Robben and Neuer out

Resurgent Schalke pose threat to Bavarians

BERLIN, Sept 18, (AFP): Following their best start to a Bundesliga season in six years, resurgent Schalke are relishing Tuesday's home clash with Bayern Munich, whose coach Carlo Ancelotti has faced criticism from one of his former mentors.

Schalke have won three of their first four league games, including beating Champions League contenders RB Leipzig, under new coach Domenico Tedesco, who is only 32.

They are fourth in the table, one place below champions Bayern, who have an identical record of three wins and a defeat but are third on goal difference.

Robben

A win in Gelsenkirchen could put Schalke top as current leaders Borussia Dortmund play Hamburg on Wednesday, the same day second-placed Hanover are at Freiburg.

But Tedesco is warning his side to not get ahead of themselves.

"If you go into the game thinking that you want to lead the table, then you forget all the small steps you need to take," said the Schalke coach.

Nevertheless, there is an air of confidence around the Veltins Arena.

"If you play against Bayern you have to step out with your head held high -- which we can now do," said Schalke midfielder Leon Goretzka, who hit the winner in Saturday's 2-1 victory at Werder Bremen.

Goretzka, 22, shone at the Confederations Cup in the summer when Germany lifted the trophy but is out of contract next June and likely to be on Bayern's radar.

Bayern hammered Mainz 4-0 on Saturday after suffering a shock league defeat at Hoffenheim a week earlier. Their challenge is proving it was not a one-off.

M'gladbach vs Stuttgart beIN SPORTS 5 HD
19:30 local
Schalke vs Bayern beIN SPORTS 5 HD
21:30 local
Augsburg vs Leipzig beIN SPORTS 6 HD
21:30 local
Wolfsburg vs Werder beIN SPORTS 7 HD
21:30 local
Cologne vs Frankfurt beIN SPORTS 5 HD
19:30 local (Wednesday)
Hamburg vs Dortmund beIN SPORTS 5 HD
21:30 local (Wednesday)
Hertha vs Leverkusen beIN SPORTS MAX 5
21:30 local (Wednesday)
Mainz vs Hoffenheim beIN SPORTS 10 HD
21:30 local (Wednesday)

"We must confirm that this is not unique," said Arjen Robben, who scored Bayern's second goal against Mainz but will be missing in Gelsenkirchen with flu.

Bayern have confirmed Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer is out after injuring his left foot, the same one he had surgery on for a stress fracture in May. Sven Ulreich will deputise.

Juan Bernat and David Alaba are also missing but Thomas Mueller will hope to keep his place after impressing his coach at the weekend.

"He played well and was fantastic in his movement, even without the ball," enthused Ancelotti.

Centre-back Jerome Boateng is set to be rested having only just returned from injury.

The biggest threat facing Ancelotti and sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic is keeping the squad together amidst obvious cracks.

Hot-shot striker Robert Lewandowski, who has now scored 82 goals in 100 league games for Bayern, has criticised the club's spending policy.

Robben slammed the team's performance for struggling to break down 10-man Anderlecht before winning 3-0 in the Champions League last midweek. And winger Franck Ribery threw his shirt at the bench in a temper after being substituted in that same game.

Now Ancelotti has been criticised by his former coach Arrigo Sacchi.

"It looks as though some changes would do Bayern good," Sacchi, one of Italy's former top coaches, told German broadcaster Sport1.

"One gets older and loses the passion and the absolute will -- that's life," added the 71-year-old in a thinly-veiled attack on Ancelotti.

"I have the impression that the enthusiasm of the team has been lost."

The 58-year-old Ancelotti is one of Europe's most successful coaches having won three Champions League titles with AC Milan and Real Madrid.

As a player, Ancelotti won the European Cup under Sacchi in 1989 and 1990 at Milan.

Meanwhile, former Mainz boss Martin Schmidt has been appointed by Wolfsburg to replace Andries Jonker, who was sacked following Saturday's 1-0 defeat at VfB Stuttgart.

Schmidt will get an early chance to assess his new charges as they host Bremen on Tuesday evening before going to Bayern on Friday.

PSG win again but tensions simmer between Neymar, Cavani

PARIS, Sept 18, (AFP): Paris Saint-Germain kept their perfect start to the season going on Sunday, but the 2-0 win over Lyon also laid bare certain tensions in their all-star front line.

PSG were leading 1-0 at the Parc des Princes when they won a penalty with 10 minutes remaining for a foul on Kylian Mbappe, making his home debut.

Having already scored three times from the spot this season, Edinson Cavani assumed the responsibility would once again be his.

SOCCER

Neymar tried to get the ball from the Uruguayan but it was Cavani who eventually took it. And his effort was brilliantly saved, Anthony Lopes tipping the ball onto the bar.

"The penalties are taken by a couple of players, one is Cavani and the other is Neymar. There needs to be a gentleman's agreement on the pitch to decide who takes the penalties," coach Unai Emery admitted later.

Those comments, and the fact Cavani was unsuccessful from the spot, suggests Neymar will get his chance in future.

The Brazilian had previously tried and failed to grab the ball from Cavani when a penalty was awarded in the 3-0 win over Saint-Etienne last month. Cavani scored that time.

Lyon's Dutch forward Memphis Depay (right), vies with Paris Saint-Germain's French defender Presnel Kimpembe during the French Ligue 1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Lyon (OL) at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sept 17. (AFP)

Earlier in Sunday's game, the duo disagreed over who should take a free-kick with the match still goalless. Dani Alves intervened to give his compatriot the ball on that occasion, and Neymar's strike was saved.

"They are two great players. They want to score goals. There are no problems between them, everything is fine," insisted PSG defender Presnel Kimpembe.

Most coaches would envy the embarrassment of riches at Emery's disposal.

The 'MCN' front line of Mbappe, Cavani and Neymar has cost the capital club 466 million euros ($557 million, £411 million) but now the coach has to somehow keep them all happy.

Cavani scored a remarkable 49 goals in all competitions last season and already has nine this season — it would have been 10 had the opener against Lyon not been credited as a Marcelo own goal.

But Cavani, who previously lived in the shadow of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, has seen PSG commit the two biggest transfer fees in history to sign Neymar and Mbappe.

And 222 million-euro man Neymar has come to Paris to be the main man after spending four years in Lionel Messi's shadow at Barcelona.

"This victory has exposed tensions between Neymar and Cavani," said sports daily L'Equipe on its front page on Monday.

The 'MCN' scored eight goals between them in their first two matches together against Metz (5-1) and Celtic (5-0), but Sunday was less encouraging.

Cavani saw very little of the ball, while Neymar and Mbappe were relatively subdued, even if they combined to force PSG's second on the night, a Jeremy Morel own goal.

Julian Draxler, a 40 million-euro signing from Wolfsburg in January, was also shoehorned into the team on Sunday but overloading the side with attacking stars is to the detriment of the overall balance.

PSG have not slipped up yet, but Sunday's game showed that Emery has plenty on his plate.

Burton face daunting task of trip to Old Trafford

Liverpool's Ox set for first in League Cup

LONDON, Sept 18, (AFP): Liverpool take on Leicester City in the pick of the English League Cup ties this week as manager Jurgen Klopp seeks to eradicate the frustrating defensive blunders dogging his team.

Other all-Premier League ties pit struggling Crystal Palace against Huddersfield, West Brom against Manchester City, Bournemouth against Brighton, while Manchester United face Burton Albion in a low-key start to their title defence.

Burnley vs Leeds beIN SPORTS 1 HD
21:45 local
Leicester vs Liverpool beIN SPORTS 2 HD, 11 HD
21:45 local
Reading vs Swansea beIN SPORTS 12 HD
22:00 local
Chelsea vs Nott Forest beIN SPORTS 12 HD
21:45 local (Wednesday)
Arsenal vs Doncaster beIN SPORTS 13 HD
21:45 local (Wednesday)
WBA vs Man City beIN SPORTS 2 HD
22:00 local (Wednesday)
Man U vs Burton beIN SPORTS 11 HD
22:00 local (Wednesday)

Liverpool, United and the other teams in European competition only enter the draw for the League Cup, called the Carabao Cup this season after its new sponsors, at the third-round stage

Klopp's Liverpool started the season brightly but have stuttered over the past week, with a 5-0 defeat to Manchester City followed by frustrating draws against Sevilla in the Champions League and Burnley in the Premier League.

The manager is set to make changes for Tuesday's match at Leicester, handing midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, who joined on transfer deadline day from Arsenal, his first start for the club after three substitute appearances.

"It is a fantastic opportunity for Alex because since he has been (here) it has been difficult to train on different things because of game after game after game," Klopp said at his pre-match press conference on Monday.

"There is no rush but we are in this three-game-a-week rhythm and during the international break he was with the national team.

"But it is a long-term project so I have no problem. We sat together with him and the analysts and showed him how we want him to play in this position and that position."

Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (left), runs away from Burnley's Scottish-born Canadian midfielder Scott Arfield. (AFP)

Leicester themselves are looking to kickstart their season after a disappointing start that sees the 2015-16 Premier League champions languishing in 15th place but striker Jamie Vardy, who has a groin problem, is a major doubt.

Also on Tuesday, Roy Hodgson's Palace play Huddersfield at Selhurst Park after a 1-0 defeat to Southampton saw them become the first Premier League side to lose their first five games and fail to score.

Burton face the daunting task of a trip to Old Trafford on Wednesday, 11 years after they held United to a 0-0 draw at home in the FA Cup before losing the replay 5-0.

Burton boss Nigel Clough hailed the "transformation of the club since the last time we played them as a part-time Conference side", when he was in his first spell as Burton boss.

"We are only one league behind them after 11 years," he said. "It's remarkable how far we have come. The one outstanding memory of the game last time at the Pirelli was when they brought on (Cristiano) Ronaldo and (Wayne) Rooney after 60 minutes.

"I think the tie has financially helped the club to build a solid foundation."

Elsewhere on Wednesday, Arsenal take on Doncaster Rovers at home and Chelsea host Nottingham Forest.

Meanwhile, West Brom midfielder Gareth Barry plans to play on for as long as possible after equalling Ryan Giggs's Premier League appearance record at the weekend.

The 36-year-old started in the Baggies' 0-0 draw against West Ham on Saturday to draw level with the Manchester United legend's mark of 632 games.

Manchester United's Belgian midfielder Marouane Fellaini congratulates Manchester United's Armenian midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan (right), on scoring a goal. (AFP)

Dembele to undergo surgery on Tuesday

Bale intent on bouncing back from boos

MADRID, Sept 18, (AFP): Gareth Bale believes he can still win over the Real Madrid faithful after silencing his critics with a sensational solo goal to seal a vital 3-1 win at Real Sociedad on Sunday.

Bale had been jeered by his own fans in Madrid's 3-0 Champions League win over APOEL Nicosia in midweek for an underwhelming start to the season, particularly in Cristiano Ronaldo's absence due to a five-game ban.

The Welshman failed to find the net as Real dropped points at home to Valencia and Levante to allow Barcelona to open up a four-point lead at the top of La Liga. But Bale helped Madrid get back to winning ways in impressive style by ending Sociedad's own 100 percent start to the season.

"It's normal, it happens in football," Bale told Spanish TV station Movistar of the criticism that has come his way.

Bale

"For me obviously I just have to try to keep my head down and keep working hard. That's all I can do.

"I can't control what goes on, I can only control how hard I work on the pitch.

"You go through ups and downs in your career, but it is how you bounce back."

Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane believes Bale's strike can be a turning point in his season.

Bale used his electric pace to burst past Kevin Rodrigues before dinking the ball over the advancing Geronimo Rulli.

"He needed to score a goal and in this manner. After a run of 60 metres, technically he finished it very well," said Zidane.

However, the Frenchman insisted the man, who joined Madrid for a then world record fee in 2013, can still do much more to impress.

"I am happy for him, but for me he is still not at his best. Little-by-little we are going to discover the best of Gareth.

"Today he played great, but I know he can do much more. We need to be patient."

Despite his struggles of late, Bale has always shone at Anoeta as he added to his impressive record of six goals in five games in San Sebastian.

"It's great to always score, but the most important thing was to get the three points for the team, get back on track and get back to winning ways," added Bale.

Victory lifted Real up to fourth and ensured the remain just four points adrift of Barca, who had temporarily extended their lead to seven with victory at Getafe on Saturday.

"Today the most important thing was to win because when you look at the table and see Madrid so low down it is strange," said Zidane.

"Now we are back on form, but we need to continue because we have another game on Wednesday."

Barcelona's record 105 million-euro ($125 million) signing Ousmane Dembele will undergo surgery on the torn hamstring that has ruled him out of action for up to four months in Helsinki on Tuesday.

"Dembele travelled on Monday morning to Helsinki, Finland, where he will undergo surgery to repair a rupture of the biceps femoris tendon in his left thigh," Barcelona said in a statement on Monday.

SOCCER

"Dembele was accompanied by team physician, Dr. Ricard Pruna. Dembele will be operated on Tuesday by Dr. Sakari Orava."

In pictures published by Spanish sports daily Marca, Dembele needed the aid of a wheelchair as he left Barcelona airport for the Finnish capital.

The French international has made just three appearances for Barca since sealing his move from Borussia Dortmund last month for a fee that could rise to as much as 145 million euros based on performance-related bonuses.

However, he looks set to miss the rest of the year after hurting his hamstring after attempting a backheel just 29 minutes into Saturday's 2-1 win at Getafe.

Giro d'Italia unveils challenging Israel start

JERUSALEM, Sept 18, (AFP): Alberto Contador and Ivan Basso helped unveil plans Monday for a challenging start to the 2018 Giro d'Italia in Israel, the first time one of cycling's three major races will begin outside Europe.

The two cycling stars attended a press conference in Jerusalem detailing the start for the Italian race next year, with the first three stages to be hosted by Israel from May 4-6.

It will begin with a time-trial in hilly Jerusalem, followed by two other stages, one that will follow the Mediterranean coast from Haifa to Tel Aviv and another that will begin in Beersheba in the Negev desert and end in Eilat on the Red Sea.

The opening time-trial will be 10.1 kms, while the second stage is 167 kms and the third 226.

The Jerusalem leg will pass by Israel's parliament and begin and end near the walls of the ancient Old City, holy to Christians, Muslims and Jews.

"It's 10 kms up and down, lots of corners," Basso, a two-time Giro winner, said of the time-trial.

CYCLING

"The second stage and the third stage, when you ride on the coast, on the desert, lots of wind maybe, can be already not an easy start for the race," the Italian added.

The recently retired Contador, who also won the Giro twice, said riders will have to weigh how much to risk in the time-trial.

"In my case, if I'm here, for sure I don't take a big risk because you can lose more than you can win," the Spaniard said. "It will be a very hard three stages."

Besides Haifa and Tel Aviv, the second day will see the riders curve around Acre as well as pass the ancient Romanera port city of Caesarea and Zichron Yaakov in the Carmel Mountains.

Day three also includes Mitzpe Ramon in the Negev desert, on the edge of the world's largest erosion crater.

Giro officials, Italian sport minister Luca Lotti and Israeli ministers described the start as an opportunity to bring different cultures and countries together.

It is a major coup for Israel, allowing it to promote its tourism industry in a year when it also celebrates 70 years since the country's creation.

"The philosophy that the Giro d'Italia has always had is to say something about history, places, culture, and I think there isn't anything more important than the one of Jerusalem and all of Israel," said Giro director Mauro Vegni.

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