Monday.

Roma welcomed Sinisa Mihajlovic's side hoping to reduce their deficit to Juventus after the league leaders took their advantage to 14 points with victory over Palermo on Saturday.

But on a night of high drama at a rain-lashed Stadio Olimpico, Rudi Garcia's men were left lamenting a series of missed first-half chances when Di Silvestri, then Muriel, struck in the second half to leave the hosts with a mountain to climb.

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