

# Resurgent Azmoun on target as Leverkusen remains on course for European spot



Leverkusen striker Sardar Azmoun scores during a 3-1 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt in the German Bundesliga in Leverkusen, Germany, on April 8, 2023.

● BUNDESLIGA

## Sports Desk

Iranian striker Sardar Azmoun continued his resurgence in the Bundesliga as he was on the scoresheet to help Bayer Leverkusen defeat Eintracht Frankfurt 3-1 in the German top flight. Azmoun came off the bench with 20 minutes left on the clock before keeping his composure in a one-on-one situation to round goalkeeper Kevin Trapp and tap in home side's third in the fifth minute of the stoppage time.

This was Azmoun's fourth goal in the past five outings for Leverkusen – three of which came as cameo appearances.

Amine Adli and Moussa Diaby gave Xabi Alon-

so's men a two-goal in the first half but Swiss midfielder Djibril Sow pulled one back for the Europa League champion in the 74th minute before Azmoun secured maximum points right before the final whistle. Having joined Leverkusen from Zenit St. Petersburg in January 2022, Azmoun got off to a slow start to life in the German league and was sidelined for two months after suffering a calf injury during warm-up for the Champions League game against Porto last October.

A fifth successive Bundesliga victory saw Leverkusen overtake Saturday's opponent for the sixth place in the table with 43 points – five off UEFA Champions League qualification.

## Messi records 1,000th goal contribution, breaks Ronaldo record in PSG win



Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring PSG's first goal in a 2-0 victory over Nice in Allianz Riviera, Nice, France, on April 8, 2023.

● GETTY IMAGES

One week after being jeered by his own fans, Lionel Messi scored one goal and set up the other as Paris Saint-Germain won a wasteful Nice 2-0 to maintain its six-point lead of the French league on Saturday.

Messi now has over 1,000 goal contributions at the club level with 702 goals and 298 assists, FOX Sports reported.

Argentina's World Cup-winning star clipped in a cross from left back Nuno Mendes in the 26th minute. That goal put him ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo for the most goals scored in Europe (702).

Then Messi's corner from the left was headed home by veteran defender Sergio Ramos in the 76th minute. Messi leads Ligue 1 in assists with 13 assist in nine matches.

In last weekend's home defeat to Lyon, Messi was booed by some PSG fans, leading to increased speculation he could leave this summer. Messi reportedly has an offer from Saudi Arabian club Al Hilal worth \$440 million per year but also has interest from Barcelona and MLS side Inter Miami CF.

The victory saw PSG bounce back from back-to-back home defeats in the French top-flight.

Those losses had left the Qatar-owned club with eight defeats in 18 games in 2023 and piled the pressure on head coach Christophe Galtier amid reports he may not even see out the season. A win for nearest challengers Lens on Friday had cut PSG's lead at the top of the table to just three points before this game, and before the top two meet in Paris next weekend.

"It was a difficult match. We knew we had a lot of pressure on our shoulders both because of our poor performances and because of Lens winning, and especially because Nice are a really good team who have been on a great run," Galtier told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"It was definitely not our best performance of the season but the players fought for each other and it is obviously three important points."

He added: "It is better to have a six-point lead than be chasing after a six-point deficit but we know we have a very important match next weekend."

# NBA to investigate Mavericks for sitting key players for defeat

The Dallas Mavericks are facing an NBA investigation after leaving out key players against the Chicago Bulls despite being in play-off contention.

Kyrie Irving was among those omitted, while Luka Dončić only played 12 minutes of Friday's 115-112 defeat, BBC reported. The loss ended their play-off hopes but improved their chances of getting a top-10 pick in this summer's draft. That led to accusations of 'tanking' – playing a weakened side in order to lose and improve their draft chances.

"The NBA commenced an investigation today

into the facts and circumstances surrounding the Dallas Mavericks' roster decisions and game conduct with respect to last night's Chicago Bulls-Mavericks game, including the motivation behind those actions," NBA spokesperson Mike Bass said on Saturday. A lower finish in the overall standings gives the Mavericks a better chance of a top-10 pick in the draft, boosting their hopes of signing highly-rated French teenager Victor Wembanyama.

Dallas said Irving, Tim Hardaway Jr and Maxi Kleber were all nursing injuries while Josh

Green and Christian Wood were being rested. All five players – plus Dončić – featured in Wednesday's win over the Sacramento Kings. Coach Jason Kidd said before the game that the decision to rest players was made by owner Mark Cuban and general manager Nico Harrison. Speaking after the game, Kidd said: "It's not so much waving the white flag. It's [that] decisions sometimes are hard in this business. We're trying to build a championship team. With this decision, this is maybe a step back. But hopefully it leads to going forward."



Luka Dončić of the Mavericks and his teammates sit on the bench during the first half of an NBA game against the Bulls in Dallas, TX, US, on April 7, 2023.

● TIM HEITMAN/AFP



● AP

# Tsitsipas raring to go on clay with eyes on third Monte Carlo crown

Stefanos Tsitsipas said he is relishing a return to the European claycourt season as the Greek world number three targets a third consecutive Monte Carlo Masters title in the build-up to the French Open starting next month.

After losing the Australian Open final against current world number one Novak Djokovic in January, the 24-year-old Tsitsipas suffered early defeats in Rotterdam and Indian Wells before a fourth-round loss in Miami, Reuters reported.

The 2021 Roland Garros runner-up returns to clay hoping to claim his first trophy of the year at Monte Carlo, having beaten Andrey Rublev and Alejandro Da-

vidovich Fokin in the previous two finals of the prestigious tournament.

"It's a pleasure to return to the claycourt swing," Monte Carlo resident Tsitsipas told reporters. "It's one of the most fascinating parts of the year, starting the claycourt swing in Monte Carlo, which is my favourite place in the world."

"I'm looking to make it three titles. But I won't take too much time thinking of it. I'm feeling refreshed that we're able to start playing on clay again."

"The Monegasque people have showed their love and support and the Italian and French fans. Also, the Greek community. I know most of them... It's my

home tournament."

Tsitsipas said he enjoyed tactical battles on clay, a surface on which he has won four of his nine titles.

"I think it's deeper than people think. There is a lot of strategy involved," said Tsitsipas, who will begin his campaign against Benjamin Bonzi or Bernabe Zapata Miralles.

"You're not expecting to hit crazy winners on a surface like clay. You're dealing with much patience when you're playing."

"It involves more around unforced and forced errors. The way you can open the court. The main priority isn't to hit a winner, but be precise and open the court."

# Rodriguez calls out Edwards after WBO title win

Jesse 'Bam' Rodriguez said Britain's Sunny Edwards was "the only option" for his next fight after claiming the vacant WBO world flyweight title.

Rodriguez overcame a broken jaw to win a unanimous decision over Mexico's Cristian Gonzalez in San Antonio, Texas, to become a

two-weight world champion at the age of 23, BBC Sport reported.

After a dominant performance, judges scored the fight 118-110, 117-111, 116-112 for the American, who later revealed his jaw was broken in the sixth round.

Rodriguez had vacated his WBC super-flyweight title to move down a division.

And when asked what came next, he called out fellow Matchroom fighter and IBF flyweight champion Edwards.

"Sunny Edwards, that's the only option. I think he's been

talking so let's make it happen," he said.

Unbeaten Edwards, 27, had himself called out Rodriguez after retaining his title with a unanimous points win over Felix Alvarado in November. Rodriguez is also unbeaten after 18 fights, winning 11 by knockout.



Jesse Rodriguez (R) is in action against Cristian Gonzalez in a WBO world flyweight title fight in San Antonio, TX, on April 8, 2023.

● MELINA PIZANO/MATCHROOM