ZLATAN 'DOESN'T EVEN TAKE ASPIRIN'

Mino Raiola says Zlatan Ibrahimovic will sue for defamation of character after former Swedish athletics coach Ulf Karlsson accused the PSG striker of doping. Karlsson is reported to have said: "Zlatan put on 10 kilos in six months [while at Juventus]. I think he was doping, that's how it seems to me." Ibrahimovic will make no comment on the allegations but his agent revealed he will look to take legal action. Riola also made clear that measures had been taken in the past to ensure Zlatan was clean, "we had plenty of doping controls [during the alleged period]. Zlatan was tested between 15 and 20 times. He was tested all the time. At all the clubs Zlatan has been at, he doesn't even take aspirin!". -- AGENCIES



Argentina overtake Belgium

AFP, Paris

Argentina reclaimed top spot from Belgium in Thursday's FIFA world rankings, while Copa America champions Chile soared to an all-time high of third place.

Three straight wins in 2018 World Cup qualifiers helped Argentina return to the summit, five months after they were supplanted by Belgium.

Chile moved up two places from fifth, with Colombia climbing from eighth to fourth and Uruguay moving back into the top 10 as a reward for their strong start to South American qualifying.

TOP TEN 1. Argentina (+1)

- 2. Belgium (-1) 3. Chile (+2)
- Colombia (+4)
- Germany (-1)
- 6. Spain (-3) 7. Brazil (-1)
- 8. Portugal (-1)
- 9. Uruguay (+2)
- 10. England (-1)

Braithwaite's message to Stokes' mum

AGENCIES, London

Just a few days after smashing Ben Stokes for four consecutive sixes to help West Indies defeat Englnad in the World Twenty20 final, Braithwaite left her a beautiful message during a radio cricket show.

"Commiserations to her [Stokes' mother]. Want to say to her: just keep your head up, your son is and will continue to be an absolute legend and you have support from all over the West Indies and over India," Brathwaite said.

"I actually had a chat with Ben and there was no animosity with me and there is none from me towards him as well."



Wolfsburg midfielder Maximilian Arnold (L) celebrates scoring the second goal with teammate Andre Schuerrle during their Champions League quarterfinal first-leg against Real Madrid in Wolfsburg on Wednesday.

рното: AFP

Wolfsburg stun Real

AFP, Wolfsburg



Zinedine Zidane's Real Madrid suffered a shock 2-0 Champions League defeat at Wolfsburg in Wednesday's

quarterfinal, first-leg to leave them on the verge of a European exit. Just five days after ending

Barcelona's 39-game unbeaten run with a 2-1 away win in El Clasico, Real were humbled as Wolfsburg ignored their struggling mid-table form in Germany's top flight.

Real never recovered as first-half goals from Swiss defender Ricardo Rodriguez and Maximilian Arnold put the hosts 2-0 up at the Volkswagen Arena with 25 minutes gone.

"I'm not happy, above all with the first-half. This can happen if you don't play with intensity from the start," said Zidane.

"Despite everything I'm proud of the team, we have to think about resting well and think about the return because we have the chance to

change this in the return leg." Real's six-game winning streak

was ended as Wolfsburg picked up -- Danilo in for Dani Carvajal at beating Gent in the last 16 of the which beat Barcelona. tournament.

Wolfsburg needed a 93rd minute equaliser to seal a 1-1 draw with relegation-threatened Darmstadt on their last home league appearance.

There was no hint they would bother Real when they crashed 3-0 at Bayer Leverkusen last Friday in Germany's top flight.

Manchester United 3-2 at home in the group stages, Wolfsburg now have the upper hand ahead of Tuesday's return leg at the Bernabeu.

But goal-scorer Arnold insists nothing has been decided yet.

"There is no point getting carried away. We have only finished 55 percent of the job," he said after his first Champions League goal.

It was a poor performance from Real's star forwards as Gareth Bale was kept quiet and Cristiano Ronaldo rarely shook of his markers.

France forward Karim Benzema

their first win in four games since right-back -- from the ten-man side Wolfsburg coach Dieter Hecking

To give the result context, gambled by starting inexperienced Brazilian Bruno Henrique on the right wing. Centre-back Naldo was also

rushed back after dislocating his shoulder in February, but both selections were rewarded. There was little hint of the drama to

come as Real needed just 74 seconds But having also beaten to put the ball in the Wolfsburg net. Ronaldo made a late run and

> tucked his shot past Diego Benaglio, but the offside flag went up. The hosts started to find their feet

> before taking a shock 18th minute lead. Italian referee Gianluca Rocchi pointed straight to the spot when Real midfielder Casemiro put in a

> Andre Schuerrle. Real goalkeeper Keylor Navas tried to unsettle the taker, but Rodriguez nailed the spot kick.

clumsy foul on Wolfsburg striker

It was the first Champions League went off on 41 minutes after a knock. goal Navas had conceded after 738 Zidane had made just one change minutes.

Advantage Man City

AFP, Paris



Away goals by Kevin De Bruyne and Fernandinho handed Manchester City a 2-2 first-leg draw at Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday to give the

English side the edge in their Champions League quarterfinal tie. On a night that will be remembered for

some comical defending and a Zlatan Ibrahimovic penalty that was saved by City goalkeeper Joe Hart, the Premier League side twice punished mistakes by their hosts. De Bruyne put City ahead on 38 minutes,

only for Ibrahimovic to level after an embarrassing mix-up in the visitors' defence soon after. Adrien Rabiot then put PSG ahead just

before the hour, but Fernandinho made it 2-2 on 72 minutes and ensured the French giants will be chasing the tie in next Tuesday's second leg. "It was a crazy game and we played our

part in a great game of football," Hart told BT Sport. "It's up to us to make the away goals

count. We are making history for the club

and we don't want it to end."

City were appearing at this stage for the first time and were handicapped by the absences of injured captain Vincent Kompany, Yaya Toure and Raheem Sterling. However, Hart had recovered from injury

in time to play and De Bruyne started after making his own comeback from two months on the sidelines at the weekend, giving the English side's attack a fearsome look to it. PSG, conquerors of Chelsea in the last 16,

feared Sergio Aguero the most, though, and the stocky Argentinian striker coaxed a yellow card out of David Luiz inside 20 seconds after getting in behind the Brazilian. The home support were furious soon

after when Serbian referee Milorad Mazic refused to give Paris a penalty after Blaise Matuidi went down in the box under pressure from Eliaquim Mangala, but PSG did win a spot-kick in the 13th minute for a foul by Bacary Sagna on Luiz.

Ibrahimovic stepped up, but was thwarted by Hart, who dived low to his right to make the save.

City made Ibrahimovic pay as they opened the scoring seven minutes before half-time, capitalising on loose play in the Paris midfield.

Marcelo told to 'cut the acting'

AFP, Wolfsburg



Wolfsburg coach Dieter Hecking has told Real Madrid defender Marcelo to "cut out the acting" following his antics during his team's 2-0 Champions League quarterfinal first-leg defeat in Germany.

The Brazil left-back thrust his head towards Wolfsburg midfielder Maximilian Arnold's chest in the 69th minute of Real's shock defeat, then crumpled to the turf, clutching his face.

Arnold, who scored Wolfsburg's second after a penalty from Ricardo Rodriguez, was shown a yellow card, while Marcelo escaped a booking for the incident.

"Marcelo is an actor," fumed Hecking.

The Wolfsburg coach sought out the Real star at Wolfsburg's Volkswagen Arena stadium after the game to tell him not to try anything similar for the return leg in Madrid on Tuesday. "I told Marcelo to cut his acting out. He couldn't have

complained if he'd found himself no longer on the pitch after that scene," added Hecking. "Arnold got a yellow card he didn't deserve. That

annoyed me, because there was no need." Arnold gave a tongue-in-cheek answer when asked about the incident following his heated exchange with Marcelo or

the pitch. "We ended up talking about our haircuts," said the to Argentine businessmen German with a grin.

Police raid **UEFA HQ**

REUTERS, Nyon

Swiss police raided the headquarters of the European soccer body UEFA on Wednesday to gather information about a contract signed by Gianni Infantino that was reported in the Panama Papers. The Swiss attorney-

general's (OAG) office said the search in Nyon, Switzerland, was part of "ongoing criminal proceedings". Infantino said in a state-

ment issued by the soccer body that he welcomed any investigation into the matter. He said on Tuesday he was "dismayed that his integrity was being doubted".

Reports from multiple news organizations said on Tuesday that UEFA sold broadcast rights for 2006-09 Champions League matches Hugo and Mariano Jinkis.

We do not dream

Leicester City manager Claudio Ranieri wrote for 'The Players' Tribune' -- a media platform that provides conversation and publishes first-person stories directly from athletes, presents direct reflections, thoughts and experiences of professional athletes. Here Ranieri, the man behind the Foxes fairytale run, talks about his first night in the sleepy town, his experience baking pizzas with the squad and his ambitions for the future.



I remember my first meeting with the chairman when I arrived at Leicester City this summer. He sat down with me and said, "Claudio, this is a very important year for the club. It is very important for us to stay in the

Premier League. We have to stay safe." My reply was, "Okay, sure. We'll work hard on the training ground and try to achieve this."

Forty points. That was the goal. That was the total we needed to stay in the first division, to give our fans another season of Premier League football. Back then, I did not dream that I would open the paper on April 4 and see Leicester City at the top of the table with 69 points. Last year on this same day, the club was at the bottom of the table.

Unbelievable.

I am 64 years old, so I do not go out much. My wife has been with me for 40 years, so on my off days, I try to stay close to her. We go out to the lake by our house or maybe if we are feeling adventurous we watch a movie. But lately, I have indeed been hearing the noise from all over the world. It is impossible to ignore. I have heard we even have some new supporters in America following us.

To you, I say: Welcome to the club. We are happy to have you. I want you to love the way we play football, and I want you to love my players, because their journey is unbelievable.

Perhaps you have heard their names now. Players who were considered too small or too slow for other clubs. N'Golo Kanté. Jamie Vardy. Wes Morgan. Danny Drinkwater. Riyad Mahrez. When I arrived for my first day of training and I saw the quality of these players, I knew how good they could be. Well, I knew we had a chance to survive in the Premier League.

This player Kanté, he was running so hard I thought he must have a pack full of batteries hidden in his shorts. He never stopped running in training. I had to tell him, "Hey, N'Golo, slow down. Slow down. Don't run after the ball every time, okay?"

He says to me, "Yes, boss. Okay." Ten seconds later, I look over and he's running

again. Itell him, "One day, I'm going to see you cross the ball, and then finish with a headeryourself."

He's unbelievable, but he is not the only key. There are too many keys to name in this

incredible season. Jamie Vardy, for example. This is not a footballer. This is a fantastic horse. He has a need to be free out there on the pitch. I say to him, "You are free to move however you want, but you must help us when we lose the ball. That's all I ask of you. If you start to press the opposition,

all of your teammates will follow you." Before we played our first match of the season, I told the players, "I want you to play for your teammates. We are a little team, so we have to fight with all our heart, with all our soul. I don't care the name of the opponent.



All I want is for you to fight. If they are better than us, Okay, congratulations. But they have to show us they are better."

There was a fantastic electricity in Leicester from the very first day. It starts from the chairman and goes to the players, the staff, the fans. It was unbelievable what I felt. In the King Power Stadium, there was a terrific energy.

Do the fans sing only when we have the ball? Oh, no, no, no. When we are under pressure, the fans understand our pain and they sing their hearts out. They understand the

complexity of the game, and when the players are suffering. They are very, very close to us. We started the season very well. But our goal, I repeat, was to save the club from relegation. The first nine games, we were winning, but we were

giving up many goals. We had to score two or

three goals to win every game. It concerned me.

Before every game, I said, "Come on boys, come on. Clean sheet today."

No clean sheet. I tried every motivation. So finally, before the game against Crystal Palace, I said, "Come on boys, come on. I offer

you a pizza if you get a clean sheet." Of course, my players made a clean sheet against Crystal Palace. One-nil.

So I stood by our deal and took my players to Peter Pizzeria in Leicester Square. But I had a surprise for them when we got there. I said, "You have to work for everything. You work for your pizza, too. We will make our own."

So we went into the kitchen and we tossed our own pies. It was very good, too. I enjoyed many slices. What can I say? I'm an Italian man. I love my pizza and my pasta.

Now, we make a lot of clean sheets. A dozen clean sheets after the pizza, in fact. I think this is no coincidence.

We have six games left, and we must continue fighting with our heart and our soul. This is a small club that is showing the world what can be achieved through spirit and determination. Twenty-six players. Twenty-six different brains. But one heart.

A few years ago, many of my players were in lower leagues. Vardy was working in a factory. Kanté was in the third tier of the French league. Mahrez was in the French fourth division. Now, we are fighting for a title. The Leicester

fans I meet in the street tell me they are dream-

ing. But I say to them, "Okay, you dream for us. We do not dream. We simply work hard." No matter what happens to end this season, I think our story is important for all football fans around the world. It gives hope to all the young players out there who have been told they are not good enough. They can say to themselves, "How do I arrive at the top level? If Vardy can do this, if

What do you need to arrive? A big name? No. A big contract? No.

Kanté can do this, maybe I can too."

son, we will have two pizza parties.

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