

Sports

Newcastle survive Blackburn scare, Wednesday earn Chelsea clash

Wednesday without a permanent manager, wait for Steve Bruce to take charge

LONDON: Newcastle survived an FA Cup scare at Blackburn as they blew a two-goal lead before hitting back to win 4-2 after extra time in Tuesday's third-round replay. Rafael Benitez sent out an under-strength line-up featuring eight changes from Newcastle's 2-1 defeat at Chelsea in the Premier League on Saturday.

The stand-ins made a fast start when Sean Longstaff scored his first goal for Newcastle. The 21-year-old found the net inside the first minute with a deflected strike from outside the penalty area. Callum Roberts, handed his first Newcastle appearance since January 2015, doubled their lead in the 22nd minute with his first goal for the club.

But Blackburn pulled a goal back 12 minutes before half-time through former Newcastle forward Adam Armstrong. And Republic of Ireland international Daraagh Lenihan equalised for Blackburn with a header in first-half stoppage time.

It took extra time to settle the tie, with Blackburn's Bradley Dack missing a golden chance before Joselu pounced to slot home in the 105th minute after Rovers goalkeeper David Raya spilled Fabian Schar's drive.

Blackburn complained in vain that Joselu was offside. Ayoze Perez completed Newcastle's escape act moments later when he cut in from the right and fired home. "We went 2-0 up and then Blackburn did well, but we reacted so I'm pleased with the effort and the commitment of the players. The young players did well," Benitez said.

Yet injuries to defenders Ciaran Clark and Jamaal Lascelles will cast a shadow over the win for Benitez. "We need to wait tomorrow and see how they are, and if they cannot play then we will bring another one in," Benitez said.

Newcastle, who haven't won the FA Cup since 1955, host fellow Premier League club Watford in the fourth round.

WEDNESDAY BOOK CHELSEA CLASH

In the night's other third-round replays, Sheffield Wednesday booked a trip to holders Chelsea as the second-tier strugglers won 1-0 at League One side Luton. Wednesday are without a permanent manager while they wait for Steve Bruce to take charge on February 1.

But the Championship outfit avoided an upset at Kenilworth Road against a Luton team who are chasing promotion after a 13-match unbeaten run. At the Nuhui won it for Wednesday when the striker's effort was deflected past James Shea in the 46th minute.

Luton came close to levelling with 13 minutes to go when James Collins diverted Sonny Bradley's header on to a post. Bradley's header was then nodded off the line by Nuhui in the closing moments.

Luton's previous manager Nathan Jones recently left to take charge at Stoke, but his first home game in charge of the Championship side was ruined by third-tier Shrewsbury's remarkable 3-2 win.

Jones' team appeared to be cruising after a first-half double from teenager Tyrese Campbell, the son of former Arsenal and Everton striker Kevin Campbell. However, James Bolton netted 19 minutes left before Fejiri Okenabirhie equalised from the penalty spot in the 77th minute.

Josh Laurent capped the stunning fightback when he struck in the 81st minute to earn a fourth-round home tie against Premier League side Wolves. — AFP



BLACKBURN: Newcastle United's Spanish midfielder Javier Manquillo jumps to control the ball during the English FA Cup third round replay football match between Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United at Ewood Park in Blackburn, north west England on Tuesday. — AFP

FIFA says in regular contact with AFC over detained Bahrain player

DUBAI: FIFA says it has been in regular contact with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) over the Bahraini soccer player arrested in Thailand in November over a prison sentence in his homeland. The Australian soccer players' union this week called on the AFC to intervene to help secure the release of Hakeem Al Araibi, who plays in Australia but was arrested in November in Bangkok on an Interpol notice issued at Bahrain's request.

Araibi, who played for Bahrain's national soccer team and was a critic of the government, had been convicted of vandalising a police station and sentenced to 10 years in prison in absentia.

He denies wrongdoing. The Bahrain government says Araibi can appeal against the sentence if he returns to the kingdom. Araibi was granted asylum in Australia in 2017 after fleeing Bahrain three years earlier.

Araibi was a vocal critic of AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa, a member of Bahrain's ruling family and cousin of the king, when he contested the FIFA presidential election in 2015.

FIFA has "been working behind the scenes and have been in regular contact with our national associations and with the AFC about this case", a spokesman said late on Tuesday. Last week, the governing body said Araibi should be freed and allowed to return to Australia to continue his career. The AFC has said it was working with groups including FIFA, but declined to comment further. — Reuters



Hakeem Al Araibi

Mind the Gulf as crisis-hit Qatar, Saudis clash at Asian Cup

AL-AIN: Nineteen months of diplomatic rancour will be recast as 90 minutes of football when isolated Qatar take on Saudi Arabia in a clash bristling with political symbolism at the Asian Cup today. With Saudi Arabia the chief protagonist in a Gulf crisis that has left Qatar, the 2022 World Cup host, cut off from its neighbours since mid-2017, the group game at Abu Dhabi's Zayed Sports City Stadium resonates far beyond the pitch.

Even in sporting terms it is one to watch, with both teams scoring a handful of unanswered goals in their opening two games, suggesting they are among the favourites to lift the trophy at the same venue on February 1.

Qatar have entered the lion's den at the tournament in the United Arab Emirates, an unflinching Saudi ally and one of the countries which have slashed diplomatic ties and transport links, protesting that Doha supports terrorism—a claim the Qataris deny.

It means that Qatar are playing without any of their fans at the Asian Cup. Just 452 people watched their 6-0

Habs, Niemi (52 saves) tame Panthers

MONTREAL: Montreal backup goalie Antti Niemi was incredible in a record-setting 52-save outing, and the Canadiens strung together a three-goal second period to claim a 5-1 win over the visiting Florida Panthers on Tuesday. Shea Weber, Phillip Danault, Max Domi, Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Brendan Gallagher scored for the Canadiens, who have won four of five and swept their back-to-back games to start the week. Montreal was victorious in Boston on Monday, beating the Bruins 3-2 in overtime. With Montreal playing its third game in four days, Niemi started and frustrated the Panthers, particularly in a 21-shot third period. Niemi ran his record to 8-4-1. Niemi established a career high for saves, and Florida eclipsed its record for most shots against an opposing goalie, totaling 53, including Mike Hoffman's goal. The Panthers fired 52 on Los Angeles Kings backstop Kelly Hrudey in 1993.

ISLANDERS 2, BLUES 1 (OT)

Valtteri Filppula scored 1:37 into overtime as host New York edged St. Louis. Jordan Eberle scored in the first period for the Islanders, and David Perron replied in the third for the Blues. In the extra session, Islanders center Mathew Barzal took a pass from Anthony Beauvillier and skated back toward center ice as Beauvillier dashed toward the bench, where Filppula was waiting to take his spot on the ice. Filppula was alone for a couple of seconds as the Blues swapped out defenseman Alex Pietrangolo for Vince Dunn. Barzal hit an open Filppula in stride, and the center, with Dunn in desperate pursuit, shuffled the puck for a couple steps before he fired a shot that sailed beyond the grasp of goalie Jordan Binnington and into the far corner of the net.

PREDATORS 7, CAPITALS 2

Viktor Arvidsson finished with a hat trick, and Nick Bonino added two goals as Nashville defeated visiting Washington. Arvidsson scored once in

the first period and twice more in the second as Nashville got six goals in the opening 40 minutes and sent the Capitals on the way to their third consecutive loss. Rocco Grimaldi and Calle Jarnkrok also scored for the Predators. Goalie Juuse Saros got the win, finishing with 26 saves. The loss dropped the Capitals into a tie for first place in the Metropolitan Division with the Columbus Blue Jackets. Nicklas Backstrom and T.J. Oshie scored for Washington.

SHARKS 5, PENGUINS 2

Tomas Hertl notched a hat trick as sizzling San Jose outplayed visiting Pittsburgh for its seventh consecutive win. Marcus Sorenson and Joe Thornton also scored for San Jose. Evander Kane recorded three assists, and Brenden Dillon had two assists. Goaltender Martin Jones stopped 22 of 24 Penguins shots to win his eighth straight start. Kris Letang scored on a strong individual effort and Derick Brassard scored late for Pittsburgh. Penguins goalie Matt Murray made 24 saves and had his nine-start winning streak halted.

RANGERS 6, HURRICANES 2

Mika Zibanejad scored twice in the first period, added two assists and tied a career high with four points as New York extended its home winning streak over Carolina to 16 games. Zibanejad recorded his 10th career two-goal game and second of the season by scoring twice in a span of 1:41 in the first period to put New York ahead 3-1 after 20 minutes. Pavel Buchnevich and Tony DeAngelo also had two goals apiece for the Rangers. Saku Maenalanen scored twice for the Hurricanes.

BLUE JACKETS 4, DEVILS 1

Columbus continued its recent dominance against the Metropolitan Division, defeating visiting New Jersey. The Blue Jackets' top line of Cam Atkinson, Pierre-Luc Dubois and Artemi Panarin each contributed a goal and an assist as Columbus improved to 11-3-0 in its last 14 games, a hot streak that has been buoyed by success against division rivals. The Blue Jackets have won seven of their past eight games against Metropolitan Division opponents. Boone Jenner also scored for Columbus. New Jersey got a goal from Blake Coleman.

win over North Korea, the biggest scoreline of the tournament so far, in Al Ain on Sunday.

While Qatar have never gone further than the quarter-finals, Saudi Arabia are one of the continent's traditional football powers, winning the Asian Cup three times and playing five World Cups. But Qatar's image as the new challenger to the region's accepted order goes beyond the football field, said Simon Chadwick, professor of sports enterprise at Britain's Salford Business School.

Qatar has also led the way in vigorously promoting itself and extending its soft power through sport, notably by securing the World Cup and through deals like the purchase of French club Paris Saint-Germain, and Qatar Airways' shirt sponsorship of Barcelona.

'UPSTART' QATAR

"In very simple terms, Saudi Arabia is the regional power and Qatar is something of an upstart," Chadwick told AFP. "The essence of all this is that Saudi Arabia wants Qatar to fall into line and Qatar refuses to do that."

He added: "Qatar are like a rebellious teenager... they are the Sex Pistols of the Middle East." The effects have been noticeable at the Asian Cup, whose rights-holding broadcaster, beIN Sports, is Qatari—with the result that the games are not widely shown in the host country.

As the tournament progresses, beIN and the Asian Football Confederation have complained about Saudi-biased pirate channel beoutQ, which has been broadcasting the games illegally. Saudi Arabia has borrowed from the Qatari blueprint by attracting a number of high-profile

sports events, including Wednesday's Italian Super Cup between Juventus and AC Milan in Jeddah.

However, last month's tennis exhibition between Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic was called off following an international outcry over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, although the official reason for the cancellation was an injury to Nadal.

"Sports is a strategy for various of the Gulf states (but) the Qataris have been much more strategic about this," said James M. Dorsey, a senior fellow at Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, and a blogger and author on Middle Eastern politics and football. "Most countries develop a sports structure with various components, like sports media and sports security, that's developed organically. "The Qataris have stamped that out overnight. They see sports as part of their effort to forge a national identity." Chadwick said the Asian Cup was a "microcosm" of the Gulf dispute, and "a means through which these nations will be playing out their fight with one another".

"Even things like the quality and standard of the football will be really important," he said. "If you demonstrate yourself as the Brazil of the Middle East and you have got silky skills" it will give a positive view of your country, he added. "(But) if you are a dirty team (you may) colour perceptions." Dorsey said the situation also undermined the belief, often repeated by senior sports administrators, that sport and politics operate separately.

"You have the fiction that politics and sport are separate. That's baloney. They're Siamese twins joined at the hip, inseparable," he said. — AFP



NEW YORK: Robin Lehner #40 of the New York Islanders blocks the puck as David Perron #57 of the St. Louis Blues looks for a rebound at the Barclays Center on Tuesday in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. The Islanders defeated the Blues 2-1 in overtime. — AFP

WILD 3, KINGS 2 (SO)

Jason Zucker scored a shootout goal, and Minnesota ended a two-game losing streak with a victory that completed a season sweep of Los Angeles in Saint Paul, Minn. The Kings missed all three of their shots in the shootout, with Wild goaltender Alex Stalock saving two of them, while Los Angeles' Anze Kopitar hit the post on his attempt. Stalock sealed the victory with a save on a Dustin Brown wrist shot. Eric Staal and Nino Niederreiter scored in regulation for the Wild, who had lost three of their previous four games. The Kings got regulation goals from Ilya Kovalchuk and Jeff Carter.

LIGHTNING 2, STARS 0

Ondrej Palat and Mikhail Sergachev provided all the offense, and goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy was perfect between the pipes as visiting Tampa Bay defeated Dallas. Vasilevskiy made 35 saves—including 13 in each of the first two periods—to backstop the NHL-leading Lightning to a fourth win in five games. It was his third shutout of the season and the 15th of his career. The Stars, who got 19 saves from Anton Khudobin lost their third game in a row.

RED WINGS 3, DUCKS 1

Gustav Nyquist and Darren Helm scored late in the third period as host Detroit defeated slumping Anaheim. Danny DeKeyser assisted on the last two goals for Detroit. Anthony Mantha scored the other goal for the Red Wings, who trailed 1-0 entering the final period. Detroit's Jimmy Howard made 23 saves. Rickard Rakell scored the lone goal for the Ducks, who have lost a club record 12 straight to fall to the .500 mark. John Gibson made 22 saves for Anaheim, which is 0-8-4 during the slide.

JETS 4, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 1

Kyle Connor had two goals and an assist, and Laurent Brossoit made 43 saves to lead Winnipeg to a victory over visiting Vegas. Mark Scheifele had a goal and an assist. Blake Wheeler finished with two assists, and Mathieu Perreault also scored a goal for Winnipeg, which won for the fifth time in six games while improving to 18-6-2 at home. It was the seventh straight victory for Brossoit, who improved to 10-1-1 this season. Brandon Pirri scored for the Golden Knights. It was the first meeting between the two teams since Vegas clinched a spot in the Stanley Cup Final with a 2-1 victory over the host Jets on May 20 in Game 5 of the Western Conference final. — Reuters



Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

SPAIN COPA DEL REY

Real Sociedad v Real Betis	21:30
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
RCD Espanyol v Villarreal CF	22:30
beIN SPORTS HD 5	
FC Barcelona v Levante	23:30
beIN SPORTS HD 3	

ASIAN NATIONS CUP

Japan v Uzbekistan	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
Oman v Turkmenistan	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
Saudi Arabia v Qatar	19:00
beIN SPORTS	
Lebanon v North Korea	19:00
beIN SPORTS	