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HAMBURG SEE OFF BREMEN

LONDON: Hamburg made themselves favourites to reach next month's Uefa Cup final with a 1-0 semi-final win at Werder Bremen, and Shakhtar Donetsk's likely to fill the other spot after a 1-1 draw at Dynamo Kiev last night.

Germany midfielder Piotr Trochowski hit the winning goal for Hamburg against their German rivals in the 28th minute, heading in at the far post from a cross by Guy Demel.

Hamburg need only to avoid defeat in next week's second leg to qualify for the May 20 final in Istanbul. Shakhtar could make it through with a scoreless draw after securing a 1-1 result through a second-half goal by Ferdinandinho.

Bremen goalkeeper Tim Wiese, who stopped three penalties when Werder eliminated Hamburg in the semifinals of the German Cup last week, kept his team's chances alive in the two-legged semifinal with several good saves, including one from Ivica Olic early in the game.

The goalkeeper also turned away striker Paolo Guerrero's low shot in the 22nd.

On the other side, Frank Rost was busy in Hamburg's goal early in the match, foiling Diego for what was Bremen's best chance.

But after Bremen's early pressure, Hamburg controlled the game and created several chances.

The one it did convert came when Trochowski headed Demel's cross from the right flank over Wiese's outstretched



**● Shakhtar
hold Dynamo**

UEFA CUP	
Semi-final, first leg:	
Dynamo Kiev 1	Shakhtar Donetsk 1
(Chygrynskiy 22-og)	(Ferdinandinho 68)
Werder Bremen 0	Hamburg 1
	(Trochowski 28)

■ Hamburg's Trochowski (not pictured) scores a goal past Bremen goalkeeper Tim Wiese. Reuters

arms and just inside the far post.

Werder also had the upper hand early in the second half and Hugo Almeida nearly beat Rost with a header after the Hamburg goalkeeper had failed to handle a cross. But Rost recovered to make a good save.

Defender Sebastian Boenisch nar-

rowly missed in the 59th and Almeida missed with another header before he was replaced by Markus Rosenberg.

Guerrero got his second booking then and will miss the return leg.

The win put Hamburg close to its first final in a European competition since it won the European Cup, the precursor to the Champions League, in 1983.

Dynamo took the lead against its Ukrainian rival in the 22nd minute when Shakhtar defender Dmytro Chygrynskiy put Oleksandr Aliyev's powerful free kick into his own net while struggling with striker Artem Milevskiy at the far post.

But neither of the clubs, who have played each other 135 times, dominated the first half.

Higgins races ahead in semi-final clash

SHEFFIELD, England: John Higgins stamped his authority on his World Snooker Championship semi-final against Mark Allen by taking a 6-2 lead in the first session yesterday.

Chasing his third world title, Higgins has made a strong start to this best-of-33 clash and will take a four-frame buffer into the second of four sessions today.

Higgins showed few signs of fatigue after his

marathon battle with Mark Selby which finished late last night. Allen, playing the biggest match of his life, missed key balls at crucial moments and must be disappointed not to have won at least one more frame.

Ulsterman Allen was soon at ease in the arena, now hosting just the one table. He looked cool and calm on his way to winning the 20 minute opener, although a 38 was the only break of note.

Higgins, champion in 1998 and 2007, opened his account by taking the second with a 40 clearance to the pink. Appearing in his sixth Crucible semi-final, with an arsenal of big match experience behind him, Higgins increased his tally.

Chance

The Scot went about his business in an efficient manner, capitalising on unforced errors from the Antrim Ace with contribu-

tions of 55 and 49 to win frames three and four and open a 3-1 lead.

After the mid-session interval, Higgins had a chance to extend his advantage, but suffered a kick on the penultimate red. Allen, the conqueror of hot favourite Ronnie O'Sullivan, dug deep with a tenacious 41 clearance to steal it on the black for a much needed boost in his first Crucible semi.

Wizard of Wishaw Higgins cast his cue in

wand-like fashion, taking the century count in this year's Championship to 73 with an assured 114, the Scot's sixth ton of the tournament.

When Allen missed the penultimate red with the rest on 45 in frame seven, Higgins cleared the table to go 5-2 up. And with a composed 75 break, he opened a commanding 6-2 overnight lead, leaving Allen to face a real test of his ability and character when they return.

SPORT AT A GLANCE

■ Federer enters Rome last eight

ROME: Defending champion Novak Djokovic breezed past misfiring Spaniard Tommy Robredo 6-1 6-1 yesterday to set up a quarter-final clash with fifth seed Juan Martin Del Potro at the Rome Masters.

World number two Roger Federer had to work only slightly harder to progress with a 6-4 6-1 win over 16th seed Radek Stepanek and avenge the quarter-final defeat he suffered against the Czech here last year. Next up for Federer is German qualifier Mischa Zverev, who sprang a surprise by whipping French eighth seed Gilles Simon 6-4 6-1.

Argentine Del Potro will face Djokovic after fending off a fight-back from Federer's compatriot Stanislas Wawrinka, last year's runner-up, to prevail 6-2 6-7 6-3.

■ Lin overcomes Wen

YOKOHAMA, Japan: China dominated the first two rounds of the world table tennis championships here yesterday.

Olympic gold medallist Ma Lin, who lost two games before beating Spain's Alfredo Carneros in the first round earlier in the day, had a better second round, beating Spaniard He Zhi Wen in five games.

Athens Olympic champion Ryu Seung-Min of South Korea, who beat Lubomir Jancarik of the Czech Republic in the morning, failed to keep his momentum, losing to Bojan Tokic of Slovenia.

Other Chinese top guns, led by world number ones Wang Hao and Zhang Yining, easily went through to the third round.

■ United hit by Rio injury

MANCHESTER: Rio Ferdinand could miss the finale to Manchester United's season after suffering a suspected rib fracture in the 1-0 Champions League semi-final first leg win over Arsenal here on Wednesday.

"Rio has got a crack on his ribs," United boss Sir Alex Ferguson said. "We hope it is nothing broken but if it is he'll be out for two or three weeks. We will just have to wait and see." Ferdinand was substituted late in the game and left Old Trafford in an ambulance, en route to hospital for a scan on his ribs.

■ Lippi rules out return

MILAN, Italy: Italy coach Marcello Lippi yesterday dismissed speculation he would return to Juventus after next year's World Cup in South Africa.

Lippi, who guided Italy to World Cup glory in Germany three years ago, has a contract with the Italian Football Association until the end of the next tournament. But the coach who led Juve to five league titles and a Champions League during two previous spells at the club does not want to retrace his steps.

