

Sports

Man City ease past Huddersfield Town to cut Liverpool's lead

Kevin De Bruyne and Sergio Aguero return to starting line-up

HUDDERSFIELD: Manchester City reduced Liverpool's lead at the top of the English Premier League table to four points as they eventually found top gear to win 3-0 away to basement club Huddersfield Town yesterday. This was by no means City's most outstanding display of the season but, ultimately, goals from Danilo, Raheem Sterling and Leroy Sane ensured they did not trip up in the latest leg of their quest to keep the Premier League title-race alive.

Liverpool's captivating 4-3 victory over Crystal Palace on Saturday ensured this was a crunch fixture for Pep Guardiola's side, yet any hopes Huddersfield could pull off a shock win never materialised.

The embarrassment of riches available to City manager Guardiola meant Gabriel Jesus, who had scored seven goals in three matches, dropped to the bench alongside David Silva while Kevin De Bruyne and Sergio Aguero returned to his starting line-up.

That depth of quality would be difficult for any side to counter, especially a team struggling as much as Huddersfield are at present.

They parted company with manager David Wagner on Monday, a mutual decision but a sad one for Terriers' fans who will always remember him as the man who not only secured promotion to the Premier League for the Yorkshire club but also kept them in the top-flight last term.

A repeat of that looks highly unlikely this season and this match pitted the Premier League's highest scorers against the lowest, with Huddersfield having netted just 13 times going into this encounter and having lost eight of their last nine league games.

Huddersfield made six changes for the game but did manage to match reigning English champions City early on. After 12 minutes, Sterling felt he was denied a penalty after Terence Kongolo's

heavy challenge in the box.

But City's wait to break the deadlock lasted just six more minutes as Danilo's fierce shot was deflected past Jonas Lossl by Christopher Schindler. The goal was City's 100th of the season in all competitions, a statistic underlining their potent attack, but they were surprisingly lacklustre in the remainder of the first half.

One clumsy Kyle Walker foul on Chris Lowe might have been worthy of a red card but the England international escaped with a booking.

EMOTIONAL MESSAGE

An emotional message from Wagner was broadcast on the big screen at the John Smith's Stadium during the half-time interval and that comfortably eclipsed most of the entertainment offered in the opening period.

Yet after the break, City finally upped the tempo and were soon out of sight. After 52 minutes, De Bruyne's pass found Sane on the left and his pinpoint cross was met by Sterling who finished off a diving header with some aplomb.

City's afternoon soon got even better when Sane then scored a wonderful team goal that demonstrated how City had finally woken up. Danilo pumped a ball forward and Aguero steered a fantastic cushioned header into the path of Sane who slipped the ball past Lossl.

Immediately, it felt as if Huddersfield would need to enter damage-limitation mode to stop City from running riot as they did in the 6-1 reverse fixture victory at the Etihad Stadium in August.

But to the credit of Huddersfield caretaker coach Mark Hudson, he implored his team to keep on trying to attack despite being three goals down. However, Huddersfield never really looked like con-



HUDDERSFIELD: Manchester City's Brazilian defender Danilo (L) shoots past Huddersfield Town's English midfielder Jonathan Hogg (R) but over the bar during the English Premier League football match between Huddersfield Town and Manchester City at the John Smith's stadium in Huddersfield, northern England yesterday. —AFP

cluding up a miracle comeback as Stevie Mounie resorted to attempting to score from 30 yards but with little effect.

A close-range header from Mounie was also well

saved by Ederson towards the end. But that incident was the City goalkeeper's first real piece of action, which said everything about the lopsided nature of this contest. —AFP

Demand for answers after Australia football women's coach sacked

SYDNEY: There were calls for answers yesterday over the sudden sacking of Australia's women's football coach Alen Stajcic just five months from the World Cup, as his assistant resigned in protest against the decision.

Football Federation Australia chief David Gallop said Saturday when announcing the governing body's decision that he had lost faith in the 45-year-old Stajcic, while concerns over "workplace" and "player welfare" issues were also cited.

The sacking followed two recently conducted confidential FFA surveys to evaluate the standard of the team environment and culture. Gallop said the results, along with interviews with players and staff, had led the FFA to determine that the team environment was "unsatisfactory" and change was needed.

No specific details of the problems were given by the FFA, and the Football Coaches Australia body criticised the treatment of Stajcic and called for transparency. "It is important that the decision-makers in the sport make decisions for the right reasons. In this instance, that evidence has not been forthcoming," FCA president Phil Moss said in a statement.

"The broader process used to end Alen's tenure was highly questionable." The newly established FFA Women's Council said it was not consulted or made aware of the decision to sack Stajcic.

The council's independent chair Ros Moriarty told national broadcaster ABC she would "request full details of how stakeholder surveys escalated to a sudden sacking". "I would like to understand what specific feedback has left our national women's team in a World Cup year, without the leader who has orchestrated their success over the past few years," she said.

Prominent former Soccerroo Robbie Slater also called for clarity, writing in a column for Sydney's Sunday Telegraph that "the Australian public deserves a real answer why such a successful coach has been sacked". "You don't have to be an insider to see that this is an astonishing decision," he wrote. "It's unfair for the FFA to hide behind 'confidential' reviews—that will only inflame the whispering campaign, and in the process further ruin Stajcic's reputation." —AFP

Atletico shoot for football future in cricket-mad Pakistan

LAHORE: Spain's Atletico Madrid are taking on a challenge tougher than winning La Liga—developing football in cricket-mad Pakistan, where bat and ball are king, pitches come with stumps not goalposts, and even the prime minister is a former World Cup winner.

During a recent session at the club's new facility in Lahore—the country's first European football academy—a cabal of Spanish coaches watched as a new class of young Pakistani hopefuls fired off penalty kicks.

"We are not looking for players for Atletico Madrid because we know that this is going to be very difficult... Our target is to improve the football here," coach Javier Visea told AFP. To succeed in carving out a place for football, they will need to overcome marginal government support, poor infrastructure and a troubled history with FIFA that has resulted in multiple bans for violating the body's rules.

PSG claim record home win with thrashing of Guingamp

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe and Edinson Cavani both scored hat-tricks as Paris Saint-Germain romped to their biggest-ever home win with a 9-0 Ligue 1 thrashing of Guingamp on Saturday. The runaway league leaders exacted sweet revenge on bottom club Guingamp, who had ended their bid for a sixth straight League Cup title earlier this month in Paris.

It was PSG's largest victory at the Parc des Princes, beating an 8-0 win over Dijon 12 months ago, but fell narrowly short of equalling their biggest win in total—a 10-0 French Cup thumping of Cote d'Ivoire in 1994.

The capital club, who lead second-placed Lille by 13 points with two games in hand, have dropped just four points in their opening 19 matches of the season as they bid for an unbeaten league campaign.

Neymar also scored twice as PSG's front three took their combined tally for the season to 58 goals, while Mbappe extended his advantage in the Ligue 1 scoring charts having netted 17 times in only 14 appearances.

Coach Thomas Tuchel did see Marco Verratti forced from the field with what he

later described as a "serious injury", with the Italian now a doubt for PSG's Champions League last-16 tie against Manchester United next month.

"It's possible he'll miss a few weeks," said the German. "Marco's injury changes everything. Playing without Marco is completely different, I think it's serious. It's hard." PSG wasted little time in forging ahead, with a wonderful 11th-minute goal by Neymar doing the damage.

His former Brazil international teammate Dani Alves picked out the world's most expensive player with a sumptuous pass over the top, and Neymar flicked the ball over Guingamp right-back Jordan Ikoko and slotted in his 19th goal of the season.

Neymar was involved as PSG all but ended the game as a contest eight minutes before half-time, playing a neat one-two with Mbappe which allowed the World Cup winner to side-foot into the corner of the net.

Mbappe added another goal on the stroke of the interval, as Cavani's pass found him in acres of space inside the Guingamp box. The game was even more one-sided after the restart, with Cavani tapping in Juan Bernat's low cross just before the hour mark, before nodding Di Maria's swinging delivery past helpless Guingamp goalkeeper Marc-Aurele Caillard.

CAVANI WINS HAT-TRICK RACE

Guingamp were totally unable to deal with the reigning champions, as Mbappe sent Neymar racing clear to slide the ball under Caillard in the 68th minute. Cavani

Meanwhile Mike Conway, one-time managing director of Australian children's band The Wiggles, is on hand as the Soccerroos "emotional agility and mental coach" during the tournament in the United Arab Emirates.

It's perhaps no coincidence that positive vibrations have been a feature of the Australian campaign—even to the extent of grating on the opposition. Arnold was accused of arrogance after his bold assertion that Australia "expect to win" their opening game against Jordan—a fixture they lost 1-0.

But Arnold, 55, was merely quoting from a Stubbs mantra, which holds that unwavering self-belief is the key to success. Long-time observers say the formerly gruff coach is far more relaxed and open since he started working with Stubbs during his time at Sydney FC,

where he won the 2016-17 A-League title with only one loss. Similar results followed Stubbs' work with Cheika, who unexpectedly took Australia to the 2015 Rugby World Cup final, and Jones, who led England to a Six Nations clean sweep in 2016.

Stubbs, who did not want to be interviewed when approached by AFP, developed his programme and wrote his book, "The Science of Belief", after suffering a mental breakdown when a car accident ended his burgeoning surfing career.

He has some unusual ideas, including tapping the power of the universe. His programme, which reportedly costs about \$4,000 for an hour-long session, builds on the theories of neuro-linguistic programming, which holds that using certain language can trigger a desired psychological response. —AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar (R) vies with Guingamp's French defender Christophe Kerbrat (L) during the French L1 football match Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) vs Guingamp (EAG), on Saturday at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. —AFP

won the three-man race to a hat-trick by miskicking a rebound in off the post, with the goal awarded by VAR, before the Uruguayan's square pass was diverted into an empty net by Mbappe to seal his own treble.

There were still 10 minutes remaining as PSG looked to match their record winning margin, and full-back Thomas Meunier got in on the act to make it nine

in the 83rd minute. A lack of injury-time was the telling factor in the hosts' failure to reach double figures, as Guingamp desperately clung on to avoid further ignominy.

"We were drowned, we made beginners' mistakes," bemoaned Guingamp coach Jocelyn Gourvenec. "It was like watching an Under-19s team against a Ligue 1 team." —AFP

Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
SD Eibar v RCD Espanyol beIN SPORTS HD 3	23:00
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
Genoa CFC v AC Milan beIN SPORTS HD 4	17:00
Juventus FC v AC Chievo Verona beIN SPORTS HD 4	22:30
ASIAN NATIONS CUP 2019	
Japan v Saudi Arabia beIN SPORTS	14:00
Australia v Uzbekistan beIN SPORTS	17:00
United Arab Emirates v Kyrgyzstan beIN SPORTS	19:00

'Coach whisperer', mind guru propel Aussies at Asian Cup

AL-AIN: If Australia successfully defend their Asian Cup title in the United Arab Emirates, two people will be quietly celebrating behind the scenes: a self-styled 'coach-whisperer' and the team's in-house mind guru.

Coach Graham Arnold is an adherent of Bradley Charles Stubbs, the colourful motivator who has worked with several big names including Wallabies handler Michael Cheika and England's Eddie Jones.