Five-star Man Utd thrash Leeds

Dream start for Chelsea • Liverpool too good for Norwich on Van Dijk's return

LONDON: Manchester United enjoyed a dream start to the Premier League season as Bruno Fernandes scored a hat-trick in a 5-1 thrashing of Leeds in front of 73,000 at Old Trafford, while Chelsea and Liverpool also got their campaigns off to a winning start yesterday. Over 300,000 fans are expected to attend the opening weekend of the season with full crowds restored following the easing of coronavirus restrictions in England.

United were inspired by a raucous atmosphere as Fernandes and Paul Pogba combined to blow away Marcelo Bielsa's men. Fernandes walked away with the match ball, but Pogba was just as impressive as the Frenchman produced four assists for the Portuguese's first two goals and second-half strikes from Mason Greenwood and Fred.

"When you run down that end and you score four goals like we did second half, it's just the best feeling in the world," said United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. "To be reunited with the fans again is important. This is the real Man United." Luke Ayling's stunning strike early in the second-half briefly brought Leeds level, but it was another Old Trafford trip to forget for them after also being thrashed 6-2 last season.

Chelsea cruise

After seeing United display their title credentials, European champions Chelsea dispatched Crystal Palace 3-0 in Patrick Vieira's first match in charge of the Eagles with ease to make their own case. Marcos Alonso's free-kick and Christian Pulisic's scuffed finish gave Thomas Tuchel's men a commanding 2-0 lead before half-time.

Centre-back Trevoh Chalobah then marked his Premier League debut with a long-range strike to round off the scoring. "We have to hunt the others from day one," said Tuchel. "This is what we want to do, this is our mentality and we are never shy to fight for the best outcome possible but the reality is we are not the favourites right now."

Van Dijk makes winning return

Liverpool were also 3-0 winners away to promoted Norwich thanks to goals from Diogo Jota, Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah. Virgil van Dijk was restored to the Reds defense for the first time since his cruciate knee ligament injury derailed Liverpool's title defense last October.

The Dutchman looked like his old self as he strolled through the 90 minutes and Jurgen Klopp's men needed just a few moments of attacking inspiration to see off the Canaries. Jota pounced to fire through the legs of Tim Krul on 26 minutes before making way for Firmino on the hour mark. The Brazilian took just five minutes to double Liverpool's lead from Salah's unselfish cross before the Egyptian blasted home to score on the opening day for the fifth consecutive season.
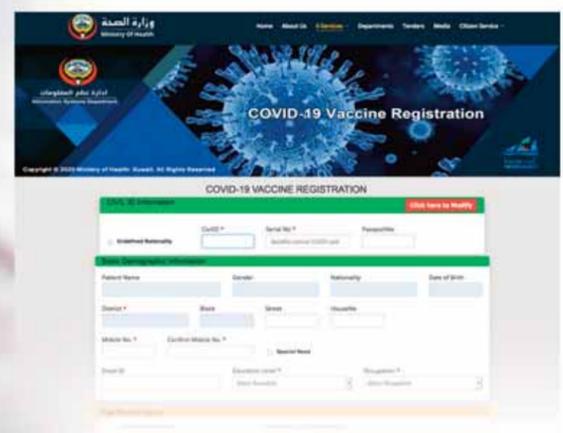
Elsewhere, Rafael Benitez went a long way to quieting his doubters at Everton as the Toffees came from behind to beat Southampton 3-1. Adam Armstrong's opener on his debut for the Saints saw Benitez's men booed off at half-time at Goodison Park with many of the home fans still unhappy at the appointment of the former Liverpool manager.

But the mood was lifted straight after half-time by Richarlison's equalizer before Abdoulaye Doucoure and Dominic Calvert-Lewin ensured Benitez got off to a winning start. Leicester also secured all three points as Jamie Vardy's deft flick proved the difference in a 1-0 win over Wolves. Life for Aston Villa without Jack Grealish got off to a terrible start as Watford celebrated their return to the top flight with a 3-2 win at Vicarage Road.

Goals from Emmanuel Dennis, Ismaila Sarr and Cucho Hernandez had the Hornets cruising towards victory. John McGinn pulled a goal back and Danny Ings netted from the penalty spot on his debut, but it was too little, too late for Villa. Brighton bounced back from conceding inside two minutes at Burnley to win 2-1 at Turf Moor thanks to second-half goals from Neal Maupay and Alexis MacAllister. — AFP

NORWICH: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (left) and Norwich City's English midfielder Todd Cantwell (right) vie for the ball during an English Premier League football match at Carrow Road yesterday. — AFP