

Chelsea ease pressure on Potter

Newcastle strike late to move up to third



LONDON: Crystal Palace's English midfielder Eberechi Eze (R) vies with Chelsea's English defender Trevoh Chalobah (2R) during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Crystal Palace at Stamford Bridge in London on January 15, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Chelsea eased the pressure on manager Graham Potter with a 1-0 win over Crystal Palace as Newcastle struck late to beat Fulham 1-0 and move up to third in the Premier League on Sunday. Kai Havertz scored the only goal at Stamford Bridge with a towering second half header on the day Chelsea paid tribute to former player and manager Gianluca Vialli.

The Italian great died earlier this month aged 58 from pancreatic cancer. A number of Vialli's former Chelsea teammates joined the players from both sides on the field for a minute's silence, while the home fans unfurled a banner with a picture of

Vialli against the backdrop of the Italian flag.

The action on the field was also overshadowed by the official announcement during the first half that Chelsea had completed the signing of Mykhailo Mudryk for a fee that could rise to 100 million euros (£88 million, \$108 million). The former Shakhtar Donetsk winger was presented at half-time draped in the Ukrainian flag with the move set to take Chelsea's spending in their first season under the ownership of Todd Boehly's consortium beyond £400 million.

There was not been much to show for that investment so far, but Potter's injury-ravaged

squad did enough to grind out just a second win in 10 league games. Havertz made the breakthrough as he rose highest to power home Hakim Ziyech's cross from a well-worked corner on 64 minutes.

Chelsea still needed some heroics from goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga to see the game out as the Spaniard made a flying save from Cheick Doucoure's sweetly-struck volley. Despite a much-needed win, Chelsea remain 10 points adrift of the top four after Newcastle kept their title dreams alive at St James' Park.

The Magpies were given a huge let off when

Aleksandar Mitrovic saw a second half penalty ruled out against his former club. The Serbian slipped as he took the spot kick and his right-footed effort rebounded off his left foot into the net.

Newcastle took full advantage as club record signing Alexander Isak came off the bench to head in the winner a minute from time. Victory takes Eddie Howe's men back above Manchester United into third in the table on goal difference and within six points of leaders Arsenal.

The Gunners could move eight points clear at the top should they win the north London derby away to Tottenham later on Sunday. — AFP



DAMMAM: Toyota's driver Nasser Al-Attiyah of Qatar (C) with Prince Khalid bin Sultan al-Abdullah al-Faisal, President of Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation (Center-L), after winning the Dakar Rally 2023, at the end of the last stage between Al-Hofuf and Dammam in Saudi Arabia. — AFP

Al-Attiyah crowned Dakar Rally champion for fifth time

DAMMAM: Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah on Sunday won his fifth Dakar Rally driver's title and second in a row, with Argentina's Kevin Benavides securing his second motorbike crown. The 52-year-old Al-Attiyah won three stages and had more than an hour's advantage in the overall standings over Frenchman Sebastien Loeb, who also finished runner-up last year.

Al-Attiyah's Toyota team-mate Lucas Moraes of Brazil finished third on his debut in the iconic test of endurance which reached its climax in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Al-Attiyah took the overall lead after the third stage, having built up a commanding advantage in the first week and deployed a safety-first strategy in the second half of the race.

"We just finished and I'm so happy. It was a difficult Dakar for everyone," said Al-Attiyah. "It's crazy to manage to defend my title. I'm very happy to win five times, and Mathieu (his co-driver Mathieu

Baumel) four... Sorry, Mathieu! "We didn't have to attack like crazy. We managed to get through the second week and win the Dakar at the end, that's what really matters."

Loeb gave it all he could as he won a record six successive stages in the second week. But the 48-year-old Frenchman had lost so much time on the first part of the race that it was a lost cause. "After the beginning of the Rally we had we could not hope for better than this," said Loeb.

"Nasser was so consistent that he was unbeatable, he produced a brilliant performance without any mistakes." Moraes-whose co-driver Timo Gottschalk was Al-Attiyah's partner in his first win in 2011 — was proud as punch to be the first Brazilian to finish in the top three. "It was important for the rally community in Brazil because it had never happened before," he said. "I'm going to celebrate with all the Brazilian photographers."

'Incredible'

The car category may not have had a lot of suspense about it but the motorbike title race more than made up for it with plenty of thrills and spills. Benavides, the 2021 champion, edged out Australian Toby Price by 43 seconds with Skyler Howes of the United States finishing third. — AFP

Celtics sting Hornets, Grizzlies nab ninth win

MIAMI: Jayson Tatum scored 33 points as the Boston Celtics overturned a double-digit deficit to extend their lead at the top of the NBA Eastern Conference on Saturday with a 122-106 road victory over the lowly Charlotte Hornets. The Celtics entered the game heavily favored to record their sixth straight victory against a Hornets team propping up the conference table with just 11 wins.

But Boston were startled by a confident first-half performance from Charlotte, who surged to a 16-point lead midway through the second quarter. Boston trimmed the gap to just four points at halftime, with Charlotte leading 66-62. Then the Celtics cut loose in a devastating burst of scoring after the break.

The Celtics outscored Charlotte 33-19 in the third quarter to turn the game on its head and maintained a comfortable cushion through the final period. Malcolm Brogdon had 30 points for Boston, while Al Horford added 16 and Marcus Smart 13.

LaMelo Ball led the Hornets' challenge with 31 points. "They were more 'up' to play us, and we came out on our heels," Tatum said. "I'm just glad that we played with more physicality, played tougher. We started hitting some shots, too." The Memphis Grizzlies bagged their ninth win in a row with a 130-112 blowout of the Indiana Pacers.

The win leaves Memphis level with Denver at the top of the Western Conference with both teams at 29-13. Desmond Bane drained five three-pointers in a 25-point haul while Ja Morant finished with 23 points and 10 assists in an emphatic win for Memphis.

Embiid lifts 76ers

The Philadelphia 76ers escaped with a 118-117 victory over the Utah Jazz in Salt Lake City, where Sixers big man Joel Embiid made the game-winning step-back jump shot off a pass from James Harden with 4.9 seconds remaining. Harden scored 31 points and handed out 11 assists and Embiid scored 30 for the Sixers, who were in control after scoring 41 points in the first quarter for a 17-point lead.



PORTLAND: Dwight Powell #7 of the Dallas Mavericks drives to the basket during the game against the Portland Trail Blazers at the Moda Center Arena in Portland, Oregon. — AFP

The Jazz had whittled that to three points going into the fourth period, finally taking the lead for the first time on Walker Kessler's tip-in of a Jordan Clarkson miss that made it 115-114 with 33 seconds left. Harden and Clarkson—who led Utah with 38 points-traded baskets that left the Jazz up 117-116 before Embiid struck, and the 76ers' strong defense denied Utah on the final possession.

In Miami, Gabe Vincent scored 27 points and snaffled five steals as the Heat took full advantage of the absence of Giannis Antetokoumpo to defeat the Milwaukee Bucks 111-95. Miami extended their winning streak to three games after dominating Milwaukee from the outset.

Vincent was one of five Heat players in double figures, with Victor Oladipo and Bam Adebayo catching the eye with 20 points each. Adebayo hauled in 13 rebounds with two assists while Jimmy Butler added 16 points in his 26min 35sec on court at the Miami-Dade Arena.

Nigeria international Vincent, who re-signed with Miami in 2021 after going undrafted in 2018, credited "perseverance" with his latest impressive showing, which followed 28 points in a win over Milwaukee on Thursday. Miami are now within striking distance of the automatic playoff places in seventh place. — AFP