

14 Yankees' Cole posts 20th straight win



15 Bo Horvat's overtime winner gives Canucks 2-0 lead in playoff series



15 Miami's Jones stretched off in NBA loss to Pacers



LISBON: Bayern Munich's Brazilian midfielder Philippe Coutinho (C) scores his team's eighth goal during the UEFA Champions League quarter-final football match between Barcelona and Bayern Munich at the Luz stadium in Lisbon. —AFP

Bayern humiliate Messi's Barcelona 8-2

End of an era as Barca humiliation makes revolution the only option

MADRID: Barcelona's worst ever defeat in Europe, an 8-2 mauling at the hands of Bayern Munich, will signal the end of Quique Setien as coach but it feels like the end of more than that. Setien may not even survive the weekend but the fact a second sacking in eight months would be the least of Barca's worries says it all.

"It's too soon to say if I will continue or not and it doesn't depend on me," said Setien. "The club needs changes," said Gerard Pique. "Nobody is untouchable, least of all me. Fresh blood is needed to change this. We've hit rock bottom."

Lionel Messi was supposed to win it alone, the Argentinian charged with somehow masking the failings of an entire club against the most formidable team in Europe. It was a desperate hope, swiftly dashed by a ruthless Bayern side, whose demolition exposed Barcelona's ageing team for what Messi has been saying all along: they are simply not good enough.

He said it in February and again in July, when a rant in the aftermath of handing Real Madrid the title turned into a brutal, but honest, assessment of their

season. Messi saw the fall coming but it was too late to do anything about it and the question now is whether he wants to be part of the process of recovery and renewal.

Most have assumed it would take something cataclysmic for Messi to leave but at an elite football club, what could be worse than this? This was more painful than the capitulations against Roma and Liverpool, when carelessness and fragility deprived Barcelona of a genuine chance to lift the Champions League trophy.

But they were shocks because Barca were contenders. This time, nobody expected them to beat Bayern. Many expected a thrashing but few could have predicted the severity of it. The humiliations started in the fourth minute and kept coming until the 89th.

They began even before kick-off when the starting line-ups were announced, with three Barca signings bought for more than 100 million euros each all sitting on the bench. One of them, Philippe Coutinho, was on Bayern's bench and he came on to score twice against his parent club, the first even seemingly with reluctance.

Doha in September. "It took a lot of mind setting to keep being motivated this year because so many people are staying at home, but you have to stay motivated."

The Ugandan added: "I pushed myself, I had the right staff with me, the right coach. I'm also usually based in Europe, but being based in Uganda with my family was actually great." Following exhibition events in Oslo and Zurich in June and July, the Diamond League meeting in Monaco marked the start of the competitive season.

Meetings in Eugene, London, Paris, Rabat, Gateshead and Shanghai have all cancelled because of coronavirus. Running in front of a reduced capacity of 5,000 masked spectators in line with COVID-19 restrictions, music blared out as World Athletics debuted a "bespoke atmosphere creation system" to enhance the experience for the athletes, the spectators and the broadcast audience in the absence of a full crowd.

Warholm showed no sign of coronavirus-induced rustiness as he led from gun to tape to clock a meet record of 47.10sec in the men's 400m hurdles, the first time he has run the event since he won his second world title in Doha. "It's a great start," said the Norwegian. "I'm happy to be back. It's great seeing some audience... competitors at my side."

BRAVE DECISIONS AWAIT

Messi, at 33, knows his end is near but he will choose when it comes. Others may not be so lucky, with Pique and Luis Suarez also 33 and Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba 31.

All of them have played a part in Barca's golden era but that era feels a long time ago now and if this team is to regenerate, brave decisions will have to be made.

Frankie de Jong, Ansu Fati and Riqui Puig are the future, smothered this season by the failures of those ahead of them and perhaps ready to be trusted to lead. If it's the end of an era for Barcelona, it is for Spain too. The national team may have long been overtaken but Messi kept Barca challenging while the Champions League became the kingdom of Real Madrid.

Not anymore, this the first year since 2007 that the semi-finals will be without a Spanish club, and the first since 2005 without either Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo.

Who will lead the Barca revolution remains to be seen, with Xavi Hernandez, Mauricio Pochettino and Ronald Koeman all sufficiently put off that they rejected the chance in January. Will

they be any keener now?

Barcelona will not have the money to make big additions, meaning they may have to look within.

But that would be a long-term project, which the club cannot guarantee either given their presidential elections are due in 2021. A new regime could well bring a new coach too.

A year might even feel like a long time for the current president Josep Maria Bartomeu, who would not rule out the elections being brought forward on Friday. "Today was a disaster," he said. "Some decisions we had already thought to take and others we will think about in the next few days."

Since 2014, his board have stumbled from blunder to blunder, all the while alienating the dressing room and driving this period of chaos and decline.

It began with Neymar leaving and never being replaced, the frantic attempts to bring him back then failing because the funds had been squandered elsewhere. And it ended with a public humiliation that Messi saw coming. It had been coming for a long time. —AFP

Cheptegei sets record, Lyles' raised fist protest

MONACO: Ugandan Joshua Cheptegei ensured a thrilling return for competitive athletics on Friday as he shattered the much-vaunted 16-year-old 5,000m world record at the Monaco Diamond League. Cheptegei's astonishing display capped a warm welcome back for track and field for a season almost wiped out by the coronavirus pandemic, with fellow world champions Noah Lyles and Karsten Warholm also shining on the track.

Lyles had worn a black glove on his right hand and raised his fist at the start of the 200m to show his support for recent anti-racism protests. In perfect conditions, with little wind and temperatures of 27 degrees Celsius (81F), Cheptegei clocked 12min 35.36sec to shatter Ethiopian legend Kenenisa Bekele's previous best of 12:37.35, set in 2004.

"I've tried to improve on my speed," smiled Cheptegei when asked what he had been working on since his world gold medal showing in the 10,000m in

LYLES RAISES BLACK-GLOVED FIST

World 200m champion Lyles also had no problems in his race, sweeping to a convincing victory in 19.76sec. Raising a black-gloved fist to the air when introduced to the crowd, the win was the perfect tonic for Lyles, who has admitted to psychological problems worsened by the "perfect storm" of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Black Lives Matter movement and the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics at which he was hotly tipped for success. "It's a lot better to be out here competing instead of being in your backyard," said Lyles. "I have high expectations for myself so I'd say the race got the Noah stamp of approval but not the Noah satisfaction stamp!"

A loaded women's 5,000m field witnessed a battle royale between Kenyan world champion Hellen Obiri and Ethiopian Letesenbet Gidey. After world 1,500m and 10,000m double gold medalist Sifan Hassan dropped out of the running, Gidey took up the fight, leading Obiri through the bell.

But the Kenyan responded magnificently, sprinting away for the win in a meet record of 14:22.12. Obiri's teammate and fellow world champion Timothy Cheruiyot also held off Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen for a thrilling win in the men's 1500m, taking the victory by 0.23sec in 3:28.45. American Donovan Brazier made no mistake in the men's 800m, bettering his world



MONACO: Uganda's Joshua Cheptegei, wearing an Uganda national flag on his shoulders, poses for pictures next to the timer screen after breaking the world record in the men's 5000metre event during the Diamond League Athletics Meeting at The Louis II Stadium in Monaco. —AFP

lead to 1:43.15. However, there was no such success for US compatriot and world 110m hurdles champion Grant Holloway, who could only finish fourth (13.19sec) in a race won by Cuban-born Spaniard Orlando Ortega (13.11). Earlier in the day, French pole vaulter Valentin Lavillenie was ruled out of competition after testing positive for COVID-19. —AFP