



MANCHESTER: In this file photo taken on March 28, 2019 Manchester United's Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is seen during a photo call at Old Trafford in Manchester, northwest England, after it was announced that he was appointed as the club's full-time manager on a three-year contract. — AFP

Man Utd finally end Solskjaer experiment

Carrick takes over while club look to appoint interim manager

MANCHESTER: Manchester United ended Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's three-year reign as manager at Old Trafford yesterday, but plan to wait until the end of the season to name the Norwegian's permanent successor.

Saturday's 4-1 embarrassment at the hands of struggling Watford was the final straw for the United board, who had stuck by Solskjaer in recent weeks despite humiliating home defeats to Liverpool and Manchester City. Former midfielder Michael Carrick, who was part of Solskjaer's coaching team, will take charge of the forthcoming games while the club look to appoint an interim manager till the end of the season.

"Manchester United announces that Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has left his role as Manager," the club said in a statement. "Ole will always be a legend at Manchester United and it is with regret that we have reached this difficult decision. While the past few weeks have been disappointing, they should not obscure all the work he has done over the past three years to rebuild the foundations for long-term success."

Solskjaer leaves with United already realistically

out of the Premier League title race, 12 points behind leaders Chelsea down in seventh in the table, and having exited the League Cup. Carrick's first game in charge will be a crucial Champions League trip to Villarreal tomorrow. Another defeat in Spain would leave the Red Devils needing both results in the final round of matches in Group F to go their way to avoid crashing out at the group stage for a second consecutive season.

"Ole couldn't get a performance out of them in the end. The players look drained of confidence and I'm not surprised today," said Gary Neville, former United captain and teammate of Solskjaer. "They need to get the next appointment right and that'll probably be at the end of the season. They haven't planned for this, they haven't prepared for it. It's deteriorated so badly and so quickly."



Zidane top replacement candidate

'Nightmare'
A run of five defeats in Solskjaer's final seven league games contrasts sharply with the anticipation that surrounded the club in August when Cristiano Ronaldo made a surprise return to Old Trafford in the final days of the transfer window.

United handed Solskjaer a new three-year contract in July and also spent over £100 million (\$134 million) on Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane as they looked to build on finishing second in the league to Manchester City last season. However, Solskjaer was unable to assemble the pieces of his star-studded squad into a collective unit despite Ronaldo's return of nine goals in 14 games.

"We don't know what to do with the ball, we don't know how to defend properly and we're conceding a lot of goals," said United goalkeeper David de Gea, whose double penalty save from Watford's

Ismaila Sarr counted for nothing. "It's not acceptable for this club and the level of players that we have. It's another nightmare."

Solskjaer had ridden out storms before in a rollercoaster but ultimately trophyless three years. However, even his credit as a club legend for scoring the winning goal in the 1999 Champions League final to win a historic treble for Alex Ferguson's side was fading as he was booed by the travelling support at Vicarage Road. "You signed me for the best club in the world and gave me the biggest honor in football," tweeted United captain Harry Maguire. "Thank you for everything boss. Legend."

Zinedine Zidane, who won three Champions League titles with Ronaldo and Varane at Real Madrid, is the bookmakers' favourite to succeed Solskjaer, with Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers and Ajax boss Erik ten Hag also in contention.

But the decision to wait until the summer to make a permanent appointment could open up a wider pool of potential candidates, including Paris Saint-Germain boss Mauricio Pochettino, who has previously been linked with the job. — AFP

Hamilton wins Qatar Grand Prix to cut Verstappen's lead

DOHA: Lewis Hamilton won yesterday's inaugural Qatar Grand Prix with a commanding performance from pole to cut Max Verstappen's world championship lead to eight points. The Mercedes seven-time champion comfortably held off his arch Dutch rival's Red Bull under the Losail circuit's lights to leave the battle for the F1 drivers' crown delicately poised with only two races remaining. Fernando Alonso took third for Alpine, the former two-time world champion's first podium since 2014.

One week on from arguably his toughest and greatest win in Brazil, Hamilton enjoyed one of his easiest. And after an unprecedented eighth world title appeared to be slipping from his grasp after Verstappen's wins in the USA and Mexico, it is the 36-year-old Briton rather than the 12-year-younger pretender who has the momentum.

"We needed those points today. I can't wait to watch the race

replay to find out what happened behind me," he said after his 102nd career win. "I'm really grateful for these points, it's been a hell of a year. Back-to-back wins here, feel good, I feel fit, fitter than I've ever felt. Bring on the next two!"

Verstappen, who was demoted from second to seventh on the grid for a yellow flag infringement in qualifying on Saturday, took second, and picked up a point for the fastest lap. "Our starting position was compromised, but luckily we had a really good start," he said. "Of course, I know it's going to be difficult to the end but it keeps it nice, keeps it exciting. This track was fun to drive as well. I feel good, but it's going to be a tight battle to the end."

Hamilton's faster engine, fitted last weekend in Sao Paulo, will give Red Bull a likely tough time again at the ultra-quick new circuit in Saudi Arabia in a fortnight's time ahead of the season-closing race in Abu Dhabi in mid-December. — AFP

Man City sweep aside Everton to close on Chelsea

MANCHESTER: Raheem Sterling, Rodri and Bernardo Silva got the goals as Manchester City cruised to a 3-0 win over Everton to move within three points of Premier League leaders Chelsea. With the focus of the football world on events across Manchester yesterday as United sacked manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, City made light work of seeing off an Everton side still decimated by injuries to key players.

Pep Guardiola was also without Kevin De Bruyne after the Belgian tested positive for coronavirus and the injured Jack Grealish, but still had far too much in reserve for the Toffees. Sterling was denied a penalty midway through the first half by a VAR review after referee Stuart Attwell initially pointed to the spot for a trip by Michael Keane.

The England international did not have to wait long to net on his 300th Premier League appearance as he turned home Joao Cancelo's sensational pass with the outside of his right foot for his 98th goal in the English top flight.

Without the presence of Dominic Calvert-Lewin up front, Everton rarely



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's midfielder Riyad Mahrez takes a freekick during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Everton at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England yesterday. — AFP

threatened. Rafael Benitez's men have now taken just two points from the last 18 on offer in the Premier League to drop into the bottom half of the table and just six points clear of the relegation zone.

Rodri's stunning long-range drive into the top corner 10 minutes after the break ended the game as a contest. City were then content to cruise for the final half-hour with one eye on Wednesday's

Champions League clash with Paris Saint-Germain.

Sterling should have slotted home his second of the afternoon from Riyad Mahrez's inviting cross, but was instead denied by international teammate Jordan Pickford as he tried to round the goalkeeper. City did get a deserved third five minutes from time when Silva followed up after Cole Palmer's shot was blocked. — AFP