

ATLETICO STROLL PAST GALATASARAY



ISTANBUL: Galatasaray's Burak Yilmaz (right) and Saul Niguez of Atletico Madrid fight for the ball during the Champions League Group C soccer match at Turk Telekom Arena Stadium. —AP

ISTANBUL: Spanish giants Atletico Madrid yesterday made a confident start to their Champions League campaign, cantering past Group C rivals Galatasaray 2-0 in a potentially tricky Istanbul tie.

French international Antoine Griezmann ran rings around a leaky Galatasaray defence with two goals in a devastating seven-minute spell to settle the game in the first half.

Despite an improvement by Galatasaray in the second half, the tie demonstrated the sheer gulf in class between last season's La Liga third placed side and the Turkish Super Lig champions.

Atletico coach Diego Simeone could afford to leave plenty of firepower on the bench, including former Liverpool and Chelsea striker Fernando Torres, who was brought on after 60 minutes.

French international Griezmann stunned the traditionally boisterous Istanbul crowd into silence with a goal in the 18th minute, slamming the ball past Fernando Muslera after finding himself unmarked in the box. Griezmann broke Turkish hearts

with another goal just seven minutes later, latching onto a headed pass from Diego Godin with a spectacular high shot that beat the flailing Muslera.

In an indication of the bleak mood on a muggy night at the Turk Telekom Arena, Galatasaray coach Hamza Hamzaoglu substituted midfielder Emre Colak after he was whistled by his own fans.

Dutch international Wesley Sneijder gave the hosts some excitement with a tricky long range bouncing effort close to the half hour mark, but Jan Oblak made no mistake in the Atletico goal.

With Galatasaray starting to find some rhythm, Belgian Jason Denayer, a new loan acquisition from Manchester City, went close with a header that whizzed by the post.

After half time, the Turkish side's ex-Arsenal forward Lukas Podolski horribly miscued a delicate cross from Denayer, burying his head in his hands in shame.

Podolski and Galatasaray's abject night was summed up a few minutes

later when instead of making contact with a Sneijder cross, the German tripped and face-planted himself into the turf.

Atletico eased down the tempo in the second half and, despite plenty of possession, Galatasaray never found the final penetrating touches to challenge Oblak's goal.

Unmarked yet again, Griezmann ran through for a hat trick chance just before full time but was foiled by a superb reflex save from Muslera.

Galatasaray were seeking to put behind them their pitiful form so far this season in the Turkish Super Lig which has seen the Lions win just one of their first four games.

While Galatasaray can boast of four successive Champions League appearances, their performance in the 2014/2015 edition was an embarrassment, taking just a single point from the group stage. Atletico, runners-up in 2013/2014, will be looking to do better than last season when they were narrowly beaten in the quarter finals by city rivals Real Madrid. —AFP

BENFICA SURVIVE SCARE BEFORE GAITAN BREAKS DOWN ASTANA

LISBON: Champions League debutants Astana gave Benfica some worrying moments as they held out until halftime and then hit the post before going down to a 2-0 defeat in their opening Group C match yesterday. Nicolas Gaitan burst through the Astana defence to provide the breakthrough six minutes into the second half and Kostas Mitroglu made the points safe for the Eagles in front of a sparse crowd at the Stadium of Light.

But Astana, the first Kazakh team to reach the group stage, will have plenty of positives to reflect on as they make the 7,000 kilometre trip back to Central Asia.

The Kazakh champions kept Benfica at bay for the first 45 minute with some solid defending, plus two last-gasp saves by goalkeeper Nenad Eric who denied Jonas with his leg on both occasions.

In between, Benfica goalkeeper Julio Cesar gave home fans the jitters as he fumbled Foxi Kethevoama's curling free kick before gathering the ball at the second attempt. Astana nearly took a sensational lead at the start of the second half when Aleksei Schetkin, who had just come on as a substitute, got between Jardel and Luisao to poke an effort against Julio Cesar's post. Gaitan ended their resistance when he latched onto a loose ball, powered his way through a gap between the defenders and placed an angled shot past Eric in the far corner.

Mitroglu, having headed wide from eight metres, atoned for the miss when he turned in Eliseu's cross from close range following another move down the left in the 62nd minute to secure the points for the Portuguese champions. — Reuters



LISBON: Benfica's Jardel (right) jumps for the ball with Astana's Junior Kabananga during the Champions League Group C soccer match. —AP

SEVILLA PENALTIES ENOUGH TO BEAT HAPLESS GLADBACH

SEVILLE: Europa League winners Sevilla scored two out of three penalties in the second half as they beat Borussia Moenchengladbach 3-0 in Champions League Group D yesterday.

Kevin Gameiro scored from the spot seconds after the restart but failed to do it again two minutes later, striking his second penalty against the crossbar.

Sevilla's Argentine Ever Banega made amends with their third spot kick in the 67th minute and Yevhen Konoplyanka wrapped up the win in the 84th with a clever shot from a tight angle that beat goalkeeper Yann Sommer. Gladbach, who have made their worst start to a Bundesliga campaign with four consecutive defeats, were no match for the speedy Spaniards and struggled to contain them throughout the entire game.

Sevilla, still without a La Liga win this season, should have scored in the fifth minute when Vitolo hit the post with a low drive and captain Jose Antonio Reyes somehow managed to fire over the bar from five metres. Gladbach responded with a chance of their own but Roel Brouwers' glancing header sailed narrowly wide. But the Spaniards kept pushing forward and earned a penalty seconds after the restart when Sommer brought down Vitolo. Frenchman Gameiro sent the Swiss keeper the wrong way to put the hosts ahead.

Gladbach, making their first European Cup appearance in more than 37 years, were lucky to see Gameiro then rifle a second spot kick, given for another foul on Vitolo, against the bar before Banega stepped up and



SPAIN: Sevilla's Kevin Gameiro (right) heads the ball as Moenchengladbach's goalkeeper Yann Sommer, tries to catch it during a Champions League Group A soccer match. —AP

kept his cool with their third penalty to seal the victory. Sevilla, who next visit Juventus and Manchester City, with the Italians having won 2-1 in England on

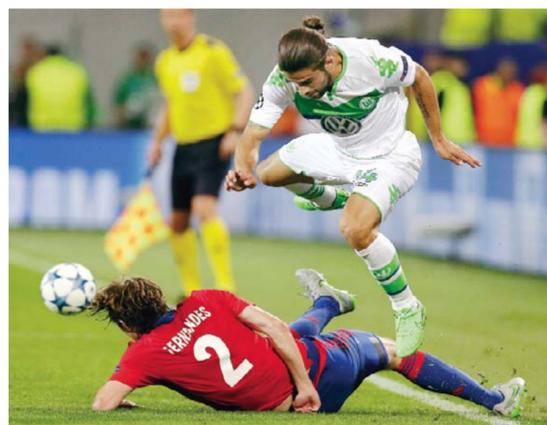
Tuesday, added a third when Konoplyanka caught Sommer off guard and the keeper fell into the goal with the ball. —Reuters

DRAXLER'S DEBUT GOAL HELPS WOLFSBURG DOWN CSKA

WOLFSBURG: VfL Wolfsburg threw down the gauntlet to Group B favorites Manchester United before their Old Trafford clash in a fortnight with a 1-0 win over CSKA Moscow yesterday.

Germany midfielder Julian Draxler scored his first goal for his new club as Wolfsburg marked their return to the Champions League after a six year absence with a win over the same side they beat 3-1 on their competition debut back in September 2009. Wolfsburg face United away in their next Champions League fixture on September 30 as Louis van Gaal's side lost 2-1 at PSV Eindhoven on Tuesday to leave the Dutch champions top of the group. The win over Moscow left Wolfsburg second in the table to Eindhoven on goal difference.

This was an impressive display from Draxler, who ran the German's midfield on only his second appearance for Wolfsburg. The 21-year-old opened the scoring on 40 minutes as he proved why Wolves paid



GERMANY: Wolfsburg's Ricardo Rodriguez (right) and CSKA's Mario Fernandes (left) challenge for the ball during the Champions League Group B soccer match. —AP

Schalke 36 million euros (US\$40.58 million) for his services. Playing in the attacking midfield role vacated

by Kevin de Bruyne's record transfer to Manchester City, Draxler finished off the move he started. After his

pass found Max Kruse in space on the right wing, Draxler powered his header at Moscow goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev, but was first to react and stabbed home the rebound.

It was no more than the hosts deserved after right winger Daniel Caligiuri had wasted a superb chance just moments before when he took too long with his shot having got in behind the defence.

Russian league leaders Moscow had little to offer and Nigeria forward Ahmed Musa was their biggest threat up front, while Serbia left winger Zoran Tosic forced Wolfsburg goalkeeper Diego Benaglio into a diving save with 20 minutes to go.

Wolfsburg needed a second goal to make sure of the three points, but the Moscow defence kept frustrating the German Cup winners.

Caligiuri had a late chance charged down while his replacement France international Josuha Guilavogui failed to connect a cross with the goal at his mercy. The hosts deserved their win with 21 shots on goal compared to Moscow's eight. —AFP

DI MARIA, CAVANI STRIKE AS PSG SEE OFF MALMO

PARIS: Angel Di Maria and Edinson Cavani were on target as Paris Saint-Germain began their Champions League campaign with an ultimately comfortable 2-0 win against Malmo at the Parc des Princes yesterday.

Di Maria scored less than four minutes into his Champions League debut as a PSG player to set the French champions on their way, but they missed a succession of opportunities before finally extending their advantage when Cavani headed home in the 61st minute.

With Real Madrid and Shakhtar Donetsk also in Group A, Paris needed a strong start against the Swedish champions as they target not just qualification for the knockout rounds but an improvement on their runs to the quarter-finals in each of the last three campaigns.

But while they got the points, it was far from a vintage display by Laurent Blanc's side with Zlatan Ibrahimovic wasteful in front of goal and later being substituted against his

hometown team and the club with whom he started his illustrious career back in 1999. The Swedish striker returned after injury in one of three changes to the Paris team that had been held to a 2-2 draw at home by Bordeaux in Ligue 1 at the weekend, but he was upstaged in the fourth minute by Di Maria.

The Argentina winger was labelled as the man to take PSG to the next level in Europe when he was signed from Manchester United last month, and he indicated why as he ran onto Marco Verratti's pass in behind the Malmo defence before angling a beautiful finish past Johan Wiland and into the far corner of the net. However, if anyone then expected PSG to romp to a big victory, they were to be disappointed. Malmo, who beat Celtic in a play-off to reach this stage, lined up with nine full internationals on the field at kick-off and, with a five-man defence and two deep in midfield, were stuffy opponents. But, save for a Nikola Djurdjic shot that slid just wide of Kevin Trapp's far post in the 34th minute, they

offered little in attack. Instead, PSG let themselves down at times with wasteful passing and poor finishing, not least from Ibrahimovic, who failed to convert no fewer than five attempts in the first half alone and was then let down by his touch having been put in by Cavani just after the restart. Nevertheless, he proved much more adept when it came to setting up his colleagues, and it was from an Ibrahimovic pass that Di Maria sent in a curling shot which was tipped around the post by Wiland on 52 minutes.

The second goal finally arrived just after the hour mark thanks to Cavani, the Uruguayan heading home his sixth of the season after Ibrahimovic had flicked on a left-wing cross from Maxwell.

That ended any ideas that Malmo had of coming back into the game, and only a superb stop by Wiland from point-blank range to deny David Luiz kept the final score down before substitute Ezequiel Lavezzi had a goal disallowed right at the death. —AFP



FRANCE: PSG's Zlatan Ibrahimovic (right) watches Malmo's goalkeeper Johan Wiland catch the ball during the Champions League Group A soccer match. —AP