

Sports

Hakimi's heroics maintain Messi-less PSG's 100% start

PARIS: Achraf Hakimi's dramatic injury-time winner rescued Paris Saint-Germain a 2-1 victory at bottom club Metz on Wednesday as the capital giants maintained their 100 percent start to the Ligue 1 season despite the absence of the injured Lionel Messi. Moroccan full-back Hakimi, a 60-million-euro signing from Inter Milan this year, gave PSG a fifth-minute lead before Kiki Kouyate's equalizer.

But a chaotic climax to the match saw Metz reduced to 10 men and have their coach Frederic Antonetti sent to the stands before Hakimi's 94th-minute strike. "The team fight to the end and never admit defeat, they have this ability to surpass themselves, with character, and the reward came at the end," said PSG boss Mauricio Pochettino.

PSG went into the new season as red-hot favorites to regain their French title after a raft of close-season signings, including six-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi. The former Barcelona icon was absent with a knee injury and Pochettino's men struggled against winless Metz. But PSG extended their early advantage at the top of the table to seven points over rivals Marseille - who drew 0-0 at third-placed Angers - after a seventh victory from as many league games.

Hakimi pounced early on but PSG were far from their best and Kouyate headed home from a corner six minutes before the break. Visiting goalkeeper Keylor Navas had to make a good save to deny Lamine Gueye a goal on the stroke of half-time, while Metz appeals for a penalty for handball against Hakimi early in the second period were turned down.

The real drama came after the clock had ticked past the 90 minutes, though, as Metz defender Dylan Bronn was shown a second yellow card for kicking the ball away. Coach Antonetti was

then promptly dismissed. PSG made the most of their brief man advantage as Hakimi latched onto Neymar's excellent pass, cut inside and fired into the bottom corner left-footed. Paris, champions in seven of the last nine seasons, celebrated wildly, with Neymar booked in the aftermath.

Shaqiri off the mark

Xherdan Shaqiri scored his first Lyon goal since joining from Liverpool as his new side saw off Troyes 3-1. Xavier Chavalierin gave Troyes a half-time lead, but Shaqiri's brilliant shot into the top corner dragged Lyon level. His fellow close-season arrival Emerson Palmieri completed the turnaround before Lucas Paqueta added a third. After a poor start to the campaign, Lyon have won three of their last four matches to climb to sixth in the table.

Nice are a place below them after Amine Gouiri missed a penalty for the second straight match in a 1-0 loss at Lorient. It was the first Ligue 1 defeat of the season for the club financed by British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe and Ineos. Thomas Monconduit scored the only goal midway through the first half for Lorient before Gouiri, who also failed from the spot late on in Sunday's 2-2 draw with Monaco, missed again in the 55th minute.

Lille get second win

Struggling Ligue 1 champions Lille held on to beat Reims 2-1 to claim just their second win of the season. Canada forward Jonathan David put the hosts ahead at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy just after the half-hour mark and midfielder Benjamin Andre doubled the advantage before the break with his first goal of the campaign. Lille, who saw title-winning coach Christophe Galtier leave in the close season for Nice, came through a nervy final 15 minutes



LONGEVILLE-LES-METZ, France: Paris Saint-Germain's Moroccan defender Achraf Hakimi (left) fights for the ball with Metz's French defender Sikou Niakate at the Saint-Symphorien Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

after Alexis Flips' penalty cut the deficit for Reims.

Monaco are above Lille on goal difference after also sealing their second league win this term by seeing off 10-man Saint-Etienne 3-1. In a Ligue 1 first, Monaco made six substitutes due to the new concussion protocols as Krepin Diatta had to be replaced after a clash of heads with Yvan Neyou. Elsewhere, Rennes bounced back from three straight losses by thrashing Clermont 6-0, while Nigerian Samuel Kalu rescued Bordeaux a 3-3 draw at Montpellier. —AFP

Flamengo edge towards final as Barcelona downed

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian giants Flamengo took a huge stride towards the Copa Libertadores final on Wednesday, dominating Ecuadorian club Barcelona SC to seal a 2-0 victory in their semi-final first leg. Two first-half goals from striker Bruno Henrique set up a convincing win for Flamengo at the Maracana Stadium with the visitors outclassed for long periods of a one-sided encounter.

With Brazilian clubs Palmeiras and Atletico Mineiro battling it out in the other semi-final, Flamengo's win increases the chances of an all-Brazil Libertadores final for a second straight year. Barcelona made a bright start, with Gonzalo Mastriani and Byron Castillo forcing Flamengo keeper Diego Alves to save twice during a frenetic opening. But thereafter it was all Flamengo, and the Rio club took the lead on 21 minutes when Gabriel's perfectly flighted cross was met by Henrique, directing his header across goal and into the net. Barcelona midfielder Nixon Molina let his frustration get the better of him straight from the restart, earning a booking for taking out goalscorer Henrique.

Henrique should have had a second on 34 minutes, ghosting into the area to meet Gabriel's cross only to hit the bar with a header. Andreas Pereira, on loan from English giants Manchester United, also hit the woodwork soon afterwards with a dipping long range shot on 37 minutes. But a minute later, Flamengo's second goal duly arrived after a clinical counterattack from the hosts. —AFP

Milan join leaders Inter, Juve get first win of season

MILAN: AC Milan moved level with Serie A leaders Inter Milan on Wednesday thanks to a Theo Hernandez-inspired 2-0 win over Venezia, while Juventus won their first match of the season at the fifth attempt, 3-2 at Spezia. France international Hernandez laid on Brahim Diaz's opener and scored the other at the San Siro to move second-placed Milan onto 13 points alongside city rivals Inter, in a win which maintains an unbeaten record so far this season for Stefano Pioli's side.

Diaz opened up a stubborn Venezia side when he forced home Hernandez's volleyed cross in the 67th minute in a match in which up to that point the Rossoneri had been restricted to a handful of chances. Hernandez then sealed the three points with eight minutes remaining when he collected the ball following superb play from fellow substitute Alexis Saelemaekers and lashed in his first goal of the campaign.

Milan are a point ahead of Napoli who travel to Sampdoria looking to maintain their 100 percent record, while Atalanta and Roma lurk behind in fourth and fifth respectively. "We knew that Venezia were a difficult team to play against... We need to win all of these sorts of matches and now we need to win tomorrow (at Spezia) as well," said Hernandez to DAZN. "Our goal needs to be to win the title, and that's what we need to aim for."

Way back in 13th are Juventus, the 36-time Italian champions some eight points behind their Milan rivals following a hard-fought win at Spezia which at one point was looking like an embarrassing defeat. Emmanuel Gyasi and Janis Antiste put Spezia ahead shortly after the break with two deflected strikes following Moise Kean's 28th-minute opener, the Italian's first goal for Juventus since returning from Everton. However substitute Federico Chiesa levelled midway through the second half with his first league goal of the season and in the 72nd minute Matthijs de Ligt struck the winner when the ball



MILAN: Unione Venezia's Slovenian midfielder Domen Crnigoj (center) tackles AC Milan's French defender Theo Hernandez (right) at the San Siro stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

fell kindly to him from a Paulo Dybala corner. It was a far from convincing performance though and Spezia could have levelled late on, with Wojciech Szczesny at his best to push away Giulio Maggiore's volley with five minutes remaining. "It was a difficult match, in the first half we played well but they managed to fight back," said De Ligt, who has fallen down the pecking order and was only playing because Giorgio Chiellini wasn't fit. "We're in a period where everything that can go wrong does. Both of their goals came from deflections, let's hope we can have some luck in the future."

Juve have now conceded at least one goal in 19 consecutive league matches, a trend that needs to change with Chelsea visiting Turin in a week's time. Salernitana earned their first point of the season when they came back from two goals down to draw 2-2 at home with 15th-placed Verona. Nikola Kalinic put the away side ahead with a deft first-half brace but Cedric Gondo pulled one back just before half-time when the ball dropped to him following Franck Ribery's free-kick. —AFP