

14 Sole in one! thousands of players kicking balls on 'footgolf' courses



15 Ronaldo targets more records as Juventus close in on title



15 Mbappe to stay at PSG next season



BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa's Spanish goalkeeper Pepe Reina (R) jumps for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Arsenal at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England. — AFP

Aston Villa out of relegation zone

Trezeguet clinch a priceless 1-0 win against Arsenal

BIRMINGHAM: Dean Smith urged Aston Villa to finish the job after they climbed out of the Premier League relegation zone as Trezeguet clinched a priceless 1-0 win against Arsenal on Tuesday.

Smith's side have their survival fate in their own hands after the Egypt winger's first-half strike at Villa Park. Watford's 4-0 thrashing against Manchester City earlier on Tuesday had opened the door for Villa to escape the bottom three.

And Villa seized their chance with a first home Premier League win over Arsenal in 18 attempts dating back to 1998.

Villa are now fourth bottom and have moved ahead of third-bottom Watford on goal difference, with Smith's men on -26 compared to the Hornets' -27. They head to West Ham for their final game of the season on Sunday, while Watford visit Arsenal and second-bottom Bournemouth, three points from safety, travel to Everton.

There are a multitude of permutations that could

decide relegation, but Villa will be safe if they can better Watford's result on what is certain to be a dramatic finale. If Villa and Watford both win, goal difference or goals scored will decide who goes down.

"It is a big boost, that's for sure. We knew we had to get that win to catch Watford and now we have got the season in our own hands," Smith said.

"That's all you can ask going into the last game. It was a great performance and an even better result against a good team who just beat two of the best teams in Europe."

"We have taken the season to the last day. Watford can go and win at Arsenal so we have to make sure we win at West Ham." Having secured an FA Cup final place by beating Manchester City on Saturday, Gunners boss Mikel Arteta made six changes and Arsenal looked a shadow of the team who impressed at Wembley. "Emotionally and physically it's been a very demanding week but I saw a team who

wanted to fight until the end," Arteta insisted.

Arsenal cannot finish higher than eighth and must win the FA Cup final against Chelsea to qualify for next season's Europa League.

For all the positive signs since Arteta took charge in December, Arsenal will suffer their worst Premier League finish since 1995. "It tells you the gap doesn't lie. We have to make that smaller and smaller," Arteta said. "I know where we are in certain areas and where we need to improve. We will get that." A plane trailing a banner reading "Back Arteta Kroenke Out" was flown over Villa Park during the match, but Arteta pleaded with Arsenal fans to trust he has the support of the US-based owner.

"The Kroenkes and the board and the sporting director, I have their full backing. I have that 100 percent. The fans have to believe what I'm saying," Arteta added. Arsenal's long-standing weakness at set-pieces reared its head again as Villa snatched the lead in the 27th minute.

Tyrone Mings glanced Conor Hourihane's corner across the six-yard box and Trezeguet was left unmarked to blast a fierce strike past Arsenal keeper Emiliano Martinez.

Trezeguet has been Villa's saviour as the stakes have got higher and his vital goal followed his brace in the victory against Crystal Palace nine days earlier. Jack Grealish, strongly linked with a close-season move, was captaining Villa in what could have been his last home game with the club he supported as a boy. Asked after the match about his future, Grealish said: "I'm not too sure at the moment. I have one aim and that's to keep Villa in the Premier League. That's all I'm thinking about."

Arsenal were better in the second half but Bukayo Saka blazed over from a good position 12 yards out.

With the tension mounting, Villa rode their luck when Eddie Nketiah's glancing header hit the post and bounced back into Pepe Reina's hands. — AFP

Watford 'crazy low' on confidence after latest City thrashing

LONDON: Watford goalkeeper Ben Foster admitted the Hornets' confidence is "crazy low" as they slipped into the relegation zone with one game of the Premier League season to go after being thrashed 4-0 at home by Manchester City on Tuesday.

A change of management did little good after Watford became the first Premier League team to sack three managers in a season when Nigel Pearson departed on Sunday, as City bounced back from their weekend disappointment of losing an FA Cup semi-final to Arsenal.

Raheem Sterling scored twice in the first half before Phil Foden and Aymeric Laporte rounded off a comprehensive City win as Pep Guardiola's men won a fourth straight league game for the first time this season.

The margin of defeat could send Watford down come the final day of the season on Sunday as they dropped into the bottom three on goal difference after Aston Villa beat Arsenal 1-0.

Watford travel to Arsenal at the weekend, while Villa take on West Ham, who are now realistically safe due to a much superior goal difference.

"I don't think we helped ourselves, I don't think we did enough to do anything but what the result suggested to be honest," said Foster, who helped keep the score down with a string of saves.

"The confidence is so crazy, crazy low. I don't know why it should be, but you get into a state of trying to minimise as much damage as you can and it's a dangerous way to do things."

City will end the season in second place no matter what happens on the final day when they host already relegated Norwich, but Guardiola was pleased to get a reaction from a bitterly disappointing 2-0 defeat to his old assistant Mikel Arteta's Arsenal on Saturday.

"Watford were playing for a big issue but we were much more aggressive in our senses today," Guardiola said.

"We had to avoid the game we played against Arsenal, especially the first half. Whether you win or lose you have to go in the dressing room and say, 'OK, I've done everything'. This must always be happening at the big clubs and the last game we did not do it."

City have now beaten Watford by a combined score of 18-0 in their last three meetings after an 8-0 rout earlier in the season and 6-0 in last season's FA Cup final.

Hayden Mullins took charge of the hosts on a temporary basis for the second time this season and set up to frustrate the visitors by defending deep with

little threat of ever testing City's soft spot at the heart of their defence.

However, there was little doubt over the outcome once Sterling controlled Kyle Walker's cross and fired powerfully into the top corner on 31 minutes.

Nine minutes later Sterling was taken down inside the area by Will Hughes and was given the chance to further his chances of chasing down Jamie Vardy for the golden boot as Kevin De Bruyne handed over responsibilities from the penalty spot.

Foster nearly made the Belgian regret that decision with a brilliant save from Sterling's penalty but the England international followed up to tap home his 19th Premier League goal of the season.

Foden added the third after Foster had again denied Sterling's initial effort before Laporte was left completely unmarked to head home De Bruyne's free-kick as the latter moved to within one of Thierry Henry's record of 20 Premier League assists in a season. — AFP