

Germany's Leverkusen Sees Off Zenit St. Petersburg in Champions League

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Zenit St. Petersburg's goalkeeper Yury Lodygin reacts after he failed to save a shot by Bayer Leverkusen's Giulio Donati during their Champions League group C soccer match in Leverkusen Oct. 22, 2014.

LEVERKUSEN — Bayer Leverkusen have beaten Zenit St. Petersburg 2-0 in their Champions League Group C match with both goals coming from defenders as they ended the Russians' 16-game unbeaten run in all competitions.

Fullback Giulio Donati put the Germans ahead in the 58th minute of Wednesday's match with a low drive and substitute Kyriakos Papadopoulos, a central defender, headed in another five minutes later after their forwards had repeatedly failed to pierce a disciplined Zenit back line.

"We have shown in the past what we are capable of," said Leverkusen captain Lars Bender, after the team was criticised for wasting a 3-0 lead over VfB Stuttgart in the league last week to draw 3-3.

"It was extremely hard work today but the 1-0 was a huge relief, and it was good to bring this

game home with not just one but two goals."

Turkey international Hakan Calhanoglu confirmed his fine form this season as he set up both goals.

Leverkusen, who had Wendell sent off for a second booking late in the game, bounced back after three straight draws in all competitions to move top of Group C with six points.

Monaco are a point behind following their goalless draw against bottom-placed Benfica, with Zenit on four points.

Zenit, who had beaten Leverkusen 4-1 on their last visit to Germany for the UEFA Cup six years ago, had only a trickle of chances themselves, conceding their first goals in the Champions League this season.

The Germans, with the second best attack in the Bundesliga, predictably got off to a promising start, their trademark pressing style and attacking fullbacks giving them the edge early on.

Emir Spahic's powerful header in the ninth minute sailed wide but the game gradually lost some of its pace with both defences working frantically to close down spaces.

Bender and Calhanoglu came close for Leverkusen but had their efforts saved by keeper Yury Lodygin before Zenit winger Hulk responded with a trademark thundering drive.

It was a similar story at the start of the second half with Leverkusen attacking but time and again crashing into a Russian wall of defenders.

They needed the skills of defender Donati to finally break the deadlock, with the 24-year-old Italian cracking an unstoppable shot into the bottom corner from 25 meters for his first goal for the German club after being left with too much space.

Greece international Papadopoulos, who had come on three minutes earlier, scored with his first touch, timing his header perfectly to power in a Calhanoglu free kick.

Leverkusen were left with 10 men in the final 11 minutes after Wendell was sent off following a second booking but the Russians could not profit from the extra man.

The two sides meet again on Nov. 4 in Russia.

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