

United scrape into Europa League semis



Manchester United's Brandon Williams (left), and Copenhagen's Jonas Wind fight for the ball during the Europa League quarter-final soccer match between Manchester United and Copenhagen at the Rhein Energie Stadium in Cologne, Germany, on Aug 10. (AP)



Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku (right), and Leverkusen's Edmond Tapsoba battle for the ball during the Europa League quarter-final match between Inter Milan and Bayer Leverkusen at the Dusseldorf Arena in Dusseldorf, Germany on Aug 10. (AP)

Scottish season in 'jeopardy'

Health officials block clubs 'plans' for fans

BERLIN, Aug. 11, (AP) — German health officials have blocked professional soccer clubs' plans to allow fans at Bundesliga games when the new season begins in September.

"Thousands of fans in the stadiums — that doesn't fit with the current situation with infections. Now it's about not taking any unnecessary risks," national Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Twitter of the coronavirus pandemic on Monday. The 36 clubs in Germany's top two divisions had been planning on having limited numbers of socially distanced and seated supporters at games, and had produced a proposal last week that included prohibiting away fans, restrictions in standing areas of stadiums, and a ban on sales of alcohol. They mooted personalized tickets to help with contact tracing, though those plans have been criticized by fans.

"The league's concept is good in theory," Spahn said. "But what's decisive is what happens every day in practice."

In a follow-up tweet, Spahn added, "We feel that we have to stay alert."

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Having spectators in the stands would be the wrong signal in the current situation."

Germany's 16 state health ministers met on Monday and agreed that having fans in stadiums for league games was not a priority.

Germany has registered 217,835 coronavirus infections, and a relatively low number of deaths at 9,203 compared to neighboring France, Spain and Italy, but there has been some concern over a recent increase in the daily rate of new infections.

Last week, Germany recorded its highest daily tally of new infections in three months. The national disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, said 1,045 cases were recorded last Wednesday — the first time since May 7 that it has counted more than 1,000 cases in a day. Berlin health senator Dilek Kalayci said on Monday the ministers came to a unanimous position that stadiums should remain closed to fans based

on the current pandemic situation.

"In terms of health policy, we are currently not in favor of opening the stadiums until Oct 31, at least. Then you can discuss the situation again," Kalayci said. Bavarian governor Markus Söder had been one of those most vocally in favor of the Bundesliga resuming without fans after its two-month break last season, but he said allowing fans to attend games when the new season begins on Sept 18 would send the wrong signal.

"It would send a devastating signal to the public, both in terms of what it means for medical capacities and in relation to cultural events," Söder said.

Scottish soccer was in danger of being halted by the country's government after a Celtic player breached coronavirus rules by taking a secret trip to Spain and failing to self-isolate on his return.

The Scottish champions have begun a "full investigation" into the actions of left back **Boli Bolingoli**, who played in a 1-1 draw with **Kilmarnock** in the league on Sunday despite only recently returning from Spain without quarantining.

A game between **Aberdeen** and **St Johnstone** on Saturday was postponed a day earlier after two Aberdeen players tested positive for COVID-19 and a further six were instructed to self-isolate following a night out in a bar.

It led to Scotland First Minister **Nicola Sturgeon** warning that Scottish soccer's privileges to play during the safety restrictions would be at risk if a similar situation arose. All 12 Premiership managers and captains held talks with government officials on Monday and were reminded of their responsibilities over protocols particular to football and also the general public.

Celtic said it has taken its response to COVID-19 "extremely seriously" and has recorded no positive tests so far.

"Our staff have given so much in this area," a club statement read, "working tirelessly to ensure that all players and other club personnel are safe, fully aware of their own responsibilities and familiar with all guidance and protocols. Safety must always be our priority."

COLOGNE, Germany, Aug 11, (AP) — Manchester United needed an extra-time penalty from Bruno Fernandes to scrape into the Europa League semifinals after beating Copenhagen 1-0.

In sweltering heat, United's young team controlled the lion's share of possession but had a hard time creating clear chances until Andreas Bjelland brought down Anthony Martial in the penalty area. Fernandes blasted the ball past the otherwise excellent goalkeeper Karl-Johan Johnsson to give United the 95th-minute lead.

Once again a Europa League game against a team from a smaller league with limited finances was tighter than expected, five days after LASK Linz restricted United to a 2-1 win at Old Trafford.

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"Their keeper had probably the game of his life, he was really good, but then again I could say we need to be more clinical in knockout games," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said.

United recorded 14 shots on target while Mason Greenwood and Fernandes hit the woodwork with shots during normal time and earlier video reviews cost United two of its best opportunities to score.

First, VAR scratched off a United penalty for offside in the buildup. Just before the break Greenwood put the ball in the net after a lightning break down the right flank but the replay showed he'd been just offside when Marcus Rashford's pass was played.

That decision was a particular blow for United after the apparent breakthrough goal came just as the English team had seemed to be getting frustrated and taking increasingly speculative shots against a Danish team playing its first ever European quarter-final.

Copenhagen striker Mohamed Daramy muscled his way past the United defense to shoot in the 17th but had his shot blocked by Harry Maguire, and Jens Stage's follow-up was blocked, too. Copenhagen had other chances blocked or sent wide in the

Inter eliminate Leverkusen

Dortmund say Sancho staying amid Utd links

BAD RAGAZ, Switzerland, Aug 11, (AP) — England winger Jadon Sancho will stay with Borussia Dortmund for the upcoming season amid reported interest from Manchester United, club sporting director Michael Zorc said.

"We plan on having Jadon Sancho in our team this season, the decision is final. I think that answers all our questions," Zorc said at the team's training camp in Switzerland.

Zorc added that Dortmund had already given Sancho a pay rise "to match the development of his performances" last summer.

"So in context, we had already extended his contract until 2023 back then," he said.

Sancho's contract was originally due to run to 2022. Dortmund made no announcement regarding the one-year extension when it was made.

Sancho has been heavily linked with United in the off-season after the club qualified for next season's Champions League. Sancho joined Dortmund from Manchester City in 2017.

United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer declined to respond to the announcement by Dortmund. "I can't comment on other teams' players," he said after United beat Copenhagen 1-0 in the Europa League quarter-finals.

Sancho was one of Dortmund's stand-out performers last season. The 20-year-old forward scored 17 goals and set up 17 more in 32 Bundesliga appearances.

Due to circumstances caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the transfer period will run to Oct 5. The next day is the closing date for clubs to register players for the group stages of the new season's UEFA competitions.

second half.

For United manager Solskjaer, the game was a reunion with his old Norway teammate and friend Stale Solbakken, the coach of Copenhagen.

Solbakken was vocal on the touchline, screaming his team forward in extra time. During the earlier drinks breaks he was heard to tell his players that "we have been the better side", which was true for much of the 90 minutes. Despite creating some scoring chances in promising positions, though, Copenhagen didn't register a single shot on target.

"We should maybe be a little more cynical. We didn't go down when we

had chances to go down ... inside the box," Solbakken said. He drew a contrast with the penalty Martial won in extra time, but said he didn't necessarily disagree with the referee's decision.

United plays five-time Europa League winner Sevilla or English club Wolverhampton on Sunday in the semifinals. They play their quarter-final on Tuesday.

Until the semifinal on Sunday, United will be staying within the UEFA "bubble" in western Germany.

Solskjaer said that meant conditions wouldn't be optimal for recovery, compared to being in Manchester, and he wouldn't be allowed to visit the

Sevilla-Wolverhampton game. "We just have to make the most out of a difficult situation in conditions which are really hot, humid," he said.

It's the third time United have reached a semifinal this season, but they lost the previous two. Manchester City knocked United out of the League Cup and Chelsea knocked United out of the FA Cup.

Meanwhile, Romelu Lukaku scored one goal and set up another as Inter Milan defeated a tenacious Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 to reach the Europa League semifinals.

Lukaku was the driving force from the start, imposing himself on the game and disrupting the Leverkusen defense to keep Inter in the hunt for their first trophy in nine years. Inter last played a European semifinal on their way to the Champions League title in 2010.

"We are growing but we have to learn to kill games off when we have the chances to do it, and we didn't tonight," Lukaku said. "Now we have time to recover physically and prepare for another great game." When Nicolo Barella gave Inter the lead in the 15th minute it was off a rebound from a shot of Lukaku's which had been blocked. Six minutes later, Lukaku scored after a link up with Ashley Young, even though he was falling as he hit the shot while battling a defender.

Just as Inter threatened to overwhelm Leverkusen, the German team kept themselves in the game. Kai Havertz played a one-two with Kevin Volland and fired the ball past goalkeeper Samir Handanovic to cut the gap to a single goal four minutes after Lukaku scored.



Manchester United's Mason Greenwood controls the ball during the Europa League quarter-final soccer match between Manchester United and Copenhagen at the Rhein Energie Stadium in Cologne, Germany on Aug 10. (AP)

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