

Sports

# Kylian Mbappe sent off as PSG reach French League Cup final

## Referee Mikael again turned to video technology

PARIS: Holders Paris Saint-Germain edged into the French League Cup final by beating Rennes 3-2 at Roazhon Park on Tuesday, despite seeing Kylian Mbappe sent off on his return from injury. Thomas Meunier put the visitors ahead with a magnificent volley, before Rennes winger Wahbi Khazri had a goal ruled out for handball after a video assistant referee review. Brazilian defender Marquinhos tapped in after half-time, before Giovanni Lo Celso was gifted PSG's third goal by a dreadful mistake from home goalkeeper Abdoulaye Diallo. Mbappe saw red after another VAR decision for a terrible foul on Ismaila Sarr, but consolations from Diafra Sakho on his Rennes debut and Sanjin Prcic couldn't prevent PSG from continuing their bid for a fifth consecutive League Cup. "I think the team kept calm and patient in the first half, and then we made the difference," said PSG coach Unai Emery. "But Kylian's red card gave them some opportunities to score and get closer to us... But I'm happy with the way the players responded."

“ I think the team kept calm in the first half ”

PSG are still on track to complete an unprecedented quadruple of the Ligue 1, Champions League, French Cup and French League Cup titles, after extending their winning streak in domestic cup competitions to 37 matches. The capital club will face either Monaco or Montpellier, who play at the Stade Louis II, in the final on March 31. Emery made six changes to the team which thrashed Montpellier 4-0 in the league on Saturday, with Mbappe returning from a two-game injury absence and Edinson Cavani rested after breaking the club's all-time goalscoring record at the weekend. Belgian right-back Meunier, no stranger to spec-

tacular strikes, broke the deadlock in the 24th minute with a wonderful finish from the edge of the area. The 26-year-old barged his way through a couple of tackles before flicking the bouncing ball with the outside of his right foot, sending it looping over Diallo and in off the far post for his fourth goal of the season.

### KHAZRI GOAL OVERTURNED

The hosts thought they had equalised when Khazri took advantage of some woeful defending to stab into the corner, but the referee checked the VAR which showed that the former Sunderland player's first touch had bounced off his arm.

Mbappe had the ball in the back of the net early in the second half but saw the goal ruled out for offside, with the decision upheld after another video review.

The runaway Ligue 1 leaders did double their tally in the 54th minute as centre-back Marquinhos was on hand to tap in after Diallo parried Angel Di Maria's shot. Diallo was totally at fault for the third, as the Senegalese stopper allowed Lo Celso's tame effort to slip through his legs and bobble into the net. Mbappe was given a straight red card in the 63rd minute to give Rennes a glimmer of hope. The 19-year-old twice tried to foul Sarr, and succeeded by raking his studs down the back of the Rennes midfielder's leg while making zero attempt to play the ball. Referee Mikael Lesage again turned to the video technology before giving Mbappe his marching orders.

Sakho, who had come on at half-time for his debut after joining Rennes from Premier League outfit West Ham, headed home his first goal for the club in the 85th



RENNES: Rennes' French forward Thomas Brandon (L) and Rennes' French defender Joris Gnagnon (R) jump for the ball during the French League Cup football semi-final match between Rennes and Paris Saint-Germain at the Roazhon Park stadium in Rennes on Tuesday. — AFP

minute. French international Lassana Diarra was introduced for his first PSG appearance since signing last week, but a long-range strike from Prcic slipped through Kevin Trapp's grasp to set up a nervy final two

minutes for the away side. Although they held on to book their spot in the final, Paris will need to improve before the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie at Real Madrid on February 14. — AFP

## Swansea stun Arsenal, Liverpool cruise

LONDON: Petr Cech's howler rocked Arsenal as they crashed to a shock 3-1 defeat at Swansea, while Liverpool cruised to victory over Huddersfield on Tuesday. Arsenal goalkeeper Cech's miscued attempt to clear allowed Jordan Ayew to slot home Swansea's second goal at the Liberty Stadium.

It was the killer blow for Arsenal, who had already seen Sam Clucas equalise just one minute after Nacho Monreal put the visitors ahead from Mesut Ozil's pass in the 33rd minute. Clucas claimed his second four minutes from time to finish off Arsenal, who have now won just once in their last five league games.

The result leaves Gunners manager Arsene Wenger still searching for his first away win of 2018, despite a second-half debut for substitute Henrikh Mkhitaryan following his move from Manchester United.

The Gunners are in sixth place, trailing eight points behind fourth-placed Liverpool in the race to qualify for the Champions League via a top-four finish. The arrival of Borussia Dortmund striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, set to sign on Wednesday's transfer deadline day, can't come soon enough for Wenger.

"We will know more about that tomorrow morning," Wenger said of the Aubameyang move. "I felt defensively we were very poor and made big mistakes. It's better not to talk about the second or third goals. Swansea were sharp, disciplined and hungry. Unfortunately I believe we were not good enough, we were not disciplined enough."

The result also completes remarkable back-to-back victories for Swansea over Liverpool and now Arsenal. They are out of the relegation zone and have transformed their season with three wins in five league games under new boss Carlos Carvalhal.

At the John Smith's Stadium, Liverpool got back on track in emphatic fashion thanks to goals from Emre Can, Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah in a 3-0 win. The Reds had endured frustrating defeats against



SWANSEA: Arsenal's Spanish defender Nacho Monreal (L) vies with Swansea City's English defender Kyle Naughton during the English Premier League football match between Swansea City and Arsenal at The Liberty Stadium in Swansea. — AFP

Swansea in the league and West Brom in the FA Cup.

### 'MATURE PERFORMANCE'

But Jurgen Klopp's men dominated possession and from the moment Emre Can rocketed home a long-range opener in the 26th minute the result was never in doubt. Firmino extended Liverpool's lead on the stroke of half-time when he somehow squeezed the ball home from the byline after being played in by a clever Sadio Mane back-heel. Klopp had left Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk on the bench, but the absence of the club-record signing was hardly noticed as the Reds continued in cruise control.

Salah completed the scoring from the penalty spot in the 78th minute after Can was tripped up in the box. "We had to keep the ball and score at the right

moments. Overall it was absolutely deserved," Klopp said. "It was exactly what we needed. It was not a brilliant performance, but it was very mature and exactly what we needed at the right moment." A Mark Noble penalty helped West Ham shrug off the disappointment of their embarrassing FA Cup fourth round defeat at Wigan with a hard-fought 1-1 draw against Crystal Palace.

Roy Hodgson's much-improved Eagles grabbed the lead in the 24th minute when Christian Benteke rose to steer an Andros Townsend cross home from close range. But the Hammers were level just before the break after Javier Hernandez was brought down by James Tomkins in the box. Hernandez came closest to a winner when his 51st-minute effort was brilliantly saved by Wayne Hennessey. — AFP

## Higuain, Buffon put Juventus on brink of Cup final

BERGAMO: Gonzalo Higuain scored after three minutes and Gianluigi Buffon saved a penalty as Juventus stayed on track for a fourth straight Italian Cup on Tuesday with a 1-0 semi-final, first leg win at Atalanta.

Buffon-making his first appearance in goal since turning 40 and after a two-month layoff with a calf injury—showed he was back at his best as he made his first Cup appearance since 2012.

The holders got on the scoresheet in Bergamo after just two-and-a-half minutes when Argentine Higuain found a way through the Atalanta defence and curled into the corner. It was the quickest goal this season for Massimiliano Allegri's side who are sitting second in Serie A behind Napoli.

Atalanta thought they would level when the video assistant referee (VAR) awarded a penalty after Medhi Benatia handled in the box, but Alejandro Gomez's spot-kick was saved by the evergreen Buffon.

Buffon got down low to hold the Argentine's driven effort to the left. "I am glad we honoured the Italian Cup again this year," said Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri. "It's an important result, although nothing is decided until the second leg." Higuain missed a chance for a second after half an hour with two Blaise Matuidi efforts deflected over the bar. Buffon again saved two quick-fire attempts from top Atalanta scorer Gomez after the break, tipping over the second.

"I'm happy for Gigi (Buffon), who hadn't played in the Italian Cup for five years," Allegri added. "He hasn't forgotten everything he knew just for being out of action for 45 days."

"He had a rest for a few weeks, perhaps he needed to put his feet up, but he's back now and he's our first-choice goalkeeper. "Wojciech Szczesny did well in his absence and is a champion, but Buffon is Buffon."

Despite beating league leaders Napoli at the San Paolo Stadium to advance to the semi-finals, Atalanta could not find a way past Juventus who controlled the game. Higuain came close late on and Buffon again saved his team three minutes from time when he blocked Andrea Petagna's point-blank shot. Allegri's men now just have to maintain their advantage when they host Atalanta in the return leg on February 28 in Turin.

AC Milan and Lazio face each other in the second semi-final at the San Siro. — AFP

## KIB football team completes training for 2018 Kuwait Banking Club League

KUWAIT: Within the framework of its social responsibility program aimed at supporting sports activities and youth, the Kuwait International Bank (KIB) football team recently completed its training for this year's annual Kuwait Banking Club Football League.

On this occasion, Corporate Communications Officer at KIB, Ahmed Alenzi, said: "In preparation for this season's tournament, our very own KIB team has completed yet another intensive training session. Now ready for a new season, the KIB football team hosts a number of highly-skilled, physically fit players that is sure to land us amongst this season's winners."

Alenzi added that the KIB team enjoys the management's ongoing support in participating in this thrilling tournament. In turn, their encouragement will play a crucial role in boosting the team's morale, undoubtedly impacting their performance and leading them to victo-



KIB football team.

ry. At the end, Alenzi pointed out that, as part of its leading social responsibility program, KIB remains dedicated towards supporting youth and sports-

focused activities and initiatives. By doing so, the Bank aims at promoting increased involvement in sports and healthy lifestyles.

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