

Madrid not going to give league champs guard of honour

Barca perfect record on the line against Real

BARCELONA, May 3, (RTRS): La Liga and King's Cup champions Barcelona will be flying high when they host Real Madrid on Sunday in the 'Clasico' but their arch rivals will be feeling equally smug after reaching the



Real Madrid's Marco Asensio (left) and Bayern's Thiago challenge for the ball during the Champions League semifinal second leg soccer match between Real Madrid and FC Bayern Munich at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid, Spain on May 1. (AP)

Sevilla vs Sociedad beIN SPORTS 3HD
22:00 local

Girona vs Eibar beIN SPORTS 3HD
14:00 local (Saturday)

Bilbao vs Betis beIN SPORTS 3HD
17:15 local (Saturday)

Celta vs Deportivo beIN SPORTS 3HD
19:30 local (Saturday)

Villarreal vs Valencia beIN SPORTS 3HD
21:45 local (Saturday)

Malaga vs Alaves beIN SPORTS 3HD
13:00 local (Sunday)

Atletico vs Espanyol beIN SPORTS 3HD
17:15 local (Sunday)

Palmas vs Getafe beIN SPORTS 3HD
19:30 local (Sunday)

Barcelona vs Real beIN SPORTS 3HD, 11HD
21:45 local (Sunday)

Leganes vs Levante beIN SPORTS 3HD
22:00 local (Monday)

Champions League final for a third year in a row.

After clinching a seventh league title in 10 years last Sunday, Barcelona's only incentive is to finish the La Liga season without losing a game.

Third-placed Real's motivation,

however, is to leapfrog Atletico Madrid, who hold a four-point advantage but have played one more game.

There will be plenty of tension on the pitch in Sunday's eagerly anticipated fixture.

Barca will be keen to further cement their domestic hegemony over Madrid and extend their gap over them to 18 points, which would be the biggest gap they have ever held over their rivals.

Zinedine Zidane's side can avenge December's humiliating 3-0 home defeat by Barca by snapping the Catalans' Liga record of 42 games without defeat.

Zidane has already angered Barca by declaring his side will not give the newly crowned champions a guard of honour before kickoff, a gesture the Catalans did carry out in 2008 when

Madrid had won the title.

Sunday's game is also the first 'Clasico' since 2008 to take place after the title race has been decided.

Real have had a disappointing Liga campaign and could finish third for the first time in four years. But their domestic woes has not stopped them from storming into the Champions League final with a 4-3 aggregate win over Bayern Munich. In contrast Barca crashed out of Europe to AS Roma in the quarter-finals.

Madrid will play Liverpool in the final in Kiev on May 26, when they will be targeting a record-extending 13th European Cup. They will also be looking to become the first team since Bayern Munich in 1976 to win the trophy three years in a row.

'Process lacks transparency and consultation'

Europe's leagues come out against FIFA plans

COPENHAGEN, May 3, (RTRS): Europe's top football leagues are in "firm opposition" to FIFA President Gianni Infantino's plans for two new international tournaments, the body representing them said on Thursday.

The European Leagues, which represents England's Premier League and Spain's La Liga among others, said they rejected proposals for an expanded Club World Cup and a new global Nations League in the first sign of a serious split in world football over the plans.

The organization called for a united front against the proposals in a statement issued on Thursday.

The statement urged European soccer's governing body UEFA to ally with the World League Forum, the European Clubs Association and FIFPro (the International players union), to "firmly oppose and together stop this unilateral initiative from FIFA and the process which lacks of transparency and a proper consultation with the stakeholders."

FIFA's plans for the Club World Cup would involve expanding it to 24 teams including 12 from Europe and staging it every four years instead of annually as happens at present.

The Nations League would be a global version of the new competitions which are being introduced by UEFA in Europe and CONCACAF in North and Central American and the Caribbean.

In both cases, the competitions involve all the national teams in the respective continents who are divided into divisions based on their rankings.

There is promotion and relegation between the divisions, as in conventional domestic leagues.

Each division is sub-divided into groups with the winners qualifying for a knockout contest.

Infantino has said that he believes the deals together could be worth \$25 billion in a 12-year cycle and has

put his plans to FIFA's Council saying they are backed by an, as yet unnamed, international consortium of investors.

Several national associations contacted by Reuters said they had not received any direct communication from FIFA on the plans.

European Leagues President Lars-Christer Olsson said the approach was reminiscent of FIFA's problematic past.

This process reminds me of the way the old FIFA acted which I thought we had left behind. What we have experienced is a clear lack of consultation and transparency, and an intentional manipulation of the decision making structure by FIFA in presenting these proposals.

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"To present a long-term 12 year plan with lots of uncertainty and a lack of information sounds, to me, like a can of worms," he added.

Jesper Moller, a member of FIFAs Organising Committee for FIFA Competitions and president of the Danish Football Federation, told Reuters no vote could be held on the plans without Infantino revealing the identity of the backers, who wish to take 49 percent ownership in the management of the new events.

"We want to see things and documentation. We have learned from the past. So now do it in a proper way," he said.

In a recent letter to FIFA Council members, Infantino said the investors came from Asia, Europe and North America but said he was unable to provide details as he had signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Best of the Rest

Deschamps to delay list: France coach Didier Deschamps could delay naming his 23-man World Cup party to allow Marseille to prepare well for the Europa League final, reports said on Thursday.

Deschamps is scheduled to name his travelling party for Russia 2018 on May 15 but according to L'Equipe newspaper "the France team staff does not want to hinder Marseille's preparations in view of an eventual Europa League final".

The final is on May 16 in Lyon.

The report added: "The announcement for the 23-man list, initially scheduled for May 15, could be pushed back to May 17." (AFP)



Deschamps

Verratti out of season: Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Marco Verratti will miss the rest of the season after having an operation on his adductor tendons.

PSG says the recent operation "went perfectly well" and the date was chosen in order for him to be ready for the start of next season.

Italy did not qualify for the World Cup in Russia, giving Verratti time to rest.

The central midfielder has played 22 league games this season, and last played for PSG on March 31 in the French League Cup final win over Monaco on March 31. (AP)

Captain appears before CAS: Peru captain Paolo Guerrero appeared before sport's highest tribunal on

Thursday to appeal against a six-month doping ban and defend himself against a request for the same suspension to be increased.

As it stands, Guerrero will be able to play at the World Cup in Russia next month but he would miss out if a World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) request for a stiffer sentence is accepted.

Peru have qualified for the World Cup for the first time in 36 years and face Denmark, France and Australia in their first-round group.

Around one dozen Peru fans were waiting at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) headquarters as Guerrero, who plays for Brazilian club Flamengo, arrived for Thursday's hearing.

Guerrero was suspended for a year by world football's governing body FIFA on Dec 8 after testing positive for cocaine metabolite benzoylecgonine after Peru's 0-0 draw away to Argentina in October.

FIFA then reduced the ban to six months and back-dated the start of the suspension period to Nov 3, the day when he was provisionally banned. He is due to make his comeback in the Brazilian championship match against Internacional on Sunday.

Guerrero, who has protested his innocence throughout, wants the ban quashed completely while WADA has also appealed and asked CAS to increase the sentence to between one and two years.

There was no immediate comment from CAS on when the ruling would be announced. However, such decisions can take anything from a few days to several months.

Guerrero has scored 32 goals for Peru and helped them finish third in the 2011 and 2015 Copa Americas when he was leading scorer in both tournaments. (RTRS)

'You are working to make this WC the best ever'

Russia absolutely ready for WCup: Infantino

MOSCOW, May 3, (AFP): FIFA boss Gianni Infantino said on Thursday (May 3) Russia was "absolutely ready" to host the World Cup and thanked President Vladimir Putin for his commitment to the football showpiece.

Infantino met Putin in the Black Sea resort of Sochi as Russia races against the clock to put the finishing touches on preparations for the Jun 14-July 15 final.

The first World Cup staged in eastern Europe will be the most expensive ever and comes in the heat of flaring tensions between Russia and the West.

It has also been shadowed by stadium construction delays and fears ranging from hooliganism to racist chants at matches.

But Infantino lavished praise on Russia's preparations and said the

tournament was shaping up to be the best one yet.

"You are working to make this World Cup the best World Cup ever," Infantino told Putin during a nationally televised meeting.

"The feedback from all our experts at FIFA are extremely positive.

"And this shows that Russia is absolutely ready to host the world to celebrate a summer of festivities here in this beautiful country," he said.

Putin and Infantino began the day by posing for the cameras and getting Fan ID cards issued by the Russian authorities to supporters who pass a required security background check.

The two then toured Sochi's Fisht Stadium — scene of the 2014 Winter Olympics — and listened to leaders of regions where the games will be played.

The tournament will span 12 stadiums and 11 host cities across the European part of Russia. "I am now involved in the organisation of major world events for 20 years and the level of commitment, of dedication, of professionalism that you have in the organisation of this World Cup is unique," Infantino told Putin.

The Russian leader also praised organisers and listed ways in which the tournament would benefit host cities in the long term.

But he sounded a sterner note when discussing the Russian team's prospects once the games begin.

"We all very much hope that our players will commit themselves to the

game, will give all they got, playing to their full potential," said Putin.

"And the most important thing — they must show hard-nosed, uncompromising football, one which the fans love."

Russia have not made it past the group stage of an international tournament in 10 years and will be under intense pressure to perform at home.

Putin is using the prestige of the event to showcase Russia's superpower status and wants the national team to play its part on the pitch.

But coach Stanislav Cherchesov's men have been hit by a string of injuries and are seen as one of the tournaments underdogs.



Pedrinho of Brazil's Corinthians controls the ball during a Copa Libertadores soccer match against Argentina's Independiente, in Sao Paulo, Brazil on May 2. (AP)

Trump tweet wasn't a threat to bid

COPENHAGEN, May 3, (RTRS): The joint North American bid to host the 2026 World Cup has not been damaged by US President Donald Trump's recent controversial tweet of support, bid co-chair Carlos Cordeiro told Reuters on Thursday.

The US is bidding together with Canada and Mexico to host an expanded 48 team World Cup in 2026 but faces opposition from Morocco who have large support from African nations, as well as Russia and France. The 211 football associations who make up FIFA's membership will vote on the hosting rights in June. Last week Trump said in a tweet: "It would be a shame if countries that we

always support were to lobby against the US bid. Why should we be supporting these countries when they don't support us (including at the United Nations)?"

FIFA responded by issuing a reminder of the ethics and code of conduct rules for bidding campaigns. Cordeiro said the tweet represented a welcome expression of support for the joint bid.

"I don't see it as threatening. I think you have got to appreciate how he says things. I think what was implicit in what he said was that he would like to see people support our bid and that is what I like my head of state to say," Cordeiro, who is the president of the US soccer federation, said.

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