

Sports

France defeat
Latvia, to play
Spain in semifinals



Mueller brace
lifts Bayern



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2015

HAMILTON LOOMS LARGE IN SMOKY SINGAPORE

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ITALY: AS Roma's French defender Lucas Digne (left) vies with Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (right) during the UEFA Champions League football match at the Rome Olympic stadium. — AFP

FLORENZI WONDER GOAL DENY MESSI, BARCA

ROME: An Alessandro Florenzi wonder goal earned Roma a share of the spoils as Barcelona's Lionel Messi celebrated his 100th Champions League appearance yesterday with a goal in a 1-1 draw at the Stadio Olimpico.

Roma, dominated throughout by the defending champions, looked to be on their way to a sound defeat after Luis Suarez rose at Wojciech Szczesny's back post after 21 minutes to head home Ivan Rakitic's delivery.

But the hosts were given a huge treat when Florenzi struck from just over the halfway line to catch Marc-Andre ter Stegen way out of his goal with a shot that bounced off the post and into the net.

Barcelona went on to spurn a series of great chances but a determined Roma produced a solid defensive performance to ultimately frustrate Luis Enrique's men.

A draw against the Catalan giants will be considered a huge result, given the 7-1 thrashing Roma suffered by Bayern Munich in the group stages last year.

A day after seeing Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo overtake their shared record of 77 goals in the competition with a hat-trick in a 4-0 win over Shakhtar Donetsk, Messi had plenty reason to be on the goals hunt. The Argentinian was a class act, dipping and skipping past Roma's players at will but failing to add to close his gap to Ronaldo's new tally of 80 goals. When Messi spun away from Radja Nainggolan in the opening minutes he fired just a metre over Szczesny's bar.

Roma were finding counter-attacking chances and twice Mohamed Salah powered down the right flank in the opening ten minutes before meeting traffic.

Gradually, Barcelona settled, prompting a chorus of whistle and jeers among Roma's increasingly-unhappy fans. When Suarez threatened deep on the right byline, nerves were settled only by Antonio Rudiger's clean tackle to dispossess the Uruguayan.

But Barcelona were not to be denied. On 21 minutes

Messi backed into Lucas Digne and the subsequent confusion over whether a foul had been committed gave Barcelona a split second's momentum. Rakitic went unchallenged at the right post to send in a lob for Suarez to header home at the back post, as Roma's players protested in vain.

Roma looked all at sea and when Suarez broke deep on the left, only a timely intervention from Szczesny rescued the hosts from conceding again although replays showed the Polish goalkeeper completely missed the ball and made contact with Suarez instead.

Roma seemed shellshocked and an eerie silence hung over the stadium as fans sat in awe, until the stupor was broken in spectacular fashion just after the half hour.

Seeing Ter Stegen 15 metres off his line, Florenzi looked up from near the right touchline and hit a drive from just inside the halfway line that sailed over the 'keeper, off the far post and into the net.

The 58,800 crowd were stunned, but Barca responded immediately, Messi twice going close after a mazy run down the right hand side of the penalty area although Roma finished the half on a high, Nainggolan unleashing a drive from 25 yards that forced Ter Stegen to parry down low at his left post, while Salah fired over after a great run that saw him hold off two markers.

Barca took barely 90 seconds after the restart to threaten again, Szczesny first denying Messi from distance and then diving at the feet of Suarez to deny the Uruguayan.

Jordi Alba had kept the ball in play and Suarez had two stabs with his feet, the second injuring Szczesny's hand and ending his game prematurely. Morgan De Sanctis, who has not played a league game all season, replaced the Pole and despite some early nerves went on to produce a great performance, denying Barcelona with a string of fine saves at the death. — AFP

ARSENAL STUNNED IN ZAGREB

ZAGREB: Dinamo Zagreb piled further misery upon English sides in Europe as they stunned 10-man Arsenal 2-1 in Croatia to record their first Champions League group stage win in 16 attempts.

Making their 18th straight group phase appearance in the competition, the Gunners were hoping to fare better than both Manchester clubs, who lost their opening games on Tuesday, but instead suffered a chastening defeat of their own in their Group F curtain-raiser.

Arsene Wenger's men fell behind on 24 minutes when Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain put through his own net and their troubles were compounded with Olivier Giroud dismissed for a second yellow card just before half-time.

Junior Fernandes added a second for Dinamo just before the hour and although substitute Theo Walcott pulled one back the Croatian champions held on to extend their unbeaten run in all competitions to 42 matches.

With an eye on Saturday's Premier League trip to Chelsea and a League Cup tie at Tottenham the following week, Wenger made six changes to the side that beat Stoke 2-0 at the weekend.

Captain Mikel Arteta was handed a first start of the season in midfield with

Aaron Ramsey and Francis Coquelin rested while David Ospina deputised for Petr Cech in goal.

Giroud was also restored to the line-up and it was the Frenchman who nearly put Arsenal ahead on nine minutes when he connected with a Santi Cazorla corner only to be denied by an excellent save from Eduardo. Giroud was then left frustrated by the woodwork after getting on the end of an Oxlade-Chamberlain cross with Eduardo blocking the striker's follow-up effort.

The Arsenal goal had come under little threat aside from two speculative Marko Pjaca strikes but Dinamo made the most of their opportunity when it arrived midway through the first half as El Arabi Hilal Soudani threaded a pass into the path of left-back Josip Pivacic.

Pivacic had crept in behind the visitors' defence and although his initial effort was kept out well by Ospina the rebound ricocheted back off the unfortunate Oxlade-Chamberlain and over the stranded Colombian. Arsenal's night then lurched from bad to worse as Giroud, cautioned earlier for dissent, was sent off five minutes before the interval after picking up a second booking for a clumsy tackle on Ivo Pinto. Soudani missed a glorious chance to double the lead for the home side just after



ZAGREB: Arsenal's Gabriel (left) and Zagreb's Leonardo Sigali (second left) challenge for the ball during a Champions League Group F soccer match. — AP

the resumption as he headed against the post from close range before stabbing the rebound wide.

Moments after that huge let-off Mesut Ozil found himself alone in front of Eduardo but the German's scuffed shot was smothered by the Dinamo goalkeeper.

A second goal for the home side on 58 minutes eased the nerves at the Stadion Maksimir though. Mathieu Debuchy made a desperate block to divert a Junior Fernandes effort behind but the Chilean

rose above Laurent Koscielny to power home a header from the resulting corner and put Dinamo firmly in control. Walcott, on the ground where he scored a hat-trick for England against Croatia seven years ago, raced onto a ball through from Alexis Sanchez and steered a composed finish beyond Eduardo to give the Gunners a lifeline on 79 minutes. Dinamo remained resolute at the back though with Ante Coric nearly netting a third for Zoran Mamic's side right at the death. — AFP

GHENT HOLD LYON

GHENT: Champions League newcomers Ghent overcame the disadvantage of two dismissals to come from behind to draw 1-1 at home with Olympique Lyonnais in their Group H encounter yesterday.

Ghent finished with nine men but goalkeeper Matz Sels made a one-handed penalty save just two minutes from time to ensure a share of the spoils in a drama-filled tie at the Artevelde Stadium.

The Belgian club's debut in Europe's premier club competition threatened to turn into a nightmare after Brecht Dejaegere was sent off four minutes before half-time for a studs-up challenge in a decision that seemed harsh on the part of Scottish referee William Collum.

Dejaegere was in tears as he departed the pitch and would have felt even worse 13 minutes into the second half when Lyon opened the scoring with substitute defender Christophe Jallett expertly heading home a corner.

But the lead lasted just 10 minutes before Danijel Milicevic equalised after a strong run down the wing and shot into the corner of the French team's net.

With two minutes left, Thomas Foket was dismissed for a tug from behind after being caught on the wrong side of Lyon's teenage substitute Aldo Kalulu and Lyon were awarded a penalty.

Alexandre Lacazette, seeking to end a recent goal drought, stepped up to take the spot kick but saw Sels stick up his hand to turn the effort over the crossbar.

The Belgians, who won a first domestic title in their 115-year history in May, made a bright start with Lyon keeper Anthony Lopes forced to save from Dejaegere after just two minutes and then getting a slight touch to a shot from Laurent Depoitre which thundered back off the crossbar seven minutes later. Renato Neto missed a chance to give Ghent the lead on the stroke of half-time and despite the setbacks, the Belgians proved equals to a French team with considerable past Champions League experience. — Reuters