

Real have CL left to salvage season

Dortmund's season is unraveling as Spurs visit

BARCELONA, Spain, March 4, (AP): Two demoralizing defeats to Barcelona have left Real Madrid with just one chance to salvage their season by winning a record-extending fourth consecutive Champions League trophy.

But they must do without the goals of Cristiano Ronaldo, the star striker who fueled their title run before leaving for Juventus at the end of last season.

Madrid failed to score against Barcelona in two "clasico" matches at their Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in the past week. Barcelona eliminated Madrid from the Copa del Rey semi-finals with a 3-0 victory on Wednesday, and three days later left Madrid 12 points adrift in the Spanish league with a 1-0 win.

Madrid could do with rediscovering their scoring form to avoid another calamity when they host Dutch side Ajax in the return leg of their Champions League round-of-16 tie on Tuesday. The visitors won the away leg in Amsterdam 2-1 thanks to goals from Karim Benzema and Marco Asensio.

Real vs Ajax beIN SPORTS 1HD, 12HD

23:00 local

Dortmund vs Tottenham beIN SPORTS 2HD, 11HD

23:00 local

PSG vs Man United beIN SPORTS 1HD, 11HD

23:00 local (Wednesday)

Porto vs Roma beIN SPORTS 2HD, 12HD

23:00 local (Wednesday)

"We gave it our all (against Barcelona) but weren't decisive enough in the box," defender Dani Carvajal said. "On Tuesday, we need to lay it all on the line. They (Ajax) have had a good rest and we saw what they can do in the first leg. I hope the fans back us because we want to give them something to cheer."

Manchester United and Borussia Dortmund also need to overturn defeats by Paris Saint-Germain and Tottenham to advance.

Madrid's biggest threat against Barcelona was the speed and dribbling skills offered by Vinicius Junior. But the 18-year-old Brazilian forward failed to finish off his scoring chances and got little help from the team's veterans. Benzema squandered his opportunities and Gareth Bale was jeered by segments of the crowd when substituted on Saturday.

The hosts are without suspended center-back Sergio Ramos, while Ajax have won their last three games by at least three goals.

"Goals come in patches," said Madrid manager Santiago Solari. "We'll keep plugging away. We can't let our teamwork, solidity and commitment slip."

Here is a look at this week's other three Champions League matches:

PSG vs Manchester United

United face the daunting task Wednesday of retrieving a 2-0 loss against a PSG side led by the in-form Kylian Mbappe.

The 20-year-old France forward is helping PSG supporters forget all about Neymar. Mbappe scored in the first leg at Old Trafford, and found the net twice on Saturday at Caen. He has now netted in all five domestic league games since the club lost Neymar and Edinson Cavani to injury.

"The coach said we had to win this game to prepare well for Manchester's visit and that's what we did," said Mbappe, who took his tally to 24 goals in 21 French league games.

Mbappe will hope to profit from more open spaces as United chases the game without suspended midfielder Paul Pogba.

PSG can also count on Cavani, who has resumed full training.

Dortmund vs Tottenham

After such a promising start under new coach Lucien Favre and an overhaul of the squad, Dortmund's season is unraveling.

Their 3-0 first-leg loss at Tottenham came after the side was knocked out of the German Cup and held to two draws in the Bundesliga.

Nothing has happened since to sug-



Lyon forward Moussa Dembele (right), and Toulouse's Christopher Jullien challenge for the ball during the French Ligue 1 soccer match between Lyon and Toulouse in Decines, near Lyon, central France on March 3. (AP)

Samper to leave Barcelona

Neymar says 2 injuries, not 1, affected World Cup 'displays'

RIO DE JANEIRO, March 4, (Agencies): Brazil and Paris Saint-Germain star Neymar was battling back from two injuries, not one, at last year's World Cup.

In a 2-hour interview with TV Globo on Sunday, Neymar said a problem in his right ankle was affecting his recovery in Russia, as well as the metatarsal fracture in the same foot that he had previously described.

"Besides the metatarsal, I had an ankle problem. I ruptured the ligament and the recovery was crazier because of this," the PSG striker said.

Neymar said the metatarsal injury did not unduly trouble him in Russia, but the ankle did. "It is very annoying with the ankle, it takes a long time to get back to normal," he said.

Brazil was eliminated by Belgium in the quarter-finals, and Neymar failed to deliver his best performances during the tournament.

Neymar is currently recovering in Brazil from another metatarsal injury in his right foot that he sustained in January, and is expected to return to action next month.

The former Barcelona forward talked about speculation he could one day join Real Madrid.

"It is one of the biggest clubs in the world, any player that Real Madrid seeks would be drawn into playing there. I am very happy at PSG. But no one knows the future," he said.

Recent videos have shown Neymar dancing at a party in Salvador, which has led to criticism about the way he is handling his recovery, but he said he would not be changing his ways.

"When people say Neymar's life off the pitch troubles him on the pitch ... No. You are completely wrong, it doesn't trouble him in any way. I am a man that takes care of himself. I know when I can go out," he said.

□ □ □

Barcelona have reached a deal with Sergi Samper to end the midfielder's contract, the La Liga leaders said on Monday.

The 24-year-old was once considered the successor to Sergio Busquets after progressing from the Barcelona's academy, but several injuries have proved a setback, disrupting loan spells at Granada and Las Palmas.

"The club would like to thank Sergi Samper for his dedication and commitment during his time at FC Barcelona and wishes him all the best for the future," it said in a statement.

Samper was part of the Barcelona first team squad this season but did not make a single appearance.

□ □ □

Celta Vigo have sacked coach Miguel Cardoso less than four months after he took charge, the La Liga club said in a statement on Sunday.

Celta were earlier beaten 1-0 at Eibar, completing a miserable run of eight defeats in 10 league games which has left them one place and two points above the relegation zone.

Cardoso is the second coach sacked by Celta this season after Argentine Antonio Mohamed was relieved of his duties in November.

Portuguese Cardoso got off to an embarrassing start to life at Celta by mistakenly declaring in his first news conference that he was taking over at their fierce local rivals Deportivo La Coruna, although he quickly corrected himself.

His first few games in charge were encouraging as Celta earned two victories from his first four games but their results took a turn for the worse in the new year, their plight worsened by injury to top scorer and Spain international Iago Aspas.

the Italian visitors holding a slim 2-1 advantage.

Roma were beaten 3-0 by city rivals Lazio in the derby on Saturday to seriously damage their chances of qualifying for next season's Champions League.

"We really need to focus on Porto so we can get through to the quarter-finals," Roma captain Daniele De Rossi said. "If we do that, it will also change our vision of the season and our current form."

Porto are also reeling after losing 2-1 to Benfica on Saturday, a defeat which let their fierce rivals take the lead at the top of the Portuguese league.

Everton's Silva should be given time, says Coleman

'Liverpool will keep fighting after derby setback'

LIVERPOOL, March 4, (RTRS): Liverpool will fight to the end to win the Premier League title, left-back Andy Robertson has said after his team were overhauled by defending champions Manchester City at the top of the table following Sunday's 0-0 draw at Everton.

Liverpool's fourth draw in six league games saw them slip into second place, a point behind City with nine games remaining, with the Merseyside club having squandered a seven-point lead over the defending champions.

"We will fight for every last ball until the whistle is blown at the end of the season," Robertson told British media after Liverpool's latest setback. "We become the chasers now and all the pressure is on Manchester City."

City have not been at their best in recent weeks but have still maintained momentum, extending their winning run to five league games in a row with consecutive 1-0 wins over West Ham United and Bournemouth in their last two matches.

SOCCER

Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson reinforced the message that his team were still in the hunt to win a first league title since 1990.

"You've got to stay confident, stay positive," the midfielder said. "We'll take it game by game and there's still quite a few games to go, so that's what we'll keep doing from now until the end of the season."

The goalless draw at Goodison Park was the third time in four games that Liverpool have failed to get on the scoresheet, with matches against Bayern Munich in the Champions League and Manchester United in the league ending in the same scoreline.

The three stalemates were broken up by Liverpool's thumping 5-0 victory over Watford on Wednesday and Henderson said that victory showed the club's attacking players were not



Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk, (left), challenges for the ball with Everton's Dominic Calvert-Lewin during the English Premier League soccer match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park in Liverpool, England on March 3. (AP)

Infantino says joint Korean Women's WC bid possible

ABERDEEN, Scotland, March 4, (AP): A joint World Cup bid by North and South Korea is being talked up by FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

"I have been hearing for the Women's World Cup in 2023, the two Koreas," Infantino said. "I have been hearing that. It would be great."

A combined Olympic bid is already in the works. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced plans in September to jointly bid for the 2032 Summer Games.

Soccer officials from North and South Korea did not respond Sunday to emailed questions from The Associated Press about Infantino's comments, which came after a meeting of the International Football Association Board lawmaking body in Scotland.

The Korean Peninsula remains technically at war because the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. Sport has been used to foster diplomacy and North Korea's participation in last year's Winter Olympics in South Korea, including a combined women's hockey team, spurred reconciliation by the neighbors.

"They have been in a very, very difficult situation until recently," Infantino said.

The 2023 Women's World Cup hosting contest is already a crowded field. Australia, Colombia, Japan and

South Africa have already expressed interest in bidding.

FIFA last month asked countries to make an expression of interest in bidding by March 15, complete the bidding registration by April 16 and submit bid books by Oct 4. The FIFA Council vote is set to be held in March 2020.

Interest is also growing in hosting the 2030 men's World Cup.

Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay are combining for a South American bid and a European challenge is expected.

England is leading plans for a British Isles bid, including Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland. The leaders of four Balkan countries — Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Serbia — are also keen on a joint entry. The Spanish government has expressed interest in combining with Portugal and Morocco too.

UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin said in December he would not back a nation from another continent being involved in a European bid, but Infantino is keener on different confederations combining.

"Generally the more bidders we have the better it is," Infantino said. "The more we speak about all these topics, joint bids, South Americans, Home Nations, cross-confederations, the happier I am."

in the midst of a crisis of confidence.

"Scoring goals is probably the hardest part of football, so as long as we're creating the chances we know it'll come in the end," he added.

"Midweek we scored five — I know it was at home, but we know we can

score goals ... in the end we've got to take the point and move forward because ... Everton's a tough place to come to."

Everton defender Seamus Coleman has urged the club's owners to be patient with manager Marco Silva and buck the Premier League's trend of sacking managers after a string of poor results.

Everton have struggled for form, with eight losses in their last 13 league matches and Silva is under pressure to deliver after the Merseyside club dropped to 10th in the league standings. They were sixth in December last year.

"I think managers need time and the manager here is working very hard. It's not going to happen overnight or one season," Coleman said after Sunday's 0-0 draw with Liverpool.

"He needs to get his own players in, implement his own style of play. That goes for all around the league, I think owners need to be a bit more patient."

"I think there's a lot of emphasis on teams doing badly. It's something that I don't agree with."

Coleman said players should also be in the firing line for poor results.



Real Madrid's Dani Carvajal controls the ball during a training session at the team's Valdebebas training ground in Madrid, Spain on March 4. Real Madrid will play against Ajax in a Champions League soccer match on Tuesday. (AP)