

Sports

Forest stun holders Leicester as Liverpool see off Cardiff 3-1

'Incredible' non-league Boreham Wood stun Bournemouth in FA Cup

LIVERPOOL: Nottingham Forest knocked holders Leicester out of the FA Cup as the Championship side powered to a shock 4-1 win, while Liverpool eased into the fifth round with a 3-1 victory against Cardiff on Sunday. Leicester's disappointing season hit a new low with the dismal fourth round loss against their midlands rivals at the City Ground.

Last season's Wembley triumph against Chelsea was Leicester's first ever FA Cup final victory, but that seemed a distant memory as their trophy defense ended with a whimper. Bottom of the second tier when Steve Cooper took charge in September, Forest have been revitalized by the former Swansea boss and they destroyed Leicester with three goals in nine first half minutes. Forest will face fellow Championship side Huddersfield in only their second appearance in the FA Cup fifth round in 17 years.

Having climbed to eighth place in the Championship, Forest are also chasing a return to the Premier League for the first time since 1999. It is still some way from the glory days of Brian Clough, who led Forest to the English title in 1978 and two European Cups in 1979 and 1980. But Cooper's men have provided their long-suffering fanbase with hope that a return to relevance could be on the cards in the near future for one of English football's sleeping giants.

In the first derby between the clubs for eight years, Forest took the lead in the 23rd minute when Brennan Johnson's cross was nodded down by Keinan Davis and poked home by Philip Zinckernagel. Just 24 seconds later, the sell-out crowd erupted again as Leicester shot themselves in the foot. Daniel Amartey's woeful backpass towards Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel was intercepted by Johnson, who took a touch before clipping his shot through the Dane's legs.

The goal prompted one angry Leicester supporter to invade the pitch and confront several Forest players in an ugly incident that saw punches thrown before he was led away. All the problems that have bedevilled Leicester this season were being exposed by Forest and it was their set-pieces woes that the hosts punished next. In the 32nd minute, James Garner swung over a corner and Joe Worrall took advantage of Leicester's slack marking to head past Schmeichel.



MILAN: AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud (center) and Spezia's Italian goalkeeper Ivan Provedel (right) go for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Spezia on January 17, 2022.—AFP

Elliott 'fairytale'

Forest keeper Brice Samba gifted Leicester a goal in the 40th minute, needlessly rushing out of his area as Kelechi Iheanacho danced past him and shot into the empty net from an acute angle. But Djed Spence quashed any hopes of an unlikely Leicester revival when he exchanged passes with Zinckernagel before delivering a clinical finish in the 61st minute.

Jurgen Klopp labelled Harvey Elliott's goalscoring return in Liverpool's win over Cardiff as a "fairytale" after five months out with a serious ankle injury. Elliott was introduced off the bench alongside new signing Luis Diaz after Diogo Jota's header had opened the scoring early in the second half. Diaz made an instant impact by teeing up Takumi Minamoto to double Liverpool's lead. But the biggest cheer was reserved for Elliott when he fired home on the volley 14 minutes from time.

There were fears Elliott could be out for at least the rest of the season when he suffered a dislocated ankle against Leeds. "Coming on was a great step back but

scoring this goal was a proper fairytale," said Klopp. "Harvey was unlucky with the injury but lucky with the whole process afterwards. Everything went really well. He did an incredible job, the medical department did an incredible job. He is a fearless boy and a great footballer." Rubin Colwill pulled a goal back for the Bluebirds, but it is Liverpool who will meet Norwich at Anfield in the last 16.

Boreham Wood boss Luke Garrard hailed his "incredible" non-league minnows after they shocked Championship side Bournemouth with a 1-0 win in the FA Cup fourth round on Sunday. Mark Ricketts' first half goal at Dean Court sent Boreham Wood into the fifth round for the first time as they demonstrated the FA Cup's renowned knack for producing stunning upsets. Boreham Wood, currently in fifth place in the fifth tier National League, are the lowest ranked team left in the competition. But Bournemouth, third in the Championship, paid the price for a lethargic display that suggested they were prioritising their push for promotion back to the Premier League.—AFP



VENICE: Napoli's Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen (left) fights for the ball with Unione Venezia's Italian defender Mattia Caldara during the Italian Serie A football match between Venezia and Napoli on February 06, 2022.—AFP

Osimhen fires Napoli into heart of 3-way Serie A title tussle

MILAN: Victor Osimhen scored on his first Napoli start since November to help his team to a 2-0 win at Venezia on Sunday which moves them one point behind Serie A leaders Inter Milan. Nigeria striker Osimhen had made two brief substitute appearances since fracturing bones in his face in a sickening head clash at Inter, and rewarded coach Luciano Spalletti's decision to pick him by leaping to head Napoli ahead just before the hour mark at the Stadio Pier Luigi Penzo.

Andrea Petagna sealed the points in the 100th minute of a match extended due a clash of heads between the referee and Venezia's Tyrone Ebuehi, as well as that same player's late red card for a dreadful foul on Dries Mertens. "I prepared well for this game, had a good week and was ready to kick on from the first minute," Osimhen told DAZN. "And of course to start with a goal, I'm really happy about this performance from the whole squad."

Wearing a special face mask he described as a "good look for me", Osimhen's sixth Serie A goal of the season—his first since mid-October-fired Napoli right back into a three-way league title tussle. Napoli are second, level on 52 points with AC Milan who broke open the race for the Scudetto as Olivier Giroud's derby double saw off Inter on Saturday.

Like Milan, Napoli have played a game more than Inter but they host the champions next weekend before travelling to Barcelona for the first leg of their Europa League play-off with the Catalan giants. "We have a lot of objectives this season and the Scudetto is one of them, so step by step and with determination I think we'll get there," added Osimhen. Osimhen could have had another as he

struck the post in the first half but Napoli had to battle their way past Venezia, who are in the relegation zone following defeat and Cagliari's 2-1 win at 10-man Atalanta earlier on Sunday.

Pereiro lifts Cagliari

Gaston Pereiro earned Walter Mazzarri's Cagliari their third win in five league matches to move them up to 17th, two points ahead of Venezia. The 26-year-old gave Cagliari a surprise lead four minutes after half-time in Bergamo, and was crucial to Atalanta going a man down when he was brought down by onrushing goalkeeper Juan Musso just moments later.

Fourth-placed Atalanta, who will drop out of the Champions League positions if Juventus beat Verona on Sunday night, pulled level through Jose Luis Palomino in the 64th minute. However the hopeful home fans were silenced again four minutes later when Pereiro rolled home the winner from Raoul Bellanova's low cross. "We played badly, and never really troubled Cagliari," said Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini.

"We need to get our heads back and focus on being a team, because that performance was not good enough." Atalanta have a game in hand but also have a fight on their hands to keep Champions League football after previously looking like title contenders. They host Juve next weekend and will have to do without Duvan Zapata for that match and their Italian Cup tie with Fiorentina, with the Colombia forward pulling up just 14 minutes after coming off the bench for his first appearance of 2022.

Sampdoria took advantage of 18th-placed Venezia's defeat by thumping Sassuolo 4-0 and going five points clear of the bottom three. Marco Giampaolo's Samp won thanks to two stunning volleys from Francesco Caputo and Andrea Conti, a goal from Stefano Sensi on his debut after arriving on loan from Inter and Antonio Candreva's late penalty. Bologna and Empoli played out a goalless draw in the afternoon's other match.—AFP

Messi, Mbappe on target as PSG thrash sorry Lille

PARIS: Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe both scored as Paris Saint-Germain stretched their mammoth lead at the top of Ligue 1 to 13 points with a 5-1 thrashing of defending champions Lille on Sunday. Mauricio Pochettino's men were given a helping hand by a nightmarish display from Lille goalkeeper Ivo Grbic at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy. Portuguese midfielder Danilo Pereira netted twice, while Presnel Kimpembe also got on the scoresheet.

All eyes in the capital remain on Paris' Champions League last-16 first leg against Real Madrid on February 15. Mbappe, who has long been linked with Real, said that match has been the reason he is yet to make a decision about his future, despite having been free to sign a pre-contract agreement with another club since the start of last month. "Playing against Real Madrid changes a lot of things," the World Cup winner told Amazon Prime.

"Even if I'm free to do what I want, I'm not going to talk to the opponents. I'm focused on winning against Real Madrid and we'll see what happens afterwards." This game, though, was the perfect response for PSG after their French Cup exit on penalties at the hands of Nice in midweek. Lille are languishing down in 11th place after a seventh defeat of their title defense. The hosts needed to get something from the game to move into the top half of the table, but they made a calamitous start.

Grbic somehow failed to gather in Nuno Mendes' low cross despite being under no pressure, and Danilo duly stabbed into an empty net to give PSG a 10th-minute lead. Hatem Ben Arfa, making his first start since last April after his surprise move to Lille, set up Sven Botman to equalise before the half-hour mark. But PSG were back in front in the 32nd minute as Grbic totally missed Messi's corner and Kimpembe bundled home from close range.

Messi grabbed his first goal of 2022 in slightly fortuitous circumstances, as a clearance ricocheted off his shins and played him in on goal. Grbic rushed out to close the angle, but the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner coolly dinked the ball into the net to score his second Ligue 1 goal. "I have never had any doubts about Messi," said PSG coach Pochettino. "He's the best player in the world.—AFP



NORD: Lille's defender Zeki Celik jumps over Paris Saint-Germain's Italian midfielder Marco Verratti after scoring a goal during the French L1 football match between Lille and Paris Saint-Germain on February 6, 2022.—AFP

News in brief

Vlasov wins Tour of Valencia

VALENCIA: Russian climb specialist Aleksandr Vlasov won the Tour of Valencia five-day stage race on Sunday as Dutch sprinter Fabio Jakobsen edged the dash to the line in downtown Valencia. The 25-year-old Vlasov took the lead with a solo break on stage three's gravelly summit finish, and held on over the two final flat stages at the weekend. Vlasov won by 32 seconds from the great Belgian hope Remco Evenepoel of Quick-Step, while 21-year-old Spaniard Carlos Rodriguez of Ineos was another four seconds back in third. In only his second race for German outfit Bora since leaving Astana, this was Vlasov's first ever multi-day race win. "We've had a perfect five days here. We've worked very well together as a team," Vlasov said.—AFP

Chelsea face Al Hilal in semis

ABU DHABI: Chelsea will face Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia in the Club World Cup semi-finals after the Asian Champions League winners came from behind to rout Al Jazira 6-1 on Sunday. Abdoulay Diaby struck first for UAE Pro League champions Al Jazira, but Al Hilal responded with two goals before half-time from former Manchester United striker Odion Ighalo and Matheus Pereira. Mohamed Kanno headed in a corner to increase Al Hilal's lead on 57 minutes and Salem Al Dawsari added a fourth with a composed finish at Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium. Moussa Marega and Andre Carrillo completed a thumping win with late goals for Leonardo Jardim's side, the record four-time Asian champions and 17-time Saudi league winners.—AFP

Bublik captures maiden ATP title

PARIS: Alexander Bublik stunned top seed and Olympic champion Alexander Zverev to win his maiden ATP title in Montpellier on Sunday. The 24-year-old Russian-born Kazakh triumphed over the world number three from Germany, 6-4, 6-3. Bublik's win will also assure him a new career-high ranking on Monday from his current 35. Before Sunday, the eccentric Bublik had lost all four of his previous ATP finals in Newport and Chengdu in 2019, and Singapore and Antalya last year. He now heads for the Rotterdam tournament next week where he has a first-round clash against former world number one and three-time major champion Andy Murray. "I had four finals and the fifth final I have won against a great player like 'Sascha'," said Bublik who had also defeated Zverev in Rotterdam last year. "It's great. All my game together.—AFP



MONTPELLIER: Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik poses with his trophy after winning the final over German's Alexander Zverev on February 6, 2022.—AFP

Real sneak past Granada

MADRID: Jordi Alba scored an extraordinary volley and Dani Alves was sent off as Barcelona delivered a major boost to their hopes of finishing in La Liga's top four on Sunday by winning a six-goal thriller against Atletico Madrid 4-2. Real Madrid then capitalized on Sevilla's goalless draw with Osasuna on Saturday by edging past Granada 1-0 to extend their lead at the top of the table to a daunting six points. In the absence of the injured Karim Benzema, Marco Asensio finally broke Granada's resistance in the 74th minute at the Santiago Bernabeu. Barcelona were more emphatic as they scored four in 40 minutes at Camp Nou before surviving a late fightback from Atletico after Luis Suarez headed in and Alves saw red with 20 minutes left. A statement victory returns Xavi Hernandez's side into the top four for the first time since September, with Atletico now two points behind in fifth. "The team, the fans and the club in general needed a win like this," said Xavi.—AFP

Villiere hat-trick lifts France

PARIS: France team manager Raphael Ibanez said Gabin Villiere was a "warrior" after the winger scored three times as the Six Nations contenders beat Italy 37-10 in Paris on Sunday to move top of the table. Player of the match Villiere, who featured in the French third-tier just four years ago, took his tally to six tries in nine matches for France, who go above Ireland on points difference after the opening weekend. "Gabin's performance was exceptional. He's a finisher, he showed that," Ibanez told reporters. "What is quite characteristic in him is his warrior state of mind which is an example to his team-mates," he added. Italy lost for a record-extending 33rd consecutive time in the tournament despite leading early in the first half thanks to debutant Tommaso Menoncello's effort. "I'm not satisfied with the end result," said Italy head coach Kieran Crowley.—AFP