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Lienz with slalom triumph



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## Liverpool lean on VAR to edge Wolves



LIVERPOOL: Wolverhampton Wanderers' Moroccan midfielder Romain Saiss (C) sends a shot high over the bar during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Wolverhampton Wanderers at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England, yesterday. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool continued their relentless march towards a first Premier League title in 30 years, but Jurgen Klopp's men needed the benefit of two VAR reviews to see off Wolves 1-0 at Anfield yesterday.

Sadio Mane scored the only goal three minutes before half-time as the Senegalese's strike was allowed to stand after initially being ruled out for handball against Adam Lallana.

Moments later Wolves had an equaliser scored by Pedro Neto disallowed by VAR for the tightest of off-side decisions. An 18th win in 19 Premier League games this season reestablished Liverpool's 13-point lead at the top of the table and they have a game in hand over closest challengers Leicester.

Wolves were angered even before kick-off with the scheduling that meant they travelled to the European champions just 45 hours after a thrilling 3-2 win over Manchester City.

Nuno Espirito Santo responded by making four changes with all three goalscorers from Friday — Raul Jimenez, Adam Traore and Matt Doherty — starting on the bench.

Liverpool made just one alteration from the side that thrashed Leicester 4-0 in a top-of-the-table clash on Boxing Day to open up a seemingly unassailable lead in the title race.

An extra day's rest for the hosts showed in the early stages as Mohamed Salah, Georginio Wijnaldum, Mane

and Roberto Firmino all came close. The deadlock was finally broken when Mane swept home his 14th goal of the season.

Referee Anthony Taylor ruled the goal out for handball as Lallana knocked the ball into Mane's path, but the English midfielder had instead used his shoulder and the goal was given after a lengthy VAR review.

If Wolves felt hard done by for the opener, they were rightly infuriated again in first half stoppage time when Neto's equaliser was ruled out.

Jonny was adjudged to be offside by the tiniest of margins to add to a number of Premier League goals over the past two days ruled out for the most marginal of offside calls.

Nuno was booked among the Wolves protestations, but the Portuguese coach's starting line-up meant he had weapons up his sleeve come the second half with the pace of Traore unleashed on the hour mark.

Wolves' top scorer Jimenez followed, but only after Diogo Jota's fierce strike forced Alisson Becker into a smart save. The visitors had lost just once in their previous 14 league games to move into contention for a top-four finish and they did not go down without a fight in the final stages.

Jimenez had the best chance to claim an equaliser, but was denied by a block from Joe Gomez before Joao Moutinho, Romain Saiss, Ruben Vinagre and Traore fired off target. — AFP

## Chelsea sink Arsenal with late fightback

LONDON: Chelsea ruined Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta's home debut as Tammy Abraham's late strike sealed a dramatic 2-1 win after Bernd Leno's horrific blunder turned the tide in a thrilling London derby yesterday.

Leading through Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's early goal at the Emirates Stadium, Arteta was just seven minutes away from securing his first victory in his second game in charge. But Gunners goalkeeper Leno made a hash of coming to catch a free-kick and Jorginho tapped in to spark a Chelsea fightback that climaxed in Abraham firing home with three minutes left. After dominating the first half, it was a shocking but familiar collapse from Arsenal, whose lack of steel was the key element in the downfall of Arteta's predecessor Unai Emery. In their final game of the decade, Arsenal showed just how much work Arteta has to do to steer the Gunners back to respectability in his first managerial role.

After coming from behind to rescue a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth in his first match on Thursday, Arteta would have been encouraged by their bright start — but not the woe-filled meltdown that leaves Arsenal with only one win in their last 15 games in all competitions. Arsenal, 12 points adrift of the top four, have lost four consecutive home fixtures in all competitions for the first time in 60 years. They also suffered three successive top-flight home defeats for the first time since 1977. While Arteta held his head in despair after Abraham's winner, Frank Lampard's wild celebration showed Chelsea's need for the win after a difficult period of their own. Fourth placed Chelsea had lost five of their last seven league games, but a second successive away win — following their recent impressive success at Tottenham — moves them four points clear of fifth placed Manchester United.

There was no fanfare for Arteta before kick-off, the Spaniard quietly take his place on the bench to applause from Arsenal fans but without any elaborate introduction. Chelsea went close early on when Willian's quick free-kick caught Arsenal flat-footed, allowing Mason Mount to drift into space for a fierce strike that stung Leno's palms.

But, initially vibrant in possession and tireless without the ball, Arsenal exposed Chelsea's own problems at the back to take

the lead with a well-rehearsed set-piece routine in the 13th minute.

Calum Chambers was positioned perfectly to rise above Fikayo Tomori and glance Mesut Ozil's corner towards Aubameyang.

The Gabon striker, who also scored in Arteta's first game, applied the finishing touch, escaping Emerson's slack marking to guide a diving header past Kepa Arrizabalaga for his 15th goal of the season.

Arteta didn't hide his delight, fist-pumping in celebration of the first home goal of his reign. Aubameyang's goal meant Chelsea had kept just two clean sheets in their last 11 league fixtures and, with Arsenal well on top and threatening to score again, Lampard was forced to take drastic action.

In a bid to shake Chelsea out of their lethargy, Lampard hauled off Brazilian wing-back Emerson and sent on Italy midfielder Jorginho as he ditched his 3-4-3 formation after just 33 minutes.

The switch proved an inspired move but not before Mount, N'Golo Kante and Antonio Rudiger were all booked in quick succession as Chelsea used brute blunt Arsenal's momentum. Chelsea were on top in the second half and teenage debutant Tariq Lamptey led the charge when his surge ended with Abraham's shot being blocked by David Luiz. Leno's game-changing 83rd minute howler



LONDON: Arsenal's French midfielder Matteo Guendouzi (left) tangles with Chelsea's French midfielder N'Golo Kante during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium yesterday. — AFP

was truly farcical, the German lying with his head in his hands after his misjudgement of Mount's high free-kick allowed Jorginho to tap into the empty net. Willian broke into the

Arsenal area and crossed to Abraham, who turned unchecked by the ponderous Shkodran Mustafi to fire a cool strike under Leno. — AFP