

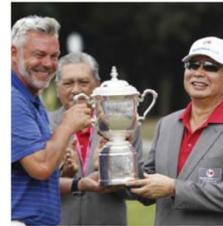
# Sports

Clarke 'still has much to learn' after EurAsia win

16

Juventus beat Udinese, Roma held by Verona

19



MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2016

MAXWELL HEROICS GUIDE AUSTRALIA TO VICTORY Page 17



LIVERPOOL: Manchester United's English striker Wayne Rooney (R) tackles Liverpool's Spanish defender Alberto Moreno (L) during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Manchester United at Anfield yesterday. — AFP

## LIVERPOOL FELLED BY ROONEY SUCKER-PUNCH



**LIVERPOOL:** It was only three weeks ago that Manchester United was on an eight-match winless streak, Wayne Rooney was so out of form he was dropped to the bench, and manager Louis van Gaal appeared to be contemplating resigning. Now, United is unbeaten in 2016, Rooney can't stop scoring and Van Gaal is talking optimistically about winning the Premier League after a 1-0 victory at fierce rival Liverpool on Sunday. Rooney grabbed his fifth goal in four games since the turn of the year, rifling home a volley from close range after Marouane Fellaini's header rebounded off the bar to settle a poor-quality game between English

football's two most successful clubs. "I am a happy coach," said Van Gaal, who has won all four games against Liverpool since joining United in 2014. "I think this game will give a big boost to players, fans, everyone in the environment of Manchester United. We have to continue this ... we can do it (win the league)." United stayed two points behind fourth-place Tottenham in the race for Champions League qualification, and moved up a place to fifth thanks to only a second win in nine league games. With leader Arsenal drawing 0-0 at Stoke, United is only seven points off first place. Playing at Anfield without a recognized striker and a starting lineup containing only six league goals this season, Liverpool largely dominated its biggest rival but only created half-chances - the two best falling to midfielder Emre Can. United goalkeeper David de Gea kept out both shots, again demonstrating his importance and Liverpool's need for a top-quality striker to finish off good build-up play. "It's a derby and you only have one job to do: To win it," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said. "I think Man United, if they talk about this performance, they will say

it's not that good but they won. I feel really frustrated. A lot of the things we did were good but our finishing wasn't good." **BEST FORM** Rooney appears back to something close to his best form after a disappointing first half of the season. He was even dropped for the Dec. 26 match against Stoke, but was recalled for the next match - against Chelsea at home two days later - and has scored in every game since then. "A striker who scores is always very important," Van Gaal said. "And now he is scoring in a row and we are winning in a row. I am very happy for him." Rooney was isolated for much of this game, feeding off scraps, but took his chance well with a true strike after Fellaini rattled the crossbar with a header following a short corner. "Scoring a winning goal at Anfield, it's been a long time since that happened for me," said Rooney, who last achieved that feat in 2005, "so I will be a bit selfish today and enjoy that one." Many global football fans mark this fixture as one of the games of the Premier League season - the rivals have 38 league titles between them - but the two powers have struggled this campaign.

United and Liverpool kicked off lying in sixth and ninth place in the standings, respectively, and the first half showed just why. There was plenty of energy and snappy tackles but little quality, especially from United. The teams were involved in thrilling 3-3 draws in mid-week. They went from feast to famine a few days later. Liverpool carved out some openings, for lone striker Roberto Firmino, Jordan Henderson and James Milner, but De Gea wasn't tested once and the shots were from long range. At the other end, opposite goalkeeper Simon Mignolet was little more than a bystander. "I admit, we survived the first half," Van Gaal said. De Gea stepped up for United in the second half, though. He saved with his feet a low shot from Can, who then brought a superb diving save out of the Spain international with a fierce drive. In between those chances, Anthony Martial finally got in behind Liverpool's defense and flashed a left-foot shot just past the far post - United's first genuine effort. It meant Rooney's goal came against the run of play for United, which maybe made it even sweeter for the celebrating visiting fans, including injured United players Phil Jones, Marcos Rojo and Michael Carrick. — AP

## BALE INJURED AS ZIDANE'S MADRID HIT FIVE AGAIN



**MADRID:** Real Madrid's Raphael Varane, top right, jumps over Sporting Gijon's players to head the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Real Madrid and Sporting Gijon yesterday. — AP

**MADRID:** Zinedine Zidane's dream start to life as Real Madrid boss continued as Los Blancos scored four times in the opening 18 minutes on their way to a 5-1 rout of Sporting Gijon yesterday. However, Madrid's joy was tempered as Gareth Bale and Karim Benzema both had to be replaced due to injuries. Bale limped off with what looked like the recurrence of a calf problem just before half-time having scored his 11th goal in eight games. Benzema and Cristiano Ronaldo also scored twice in the first-half before the former picked up a knock in a collision with teammate James Rodriguez. Madrid have now scored 35 goals in six games at home since losing to 4-0 to Barcelona in November. Victory takes Madrid above Barcelona and to within a point of leaders Atletico Madrid at the top of La Liga. However, Atletico and Barca are in action later when they face Las Palmas and Athletic Bilbao respectively. "We played very well in the first-half. We were concentrated and up for the game from the start. We prepared well and are happy with how the match went," said Zidane. "Karim just has a knock, which isn't so bad. Gareth is a little more complicated because it is his calf and in his left leg which is a problem. He will have a scan tomorrow and we hope it is nothing serious." Having thrashed Deportivo la Coruna 5-0 in his managerial bow at the Bernabeu last weekend, Zidane made just one change with Raphael Varane replacing injured captain Sergio Ramos. Sporting had surprisingly held Madrid to a 0-0 draw on the opening day of the season, but were powerless to stop Real's rampant 'BBC' frontline of Bale, Benzema and Ronaldo early on.

Bale scored his seventh headed goal of the season from Toni Kroos's corner on seven minutes to get the hosts off to the perfect start. Ronaldo showed his frustration at not getting on the scoresheet against Deportivo last weekend and made amends moments later by smashing Benzema's through ball into the roof of the net. Benzema then produced a special finish of his own as he acrobatically swivelled to volley home Bale's cross. And another flowing Madrid move saw Ronaldo sweep home Dani Carvajal's cross at the near post two minutes later. There was some brief respite for Sporting as Zidane's men waited 23 minutes to add the fifth when brilliant play from Isco freed Benzema to roll in his 20th goal in 19 appearances this season. However, Madrid suffered a setback when Bale pulled up seconds before the break and had to be replaced by Jese Rodriguez for the second period. Without the Welshman, Sporting managed to restore some pride after half-time and were rewarded when Isma Lopez rounded off a fine team goal just after the hour mark. Benzema also then had to be replaced after colliding with Rodriguez on the edge of the box, but the Frenchman was able to walk off the field and his problem seems less of a concern than the injured suffered by Bale. Earlier, Gary Neville's winless streak as Valencia boss in La Liga stretched to six games in a disappointing 2-2 draw at home to relegation threatened Rayo Vallecano. Los Che were heavily favoured to end a two-month run without a league win against a

## ARSENAL ON TOP AGAIN



**STOKE-ON-TRENT:** Arsenal returned to the top of the Premier League but their Britannia Stadium hoodoo was extended with a goalless draw against Stoke City yesterday. A point was enough to take Arsene Wenger's side clear of Leicester City on goal difference but it was another afternoon of frustration in the Potteries for the veteran French manager. His side have now failed to win at Stoke's home ground in six attempts-a sequence that dates back to a 3-1 success in February 2010. That victory became infamous for the sickening broken leg suffered by Gunners midfielder Aaron Ramsey, who was again singled out for some unsavoury abuse by Stoke fans during his 250th Arsenal appearance. The bad blood from the injury and Ramsey's refusal to accept Ryan Shawcross's apology for the challenge that caused it remains for Stoke fans, who taunted Ramsey throughout on Sunday with boos and a chant about the damage caused to his leg. Arsenal could not silence the home crowd as Stoke held their own, with both Potters goalkeeper Jack Butland and Arsenal counterpart Petr Cech in good form. After a scrappy opening littered with fouls and poor passes, it was Stoke who carved out the first chance through Marko Arnautovic. The Austrian wandered in off the left flank to collect possession in a central area 30 yards from goal, but his ambi-

tious effort flew high into the Arsenal fans behind Cech's goal. The game finally came to a semblance of life in the 20th minute when Glen Johnson and Jonathan Walters found space on the Stoke right to pick out Joselu on the edge of the area. His deft flick teed up Ibrahim Afellay, whose long-range effort flew a yard wide of the target. Arsenal immediately broke and created an opening of their own thanks to a fine pass by Joel Campbell and an equally clever run by Olivier Giroud. The Frenchman found himself one on one with Butland but the England international spread himself well to make an important stop. The game remained disjointed but, when Stoke failed to clear their lines in the 28th minute, Ramsey had a goal-bound shot deflected wide for a corner which was dealt with easily by the Potters. Ten minutes before half-time Arsenal failed to deal with Erik Pieters's dangerous cross but Joselu headed straight at Cech. The Gunners then handed cheap possession to Stoke, for whom Bojan fired just wide. Just over a minute into the second half, Butland denied Arsenal what looked like a certain goal. The goalkeeper reacted superbly to dive low to his left and turn away a free header from Giroud, who had been left unmarked to meet Ramsey's corner. Then Stoke were denied as the tempo of the game was raised a notch. Arnautovic advanced and fed Joselu, whose shot was clawed away superbly by Cech. The former Chelsea star then reacted well to scramble Bojan's follow-up around the post. Arsenal needed Cech again in the 66th minute as he turned a shot from Joselu around the post. The game became scrappy once more but it was Arsenal who made most of the running in the closing stages and Campbell tried his luck from a tight angle with five minutes remaining. — AFP