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19 Dortmund, Hertha take a knee at Black Lives Matter protests



Bayern close on Bundesliga title

Wirtz becomes Bundesliga's youngest scorer at 17 years and 34 days



LEVERKUSEN: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (C) heads to score his team's fourth goal during the German first division Bundesliga football match Bayer 04 Leverkusen v FC Bayern Munich in Leverkusen, western Germany. — AFP

BERLIN: Bundesliga players wore black armbands and took the knee in displays of support for the Black Lives Matter protests on Saturday, as Bayern Munich kept title rivals Borussia Dortmund at bay with a ninth successive win.

Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski scored his 30th league goal of the season as Bayern came from behind to claim a 4-2 victory over Bayer Leverkusen, a win which kept them seven points ahead of second-placed Dortmund, who beat Hertha Berlin 1-0.

After Lucas Alario secured an early lead for the home side, Bayern struck twice in quick succession just before half-time to turn the game in their favour after Kingsley Coman's equaliser.

A mistake from Moussa Diaby allowed Coman to curl in the equaliser, before a fizzing shot from Leon Goretzka and an elegant lob from Serge Gnabry saw Bayern take a two-goal lead into the break. "We didn't start well, but I think it's something which really distinguishes us at the moment, that we are able to fight our way back into games," Goretzka told Sky.

Lewandowski sealed the win in the second half, equalling his most prolific Bundesliga season, although Leverkusen teenager Florian Wirtz struck late on to become the Bundesliga's youngest-ever scorer at just 17 years and 34 days.

"We already knew he was a huge talent," said Leverkusen coach Peter Bosz of the teenager, who beat the record set by Nuri Sahin for Borussia Dortmund in November 2005 by 48 days.

As thousands of protesters assembled in city centres across Germany, both of the country's top two clubs also used Saturday's games to make statements against police brutality and racism.

Dortmund players warmed up in T-shirts bearing messages of solidarity such as "no justice, no peace", before taking the knee in the centre circle with their Hertha colleagues for a moment's silence before kick-off.

Bayern players, meanwhile, wore black "Black Lives Matter" armbands during their rampant win over Lev-

erksusen. "As players, we always have the same message — we are tolerant, we are open, we are open to the world," Bayern captain Manuel Neuer told Sky.

Dortmund battled to a 1-0 home win over Hertha thanks to a second-half strike from Emre Can. England winger Jadon Sancho, who was among the first Bundesliga players to lend his voice to the protests last weekend, missed from close range just after the break before settling up Can with a deft chip over the back line on 57 minutes.

A late equaliser from Christian Strohdiek saw bottom-of-the-table Paderborn snatch a 1-1 draw away to RB Leipzig. Timo Werner set up Patrik Schick on 27 minutes to give Leipzig the lead, but they were forced to defend it with 10 men after Dayot Upamecano was booked twice in the first half.

Strohdiek's last-minute strike gave Paderborn their fourth draw in five games, though Stefan Baumgart's side remain eight points off Fortuna Duesseldorf, who occupy the relegation play-

off place.

Duesseldorf themselves missed the chance to move towards safety, as they battled to a dramatic 2-2 draw against 10-man Hoffenheim. A headed opener from Rouven Hennings and a red card for Hoffenheim's Benjamin Huebner put the home side in pole position.

However, the visitors struck back with goals from Munas Dabbur and Steven Zuber before Hennings saved a point with a late penalty.

Uwe Roesler's side remain three points adrift of safety in the relegation play-off place, after goals from Moussa Niakhate and Pierre Kunde Malong gave fellow strugglers Mainz a rare win over local rivals Eintracht Frankfurt.

Having sealed a crucial win with his 77th-minute strike, Cameroon international Kunde also joined the protests, taking a knee in place of a celebration. "I think it's good. It isn't a political statement, it's just a position, and these are values that we have. For me, there is no other possible position to take," said Mainz sporting director Rouven Schroeder. —AFP

McGregor announces retirement

NEW YORK: Mixed martial arts superstar Conor McGregor announced his retirement from the sport yesterday. The two-division Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) World Champion said his fighting days were over in a Twitter message posted on his verified account, alongside a picture of the Irishman with his mother, Margaret.

"Hey guys I've decided to retire from fighting. Thank you all for the amazing memories! What a ride it's been!" he wrote. "Here is a picture of myself and my mother in Las Vegas post one of my World title wins! Pick the home of your dreams Mags I love you! Whatever you desire it's yours."

The controversial fighter, nicknamed "The Notorious", first announced his retirement from the sport in March last year after being battered into submission by arch-rival Khabib Nurmagomedov in October 2018.

He made a return to the octagon in January after 15 months of inaction to knock out American Donald "Cowboy" Cerrone in just 40 seconds in Las Vegas.

The 31-year-old, an icon of the UFC, is no stranger to controversy and hit the headlines last year for an attack on an older man in a Dublin bar that was captured in a viral video.

McGregor, one of the most popular fighters in MMA history, has a record of 22-4 and was the first UFC fighter to hold two championship belts at the same time.

He achieved that feat in 2016, when he stopped Eddie Alvarez in a lightweight title fight, adding it to his featherweight title.

That triumph was followed by a loss to boxing great Floyd Mayweather in a cross-combat superfight in 2017, his loss to Nurmagomedov, announcements of retirements and returns to fighting.

Earlier, UFC featherweight champion Amanda Nunes dominated Felicia Spencer and scored a comprehensive decision victory on Saturday in retaining her crown, becoming the first two-weight UFC champ to successfully defend both belts.

The Canadian challenger went the distance at the UFC 250 event at the UFC Apex in Las Vegas on Sat-

urday, but she was completely outclassed, as Nunes won every one of the five rounds on the judges' scorecards.

"I studied her very well, I know she's tough and I have to be sharp if I have to go five rounds, I have to be dominating," a beaming Nunes told commentator Joe Rogan after the fight.

"That was my goal, defending my two belts at the same time. I defended both belts, you know, I'm the greatest! I'm so happy right now!" she added.

Spencer fought bravely but her limitations were exposed early on as Nunes caught her with a stiff jab and then took her to the mat, where she controlled her with ease.

A flurry of punches by Nunes the end of the second round almost put a stop to the contest, and Spencer somehow survived a late choke attempt at the end of the fourth, although her forehead swelled up heading into the final round.

With Nunes barely breaking a sweat, the doctor was called into the octagon late in the fifth to examine a cut on Spencer, but the 29-year-old was able to battle on to the end of a one-sided contest that cemented Nunes' status as one of the sport's most dominant champions.

After beating Miesha Tate to win the bantamweight belt in July 2016, the 32-year-old Brazilian has been on a tear for almost four years, defending that title with violent knockouts of former champions Ronda Rousey and Holly Holm.

She then stepped up to featherweight and added that title by demolishing the much-feared Cris Cyborg in just 51 seconds, knocking her unconscious with a superb display of boxing in December 2018.

The problem for Nunes and the UFC now is that there is no challenger on the horizon that looks capable of threatening Nunes, who hasn't lost since she was knocked out by Cat Zingano in September 2014. "I don't know what is next, but I've proved (myself) already. Tonight I closed a cycle, and I'm proud of myself and my team," Nunes said. — Agencies

