

21 Blackhawks beat Sharks as Jets thrash Blues 4-0



22 Bucks overpower Raptors; Rockets and Cavaliers win



23 US punch Sweden to win first gold medal



Liverpool thrash West Ham 4-1

Salah's hot-streak continues; Liverpool go second



LIVERPOOL: West Ham United's Argentinian defender Pablo Zabaleta (right) vies with Liverpool's Senegalese midfielder Sadio Mane during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and West Ham United yesterday. — AFP

LEICESTER: Mohamed Salah scored for the sixth straight game as Liverpool took advantage of being the only Premier League top six side in action yesterday to move into second with a 4-1 thrashing of West Ham at Anfield. Jurgen Klopp's men still trail runaway league leaders Manchester City by 15 points, but strengthened their case to finish in the top four and make the Champions League next season as Emre Can, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane were also on target. Liverpool edge a point ahead of bitter rivals Manchester United, who host fourth-placed Chelsea today.

Salah also drew level with Harry Kane on 23 Premier League goals in an outstanding debut season at Liverpool in the battle for the golden boot. The Egyptian was inches away from opening the scoring inside three minutes when he struck the post, but did have a hand when Can's bullet header from Salah's cor-

ner broke the deadlock on 29 minutes for Liverpool's 100th goal of the season in all competitions. Salah doubled Liverpool's lead when he steered a shot into the far corner on his favoured left foot after the break from Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's through ball. Moments later it was Firmino who beat West Ham goalkeeper Adrian to Can's pass before slotting into an empty net.

Substitute Michail Antonio pulled a goal back for the Hammers just a minute after coming on, but Mane ensured all of Liverpool's prolific front three were on target when he converted Andrew Robertson's cross 13 minutes from time. At the other end of the table, promoted

Huddersfield and Brighton moved clear of the bottom three. West Brom remain rooted to the foot of the table as Huddersfield struck twice in eight minutes at the start of the second period through Rajiv Van la Parra and Steve Mounie to win 2-1 at the Hawthorns.

Brighton moved up to 11th thanks to Glenn Murray's double and late goals from Anthony Knockaert and Jurgen Locadia to end Swansea's 10-match unbeaten run in a 4-1 thrashing. Dwight Gayle also scored twice, but Newcastle failed to back up their stunning win over Manchester United as they blew a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 at Bournemouth. Adam Smith and Dan Gosling struck for the hosts in the final

10 minutes. Southampton also salvaged a point late on to edge out the drop zone on goal difference. Manolo Gabbiadini came off the bench to level in stoppage time and salvage a 1-1 draw at Burnley, whose wait since December 12 for a Premier League win continues.

Earlier, Stoke City boss Paul Lambert hailed Jack Butland as the "best goalkeeper in Britain" despite an own goal from the England international costing his side the chance to move out of the bottom three in a 1-1 draw at Leicester. The visitors, who remain 19th, led through Xherdan Shaqiri's long-range strike until Butland fumbled Marc Albrighton's cross into his own net 20 minutes from time. But Butland did at least make amends with a stunning save from Riyad Mahrez. Leicester's Harry Maguire and Matty James also hit the post as Stoke held on to move to within a point of safety. — AFP

Brighton crush Swansea 4-1 as Murray shines



Real sink Alaves

MADRID: Real Madrid's 'BBC' strikeforce hit back with a vengeance when Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale and Karim Benzema all scored in a 4-0 win over Alaves yesterday as the champions moved within four points of second-placed Atletico Madrid. Ronaldo returned to the starting line-up after being rested for Wednesday's game with Leganes and after shaking off a painful ankle knock the Portuguese put Real ahead on the stroke of halftime, taking advantage of a clever backheel from Benzema. Benzema was also the catalyst for Real's second goal which came under a minute into the second half, with the Frenchman winning the ball back in midfield and tearing towards goal, slipping it into Bale's path for the Wales international to slot it inside the near post.

Ronaldo struck Real's third goal of the day and his 299th in La Liga in the 61st minute, meeting a cut-back from in-form winger Lucas Vazquez first time and sending it under the reach of former Real goalkeeper Fernando Pacheco. Ronaldo then surrendered the opportunity to score a hat-trick by offering Benzema penalty-taking duties after Bale was brought down, and the Frenchman made no mistake, converting from the spot in the 89th minute. Real are third in the standings on 51 points, 11 behind leaders Barcelona who host Girona later and four from Atletico, who can widen the gap back to seven when they visit Sevilla today. — Reuters

Migrants keep football dreams alive in Morocco

CASABLANCA: The rubbish had been cleared away and spectators emerged from makeshift tents: it was time for kick-off in the daily football game at the Oulad Ziane migrant camp in Morocco's Casablanca. "We organize ourselves among the different nationalities," said Djabel Niang, 21, who left Senegal two years ago to pursue his dream of crossing the Mediterranean and playing for Real Madrid.

"We play in teams of five or six in conditions that aren't really up to scratch, but we play anyway—we play for pleasure, and to forget." The camp, near the central bus station in Morocco's coastal commercial capital, is home to migrants from sub-Saharan Africa who are trying to reach Europe or have been forced back. The population fluctuates between a few dozen and several hundred, and the small football pitch on the edge of the tent encampment is a key focal point. The different communities—from Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Guinea—each have

their own "president" and team.

The best-equipped squads wear old jerseys bearing the colors of AC Milan, Real Madrid, the Moroccan national team and local club Wydad Casablanca. The others make do with whatever they can find. "It isn't easy to get football kits, we don't have jobs or families," said Niang. Like all those in the camps, the footballers live from hand to mouth and try to avoid drawing the attention of constantly passing police patrols. Relations with the Moroccans living nearby are also complicated—some bring clothes or food, but others resent the presence of the migrants and sometimes pick fights.

The football matches are a way to forget the tough situation. "We train every day, every evening," said midfielder Chancelin Njike, 25, from Cameroon. To signal a foul during games, the referee hits the ground with a plastic bottle, for lack of a whistle. Along the edge of the pitch, petty traders continue plying their wares, a cook mixes up semolina, a carpenter hammers away and street children sniff glue.

At one recent match, the Guinean team chalked up a 2-0 win over Cameroon, who were hampered by the fact that two of their best players had been sent by security forces to the southern city of Agadir. "Often we organize small tournaments to create



CASABLANCA: A sub-Saharan migrant practices his skills on a makeshift football pitch in the middle of the Oulad Ziane migrant camp in Casablanca. —AFP

some atmosphere, and other times we just play for fun," said Njike. He used to play in Cameroon's third division and graduated from a sports academy, but left the country in 2015 to head to Europe. "It is my hope to get in to be able to train, play and reach a good level one day," he said.

But he has not been lucky. As he talked about his journey, his voice trembled. For months he lived in the forests

of northern Morocco, but could not find a way to breach the tall border fence that divides it from the Spanish enclave of Melilla. He nearly drowned twice attempting perilous sea crossings. Two of his friends didn't make it, dying during a voyage on an overcrowded dinghy. He said two classmates from his football academy had reached Europe and ended up playing football in France, inspiring him to attempt the same path. — AFP