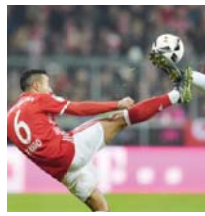


**Kohli, Vijay
put India ahead
against England**



**Bayern regain top
spot as Leipzig
lose unbeaten
record**



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BLUE JACKETS WIN FIFTH STRAIGHT OVER RED WINGS

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LEICESTER: Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy (2nd R) takes the ball around Manchester City's Chilean goalkeeper Claudio Bravo on his way to scoring their third goal during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Manchester City at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England yesterday. — AFP

VARDY TREBLE BLASTS GUARDIOLA'S SORRY MAN CITY



Leicester 4



Manchester City 2

LEICESTER: Jamie Vardy ended his Leicester City goal drought with a brilliant hat-trick as the Premier League champions crushed Pep Guardiola's shambolic Manchester City 4-2 yesterday. Leicester returned to form in style, racing into a 4-0 lead as Vardy ended a run of 16 club games without a goal by scoring a fine treble.

Andy King also scored for the champions as Guardiola's men were torn apart, suffering an embarrassing reverse despite late

goals by Aleksandar Kolarov and Nolito halving Leicester's winning margin.

After a bruising 3-1 defeat by Chelsea last weekend, Guardiola faces more tough questions, while Leicester manager Claudio Ranieri can finally enjoy a much-needed win after a poor defence so far of their title.

A dream start for Leicester came in only the third minute as Vardy's barren spell ended with the finishing touch to a pleasing move. Riyad Mahrez started it with a fine touch to bring down a high ball and lay it off to Islam Slimani, who slid a pass to the feet of Vardy. The England striker slotted a shot into the bottom-left corner with the composure of a man who had been scoring prolifically. The lead was doubled within three minutes courtesy of another goal from the top drawer as Robert Huth headed

down a Christian Fuchs throw and Slimani laid off a pass to King.

But it was still no more than a half-chance until the Wales midfielder unleashed a fantastic curling shot that flew in off the fingertips of goalkeeper Claudio Bravo.

On 12 minutes it might have been 3-0 when another Huth knock-down found Slimani, but the Algerian striker sent a shot over. Visitors City produced a rare moment of promise on 15 minutes when Kevin De Bruyne tried his luck from just inside the Leicester penalty area with a shot that flew just wide. But five minutes later the damage got worse for the visitors as Leicester turned on the style for their third goal.

STONES BLUNDER

A long pass from Fuchs was cushioned bril-

liantly by Mahrez into the path of Vardy, who rounded Bravo and rolled a low shot into the gaping goal.

It could have been 4-0 moments later when Mahrez danced his way to the edge of the area with some fine footwork, but saw his shot turned away to safety by Bravo.

The visitors were denied a penalty in first-half stoppage time when Kelechi Iheanacho went down under Marc Albrighton's heavy challenge.

Seconds later Albrighton presented a chance for 4-0 on a plate for Slimani, only for the striker to head an excellent cross wide. The visitors increased their tempo after half-time and began to pin Leicester back inside their own half. Pablo Zabaleta and De Bruyne both had shots blocked in a goalmouth scramble before Ilkay Gundogan went close to giving

his side a lifeline, shooting narrowly wide from Iheanacho's lay-off. But Slimani had another chance when he glided into the penalty area, only to see his shot saved low down by Bravo.

Vardy made it 4-0 on 78 minutes as he completed his hat-trick, pouncing on a terrible back-pass from John Stones and scoring with a shot that just crept over the line from an almost impossible angle. City made the scoreline look a little more respectable in the closing stages with two impressive goals of their own.

First, Kolarov curled a fine free-kick into the top corner from 20 yards with City's first shot on target and then Nolito side-footed home superbly from a Kolarov cross. But Leicester held on to claim a vital three points and condemn their visitors to a crushing defeat. — AFP

OZIL PROVES WORTH AS ARSENAL GO TOP



Arsenal 3



Stoke City 1

LONDON: Mesut Ozil provided a timely reminder of his importance to Arsenal's title hopes with a superb header in a 3-1 win against Stoke that moved the Gunners to the top of the Premier League yesterday.

The futures of Ozil and Alexis Sanchez remain uncertain with the Arsenal duo entering the final 18 months of their current deals.

But both were central figures as Arsene Wenger's team secured the two-goal margin of victory that lifted them above Chelsea on goals scored.

Ozil's stunning second-half header, a goal that came about in controversial circumstances in the eyes of Stoke manager Mark Hughes, was the highlight of the win.

Arsenal had fallen behind to Charlie Adam's 23rd-minute penalty but levelled before half-time thanks to Theo Walcott's 10th goal of the season.

Ozil and Alex Iwobi struck after the break to shift the pressure onto Chelsea 24 hours before Antonio Conte's side host West Bromwich Albion.

Wenger had complained angrily about referee Lee Mason's decision to award a penalty after Stoke's Joe Allen was floored by a leading elbow from Granit Xhaka.

But it was Hughes' turn to complain when Ozil scored in space vacated by Stoke left-back Erik Pieters, who was out of position after receiving treatment at the other end of the pitch. Arsenal had started the game positively, finding plenty of room down the right hand flank. But for the most part, Stoke man-

aged to restrict the home side to the occasional half-chance before they took the lead through Adam's penalty.

Shortly before the Scotland international gave the visitors the lead, the midfielder had shown his quality with a lofted ball that allowed Marko Arnautovic to set up an opportunity that Allen sent wide.

And Adam showed impressive composure to send Cech the wrong way from the spot after Allen had been floored by Xhaka in a clumsy challenge between the pair.

VULNERABLE

Arsenal's problems increased when Shkodran Mustafi was forced off with what appeared to be a hamstring injury and the introduction of Hector Bellerin prompted a reshuffle of the home back-four.

But the substitute's most significant first half contribution came at the other end of the pitch when he produced the cross that led to Walcott's 42nd-minute equaliser.

Stoke had continued to appear vulnerable on their left hand side, with Allen providing only limited cover for Pieters.

The left-back was isolated once again when the ball was played out to Bellerin from a central position and the Spaniard drilled in a low cross that was turned home by Walcott at the near post.

The goal brought relief for Wenger and his players who had been growing increasingly frustrated in their efforts to cancel out the controversial opening goal.

But it was soon the visitors' turn to feel hard done to when they fell behind to Ozil's clever, looping header.

Moments before, Stoke had pressed forward with Pieters requiring treatment after clashing with Bellerin as he went for a far post header and the left-back had not recovered his ground when Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain



LONDON: Arsenal's German midfielder Mesut Ozil (L) runs for the ball with Stoke City's Portuguese-born Dutch defender Bruno Martins Indi during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Stoke City at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. — AFP

picked out Ozil with a floated pass.

There was no doubting the quality of the Germany international's finish but the playmaker was helped by Pieters' absence.

While Stoke fumed, Arsenal continued to press with Xhaka and Oxlade-Chamberlain both testing Grant with long-range shots.

But Arsenal were unlikely to squander the lead and finally established the two-goal advantage they needed to go top when Iwobi picked up the loose ball after Sanchez had been fouled on the edge of the Stoke area. — AFP

MESSI DOUBLE BRINGS BARCELONA RELIEF

MADRID Lionel Messi struck twice as Barcelona recorded their first win in four La Liga games to close to within three points of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga with a 3-0 win at Osasuna.

Barca should have killed the game off in the first half as Luis Suarez and Messi missed two big chances each against La Liga's bottom side. However, Suarez rounded off a fine team move to break the deadlock just before the hour before Messi's double in the final 17 minutes moved him ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo as La Liga's top scorer with 11 for the season.

Real can extend their lead once more and set a new club record unbeaten run of 35 games when they host Deportivo la Coruna later. "We are Barcelona and we know we can never give up," Suarez told BeIN Sports Spain.

"We are candidates to win the league, it doesn't matter if we are four, five, six or seven points behind, we won't give up."

Barca were in desperate need of a lift after conceding in the last minute to Real in last weekend's El Clasico. The Catalans' upturn in performance since captain Andres Iniesta's return from a six-week injury layoff continued in the first half at Osasuna, but Barca were in danger of paying for their profligacy in front of goal. Suarez fired wide when through on goal and then hit the post inside 20 minutes. Osasuna remain five points off safety and it was easy to see why they are still without a home win all season as the hosts were opened up at will.

Suarez turned provider for Messi, but Nautzet Perez rushed from his goal to block. And the goalkeeper frustrated the five-time World Player of the Year

again moments later by just raising a hand in time to divert Messi's attempted chip behind.

"We were patient and generated a lot of chances," said Barca boss Luis Enrique. "It was key to go in front and calm ourselves down. The goals came in the second-half, but we deserved to go in front in the first-half and have a much easier game."

Sergio Leon gave Barca a scare at the start of the second-half when his brilliant lob over Marc-Andre ter Stegen came back off the underside of the bar.

Barca created fewer chances in the second half, but were more clinical. Sergio Busquets and Messi combined to release Jordi Alba on the left and his low cross was rolled into an unguarded net by Suarez despite Osasuna calls for offside.

The second goal came about in similar fashion 13 minutes later as Alba again got to the by-line and his cross was volleyed home by Messi at the near post.

And Messi didn't need any help for his second in stoppage time as he wriggled clear of three Osasuna defenders and left Perez on the floor before lifting the ball high into the net.

Valencia remain above the relegation zone only on goal difference despite more penalty heroics from goalkeeper Diego Alves in a 3-2 defeat at Real Sociedad. Alves saved the 23rd penalty of 47 he has faced in Spanish football from Carlos Vela, but it mattered little as a Willian Jose double and Juanmi's injury time strike moved Sociedad up to fourth.

Valencia have won just one game in eight since former Italy boss Cesare Prandelli took charge in October. — AFP