

## Brighton end City's winning run

Brighton secure EPL top-six finish



**BRIGHTON:** Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland (right) heads the ball next to Brighton's Argentinian midfielder Facundo Buonanotte (left) and Brighton's Dutch defender Jan Paul van Hecke (center) during the English Premier League football match on May 24, 2023. — AFP

**BRIGHTON:** Pep Guardiola praised his Manchester City players for shrugging off their hangovers after clinching the Premier League title with a 1-1 draw at Brighton on Wednesday to stretch an unbeaten run to 25 matches. A point was also enough for the Seagulls to guarantee they will finish sixth in the table and secure a place in the Europa League next season.

Phil Foden fired the English champions in front, but Brighton were well worthy of the point given to them by Julio Enciso's stunning long-range strike. "Only 48 hours before they drank all the alcohol in Manchester," said Guardiola. "Today they showed why they are the champions. "We

were humble and run a lot. That is why we are the champions for many years, these players showed something special."

Guardiola heaped praise on Brighton boss Roberto De Zerbi pre-match, hailing the Italian as one of the most influential managers of the last 20 years. The City coach showed his respect by restoring a number of star names to his side that missed Sunday's 1-0 win over Chelsea to toast a fourth league title in five years. Erling Haaland returned among six changes and could have had a seventh hat-trick of the season inside half an hour.

The towering Norwegian headed over Foden's inviting cross on five minutes.

Haaland then had a poor touch to blame for not beating Jason Steele when clean through on goal. At the third time of asking he took no chances as Haaland unselfishly squared with just Steele to beat for Foden to convert his 15th goal of the season. But after a slow start, Brighton soon began to live up to Guardiola's billing as the champions were rocked back on their heels. "In every situation, even when the situation was difficult, we didn't lose our style," said De Zerbi.

Danny Welbeck's free-kick came crashing off the bar and Facundo Buonanotte should have done better with his finish after sauntering through the City defense.

Kaoru Mitoma also saw an equalizer ruled out for handball. But there was no stopping Enciso's leveler when it did come as the Paraguayan picked up Levi Colwill's pass and smashed an effort into the top corner for his first goal at the Amex.

Brighton had the ball in the net for a third time in the first 45 minutes moments later only for Welbeck to be flagged off-side from Mitoma's pass. The second period was less filled with goalmouth action despite the electric pace of the game. Haaland thought he finally had his 53rd goal of the season when he headed home Cole Palmer's cross 15 minutes from time. But a VAR review caught out City's prolific

number nine as he had pulled Colwill's shirt to create the space for a free header.

Tempers briefly flared on the touchline after that decision with Guardiola shown a yellow card by the referee. There were also minor injury concerns for City ahead of the FA Cup and Champions League finals next month as Phil Foden, John Stones and Bernardo Silva were not moving freely as they were replaced in the second half. "We have to be careful for the players to arrive to the finals as best as possible," added Guardiola. But it was all smiles at the end as Guardiola and De Zerbi shared a warm embrace of mutual admiration after the full-time whistle. — AFP

## Hibs humble Celtic as Hearts hold Rangers

**GLASGOW:** Celtic slumped to just a third domestic defeat of the season as Hibernian beat Ange Postecoglou's 10 men 4-2, while Rangers were held 2-2 by Hearts on Wednesday. Either side of retaining their Scottish Premiership title, Celtic have won just two of their last six games as the newly-crowned champions have come off the boil. Postecoglou gave some of his fringe players the chance to shine at Easter Road and they led 2-1 through Reo Hatate's penalty and Oh Hyeon-gyu with 20 minutes to go. But Daizen Maeda's dismissal for a second yellow card changed the game as Elie Youan, Kevin Nisbet's penalty and Alexandro Bernabei's own goal gave Hibs hope of pipping Edinburgh rivals Hearts into fourth on the final day of the season.

"This is on me, I'm making lots of changes and playing guys who haven't played in a long time and in many ways, that's unfair on them but that's just my way of doing things," said Postecoglou. Hearts cannot catch Aberdeen in the race for third and guaranteed group stage European football next season despite taking a point at Ibrox. Australian teenager Garang Kuol scored a stoppage-time equalizer for the visitors after goals from Todd Cantwell and Fashion Sakala cancelled out Lawrence Shankland's first-minute opener for Hearts. Graeme Shinnie scored twice as Aberdeen beat St Mirren 3-0 to secure third. At the bottom of the table, Dundee United were all but condemned to relegation after a 3-0 home defeat to Kilmarnock. Last-placed United are three points adrift of Ross County, but must also overturn an eight-goal deficit on goal difference on the final day. County were pegged back by a late St Johnstone equalizer in a 3-3 draw at Dingwall, having come from 2-0 down to lead 3-2. However, they can still avoid the relegation playoff with victory at Kilmarnock on Sunday. Motherwell's Kevin van Veen equalized the post-war record of scoring in 10 consecutive Scottish top-flight games in a 1-1 draw at Livingston. — AFP



Ange Postecoglou



**ROME:** Inter Milan players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) final football match between Fiorentina and Inter Milan on May 24, 2023. — AFP

## Inter Milan retain Italian Cup title

**ROME:** Lautaro Martinez scored twice as Champions League finalists Inter Milan came from behind to beat Fiorentina 2-1 and retain their Italian Cup title on Wednesday. Nicolas Gonzalez gave Fiorentina an early lead at the Stadio Olimpico, but Martinez drilled Inter level and then volleyed in the winner before half-time for Simone Inzaghi's team.

Inter's ninth Italian Cup triumph moved them level with Roma. Only Juventus, with 14 titles, have lifted the trophy more often. "I'm so happy because we've been winning trophies with this great club the past two years," Martinez, who

also helped Inter win Serie A in 2021 and last year's Italian Cup, told Mediaset. "We have to keep going like that. We really wanted to lift another cup tonight. We started badly in the first 15 minutes but then we did what we should have done from the beginning."

Six-time winners Fiorentina were denied a first trophy since 2001, but the club could still end the season with silverware having reached the final of the Europa Conference League. They face West Ham in Prague on June 7, three days before Inter take on Premier League champions Manchester City in the Champions League final in Istanbul. "We want to play everything in the best way possible. We have two matches left in the league and then afterwards there'll be Istanbul," said Inzaghi.

Fiorentina, the first club to reach the final of four different major European competitions, made a dream start in Rome as Gonzalez turned in Jonathan Ikoné's threaded cross at the far post. Sofyan Amra-

bat rolled an effort wide from the edge of the area as Fiorentina threatened a second, with Inter striker Edin Dzeko scooping over after he was played in by Martinez. The Argentine forward made no such mistake after Marcelo Brozovic slipped him through on 29 minutes, hammering low into the corner past Pietro Terracciano for his 100th goal in Inter colors.

Martinez struck again eight minutes later as he lashed in Nicolò Barella's hooked delivery from the right. Fiorentina, who overcame Basel in the final seconds of extra time last week in Europe, pushed until the end with Luka Jovic twice going close. The Serbian striker was denied by a fantastic stop from veteran Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic before heading another chance narrowly wide. Gonzalez nearly forced extra time after bursting into the box and looping a header over Handanovic after his shot was blocked, but Matteo Darmian headed to safety as Inter clung on for victory. — AFP