

# Aubameyang seals Arsenal comeback

● Olivier Giroud's perfect hat-trick fires Chelsea into Europa League last eight

● Aubameyang the hero as Arsenal beat Rennes and reach quarter-finals

AFP | Paris

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang spearheaded Arsenal's revival by scoring twice in a 3-0 win over Rennes to reach the Europa League quarter-finals 4-3 on aggregate, as Chelsea and Napoli also booked a last-eight spot on Thursday.

The Gunners cancelled out their 3-1 deficit from last week's first leg in France inside 15 minutes as Aubameyang swept home from close range before teeing up Ainsley Maitland-Niles to head home.

However, Rennes had cause to complain as Aubameyang should have been flagged offside before the second goal.

With VAR not in use for the Europa League unlike the Champions League, there was



Arsenal's Gabonese striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (R) scores their second goal from the penalty spot

no recourse for Rennes and the Ligue 1 side will also reflect on missed opportunities after the break as a historic European run for the club came to an end.

M'Baye Niang struck the post and Sead Kolasinac's last-ditch tackle denied Ismaila Sarr before the Bosnian wing-back crossed for Aubameyang to give Arsenal breathing space.

Winning the Europa League

also offers Arsenal and Chelsea the safety net of Champions League qualification should they fail to make the top four in the Premier League.

But Arsenal boss Unai Emery, who won the Europa League three times as Sevilla coach, also wants the glory of a trophy in his first season in charge.

"It is not only the possibility to go to Champions League, it

is one title and we can feel the possibility to win one title," said the Spaniard.

Chelsea cruised into the last eight with greater ease as six Premier League sides took their place in yesterday's quarter-finals draws with Manchester City, Manchester United, Liverpool and Tottenham in the last eight of the Champions League. After a 3-0 victory in last



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UNAI EMERY

week's last 16, first leg at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea were even more dominant in Kiev as Olivier Giroud scored his first hat-trick for the club.

"We started very well. We wanted to start in this way," Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri told BT Sport. "We played a wonderful first half and managed the game in the second half."

Giroud, who is yet to start in the Premier League in 2019 after the signing of Gonzalo Higuain, netted a first-half double, before Marcos Alonso slid home a third on the stroke of half-time.

Frenchman Giroud completed his hat-trick before teenage winger Callum Hudson-Odoi rounded off the scoring.

**Sevilla shocked by Slavia**

Five-time winners Sevilla were beaten 4-3 after extra time

to lose a thrilling tie against Slavia Prague 6-5 on aggregate.

Twice the Spanish side came from behind to take the tie to extra time thanks to goals from Wissam Ben Yedder and Munir El-Haddadi.

However, after Franco Vazquez had given Sevilla a 3-2 lead on the night, Slavia hit back and Ibrahim Traore's winner a minute from time sealed a famous win for the Czechs.

Napoli wrapped up a 4-3 aggregate victory over last season's semi-finalists Salzburg despite a 3-1 second-leg loss in Austria.

Another Serie A giant fell, though, as the highly-rated Luka Jovic scored the only goal of the night and the tie as Eintracht Frankfurt beat Inter Milan at the San Siro.

Russian outfit Krasnodar suffered heartbreak as Goncalo Guedes scored a dramatic injury-time equaliser to send Valencia through 3-2 on aggregate after a 1-1 second-leg draw.

Spanish sides have dominated this competition in recent years and despite Sevilla's defeat will have two representatives in the last eight as Villarreal beat Zenit St Petersburg 2-1 to seal a resounding 5-2 aggregate victory.

## Bencic sweeps into semis

Belinda Bencic sets up Indian Wells semi-final with Angelique Kerber

AFP | Indian Wells

Resurgent Swiss Belinda Bencic toppled another top-10 player, downing fifth-ranked Karolina Pliskova to set up an Indian Wells WTA final against Angelique Kerber.

Bencic, a former world number seven whose ranking slumped as injuries stalled her career, showed no sign of a let-down after her fourth-round victory over world number one and defending champion Naomi Osaka, out-lasting Czech Pliskova 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.

She stretched her WTA match winning streak to 12 -- six of those wins coming against top-10 players with No. 8 Kerber coming up.

Germany's Kerber defeated seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams 7-6 (7/3), 6-3.

"Of course I'm very confident," said Bencic, who rose to 23 in the world with her first WTA title in four years at Dubai last month and will crack the top 10 by virtue of reaching the semis here.

"I'm not putting pressure on myself even now," the 22-year-old said. "I'm just playing. The less I think on the court the better it is."

"When you're confident you can just trust your instincts and you don't have to think about it at all. I'm definitely playing how I feel it, and it's going so well I'm not planning on changing that."

Pliskova launched her season with a 12th career title in Brisbane, and shocked Serena Williams to reach the Australian Open semi-finals.

After dropping the first set she came back strong in the second, winning the first four games as she forced a decisive



Belinda Bencic of Switzerland plays Karolina Pliskova of Czech Republic



Belinda Bencic stretched her match-winning streak to 12 - six of those wins coming against top-10 players

number ones.

Kerber dominated the tie-breaker to grab a hard-fought first set that featured four breaks of serve.

She had to fight for the lone break of the second set as Williams saved four break points to hold for 2-2 and saved four more in the sixth game before Kerber finally converted one for a 4-2 lead that would stand up the rest of the way.

Williams never got her big serve going, producing just one ace. The 38-year-old veteran did her best to catch Kerber out with crafty changes of pace, but the German was able to adjust.

"I think every body saw that Venus is really a player with a lot of experience," Kerber said. "She played really tricky -- in the good way -- it was really hard for me to play my game."

"I was really trying in the first set especially to find my rhythm but it was not so easy. I'm happy that I won the first set and then could move in and play a little bit better."

Other semi-final had already been set with 18-year-old Canadian wildcard Bianca Andreescu due to take on world number six Elina Svitolina of Ukraine.

third set, although not before Bencic saved four set points.

Close games marked the start of the third, with Pliskova fighting off four break points in a game that went to eight deuces to hold for 2-2.

But Bencic held her next two service games with authority and broke for a 5-3 lead, finally sealing the match with a serve that was too much for Pliskova.

**Kerber solves Venus puzzle**

Reigning Wimbledon champion Kerber reached the Indian Wells semi-finals for the third time with her win over Williams in a battle of former world

## Solskjaer goes back to Camp Nou as Man Utd draw Barcelona in Champions League

● An all Premier League-tie sees Tottenham take on Manchester City, while Liverpool will face Porto, and Ajax face Juventus

● Arsenal draw Napoli in pick of Europa League

● Chelsea to play Slavia Prague

AFP | Paris

Manchester United will face Barcelona in the Champions League quarter-finals while Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur clash in an all-Premier League tie following yesterday's draw.

Liverpool were drawn to play FC Porto in the knockout rounds for the second year in succession, as Ajax's reward for eliminating the holders Real Madrid is a two-legged tie against Cristiano Ronaldo and Juventus.

English hopes are high that this could be their year in Europe's elite club competition after all four of their representatives made it through to the last eight.

However, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's United will have their work cut out if they are to go any further as they take on the Barcelona of Lionel Messi in the headline tie.

For Solskjaer, the second leg will bring back memories of the 1999 final, when the Norwegian came off the bench to score a stoppage-time winner for United against Bayern Munich at Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium.



Manchester United club ambassador Andrew Cole shakes hands with FC Barcelona Sporting Director Eric Abidal after the draw

With City and United not allowed to play their home leg in the same week, United will entertain the leaders of La Liga at Old Trafford on April 9 or 10, with the return a week later.

The last time the Premier League had four teams in the quarter-finals, in 2008/09, Barcelona beat the Old Trafford side 2-0 in the final in Rome. The clubs clashed again in the final at Wembley in 2011, with Barca winning 3-1 on that occasion.

**Repeat of '96 final**

UEFA also drew the semi-finals yesterday, meaning the winners of the Barcelona v United will face either Liverpool or Porto in the last four.

Jurgen Klopp's side, fresh from knocking out Bayern Munich in the last 16, will be confident of beating the Portuguese champions after defeating them 5-0 on aggregate in the last 16 on their way to the final last season.

Liverpool will host two-time European Cup winners Porto at Anfield in the first leg before heading to the Estadio do Dragao in the return on April 16 or 17.

There is guaranteed to be one English team in the semi-finals after Tottenham and City were paired together, with the first leg to be played in London.

With Pep Guardiola's team top of the Premier League, 13 points ahead of Spurs in third, City will be the favourites to advance to their first semi-final since 2016. City have also won their last three meetings with Mauricio Pochettino's team.

The draw means there will be three clashes between the sides in 10 days -- they are also due to meet in the Premier League at the Etihad Stadium on April 20.

The winner of that tie will host either Ajax or Juventus in the first leg of the semi-finals.

The latter tie is a repeat of the 1996 final, which the Italian club won on penalties against an Ajax team who had won the trophy the previous year.

Juventus have lost five finals since then but are hoping Ronaldo can fire them to glory this season after his hat-trick knocked out Atletico Madrid on Tuesday. That result ended Atletico's dreams of reaching the final, which will be played at their Wanda Metropolitano stadium on Saturday, June 1.