

14 Masked, muted Olympics will still dominate crowded 2021 in sports



15 Dortmund's new caretaker coach gets a winning start



15 Role of heading in football has to be reexamined over risk of dementia



Chelsea lose 2-1 at Wolves

'We are not machines,' wasteful Man City slip up again



WOLVERHAMPTON: Chelsea's French striker Olivier Giroud (center) takes a shot at goal during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Chelsea at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton on December 15, 2020. — AFP

WOLVERHAMPTON: Frank Lampard believes Chelsea have become complacent after the Blues blew a lead to lose 2-1 at Wolves and suffer back-to-back Premier League defeats for the first time during his reign in charge. Twice in four days Chelsea have wasted the chance to move top of the Premier League after losing for the first time in 18 matches at Everton on Saturday. Lampard himself called into question his side's title credentials after a 1-0 loss at Goodison Park at the weekend and believes his players may have got carried away with their unbeaten run.

"Performance is what gives you results. We were playing very well, on a long unbeaten run and then maybe the lads think 'we're playing well'. The minute you think you're playing well, things like this can happen," said a visibly irked Lampard after Pedro Neto broke clear to win the game in the 95th minute. "If you're not playing well which we weren't tonight, hang on to the 1-0. Play, control the game, and don't allow counter attacks like we did."

There was more evidence that Chelsea

are still a team in transition after a £220 million (\$294 million) transfer spending spree as two of their big money signings, Timo Werner and Kai Havertz, again failed to sparkle. Lampard's men remain in fifth, three points adrift of Tottenham and Liverpool at the top, ahead of a clash between the top two at Anfield on Wednesday. Victory was no more than Wolves deserved as they bounced back from two consecutive defeats since losing top scorer Raul Jimenez to a fractured skull. "We reacted well," said Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo. "I think we were always in the game. We were well organized and second-half we played really well."

Chelsea disappoint

Other than bursts from Christian Pulisic past the struggling Nelson Semedo, Chelsea created precious little from open play. Set-pieces caused Wolves more problems as Olivier Giroud headed over when he should have hit the target before Kurt Zouma crashed a header from another corner off the crossbar. Giroud was razor sharp four

minutes into the second-half as he volleyed Ben Chilwell's cross towards goal and the ball slipped through Rui Patricio's grasp and just over the line. Going behind awakened Wolves and Fabio Silva was denied his first Premier League goal since a 40 million euro (\$47 million £36 million) move from Porto by an offside flag.

Wolves had not scored in two games since losing Jimenez to a sickening head knock suffered in a 2-1 win at Arsenal. But Daniel Podence produced a moment of magic as he twisted and turned inside the Chelsea box to find space for a shot and his effort deflected off Reece James and inside Edouard Mendy's near post. Chelsea's record signing Havertz had another night to forget. The German international was replaced by Mateo Kovacic, while Tammy Abraham replaced the injured Giroud as Lampard went in search of a winner.

Yet, it was Wolves who looked the more likely winners in the closing stages. Neto thought he had won a penalty when driving past James, but after a VAR review referee Stuart Attwell overturned his original deci-

sion as there was no contact on the Portuguese winger. However, Neto was not to be denied on the counter-attack deep into stoppage time as he accelerated past Zouma and drove low into the far corner to move Wolves into the top half of the table and within three points of the top four.

Wasteful Man City slip

Meanwhile, Ilkay Gundogan blamed a congested calendar in a unique season for Manchester City's failure to match the standards they have set under Pep Guardiola after a 1-1 draw with West Brom dealt another blow to their title challenge. Gundogan appeared to have opened the floodgates on the half hour mark, but Ruben Dias's own goal two minutes before half-time proved costly as City's problems in front of goal continued in a goalless second-half. City have won just five of their opening 12 league games of the season, a far cry from the combined 198 points they registered in two title-winning campaigns under Guardiola in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Even last season when finishing distant

runners-up to Liverpool, City scored 102 league goals, but the stale domination that has characterised a lacklustre campaign was in evidence all night as they struggled to break through West Brom's deep-lying defense. "We had great years where we played great football in the past so we set the level high," said Gundogan. "All over Europe all the big teams are struggling with the tight fixtures and it's not going to be easier in the next weeks."

"That's an explanation why it is not always as easy as the expectations people have for us. We are not machines but we also know when we have not played our best game." City could have moved to within three points of leaders Tottenham and Liverpool, who met yesterday. Instead Guardiola's men edge up to fifth on goal difference, still five points off the top. "These games you have to win, we know it, so we drop points," admitted Guardiola. "It's not far away the top of the league, but you have to win games. Still we are in early December and there are a lot of games to play." — Agencies

Benzema fires Real level with Sociedad

MADRID: Karim Benzema spared Real Madrid's blushes on Tuesday with the winning brace which shot the reigning champions to a 3-1 win over Athletic Bilbao that draws them level on points with La Liga Leaders Real Sociedad. Frenchman Benzema headed home a cross from Dani Carvajal with 16 minutes remaining to put Real ahead against battling Bilbao, who had fought back to level earlier having lost Raul Garcia to two quickfire bookings in opening minutes. Toni Kroos had given the hosts the lead in Madrid with a thumping strike on the stroke of half-time, but Ander Capa rocked the capital club six minutes after the break when he shot past Thibaut Courtois at the second time of asking.

The 32-year-old Benzema had other ideas however, putting his team in front before making sure of the points in stoppage time with a clinical finish after collecting Luka Modric's pass. Third-placed Madrid gained their fourth straight win in all competitions and are equal on 26 points with Sociedad, who faced troubled Barcelona at the Camp Nou yesterday, and local rivals Atletico Madrid. Tuesday's match was the game in hand which Real had on Sociedad, while



MADRID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (left) challenges Athletic Bilbao's Spanish defender Yeray Alvarez during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Athletic Club Bilbao on December 15, 2020. — AFP

Atletico have played two games fewer than their two title rivals. Barca are nine points back but play one of their two games in hand in the hope of giving some momentum to what has been a miserable season so far. — AFP

Doha to host 2030 Asian Games; Riyadh 2034 edition

MUSCAT: Doha will host the 2030 Asian Games, the Olympic Council of Asia announced yesterday, while Riyadh was named as host of the 2034 edition under a compromise agreed between the rivals. An executive board meeting of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) unanimously approved the proposal to name the runner-up in the two-horse race for the 2030 games as 2034 hosts. "I can now announce... that the city who had the highest vote and will host 2030 is Doha," said OCA president Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah. "The second hosting city, for 2034, is Riyadh."

Voting was delayed by hours after technical problems with the online system, in place to allow some national olympic committees to participate remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic. "I apologize for the technical problem we are facing during our voting," said Sheikh Ahmad. "Today the difficult things have been solved and the easy things have

been problems." "I will be glad to have two games in west Asia, to be honest," added Sheikh Ahmad. Saudi and Qatar are locked in a bitter dispute after an alliance of countries led by Riyadh cut diplomatic, economic and transport ties with Doha in 2017, accusing it of backing radical Islamists and Iran.

'A national priority'

Qatar denies the charges and there has been progress to reconcile the dispute in recent weeks with all sides praising Kuwaiti-led mediation. Ahead of the vote, the OCA's president said he was seeking a "win-win" situation for Doha and Riyadh. Doha hosted the Asian Games in 2006 while Saudi Arabia has never organized an OCA multi-sport event.

"Our goal is simple. We want to see more Asian athletes in the future, on future Olympic podiums," said Qatar Olympic Committee chief Joao bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani ahead of the vote. "We want that to be part of your national sports history, not just ours. And we want to support you in the efforts to get there." Qatar is also participating in the bidding process for the 2032 summer Olympics. A video showcased Qatar's raft of sporting and transport infrastructure being prepared ahead of the 2022 football World Cup that would be repurposed for the 2030 games. The games will have a \$1.3 billion budget. — AFP