

VAN GAAL'S LAST JOB

Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal revealed on Thursday that he plans to retire when his reign at Old Trafford comes to an end. The 63-year-old former Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Netherlands coach is under contract with United until 2017 and he will walk away from the sport for good either when that deal expires or at the end of any extension. "I am old. This is my last job. For sure," van Gaal said in an interview with the Daily Telegraph.

- AFP



Uzbeks gear up for qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER



Pre-qualifier favourites Uzbekistan's light warm-up at the BFF Artificial turf in the evening soon after their arrival in the capital yesterday indicated how the Central Asian nation is serious about the qualifiers of the AFC U-23 Championship, also a meet of Brazil Olympic Qualifiers.

Having had only a couple of hours rest at the hotel, the Uzbekistan team, a 72nd FIFA ranked side, reached the BFF turf with almost sundown and left the artificial turf in dark after sweating themselves.

"We are now only thinking of our group matches and finish it well to advance to the next round. Afterwards, we will think about our chances in the Olympics," said Uzbekistan coach Bakhtiyor Ashurmatov after the short warm-up session.

A 31-member contingent of Uzbekistan arrived in Dhaka yesterday five days before their official arrival as the team management wants the players to get used to the weather of Bangladesh and feel better before the start of the qualifiers.

Bakhtiyor have been given the charges of the Olympic team in the last month after Uzbekistan U-23 side failed to produce good results in International King Cup in Thailand where Uzbekistan U-23 lost to South Korea 0-1 and Honduras U-20 2-5 and won 5-2 against Thailand U-23.

Under the guidance of Bakhtiyor, Uzbekistan Olympic team, who have been together for nearly one year, played out a goalless draw against Vietnam last Saturday.

Bakhtiyor believes hosts Bangladesh and India have been improving under their respective foreign coaches for the last one year while Syria are strong opponents with very good physic.

The Uzbekistan coach, however, doesn't like to bracket any opponents as tough one for them rather he believes the qualifiers will be an entertaining tourney.



Uzbekistan under-23 players jog at the BFF artificial turf in Motijheel yesterday evening. The Uzbekistan team arrived in Dhaka in the afternoon to participate in the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers, which begin on March 27.

PHOTO: STAR

2022 WC final on Dec 18

AFP, Zurich

Football's governing body FIFA on Thursday approved holding the final of the controversial 2022 World Cup in Qatar on December 18 at the end of the first tournament held in the northern winter, a top official said.

FIFA is also aiming "in principle" for a tournament of just 28 days, four days shorter than previous World Cups, FIFA communications chief Walter de Gregorio told reporters after a meeting of the body's executive.

He said the exact starting date would be decided after talks with federations and representatives of top clubs.

FIFA had to change from the traditional June-July World Cup because of the scorching summer temperatures in Qatar.

But the issue has caused months of debate within football's leadership because of the disruption to national championships, particularly in Europe's powerful leagues.

"The final will be on December 18. It is a Sunday and it is also the national day of Qatar," de Gregorio said.

Sevilla face Zenit test

AFP, Nyon

Holders Sevilla will have to win in Russia to keep their defence on track after the Spanish side were drawn to play Zenit St Petersburg in the Europa League quarterfinals on Friday in Nyon, Switzerland.

Sevilla, who crushed domestic rivals Villarreal 5-2 on aggregate to reach the last eight, have met the 2008 winners four times including a quarter-final triumph in 2006 when they went on to win the UEFA Cup.

The first leg will be in Sevilla.

In-form Bundesliga side Wolfsburg host Napoli in the first leg of their last-eight matchup while Dynamo Kiev await the second Italian side Fiorentina.

Finally Club Brugge must travel to Ukraine and a difficult opening match against Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk before returning to Belgium for the return fixture.

Teams from Russia and Ukraine were kept apart in the draw, following a ruling by UEFA over the ongoing unrest in the region.

First leg matches will be played April 16 with the return fixtures on April 23. The final takes place at Warsaw on May 27.

DRAW

Sevilla (ESP) v Zenit St Petersburg (RUS)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk (UKR) v Club Brugge (BEL)
Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v Fiorentina (ITA)
Wolfsburg (GER) v Napoli (ITA)

Atletico's chance for revenge

AFP, Nyon



Holders Real Madrid will have to overcome city rivals Atletico in the Champions League quarterfinals, in a repeat of last year's final, while Barcelona face familiar opponents in Paris Saint-Germain after the draw made Friday in Nyon.

Portuguese giants Porto host Bayern Munich of Germany in the first leg of their last eight matchup while Italian champions Juventus welcome the Monaco side who knocked out English side Arsenal in midweek.

Sergio Ramos equalised in the dying minutes in Lisbon last year to send the final to extra-time before Real prevailed 4-1 over Diego Simeone's Atletico for their 10th European crown.

Real's legendary striker and current director of institutional relations at the club Emilio Butragueno thinks the tie is finely poised.

"Atletico are a competitive side and we have faced each other a lot this season and know each other well," said the Spaniard in reference to the six matches the two clubs have played with Real yet to register a victory since last year's final.

"They're a side who know how to compete, they let in few goals, are good from dead balls and get the best out of each situation. We will see if we can beat them and come back for the draw for the semifinals."

"The Champions League is a different competition altogether.

You never know if it's an advantage playing the second leg at home. We have to be at our best because we know exactly the difficulties that we're going to face. We need to be right on it if we want to go through."

Atletico are the Spanish champions and currently third in La Liga with Real seven points above them in second and Barcelona top of the league and one point above Carlo Ancelotti's glamour side led by

quarterfinals when the Spaniards prevailed on away goals after a 3-3 aggregate draw.

The French champions will be without suspended star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic for the first leg after the Swede was given a one-match ban following his sending off in the last-16 victory over Chelsea.

Barcelona vice-president Jordi Mestre knows the two sides are familiar foes.



Cristiano Ronaldo.

"Football doesn't have a memory. It would be a big error to think about the recent results we have had against Real Madrid," said Atletico director Clemente Villaverde.

Barcelona and PSG met in the group stages with both teams winning their respective home ties while they also met in the 2013

"PSG are old foes for us and we met them in the group phase. They're a great team who have reinforced their squad significantly and we're going to have to fight for the victory," he explained.

"In the quarterfinals, all the teams are strong and PSG are a strong team, very strong and it's going to be difficult for us."

Barca, who overcame Manchester City 3-1 on aggregate, are on track for a treble of Liga, Copa del Rey and the Champions League trophies as their high-flying side ride on the crest of a streak that has seen them win 17 of their last 18 matches.

Porto won the first of their two European Cups in 1987 when they defeated Bayern, their quarterfinal opponents, in Vienna.

Bayern's international goalkeeper Manuel Neuer expects a great atmosphere for the first leg in Portugal.

"The atmosphere in Porto is very heated. I witnessed the Porto fans during the 2004 Champions League final against Monaco," said Neuer.

"The atmosphere was amazing. With these fans it won't be easy for us, but we have played in many different stadiums with varying atmospheres and we will know what to expect," added the World Cup winner.

Finally Serie A leaders Juventus, who won the competition in 1985 and 1996, take on 2004 finalists Monaco with the first leg scheduled for Turin.

Monaco coach Leonardo Jardim expects a tough two-legged matchup against the Italian giants.

"Juventus are among the biggest sides. They are the favourites. We're lucky to have the second leg at home. We'll try to make the most of this quarterfinal."

First leg matches will be played on April 14/15 with the return legs on April 21/22.

The final will be played in Berlin on June 6.

City aim to rebound

AFP, London



After a chastening fortnight in the Champions League, the tussle to qualify for next season's tournament takes priority in the Premier League this weekend, with Manchester United's trip to Liverpool top-

ping the bill. Manchester City's 1-0 loss at Barcelona on Wednesday ended English interest in this season's Champions League and the champions are one of six clubs now apparently vying for three berths in the 2015-16 competition.

Leaders Chelsea, six points clear of second-place City with a game in hand, already appear guaranteed to qualify, but Manuel Pellegrini's side's place in the top four is no longer as secure.

Consecutive away defeats to Liverpool and Burnley have seen City's lead over third-placed Arsenal eroded to a single point, with United a point further back in fourth place and Liverpool two points further back in fifth.

Southampton and Tottenham Hotspur, meanwhile, are only six points below the top four, and with home games against strugglers Burnley and bottom club Leicester City respectively on their agendas this weekend, will be confident of making up ground on the teams above them.

Three days after a defeat at Camp Nou marked by Lionel Messi's brilliance and Joe Hart's heroics in the visitors' goal, City return to league action with a lunchtime game at home to West Bromwich Albion on Saturday.

FIXTURES

Saturday
(1500 GMT unless otherwise stated):
Aston Villa v Swansea City, Manchester City v West Bromwich Albion (1245 GMT), Newcastle United v Arsenal, Southampton v Burnley, Stoke City v Crystal Palace, Tottenham Hotspur v Leicester City, West Ham United v Sunderland (1730 GMT)

Sunday
(1600 GMT unless otherwise stated):
Hull City v Chelsea, Liverpool v Manchester United (1330 GMT), Queens Park Rangers v Everton

Sad end to a great journey

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While this episode has ended, the Tigers will now move on to a series of cricket contests this year. They are scheduled to face Pakistan, India, South Africa and Australia this year. If they can hold on to the brand of cricket that they displayed throughout the mega event, they could very well spring a few surprises.

Ibra handed 1-match ban

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint-Germain's volatile star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic will miss the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinal after being banned for one match for his sending-off in the last round against Chelsea.

But his Ivory Coast teammate Serge Aurier will have to sit out three matches for his outburst criticising the match referee on social media.

Ibrahimovic was shown a straight red card by Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers in the 32nd minute of the second leg against Chelsea following a 50-50 challenge with Oscar.

The Swede is facing a further four-match suspension over comments he made about his host country at the end of last weekend's defeat at Bordeaux.

ICC blasts Kamal

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stand for the Indian Cricket Council.

"I cannot represent the Indian Cricket Council. If someone has imposed a result on us, in that case no one can accept it," added Kamal, who is a minister in the Bangladeshi government.

Meanwhile the Indian cricket board said Kamal should have made his feelings known to his fellow administrators before airing them in public.

"I wish he could have taken all these issues on the ICC platform during the ICC meetings," said Anurag Thakur, the Indian board secretary.

"The (reality) is we've won against Bangladesh and India have won all the previous matches in the league stage. I think it's time to move ahead...we can discuss and debate these issues in the next meeting."

Clarke hails whirlwind

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Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday.

Clarke said he was looking forward to the challenge against India, who bounced back from a winless Test and one-day tour of Australia prior to the World Cup to win seven World Cup matches in a row.

"The fact that we move on gives us confidence," he said. "We have been improving slowly and every win gives you momentum."

"India and Pakistan have different strengths and weaknesses. India have been here for a long time and have worked out the conditions."



Major general Anwarul Momen, military secretary of Bangladesh Army, poses with the 19th Transcom Golf Tournament winner Jong Ok Park and ladies' winner Fatema Matiu during the prize giving ceremony at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

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