

## Sports

# Madrid disappoint again in dreary draw with Leganes

## Today I wanted to make a change, it is done: Zidane

**MADRID:** Real Madrid took the Monday night slot reserved for La Liga's lower teams and never really looked out of place as Karim Benzema's goal was enough only for a 1-1 draw away to Leganes.

Madrid delivered another thoroughly underwhelming performance at Butarque to remain 13 points adrift of Barcelona, with Zinedine Zidane's second reign as coach now delivering three wins, one defeat and a draw.

Leganes might even have won it after Jonathan Silva gave them the lead shortly before half-time and while Benzema scored his 26th goal of the season, Madrid never looked like finding a winner. "It looks like we do not have much confidence," Zidane said. "We have to give a little bit more."

Instead, they sit four points behind Atletico Madrid and finishing second, and above their city rivals, appears unlikely. Leganes climb to 11th. Zidane was asked last month about the humiliation of playing on a Monday night, the time typically reserved for La Liga's sides not involved in European competitions and so unpopular that it will be abolished next season.

It meant as Barcelona were preparing to face Manchester United in the Champions League quarter-finals, Real Madrid stepped out looking to salvage only pride and, perhaps, momentum ahead of what most expect to be a busy summer.

Most of Zidane's press conferences have so far been

dominated by questions about his players' futures and on this evidence, few will be feeling secure. Benzema has been, by a distance, Madrid's most consistent player this season and he showed again why Zidane has already said the striker will stay. Gareth Bale, meanwhile, was left on the bench for the second time in three matches, with his prospects looking ever-more bleak.

"Today I wanted to make a change," Zidane said. "It is done." Chances were few and far between in the first half but Madrid could twice have taken the lead as Marco Asensio scuffed his finish after being put through by Isco and Raphael Varane's shot was blocked after a goalline scramble.

Leganes, though, were otherwise rarely made to feel uncomfortable and shortly before half-time they took the lead. Madrid failed to clear, instead allowing Martin Braithwaite to roll back to Silva, who guided the ball into the corner.

Zidane strode down the tunnel at half-time and his team emerged with greater purpose afterwards, with Benzema finding an equaliser six minutes in. Casemiro threaded a neat ball through to Luka Modric, who twisted and set free Benzema. His first shot was pushed out by Pichu Cuellar but only back to Benzema, who fired in the rebound. Silva headed straight at Navas and Youssef En-Nesyri had a goal correctly ruled out for offside late on. Neither side really deserved a winner. — AFP



**LEGANES:** Real Madrid's Spanish midfielder Marco Asensio (R) challenges Leganes' Nigerian defender Kenneth Omeruo during the Spanish league football match between Club Deportivo Leganes SAD and Real Madrid CF at the Estadio Municipal Butarque in Leganes. — AFP

## PSG top guns missing for third tilt at title

**PARIS:** After stumbling as they reached for the French title not once but twice, runaway Ligue 1 leaders Paris Saint-Germain can clinch the trophy by beating Nantes today despite an overcrowded sickbay.

Despite two consecutive defeats the defending champions are 17 points clear of second placed Lille and can still wrap up the title with six league games to spare. But PSG are reinforcing a reputation for choking. They went out of the Champions League with a horror

show against Manchester United, then missed their first chance to wrap up Ligue 1 when they drew at home to Strasbourg before Sunday's thumping 5-1 defeat at Lille. In their defence, the Qatari backed club can point at an astonishingly crowded sickbay, a problem exacerbated by the suspension of Juan Bernat. Beleguard coach Thomas Tuchel joked on Tuesday that the list of injured resembled what might be mistaken for his first-team line up.

"We'll be playing without Marquinhos, Neymar, (Edinson) Cavani, (Marco) Verrati, Bernat, (Thiago) Silva, (Thomas) Meunier and by the looks of it (Angel) Di Maria too," Tuchel said. "That's not our squad for a Champions League match, it's our injury list," he said smiling. Tuchel vowed to finish the job. "We'll find a

solution for tomorrow and looking at who we have we are fully capable of beating Nantes," he said. When asked if he wanted new recruits, the coach of one of the world's richest clubs said he did.

"We know exactly who we need and what we are targeting and we'll be trying to sign such players," Tuchel said. Brazilian superstar Neymar may be back soon. "He's feeling really well and is in no pain, he's been training with the squad," said Tuchel.

One positive for Tuchel, PSG and French football in general is the continued excellence of the prodigy Kylian Mbappe, who had two goals ruled out for offside at the weekend. The French League's top scorer and is showing maturity beyond his years during a tricky time for his club. — AFP

## Son in the spotlight as Spurs eye Euro glory

**LONDON:** Son Heung-min insists he has already proved he can shoulder the burden of replacing Harry Kane in Tottenham's Champions League showdown with Manchester City today. Mauricio Pochettino's side head to the Etihad Stadium for the quarter-final second leg looking to protect a slender 1-0 lead.

But Tottenham's task has been made harder by injuries to Kane and Dele Alli. Kane is likely to miss the rest of the season after the striker suffered yet another ankle ligament injury in the first leg against City, while England midfielder Alli is a doubt after fracturing his hand in the same match.

Losing two such influential players ahead of a do-or-die clash with the Premier League champions would be a hammer blow to most teams. But South Korea forward Son has shown this season that playing without Kane need not be fatal to his side's European ambitions. Son has scored nine goals in 10 matches with Kane absent this season and he said: "I just enjoy the football. Everyone, not just me, should enjoy the game and scoring and winning."

"We should not put pressure on ourselves about these situations. There's nothing better than the Champions League quarter-finals at the moment." While Hugo Lloris deserved plaudits for saving Sergio Aguero's penalty, the first leg was won after Kane

limped off thanks to Son's 78th-minute strike—a typically cool finish after he alertly kept the ball in play as the City defence dithered.

In fact, Tottenham have won their last five matches without Kane and Son looks in perfect form to maintain that run at City's expense. The 26-year-old scored the first goal in Tottenham's new stadium against Crystal Palace.

Six days later, he was once again the toast of the 62,062 sell-out crowd as he drew first blood against City. His pace, skill and astute movement make him a different proposition for central defenders than Kane and some have even suggested Tottenham look better with Son up front than the England captain.

That is a little far fetched, but such is his importance. Son was rested until the 87th minute in Saturday's 4-0 thrashing of Huddersfield in the Premier League. Even then, he still managed to provide an assist in his brief spell on the pitch with a superb through-ball setting up Lucas Moura for his third goal.

Son's rise to prominence is even more impressive given he was so frustrated three years ago that he considered leaving Tottenham. Struggling for form and regular playing time, Son instead resolved to prove his worth after speaking to Tottenham boss Pochettino.

"Sometimes you have tough times to get better," said Son, who has scored 18 goals in all competitions this term. "The club, the coaching staff, the players, when I have a tough time they help me lots to be here right now."

"I'm really grateful for this situation and I'm not finished. I try to improve every day." Son showed his compassionate side this week when he reportedly donated



**MANCHESTER:** Mauricio Pochettino attends a press conference at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester yesterday. — AFP

around £100,000 (\$131,000) to the victims of a deadly fire in South Korea, which killed at least two people and left hundreds homeless.

"Although I'm living abroad, I know what's happening in my home country. I think it's something I should do when there's a big disaster in my home country," Son said. His focus back on the eagerly-anticipated City tie, Son is confident Tottenham are primed to reach their first European semi-final since 1984.

"The Manchester City game will be a tough one, but I believe that if we play as a team and believe in ourselves, we can have a good result," he said. — AFP



### Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

#### UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Man City v Tottenham Hotspur beIN SPORTS HD 1	22:00
FC Porto v Liverpool beIN SPORTS HD 2	22:00

## Henderson thriving after Klopp lifts shackles

**LONDON:** Jordan Henderson has emerged as the unexpected driving force in Liverpool's midfield after persuading Jurgen Klopp to grant him the freedom to roam. Henderson has spent most of his career as an unsung support act for more glamorous team-mates with Liverpool and England. But the 28-year-old has won Klopp's trust so completely that he goes into Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final second leg at Porto firmly established as one of the key components of Liverpool's push for a European Cup and Premier League double.

Ever since joining Liverpool from his hometown club Sunderland in 2011, Henderson has struggled to silence the critics who have questioned his ability to influence matches against the very best opposition. Those doubters seized on criticism from former Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson, who once wrote in his autobiography that he opted not to sign Henderson because of the way he ran. "We looked at Jordan Henderson a lot, and Steve Bruce was unfailingly enthusiastic about him. But we noticed that Henderson runs from his knees, with a straight back," Ferguson said.

"The modern footballer runs from his hips, and we thought this gait might cause him problems later in his career." But the level-headed Henderson refused to be beaten down by Ferguson and others who wrote him off. Impressing Klopp with his tactical discipline and relentless work ethic, Henderson has improved significantly since the German took charge at Anfield in 2015, earning the captain's armband. But even with his place in Klopp's plans secure as a reliable defensive midfielder, Henderson remained restless for a bigger role in the team's attacking scheme. Offered the chance to play in an advanced midfield berth during England's recent Euro 2020 qualifiers against the Czech Republic and Montenegro, Henderson showcased his versatility with two terrific performances.

Emboldened by those displays, Henderson made a beeline for Klopp's office on his return to Liverpool's Melwood training ground and made his case to be used in the same role with the Reds.

It wasn't the first time this season Henderson had been willing to challenge Klopp after the pair briefly clashed on the Old Trafford touchline when the midfielder was substituted against Manchester United.

Intriguingly, Klopp decided to bow to Henderson's request on this occasion and the results have been a revelation. He scored his first goal for 17 months in Liverpool's 3-1 win at Southampton, delivered a dynamic show in the 2-0 Champions League first-leg victory over Porto and then set up Sadio Mane's opener in Sunday's vital 2-0 success against Chelsea. "From now on, all the time when players come into my office and ask for a different position, I will play them. It's brilliant!" Klopp joked. "Actually we had that talk. He played the other positions when we had a need and played them really well."

"Now you can see he is really energetic. For the game against Porto, wow. So no problem. That is my job, to play the players in their strongest position."

"In the last three games he's obviously on fire." Henderson's Liverpool team-mate Mohamed Salah believes the switch to a more attacking position has benefitted the rest of the side as well. "Hendo did a great job and it makes it easier for me. I think we do a good job together, we know how to play to each other," Salah said.

With Henderson, who should recover from an ankle knock to face Porto, in such fine form, Liverpool are top of the Premier League as they chase a first English title since 1990. They are also within touching distance of the Champions League semi-finals and Graeme Souness, himself a buccaneering midfielder in Liverpool's golden era, gives plenty of the credit to Henderson.—AFP

## Hurricanes halt Caps' playoff win streak

**RALEIGH:** Warren Foegele and Dougie Hamilton each scored two goals as the Carolina Hurricanes, despite being down to 10 forwards for most of the game, trounced the visiting Washington Capitals 5-0 in Game 3 of their first-round Eastern Conference playoff series Monday at Raleigh, N.C. It was the first home playoff game in 10 years for the Hurricanes, with PNC Arena full of energy. The Capitals hold a 2-1 series lead going to Game 4 tomorrow night in Raleigh. Brock McGinn added a goal and an assist, and Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek stopped 18 shots for his fifth career playoff victory—four of them shutouts. Washington, the defending Stanley Cup champions, had won six straight postseason games dating to last season. Hurricanes rookie Andrei Svechnikov, 19, exited in the first period after he was dropped by a punch from Alex Ovechkin. Svechnikov, who appeared to be knocked out, hit the back of his head on the ice as he fell. Carolina's Micheal Ferland also left in the first period because of an upper-body injury.

#### AVALANCHE 6, FLAMES 2

Nathan MacKinnon had two goals and an assist, Cale Makar scored in his NHL debut, and Colorado put 56 shots on goal while beating Calgary in Denver in a Western Conference quarterfinal series. Makar played Saturday for UMass in the NCAA championship game. Mikko Rantanen and Matt Nieto had a goal and an assist each, Erik Johnson also scored, and Philipp Grubauer stopped 25 shots for eighth-seeded Colorado, which took a 2-1 series lead over the top-seeded Flames. Sam Bennett and TJ Brodie produced goals, and Mike Smith made 50 saves for the Flames. Calgary has dropped the past two



**RALEIGH:** Evgeny Kuznetsov #92 of the Washington Capitals takes a shot against Petr Mrazek #34 of the Carolina Hurricanes during the third period in Game Three of the Eastern Conference First Round. — AFP

games in the series after shutting out the Avalanche 4-0 in Game 1. The Flames allowed two power-play goals and a short-handed tally Monday.

#### PREDATORS 3, STARS 2

Mikael Granlund's goal midway through the third period broke a deadlock, and Pekka Rinne sparkled in net as visiting Nashville defeated Dallas and took the lead in their opening round Western Conference playoff series. The Stars had all the momentum, and not just because they had erased a two-goal deficit, when Granlund sent a long wrist shot that somehow beat Ben Bishop with 8:19 left on the clock. The Predators held on the rest of the way thanks

to Rinne to take a 2-1 edge in the best-of-seven series. Rinne made 40 saves, including a mammoth stop on Jamie Benn right after the Stars made it a 2-2 game.

#### MAPLE LEAFS 3, BRUINS 2

Auston Matthews and Andreas Johansson each had a goal and an assist as Toronto defeated visiting Boston. The Maple Leafs took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven first-round Eastern Conference playoff series. Trevor Moore also scored for Toronto, while David Krejci and Charlie Coyle scored for Boston. Frederik Andersen stopped 34 shots in the Toronto goal. On the opposite end of the rink, Tuukka Rask made 31 saves for Boston. — Reuters