

Short Takes

Levante's Boateng has successful operation for facial fracture

Bilbao (Spain), April 1 : Levante forward Emmanuel Boateng successfully underwent an operation after sustaining a fracture on his left cheek bone, the Spanish club announced on Sunday.

It is estimated that Boateng's recovery period will last around four weeks, reports Efe.

Girona defender Jonas Ramalho broke Boateng's zygomatic arch during Saturday's 1-1 La Liga draw against Girona. After the injury, Boateng was transferred to a hospital in Girona, where he underwent several medical tests, after which he was discharged and moved to Valencia on Saturday afternoon. Levante is in the 17th position in the La Liga table with 28 points, struggling to avoid relegation.

Napoli stumble against Sassuolo, miss chance to overtake Juventus

Reggio Emilia (Italy) April 1 : Napoli played a 1-1 draw against host Sassuolo in the 30th round of Serie A action and could lose ground to league-leading Juventus by the end of the day. Second-placed Napoli had the opportunity to provisionally leapfrog Juventus in the standings but those hopes were dented when it conceded a first-half goal by Matteo Politano here on Saturday, reports Efe.

With ten minutes to go before the second-half stoppage time, Napoli drew level on a goal that was credited to Jose Callejon but appeared to last touch Brazilian defender Rogerio Oliveira Da Silva. The visitors could have taken the lead on a pair of scoring opportunities early on at Mapei Stadium by Lorenzo Insigne, but instead Sassuolo made the most of one of the few opportunities it created to break the scoreless deadlock 22 minutes into the game. On the play, Federico Peluso's header ricocheted off the woodwork but Politano was there to put the ball home.

After the intermission, Napoli struggled to penetrate Sassuolo's defence, while Domenico Berardi squandered a close-range chance to double the home side's lead.

Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri inserted Polish forward Arkadiusz Milik to boost his team's attack, a move that gave his team more offensive punch down the final stretch.

Napoli's efforts paid off in the 80th minute, when a cross from Mario Rui appeared to go into the goal off Rogerio. Officials, however, credited Spanish striker Jose Callejon with the score. The visitors then went all out for the winner and nearly took the lead on a bicycle kick by Milik that struck the crossbar of the wide-open goal. Despite the draw, Napoli still has a firm grasp on the second spot and is just one point behind six-time defending Serie A champions Juventus, which is taking on A.C. Milan on Saturday night. Elsewhere, Sampdoria took a 1-0 lead on a penalty successfully converted by Fabio Quagliarella, but Chievo struck twice on goals by Lucas Nahuel Castro and Perparim Hetemaj for a come-from-behind 2-1 win.

Ready to handle pressure and get best out of team: Karthik

Kolkata, April 1 : Newly appointed Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) skipper Dinesh Karthik on Sunday said he is aware of the expectations the team management has from him as he is filling in the big shoes of Gautam Gambhir, adding that he is at a point in his career where he can cope with it.

"What Gautam Gambhir has achieved for KKR is phenomenal. He's left a benchmark that every season they have qualified as bare minimum.

"And being a leader of the team, the management will expect the same from me. I'm aware of the expectations. Whether there would be pressure, 'yes'. As a captain, you're expected to at least go to the playoffs, that's the least anybody can expect. I think I'm at a stage where I can handle it and get the best out of the team," Karthik said during KKR's jersey launch at the team hotel.

KKR decided to let go of their former captain Gambhir who was sold to Delhi Daredevils for Rs 2.8 crore in the auctions earlier this year.

Gambhir helped the men in purple win two titles in 2012 and 2014 after joining them in 2011 from Delhi where he spent the first three seasons.

KKR finished in the top four for the first time in the very season before lifting the coveted trophy in the next year.

Karthik, who was named Gambhir's successor raising a few eye-



brows, helped India win the tri series in Sri Lanka with a whirlwind unbeaten eight-ball 29 in the final against Bangladesh.

"It's been close to 10 days now since that innings, things have moved on, people have moved on. We have a new bunch of boys," Karthik said recalling the effort that catapulted him to unprecedented recognition last month.

"It was a great game as I've said. When we play Bangladesh, it's a different kind of pressure. If you win, you are like 'okay you've won', but if you lose it's like 'wake up, what you doing' types.

"We had a good start, it dipped in the middle. I just had to hit boundaries when I got in. I was lucky on that day. We had a good season, and for us not to win that game would not have been nice

to end the series. It was a great feeling," the 32-year-old stumper added.

Asked how he always keeps his cool, Karthik said, "I'm a normal human being. I do get angry. I've my moments. But I'm a pretty patient, that's a good thing to be a leader.

"It's not about throwing your weight, but maximise your resources. The kind of players I've in front of me, there's no reason for me to get angry. It's going to be a pleasure working with them and getting the best out of them."

Karthik hinted that he might promote himself in the batting order when they open their IPL-11 campaign against Royal Challengers Bangalore at home. "Obviously I will bat at different position than what I did in the Indian game. IPL is about dealing with tricky situa-

tion, handling pressure. It's just a week to go and I don't think I will treat myself any differently. Everybody is here to do their best and I'm no different. Everybody has a role to play," he said.

While Karthik will be busy with his IPL assignment, his wife and India's squash ace Dipika Pallikal is eyeing a second gold at the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast.

"One thing I've learnt from her is a lot of determination. She's worked really hard especially for the CWG. Four years back she won gold in Glasgow. As a player, the most important thing is to be able to repeat it and be consistent. She's worked really hard in the last four years to get a gold again. She's already in Gold Coast. It's very important two weeks in her life," he added.

Morocco hopes its fifth time lucky in bid to host World Cup

Casablanca, April 1 : Despite four previous failed attempts, Morocco is once again seeking to host a FIFA World Cup and hopes it will finally be given the chance to do so in 2026.

"Soccer is in our DNA," the chief executive of the Morocco 2026 bid committee Hicham el-Amrani, said in a presentation in Marrakesh, just weeks before the FIFA Congress will decide on June 13 in Moscow whether to select either of the bidders as the host, reports Efe.

The other candidate is a joint bid by Mexico, the United States and Canada.

Football is a vital part of Moroccans' life and culture, with the streets of Marrakesh and Casablanca filled with people wearing team jerseys and ads encouraging would-be travellers to head to this summer's World Cup in Russia.

This fever for the sport makes the will to host football's showcase event as strong as ever, in spite of failed bids to put on the 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2010 tournaments.

Morocco is proposing to use 14 stadiums (of which FIFA would choose 12) in a dozen cities as match venues for the tournament, which will be the biggest-ever in terms of participating teams (48 national squads instead of 32).

The stadiums will range from the planned

96,000-seat Grand Stade de Casablanca to the planned 45,400-seat Grand Stade de Oujda.

Morocco's biggest asset is its proximity to huge soccer markets in Europe, as the time difference between North America and the old continent could pose a problem in terms of the value of television broadcasting rights.

Morocco, for its part, says it expects to receive \$3.1 billion in revenue from broadcasting rights alone.

It also says the proximity of the venues to one another is a key selling point, with all of the planned host cities located within a 550-kilometer (342-mile) radius of Rabat.

Additionally, el-Jadida and Meknes would be the only cities not accessible by the country's train and highway network, while Tangier and Casablanca are due to be connected shortly by Africa's first-ever high-speed rail link.

Morocco plans to invest a total of \$15 billion in hosting the World Cup, including \$9.6 billion in transportation, conference centres and hospitals, \$3 billion in sports infrastructure and \$3.2 billion to improve hotel infrastructure.

A big question mark for the country is the issue of public safety, but el-Amrani told Efe that he did not understand that concern and that in terms of terrorism and murders Morocco is a very safe country.

Messi, Suarez save Barcelona from first loss with 2-2 tie

Seville, April 1 : A goal by Luis Suarez at the 88th minute and another by Leo Messi in the same minute erased the comfortable 2-0 score with which Sevilla was winning until late in the game, and left Barcelona unbeaten in La Liga, though it came close to posting its first loss.

A goal by Franco "Mudo" Vazquez at 30 minutes on Saturday put Sevilla ahead 1-0 on the scoreboard at the home team's Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium, reports Efe.

The match was fought on even terms throughout the first half, with Barcelona looking to dominate but with a combative Sevilla that never made things easy, to the point that it ended the first half with a 1-0 lead following a goal by Franco Vazquez at the 36th minute.

Then, just four minutes into the second half, Muriel very quickly got Sevilla its second score, making it 2-0, and Barcelona had its work



cut out for it.

At that point Ernesto Valverde sent Leo Messi into the game to try and fix the problem - and with a goal by Luis Suarez and another by Messi, Barca was saved from its first loss.

Ernesto Valverde preferred not to force Messi, who is suffering from muscular pains, and left him on the bench to see how the match went.

Another important Barca absence was the injured Sergio Busquets.

The Barca team tried from the start to show that it does not wholly depend on Messi but that it could dominate the field without him against a fast-moving rival that piled on the pressure.

Luis Suarez threatened the home team in the first 10 minutes of the game with a shot at goal, which,

however missed its mark, and after that scare came another when Joaquin "Tucu" Correa got off his shot a little too slowly.

Those two attempts, however, seemed to get Sevilla up and running to make life difficult for Barca. And so it did, racking up a 2-0 lead by the start of the second half - only to face a Barca comeback that ended the game with a 2-2 tie.

Germany can reach World Cup semis: Klinsmann

Bordeaux (France), April 1 : German football legend Jurgen Klinsmann, the 1990 World Cup winner, has said the German team has the capability of reaching the top four at the World Cup, while denying any chance of coaching the Chinese team or a Chinese club any time soon.

Klinsmann featured in the French League Cup final here as a special guest.

The former Monaco player thought that French league has been on a totally different level now. Following Neymar's arrival at Paris Saint-Germain, the league has attracted much more awareness from the world, reports Xinhua news agency.

Talking about Germany's prospect at the 2018 World Cup, he said: "It's always the same discussion before World Cup. You name big countries like Brazil and Argentina from South America and have European powerhouses like Germany, Spain and France. England are also a



very good team. You always have five, six or seven big names because they have all the quality to go to the end of the tournament.

"It's down to the team itself and players about if they can make it happen or not. Germany will always be in the top four at the minimum if there isn't a big, big disappointment. They have a lot of good young players similar to France. "It will be an exciting tournament," added Klinsmann, who helped Germany win the 1996 European Championship.

Apart from Monaco, Klinsmann also played in German, Italian and English leagues. For him, adaptation is an important element for a certain player's success when playing abroad. "I was very lucky and privileged as I was given the opportunity to play in four different leagues then. The main aspect of being successful in different countries is to adapt to the country," he said. "When the player goes to China, he has to adapt to Chinese culture and people. When I went to Italy, I had to adapt to

the Italian style.

"It's something that you really live inside. You have to feel like, 'I want to be here', and learn about people wherever you go. Only when you adapt to the culture of the country that you play in, then you will have success. If you are not feeling to be a part of the country, then you will struggle," he added.

"You have to try it, and I love it. The most important thing for your success in the place where you go is to adapt to that culture and mentality when you are privileged to live it. It's not easy." A former head coach of Germany, Klinsmann shrugged off any chance of coaching in China, at least "not right now".

"Living in America and still having a young child there makes no sense," he said. "But I admire what's going on in China. I know some players and coaches joining it. China is investing a lot of money on development of the sport, which is very important. I think there are many things to come in the future," he added.

Kovac will be Bayern's next coach, says Matthaeus

Berlin, April 1 : The mood of 2013 treble winners Bayern Munich couldn't be better after thrashing Bundesliga rivals Borussia Dortmund 6-0.

While only one more point is needed to secure the sixth consecutive league championship, the club is said to have made a decision on their most pressing issue, reports Xinhua news agency.

According to rumours, the Bavarians have succeeded in finding a successor to 72-year-old Jupp Heynckes in advance of their Champions League quarter-final against FC Sevilla this Tuesday evening.

German legend and former

Bayern Munich star Lothar Matthaeus told German TV that he is convinced that Eintracht Frankfurt coach Nico Kovac will take over the job in Munich from next season. "I heard the news from several independent sources within the club," the former Bayern professional stressed.

Berlin-born Kovac said he would fulfil his contract with Frankfurt that runs until 2019 "if nothing comes in between." The coach with Croatian roots then told German media to make investigations about Bayern's next coach at the club itself.

Meanwhile Munich's chairman Karl-Heinz

Rummenigge stated the club would announce a new coach following Heynckes by the end of the month.

"It will be a German-speaking coach," Rummenigge emphasised.

The former German international striker said the club was investigating its options after Heynckes informed them that he intended to depart at the end of the 2017/2018 season.

Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic has talked to several candidates. Rummenigge stressed adding that Thomas Tuchel told Bayern that he has already signed a contract with a leading European club

for the next season. Rumours indicate the former Dortmund coach is about to join Paris St Germain.

The French sports newspaper "L'Equipe" spoke about German options for the country's leading club on its front page. Alongside Tuchel, Germany's national coach Joachim Loew was also mentioned. But Loew denied plans to take over a club as he is entirely concentrated on the 2018 World Cup.

Paris coach Unai Emery is said to be departing after his contract is unlikely to be extended as St. Germain failed to proceed beyond the last 16 in the Champions League after being beaten 5-

2 on aggregate by Real Madrid.

Rummenigge said everybody in Munich is relaxed when it comes to the coaching issue.

Kovac is said to be a real option for Bayern. The Hamburg-based sports magazine "Sport-Bid" reports that the 46-year-old has an exit clause in his Frankfurt contract should he receive an offer from Bayern.

The former defensive midfielder played 34 times for Bayern and was part of the team together with Salihamidzic from 2001-2003. Kovac's family lives in Salzburg, only 130 kilometers from Munich.

Lallana's injury could keep him out of World Cup, says Klopp

London, April 1 : English attacking midfielder Adam Lallana suffered a "really serious" injury against Crystal Palace and could miss the World Cup in Russia this summer, Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp said.

"I haven't spoken with him, but I saw him. It's absolutely bad," Klopp said at a press conference following his team's 2-1 win against Crystal Palace on Saturday, reports Efe.

Lallana was in the match at Selhurst Park for barely five minutes when he went down after being challenged by Crystal Palace's Luka Milivojevic.

The 29-year-old Lallana was checked by a trainer and left the field.

"We don't know exactly what he has, but in the first moment and then I saw him going down it looked really serious, to be honest," Klopp said.

"It looks like something with the muscle, we couldn't make any further assessment so far, of course, but we will do that as quick as possible."

Klopp said it was too early to say whether Lallana would miss the World Cup.

"It is absolutely too early," the Liverpool coach said. "We hope it won't be that serious. That's not for now to decide that. It's just not good," he added.