

SPORTS
sports

Chelsea fight off Slavia

Pedro leads Chelsea into Europa League last four despite Slavia Prague scare

AFP | London

Chelsea were given a fright by Slavia Prague in a 4-3 home win on Thursday that saw them to a 5-3 aggregate victory and a place in the semi-finals of the Europa League.

Already 1-0 up from the first leg, Chelsea were cruising when they scored three more goals in the first 17 minutes at Stamford Bridge courtesy of Pedro, an own-goal by Simon Deli and Olivier Giroud and were 4-1 ahead on the night at half-time.

But having been facing a rout, the Czech visitors restored their pride with two early second-half goals from Petr Sevcik as they threatened a remarkable comeback.

Chelsea, however, held on and the London club will face Eintracht Frankfurt for a place in the final after the German side beat Benfica 2-0 to go through on away goals after the tie ended level at 4-4 after two legs.

Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri made five changes from the team beaten 2-0 by Liver-



Chelsea's Spanish midfielder Pedro (R) scores the team's first goal

pool in the Premier League on Sunday and put Eden Hazard on the wing with Olivier Giroud the Blues' central striker.

The Londoners doubled their

aggregate lead just five minutes into the second leg of this quarter-final tie thanks to Pedro's neat finish after a one-two with Giroud.

Minutes later, Chelsea had another goal.

Pedro produced a contender for miss of the season when presented with a tap-in from

close range that came back off the post only for the ball to fly into the face of Slavia defender Simon Deli and rebound into the net for a bizarre own-goal.

Pedro then turned provider, squaring for Giroud to score his 10th Europa League goal of the season.

Chelsea were cruising at 3-0 ahead on aggregate and it seemed Tomas Soucek had done no more than score a consolation goal when he rose unmarked to head in from a corner.

Chelsea though were soon three goals ahead again when Pedro bundled the ball in.

But Slavia rallied impressively after the interval, with Sevcik's 20-yard shot beating Kefa Arizabalaga at the Chelsea goalkeeper's near post.

And soon afterwards, in the 55th minute, Sevcik produced an even better effort from similar range that flew into the top corner to give Slavia hope of a remarkable recovery.

But that was as good as it got for the visitors, with Sevcik scuffing a shot that might have seen him complete what would

Barcelona can wait as Klopp eyes Cardiff and Huddersfield

AFP | London

Jürgen Klopp is adamant that their upcoming Premier League matches against Cardiff and Huddersfield are just as important as their mouth-watering Champions League semi-final against Barcelona as they chase down a domestic and European double.

They will be huge favourites to beat both strugglers Cardiff and already relegated Huddersfield, but Klopp is taking nothing for granted in the Reds' quest to win their first domestic title since 1990 as they tussle with champions Manchester City.

"These are all massive games," said Klopp ahead of Sunday's match in Cardiff.

"None of them are won before we start.

"Everybody thinks a lot about Barcelona but before Barcelona it's Cardiff and Huddersfield and it's exactly the same importance to us as the other games."

Arsenal dump out Ancelotti's Napoli

● Arsenal in Europa League semi-finals after Alexandre Lacazette sinks Napoli

AFP | Naples, Italy

Alexandre Lacazette scored the only goal as Arsenal dispatched Napoli 1-0 on Thursday to advance to the Europa League semi-finals 3-0 on aggregate.

Lacazette's stunning 36th-minute free-kick put the English club through to a final four meeting with Spanish side Valencia.

"I don't know if it's our best performance this season, but it's good, particularly after beating Watford Monday," said Arsenal coach Unai Emery.

"Our objective was to score, we did that, to win, and to be consistent for 90 minutes.

"I'm very proud of the players, very proud of our work. The players showed personality."

The exit of Carlo Ancelotti's Napoli means no Italian clubs are left in European competition this season.

"We knew it was going to be difficult, and sorry there's no Italian teams left," said Ancelotti, after Juventus crashed out of the Champions League to Ajax on Tuesday.

"I think the key to qualification was the first 20 minutes in the away match, that's when we played really badly.

"The two games were really balanced, there wasn't that much of a difference as the result suggests."

Emery's side were never troubled by the Italians despite the heated atmosphere in the Stadio San Paolo, with just over a thousand English fans among the 40,000 crowd, and after losing midfielder Aaron Ramsey to a hamstring injury after half an hour.

Napoli had turned up the pressure early with a chance to break through after 17 minutes

with Kalidou Koulibaly going on the counter-attack, racing up the pitch to cross to Jose Callejon but Petr Cech closed down the Spaniard's weak effort.

Ramsey limped off after 33 minutes with Henrikh Mkhitaryan coming on for the Welsh international.

The Armenian promptly set up Lacazette who was awarded a free-kick after being brought down by Piotr Zielinski.

Lacazette whipped the ball in from 25 metres past a motionless Alex Meret in the Napoli goal. Napoli could have scored four goals but paid for sloppy finishing, with captain Lorenzo Insigne visibly upset as the team were whistled off the pitch.

'Play intelligently'

Emery now faces a reunion with former club Valencia, 5-1 aggregate winners over fellow Spaniards Villarreal, as he targets a fourth Europa League title.

"I think Arsenal is an intelligent team, they are really well organised offensively and defensively," said Ancelotti.

"It's not a team that plays in my opinion fantastic football, but they play intelligently and they deserved victory. I wish them the best in the Europa League."

The final will be in Baku on May 29.

Three-time Champions League winner Ancelotti finished his first season with Napoli without the promised trophy.

Napoli's hopes of a first Serie A title since 1990 are over as they trail second in Serie A -- 17 points behind Juventus who need just one point to wrap up an eighth consecutive Scudetto.

No hiding place for out-of-form United stars: Solskjaer

AFP | Manchester

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has warned his under-achieving Manchester United players there is no "hiding place" for them and they are playing for their futures at the club.

The United manager, whose side exited the Champions League this week in limp fashion against Barcelona, said he is looking to the likes of Anthony Martial and Paul Pogba to rediscover their best form as they battle to qualify for next season's Champions League.

United face three crucial league games with Everton, Manchester City and Chelsea that will have a huge say on whether they finish in the top four.

But with big name stars such as Martial and Pogba desperately struggling for form in a run that has seen United lose five of their last seven league and cup games, the United manager has laid out demands to his players.

"I've learnt a lot about them over the months I've been here now and you get to know them," said Solskjaer.

"Most of them have really impressed me in their attitude and, of course, there are some who need to get a reality check of where they're at.

"Every day in training, every game when you're playing



Manchester United's French midfielder Paul Pogba (L) and Manchester United's French striker Anthony Martial attend a training session (file photo)

there's no hiding place and everyone can see what your level's at we're working with fantastic staff to create this culture."

'Have to be realistic'

Solskjaer, who has seen his side's fortunes slide since he was handed the job on a permanent basis after a sparkling start as interim manager, said tests such as Barcelona are good indicators of whether players are able to play at such a level.

"It is performance on the pitch that will determine where they're at in their careers, short term and long term, every single day," said Solskjaer.



Three-time Champions League winner Ancelotti finished his first season with Napoli without the promised trophy



Alexandre Lacazette of Arsenal hits home a free-kick to ensure his side's progress at the expense of Napoli