

Sports

5 sent off as Marseille grab a rare win at PSG

Furious Neymar alleges racism; Marseille end long PSG curse

PARIS: Florian Thauvin snapped Marseille's 20-match winless run against Paris Saint-Germain as the Ligue 1 champions suffered another 1-0 defeat on Sunday and had Neymar sent off on his return from quarantine after contracting Covid-19. France winger Thauvin missed most of last season with an ankle injury but his close-range volley on 31 minutes at the Parc des Princes earned Marseille a first victory over their bitter rivals since November 2011.

PSG, who lost the Champions League final to Bayern Munich last month, have now lost their opening two games of a season without scoring for the first time since 1978/79 and the task for Thomas Tuchel's coronavirus-afflicted side does not get any easier this month. A frenzied schedule awaits, starting with the visit of Metz in midweek and a trip to Nice next Sunday, and Neymar now faces a suspension for a slap on Marseille defender Alvaro Gonzalez in an injury-time scuffle that resulted in five red cards.

The Brazilian appeared to accuse his opponent of racism as he followed Layvin Kurzawa and Leandro Paredes down the tunnel after he was sent off following a VAR review. Argentine striker Dario Benedetto and left-back Jordan Amavi were shown red cards for the visitors. Marseille are attempting to close the gap on PSG after coming a distant second last season and find themselves with an early six-point advantage over a club that has won the title seven of the past eight years.

After fielding a depleted line-up at Lens on Thursday, Tuchel was able to recall Neymar and Angel Di Maria for a match played in front of around 4,000 supporters in Paris. However, Kylian Mbappe remained absent after testing positive for Covid-19 on France duty at the start of the week with Mauro Icardi and Marquinhos also still missing.

PSG handed a debut to Italy international Alessandro Florenzi following his arrival on a season-long loan from Roma while Sergio Rico started in goal after rejoining on a long-term deal. Marseille keeper Steve Mandanda produced a magnificent reflex to keep out an effort from Marco Verratti just a minute in as tempers bubbled over frequently in the capital. Thauvin, who shone in Marseille's opening 3-2 win at Brest before the international break, made the breakthrough when he turned in a Dimitri Payet free-kick from point-blank range.

Di Maria found the net for PSG just past the hour but had strayed clearly behind the last defender, and Marseille's celebrations were cut short in similar fashion moments later when a Benedetto goal was ruled offside. The Argentine rifled in a rebound after Rico parried from Thauvin, who was controversially adjudged to be in an offside position much to the frustration of Marseille. PSG's last goal came in the 3-0 win over RB Leipzig in the Champions League semi-final on August 18, and Neymar poked wide from a Pablo Sarabia cross before the contest turned ugly at the finish. — AFP



PARIS: Marseille's French defender Jordan Amavi (right) and Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar jump for the ball during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Marseille (OM) on September 13, 2020. — AFP

Valencia fight back to win 6-goal thriller against Levante

MADRID: Valencia twice came from behind to beat local rivals Levante 4-2 on Sunday, a welcome boost to morale following a turbulent summer for the club. Manu Vallejo scored the decisive late goals in a goal-fest at Mestalla after Jose Luis Morales's double for Levante had been cancelled out by Gabriel Paulista and the excellent Maxi Gomez. The victory was Javi Gracia's first since being appointed Valencia coach in July and gets the team off to a positive start in La Liga, despite simmering tensions off the pitch.

Manuel Pellegrini also enjoyed a successful start in charge of Real Betis after they won 1-0 away at Alaves. But Unai Emery's first game as coach of Villarreal ended in a 1-1 draw at home to newly-promoted Huesca. Valencia would hope to be challenging the likes of Villarreal for a place in the top four this season but several key players have been sold, with unpopular owner Peter Lim determined to improve the club's financial situation.

Gracia said on Friday he felt "sad" because the squad had been "weakened", a brave move given the board's impatience with previous coaches. Yet this was a gutsy performance that Gracia could have been proud of, even if Valencia were behind after just 37 seconds, Morales weaving his way through four defenders before poking in. Gabriel pulled Valencia level when his header crept inside



VALENCIA: Levante's North Macedonian forward Enis Bardhi (right) challenges Valencia's Danish midfielder Daniel Wass during the Spanish league football match Valencia CF against Levante UD at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on September 13, 2020. — AFP

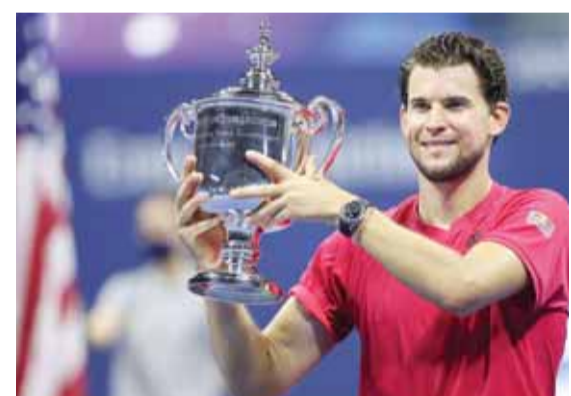
the near post from a corner but Levante scored again, Morales driving into the top corner after more sloppy Valencia defending.

But Valencia came back again, Maxi sliding a shot into the far corner and then Yunus Musah, the 17-year-old who left Arsenal's academy last year, clipped the crossbar with a shot in the second half.

Valencia looked more likely to snatch a third and Vallejo kept a cool head when it mattered, tucking a finish into the corner after a smart dummy by Maxi. There was time even for a fourth in injury-time as Maxi pulled clear on the break and when his shot cannoned back off the post, Vallejo was perfectly placed. — AFP

Thiem wins US Open for first Grand Slam title

NEW YORK: Dominic Thiem produced a historic comeback to beat Alexander Zverev in a nervy five-setter and win the US Open on Sunday for his first Grand Slam title. The second seeded Austrian beat the fifth seed 2-6, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) in 4hr 2min inside a near-empty Arthur Ashe Stadium. It marked the first time in the US Open's Open era history that a player had recovered from losing the opening two sets to win the title. It was also the first time the final had been settled by a tie-break. "I wish we could have two winners today. I think we both deserved it," said Thiem. The title is the 27-year-old Thiem's maiden Grand Slam trophy after three previous defeats in finals of tennis majors.



NEW YORK: Dominic Thiem of Austria celebrates with championship trophy after winning in a tie-breaker during his Men's Singles final match against Alexander Zverev of Germany on September 13, 2020. — AFP

serving for the championship at 5-3 in the fifth set. But he could not hold and soon Thiem found himself 6-5 ahead. He took a medical timeout before it was his turn to serve for the championship. However, like Zverev moments earlier, Thiem failed to clinch the match and it went to a tie-break. He found himself 5-3 up after two double faults by Zverev but Thiem, by now exhausted and limping, blew two championship points. He won the title and the winner's cheque of \$3 million on his third after Zverev hit a backhand wide. Thiem collapsed to the ground with his head in his hands before the pair, who are close friends, embraced on the court.

"It was a tough battle," said Zverev, who burst into tears during his runner-up speech. "I wish you would have missed a little bit more so I could have hold that trophy up," he added. Zverev said losing in a tie-break after being two sets and a break up "is not easy," but said his time would come. "I don't think it's my last chance. I do believe that I will be a Grand Slam champion at some point," he told reporters. The match was watched by just a few dozen people, mostly officials, journalists and event staff after the coronavirus pandemic forced the tournament to be held behind closed doors. It was a scrappy, timid affair, with both players desperate to win their first Slams. Zverev smashed 15 aces compared to Thiem's two. But the German also hit 15 double faults, with Thiem hitting eight. — AFP

Point-led Lightning sink Islanders for 3-1 series lead

LOS ANGELES: Ondrej Palat and Blake Coleman scored 12 seconds apart in the second period and the Tampa Bay Lightning put the New York Islanders on the brink of Stanley Cup playoff elimination with a 4-1 win on Sunday. Palat finished with a goal and an assist and Brayden Point returned from injury to score his ninth of the playoffs as the Lightning seized a commanding 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference finals. "We played a complete game. They had some pushes but we got a lot of pucks behind their defence and our forwards made the right plays," said Lightning forward Coleman.

Nikita Kucherov and Yanni Gourde both had two assists and Patrick Maroon scored into an empty net for the Lightning. Game five is today in the COVID-19 quarantine bubble in Edmonton, Canada. Point was injured in game two and missed game three of the series with an undisclosed injury but wasted no time getting back into playoff mode as he and Kucherov lead the team in scoring. Point has 25 points, including nine goals, in 16 playoff games and Kucherov has 19 assists and 25 points in 17 games.

"He's the most dangerous guy in the playoffs this year," said Coleman of Point. Point scored 3:33 into the third from in close to break game four open for Tampa, giving the Lightning a 3-1 lead. Palat did all the heavy lifting on the goal, deftly kicking the puck to Kucherov in the centre zone then getting the it back and passing cross ice to Point, who was left wide open in front of the goal after Isles forward Mathew Barzal skated past. Point had plenty of time to take two chops at the puck and beat Islanders goaltender Semyon Varlamov.

Brock Nelson opened the scoring for the Islanders at 11:27 of the second period to make it 1-0, setting off a quick succession of goals by both teams. Just 15 seconds later, Coleman broke loose and scored on a breakaway to tie it. Palat then finished off a beautiful three-man passing play at 11:54 of the second. — AFP

Nuggets rally past Clippers to level NBA playoff series

MIAMI: Denver's Nikola Jokic had game highs of 34 points, 14 rebounds and seven assists Sunday, powering the Nuggets over the Los Angeles Clippers 111-98 to level their NBA playoff series. The Nuggets, who also had 21 points from Jamal Murray and Gary Harris, recovered from a 19-point deficit in the third quarter to match the Clippers at 3-3 in the Western Conference semi-final, setting up a winner-take-all game seven today.

"We don't have pressure," Jokic said. "All the pressure is on them. We have to play at a high level and give our best. To us it's just another game seven. We're going to go out there and play." It's the fourth consecutive playoff series over two seasons in which the Nuggets have faced a seventh game. They are 5-0 in elimination games and have rallied from 16-point or worse deficits in the past three such games. "The effort was amazing," Jokic said. "We were down 16 last time, down 16 to Utah - we don't want it but maybe we like it. We're good at it."

"The whole team played well. It was an amazing game for us." The 25-year-old 7-foot (2.13m) Serbian center hit 13-of-22 shots, 4-of-6 from 3-point range and 4-of-5 from the free throw line. "I think it's defense," Jokic said. "When we get a couple stops, we are flying and the ball is moving. When we start running the offense, we're a really good team." The Clippers, who have squandered a 3-1 series edge, have never reached a conference final in their 50-year history. They missed 10 shots in a row in the third period during a 17-0 Nuggets run.

"They came down and scored or got fouled in the third quarter and we couldn't buy a basket," Clippers star Kawhi Leonard said. "We've just got to leave it all out on the floor, communicate and play hard on the defensive end." Paul George scored 33 points and Leonard, last year's NBA Finals Most Valuable Player for Toronto, added 25 to lead the Clippers, who were outscored 64-35 in the second half. "It was beautiful playing," Clippers coach Doc Rivers said. "Then we stopped moving the ball, stopped playing. That's what let them get back in the game. We clearly have the right formula. We just lost it. We lost our pace."

The Nuggets became the first team since the 1970 Los Angeles Lakers to force multiple game sevens in the same playoff run. No team has ever recovered from a 3-1 deficit twice in the same playoff run but the Nuggets could be the first. "I'm running out of superlatives to say about our team. I love our team. I love our toughness," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "We were down 16 at half. We weren't down on ourselves. We knew what we were going to have to go through. The question was how are we going to get out of it. "One of the best third quarters I can ever remember in my five years."

Malone has no idea what gives his team the ability to climb out of deep deficits. "I think it's an inner belief, a confidence. We believe we have what it takes to win a championship," said Malone. "We have a tremendous belief and confidence in who we are, how we play and what our talent level is. We're enjoying this. We're embracing this. "But we have a lot of work to do." Tuesday will also see Miami and Boston meet in the Eastern Conference final opener. All games are being played without spectators in a coronavirus quarantine bubble at Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Torrey Craig's 3-pointer a minute into the fourth quarter gave the Nuggets an 82-79 lead, their first edge since 8-7 in the first quarter. — AFP

'Tough battle'

After Thiem took set four, Zverev found himself