

MIDDLESBROUGH SHOCK UNITED IN LEAGUE CUP, KLOPP OFF MARK

LONDON: Wayne Rooney failed to convert a spot-kick as Manchester United lost 3-1 on penalties to second-tier Middlesbrough in the League Cup on Wednesday, while Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool edged Bournemouth. After 120 goalless minutes at Old Trafford, the fourth-round tie went to penalties and with Rooney, Michael Carrick and Ashley Young all fluffing their lines, Championship side Middlesbrough pulled off a memorable win.

United followed holders Chelsea and Arsenal in exiting the competition, while Middlesbrough set up a home quarter-final with Everton. "You can say it's unlucky, but I said that after the City match also," said United manager Louis van Gaal, whose side drew 0-0 with Manchester City on Sunday. "You have to force the luck, but we didn't do that because we didn't score. That's why I'm disappointed."

A low-key game that saw Van Gaal make nine changes to his starting XI sprang to life mid-way through the second half, with home defender Daley Blind the central figure. The Dutchman was involved in two huge scares for United-first hacking the ball into his own net, only for the goal to be ruled out for offside, and then dispatching a back-pass that stand-in goalkeeper Sergio Romero almost allowed to bobble in for what would have been a comical own goal.

As the game ticked into injury time there was a flurry of chances, with Jesse Lingard hitting the post for United and Romero saving from Grant Leadbitter

and Stewart Downing at the other end. United pair Anthony Martial and Marouane Fellaini each had penalty shouts rejected in extra time and went close with headers, and the home side were left to rue their missed opportunities. Rooney's opening penalty was brilliantly saved by Tomas Mejias and with Carrick blazing over the bar and Mejias also denying Young, spot-kicks from Leadbitter, Downing and Ben Gibson took Aitor Karanka's men through. "I'm very proud of my players," said Karanka. "It was an amazing night for them."

City breeze through

Liverpool's new manager Klopp tasted victory at the fourth attempt as his side beat Bournemouth 1-0 at Anfield. Liverpool had recorded draws against Tottenham Hotspur, Rubin Kazan and Southampton in Klopp's first three games after succeeding Brendan Rodgers, but Nathaniel Clyne's first-half strike got the German off the mark. "It's better than a draw," Klopp told Sky Sports with a wry smile. "I'm really satisfied tonight because this team never played together since I'm here-young players, new players, players who didn't play for a long time because of injuries and they did really well." Clyne struck in the 17th minute, following up after Joao Teixeira's audacious back-heel had been cleared off the line to score his first Liverpool goal and set up a quarter-final at his former club Southampton.

Premier League leaders Manchester City will host Hull City in the last eight after a routine 5-1 home victory over



MANCHESTER: Middlesbrough's Spanish goalkeeper Tomas Mejias (left) is congratulated by Middlesbrough players after saving Ashley Young's penalty in the shoot-out during the English League Cup fourth round football match between Manchester United and Middlesbrough at Old Trafford in Manchester on October 28, 2015. — AFP

Crystal Palace, which came at the cost of an injury to right-back Pablo Zabaleta. Wilfried Bony headed City in front from Aleksandar Kolarov's 22nd-minute corner before Kelechi Iheanacho teed up Kevin De Bruyne to tap in his sixth goal in nine club games shortly before half-time. Zabaleta was stretchered off early in the second half after hurting his knee in a collision with Wilfried Zaha, with

Bacary Sagna replacing him.

City manager Manuel Pellegrini said the Argentine had damaged the medial ligament in his right knee and would undergo tests. Second-half goals by Iheanacho, Yaya Toure, from the penalty spot, and 17-year-old substitute Manu Garcia sealed victory, with Palace replying through Damien Delaney's 89th-minute header. Meanwhile, Aston Villa

began life without sacked manager Tim Sherwood by losing 2-1 at Premier League rivals Southampton, who won courtesy of second-half goals from Maya Yoshida and Graziano Pelle. Tuesday's results opened up the competition, with holders Chelsea losing 5-4 on penalties at Stoke City after a 1-1 draw and a second-string Arsenal team crashing 3-0 at second-tier Sheffield Wednesday. — AFP

BLATTER CLAIMS BACKROOM DEAL ON RUSSIA WORLD CUP

PARIS: Sepp Blatter has claimed there was a deal to give Russia the 2018 World Cup before voting took place, and blamed "bad losers" England and the US for the corruption scandal engulfing the organisation. "In 2010, we (FIFA's 22-strong executive committee) had taken a double decision, we were agreed to go to Russia (in 2018), then in 2022 we'd return to the United States," the outgoing FIFA president told Russian news agency TASS.

If the United States had won the right to host the 2022 World Cup, "all we'd be talking about now would be the marvellous 2018 World Cup in Russia and not about any problem at FIFA," he said Wednesday. Blatter's comments prompted the head of the English Football Association Greg Dyke to say he would look into recouping around £21 million (\$32.2 million, 29.1 million euros) spent on England's failed 2018 bid. Dyke said investigating the claims was a "good idea" as it would be "very nice to get taxpayers' money back."

In further revelations, Blatter hit out at UEFA president Michel Platini and former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, saying they skewered the 2022 plan by cosying up to eventual hosts Qatar. Everything changed, he added, "after talks between Sarkozy and Qatar's prince (Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani) who is now running the emirate" - a meeting followed by lunch between the two men and Platini. As a result of that Franco-Qatari summit, at

FIFA's secret ballot in December 2010 "four European votes deserted the United States and the result was 14-8 (to Qatar)", he said.

Platini defiant

Blatter accused Platini of being the original cause of the crisis at the top of football. "Platini wanted to be FIFA president, but he didn't have the courage to put himself forward," he said, referring to the May 29 election in which Blatter saw off Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein for his fifth term in office. "And now look where we are. And the victim of all this at the end of the day is Platini himself," said the 79-year-old Swiss.

Platini is currently suspended from all football-related activities for 90 days while he is investigated over a clandestine \$2 million payment he received from Blatter on behalf of FIFA in 2011 for consultancy work carried out years before. Platini had been seen as a strong favourite to take over when Blatter announced in June he was standing down. FIFA's Electoral Committee confirmed Wednesday it had seven candidates running to be the new president in a February 26 election, including the Frenchman. FIFA said the applications from the six others would be processed, but Platini's case would only be considered once his ban is lifted.

But the Frenchman was defiant, telling Swiss daily Le Matin: "In all modesty, I am the best-placed to lead world football." In the interview published yesterday he blast-

ed his suspension and the negative effect on his chances, and was adamant he would be cleared. The other candidates are Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein, Musa Bility, Jerome Champagne, Gianni Infantino, Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa and Tokyo Sexwale. Former Trinidad and Tobago footballer David Nakhid told AFP that he would appeal against a rejection of his candidacy, issued on the grounds that one of the five national football associations he gave as endorsing him has already backed another candidate.

Investigations continue

The FIFA scandal erupted when seven officials were among those arrested by Swiss police in Zurich on May 27 as part of a bribery investigation by US authorities. On Wednesday, one of those arrested, former Brazilian Football Confederation president Jose Maria Marin, 83, agreed to be extradited to the United States. Also on Wednesday, the German government confirmed it was looking into corruption allegations in relation to the country's hosting of the 2006 World Cup and an alleged unexplained payment of 6.7 million euros (\$7.43m) made to FIFA by the German Football Association. FIFA's major sponsors have renewed demands for outside figures to lead reform of the scandal-plagued world football governing body, with credit card giant Visa saying it could end its deal if the organisation is not made more accountable. — AFP

NEYMAR AND SUAREZ KEEP STUTTERING BARCA ON TRACK

MADRID: A stuttering Barcelona have had to rely on the devastating duo of Neymar and Luis Suarez to fire the goals and keep them on track as the joint La Liga leaders with Real Madrid now prepare to face Getafe away tomorrow. The Catalan side are missing injured talisman Lionel Messi but the other members of the attacking trident that hit a Spanish record 122 goals between them last season have been able to dig them out of trouble when necessary. Last weekend it was Suarez who celebrated a year since his Barca debut with a hat-trick as they had to come from behind to beat a determined Eibar at the Camp Nou.

It was a difficult start for the Uruguayan following his ban for biting during the World Cup in Brazil but he went on to be an integral figure in their treble success last season and now has a return of 35 goals from 57 games. "I never thought I would win the treble. It is something you would never expect and it has been an incredible year," Suarez told reporters. "While Leo is recovering it is good to be scoring and helping the team to win without him. This year there is a lot of expectation on the team which is normal because we always want more but to win you need to overcome a lot of obstacles." Neymar has been playing in a deeper more creative role and the pair have papered over the cracks with the team lacking their usual slick football and looking fragile at the back.

Along with Messi, Andres Iniesta and Rafinha are also among the injured while the squad has been stretched by the FIFA transfer ban over the last two windows for illegally signing minors. The poor display of a second string in a 0-0 draw away to third tier Villanovense in the first leg of their King's Cup Last 32 tie on Wednesday was further indication that the back-up is unconvincing for coach Luis Enrique. Meanwhile, Real, who are level with Barca on 21 points from nine games, are also having to overcome injury problems. They now face Las Palmas at home hoping that Karim Benzema and Pepe are ready to return but James Rodriguez, Sergio Ramos, Gareth Bale and Dani Carvajal are all set to remain in the treatment room. — Reuters