



Muller backtracks over Bayern-Havertz transfer rumour comments

Goal - The vice-captain of the Bavarian giants has dismissed talk of a dispute with the club's hierarchy after making some controversial comments

Thomas Müller has clarified his controversial comments about Bayern Munich's transfer policy, insisting that his initial words, which led to a public rebuke by sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic, were taken out of context.

Müller caused a stir on Wednesday when he spoke about the "paradox" in the club's finances amid rumours of a big-money bid for Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Kai Havertz.

Speaking after Bayern's 2-1 DFB-Pokal semi-final win over Eintracht Frankfurt, the 30-year-old questioned the logic of being linked with a player like Havertz, who could cost up to €100 million (£90m/\$113m), while at the same time current players are being asked to take pay cuts to help the club through the coronavirus crisis.

Salihamidzic was unimpressed with Müller's comments, saying he "maybe chose the wrong path with his words," though he also insisted the pair had resolved their differences in private.

Müller has now issued some further clarification to his comments, saying his words had been misinterpreted by the media as "provoc-

ative".

"At FC Bayern there is no internal dispute over the waiver of salaries with regard to possible transfers in summer. We have waived our salary for completely different reasons, namely for our employees," the Germany forward said on Twitter.

"My statement related to the fact that I was annoyed that I was asked about transfers next season after a cup semi-final.

"It is pretended that these top transfers - which we absolutely need - can be managed with a snap of your fingers. As if 100 or 50 million euros are not (big) sums in these times we are in right now.

"Personally, I want the best possible squad for me next season. I have big goals, I want to win the Champions League. I want us to attack properly, to continue this run that we currently have.

"I (will) no longer speak publicly about transfers. Let us be relaxed about the future."

Müller was absent through suspension on Saturday as Bayern beat Borussia Mönchengladbach 2-1 to restore their seven-point lead at the top of the table.

It means Hansi Flick's side can clinch an eighth successive Bundesliga title with victory at Werder Bremen on Wednesday.



Messi claims new La Liga record in Barcelona win

Goal - Lionel Messi set another La Liga record on Saturday as Barcelona made a winning return to the pitch.

The leaders won 4-0 at Real Mallorca in their first match since the campaign was suspended in March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Arturo Vidal opened the scoring after just two minutes before Messi set up Martin Braithwaite for his first Barca goal and then Jordi Alba to make the points safe.

Messi then added a fourth in second-half injury time to reach 20 La Liga goals for 2019-20.

The Argentina star is the only player to score 20 or more goals in Spain's top flight in 12 consecutive seasons.

Messi's strong performance against Mallorca also saw his league assist tally this season rise to 14, making him both the top scorer and top assist provider in La Liga this campaign.

Ahead of Barcelona's return to action, club legend Rivaldo stressed Messi's workload must be managed carefully, though the 32-year-old did end up playing the full 90 minutes on Saturday.

"Lionel Messi had some physical issues

last week, so there's a lot of discussion about whether he play the whole game for Barcelona in their first game back against Mallorca on Saturday," Rivaldo told Betfair.

"Barca are two points head of Real Madrid at the top of the table so the title race is tight. If Barca can pull away, they could rest Messi in a few games.

"If the battle goes to the wire then he might have fewer chances to rest - perhaps only in games which Barca manage to dominate from the first-half - but it will be important for Quique Setien to manage his squad well, as it won't just be Messi that will reach the first game still looking to be 100 per cent fit, after all everyone has stopped and it's not easy to resume on the best form.

"As we know, Messi is always in contention for the 'Pichichi' top scorer award in La Liga and always making the difference in the team, so he wants to be on the pitch all the time and it's difficult for the manager to rotate him. He also fights for the Ballon d'Or every season and that's on his mind regularly, so you can't go to Messi and simply tell him 'take a rest.'"



Gattuso dedicates Napoli result to sister

Goal - The Italian manager recently lost his sister and was quick to pay tribute to her post-match.

Gennaro Gattuso thanked his Napoli players for their "extraordinary" dedication after they drew with Inter to reach the Coppa Italia final.

Dries Mertens became the Serie A club's outright all-time leading goalscorer, cancelling out Christian Eriksen's opener in Saturday's 1-1 draw at Stadio San Paolo.

The result was enough to send Napoli through to the final against Juventus thanks to a 2-1 aggregate win in the semi-final.

Gattuso's sister Francesca died aged 37 earlier this month and the Napoli coach dedicated his side's progression to her, while hailing his players.

"I dedicate this result to my sister and my family," he said, via the club's website.

"The guys were extraordinary for the dedication they put on the pitch. I thank them because they played for me and they were close.

"I have a team that has great quality, but there was [a will] to suffer because not all the mechanisms went in the right direction. After the first very naive goal conceded it was not easy to go back up.

"We showed character and I have to say that in terms of intensity we started from where we left off. We went through a very hard period, it wasn't even easy to train for the health emergency."

Mertens' 122nd goal for Napoli saw him pass Marek Hamsik (121) as the club's outright all-time leading goalscorer.

Gattuso was pleased with the way his side performed after the Belgian's 41st-minute strike.

"After Mertens' goal we had a sort of liberation and we expressed ourselves better," he said.

"The boys are giving everything both in terms of commitment and availability. Now we will play the final with our weapons. If we continue on this path we can take great satisfaction from ourselves."

Napoli will face Juventus in the final in Rome on Wednesday and while Italian football has now restarted, Gattuso stressed the tragedy of the coronavirus pandemic will never be forgotten.

"We lost thousands of people. The world has changed," he said.

"Even coming to the stadium with masks and sitting far away from people in the street - all of it is strange but none of it compares to the devastation of losing so many people."