

**BRIEFLY**

**Bengaluru lose in AFC Cup qualifiers**

**Bengaluru:** Bengaluru FC failed to qualify for the group stage of the AFC Cup after they lost the two-legged play-off tie to Maziya of Maldives in a penalty shoot out here on Wednesday. Bengaluru won the second leg 3-2 here on Wednesday but since they had lost to the Maldivian team 1-2 in their away match on February 19, the two sides were tied 4-4 on aggregate and the tie had to be decided on a penalty shoot-out. Maziya won the shootout 4-3 to progress further in the group stage of the AFC Cup.

**Sonam beats Sakshi in wrestling trials**

**Lucknow:** Proving her mettle yet again, young Sonam Malik downed Sakshi Malik for the second time in a row, this time by pinning the Olympic medalist, to make it to the Indian team for next month's Olympic Qualifiers here on Wednesday. Sonam failed to win a medal in both the events but impressed during her fifth-place finish in New Delhi. Meanwhile, Kiran won the trial in 76kg. The Asian Olympic Qualifiers will be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from March 27-29. The finalists will qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

**Top stars for India Open badminton**

**New Delhi:** World No. 1 Chen Yufei and defending men's singles champion Viktor Axelsen will headline a star-studded international contingent when the 10th edition of the India Open Super 500 tournament will begin here on March 24. With the Olympic qualification cut-off set to end on April 26, the USD 400,000 event will see a galaxy of stars, including eight of the world's top 10 women singles and three of top 10 men singles players, descending at the Indian capital. Home challenge will be led by world champion PV Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, and doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty.

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# Munich Serge over the Bridge

German winger scores a brace as Bayern expose a youthful Chelsea's shortcomings in the 3-0 first-leg win

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 26

FRANK LAMPARD faces the first major test of his nascent managerial career after Chelsea were given a chastening Champions League lesson by Bayern Munich. Lampard's side are on the verge of crashing out of Europe's elite club competition following Tuesday's 3-0 home defeat against the German champions in the last-16 first leg.

Serge Gnabry's second-half brace and Robert Lewandowski's late strike underlined the gulf in class between a Chelsea team experiencing growing pains in Lampard's first season and a Bayern side packed with Champions League experience. Four of the Bayern team that outplayed Chelsea at Stamford Bridge were members of the German club's 2013 Champions League final-winning team.

That wealth of knowledge was clear to see as Thomas Muller ran the show in midfield, while Lewandowski, who played in that final for Bayern's opponents Borussia Dortmund, was a constant menace. For Chelsea to reach the levels set by Bayern, Lampard knows he needs to oversee a lengthy rebuild that will require patience—a quality not usually shown by the club's notoriously fickle owner Roman Abramovich and his advisors in the boardroom.

"This is Champions League football. We as a club haven't been fighting to get to the latter stages for a number of years and that's the level we have to get to," Lampard said. "This was a clear show that there is a lot of work to be done. I felt that when I took the job, I will keep working."

Lampard is only just finding his feet as a manager and deserves time to put his stamp on a Chelsea team that has shown flashes of excellence this season. They have impressed in wins against Tottenham, Arsenal and Ajax, but have flopped in a succession of uninspired home defeats.

His hand forced by Chelsea's transfer ban last summer, Lampard's first major decision after arriving from Derby, where he started his managerial career last term, was to put his faith in the club's cadre of talented youngsters. Tammy Abraham, Mason Mount, Fikayo Tomori and Reece James have all shone at times.

But Chelsea's kids remain far too raw to



Chelsea's Willy Caballero fails to stop a shot by Bayern Munich's Serge Gnabry during their Champions League match on Tuesday. The 3-0 loss was Chelsea's heaviest defeat in a home game of a European competition. Reuters

be expected to thrive against teams of Bayern's calibre. Lampard acknowledged that fact by starting with Abraham on the bench on Tuesday and leaving Tomori out of the squad, instead using immobile veteran Olivier Giroud up front in a gamble that backfired.

**'Show character'**

Against Tottenham on Saturday, the average of Chelsea's starting line-up was 28 years and 171 days, the oldest team Lampard has selected in the Premier League. In their 1-0 win at Ajax in October, the average age of his team was 25 years and 71 days.

After turning to his old guard when it came to the crunch, Lampard will have been frustrated that two of his senior players, Jorginho and Marcos Alonso, lost their heads. Alonso was sent off for lashing out at Lewandowski and Jorginho earned a needless booking for arguing with the referee, which rules him out of the second leg.

Lampard was not helped by Chelsea's fail-

**LAID BARE**

**4** Number of players from the Bayern team that defeated Chelsea, who were also the members of their 2013 Champions League-winning side. In contrast, almost half of Chelsea's team were competing at this stage for the first time.

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FRANK LAMPARD  
MANAGER, CHELSEA

ure to make any signings in the January transfer window, although Hakim Ziyech agreed a deal that will bring him from Ajax in the close-season. Injuries to N'Golo Kante, Christian Pulisic and Callum Hudson-Odoi have put further strain on Lampard's squad.

Chelsea are desperately short of guile and pace in the final third, while their central midfielders are far too predictable. Lampard tried to plug the holes in a leaky defence by deploying Antonio Rudiger, Andreas Christensen and Cesar Azpilicueta as a back three.

The experiment had worked against toothless, injury-hit Tottenham, but Bayern posed a more formidable threat. With their Champions League campaign in tatters, Chelsea must regroup for a final push to qualify for next season's tournament. Sitting in fourth place in the Premier League, Chelsea's destiny is in their own hands. "It was a harsh lesson. I learned about my players. We have to show character. They need to use it to positive effect," Lampard said.

## At Maradona's 'home', Messi & Co. held

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NAPLES, FEBRUARY 26

ON A night when Lionel Messi was expected to put on a show in the stadium that was once Diego Maradona's, the Barcelona forward did relatively little in a 1-1 draw at Napoli in the first leg of the Champions League round of 16 on Tuesday.

Dries Mertens tied Napoli's all-time scoring record by curling in a first-half shot and Antoine Griezmann equalized for Barcelona near the hour mark after being set up nicely by Nelson Semedo for the visitors' only shot on target. Mertens matched former Napoli captain Marek Hamsik with 121 goals in all competitions for the club—six more than Maradona. "This result leaves a bitter taste, because we played on level terms and showed sacrifice," Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne said. "It was emotional to face Barcelona and Messi for the first time. I just feel we could have had a better result in front of our fans, especially with the chances we created."

Napoli has reached the Champions League knockout stages for the third time in six appearances but has never progressed further than the round of 16. Key Barcelona midfielder Arturo Vidal—who deputized in attack amid a shortage of forwards for Barcelona—was sent off in the final minutes after picking up two quick yellow cards, first for a hard foul on Insigne then for physical contact with Mario Rui after play had stopped. Already depleted by injuries, Barcelona will also be without Sergio Busquets in the second leg on March 18 due to accumulated cards.

Also, veteran Barcelona defender Gerard Pique limped off with an apparent injury toward the end. "They have other strong players," Insigne said. "We have to focus on going there, playing a great game, running some more risks and qualifying for the next round."

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