



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's Paraguayan midfielder Miguel Almiron controls the ball past Liverpool's Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson Becker and scores, but the goal was cancelled due to an offside position, during their English Premier League match at St James' Park on April 30, 2022. —AFP

Keita takes Liverpool top with win

NEWCASTLE: Liverpool forged back ahead of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League as Naby Keita's solitary goal beat Newcastle 1-0 at St. James' Park. With the game sandwiched between two legs of a Champions League semi-final against Villarreal, Jurgen Klopp made five changes.

The Reds could have made life easier for themselves had Sadio Mane and Diogo Jota not missed big chances to extend Liverpool's lead. However, Keita's controversial goal on 19 minutes was enough to move two points ahead of City, who can retake top spot when they travel to Leeds later on Saturday.

Any slip by Pep Guardiola's men and an unprecedented quadruple of Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup would be just seven games away for the Reds. Klopp gave Liverpool fans even more cause for celebration by extending his contract at Anfield by two years to 2026 on Thursday.

The German was brave with his team selection as he left Mohammed Salah, Thiago Alcantara, Fabinho and Trent Alexander-Arnold on the bench from the side that beat Villarreal 2-0 on Wednesday to put one foot in the Champions League final.

Only Klopp's men have won more Premier League points in 2022 than Newcastle since the Magpies were able to begin splashing the cash of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund. Eddie Howe's men had won their last six home games, but Liverpool showed their strength in depth as even a much-changed team controlled the game.

Three of those brought back into the team had a major role to play in the only goal as James Milner snapped into a tackle on Fabian Schar. Newcastle were furious no free-kick was given, but as Liverpool played on, Jota found Keita, who kept his cool to round Martin Dubravka and fire into the unguarded net.

Dubravka went on to keep Newcastle in the game as

the visitors should have avoided a nervy finale. Mane fired straight at the Slovakian from Luis Diaz's unselfish pass before Dubravka tipped over Jota's towering header. The Senegalese then side-footed wide a glorious chance from Joe Gomez's cross after the break much to Klopp's dismay.

The German used his considerable quality off the bench sending on Salah, Fabinho and Thiago were introduced in the final quarter in a bid to seal the points. Chances continued to come and go as Dubravka twice repelled powerful efforts from Jota and flew off his line to smother from Salah.

On the only occasions Newcastle threatened, the offside flag would have come to Liverpool's rescue in any case. Miguel Almiron had strayed well beyond the last defender when he found the net in the first-half, while Chris Wood was also offside when he failed to beat Alisson Becker one-on-one. —AFP

23.5 million tickets sought in latest World Cup sale

DOHA: FIFA said Friday that 23.5 million World Cup tickets were requested in the latest round of sales for the tournament that starts in Qatar in less than seven months. Applications from Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Mexico, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United States dominated, the world body said highlighting the "enormous demand".

The most popular games are the final on Dec 18 alongside some of the group games which are already known: Argentina v Mexico, Argentina v Saudi Arabia, England v United States and Poland v Argentina, FIFA said in a statement. For matches where demand exceeds the number of tickets available, the requests will go into a random lottery. All the successful applicants will be told from May 31. Any remaining tickets will then go on general sale on a first-come first-served basis. Ticket prices are on average about 30 percent higher than for the Russia World Cup in 2018. The cheapest tickets are for Qataris and the army of migrant workers in the state who will pay as little as \$10 to watch a first round group match. But for the final, the most expensive tickets cost more than \$1,600 - a 45 percent hike on 2018. Some 804,186 tickets were snapped up in the first round of sales in January-February.

Demand in this 23-day window for applications was higher, as it followed the World Cup draw on April 1 which revealed when and where each team will play. About two million tickets are available to the general public, with 1.2 million others going to sponsors and other backers. The first match between Senegal and Netherlands is on Nov 21 and the final on Dec 18 at the 80,000 capacity Lusail stadium.

Qatar is predicting that up to 1.4 million people will visit the wealthy Gulf state for the first World Cup in an Arab country. Qatar has spent billions of dollars building seven new stadiums and refurbishing an eighth for the tournament. FIFA president Gianni Infantino has promised it will be the "best-ever" World Cup and the global body is looking to the healthy ticket sales to back its case.

Qatari organizers have highlighted progress on rights since the World Cup was awarded in 2010, and said critics were trying to undermine the Arab region's right to hold the event. Organizers have said special measures will be arranged for drinking in fan zones and other designated areas, and that leniency will be applied on social laws. They insist all fans will be "welcomed" at the World Cup. —AFP

Boris Becker jailed in Britain over bankruptcy

LONDON: Former tennis star Boris Becker was on Friday jailed for two and a half years after being found guilty by a British court of charges relating to his 2017 bankruptcy. The six-time Grand Slam champion, 54, will serve half of the term having been convicted at Southwark Crown Court in London over his transfer of huge amounts of money from his business account.

He also failed to declare a property in Germany and concealed €825,000 (\$866,500) of debt and shares in a tech firm. He was acquitted earlier this month of a further 20 charges, including nine counts of failing to hand over trophies and medals he won during his glittering tennis career. Becker told jurors he did not know the whereabouts of the memorabilia, including two of his three Wimbledon men's singles trophies. Judge Deborah Taylor had released Becker - who won Wimbledon as an unseeded teenager - on conditional bail ahead of her sentencing decision on Friday. Passing sentence, she told him: "You have not shown remorse, acceptance of your guilt and have sought to distance yourself from your offending and your bankruptcy. "While I accept your humiliation as part of the proceedings, there has been no humility."

Taylor said Becker's previous conviction in Germany for tax offences was "a significant aggravating factor". Becker arrived early for the hearing, wearing a striped purple and green tie in the

Wimbledon colors, a white shirt and a charcoal grey suit. He held hands with his partner Lilian de Carvalho Monteiro as he walked into court past a bank of waiting reporters and cameras.

The star showed no emotion as he was sentenced, picking up his bag before being taken down to the cells. There was no immediate word that Becker would appeal and he will lodge any legal challenge from behind bars. US women's tennis great Chris Evert responded to Becker's imprisonment by tweeting: "Sorry to hear about @TheBorisBecker... fun to work with on @eurosport and always a gentleman."

'Vast amount'

Former world number one Becker told the jury how his \$50 million (£40 million) career earnings were swallowed up by a costly divorce from his first wife Barbara Becker, child maintenance payments and "expensive lifestyle commitments". Becker said he was "shocked" and "embarrassed" when he was declared bankrupt in June 2017 over an unpaid loan of more than £3 million on his estate in Mallorca, Spain.

The German, who has lived in Britain since 2012, said he had cooperated with trustees trying to secure his assets, even offering his wedding ring, and relied on the advisers who managed his life away from tennis. But the former player, who was supported in court by his partner and eldest son Noah, was found guilty of four charges.

Giving evidence, Becker said he earned a "vast amount" of money during his career, paying cash for several properties. But the German, who went on to coach current world number one tennis player Novak Djokovic, work as a TV sports commentator and act as a brand ambassador for firms including Puma, said

his income "reduced dramatically" following his retirement in 1999.

Commitments

Becker, who was resident in Monte Carlo and Switzerland before moving to the UK, said his financial commitments included his £22,000-a-month rented house in Wimbledon, southwest London. He also owed the Swiss authorities five million francs (about \$5.1 million) and separately just under one million euros in liabilities over a conviction for tax evasion and attempted tax evasion in Germany in 2002. He said bad publicity had damaged "brand Becker", meaning he struggled to make enough money to pay off his debts. His lawyer Jonathan Laidlaw said at the time of his bankruptcy that Becker was too "trusting and reliant" on his advisers. Becker, with a shock of strawberry-blond hair, shook up the tennis world in 1985 when he became Wimbledon's youngest men's singles champion at 17 and repeated the feat the following year.

Nicknamed "Boom Boom" Becker for his ferocious serve, he won Wimbledon for a third time in 1989. He also won the Australian Open twice and the US Open during his glittering career, becoming the top-ranked player in the world in 1991. Becker turned to commentary after his retirement, landing a high-profile role on the BBC, but he returned to the court in 2013 to guide Djokovic, helping the Serb win six more Grand Slam trophies before the pair parted ways in 2016. —AFP



Boris Becker

Top seed Yamaguchi beats Sindhu to reach Asia final

MANILA: Top seed Akane Yamaguchi battled back to reach the Badminton Asia Championships final with a controversial win over Indian rival P V Sindhu on Saturday. Japan's Yamaguchi will be favorite to retain her women's singles crown when she faces China's unseeded Wang Zhiyi in the title-decider on Sunday in Manila.

Fourth-seeded Sindhu claimed the first game of her semi-final against the reigning world champion 21-13 and was leading 14-11 in the second when the umpire ruled that the Indian player was taking too long to serve. A clearly unhappy Sindhu, an Olympic silver and bronze medalist, argued her case with the officials but to no avail and she conceded a point penalty to her opponent.

She appeared to lose her focus and rhythm after that, allowing Yamaguchi to come back to claim the second game 21-19 and the deciding third 21-16. "That was one of the reasons I lost, that's my feeling. At that point it was 14-11 and you never know, it would have been 15-11," Sindhu said of the umpiring decision which proved to be a turning

point in the match. "It was very unfair, maybe I would have won the match and I would have played in the final."

Wang, the world number 16, booked her place in the final with a shock 10-21, 21-12, 21-16 victory over South Korea's second seed An Se-young. The men's final will be between Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia and Jonatan Christie of Indonesia. Third-seeded Lee swatted aside China's unseeded Weng Hongyang in ruthless fashion with a 21-11, 21-19 win in 39 minutes. In contrast, fourth seed Christie was pushed to three games by his fellow Indonesian Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo before prevailing 21-9, 18-21, 21-16 in just under an hour. —AFP



Akane Yamaguchi