

Sports

Hoffenheim's Geiger ends 3-year goal drought in Bremen draw

Arnold crucial as Wolfsburg stop draw run with Bielefeld win

BERLIN: Hoffenheim midfielder Dennis Geiger scored his first Bundesliga goal in three years to secure his team a 1-1 draw away to Werder Bremen on Sunday. "It's not usually my job, but I'm happy that I was finally able to score again," Geiger told Sky. The draw leaves Sebastian Hoeness' Hoffenheim without a win in three league games since they beat champions Bayern Munich 4-1 in September.

"After the Bayern game we had two unnecessary defeats, but our attitude was much better today," said Geiger. Maximilian Eggstein turned in a fizzing cross from Theodor Gebre Selassie to give the hosts an early lead. Yet the goal would remain Bremen's only shot on goal in the first half, as Hoffenheim increasingly took control.

They were rewarded on 22 minutes as Robert Skov and Sebastian Rudy linked up to set up Geiger, who fired a fine first-time finish under the bar. Skov came closest to breaking the deadlock in the second half, thundering a vicious free-kick against the bar with ten minutes to play. Having narrowly escaped relegation last year, Bremen have lost just one of their first five games this season and currently sit in sixth place. Hoffenheim's attention, meanwhile, now turns to their upcoming Europa League clash with Belgian side Gent on Thursday.

Arnold 'relief'

Earlier Sunday, Wolfsburg avoided an unwanted Bundesliga record as they battled to a 2-1 win over Arminia Bielefeld. After picking up four points so far

this season, Wolfsburg were on course to become only the fourth Bundesliga side ever to draw all of their first five games, equaling an all-time league record. Yet Maximilian Arnold's impressive first-half display ended the dreary run of results to give Oliver Glasner's side their first win of the season against promoted Bielefeld.

It was the first league meeting between the two clubs since Wolfsburg's title-winning season in 2009, and Bielefeld's top-flight inexperience showed in the first half. With 19 minutes gone, they were caught flat-footed as Arnold set up Wout Weghorst with a short free-kick, and the Dutchman fired home to score his second goal in two games. Arnold himself doubled the lead just a minute later, as Wolfsburg pinned Bielefeld back and regained

possession with aggressive pressing directly after the restart.

In Sven Schipplock, Bielefeld brought on a striker with 153 top flight appearances to his name in the second half, and the former Hoffenheim and Hamburg front man promptly fired them back into the game, sweeping in a sharp assist from Japan winger Ritsu Doan. The visitors then hit the post as they pushed for an unlikely comeback, but Wolfsburg held on to avoid yet another draw. "It's a huge relief, particularly as we made it difficult for ourselves towards the end," Arnold told Sky. After starting the season strongly with a win and a draw, Bielefeld have now lost three games in a row in October and are now just two points above the relegation play-off place. — AFP

'World-class' Vardy rocks Arsenal as Leicester go fourth

LONDON: Brendan Rodgers saluted "world-class" Jamie Vardy after he sealed Leicester's late 1-0 win as spluttering Arsenal crashed to a third defeat in their last four Premier League games on Sunday. Vardy was only fit enough for the bench after a calf injury, but Foxes manager Rodgers sent the striker on with 30 minutes left. Vardy responded with his sixth goal of the season. The 33-year-old has made a habit of tormenting Arsenal and has now scored 11 goals in 12 Premier League games against them. "Our plan was always to bring Jamie Vardy into the game and he can stretch it," said Rodgers.

"He makes the big contributions in the big games," he added after Leicester's first win at Arsenal since 1973. "That shows you the level he is at and he is a world-class player. I'm lucky to have him." Leicester climbed to fourth after ending a run of two successive league defeats. "We deserved it, we played against a really good side and have players who can run in behind," Rodgers said. "To keep a clean sheet and play with the quality and calmness was good." Arsenal are languishing in 10th after a second consecutive league loss following their 1-0 defeat at Manchester City last weekend.

But it might have been a different story when,



LONDON: Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy (left) heads the opening goal past Arsenal's German goalkeeper Bernd Leno during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Leicester City at the Emirates Stadium in London on October 25, 2020. Leicester won the match 1-0. — AFP

early in a then goalless game, Arsenal's Alexandre Lacazette headed in from a corner only for his effort to be disallowed for offside against Granit Xhaka. Gunners boss Mikel Arteta was also disappointed by his team's lack of cutting edge. "I'm really disappointed, we had it in our hands in the first half and I don't know how the hell Lacazette's goal was disallowed," Arteta said. "It is difficult to create spaces with 10 men behind the ball, but we should have finished the game better."

The principle problem is a sudden dip in form

for captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang. The Gabon forward is without a goal in his last five league games—his worst drought since 2014, although he did net against Rapid Vienna in the Europa League on Thursday. Aubameyang has scored just once in the league this season, hardly the kind of form Arteta would have hoped for after handing the striker a lucrative new contract in September. Arsenal's ability to challenge for a top four place rests on Aubameyang leading the charge. So far this term he has been a flop. — AFP

Toko Ekambi at the double; Lyon thrash Monaco 4-1

PARIS: Lyon continued their revival with another first-half spree on their way to thrashing Monaco 4-1 in Ligue 1 on Sunday but earlier Lille faltered and blew a chance to retake top spot, drawing at Nice. Lyon ended the eighth round of the French league season with an decisive home victory as Karl Toko Ekambi struck twice for the second week in a row. "Toko Ekambi played a huge match," said Lyon coach Rudi Garcia. "Let's hope he keeps it up." Memphis Depay opened the scoring after a pass from Houssein Aouar in the 12th minute. Toko Ekambi converted a cross from Tino Kadewere at the second attempt in the 34th minute.

In the 41st minute, the Cameroon striker won a penalty that Aouar converted. Three minutes later, Toko Ekambi took advantage of a misunderstanding in the Monegasque defense to score. "We led 4-0 at half-time on our four shots on target," said Garcia. "In the first half, Anthony Lopes made at least two great saves that allowed us to reach the break in the lead." Monaco had dominated possession and their coach Niko Kovac agreed that the half-time score flattered Lyon. "It was a pretty



DECINES-CHARPIEU: Lyon's Dutch forward Memphis Depay (right) vies with Monaco's French defender Benoît Badiashile (left) during the French L1 football match between Olympique Lyonnais (OL) and AS Monaco on October 25, 2020. — AFP

incredible first half," said Kovac. "I have never experienced such a first half before."

Last week in Strasbourg, Lyon led by three goals after 42 minutes only to finish the game clinging to a 3-2 victory. Wissam Ben Yedder converted a Monaco penalty early in the second half but even though the visitors dominated possession, they could

not make the game close. "We had opportunities to put in a fifth goal but the main thing is to hold on to a good win," said Lopes. Lyon moved up to sixth and next week face Lille who are second on goal difference after drawing at Nice. Lille remain unbeaten after eight matches but trail reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain on goal difference. — AFP

Kulusevski rescues point for Juventus against Verona 1-1

MILAN: Dejan Kulusevski came off the bench to rescue a point as champions Juventus, playing without Cristiano Ronaldo, were held to a third Serie A stalemate at home against Hellas Verona on Sunday. Portuguese forward Ronaldo remains absent after testing positive for coronavirus with Juventus preparing for next week's Champions League tie against Barcelona in Turin. "We had a too wait-and-see first half, we weren't very aggressive with the midfielders but we had the most dangerous opportunities," said Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo.

Substitute Andrea Favilli put Verona ahead after an hour in Turin but Swedish forward Kulusevski rescued Pirlo with 13 minutes to go. "In the second half after the goal there was a good response, but we shouldn't need a slap in the face to wake us up. "When you play against Verona it's hard for everyone, but we could have done better." To add to Pirlo's problems before hosting

Barcelona, defender Leonardo Bonucci went off with a thigh problem. Veteran Giorgio Chiellini is already out.

"He had already felt something on Tuesday (against Dynamo Kiev), he felt something again today," said Pirlo. "We will evaluate it tomorrow, calmly." Juventus are fifth in Serie A, three points behind leaders AC Milan, who hosted Roma yesterday. The nine-time reigning champions have stalled under new coach Pirlo after winning their opener against Sampdoria, their only victory on the pitch in Serie A this season. They drew against promoted Crotone 1-1 and 2-2 at Roma. Between those matches they were awarded a 3-0 victory after Napoli refused to travel to Turin on October 4 because of coronavirus cases.

On Sunday, Ebrima Colley had a goal ruled offside after quarter of an hour for Verona with the hosts also denied an Alvaro Morata goal for a marginal offside. Favilli came on after 55 minutes and five minutes later had



TURIN: Verona's Italian goalkeeper Marco Silvestri (left) and Verona's Italian defender Davide Faraoni jump for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus vs Verona at the Allianz Stadium on October 25, 2020. — AFP

the visitors ahead finishing off a Mattia Zaccagnini cross. Morata missed another chance on 72 minutes. Paulo Dybala, making his return after three months, hit the crossbar five minutes later. Then Kulusevski beat Silvestri from an angle. The Verona goalkeeper pulled off two late saves to stop Dybala and Morata.

Napoli moved up to second place,

one point behind AC Milan, after a 2-1 win over promoted Benevento, a match in which brothers Lorenzo and Roberto Insigne scored for rival clubs. "I'm very happy, but sorry my first goal in Serie A was against my brother," said midfielder Roberto, 26, who opened the scoring after half an hour against his hometown club who he left two seasons ago for Benevento. — AFP

Berkane win CAF Confederation Cup

JOHANNESBURG: Defender Issoufou Dayo scored a rare goal to give Renaissance Berkane of Morocco a 1-0 win over Pyramids of Egypt in Sunday's CAF Confederation Cup final. Dayo only previous effort in the competition came more than a year ago at home to Ashanti Gold of Ghana in a round-of-32 second leg. The title decider was delayed five months because of the coronavirus pandemic. Beaten in the final of the secondary African club competition last season by Zamalek of Egypt, Berkane made no mistake at the second attempt and should have won more convincingly in Rabat.

The Moroccans created far more scoring chances than the Egyptians before surviving a tense finish when reduced to 10 men on 89 minutes after Bakr el Helali was shown a red-card. Burkina Faso international Dayo—the only non-Moroccan in the starting line-up—struck after 15 minutes at the Stade Moulay Abdallah in a match staged behind closed doors. A goalmouth scramble after a free-kick ended with the centre-back credited with the goal that proved the match-winner.

Berkane are the fifth Moroccan club after FAR Rabat, FUS Rabat, Moghreb Fes and Raja Casablanca to win the African equivalent of the Europa League. North African clubs have dominated the 17 editions of the Confederation Cup with Tunisian clubs also lifting the trophy five times, and Egyptian giants Al Ahly and Zamalek once each. Berkane will defend the trophy next season while Pyramids go into the CAF Champions League or Confederation Cup depending on whether they finish second or third in the Egyptian Premier League.

Pre-match surprise

Croatian coach Ante Cacic sprang a pre-match surprise by omitting Ghanaian forward John Antwi from the team that beat Horoya of Guinea in a semi-final last Tuesday. He preferred defender Abdallah Bakry, signalling a cautious approach that backfired during the opening half with the Cairo outfit lacking numbers on the rare occasions they attacked.

Berkane pressed Pyramids and 35-year-old forward Mouhssine Iajour was a constant threat with his pace. It took the Egyptians 25 minutes to worry Berkane when Mohamed Farouk fired narrowly wide from an Omar Gaber pass. Cacic changed his approach as the second half progressed, bringing on attackers Ibrahim Hassan and Antwi. Farouk once again came close to equalising.

Hamid Laachir wasted a chance to put Berkane further ahead on 72 minutes by blazing over from close range after a defensive mix-up. El Helali was sent off after a VAR (Video Assistant Referee) review for a reckless challenge on Omar Gaber, but Pyramids could not find the equaliser that would have taken the final to extra time. It was a disappointing end to the first African campaign of Pyramids, who are called the 'Manchester City' of Africa because the club has benefited from spending sprees by Saudi and Emirati owners. Renaissance are known as the Orange Boys as they are based in Berkane, the northeastern hub of citrus fruit production in Morocco. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

| UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE | | |
|--|------------------|-------|
| Lokomotiv Moscow v Bayern Munich | beIN Sports HD 1 | 20:55 |
| Shakhtar Donetsk v Inter Milano | beIN Sports HD 2 | 20:55 |
| Atletico de Madrid v Red Bull Salzburg | beIN Sports HD 3 | 23:00 |
| Borussia Monchengladbach v Real Madrid | beIN Sports HD 1 | 23:00 |
| Porto v Olympiacos Piraeus | beIN Sports HD 5 | 23:00 |
| Marseille v Manchester City | beIN Sports HD 6 | 23:00 |
| Liverpool v Midtjylland | beIN Sports HD 2 | 23:00 |
| Atalanta v Ajax | beIN Sports HD 4 | 23:00 |