

Roles reversed

Milan struggle and Lazio 'fly'

MILAN, Jan 25, (RTRS): At the start of the season, AC Milan were seen as a side capable of challenging for Champions League places and even the Serie A title while Lazio were widely expected to hover around mid-table.

Yet when the two sides face each other at the San Siro on Sunday in the first part of a double bill, which also features an Italian Cup game three days later, it will be Lazio in the role of favourites.



Inzaghi

Lazio go into the match in third place with 46 points and as Serie A's top scorers, having blasted 56 goals in 21 games, including six matches where they have scored four goals or more.

Milan, meanwhile, are stuck in seventh place with 15 points fewer than their Lazio, despite having spent almost 10 times as much as their opponents in the summer transfer market.

"Nobody gave us much thought before the start of the championship," said Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi after Wednesday's 3-0 win over Udinese. "They expected to see us in 10th place but now everyone is talking about us."

Sassuolo vs Atalanta beIN SPORTS 4 HD

20:00 local (Saturday)

Chievo vs Juventus beIN SPORTS 4 HD

22:45 local (Saturday)

SPAL vs Inter beIN SPORTS 4 HD

14:30 local (Sunday)

Napoli vs Bologna beIN SPORTS 4 HD

17:00 local (Sunday)

Milan vs Lazio beIN SPORTS 4 HD

20:00 local (Sunday)

Roma vs Sampdoria beIN SPORTS 4 HD

22:45 local (Sunday)

"We must not forget where we started from. The lads deserve the praise but we can still get better."

Inzaghi, the younger brother of former Italy forward Filippo, was initially appointed on a caretaker basis late in the 2015/16 season.

Lazio then named Marcelo Bielsa as their long-term coach during the summer of 2016 but the eccentric Argentine quit after two days and Inzaghi, who had already agreed to coach lower tier Salernitana, was invited back.

Since then, the 41-year-old has emerged as one of the best young coaches in Serie A, taking Lazio to fifth place last season.

According to the specialist website Transfermarkt, Lazio spent just under 29 million euros (\$36.01 million) in the summer transfer window with right back Adam Marusic the most expensive purchase at 6.5 million euros from Oostende.

Real hit new low after Cup exit

'Worst moment'

MADRID, Jan 25, (RTRS): Real Madrid's troubled season lurched further into crisis as coach Zinedine Zidane described their elimination from the King's Cup by humble neighbours Leganes as a "fiasco".

It is almost a year ago to the day that Madrid's record 40-game unbeaten run in all competitions ended as they swept all before them, but this season has been a tale of woe for the La Liga and European champions.

"It's a fiasco. My worst moment as a coach," Zidane told a news conference. "I don't regret anything I did in the game, though. I take responsibility for what I do. Winning 1-0 from the first leg to start tonight's tie in the manner we

Bilbao vs Eibar beIN SPORTS 3 HD

23:00 local

Deportivo vs Levante beIN SPORTS 3 HD

15:00 local (Saturday)

Valencia vs Real beIN SPORTS 3 HD

18:15 local (Saturday)

Malaga vs Girona beIN SPORTS 3 HD

20:30 local (Saturday)

Villarreal vs Sociedad beIN SPORTS 3 HD

22:45 local (Saturday)

Leganes vs Espanyol beIN SPORTS 3 HD

14:00 local (Sunday)

Atletico vs Palmas beIN SPORTS 3 HD

18:15 local (Sunday)

Sevilla vs Getafe beIN SPORTS 3 HD

20:30 local (Sunday)

Barcelona vs Alaves beIN SPORTS 3 HD

22:45 local (Sunday)

Celta vs Betis beIN SPORTS 3 HD

23:00 local (Monday)

did it's really bad. For that I'm angry. I don't understand what's going on."

Madrid, who lost 2-1 to Leganes to exit the competition on away goals, have slipped to fourth in the La Liga standings, trailing leaders and arch-rivals Barcelona by 19 points.

In 18 games in all competitions at the Bernabeu Stadium this season they have won just nine times, losing four and drawing five including two 2-2 draws in the Cup against third tier opposition in previous rounds.

However, Cup elimination by a side who had never won at the Bernabeu in their history after taking a 1-0 lead into the second leg was a new low.

Despite lifting eight major trophies in just over two years in charge, the pressure is mounting on Zidane to turn things around or face the fate of so many of his predecessors.

The Frenchman admitted Real's season boils down to next month's Champions League last-16 meeting with in-form Paris St Germain.

"Yes, that's clear," he said when asked if his future depended on the European tie.

"I'm responsible for this, I'm the boss. I have to find the solutions. We've found some of them but not consistently enough. I need to take responsibility and I'll always fight."

Leganes started brightly and Claudio



Leganes' Serbian midfielder Darko Brasanac (left), vies with Real Madrid's Spanish midfielder Isco during the Spanish 'Copa del Rey' (King's Cup) quarter-final second leg football match between Real Madrid CF and CD Leganes at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid on Jan 24. (AFP)

I dont control beaten Chelsea transfers: Conte

'Arsenal over their difficult January'

LONDON, Jan 25, (RTRS): Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said his side's 2-1 League Cup semifinal victory over London rivals Chelsea on Wednesday showed they were over the upheaval caused by the transfer of striker Alexis Sanchez to Manchester United.

Arsenal endured a poor run of form in recent weeks but the comeback win over Chelsea means they will face Manchester City in the League Cup final on Feb 25.

"I felt that in January we paid a heavy price for uncertainty in our dressing-room," Wenger told reporters. "Now we are back with more clarity. We know what we have to do. We can focus on our game."

Arsenal sit sixth in the Premier League, 23 points behind leaders Manchester City, and they lost to Championship side Nottingham Forest in the FA Cup, leaving the League Cup as the only route to domestic silverware.

Sanchez, Arsenal's stand-out player of recent seasons, was sold to Manchester United after weeks of speculation that he was on his way out of the London club.

But his former team mates showed little sign of missing the Chilean as they recovered from an early goal by Chelsea's Eden Hazard to turn around the second leg with an own goal by Antonio Rudiger and a second-half strike

by Granit Khaka.

Wenger said he could not comment on the likelihood of Arsenal signing striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang

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from Germany's Borussia Dortmund as a way to offset the loss of Sanchez.

"What's best is I don't talk about that

because it won't help," Wenger said. "If something happens, it happens. If it doesn't happen we are strong enough to focus on the players we have ... I am perfectly happy with the players we have."

"We are open to strengthening the team and the squad but we are not close to signing anybody."

Chelsea manager Antonio Conte

said he has little impact on the club's transfer market activity after they were knocked out of the League Cup by Arsenal on Wednesday.

The result capped a difficult period for the south London club, who have now failed to win six of their last seven games, discounting the penalty-shoot-out win over Norwich City in the FA Cup.

The manager said his squad was under pressure due to a number of injuries and he was seemingly unhappy at a lack of activity in the transfer market. "I don't have a big impact in the transfer market," he told reporters.

"About the transfer market, from the summer there is the club and the club decides for every single player."

Chelsea have been linked with a move for AS Roma forward Edin Dzeko, and media reports in Italy on Wednesday said a deal was close.

Chelsea have reportedly targeted several strikers in the January window, including Andy Carroll and Ashley Barnes, as Conte looks to ease the burden on Alvaro Morata.

When asked about Dzeko, Conte reiterated that the situation was out of his hands.

"I don't like to speak about the transfer market, the club decides our transfer market, as I said before my task is to try to improve my players," he said.



Chelsea's Antonio Rudiger (center), heads the ball during the English League Cup semifinal second leg soccer match between Chelsea and Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium in London on Jan 24. (AP)

Beauvue sent a free kick against the post in the opening exchanges.

The visitors were deservedly level on aggregate after half an hour as a mishap between Achraf Hakimi and Nacho allowed Javier Eraso the space to produce

a stunning finish from outside the box.

Beauvue sent a volley into the side netting on the stroke of halftime as a shell-shocked Real were jeered off the pitch at the break.

That appeared to bring about a re-

action from the home side and Karim Benzema produced a neat finish from an acute angle immediately after the restart to put Zinedine Zidane's men ahead on aggregate.

Leganes centre-back Dimitris Siovas

missed a gilt-edged chance as he headed back across the six-yard box with the goal gaping, but moments later Gabriel Pires made no mistake as he thumped home a header to put Leganes through on away goals.

Hollerbach hoping to cut Hamburg losses

Bayern dominance hurting Bundesliga

MUNICH, Jan 25, (Agencies): Bayern Munich's dominance could be hurting German soccer and also appears to be having a detrimental effect on the club's European aspirations.

Bayern host Hoffenheim on Saturday and are on their way to a record sixth straight Bundesliga title with a 16-point advantage at the top, a record at this stage of the season.

The club, however, will face tougher challenges in the Champions League later in the campaign.

Their recent shortcomings in Europe - Bayern haven't won the competition since securing the treble under Jupp Heynckes in 2013 - can partly be attributed to a lack of serious rivals at home, opponents that would force the best from the team so that they are primed for the big games against foreign sides.

Heynckes' 2013 treble came after his team lost the 2012 Champions League final on penalties to Chelsea at the Allianz Arena, their successes fueled by the previous season's disappointment.

"So far in international competitions, the chance has been missed to show that the Bundesliga is one of the strongest leagues in the world," league CEO Christian Seifert said in his New Year address, during which he criticized German teams' "average" performances.

"Whoever thinks second-rate international participation is not so bad will find themselves in international insignificance - quicker than some think," said Seifert, who called for more "beacons" of the league.

Forward Thomas Mueller said last Sunday that Bayern's training sessions

are tougher than the team's league games and it seems none of the club's Bundesliga rivals seems capable of challenging for the title.

It briefly appeared in September as if Borussia Dortmund might, reviving memories of their successes in 2011 and 2012, but the team then squandered a five-point lead.

Heynckes has led his side to 16 wins in 17 games in all competitions since returning for a fourth stint in charge in October, the only blot being a defeat at his hometown side Borussia Mo-



Schalke's defender Thilo Kehrer runs with the ball during the German First Division Bundesliga football match FC Schalke 04 vs Hannover 96 in Gelsenkirchen, western Germany on Jan 21. (AFP)

enchengladbach.

Former Hamburg SV defender Bernd Hollerbach will need to live up to his nickname of "Holleraxe" if he is to whip the Bundesliga club back into shape and help them avoid relegation as they prepare to face RB Leipzig on Saturday.

Hollerbach, a trained butcher who

Frankfurt vs M'gladbach beIN SPORTS 5 HD

22:30 local

Dortmund vs Freiburg beIN SPORTS 4 HD

17:30 local (Saturday)

Bayern vs Hoffenheim beIN SPORTS 5 HD

17:30 local (Saturday)

Bremen vs Hertha beIN SPORTS 5 HD

20:30 local (Saturday)

Leverkusen vs Mainz beIN SPORTS 5 HD

17:30 local (Sunday)

Hanover vs Wolfsburg beIN SPORTS 5 HD

20:00 local (Sunday)

was known for his no-nonsense approach during a seven-year playing stint at Hamburg, took over from sacked coach Markus Gisdol this week with a clear mandate of maintaining the club's 100 percent Bundesliga record.

'2022 Cup will represent whole Arab region'

WC on track despite boycott: Qatar

DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan 25, (RTRS): Qatar is confident that it can host a successful World Cup in 2022 and preparations are fully on track after a boycott by its Gulf neighbours briefly disrupted supply lines last year, its foreign minister told Reuters.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who is also deputy prime minister, said Qatar's economy was now growing much faster than anticipated and the major gas exporter was well prepared to withstand the crisis in relations with its neighbours.

He also said Qatar still counted on strong support from US President Donald Trump to help solve the crisis and had filed legal complaints with Western regulators against what it sees as currency and market manipulations by its neighbours.

"We are confident we will host the best World Cup in the Arab world. It will represent the whole Arab region," Sheikh Mohammed said in an interview during the World Economic Forum in Davos.

"The government has already overcome the disruptions which happened to supplies at the beginning of the crisis and we have introduced alternative routes. There is no disruption at the moment," he said, adding he had heard no signals from FIFA that it was planning to change the venue of the World Cup.

FIFA has made no suggestion that either Russia or Qatar should lose the right to stage tournaments in 2018 or 2022 respectively, despite publishing a report last year detailing numerous attempts to influence voting officials.

The diplomatic crisis, in which Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt have boycotted Qatar, erupted last summer when the four countries cut diplomatic, transport and trade ties with Qatar, accusing it of financing terrorism.

Riyadh also accuses Qatar of cosying up to the kingdom's arch-rival Iran. Qatar rejects the charges and says it is being punished for straying from its neighbours' backing

for authoritarian rulers. The World Cup is the centrepiece of Qatar's strategy to project itself on the global stage.

The soccer tournament was dragged into the Gulf crisis last year when the UAE said Qatar's hosting of the World Cup should depend on it rejecting "extremism and terrorism".

Sheikh Mohammed said the crisis was negatively affecting security coordination across the entire Gulf region.

"This undermines our collective effort in combating terrorism. Our officers are not allowed to go to the (US) Fifth Fleet, their (Saudi and UAE) officers' seats are vacant in Doha while their flags are there," he said, referring to the US Navy in the Gulf and the US base near Doha.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia have both been among the closest allies of the United States but all attempts by Washington to

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help solve the crisis have so far failed.

"When President Trump spoke to the Emir (of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani) last week he stressed this point and he said that he wants to help in solving the crisis." "But when one of the parties is unwilling to engage... then it will be difficult," said Sheikh Mohammed.

Qatar filed a complaint to the United Nations about an alleged violation of its airspace in December by an Emirati military aircraft.

Sheikh Mohammed said Qatar's central bank had also filed legal complaints with Western regulators regarding alleged manipulations of its currency.

"The information we had that there is something wrong being committed within our financial markets and these complaints are taking their due process and there are legal steps Qatar is taking," he said.

Sheikh Mohammed said one of his main worries was a direct conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

"Qatar is just a sandwich between them. And this means that any direct conflict between Iran and Saudi will have a spill over not only on Qatar but on the entire region".



Trump