

‘Silva is the perfect player’

REUTERS, Lisbon

Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola said Bernardo Silva was the “perfect player” after the Portuguese midfielder’s double helped his side to secure a 5-0 win over Sporting Lisbon in their Champions League last-16 first leg on Tuesday.

Silva scored his first-ever Champions League brace and his first goals in the competition in almost a year in a vintage display, a performance all the sweeter given that he came through the academy at Sporting’s rivals Benfica.

“I always tell him ‘you are the perfect player’,” Guardiola said. “With the ball he is more than exceptional, but I always say to him you have to go and win games, you have to have the ability to do it. He has the technique, everything.

“This was his home town, and he loves coming back here. Of course he is a former Benfica player, so this was special for him tonight.”

Despite steering his side to their biggest ever win in an away game in any round of the competition, the Spaniard was not totally satisfied with what he saw.

“We defended well and got an incredible result,” he added. “We have a duty to look at the performance too, even if the result is a dream.”



Kylian Mbappe slots one past Thibaut Courtois to give Paris Saint-Germain a crucial 1-0 victory at home against Real Madrid in their Champions League last-16 fixture on Tuesday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Mbappe undecided on future

REUTERS

France international Kylian Mbappe said he is happy at Paris St Germain, but the forward still remains undecided over his future at the Ligue 1 club as rumours continue to swirl over a possible move to Spanish giants Real Madrid.

On Tuesday Mbappe scored a late winner as PSG defeated Real 1-0 in the first leg of the pair’s last-16 match-up in the Champions League.

The 23-year-old’s PSG contract is due to expire at the end of this season.

“I’ve not decided my future. I play for Paris Saint Germain, one of the best clubs

in the world,” Mbappe told broadcaster Movistar after Tuesday’s match.

His goal triggered wild celebrations from PSG fans, and Mbappe was asked whether Tuesday’s acclaim might play a part in shaping his decision.

“No, I’ve not decided,” he replied. “I give my best and then we will see what happens next season.”

Now Mbappe, who has 22 goals and 16 assists in all competitions for PSG this season, is expected by many to move to Real on a free transfer at the end of this campaign, having so far resisted offer to sign a new deal with the Parisian club.

“How to ignore the (transfer) context?

It’s easy, you have to play football,” Mbappe told broadcaster Canal Plus.

“We ask too many questions, we say too many things. We talk about PSG and Real, two big clubs. I’m a PSG player, I’m always very happy.”

Meanwhile, Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti recognised his side had no answer to Mbappe, acknowledging the match-winner was “unstoppable”.

“Mbappe is unstoppable,” Ancelotti was quoted as saying by Marca.

“We have tried to control him. [Eder] Militao has done very well but [Mbappe] can always invent something out of nothing, and he created at the last minute.”

Troubled Barca face Napoli

AFP, Madrid

Joan Laporta claimed Barcelona are “back as big players” but Thursday will mark another checkpoint in the club’s decline as they face Napoli in the knock-out stage of the Europa League.

After failing to make it out of their Champions League group, Barca will play in Europe’s second-tier tournament for the first time since losing to Celtic at the last-16 stage in March 2004.

Laporta was in the opening season of his first spell as president that year and while Barcelona’s fortunes would soon improve exponentially as Pep Guardiola and Lionel Messi got to work, nobody can be optimistic a similar transformation is close now.

Barcelona’s players were likely watching on television on Tuesday as Messi played – and missed a penalty – for Paris Saint-Germain against Real Madrid in Paris, the kind of heavyweight European tie to which the Catalans would be normally more accustomed.

There are some positive signs that head coach Xavi Hernandez is steering the team in the right direction, even if erratic results and performances are a reminder of the work still to be done.

Barca defeated Atletico Madrid 4-2 earlier this month in one of the most encouraging displays under Xavi, but a 2-2 draw away at city rivals Espanyol last weekend saw doubts resurface ahead of the visit of Napoli to the Camp Nou.

The youthful Barca side’s attempt to rebuild their reputation in the Europa League will come under a severe examination against opponents who sit third in Serie A and have conceded only 17 goals in 25 matches..



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