

Newcastle go 3rd, down United

West Ham scramble out of relegation zone



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's English midfielder Anthony Gordon (left) vies with Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes (right) during the English Premier League football match on April 2, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Newcastle avenged their League Cup final loss against Manchester United as Joe Willock and Callum Wilson clinched a 2-0 win that lifted the Magpies into third place in the Premier League on Sunday. Eddie Howe's side were beaten 2-0 by United at Wembley five weeks ago in their first major final for 24 years. But Newcastle might swap silverware for a lucrative Champions League berth and second half goals from Willock and Wilson at a raucous St James' Park moved them closer to that ambition.

Newcastle's third successive league win - and their first against United since 2019 - took them above their fourth placed opponents on goal difference. They sit one point ahead of fifth placed Tottenham, who visit Everton on Monday, as the race hots up to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish. It is 46 years since Newcastle last finished above United, but the Magpies, fuelled by Howe's astute management and the financial backing of their Saudi owners, now have a rare

chance to emulate that feat.

"We were frustrated not to lead at half-time, but I felt if we performed the same way it would come. Thankfully it did," Howe said. "If you're playing well that's the most important thing. That gives us a great chance of achieving a special season. If we can maintain our position I'll be very happy." United are without a win in their last three league games, thrashed 7-0 at Liverpool and then held to a goalless draw by lowly Southampton before this setback on Tyneside.

United's first major trophy in six years was supposed to be the start of a new golden era, but instead they have failed to score in three successive league matches for the first time since February 2020. It was a dispiriting start to a busy run of nine fixtures in April as Erik ten Hag's men look to nail down a top four finish, while aiming to advance to the Europa League semi-finals and FA Cup final. "I hate to say it but they were better today, especially their determination, passion and desire. They wanted to win more

so they won," Ten Hag said. "It wasn't good enough. We allowed them too many chances. You have to be hungry and give everything every game. "We have to deal with the setback and learn a lesson. I believe we'll bounce back." Newcastle's pressure was finally rewarded in the 65th minute when Bruno Guimaraes clipped a cross to the far post and Allan Saint-Maximin headed back towards Willock, who nodded home from virtually on the goalline. Wilson put the result beyond doubt after 88 minutes with a clinical close-range header from Kieran Trippier's free-kick.

West Ham boost

In Sunday's other game, West Ham scrambled out of the relegation zone as Nayef Aguerd's first goal for the club sealed a crucial 1-0 victory against fellow strugglers Southampton. David Moyes' side kicked off at the London Stadium languishing second bottom of the table, with Southampton in last place.

But Morocco defender Aguerd's maiden goal since signing from French club Rennes last year lifted the Hammers up to 14th. West Ham are just one point above the relegation zone, but they have a little breathing space thanks to their first win in three league games. On the day Leicester sacked Brendan Rodgers after their slump into the bottom three, Hammers boss Moyes must have breathed a sigh of relief when the final whistle blew on a result that may have saved his job.

Southampton remain bottom of the table and sit three points from safety after their winless run reached four games. Aguerd eased West Ham's mounting anxiety in the 25th minute as the Morocco defender rose to power a header past Gavin Bazunu from Thilo Kehrer's free-kick. "We have played better than that and not won this season, but today was all about the result," Moyes said. "I have to get results. There's no protection to stop me losing my job." — AFP

Messi jeered as PSG suffer home defeat

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain suffered a second home defeat in a row Sunday, falling 1-0 to Lyon as their World Cup winning superstar Lionel Messi was jeered by a section of supporters. After losing 2-0 at home to Rennes two weeks ago, it was Lyon's Bradley Barcola who inflicted the latest loss for PSG at the Parc des Princes. The goal by Barcola—who had come on as replacement for injured Amin Sarr—made up for a missed penalty by Alexandre Lacazette in the first half.

It is the Parisians' fifth Ligue 1 loss this season, all of them in 2023, and leaves Christophe Galtier's side just six points ahead of both second-placed Lens and Marseille in third. The night started in controversial circumstances. As the team line-ups were announced over the loudspeaker, whistling greeted Messi's name in one part of the stadium. Fans in another area, however, shouted in response "Messi". Messi, 35, is nearing the end of his two-year contract with the Paris club. Talks have begun on a possible renewal but he has also been linked with a return to Barcelona.

In two seasons, the veteran has played 67 matches with PSG including Sunday's game against ninth-placed Lyon and scored 29 goals. "The whistles, I find that hard," said Galtier. "Leo is a player who gives a lot and who has given a lot since the start of the season." He added: "With a stroke of genius, Leo is able to deliver the right ball, to provide an assist, to score a goal. I never once thought about taking him off." PSG midfielder Danilo acknowledged the team had hit "a difficult phase" which they had to find a way out of, given their rivals were closing in.

"We have to wake up. The title is not guaranteed at all, there are still a lot of matches," he said on Prime Video. "There are a lot of things to change, not just the

mindset, but it's not up to me to say what." PSG have been severely hampered by injuries, with Neymar recovering from ankle surgery and their defence decimated. On Sunday, PSG called up 17-year-old central defender El Chadaille Bitshiabu but he was overawed, giving away the ball too often. Kylian Mbappe failed to pull off a repeat of his late scoring heroics as he had done in recent games against Strasbourg and Brest.

"We can't expect everything from Leo and Kylian," said Galtier. "It's our eighth defeat in 2023, it's far too many." Next up for PSG is a trip to Nice who are undefeated since January 2 before a crucial home clash with second-placed Lens. Lens will be hopeful of delivering a further blow to their Qatar-owned rivals whose season is threatening to implode after a Champions League exit at the hands of Bayern Munich and a French Cup loss to bitter rivals Marseille. Monaco kept up their push for a Champions League spot with a roller-

coaster 4-3 home win over lowly Strasbourg. Monaco trailed 2-1 at the interval despite taking an 18th-minute lead through Vanderson. Lebo Mothiba and an own-goal by Chilean defender Guillermo Maripan gave Strasbourg the edge. Eliesse Ben Seghir and Edan Diop, both just 18 years old, and Youssouf Fofana then hit three goals inside an 11-minute spell in the second half to give Monaco a 4-2 lead.

Habib Diallo's stoppage-time strike was only a consolation for Strasbourg. Monaco have 57 points, just three behind third-placed Marseille who were held to a 1-1 draw by Montpellier on Friday. "As I told the players, we saw two faces of Monaco tonight," said Monaco coach Philippe Clement. "We started well and for 25 minutes, we were good. But then the aggressiveness fell away and Strasbourg came back and scored twice. At half-time, I was very angry. I didn't recognize my team." —AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi (left) and Lyon's French defender Castello Lukeba (right) fight for the ball during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Olympique Lyonnais (OL). — AFP



MADRID: Real Madrid's Belgian forward Eden Hazard (left) falls down next to Real Valladolid's Moroccan defender Jawad El Yamiq (center) and Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Rodrygo (right) during the Spanish league football match on April 2, 2023. — AFP

Madrid thrash Valladolid 6-0

MADRID: Karim Benzema scored a stunning hat-trick in a seven-minute salvo as Real Madrid thumped Real Valladolid 6-0 on Sunday in La Liga. The champions, second, sit 12 points behind leaders Barcelona after the Catalans beat Elche on Saturday, with 11 games remaining each. Carlo Ancelotti's side warmed up for their Copa del Rey semi-final clash on Wednesday with their arch-rivals in style by dismantling the helpless visitors, 16th and a point above the drop zone.

Rodrygo Goes opened the scoring early on, before Benzema's hat-trick, including a spectacular acrobatic effort, with Marco Asensio netting the fifth in the second half and Lucas Vazquez adding another late on. Rodrygo had another goal ruled out for handball by Vinicius Junior, who set up two of Benzema's strikes,

as Madrid ran riot in the spring sunshine at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"The team went out with a lot of conviction, a lot of desire to win the game and to play well in front of our fans," Vazquez told DAZN. "Karim is a spectacular player, a world-class star, he's been here 14 years and year after year he scores goals. "Year after year he's been Madrid's number nine, there's not much left to say about him, I'm very happy for him and enjoying (playing with) him in each game."

Starting in a central attacking midfield role, Rodrygo slotted home the opener after 22 minutes after being teed up by Asensio to open the floodgates. Vinicius's cross allowed Benzema to net the second after 29 minutes, and four minutes later, the Brazilian fed his French strike partner again and the forward curled home from the edge of the box. Benzema completed his hat-trick after 36 minutes when Rodrygo crossed and he pulled off an impressive overhead effort from inside the six-yard box for his 14th goal of the season in La Liga. — AFP