

## DEILA BACKS CELTIC TO BOUNCE BACK AT DUNDEE

**GLASGOW:** Celtic manager Ronny Deila has backed his side to bounce back from their European disappointment when they face Dundee in their Scottish Premiership clash tomorrow.

The Hoops crashed out of the Champions League for a second time on Tuesday when NK Maribor's 1-0 win at Celtic helped the Slovenians claim a 2-1 aggregate win in their play-off match. The tie with Maribor was Celtic's second chance to reach the group stage of the Champions League after they were reinstated into the competition.

Their second-leg defeat by Legia Warsaw in the previous round was reversed to a 3-0 win after the Poles field-

ed an ineligible player in the last few minutes, resulting in an away goals win for Celtic. Tuesday's loss to Maribor was their fourth in just nine competitive matches under new manager Deila, who was criticised for making 10 changes to his side in the 1-0 loss to Inverness last weekend.

Next up for the Scottish champions is newly-promoted Dundee, who are yet to taste defeat since their return to the top flight. However, Deila retains faith in his side and is confident they can avoid a third straight defeat. "We are mostly thinking about ourselves," Deila said. "We want to bounce back and we will be going into the game doing everything we can to win it and have a good start in the league."

One player who could feature at Dens Park is Ghanaian international Mubarak Wakaso. The 24-year-old arrived at Celtic Park on a season-long loan from Russian side Rubin Kazan on Wednesday. Wakaso had spells in Spain at Espanyol, Villarreal and Elche and Deila is happy to have added the 19-times capped winger to his squad.

"We've been looking for speed and hardworking wingers, with good deliveries and he is a good player with good experience as well," the Celtic manager said. "He will be a new player coming into the squad who will strengthen us and I'm looking forward to seeing him on the pitch." Elsewhere today, managerless Ross

County head to New Douglas Park to take on Hamilton. County, who sacked Derek Adams on Thursday, are without a point from their opening four fixtures while newly-promoted Hamilton sit in second position with three straight wins.

Aberdeen, with just three points from their opening three games, will attempt to get their season back on track when they welcome Partick Thistle to Pittodrie and pointless St Mirren take on Dundee United at New St Mirren Park.

League leaders Inverness Caledonian Thistle host Kilmarnock while Motherwell will try to end a run of three straight defeats when they welcome St Johnstone to Fir Park. — AFP



**MUNICH:** In this picture taken Thursday, Real Madrid player Xabi Alonso leaves the office of a sports doctor after a check-up in Munich, Germany. — AP

## ALONSO CALLS BAYERN MOVE TOUGH DECISION

**MADRID:** Spain's midfield hero Xabi Alonso said yesterday that moving from Real Madrid to Bayern Munich had been the toughest decision of his career and that the Spanish club had wanted him to stay.

Alonso spoke about his "new adventure" after Real confirmed that it had reached agreement with the German champions for a transfer that Spanish media said was worth 10 million euros (\$13 million).

The 32-year-old passed a medical in Munich on Thursday. A member of the Spanish side that won the World Cup in 2010 and the European Championships in 2008 and 2012, Alonso joined Real from Liverpool in 2009. He announced his retirement from international football on Wednesday, one of many Spanish stars to stand down after the country's World Cup debacle. But the recent purchase of German midfielder Toni Kroos had also complicated his future with Real, despite his role in the club's 10th European Cup and Champions League triumph last season.

"It was the hardest decision I've ever had to take," Alonso told a press conference at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. "Leaving Madrid is never easy." "You have to know when to say goodbye and I think that this was the best moment to do so," he added.

"The club did not want me to go, it was my decision and I asked them to understand," he said. "The club didn't share my idea but they understood my need to start a new chapter, to start from zero in a new club."

"After winning the 'Decima' (10th title), I sensed a new cycle opening at the club and that I should do the same," he said. "Thanks for everything. That's all," Alonso added on his Twitter account after the press conference. — AFP

## ST ETIENNE WORRY FOR PSG AHEAD OF EURO CHALLENGE

**PARIS:** Big-spending Paris Saint Germain, poised for a tough Champions League campaign, turn their focus first to their stuttering Ligue 1 start when they host high-flying rivals St Etienne at the weekend. PSG were handed a tricky European group stage draw alongside four-time winners Barcelona and Ajax on Thursday, but far from the glamour of Europe eyes will be firmly fixed on the domestic grind tomorrow.

PSG host Saint Etienne after a goalless draw by the Parisians at Evian followed a 2-0 home win against Bastia and an opening 2-2 draw at Reims.

St Etienne, sitting second, have so far notched up two wins and a draw. They are also on a high after advancing to the Europa League group stages following a suspense-filled penalty shootout against Turkish side Karabukspor on Thursday.

Laurent Blanc's Parisians are fifth, four points adrift of leaders Bordeaux who have a maximum nine points after three games. But the reigning two-time champions can be encouraged by the fact that with five points from three matches they are in the same position as last season and even have two more than in 2012-2013, when they started with three draws. PSG have been hampered by injury woes with captain Thiago Silva out with a hamstring injury, Zlatan Ibrahimovic suffering a muscle tear, Gregory Van der Wiel a fractured vertebra and midfielder Thiago Motta a fractured nose.

Swedish international Ibrahimovic has however returned to training and believes he will be ready for Sunday's game at Parc des Princes. Meanwhile, last season's runners-up Monaco, also need a lift despite being handed a less imposing elite European draw against Benfica, Zenit St Petersburg and Bayern Leverkusen. The Principality side are struggling in 17th place with just three points, and face a stiff test at third-placed Lille. Monaco's new coach Leonardo Jardim believes however that the team are "almost at their top level" after their first success against Nantes on Sunday.

Lille, with the future of Salomon Kalou still in doubt, are coming off their Champions League dumping by Porto this week which they played without the key Ivorian striker who is also uncertain to play against Monaco. Bordeaux will be bidding to keep their winning momentum as the



**SAINT-ETIENNE:** Saint-Etienne's French defender Faouzi Ghoulam (C) vies with Karabuk's midfielder Yigit Incedemir (L) and Karabuk's defender Fehmi Gungor (R) during the UEFA Europa League play-off football match between Saint-Etienne and Karabuk on Thursday, at the Geoffroy Guichard Stadium in Saint-Etienne, central France. — AFP

Ligue 1 leaders host Bastia. Willy Sagnol's side have three wins from as many games in his first season at Bordeaux to sit two points ahead of Saint Etienne and Lille.

Marseille coach Marcelo Bielsa will be bidding to carry the winning momentum from last week's trip to Brittany back home for a clash against Riviera rivals Nice at their Velodrome Stadium.

Marseille achieved their first win of the season over Guingamp last Saturday, thanks to an Andre-Pierre Gignac goal, before he limped off the pitch with an ankle injury.

But Argentinian Bielsa insisted that he was counting on Gignac against Nice, along with midfielder Mario Lemina, also recovering from an ankle injury.

They face a tough test against Nice who beat them three times last season including twice at the Velodrome, includ-

ing a 5-4 win the French Cup last 16.

"The fact that it's a derby adds spice to the clash," said Bielsa. Nice, equal on four points with Marseille, are coming off a 3-1 home loss to Bordeaux, but their opening 3-2 win against Toulouse and goalless draw against Lorient give them reason for optimism. Fifth-placed Montpellier travel to Nantes three places below them with Tunisian international midfielder Jamel Saihi, who has failed to feature since picking up a knee injury two years ago, set to play for the first time this season.

Elsewhere, newly-promoted Caen, in fourth, host Rennes, in seventh, as Nantes travel south to Montpellier, and Lorient host Guingamp in a Brittany derby.

Tailenders Evian travel to Toulouse; Lens host Reims and Lyon, fresh from their Europa League dumping, travel north to struggling Metz. — AFP