

Sports

Rare Joelinton strike helps Newcastle seal 2-0 victory

Bruce hopes Joelinton kicks on after downing Palace

LONDON: Perseverance finally paid off for Newcastle United's Brazilian forward Joelinton as he shrugged off a night of frustration to help his side to a 2-0 victory at Crystal Palace in the Premier League on Friday. The 24-year-old's Newcastle career is yet to take off after his 40 million pounds (\$53.22 million) move in July 2019.

But his astute pass set up Callum Wilson for his seventh league goal this season in the 88th minute at a chilly Selhurst Park before Joelinton's deflected shot sealed the points. It was only the South American's third league goal since his move from Hoffenheim but his work rate could not be faulted. Palace were looking threatening late on after manager Roy Hodgson sent on forwards Christian Benteke and Michy Batshuayi to try and win the game, but his side were left deflated.

Newcastle's win, after back-to-back league defeats, lifted them to 10th in the table on 14 points from 10 games with Palace a point behind in 13th place. "We created a few opportunities and missed the right pass but the strikers showed a little bit of quality," Newcastle manager Steve Bruce said. "Joe's price tag and wearing the number nine at Newcastle, he has struggled with it. "But we are starting to see a bit from him with his overall strength and we're pleased for him."

Sprightly visitors

Newcastle's early season promise had stalled but they began in sprightly fashion with Palace defender Gary Cahill having to intercept a dangerous low cross by Joelinton early on. The Brazilian failed to capitalise on a couple of chances, notably just before halftime when Palace defender Scott Dann gifted him the ball but his shot lacked conviction and was straight at goalkeeper Vicente Guaita.

Palace, missing the flair of Wilfried Zaha who has tested positive for COVID-19, picked up after a cagey start and the lively Eberechi Eze stung the fingers of



LONDON: Newcastle United's Brazilian striker Joelinton (left) vies with Crystal Palace's English defender Nathaniel Clyne and Crystal Palace's Senegalese midfielder Cheikhou Kouyate (up) during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Newcastle United at Selhurst Park in south London on November 27, 2020. — AFP

Karl Darlow who then made a fine save to keep out Jeffrey Schlupp's powerful effort. Joelinton had another great chance with 20 minutes left but he failed to make proper contact with an inviting cross.

Benteke's header forced a save by Darlow before Cheikhou Kouyate found space and looked poised to score but his shot was superbly blocked by defender Federico Fernandez. It looked as though the points

would be shared but Newcastle then stunned the hosts on the counter-attack with Joelinton playing in Wilson who finished confidently. Exactly 100 seconds later Joelinton's shot took a big deflection to wrongfoot Guaita. "This is not a performance we can be particularly proud of," Palace boss Hodgson said. "We have to accept that if we want to get points on the board then we need to do better." — Reuters

Golden ticket - How clubs plan to welcome back fans

LEEDS: With 2,000 fans allowed back into stadiums in Tier 2 locations in England, soccer clubs have the unenviable task of trying to decide which supporters get a golden ticket this Christmas. It was the news fans were waiting for as they wondered which tier their area of the country would be in after the national lockdown ends on Wednesday as, among other things, it would determine how many would be able to return to each stadium.

No Premier or Football League clubs fall into Tier 1 of the government's new system, while 10 of the country's top flight clubs cannot welcome any fans back at all after finding themselves in the most restrictive Tier 3. However, 10 Premier League clubs and 34 Football League teams can have 2,000 fans for each match from next week. The problem is how to distribute the limited number of tickets.

The first game involving a Premier League club with fans in attendance will be Arsenal's Europa League clash with Rapid Vienna next Thursday, with the club confirming tickets will be available on a "first come, first served" priority sale. Chelsea and West Ham United, both under London Tier 2 restrictions, are at home on Saturday Dec. 5 but have yet to announce their ticketing policy. Liverpool is another area that benefits from being in Tier 2, with the club able to host fans against Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday Dec. 6.

Only season ticket holders or members with sufficient credits, from the Liverpool City region, will be allowed to apply for 75% of the 2,000 tickets, with the

rest going to hospitality and to meet other contractual obligations. Meanwhile, in the world of rugby, the governing RFU has said that 400 of the tickets for England's final Autumn Nations Cup match will be given free to local NHS workers. Around 600 will be for players' families, local rugby clubs and sponsors and around 1,000 seats will be on sale to debenture holders, local residents and England supporters club members.

New normal

Two thousand may seem like a disappointingly low number of fans being allowed to return, but that will be reduced a lot further at League Two (fourth-tier) side Harrogate Town. One of only four northern Tier 2 Football League sides, Harrogate are considering asking fans to bring ID and proof of address to make sure they are not based in one of the many surrounding Tier 3 areas.

One stand is also needed for a "red zone" to keep players separate, another for socially-distanced substitutes, while a third will be required for socially-distanced media. An attendance of less than 1,000 is the likely outcome. Fans expecting anything like a normal festive day out are in for a rude awakening. Liverpool are advising ticketed fans to get a COVID-19 test, while Liverpool Director of Public Health, Matthew Ashton, also called for supporters to make testing part of their routine before going to matches.

Tottenham Hotspur, who can have fans back for the north London derby against Arsenal on Dec. 6, have announced what the fortunate few can expect on a match day, and it sounds like a far cry from leisurely a pie and a pint. There will be timed entry of fans to avoid congestion at the turnstiles and outside the stadium plus enhanced cleaning measures - including infection control fogging, electrostatic spraying and disinfecting - before, during and after the game. Food consumed at the ground will be click and collect, via the Spurs official app, reducing the need to queue. — Reuters



BRIGHTON: Liverpool's Portuguese striker Diogo Jota (3rd right) scores during the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Liverpool at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton yesterday. — AFP

Doctors warn over New Delhi 'suicidal' half-marathon

NEW DELHI: Top doctors have warned elite runners are taking a major health risk by competing in today's New Delhi half-marathon in the midst of a major coronavirus outbreak and soaring air pollution. Women's marathon world record-holder Brigid Kosgei from Kenya and Ethiopia's two-time men's winner Andamlak Belihu are among the 49 elite athletes running the 21-kilometre race, while thousands of amateurs are taking part virtually.

Organizers say the "highest level of safety-standards, with bio-secure zones" have been laid on for the race starting at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. But with New Delhi recording more than 500,000 virus cases, and air quality in the world's most polluted capital hovering between 'unhealthy' and 'hazardous', health experts said the athletes should think twice.

"It will be suicidal for runners to run the race this time. We have such high levels of pollution, we have the risk of coronavirus," Arvind Kumar, founder trustee of the Lung Care Foundation said. "With the presence of this twin threat if people are still running despite knowing everything, well, I have no words to express my anguish." "Whether you are an international elite runner or you are a small boy from a village, the damaging potential of a damaging agent remains the same," said the doctor.

Burns has Georgia on his mind in Autumn Nations clash

LONDON: Billy Burns' ability to direct Ireland's play in his first Test start against Georgia should not be in doubt given the fearless manner he showed in dealing with his father as a teenage referee. Burns has a golden opportunity to stake a claim to be the long-term successor to Johnny Sexton when the fly-half finally decides to call time on his career. The 26-year-old has impressed in his two performances coming off the bench in the Autumn Nations Cup, including against England, where he was born, and has earned a starting spot for today's match.

Burns played for the England Under-20 side that won the 2014 world championship, "battering" the Irish along the way, in his words. But Ireland have always been on his radar. "My father has always worn the Ireland shirt," Burns said before last week's England game, which Ireland lost 18-7. Jerry, whose father hailed from Cork, gave his each of four sons an Ireland shirt along with an England one when they were young. It was in another shirt that Jerry and Billy had their contretemps, when he was asked to referee his father's club side's game at the age of 15 after the official referee failed to show up.

"I said 'dad I'm so scared, I don't want to do it - I'm so scared,'" Burns told the Irish Independent. "He said 'don't worry about it - if anyone gives you any backchat, I'll come over and sort it out.' "First kick-off it goes off and I give a penalty against Oldfield (Jerry's club) to the other team, and who's the first one to come over shouting in my face but my old man. "So I blew him up and sent him back 10 metres."

Burns' display of authority that day has transferred itself into professional rugby. He made more than 100 appearances for English Premiership side Gloucester before the bold move to Belfast-based Ulster in 2018. The impending arrival of the mercurial Danny Cipriani forced his hand but the decision proved the right one. The calm authority he exudes, which he has shown in his two Tests so far, is referred to by Ulster and Ireland teammate Iain Henderson. "I've great admiration for him taking a leap of faith and backing himself and coming over," said Henderson. "He's worked incredibly hard for what he's got over the last couple of years at Ulster. "He's really fitting into 10, into that commander role if you like, and a lot of the players up in Ulster respect him." —AFP

Toxic mix

Randeep Guleria, director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), the country's top research body, told AFP that "in an ideal situation" the race should not be run. "Because of high levels of air pollution, exercising outside in this weather sometimes can lead to aggravation of underlying lung problems," he said. "Even if you are an elite runner the air pollution would still affect your lung." Normally thousands of amateurs would also take part, but because of the coronavirus they have been told to run their chosen route between Wednesday and Sunday and chart their time on an app.

Delhi has been hit by a winter pollution crisis each year for the past decade when crop-stubble burning from nearby states, cold temperatures and car and industrial pollution produce a toxic mix. This year, the Indian capital is also a major concern in the battle

Gerrard leads Rangers' revival; Celtic crumble

LONDON: Rangers have spent nearly a decade in the doldrums but their revival under Steven Gerrard appears to be coming just in time to stop rivals Celtic from winning a historic 10th consecutive Scottish league title. The club have had a bumpy ride since they last won the league in 2011. Financial troubles led to liquidation and the club were reformed in the fourth tier of Scottish football.

Rangers returned to the Scottish Premiership in 2016, but even then the turmoil did not end as three managers were dismissed in little over a year trying to bridge the chasm Celtic. Now it is the blue half of the Glasgow divide that enjoy an 11-point lead at the top of the Scottish Premiership and are outperforming their rivals on the European stage. Gerrard's men are unbeaten in 22 games in all competitions this season, confirming the steady progress he has made since landing his first senior managerial role in 2018.

The former Liverpool captain famously never won a league title as a player, but he will forever be hailed a Rangers' hero if he denies Celtic the coveted 10-in-a-row. Gerrard has benefited from a level of patience scarcely afforded to Old Firm managers. He is the first Rangers manager to begin a third season in charge without winning a trophy in his first two. Celtic have not just swept the board in the league, but won all of the past 11 domestic trophies on offer in Scotland and can make that 12 in the Scottish Cup final next month.

However, the tide appears to have turned, with Celtic boss Neil Lennon clinging to his job as calls grow from fans for the Northern Irishman to go after a run of two wins in nine games. "I look at the league table every time we play, I'm not going to deny that," said Gerrard after a 4-0 demolition of third-placed Aberdeen last weekend. "But I've never known a manager to get carried away in November. I don't know how many games we've played, but there is a lot of football to be played, a lot of challenges, a lot of big hurdles to get over. "I'd much rather be where we are of course. But stay humble."

Gamble pays off

The experience of Gerrard's first two seasons in charge shows much can change in the second half of the season. In December, for the past two years, Celtic were beaten in a derby to seemingly set up a proper title race, only to come back stronger as Rangers wilted in the New Year. Celtic have two games in hand that could cut the gap to five points, but the Cup final means the Hoops will miss another league match in December, offering Rangers the chance to establish a 14-point lead before the sides meet again on January 2.

Sustained progress in the Europa League over the past three seasons has allowed Rangers to build a depth of squad that should last the course domestically. The club's accounts released last week show the faith that has been placed in Gerrard in terms of their willingness to build a strong squad - the operating loss for the year increased from £11.6 million (\$15.4 million) to £15.9 million. Unlike Celtic, who have consistently sold their biggest assets to keep balancing the books, Rangers' investors are banking on Gerrard delivering a title and potentially Champions League football next season before selling any major players.

"I think the important thing to know is that this team is in much better shape than it was when we came through the door," said Gerrard, in defense of those figures. "The team is littered now with big assets. The team is worth an awful lot of money now compared to what it was." That gamble is paying off. Rangers are off to their best league start in 53 years, with 13 wins and just three goals conceded in their opening 15 games. Gerrard's men also top a Europa League group containing Benfica and saw off Galatasaray in qualifying. Celtic's consistency has set the bar in a nine-year run, but Rangers are now the ones with a ruthless streak. — AFP



ABERDEEN: In this file photo, Rangers' manager Steven Gerrard shouts instructions to his players on the touchline during the Scottish Premier League football match between Aberdeen and Rangers at Pittodrie Stadium in Aberdeen, northeast Scotland. — AFP

against the coronavirus. India is the world's second worst-hit country behind the United States, with about 9.3 million cases. The city is considering imposing a night-time curfew because of the rising number of cases, according to media reports.

Kosgei, who is visiting India for the first time, acknowledged her concerns about travelling for the race. "We have definitely been affected by COVID-19. I had to convince my parents and family back home to allow me to visit Delhi for the half-marathon," she said. "The virus has affected most of the sporting events. But it is important for us to take care of ourselves." As in other countries, nearly all sport in India has been cancelled. After repeated delays, the Indian Premier League cricket went ahead in the United Arab Emirates and the Indian Super League football is being held in a bio-secure "bubble" in Goa. — AFP