

25 McIlroy hoping to provide spark for Europe in Ryder Cup showdown

26 Smith, Warner make smashing return to Australian cricket

27 Red-hot Osaka powers past Giorgi into Tokyo final



Liverpool, Manchester City cruise

Man Utd held on Ferguson's return



CARDIFF: Manchester City's Argentinian striker Sergio Aguero (L) vies with Cardiff City's Irish defender Greg Cunningham during the English Premier League football match between Cardiff City and Manchester City at Cardiff City Stadium in Cardiff, south Wales yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool and Manchester City's shootout for the Premier League title intensified yesterday with comfortable wins over Southampton and Cardiff, while Manchester United were held 1-1 by Wolves on the day Alex Ferguson returned to Old Trafford.

Jürgen Klopp could afford the luxury of handing Xherdan Shaqiri his first Liverpool start for a 3-0 victory at Anfield and Wesley Hoedt turned the Swiss international's deflected shot in for the opener before Joel Matip and Mohamed Salah's first goal in four games sealed Liverpool's seventh straight win in all competitions.

City edged ahead of Chelsea, who travel to West Ham today, into second, two points behind the leaders, as they bounced back from a shock Champions League defeat to Lyon in midweek by thrashing Cardiff 5-0 in the Welsh capital.

United, though, are now eight points off the top as a run of three straight wins to avert an early season crisis came to an end against an impressive Wolves while

Ferguson watched on for the first time since undergoing emergency surgery on a brain haemorrhage in May.

SHAQIRI STARS

Liverpool's new-found strength in depth was in evidence as Daniel Sturridge netted on his first start of the season against Paris Saint-Germain in midweek, and those coming into the side on Saturday made a big impact again as Klopp made three changes.

The hosts were handed a huge helping hand early on by Saints thanks to a comical own goal by Hoedt as he failed to sort his feet out as Shaqiri's deflected drive trickled across the area.

Matip was another to be making his first start of the campaign and powered home Trent Alexander-Arnold's corner before Salah won the foot race to force the ball over the line after a Shaqiri free-kick came back off the bar. Liverpool's afternoon was soured, though, by a rib injury to Virgil van Dijk that forced the world's most expensive defender off early in the second period

Newcastle lacked any cutting edge up front and were fortunate to avoid defeat at Selhurst Park.

The result left Palace 11th on seven points from six games while the Magpies stayed 18th, ahead of bottom sides Cardiff City and Huddersfield Town on goal difference after another lacklustre performance. Palace have now won only one of their last 16 matches against Newcastle in all competitions, having missed a chance to register a 200th win in the top flight and their 100th in the Premier League.

The home side dominated the opening half and twice came close through captain Luka Milivojevic, who tested Newcastle keeper Martin Dubravka with a curling low shot before his floated free kick came off the

ahead of a demanding run of fixtures.

"Winning seven in a row is cool but challenges will get tougher and tougher. The boys are in good shape and that helps," Klopp said. Klopp's men face Chelsea and City in their next two league games, with a Champions League trip to Napoli in between.

Ferguson was given a standing ovation before kick-off at Old Trafford as he took his seat accompanied by his wife Cathy in the United directors' box. However, the presence of the club's most successful manager failed to inspire United to victory despite Fred's first goal for the club 18 minutes in.

Wolves have thoroughly impressed on their return to the top flight and only a series of fine saves by David de Gea prevented the visitors from being ahead at the break.

However, even the Spain number one was helpless when Joao Moutinho curled into the top corner eight minutes into the second half. "They deserved their point and we deserve the punishment of only getting one

woodwork. Newcastle striker Ayoze Perez directed an acrobatic overhead kick straight an Palace keeper Wayne Hennessey in the second half before Mamadou Sakho missed a sitter at the other end, heading wide from two metres after an Andros Townsend cross.

Milivojevic was upbeat about the home side's performance. "When you can't win, don't lose," he told the BBC. "We missed many chances. In the first we hit the bar, I think we deserved three points. We played well, were compact, had good organisation, moved the ball quickly. "But we missed a 100 percent chance. Sakho wanted to do the best, in the end he missed. But okay we drew and will continue to try and improve."

Earlier, Leicester City eased the pressure on manag-

er Claude Puel by beating Huddersfield Town 3-1 yesterday to leave the visitors rooted to the foot of the Premier League table. Leicester had lost eight of their last 12 league games but Puel finally had something to smile about as his side ran out comfortable winners at the King Power Stadium.

Huddersfield must have thought their luck was changing when Mathias Jorgensen fired them in front after five minutes. But the lead was short-lived as Kelechi Iheanacho brought the home side level on 19 minutes. James Maddison put Leicester ahead on 65 minutes with a well-taken free kick before Jamie Vardy sealed all three points with a clever finish 15 minutes from time. —Reuters

CITY CRUISE

City boss Pep Guardiola was back on the touchline after having to watch his side's defeat on Wednesday from the stands as he served a one-match ban. However, there was little chance of a Cardiff side still waiting for their first win back in the top flight also embarrassing the Premier League champions.

Sergio Aguero celebrated signing a new contract till 2021 on Friday by firing home the opener in sodden conditions before Bernardo Silva and Ilkay Gundogan made it 3-0 before half-time. Club record signing Riyad Mahrez then came off the bench to score his first two City goals. —AFP

Newcastle hold dominant Palace to goalless stalemate

LONDON: Newcastle United earned only their second Premier League point of the season after scraping a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace as the home side missed several chances and hit the woodwork in a scrappy game yesterday. Palace were guilty of poor finishing but