

14 Gutsy Rahane century puts India in driving seat against Australia



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



15 McCollum lifts Trail Blazers over Rockets as Cavaliers edge Pistons



West Brom snatch draw at Liverpool

Leeds hold off Burnley • West Ham deny Brighton



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Brazilian midfielder Roberto Firmino (center) plays the ball during the English Premier League football match against West Bromwich Albion at Anfield yesterday. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool blew the chance to open up a five-point lead at the top of the Premier League yesterday as Semi Ajayi's header eight minutes from time earned West Brom a shock 1-1 draw at Anfield. The Baggies remain second bottom of the table, but gave their chances of survival a huge boost by becoming the first visiting side to take even a point at Anfield in the league this season in Sam Allardyce's second match in charge.

Sadio Mane had given Liverpool a 12th minute lead, but Jurgen Klopp's men lived to regret not making more of a dominant first-half display to give the chasing pack in the title race an unexpected boost. The defending champions move three points clear at the top of the table, but just four points separate Everton in second from Southampton in ninth.

Allardyce was the last visiting manager to win a Premier League game at Anfield, when in charge of Crystal Palace back in April 2017, and the former England manager is now unbeaten in his last four away games against Klopp's men with three different clubs. The Baggies set out to limit the sort of damage suffered by Crystal Palace in a 7-0 hammering inflicted by Liverpool last

weekend, but could barely get out of their half before the break.

Mane ended his longest drought of nine games without a goal as a Liverpool player against Palace and showed his sharpness in front of goal is back with a brilliant touch to control and finish from Joel Matip's pass on 12 minutes. That could and should have opened the floodgates for Klopp's men given their level of control before the break. A series of dangerous crosses from Andy Robertson failed to find the finishing touch, while Mane headed just wide from Jordan Henderson's delivery.

However, Liverpool's failure to put the game beyond West Brom's reach led to a nervy second-half. The Reds suffered another injury blow at centre-back as Matip pulled up with a muscle problem and had to be replaced by 19-year-old Rhys Williams with Virgil Van Dijk and Joe Gomez long-term injury absentees. Williams was penalized for an innocuous foul with his first involvement, sparking a furious reaction from Klopp, which saw the German booked by referee Kevin Friend.

Despite their lowly position in the table, West Brom have already taken points off Manchester City and Chelsea

this season and were extremely unfortunate not to take at least a point away to Manchester United. Allardyce's game plan to stay in the game as long as possible worked to perfection as West Brom began to threaten in the final quarter. Karlan Grant outpaced Williams to burst clear on goal 20 minutes from time, but Alisson Becker spread himself brilliantly to block.

Ajayi was denied his first Premier League goal when his strike away to City in a 1-1 draw earlier this month was credited as a Ruben Dias own goal. But he repeated the trick and this time got the credit with a powerful header in off the inside of the post that this time left Alisson helpless. Liverpool have made a habit of winning games late in the past two seasons, most recently when Roberto Firmino's injury time header beat Tottenham 2-1 in their last outing at Anfield. The Brazilian nearly did it again at the death, but his downward header was brilliantly saved by Sam Johnstone.

Leeds hold off Burnley

Meanwhile, Patrick Bamford's early penalty earned Leeds a controversial 1-0 win over Burnley in the Premier League yesterday, while West Ham twice came

from behind to draw 2-2 with Brighton. Marcelo Bielsa's men now enjoy a nine-point cushion over the drop zone as they moved up to 11th, but needed luck on their side as Burnley were denied an equalizer through Ashley Barnes by a refereeing error. The only goal at Elland Road came after just five minutes when Bamford latched onto a long ball over the top and was wiped out by the onrushing Nick Pope.

Bamford fired home the resulting penalty into the top corner for his 10th goal of the season. Burnley felt doubly aggrieved when Barnes smashed home after Illan Meslier fumbled a high ball into the box on 17 minutes. The French goalkeeper was awarded a free-kick for backing in by Ben Mee and despite Meslier appearing to be the aggressor, the goal could not be reviewed by VAR as referee Robert Jones had blown for the foul before the ball hit the net.

"Their keeper comes through, knees him in the back," said Burnley boss Sean Dyche. "If a centre-half does that he probably gets booked. Not only is it a penalty, we put it in the goal and he doesn't give it one second to review it. "Ironically, it's been taking hours to make a decision and you get a really

important decision and they can't look at it. The referee played a big part, but we still have to focus on our part." Defeat sees the Claret's drop to 17th, still just two points above the relegation zone.

West Ham snatch point

Brighton edged ahead of Burnley thanks to a point at the London Stadium, but will be disappointed to have thrown away the chance of just a second win in 14 games. Twice the Seagulls led as Neal Maupay's predatory finish to a loose ball inside the area just before half-time was just reward for Brighton's more purposeful approach in the first-half.

David Moyes reacted with two changes at half-time to liven up West Ham after a dire first 45 minutes and got the reaction he wanted when substitutes Andriy Yarmolenko and Manuel Lanzini teed up 20-year-old Ben Johnson for his first senior goal. The visitors retook the lead when a corner broke perfectly for captain Lewis Dunk to fire high into the roof of the net. However, Brighton's struggles at defending set-pieces cost them all three points when Tomas Soucek's header leveled eight minutes from time. — Agencies

Brady's superb half lifts Tampa Bay into NFL playoffs

WASHINGTON: Tom Brady threw for 348 yards and four touchdowns in the first half Saturday to power Tampa Bay to a 47-7 win over Detroit and lift the Buccaneers into the NFL playoffs. The 43-year-old quarterback, who joined the Bucs this year after 20 campaigns and six Super Bowl crowns with New England, was benched for the second half after guiding Tampa Bay into the post-season for the first time since 2007.

"We played pretty good in the first half," Brady said. "Good execution. Guys were making plays for me all over the field. It was just a great effort by the whole team." The Buccaneers led 34-0 at half-time in improving to 10-5, securing a playoff spot while the Lions sank to 5-10. "It's just the beginning," said Bucs coach Bruce Arians. "Our goal when this all started was to get into the dance. Now it's to win 11 games and see who we play next. "We're going to be a pretty tough out."

Brady, who completed 22 of 27 throws, set a first-half career best and club record in passing yardage and the four touchdown passes were his most in a first half since 2014. Brady's club-record 36 passing touchdowns this season sent the Bucs to the playoffs, a feat New England failed to manage without him. The Buccaneers also set a team record with 410 total first-half yards, the most by any NFL club in a decade. In his 300th career NFL game, Brady threw touchdown strikes of 33 yards to former New England teammate Rob Gronkowski, 27 yards to Mike Evans, 12 yards to Antonio Brown and 7 yards to Chris Godwin.

Leonard Fournette added a four-yard touchdown run and Brady's back-up Blaine Gabbert added touchdown passes of 25 yards to Gronkowski and 22 yards to Evans in the rout. "When we do play the way we're capable of playing, we're tough to beat," Brady said. "We have to learn to do it more consistently."

Evans, who had 10 catches for 181 yards, broke his own team touchdown reception record with 13. "We've been scratching and clawing every year," Evans said of the Bucs' playoff quest. "We're happy we finally accomplished it, but that's just where it starts."

Arians said he could sense a great performance

coming while watching workouts. "You could feel this was a playoff practice week," Arians said. "Even with the holidays, they handled their business well." The Lions avoided a shutout when Jamal Agnew returned a punt 74 yards for a touchdown in the third quarter. Detroit, hampered by a right ankle injury to quarterback Matthew Stafford, also had five coaches sidelined by Covid-19 and contact tracing, with receivers coach Robert Prince serving as acting head coach.

Dolphins win thriller

The Bucs became the seventh NFL team to clinch a playoff berth, joining Green Bay, New Orleans and Seattle in the NFC plus Kansas City, Pittsburgh and Buffalo in the AFC. Miami's Jason Sanders kicked a 44-yard field goal with one second remaining to give the Dolphins a 26-25 victory at Las Vegas that saw four lead changes in the last four minutes. The Dolphins (10-5) stayed ahead of Baltimore (9-5) for the last AFC playoff berth by eliminating the Raiders (7-8).

Ryan Fitzpatrick's 34-yard pass - while having his face mask yanked by a defender - was caught by Mack Hollins to set up the winning kick. "It didn't feel great," Fitzpatrick said. "When I threw it, I didn't see it because my face mask got ripped off. It was pretty incredible." The San Francisco 49ers



DETROIT: Herb Miller #36 of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers intercepts a ball during the fourth quarter of a game against the Detroit Lions at Ford Field on December 26, 2020. — AFP

delivered a setback to Arizona's playoff hopes by beating the host Cardinals 20-12. CJ Beathard threw three touchdown passes for the 49ers and Cardinals quarterback Kyler Murray suffered a leg injury trying to spark a late rally. Chicago can deny Arizona a playoff spot by beating Jacksonville on Sunday and Green Bay next week. — AFP