

Sports

Barcelona suffer fourth Liga defeat, go down 2-1 to Cadiz

Messi's Barcelona take 'gigantic step backwards'

MADRID: Lionel Messi's Barcelona suffered a fourth Liga defeat of the season as they went down 2-1 to Cadiz on Saturday, while Real Madrid eased the pressure on Zinedine Zidane with their first league win since October. Barca are now a distant seventh, 12 points off leaders Atletico Madrid, who beat Real Valladolid 2-0. "It's a gigantic step backwards for our chances to fight for La Liga, you have to see it like that," the Catalans' coach Ronald Koeman said. "A points difference of 12 points with a team as strong as Atletico is enormous," he added.

Koeman made three changes from the midweek Champions League win at Ferencvaros with goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen coming in for Neto. But Ter Stegen made a first costly error in Andalusia after eight minutes as Alvaro Gimenez claimed his second goal in as many games. The Barca defense failed to clear a corner which fell to Ter Stegen, but his weak parry onto his own line was tapped in by Gimenez.

Koeman's men were all-square after 56 minutes as Jordi Alba's low cross was deflected into his own goal by defender Pedro Alcalá. But Ter Stegen's second costly error came eight minutes later. Clement Lenglet made a hash of Alba's throw in before Ter Stegen failed to clear under pressure from Negredo and the former Manchester City striker claimed his third goal league goal of the campaign.

'Difficult time'

Under-pressure Zidane said Madrid's scrappy 1-0 victory in Seville was significant after a testing run of results. Sevilla goalkeeper Bono guided Vinicius Junior's effort into his own net in the second half, allowing Zidane's side to take the three points and move up to third in the table, six points behind Atletico. Following two defeats in the past three games, including a 2-0 defeat to Shakhtar Donetsk in midweek that leaves Real's Champions League qualification hopes in the balance, Spanish press reports have linked former Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino and ex-Madrid forward Raul to Zidane's job. Zidane said he was satisfied with the points after a "difficult" time.

"These are three very important points for us. It's a well-deserved win, against a very good opponent, who can put you in trouble at any time. We got through this," he said. "It has been a bit difficult lately, today we have to enjoy it, be happy, but nothing more." Atletico, now unbeaten in 26 games in La Liga, moved to the top of the table after France international Thomas Lemar and Spain midfielder Marcos Llorente scored for Diego Simeone's men against Valladolid. Atletico are among five clubs to remain without a domestic defeat in Europe's main five leagues since the start of the season. Real Sociedad, who have lost just once in the league this term, could regain the lead if they beat Deportivo Alaves. —AFP



CADIZ: Cadiz' Swiss defender Jean-Pierre Rhyner (left) vies with Barcelona's Danish forward Martin Braithwaite (center) and French defender Clement Lenglet during the Spanish League football match between Cadiz and Barcelona on December 5, 2020. —AFP

Mueller's double rescues Bayern in thrilling 3-3 draw

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller netted twice as Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich had to come from behind to draw 3-3 at home to RB Leipzig in Saturday's pulsating top-of-the-table clash. Leipzig, second in the Bundesliga, warmed up for Tuesday's key Champions League clash at home to Manchester United by pushing the European champions hard at the Allianz Arena.

"We knew before the game that we could come back, but the fact we had to do it was news to us," said Mueller. "At the end of the day, we can live with the result." Christopher Nkunku's early goal for Leipzig was cancelled out by a superb equalizer from Jamal Musiala, 17, before Mueller tapped home to put Bayern 2-1 up. However, the lead lasted barely a minute as Justin Kluivert-son of former Dutch star Patrick Kluivert-levelled before half-time with his first goal for Leipzig. A thumping Emil Forsberg header from an Angelino cross put visitors Leipzig 3-2 ahead soon after the break.

Bayern took a share of the points when Kingsley Coman produced a towering cross-his third assist of the

night-for Mueller to head home the equalizer on 75 minutes. "That really was a top game between two teams who really wanted to win," said Forsberg. "It was awesome to be out there on the pitch - you live for games like that." The result leaves Bayern two points clear at the top and Leipzig still waiting for a first win in Munich, after five attempts.

Dortmund drop points

Earlier, Borussia Dortmund dropped more points as they labored to a 1-1 draw at Eintracht Frankfurt with star striker Erling Braut Haaland sidelined. The result left Dortmund third in the table, four points behind Bayern. After suffering a shock 2-1 home defeat last weekend against struggling Cologne, Dortmund missed the finishing of top scorer Haaland, who is out until January with a leg injury. Dortmund's defence was caught napping when they conceded an early goal by Frankfurt's Japan midfielder Daichi Kamada. Dortmund raised their tempo and equalized with a superb strike from 18-year-old US forward Giovanni Reyna, but they failed to breach the Frankfurt defense again despite finishing the stronger.

Borussia Moenchengladbach, who will try and clinch a place in the Champions League last 16 next week away to Real Madrid, drew 2-2 draw at Freiburg, where they have not won since 2002. Gladbach went ahead



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer jumps for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig on December 5, 2020. —AFP

when Swiss striker Breel Embolo netted with an excellent first-time shot on 23 minutes. Freiburg equalized with a header by defender Philipp Lienhart and then took the lead just after the break when Vincenzo Grifo converted a penalty. Gladbach leveled when Alassane Plea hit the top corner of the net with a wonderful curling shot on 50 minutes. The result leaves Freiburg 14th, a point from the bottom three, while Gladbach are seventh and are seven points behind Bayern.

Demirbay quarantined

Having ended their 18-match

winless run by shocking Dortmund 2-1 last weekend, Cologne backed it up with a 2-2 draw at home with Wolfsburg to climb to 15th. Cologne's 18-year-old striker Jan Thielmann opened the scoring, but Maximilian Arnold equalised with a magnificent free-kick. Winger Ondrej Duda restored Cologne's lead when he shot into the corner on 43 minutes, but Wout Weghorst rescued a point away for Wolfsburg just after the break. Cologne are only out of the relegation places on goal difference while Wolfsburg are fifth. —AFP

Mbappe brings up century as PSG win at Montpellier

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe scored his 100th goal for Paris Saint-Germain after making a late appearance as a substitute for the Ligue 1 leaders in Saturday's 3-1 victory at in-form Montpellier. With Neymar preserved ahead of next week's crucial Champions League clash against Istanbul Basaksehir and Mbappe rested from the start, Colin Dagba's first career goal gave PSG the lead on 33 minutes. English forward Stephy Mavididi leveled before half-time at the Stade de la Mosson, the ball just crossing the line despite the best efforts of Dagba and Keylor Navas.

Moise Kean restored the advantage for PSG on 77 minutes after Rafinha triggered a quick counter, hitting a magnificent solo goal for his fifth in seventh league games. The Italy international was then replaced by Mbappe, who wrapped up the vic-

tory in stoppage time as he brought up his century of goals in his 137th game for PSG, tapping in a Layvin Kurzawa cross. "I've been wanting to score for a few matches, it's a bit of a release," Mbappe told Canal Plus. "When I signed here I wouldn't even had thought of scoring three goals," he beamed. "(A hundred) was part of a distant goal."

Mbappe is joint-fourth on the list of PSG's all-time top scorers, level with Dominique Rocheteau and trailing Pauleta (109), Zlatan Ibrahimovic (156) and Edinson Cavani (200). "I'm feeling better and better, stringing matches together is going to allow me to get fully fit," he said. "When I came here, I said that I wanted to get a lot better and you don't do that in a year. "It's been three and a half years, I've experienced a lot of things here. I've had some less good moments, but the club has always supported me."

Defending champions PSG pulled four points clear of Marseille at the top as they avoided going three league games without victory for the first time since April 2019.



MONTPELLIER: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (center) scores a goal during the French L1 football match between Montpellier Hérault (MHSC) and Paris Saint Germain (PSG) on December 05, 2020. —AFP

Montpellier, without top scorer Andy Delort after he tested positive for coronavirus for the second time in three months, saw their hopes of dislodging the leaders dashed as their four-match winning run came to an end. Earlier, Rennes crashed to a sixth

defeat in seven matches as they lost 2-0 at home to Lens, three days being dumped out of Europe. Teenage striker Arnaud Kalimuendo, on loan from PSG, hit the opener on 27 minutes and Ignatius Ganago sealed the victory late in the second half. —AFP

Paarl," the governing bodies said.

A decision on the remaining two matches in the series will be taken after the test results are ratified independently by medical experts, the statement added. Ashley Giles, the managing director of England Men's Cricket, said: "We regret that we are unable to play in today's ODI, but the welfare of the players and support staff is our primary concern and whilst we await the results of further tests the medical advice from both teams was that this game should not take place. "We remain in constant dialogue with Cricket South Africa and will continue to work closely with them to determine how

best to move forward."

CSA said the England players and management underwent an additional round of tests on Saturday evening after two members of staff at their hotel tested positive for the virus. Former England captain Mike Atherton, now a commentator and journalist, said he feared the entire series could be under threat. Atherton said the new positive cases had "ramped up" the concern that the England camp already felt after the opening match was postponed. "Certainly this match is off and I would be pessimistic about the other games," said Atherton. —AFP

COVID cancels England match in South Africa, tour under threat

PAARL: Two members of England cricket's touring party in South Africa have returned unconfirmed positive tests for Covid-19, forcing yesterday's first one-day international to be cancelled and placing the rest of the tour in jeopardy. The match in Paarl was to have opened the one-day series after Friday's scheduled first match in Cape Town was scrapped just before play was to begin after a South African player tested positive for coronavirus. Cricket South Africa and the

England and Wales Cricket Board said in a joint statement that two members of England's touring party had now contracted the virus, although further tests were required. The statement did not specify whether the individuals affected were players or support staff. "Cricket South Africa (CSA) and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have agreed to cancel today's Betway One-Day International series opening match, which was due to take place in

Chelsea beat Leeds, grab Premier League top spot

LONDON: Frank Lampard believes there is even more to come from Chelsea after the Blues moved top of the Premier League with a 3-1 win over Leeds on the night 2,000 fans returned to Stamford Bridge. Lampard's men had to bounce back after Patrick Bamford's early opener against his former club. But the home fans in attendance after the coronavirus-enforced absence got a glimpse of why the new-look Chelsea are now title contenders as goals from Olivier Giroud, Kurt Zouma and Christian Pulisic extended their unbeaten run to 16 games.

Victory takes Lampard's men - reinforced by a £220 million (\$296 million) spending spree - a point clear of Tottenham and Liverpool, who are in action on Sunday at home to Arsenal and Wolves respectively. "We are a (team in) progression," said Lampard. "When you bring in new players and have young players, people moving to a new country, different city, different teammates, it takes time. I think there is more uplift in us."

"Whether it is this season we can get to real heights we want, we don't know. It's a long season. Consistency is our next challenge but we're moving in the right direction." Edouard Mendy had conceded just once in six previous Premier League appearances to solve Chelsea's goalkeeping woes, but the Ivorian was partly at fault as Bamford kept up his fine start to the season after just four minutes.

The Leeds striker never made a first-team appearance in five years at Chelsea but is proving his doubters wrong back in the top-flight. He scored his eighth goal in 11 games with a calm finish to round a hesitant Mendy after Calvin Phillips's pass opened up the Blues defense. Giroud earned his first Premier League start of the season after scoring four times against Sevilla in the Champions League in midweek. The French international would have had an equalizer earlier had Timo Werner not somehow turned his goalbound header onto the bar from point-blank range.

Lampard trumps old foe

Giroud did finally level on 27 minutes when he slotted home Reece James's dangerous low cross. However, Chelsea were dealt a blow in the build-up to that goal as Hakim Ziyech pulled up with a hamstring injury and had to be replaced by Pulisic. After the break, Chelsea's superior class showed to allow Lampard to get another one over old foe Marcelo Bielsa. "Always defeats are an opportunity to learn something," said Bielsa. Lampard was furious when during his time at Derby, Bielsa sent a spy to the Rams' training ground before a Championship match in 2019. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
Brighton & Hove Albion v Southampton	23:00		
SPANISH LEAGUE PRIMERA			
SD Eibar v Valencia	23:00		
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE			
ACF Fiorentina v Genoa CFC	22:45		
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA			
TSG 1899 Hoffenheim v Augsburg	22:30		