

What to WATCH

CHANNEL 9 & STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

Indian Premier League

Kolkata v Chennai

Live from 8:30pm

TEN 1

Europa League semifinal

Arsenal v Atl. Madrid

Live from 1:05am (Friday)

TEN 2

Europa League semifinal

Marseille v Salzburg

Live from 1:05am (Friday)

FIFA PROPOSES BIENNIAL MINI WORLD CUP

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has proposed staging what would effectively be a mini-World Cup, featuring eight international teams, every two years in addition to the traditional event. The tournament, known as the "Final 8", would be the climax of a proposed global Nations League competition, part of an ambitious plan to reform international football which FIFA believes could be worth \$25 billion in a 12-year cycle. In a letter seen by Reuters, Infantino, who has already overseen the enlargement of the existing World Cup from 32 to 48 teams starting in 2026, suggested that the new tournament would take place every October and/or November of every odd year starting from 2021. He said that a "solid and serious" group of investors were willing to spend \$25 billion on the competition and a revamped version of the Club World Cup, which would also start in 2021 with 24 teams. The new competition would run parallel to existing international tournaments.

—REUTERS



You have to suffer: Zizou

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid scrapped their way into a third consecutive Champions League final on Tuesday and coach Zinedine Zidane said he would not have wanted it any other way.

After their last-gasp win over Juventus in the quarterfinals, Real were left hanging on against Bayern Munich at the Santiago Bernabeu as Karim Benzema's double secured a 2-2 draw and 4-3 win on aggregate.

When Joshua Kimmich gave Bayern an early lead and James Rodriguez levelled with 27 minutes remaining, Real looked in danger of surrendering their 2-1 advantage from the first leg. By the end, Real's fans were begging for the whistle. Zidane, however, insists the grit his team have shown to overcome PSG, Juve, and now Bayern, should not be underestimated.

"In football, you have to suffer," Zidane said. "You cannot be in the final without suffering, it's even better, more beautiful when you win like that. Madrid never gives up. It is the same in adversity, we believe in what we do and we get things done by believing in ourselves and fighting."

Real, and Zidane, are now on the brink of a third consecutive Champions League triumph, and 13th overall in Europe's premier tournament. Bayern, meanwhile, are left wondering what might have been after dominating large spells of the two legs but paying a heavy price for individual mistakes.

"If you look at both games it is quite apparent we were the best team," Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes said. "I'm very disappointed in the result. We dominated, I believe, and they should thank Keylor Navas for his performance in goal, he was spectacular, particularly towards the end of the match."

On Ullreich's error, Heynckes added: "He had a little blackout, he got confused, he didn't realise he couldn't pick it up with his hands. It's terrible for a player to live through such a moment, but nevertheless we did have a lot of opportunities, and all in all our 'keeper performed well."

PHOTO: REUTERS



The Real Madrid players held nothing back in their celebrations after grinding out a 2-2 draw against Bayern Munich in the second leg of their Champions League semifinal on Tuesday night. Los Blancos won the tie 4-3 on aggregate and advanced to their third straight final.

Miracle men survive German siege

REUTERS, Madrid



Real Madrid's passage to a third consecutive Champions League final after their 2-2 draw at home to Bayern Munich was described as being akin to a miracle in the media after they rode their luck for the third game running.

Bayern goalkeeper Sven Ulreich's catastrophic error which led to Karim Benzema's second goal for Madrid in the semifinal second leg was termed "a gift" in the Barcelona-based media, who also highlighted a handball by Marcelo in the area which went unpunished right before half-time when the score was 1-1.

"Words can't describe how disappointed I am for being knocked out," Ulreich wrote on Instagram after the game. "We desperately wanted to reach the final and we gave our best and then this needless mistake happens to me. I can't explain it. I'm sorry for my team and for you fans."

Just as they did in the first leg in Munich, where Real escaped with a 2-1 victory, Bayern took the lead at the Santiago Bernabeu through Joshua Kimmich. However, the German champions failed to capitalise on their dominance and were beaten 4-3 on aggregate, knocked out by Madrid for the third time in four years.

"This is how Madrid qualify,"

howled Catalan daily Sport, adding that they had reached a third final in a row "with more refereeing help and a lot of luck".

Fellow Barcelona newspaper Mundo Deportivo called the decision not to penalise Marcelo "outrageous", labelled Ulreich's slip "an epic gaffe", and describing Madrid goalkeeper Keylor Navas as their "lifesaver".

French newspaper L'Equipe said simply: "Madrid walk on water".

Bayern fired 22 shots, hitting the target with half of them and had an additional nine attempts blocked while winning 11 corners and 60 per cent possession, prompting Madrid daily ABC to say Zinedine Zidane's

side "survived the German siege".

However, Real midfielder Luka Modric shrugged off suggestions that they were fortunate to go through.

"There's always some controversy. People are always trying to minimise our success, but we're used to that," said the Croatian.

Real had also sneaked through their quarterfinal tie against Juventus 4-3 on aggregate, qualifying with the help of a hotly contested injury-time penalty.

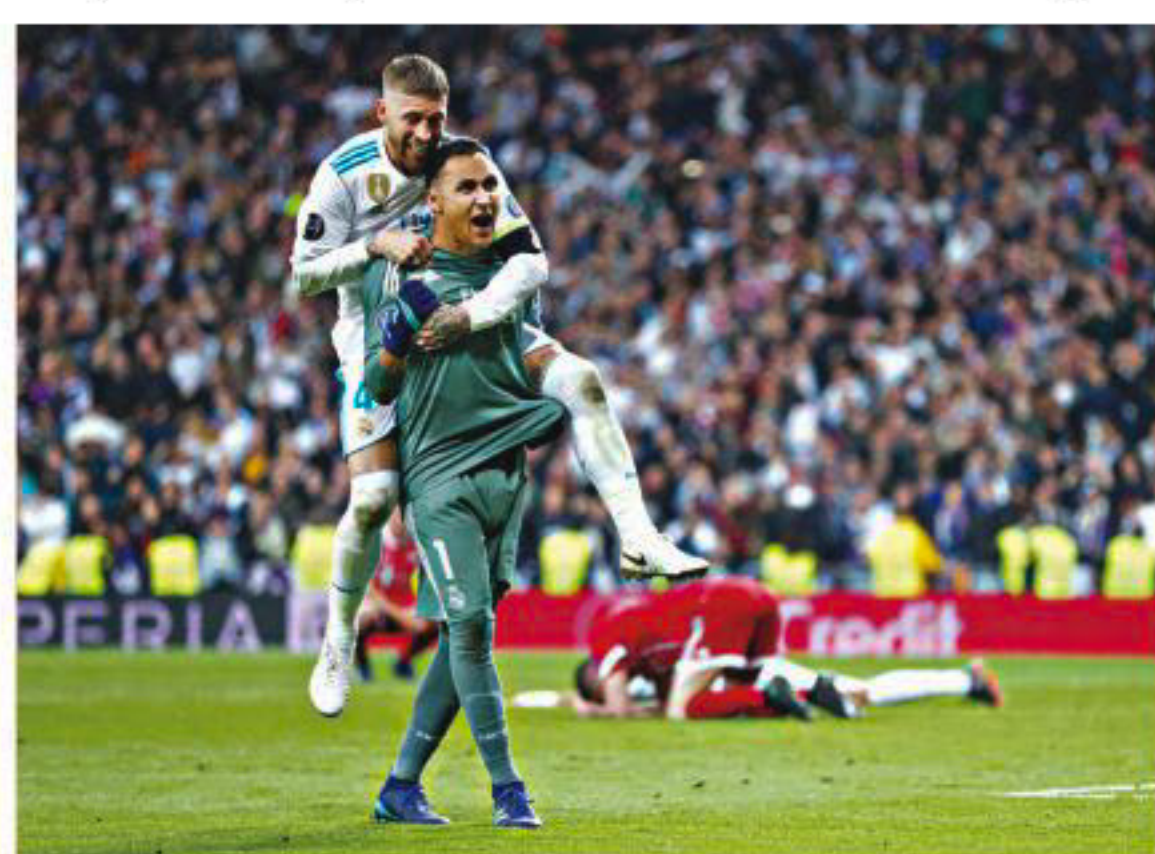
Unlike the aftermath of their second leg against the Italians, which was dominated by seething complaints from Juve captain Gianluigi Buffon and president Andre Agnelli,

there were few gripes from Bayern about Turkish referee Cüneyt Çakır.

"The referee did a good job, we didn't lose because of him," said Bayern forward Thomas Müller. "Keylor Navas was outstanding and he saved Madrid on many occasions."

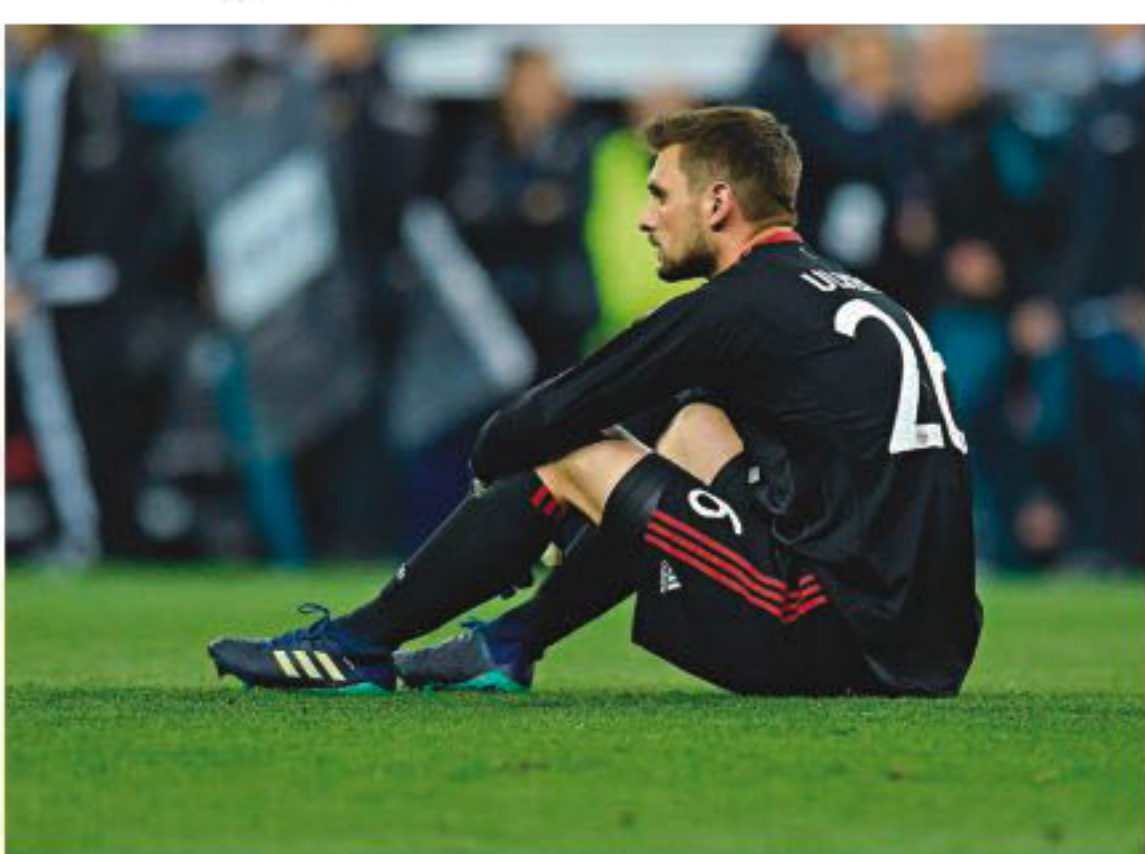
Marcelo admitted that he was lucky to get away with blocking a shot from Kimmich with his hand.

"If I say it didn't hit me [on the hand] I'd be lying, but football is like that," said the Brazilian. "I don't talk about referees, but it's clear that sometimes they go in your favour and other times against you, but whatever happens, you have to play football."



It was very much a tale of two goalkeepers on Tuesday night. Real Madrid stopper Keylor Navas pulled out all the stops to withstand a barrage on his goal while his Bayern Munich counterpart Sven Ulreich (R) was responsible for a monumental error that turned the tide in the opposition's favour.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED/REUTERS



A cruel reminder

Abahani defeated 5-1 by New Radiant

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani evoked bitter memories of the national team as the Sky Blues suffered a thumping 5-1 defeat at the hands of New Radiant Club in their AFC Cup encounter at the National Football Stadium in Male yesterday.

Abahani had gone to Maldives with hopes of securing at least a point against New Radiant after playing out a 1-1 draw with Indian outfit Aizawl FC at home. However, something dreadful awaited the seven-time professional football league champions, who could not have imagined such a humiliating defeat, one that was as embarrassing as the national team's defeat to Maldives in a friendly in September 2016.

In that game, Bangladesh, under the guidance of Belgian coach Tom Saintfiet, succumbed to a devastating 5-0 defeat.

Although there were positive signs for Abahani at the start of their penultimate match of the round -- they had more possession and mustered the first shot on target -- the Sky Blues conceded the opener from the spot after Nigerian defender Alison Udoka had brought down the famed Ali Ashfaq. Ali

Fasir, who had struck the decisive goal in a 1-0 win in the sides' previous fixture in Dhaka, converted from the spot in the 19th minute to put the Maldivian Premier League champions ahead.

The front two of Ashfaq and Fasir caused plenty more problems, but Abahani weathered the storm and attempted to build from the back before launching two good attacks in the dying moments of the first half.

Abahani finally hit back after resumption, Japanese midfielder Seiya Kojima levelling the margin with a right-footed shot from outside the box in the 46th minute.

However just as it seemed that Abahani were beginning to press their opponents in order to exact revenge for their home defeat, New Radiant blitzed the visitors with three goals in the space of eight minutes to take the game away.

Kojima's goal seemed to have only added fuel to New Radiant's attack and the promising Fasir completed a quickfire hatrick with strikes in the 51st and 56th minutes before Ashfaq added the fourth and fifth goals in the 58th and 88th minutes to consolidate New Radiant's lead at the top of Group E with 12 points from five matches.

It was the third defeat for Abahani, who are now in third place in the four-team table with four points.

They will play their final match against Bengaluru FC at home on May 16.

Abahani into last 8

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani advanced to the quarterfinals of the Walton U-18 Football tournament with an emphatic 4-0 win over Mutkijoddha Sangsad at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Abahani, who were declared 3-0 winners in their previous game after Farashganj were found guilty of fielding an over-age player, emerged Group D champions with six points from two outings. The Sky Blues went ahead in the fourth minute with a strike from Apan Chandra, who doubled lead in the 23rd minute before Rimon Hossain and Md Rony netted one goal apiece in the 33rd and 78th minute respectively.

In the day's other match, Brothers Union handed a 4-1 defeat to Sheikh Russel KC, riding on braces from Ashikur and Raihan while Saiful pulled one goal back for Sheikh Russel KC.

Women thumped by Malaysia in opener

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh women's football team suffered a 7-1 defeat to Malaysia in their opener of the AFC Women's Futsal Championship in Bangkok yesterday.

The girls in red and green took the lead in the third minute in the five-a-side match when Masura Parvin struck, but Golam Rabbani Choton's charges failed to negotiate the pace of futsal thereafter.

Malaysia hit back in the same minute in the 20-minute-per-half match, before doubling the margin a minute later. They scored three more goals to take a 5-1 lead into the break before adding two more in the second half to complete the rout.

Bangladesh will play their second match against Vietnam on Friday.

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