

Sports

Arsenal sweep aside Chelsea 3-1, ease pressure on Arteta

Man City title challenge gaining momentum as Newcastle are blown away

LONDON: Mikel Arteta hailed Arsenal's emphatic 3-1 win against Chelsea on Saturday as a "turning point" in his troubled side's season. Arteta's side sat just three points above the relegation zone before kick-off at the Emirates Stadium after their worst start to a season since 1974-75. But the Gunners produced their best performance this term to outclass their London rivals. Alexandre Lacazette's controversial penalty opened the scoring before Granit Xhaka's superb free-kick increased Arsenal's lead before half-time.

Bukayo Saka bagged Arsenal's third goal after the break as they won in the Premier League for the first time in eight games stretching back to November 1. Tammy Abraham's late strike was no consolation for woeful Chelsea, who missed a penalty through Jorginho in the final moments. Moving six points clear of the bottom three will buy Arteta a little breathing space following talk he was in danger of the sack after just a year in charge. "It's a really big win for us. We were really disappointed and frustrated with the results," Arteta said.

"The players and fans were suffering and today is a really special day. It doesn't get any better: Boxing Day, playing a London derby at the Emirates and winning the way we've done it. "Hopefully this is a turning point and will elevate the confidence of the team because I know that they can play at this level. "It is how consistent we are throughout the game to sustain that level." With matches against Brighton and West Brom coming next in their Christmas schedule, Arsenal have a chance to climb to a healthy league position heading into 2021.

"The spirit before the game was really positive, they really wanted it," Arteta said. "I am pleased for the players and for the supporters. We have let them down for many weeks so it was a good day." Having won the FA Cup final against Chelsea in August, Arteta has now delivered two major blows to Blues boss Frank Lampard this year. Chelsea would have gone second with a victory, but instead they remain six points behind leaders Liverpool after a third defeat in their last four league games.

Lacklustre in attack, short of drive in midfield and bereft of a cutting edge up front, Chelsea's £200 million (\$267 million) pre-season overhaul is yet to pay off. "I'm angry because I want us to win

games. We were lazy to give away a penalty, lazy to give away a free-kick that he puts in the top corner," Lampard said. "I'm very disappointed in the way we approached the first half because some things in football are basics. "It is not tactics or systems, it is do you want to run, back your team-mate out and sprint? Or do you want to jog and say 'maybe I don't have to run' and we took that decision instead of the right one."

Arsenal made the breakthrough in the 35th minute when Kieran Tierney got across Reece James into the Chelsea area and tumbled under the slightest contact from the panicked defender. Michael Oliver's debatable decision to award a penalty survived a VAR review and Lacazette sent Edouard Mendy the wrong way from the spot for his sixth goal of the season. It was no more than Arsenal deserved for a vibrant first half and Arteta was celebrating again in the 44th minute.

N'Golo Kante fouled Saka and Xhaka did his bit to get back in favor when he whipped a brilliant 20-yard free-kick over the Chelsea wall and into the top corner. Saka made it three in the 56th minute as Hector Bellerin and Emile Smith Rowe combined to send the youngster into the area and his cross-shot looped over Mendy into the far corner. Abraham converted Hudson Odoi's cross from close range in the 85th minute. Pablo Mari's foul on Mount gave Chelsea a stoppage-time penalty, but Jorginho missed for the third time this season as Bernd Leno kept out the Italian's weak effort.

City gaining momentum

Meanwhile, Pep Guardiola is optimistic that Manchester City are on course to challenge Liverpool again for the Premier League title after climbing up to fifth and within five points of the leaders with a routine 2-0 win over Newcastle on Saturday. At a rain and windswept Etihad Stadium as Storm Bella swept into Manchester, it was plain sailing for the hosts as goals either side of half-time from Ilkay Gundogan and Ferran Torres extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 10 games.

City's lack of goals has unusually been their undoing so far this season but despite again not hitting the free-flowing heights of previous years under Guardiola, an impressive defensive record is



LONDON: Arsenal's Scottish defender Kieran Tierney (left) and Chelsea's English defender Reece James compete during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium in London on December 26, 2020. — AFP

moving them back into contention. An eighth clean sheet in 10 games never looked threatened against a Newcastle side lacking in intent or threat, with top scorer Callum Wilson left on the bench.

"There are weird results for everyone. This season is about being calm in the good and bad moments," said Guardiola. "I have the feeling we are getting better." Guardiola's options had been limited prior to kick-off by Kyle Walker and Gabriel Jesus testing positive for coronavirus along with two members of the City staff. However, the loss of Jesus and Walker is likely to be more keenly felt in the coming week as City travel to second-placed

Everton on Monday and Chelsea next weekend in two real tests of their ability to reel in Liverpool at the top of the table.

"We played at the tempo we have to play. We are a team that needs to make a lot of passes, not run so much and attack in the right moments. Today our positional game was perfect," added Guardiola. "Unfortunately we could not score more goals but it is a good result and three more points. We don't have much time to think about it because in 45, 46 hours we are back." City threw away two points in their last home game in a 1-1 draw with West Brom after Gundogan opened the scoring. — Agencies

McCollum lifts Trail Blazers over Rockets, as Cavs edge Pistons

LOS ANGELES: Portland's CJ McCollum drained the game-winning three-pointer with 6.9 seconds left in overtime as the Trail Blazers edged James Harden and short-handed Houston 128-126 in the Rockets' belated NBA season opener on Saturday. McCollum scored 44 points, with a career-high nine three-pointers, and Damian Lillard added 32 as the Trail Blazers withstood a 44-point, 17-assist performance by Harden.

Center Christian Wood added 31 points for the Rockets, who had just nine players in uniform - one above the NBA minimum of eight - after two players tested positive for COVID-19 and four more were listed as unavailable due to "health and safety protocols" after being declared close contacts of those with the virus. The Rockets' scheduled season opener against Oklahoma City had been postponed when they could not field eight players. Harden was among those unavailable on Wednesday after he was deemed to have violated NBA anti-COVID measures that ban players from attending indoor gatherings

of more than 15 people.

He was fined \$50,000, in the latest installment of the pre-season drama surrounding Harden, who turned up late to training camp amid reports he has demanded to be traded. The three-time - and reigning - NBA scoring champion played more than 43 minutes. He connected on 12 of 22 shots from the field, including six three-pointers. Harden's step-back three-pointer with 15.3 seconds left in overtime put the Rockets up 126-125. But the Trail Blazers responded, Lillard driving toward the basket then kicking the ball out to McCollum who calmly sank a three-pointer of his own.

"I just got to the corner," McCollum said. "I knew (Lillard) was going to be aggressive, he drew a crowd. My man turned his back so I just relocated to the open area and knocked down the trey." The Rockets had the ball again after a timeout, but Robert Covington came up with the steal from Harden as he was driving toward the basket. In Detroit, Cleveland guard Collin Sexton scored 32 points, including a layup to force a



PORTLAND: Christian Wood #35 of the Houston Rockets dunks against Derrick Jones Jr #55 of the Portland Trail Blazers during the second quarter at Moda Center on December 26, 2020. — AFP

second overtime as the Cavaliers beat the Detroit Pistons 128-119.

Andre Drummond added 23 points against his former team, Cedi Osman scored 22 off the bench and Darius Garland chipped in 21 as the Cavaliers rallied from a nine-point deficit with 2:15 left in the first overtime. The Pistons appeared to seize control in the third quarter, when Jerami Grant scored 14 of his 28

points. Blake Griffin scored 26 points and Derrick Rose had 13, but the Pistons - with 24 turnovers leading to 31 Cavaliers points - could not hang on for the win. "It was multiple opportunities where we could've given in, there were multiple opportunities that we could've lost the fight," Cavaliers coach J.B. Bickerstaff said. "Every player, to a man, decided that was not going to happen." — AFP

Swansea move into 2nd place in Championship; Watford rock Norwich

LONDON: Swansea moved into second place in the Championship with a 2-0 victory at struggling QPR, while new Watford manager Xisco Munoz made a winning start against leaders Norwich on Saturday. Goals from Andre Ayew and Jamal Lowe lifted Steve Cooper's Swansea into the automatic promotion places as the race to reach the Premier League heats up.

QPR have now gone eight matches without a win and boss Mark Warburton is under increasing pressure. At Vicarage Road, Xisco got off the mark with a 1-0 win after becoming Watford's fifth manager since the start of last season following the sacking of Vladimir Ivic. Ismaila Sarr's first-half goal was enough to sink the Canaries, who remain four points clear of Swansea. Norwich were convinced they should have had a late penalty when Watford substitute Adam Masina tripped Teemu Pukki in front of goal.

Watford are up to fifth place as they chase an immediate return to the Premier League after last season's relegation. Chris Hughton and Aitor Karanka faced their former clubs in a 0-0 draw between Nottingham Forest and Birmingham at the City Ground. It was Hughton's Forest who often looked the more likely to snatch three points but they found themselves up against a goalkeeper in good form in Neil Etheridge. Famara Diedhiou came off the bench to fire a spectacular late winner as Bristol City beat bottom of the table Wycombe 2-1 at Ashton Gate.

City took a 23rd-minute lead through Chris Martin's downward header. Garath McCleary equalized on 68 minutes with a shot that took a wicked deflection off City substitute Adrian Mariappa. Having done so twice before this season, Diedhiou then proved the match-winner as a replacement when blasting an unstoppable right-footed shot past Ryan Allsop with three minutes remaining. Derby's unbeaten run under interim manager Wayne Rooney was ended when Preston scored deep in stoppage time to snatch a 1-0 victory at Pride Park. — AFP

Kuwait Football League roundup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Three teams had to wait until the final round of Kuwait Football League's ranking phase to find out who will stay in the premier league and which one will be out of luck. Khaitan played leaders Qadisiya and managed to get a draw (1-1); while Fahaeel defeated their next door neighbors (2-0) to remain in the premier league. The third team fighting to stay in

the top flight league - Burgan failed to make that achievement despite their historic win against Kuwait 2-1. The 10 premier league teams now are Qadisiya, Nasr, Salmiya, Kazma, Kuwait, Arabi, Shabab, Sahel, Khaitan and Fahaeel. Meanwhile the lower league includes Burgan, Jahra, Tadhamon, Yarmouk and Sulaibkhat.

Qadisiya's Redha Hani scored first in the 39th minute, after which Khaitan's Olson was able to equalize in the 63rd minute. This result gave Khaitan 18 points and Qadisiya 32 points - on top of the ranking. Meanwhile Fahaeel defeated Sahel 2-0. The goals were scored by Abdallah Al-Shami and Saad Ayedh - giving them 18 points - while Sahel remained at 17.



Kuwait shooting Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Shooting Championship of the late Sheikh Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah will be held on Thursday 31/12/2020 and will continue until 2/1/2021. The tournament will be in 10m Air Pistol and Rifle in addition to Archery for men and women. Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federation Secretary General Obaid Al-Osaimi said the Shooting Club is always proud to organize the tournament every year, because it carries good memories for one of Kuwait's outstanding men who contributed to the Kuwait's renaissance.

Al-Osaimi thanked the family of the late Sheikh Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah for their continued support. He said the ranges of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex are ready, and are equipped with all necessary protection against the novel coronavirus. He hoped shooters exert their extreme efforts and seek to get the best of results, as it is an important event to prepare for the championship of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah which will be held from 12-18/2/2021 in Kuwait



Obaid Al-Osaimi



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Crystal Palace v Leicester City	18:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
Chelsea v Aston Villa	20:30
beIN Sports HD 1	
Everton v Manchester City	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1	