

Sports

Messi makes PSG debut as Mbappe steals the show

Anticipation high on Mbappe's future as deadline looms



REIMS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi runs with the ball during the French L1 football match against Reims at Stade Auguste Delaune in Reims, northern France on Sunday. — AFP

PARIS: Lionel Messi came on as a substitute to make his Paris Saint-Germain debut on Sunday but Kylian Mbappe stole the show by scoring both goals in a 2-0 win against Reims in Ligue 1. Messi, wearing the number 30 jersey, came off the bench in the 66th minute to replace Neymar at the Stade Auguste-Delaune, where fans in the sell-out 21,000 crowd had earlier chanted his name as he emerged to warm up.

The Argentine had not played since arriving in Paris from Barcelona almost three weeks ago, his last appearance in any game dating back to the Copa America final on July 11, when he led his country to victory against Brazil. The six-time Ballon d'Or winner will have to wait for his first goal with his new club, and his first start, which could come when PSG host Clermont in their next match on September 11.

"I'm very happy that he made his debut. It was very important for him," PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino told broadcaster Amazon Prime after Messi's low-key first appearance in a PSG shirt. "He is still far away from his best form but he has been training well and he will be fit in the next two weeks, after the international break and, yes, we are waiting for the best from him." The week leading up to this game had been dominated not by Messi but by talk of Mbappe's future, with Real Madrid reportedly having two offers for the France World Cup-winning striker rejected.

The latest of these offers was understood to be worth 180 million euros (\$212m), an astronomical

amount for a player whose contract expires at the end of the season and who will be free to negotiate a deal with a new club in January without PSG being able to get a transfer fee. That amount is also equal to what PSG paid Monaco in 2017 to sign Mbappe, who was clearly eager to go out on a high if this was to be his final appearance for the club.



Hakimi stars for Ligue 1 leaders

'Kylian is our player'

With the transfer deadline looming today, the 22-year-old did not appear remotely distracted by the talk of a move as he headed in a glorious Angel Di Maria cross in the 15th minute to put the away side in front. Mbappe then scored his second of the night, and third of the season, just after the hour mark, finishing off an inviting low cross to the back post by Achraf Hakimi.

"Kylian is our player and you know that in football and in business there is always gossip and rumors,"

Pochettino said of Mbappe. "I think our president and our sporting director were very clear and he is still here. I am really happy to have Kylian. He is one of the best, one of the most important players in the world today and for him to be with us is a gift."

Reims were once France's pre-eminent club, twice reaching the European Cup final in 1956 and 1959, but it is a long time since the footballing spotlight has been on the city, 150 kilometers north-east of Paris in the Champagne region, to such an extent.

The home side, whose coach Oscar Garcia played for Barcelona in the 1990s, had what they thought was an equalizing goal by Zimbabwe's Marshall Munetsi early in the second half disallowed for offside. They put up a good fight but the chances of any team in France stopping PSG — even if Mbappe departs — are slim.

Neymar started, making his first appearance of the season, while Di Maria also played in an all-star attack. They are the only team in Ligue 1 with the maximum 12 points after four games and they lie two points clear of surprise package Angers, who beat Rennes 2-0.

Defending champions Lille recorded their first victory of the Ligue 1 campaign as Yusuf Yazici and Jonathan David scored in a 2-1 win over Montpellier. Monaco bounced back from their elimination from the Champions League in the play-off round in midweek to win 2-1 at Troyes, Sofiane Diop's brace securing their first victory of the league season. — AFP

Giroud, Abraham open Serie A accounts as Milan, Roma cruise

MILAN: Olivier Giroud and Tammy Abraham both got off the mark in Serie A on Sunday as the former Chelsea men helped their new teams AC Milan and Roma to comfortable victories which gave them two wins from the season's opening two fixtures.

France forward Giroud, who has not been picked for Les Bleus' upcoming World Cup qualifiers, bagged a brace in a 4-1 win over Cagliari at the San Siro while Abraham scored in a 4-0 rout at promoted Salernitana. Both strikers left European champions Chelsea this summer in the search of more regular football and have got off to quick starts in Italy. Giroud has been given the number nine jersey at Milan and scored the third and fourth in an easy victory at the San Siro. His name was sung by a large portion of the 31,000 Milan fans present, who watched their team riot in a highly entertaining first half which won the match for Stefano Pioli's team.

"I am very proud to play for Milan and to play in the San Siro stadium. It is a great emotion," Giroud said. "I believe in myself and in my abilities. As a child I used to watch Van Basten, Papin and Inzaghi and wearing this shirt makes me happy."

Sandro Tonali gave Milan a 12th minute lead with a stunning free-kick which was also his first Milan goal, and Rafael Leao claimed the second after Alessandro Deiola's surprise header levelled the scores. Giroud then artfully guided home his first Milan goal following a superb run and pass from Brahim Diaz, and when

Kevin Strootman's handball was judged to have taken place in the penalty area by VAR, the 34-year-old stepped up and stroked the spot-kick home.

Abraham on target

Abraham meanwhile crashed home the third in the 69th minute at Salernitana as a flurry of second half goals gave Jose Mourinho's team a comprehensive win in the Italian south. Roma struggled to break down the hosts in the opening period but a double from Lorenzo Pellegrini and a third goal in two games from Jordan Veretout gave the capital club a deserved win.

"I was perfectly calm right from the start. The team played really well... Again tonight, we dominated the match," said Mourinho. Both teams sit in a pack of five on a perfect six points, which also includes leaders Lazio, Inter Milan and Napoli, who earlier got a hard-fought 2-1 win at Genoa thanks to Andrea Petagna's late header.

Italy international forward Petagna, who was named a substitute despite the absences of both Victor Osimhen and Dries Mertens, was reportedly set to join Sampdoria on loan this transfer window. However with the match level through goals from Fabian Ruiz and Genoa academy graduate Andrea Cambiaso he entered the field with eight minutes remaining at the Marassi stadium and two minutes later was wheeling away in celebration after his bullet header gave Napoli the decisive goal.

"I didn't expect to be still here, there's been a lot going on this week, but I wanted to show what I think I'm worth," the imposing forward told DAZN. "It was great coming on and scoring, but honestly with my shape it's hard work, I need to play more regularly to feel right on the pitch." Sassuolo and Sampdoria played out a goalless draw in the other early match, with Emil Audero putting in a great performance in the Samp goal to escape with a point. — AFP



MADRID: Villarreal's Argentinian goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli (right) secures the ball as Atletico Madrid's Brazilian forward Matheus Cunha tackles him during the two teams' Spanish League football match the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid on Sunday. — AFP

Own-goal howler rescues point for Atletico, Depay stars

MADRID: Champions Atletico Madrid missed the chance to go clear at the top in Spain on Sunday but came from behind twice to draw 2-2 with Villarreal thanks to a howler of a late own goal. In the fifth minute of injury time, an horrific back-pass from Villarreal's Aissa Mandi left his keeper stranded and the ball rolled agonizingly into the goal to give Atletico a point. Earlier, Barcelona also dug deep for a narrow 2-1 win over Getafe with Dutch striker Memphis Depay providing the winner.

Luis Suarez was on target for the first equalizer for Atletico. Manu Triguera and then Arnaut Danjuma put the visitors ahead twice before the late blunder left Atletico on seven points from three games. "That's the joy of not losing a match that was heading in that direction," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said. "It was an injustice, but this game can be like that," he said of the late leveller. "It was our best game so far."

Real Madrid top the early Liga standings but Sevilla, Valencia, Barcelona, Mallorca and now Atletico also have seven. Triguera opened for the visitors shooting into the top corner on 52 minutes, but Suarez pounced inside the box to bring it level four minutes later. Dutch new signing Danjuma then ran into space to score his first goal for Villarreal and make it 2-1 on 74 minutes.

Atletico piled on the pressure until the own goal allowed the champions a point for their endeavors. Getting used to life without superstar Lionel Messi, Barcelona got off to a quick start as Roberto prodded home a Jordi Alba cross in just the second minute at Camp Nou. But Getafe did not buckle and Sandro Ramirez fired home a neat snap shot after a quick one-two on 18 minutes.

Winning mentality

Dressed all in black, Barca boss Ronald Koeman cut a nervous figure on the sidelines as he pointed and shouted instructions with Frenkie de Jong and Sergio Busquets bossing midfield. De Jong then provided the killer pass for the winner.

Timing his run perfectly, Depay fired home a low drive from the left of the six-yard box to put Barca back ahead on the half hour. Depay came closest to scoring another with an acrobatic volley late on. The former Manchester United and Lyon striker now has two goals and an assist from three Liga games.

"Psychologically it's a big step forward for us, we were under pressure but held on even though we were suffering," Koeman said. "We held the line further forward. So we are very happy with the three points and very happy with our pressing off the ball." Osasuna won 3-2 at Cadiz while Rayo Vallecano thumped Granada 4-0. On Saturday, Dani Carvajal's second-half goal gave Real Madrid a 1-0 win at Real Betis as Carlo Ancelotti's men rode their luck. Madrid have enjoyed a bright start to the season, while the reported potential signing of Kylian Mbappe could give them another boost before the end of the transfer window today. — AFP



MILAN: AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud (left) and teammates celebrate at the end of the Italian Serie A football match against Cagliari at the San Siro stadium in Milan, on Sunday. — AFP

Leaders Wolfsburg mute celebrations after fan's collapse

BERLIN: Wolfsburg regained top spot in the fledgling Bundesliga table Sunday with a 1-0 win at home RB Leipzig, but the hosts' victory was overshadowed by a spectator collapsing in the stadium. The hosts muted their celebrations after the final whistle when it emerged a fan had collapsed during the game and was rushed to hospital after emergency treatment. "In moments like this, it's not proper to celebrate," said Wolfsburg midfielder Maximilian Arnold. "As a whole club, our thoughts are somewhere else right now."

Wolfsburg grabbed the winner shortly after the break when left-back Jerome Roussillon reacted quickest to a loose ball. The hosts scored when Wolfsburg won the ball back from a long throw by Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi and moved the ball to the left flank. Their Swiss winger Renato Steffen whipped in a low cross, which Gulacsi could only parry into the path of Roussillon, who smashed home his

first Bundesliga goal for two years.

Under new coach Mark van Bommel, Wolfsburg are now the only team in Germany's top flight to have won all of three games this season. Leipzig captain Marcel Sabitzer was left out of the matchday squad amid reports he is about to join Bayern Munich.

It was a disappointing result for Leipzig coach Jesse Marsch after his team hammered Stuttgart 4-0 last time out following a shock defeat at Mainz on the opening weekend of the season. Defending champions Bayern are third, two points behind Wolfsburg, after Robert Lewandowski scored a hat-trick in their 5-0 thrashing of Hertha Berlin on Saturday.

Awoniyi strikes again

Earlier, ex-Liverpool striker Taiwo Awoniyi chalked up his fifth goal in all competitions this season with a superb finish as Union Berlin earned a 2-1 home win over Borussia Moenchengladbach. The 24-year-old has now scored in each of Union's three Bundesliga games this term and is reveling playing alongside Germany striker Max Kruse.

"He's just an exceptional player," Awoniyi said of Kruse, who made the last of his 14 Germany appearances in 2015. The 33-year-old has rebooted his career with Union after spells at Wolfsburg, Bremen,

Gladbach and Fenerbahce. "He has a lot of experience and knows what he wants to do every time he gets the ball," said Awoniyi. "Once you play with him, he knows where you are and this has helped me a lot - it's good for both of us."

Awoniyi's transfer from Merseyside was made permanent this summer after spending last season on spell at Union, where he managed a total of five goals. Winger Niko Giesselmann gave Union an early lead in Berlin, but Awoniyi finished a move he started from inside his own half for their superb second goal. After a strong run, he exchanged passes with Kruse, who put Awoniyi into space to round Gladbach's goalkeeper Yann Sommer and score from a tight angle just before the break.

Awoniyi proved he can create chances as well as finish chances in the second half when his pass put Levin Oztunali in space but the midfielder fired wide. The visitors scored a late consolation goal when Jonas Hofmann tapped the rebound in the net after a shot by substitute Laszlo Benes was saved.

Union are eighth after their first win in three league games. Gladbach are down near the foot of the fledgling table with a point after a draw with Bayern Munich on the opening day of the season before defeats to Leverkusen and Union. — AFP



WOLFSBURG: Leipzig's French midfielder Christopher Nkunku (left) and Wolfsburg's French midfielder Josuha Guilavogui vie for the ball during their teams' German first division Bundesliga football match on Sunday. — AFP