

A Cup of surprises

Spanish giants Barcelona and Real Madrid knocked out of new-look Copa del Rey; Catalans concede in 93rd min, Zidane's men lose a 7-goal thriller

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
MADRID, FEBRUARY 7

BARCELONA AND REAL MADRID both crashed out of the Copa del Rey as Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad pulled off a shock Basque double to reach the semi-finals.

Barca were beaten 1-0 by Bilbao at San Mames, where Inaki Williams headed in a dramatic 93rd-minute winner, after La Real had seen off Madrid 4-3 in a seven-goal thriller at the Santiago Bernabeu on Thursday.

Two sensational upsets added another layer of excitement to a competition that has been full of surprises this season, with Bilbao and Real Sociedad joining Granada and second division Mirandes in an unfamiliar lineup for the draw on Friday.

"There have been some surprise results," said Williams. "Sometimes you just have to have faith and heart."

For Barca, defeat was particularly painful, coming at the end of a turbulent week that saw Lionel Messi engage in a public spat with the club's sporting director Eric Abidal and Ousmane Dembele ruled out, probably for the rest of the season, with another hamstring tear.

To make matters worse, Gerard Pique hobbled off with his own injury problem in the second half against Bilbao and looks doubtful to face Real Betis in La Liga on Sunday.

Messi's riposte that "everyone should take responsibility for their own decisions" after Abidal suggested Ernesto Valverde was sacked last month because of the players, means Barcelona are in political turmoil off the pitch. And the fear is Messi could even leave in the summer by activating a clause in his contract that allows him to walk away from the club for free. Defeat in the Copa del Rey, a distant third in Barca's list of priorities this season, will not dictate Messi's thinking but another setback certainly adds to the sense of a club currently in a state of crisis.

Quique Setien has lost two of his opening six games in charge, with a Champions League tie against Napoli fast-approaching. The fall-out from another failure in Europe would prove longer-lasting. "We deserved to go through," said Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu. "But the ambition and attitude I saw on the field encourages me for the league and the Champions League. Success can come."

'It hurts'

For a rotated Madrid side, who sit top of La Liga, the loss against Real Sociedad was perhaps less damaging, even if they conceded as many goals in 69 minutes as they had in their last 11 matches put together.

Martin Odegaard, on loan at La Real but allowed to face his parent club, found the opener before the superb Alexander Isak hit two to give Real Sociedad a remarkable 3-0 lead. Marcelo and Rodrygo both scored late in the second half and while Mikel Merino added a fourth for the visitors, a Nacho Fernandez header set up a wild final three minutes, in which Andoni Gorosabel was also sent off.

Ten-man Real Sociedad held on for a superb win to progress to the last four while Madrid's run without success in Spain's domestic cup extends to six years.

"It hurts, we have to be honest, nobody likes a defeat," said Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane.

One consolation might have been the display of the 21-year-old Odegaard, who is beginning to live up to the hype after signing for Madrid aged 15.

On loan at Sociedad, the plan was for Odegaard to stay one more year at Anoeta but



Barcelona forward Lionel Messi reacts after Athletic Bilbao's Inaki Williams scores the stoppage-time winner. Reuters

HOW A FORMAT CHANGE SPICED UP THE EVENT

Led by president Luis Rubiales, the Spanish Football Federation last year approved changes to the Cup, axing two-legged ties in every round apart from the semi-final to make the Cup more exciting. The results are visible.

NO BIG-TEAM ADVANTAGE

The old format was skewed in favour of the bigger clubs, who could rest players for a first leg and swallow defeat before calling on their stars to turn the tie around in the return game. Barca, for example, had reached the semi-finals for the last nine seasons and monopolised the trophy between 2015 and 2018.

FIERCER COMPETITION

Ties are now settled in one match, leading to dramatic scenes such as third-tier Cultural Leonesa knocking out 10-times winners Atletico and Mirandes dumping out Celta Vigo, Sevilla and Villarreal. In the last 32, Real Madrid were made to sweat for a

There have been a lot of surprises this season and sometimes you have to have faith and play with your heart. The fans deserved this moment after the way they supported us."

SERGIO BUSQUETS,
BARCELONA MIDFIELDER

3-1 win at newly-formed Unionistas de Salamanca and Barcelona trailed tiny Ibiza for most of their match before eventually winning 2-1.

STAR-STUDED FIELD

Barca and Real both fielded their top players in their quarter-final ties against Athletic and Sociedad respectively and the San Mames and Bernabeu stadiums were packed and rocking, making victory even sweeter for the winners.

REUTERS

this glittering display, that earned him a standing ovation from the home fans when he went off, may well persuade Madrid to recall him early. Their 21-game unbeaten streak comes to an end after an uncharacteristically careless performance in which a rotated side highlighted the importance of the likes of Casemiro, Raphael Varane and Thibaut Courtois. Courtois'

replacement Alphonse Areola was at fault for at least one of the goals while Marcelo was typically unpredictable at left-back, a position the more dependable Ferland Mendy has made his own in recent weeks.

Eden Hazard is training again but the wait for his return goes on while Gareth Bale was again left out of the squad completely.

BRIEFLY

North Eastern Warriors reach maiden PBL final

North Eastern Warriors stormed into the final of the Premier Badminton League (PBL) for the first time after demolishing the challenge of Chennai Superstarz 3-1, on Friday. Lee Cheuk Yiu and the mixed doubles pair of Lee Yong Dae-Kim Ha Na put the Guwahati-based franchise ahead in their first-ever semi-final in three appearances.

Football: Argentina earn Tokyo Olympics berth

Argentina become the first South American team to reach the Tokyo Olympic football tournament when they beat Colombia 2-1 to top the regional qualifying group with a match to spare. Second-half goals from Agustin Urzi - who was later sent off - and Nehuen Perez gave Argentina the hard-fought win on Thursday night.

Police to probe racist abuse in German Cup

Jordan Torunarigha has lodged a complaint with police after he was allegedly subjected to racist abuse during a German Cup game at Schalke, his club Hertha Berlin confirmed Friday. The visibly upset Torunarigha was sent off for a second yellow card during extra time in Hertha's 3-2 extra-time defeat on Tuesday after allegedly hearing monkey chants and other racist abuse. AGENCIES

EXPLAINED
by The Indian EXPRESS



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Prachi Mishra

Managing Director, Global Macro Research, Goldman Sachs

in conversation with

P Vaidyanathan Iyer

Executive Editor, National Affairs, The Indian Express

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Guardiola wants Messi to remain at Camp Nou

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
MANCHESTER, FEBRUARY 7

PEP GUARDIOLA says he wants Lionel Messi to finish his career at Barcelona rather than join him at Manchester City. Messi has a release clause in his contract this summer and reports in Spain and England have suggested he could trigger it after a rift with Barcelona's sporting director Eric Abidal, who has accused the players of getting former manager Ernesto Valverde the sack.

Guardiola was Barcelona manager from 2008 to 2012 and works alongside former Barca directors Ferran Soriano and Txiki Begiristain at City, so it is little surprise the Premier League champions have been tipped as favourites to sign Messi if he decides to leave the Camp Nou.

City have been linked with the Argentine striker every season since Guardiola arrived in England in 2016, but after spending his entire career with the Catalan club, he repeated his oft-stated opinion that he thinks - and hopes - Messi will stay there until his retirement. "He will stay there, that's my wish," Guardiola told reporters on Friday. "I'm not going to talk about players for other clubs. I think he will finish his career there, that's my wish."

Meanwhile, Guardiola says Raheem Sterling could be out for "weeks" after the City winger injured his left hamstring in the defeat at Tottenham last Sunday.

Sterling will miss the Premier League game against West Ham this weekend and is in a race against time to be fit for when City resume their season after a two-week winter break.

They face Leicester on February 22 before the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie against Real Madrid four days later. "It's a hamstring and we will see. It takes weeks but we'll see if he is fit to play against Leicester, Madrid and the rest of the games," Guardiola said. "I don't know. It's a problem, but it's a problem we had with (Ilkay) Gundogan a couple of seasons ago and (Aymeric) Laporte this season when he was out for four or five months."



DELHI LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2020

Appeal to Voters of Delhi

DO'S

- ➔ Do carry your Photo-Voter Slip to the Polling Station.
- ➔ Always be in queue and wait for your turn.
- ➔ Always maintain peace in and around the polling station.
- ➔ Show your photo ID card as prescribed by the Election Commission of India.
- ➔ Follow instructions on "HOW TO VOTE"
- ➔ Show courtesy to the polling team which is facilitating your vote.
- ➔ After casting your vote come out of the polling station quietly.

DON'TS

- ➔ Do not accept bribe for your vote. Bribery is an offence.
- ➔ Do not impersonate for someone else. Impersonation is an offence.
- ➔ Do not cause any disturbance in the poll process. You may land up in prison.
- ➔ Do not cause damage/tamper with poll material including EVM/VVPAT. You may land up in prison.
- ➔ Do not obstruct the polling team in performing election duty. You may land up in prison.

PROHIBITED ITEMS



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