

Sports

Eden Hazard off mark but Real Madrid make hard work of Granada

Bale, Kroos forced off with minor injuries

MADRID: Eden Hazard ended the wait for his first Real Madrid goal but his team had to resist a spirited second-half comeback from Granada to seal a thrilling 4-2 victory in La Liga yesterday. Karim Benzema put Real ahead in the second minute at the Santiago Bernabeu before Hazard opened his account with a delightful lifted finish towards the end of the first half.

Luka Modric's bending long-range effort on the hour looked to have confirmed the win but Granada scored twice in quick succession through Darwin Machis and Domingos Duarte, the first from the penalty spot, to set up a tense last 12 minutes.

James Rodriguez, on as a substitute, ended the rally by scoring his first goal since May 2017 in injury-time to wrap up an unexpectedly dramatic contest between the league's top two. Granada stay second, for now, after suffering only their second defeat of the season.

Madrid had been in complete control, their fluency and tempo contributing to arguably the best hour of football they have played this season. Yet a hectic 20-minute period in the second half took some of the gloss off a performance that at least gets Zinedine Zidane's side back to winning ways following their 2-2 draw at home to Club Brugge in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Hazard had become a growing concern after five underwhelming matches, the patience granted to him after his injury in pre-season beginning to run out after his 100 million euros (\$109 million) move from Chelsea.

The Belgian still looks some way short of his best but his goal here was timely, not just for him but also Real, who will go into international break top of the table, despite their own bumpy start to the season.

KROOS INJURED, BALE BACK

Toni Kroos walked off injured in the first half to be replaced by Modric, which will be a worry for Germany, who play Argentina in a friendly on Wednesday. Gareth Bale returned after being rested against Brugge while Alphonse Areola came in for the ill Thibaut Courtois in goal. Areola's mistake gave away the penalty, and perhaps any hopes he had of keeping Courtois out longer-term.

Madrid conceded after 122 seconds on Tuesday but needed only 102 to take the lead here. Playing on the right, Bale often makes use of the outside of his left foot and the bend he created to bypass two Granada defenders and find Benzema at the backpost was superb. Benzema could not miss.

Madrid created several early chances. A slick move down the left between Bale, Benzema and Dani Carvajal saw the latter go clear while Benzema and the impressive Fede Valverde both went close too.

Bale was first to congratulate Hazard when he scored shortly before half-time but Valverde created it, driving past two Granada midfielders before intercepting Duarte's header and poking the ball through. Hazard finished just in time, lifting it coolly into the net. The second half grew increasingly bad-tempered, broken up by late tackles and complaints to the referee. Yet when Modric collected Hazard's pass on the hour, after another Valverde chase, and found the top corner, the game looked finished.

Instead, Granada were given a lifeline. Areola had just failed to claim a cross when moments later he dived in his box and caught Carlos Fernandez in a rushed attempt to clear. Darwin Machis scored the penalty and with 12 minutes left, they made it 3-2, Victor Diaz head-



MADRID: Real Madrid's Uruguayan midfielder Federico Valverde (L) falls down beside Granada's Venezuelan midfielder Yangel Herrera during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Granada FC at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid yesterday. — AFP

ing to the back post where Duarte prodded in. Madrid were suddenly alive to the unexpected threat and Benzema should have made it four in the

86th minute but his shot was saved. James did, a quick break ending with Alvaro Odriozola finding him with the pull-back. The relief was palpable. — AFP

S Lanka upset Pakistan in first Twenty20

LAHORE: Inexperienced Sri Lanka stunned Pakistan by 64 runs in the first Twenty20 international in Lahore yesterday, taking a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Sri Lanka scored 165-5 in their 20 overs with Danushka Gunathilaka scoring 57 off 38 balls including a six and eight boundaries. Teenage Pakistan pacesman Mohammad Hasnain took a hat-trick, finishing with 3-37.

Pakistan were bowled out for 101 in 17.4 overs with Nuwan Pradeep and Isuru Udana taking three wickets apiece. The second match will be played on Monday and the third on Wednesday — all in Lahore. — AFP



LAHORE: Sri Lanka's Danushka Gunathilaka (L) plays a shot during the first Twenty20 International cricket match between Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the Gaddafi stadium in Lahore yesterday. — AFP

Mahrez revival provides fresh impetus for City

MANCHESTER: Riyad Mahrez is finally back to his best after a frustrating debut season with Manchester City and the Premier League champions are reaping the rewards as they fight to keep pace with title rivals Liverpool.

When Pep Guardiola's side host Wolves today without the injured Kevin De Bruyne, Algeria winger Mahrez will be ready to shoulder the burden of driving City towards another priceless victory. It is a far cry from Mahrez's first few months at the Etihad Stadium, when his then club-record £60 million (\$74 million) switch from Leicester was in danger of becoming a nightmare. Unable to recapture the form that won him the PFA player of the year award for his instrumental role in Leicester's 2016 Premier League title triumph, Mahrez cut a miserable figure. It did not help that the superb form of Raheem Sterling and Bernardo Silva stopped Mahrez from garnering enough playing time to recover his rhythm.

Guardiola has since hinted that Mahrez became unhappy at his lack of action and let it affect his performances. "He's quality. Perhaps the only thing he has

to improve is to be more relaxed when he doesn't play. Only that. The rest is top," Guardiola said. Mahrez's nadir came at Liverpool last October when he blazed a late penalty high over the bar to rob City of a win over their main challengers. But Guardiola remained confident Mahrez would eventually turn the tide.

A defining moment came on the final day of the Premier League season when he was included in the starting line-up for the must-win clash at Brighton. Guardiola's faith in Mahrez was rewarded when his blistering second-half strike opened up a 3-1 lead that eased City's nerves as they went on to lift the trophy.

Mahrez started again a week later when City thrashed Watford in the FA Cup final to complete the domestic treble and he has not looked back since.

With his morale on the mend, the 28-year-old captained Algeria to glory in the Africa Cup of Nations in July and has carried that form into this season. When the Cup of Nations ended, City were already one game into their pre-season tour of Asia, meaning Mahrez had little respite from competitive action before the Premier League resumed. But he was determined to stay in Guardiola's plans and impressed his boss by refusing the option of an extended summer break. "I didn't have much holidays but that is what I wanted, because I wanted to be ready straight away. I am happy but I have to keep going," Mahrez said.

While he was already a believer in Mahrez's quality, Guardiola pinpoints the winger's uplifting experience with Algeria as a transformative moment. — AFP

since 2016. But their spirited fightback will give under-fire boss Jones hope of a revival after former Swansea midfielder Sam Clucas equalised midway through the first half.

It looked like Stoke were going to miss the chance to end their 10-game winless run until Hogan found the back of the net in the 90th minute. Nottingham Forest stretched their unbeaten league run to 10 games with a 1-0 win over Brentford.

Ben Watson, deputising as skipper with Michael Dawson sidelined, had not scored for three-and-a-half years prior to his strike that beat Barnsley a fortnight ago. The former Crystal Palace midfielder was again the difference against the Bees, scoring a stunning 12-yard volley in the 56th minute to lift Forest up to second in the table, level on points with West Brom.

Millwall began life after Neil Harris by ending their eight-game wait for a league victory with a 2-1 win against 10-man Leeds at The Den. The Lions, who had first-team coach Adam Barrett in charge following Harris' decision to stand down as manager earlier this week, went in front thanks to Jed Wallace's early penalty, which saw Gaetano Berardi dismissed. — AFP

West Brom back on top as Swansea stunned by Stoke

LONDON: West Brom surged back to the top of the Championship with a 4-2 win against Cardiff, while previous leaders Swansea crashed to a shock defeat against Stoke yesterday. Albion raced into a three-goal lead at the Hawthorns as Charlie Austin scored his first league goal for Slaven Bilic's side after first-half strikes from Matheus Pereira and Grady Diangana.

Danny Ward's late double for Cardiff made things nervy for Albion until Romaine Sawyers scored the hosts' fourth goal deep into stoppage-time. Scott Hogan's 90th-minute winner gave Stoke their first victory of the season in dramatic fashion with a 2-1 triumph at Swansea.

Nathan Jones watched Stoke fall behind in the opening minute to Andre Ayew's first Liberty Stadium goal

Platini free to return to football but Qatar probe goes on

DOHA: Former UEFA president Michel Platini is finally free to return to football next week when his four-year ban for ethics violations ends, although he remains linked to a corruption investigation in his home country relating to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

The former France captain and national coach went on to become one of the game's most prominent administrators when he was elected president of European football's governing body in 2007. A triple Ballon d'Or winner, Platini was expected to succeed Sepp Blatter as FIFA president in 2016 but fell spectacularly from grace a few months earlier.

He was banned from football for receiving a two-million Swiss franc (1.8 million euros, \$2 million) payment from the head of the world game, with Blatter banned for eight years, later reduced to six, for his part.

The payment, made in 2011 when Blatter was seeking re-election as president, was related to work carried out by Platini between 1999 and 2002. The pair were found guilty of "abusive execution" of their powers and a conflict of interests.

Platini, now 64, has been battling to clear his name ever since, although his ban was reduced to four years from an initial six, leaving him free to work in football again when the suspension expires on Monday.

With the former Saint-Etienne and Juventus midfielder sidelined, he watched on as Gianni Infantino, once his right-hand man at UEFA, became FIFA president in February 2016. The Swiss-Italian was re-elected in June this year.

Approached by AFP on Friday, Infantino declined to comment on Platini, who made his determination, and bitterness towards FIFA, clear in an interview with Swiss television channel RTS last month. "I will be back. I don't know where, I don't know how. I can't go out of the game on the back of a ban, even if it's a ban made by idiots," he said. Speaking to French daily Le Monde about what the future holds, he added: "I have had lots of offers and requests to become a pundit, to do the Euros, the World Cup."

In an interview with French sports daily L'Equipe, he played down talk of a return to the top levels of football administration, although he has been linked with the role of president of the French Football Federation when that position opens up in 2021.

"My wife taught me never to go back, to not experience the same love affair twice. So yes, that closes doors for me, notably those at UEFA," he said. "My suspension ends in October, while the last elections for the FIFA presidency took place in May and the next ones will be in four years," he added. "They arranged that well in Zurich."

One source close to UEFA said the organisation's current president, Aleksander Ceferin, "could support Platini" as a candidate for the FIFA presidency in 2023 as the Slovenian "cannot stand" Infantino. By then, the Qatar World Cup will have come and gone, but Platini has been dogged by his connections to the controversial awarding of that tournament. In June this year he was held and questioned by French anti-corruption police investigating the 2010 vote to award the tournament to the Gulf state. — AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Southampton FC v Chelsea FC	beIN SPORTS	16:00
Arsenal FC v Bournemouth FC	beIN SPORTS	16:00
Manchester City v Wolverhampton Wanderers FC	beIN SPORTS	16:00
Newcastle United FC v Manchester United	beIN SPORTS	18:30
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Real Mallorca v RCD Espanyol	beIN SPORTS	13:00
Celta de Vigo v Athletic de Bilbao	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Real Valladolid v Atletico de Madrid	beIN SPORTS HD 3	17:00
Real Sociedad v Getafe CF	beIN SPORTS	19:30
FC Barcelona v Sevilla FC	beIN SPORTS HD 3	22:00
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
ACF Fiorentina v Udinese Calcio	beIN SPORTS	13:30
Atalanta v US Lecce	beIN SPORTS	16:00
Bologna FC v SS Lazio	beIN SPORTS	16:00
AS Roma v Cagliari Calcio	beIN SPORTS	16:00
Torino FC v SSC Napoli	beIN SPORTS	19:00
Internazionale Milano v Juventus FC	beIN SPORTS	21:45
Brescia v US Sassuolo Calcio	beIN SPORTS	22:45
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Borussia Monchengladbach v FC Augsburg	beIN SPORTS	14:30
VfL Wolfsburg v FC Union Berlin	beIN SPORTS	16:30
Eintracht Frankfurt v SV Werder Bremen	beIN SPORTS	19:00
FRENCH LEAGUE		
LOSC Lille v Nimes Olympique	beIN SPORTS	16:00
Stade Rennais v Stade Reims	beIN SPORTS	18:00
Saint Etienne v Olympique Lyonnais	beIN SPORTS	22:00