



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's Dutch midfielder Vurnon Anita (left) vies with Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy during the English Premier League football match between Newcastle United and Leicester City at St James' Park yesterday. — AFP

RECORD-EQUALING VARDY KEEPS LEICESTER FLYING HIGH



NEWCASTLE: Jamie Vardy scored for the 10th successive game to equal Ruud van Nistelrooy's Premier League record and keep Leicester flying high in the English top tier with a 3-0 win at Newcastle yesterday. Vardy struck in first-half stoppage time to move level with former Manchester United striker Van Nistelrooy's streak of scoring in consecutive fixtures. Fittingly, the Leicester forward could eclipse Van Nistelrooy's record against the Dutchman's old club when United visit the King Power Stadium next weekend.

If he manages that, Vardy can set his sights on the all-time English top-flight record for goals in an unbroken run of 12 club matches set by Jimmy Dunne of Sheffield United in the old First Division during the 1931/32 season. While Vardy stole the headlines, the England international wasn't Leicester's only hero in their eighth win in 13 league matches. Leonardo Ulloa laid on Vardy's record-equaling effort before heading home himself and Japan

forward Shinji Okazaki came off the bench to wrap up the points.

Vardy's remarkable rise from playing non-league football just a few years ago has run hand in hand with Leicester's ascent and their dominant display at St James' Park left them top of the Premier League, although Manchester City could regain first place. Vardy threatened for the first time when Riyad Mahrez skipped beyond Vurnon Anita and found his teammate six yards out. Goalkeeper Rob Elliot's left foot denied Vardy on that occasion, but the moment everyone was waiting for soon arrived. France international Moussa Sissoko lost the ball inside Leicester's half and it found its way to Vardy. He rolled a pass into Ulloa and drifted off the flank as he stayed outside and collected the return ball, knocked it past Sissoko and rifled inside Elliot's near post for an historic goal. It was his 13th of the campaign and a strike which earned him a warm round of applause from even Newcastle's fans as he walked off at the break. Leicester's second goal came in the 62nd minute when Mahrez was given time to cross to the far post, where an unmarked Ulloa headed home. Vardy came off with 13 minutes to go, but there was still time for Leicester to score once more. Danny Simpson's effort from Marc Albrighton's pass was saved by Rob Elliot and Okazaki slammed home from close-range.—AFP



WEST BROMWICH: West Brom's Solomon Rondon (right) battles with Arsenal's Mathieu Flamini (front left) and Arsenal's Per Mertesacker during the English Premier League soccer match between West Bromwich Albion and Arsenal at the Hawthorns yesterday. — AP

ARSENAL LOSE GROUND IN WEST BROM DEFEAT



WEST BROMWICH: Arsenal missed the chance to go top of the Premier League as they suffered a 2-1 loss away to West Bromwich Albion yesterday. France international Olivier Giroud headed his ninth goal in 11 matches from a Mesut Ozil free-kick to give Arsene Wenger's visitors hope of a sixth win in seven league matches. But two lax pieces of defending before half-time, and a late Santi Cazorla penalty miss, allowed West Brom to claim victory—their first over Arsenal at the Hawthorns since 2005. James Morrison got free to turn in Chris Brunt's free-kick with his shin, before Mikel Arteta diverted a cross into his own net via his arm and his thigh.

It was not the result Arsenal wanted ahead of Tuesday's must-win Champions League tie against Dinamo Zagreb. Giroud, along with France team-mate Laurent Koscielny, was named in Arsenal's starting line-up after the trauma of being caught up in the Paris attacks eight days ago, in which 130 people died. Wenger had noted in the build-up to the match

that Koscielny, in particular, had been deeply affected by the attacks, which included a number of explosions outside the Stade de France, where France were playing Germany in a friendly. Arsenal's French manager, though, was satisfied that the central defender was in the right frame of mind to play. The injury-hit visitors suffered an early setback as midfielder Francis Coquelin limped off after jarring his knee in a challenge with Claudio Jacob. They did, though, have the better of the opening half-hour, with Alexis Sanchez's floated free-kick well held by keeper Boaz Myhill, and were first to score. Albion's defense switched off as Ozil's free-kick, swung in from the right, was glanced in by an unmarked Giroud.

Brief lead

Arsenal's advantage lasted just five minutes, however, as they were undone by a set-piece at the other end. Brunt lifted in a free-kick from just inside the visitors' half, and Morrison sneaked in behind Hector Bellerin to volley the equalizer from seven yards. It got worse for Arsenal five minutes before half-time, with the excellent James McClean doing the damage. McClean, who had caused problems with an early low ball that whizzed across goal, burst past Bellerin on to Salomon Rondon's pass, and drove in a delivery that was turned into his own net by Arteta, on as a substitute for the injured Coquelin.—AFP

COSTA DOWNS NORWICH TO EASE CHELSEA CRISIS



LONDON: Diego Costa's second half strike brought relief to Stamford Bridge as Chelsea halted a run of three straight Premier League defeats with a 1-0 victory over Norwich yesterday. It will take more to turn the reigning champions' season around, but this win at least stopped the rot and eased the pressure on manager Jose Mourinho. There were certainly positives for Mourinho, who this week received the public backing of the club's hierarchy for the second time this season, with Costa rescuing an indifferent display with his first goal in seven games and Eden Hazard again showing signs of a return to form.

But it is clear Chelsea, who moved above Norwich into 15th position, remain a shadow of the side that dominated the title race last season as they struggled to overcome the lowly Canaries. Mourinho maintains Chelsea's performances have been deserving of greater reward in recent weeks, particularly in the defeat at Stoke City last time out. That has strengthened the manager's belief his side are on the verge of drawing a line under their disastrous start. But with the gap to the top four growing ever wider, Mourinho knew his side must quickly resolve the problems at both ends of the pitch that have contributed to their demise this season.

And in the first half, the signs were the Blues are still some way short of finding the answers. Mourinho could have no complaints with the way his side approached the game, with Cesc Fabregas and Nemanja Matic providing the midfield platform that allowed the home side to push Norwich backwards. Less satisfactory was Chelsea's efforts inside the visitors' penalty area, with Costa in particular guilty of spurning a succession of good chances that confirmed the Spain striker is still operating way below the standards he set last season.

Dismal run

Coming into this game, the Brazil-born forward had scored just twice in 10 Premier League starts. And while he had the opportunity to add to that tally before the break, his finishing lacked conviction, suggesting his confidence has been affected by Chelsea's dismal run. Costa wasn't the only culprit in the first half with Fabregas and Willian also failing to make the most of good chances. But more is expected from Costa and the way he shot high over the bar after being picked out by Pedro's cut-back was a sign of things to come. A more glaring miss came in the final moments of the first half when Chelsea broke quickly with Kenedy eventually finding



LONDON: Chelsea's Brazilian striker Kenedy (left) challenges Norwich City's English defender Andre Wisdom during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Norwich City at Stamford Bridge yesterday. — AFP

Costa in time and space on the right hand side of the Norwich box, only for the forward to shoot too close to keeper John Ruddy.

And prior to that, Costa failed to read Hazard's intentions when the midfielder sent a low ball across the face of goal, waiting instead for a pull-back on the edge of the box. Mourinho's reaction on the touchline spoke volumes and the manager again remonstrated with Costa following a carbon-copy move early in the second half. Costa produced the ideal response, however, in the 64th minute when he offered a glimpse of his undoubted quality and conjured the goal Mourinho will hope triggers a resurgence in his form.

Chelsea's pressure had been building after

the break and Norwich cracked when they lost concentration as Fabregas took a quick free-kick on the halfway line. The midfielder's chip allowed Costa to break free behind the backtracking defenders and this time the striker showed great composure to curl the ball beyond Ruddy and inside the near post. Mourinho's side may have deserved their lead on the balance of play but Norwich could easily have found themselves ahead in the first half. Willian was fortunate referee Craig Pawson allowed the Brazilian's clumsy challenge on Robbie Brady to go unpunished inside the area and it took an excellent block by John Terry to deny Sebastien Bassong's close-range shot.—AFP

RAMPANT EVERTON ROUT ASTON VILLA



LIVERPOOL: Remi Garde suffered his first defeat as Aston Villa manager as Everton ran riot in a 4-0 victory at Goodison Park yesterday. After an encouraging goalless draw against high-flying Manchester City in his opening game before the international break, this was a chastening reality check for Garde as doubles from Ross Barkley and Romelu Lukaku left Villa rooted to the bottom of the Premier League. England midfielder Barkley opened the floodgates when he put the Toffees ahead in the 17th minute.

Belgian striker Lukaku then headed home in the 28th minute before poor Villa defending allowed Barkley to add another three minutes before half-time. Lukaku notched his second just before the hour to complete Villa's heaviest defeat of a miserable season and leave them five points from safety. The extent of the challenge facing former Lyon manager Garde, who replaced the sacked Tim Sherwood, was laid bare as Villa's winless league run in the league extended to 12 matches with a 10th defeat.

In contrast, it was another encouraging afternoon for Everton boss Roberto Martinez after the 6-2 thumping of Sunderland in their previous home game. Everton dominated possession from the off and it was not long before they broke the deadlock. A flowing move started with Barkley delightfully flicking a John Stones pass

to Lukaku, and the ball then moved slickly on to James McCarthy and out to Gerard Deulofeu. He sent it goalwards and Villa goalkeeper Brad Guzan was only able to parry it into the path of Barkley, who converted with ease.

Guzan was beaten again as Deulofeu tried to play Lukaku in, Micah Richards' block saw the ball break wide to Seamus Coleman and his chipped cross was headed in by the Belgium striker. It was Lukaku's 10th goal of the season in

all competitions and saw him become only the fifth player to reach 50 Premier League goals before turning 23. Martinez's side struck again when Guzan saved at Arouna Kone's feet, but he couldn't hold on to the ball and despite the presence of several Villa defenders, Barkley was able to fire into the net. Garde's misery was complete in the 59th minute when Deulofeu fed Barkley and his tee-up found Lukaku, who lifted the ball past Guzan.—AFP



LIVERPOOL: Everton's Romelu Lukaku scores his side's fourth goal of the game during the English Premier League match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park yesterday. — AP

AYEW, SHELVEY INSPIRE SWANSEA'S FIGHTBACK



SWANSEA: An Andre Ayew and Jonjo Shelvey-inspired fightback earned Swansea a come-from-behind 2-2 draw with Bournemouth at the Liberty Stadium yesterday. Joshua King and Dan Gosling put struggling Bournemouth firmly in command before Ayew reduced the deficit, with the Ghana international then going on to earn a penalty, converted by Shelvey. The stalemate

left Bournemouth, without a win now in eight outings, third from bottom and their hosts, winless since the end of August, four points above them in 14th.

Bournemouth got off to a dream start when Junior Stanislas pounced on a defensive mix-up to cross the ball to King, the Norwegian international coolly slotting the ball right-footed into the bottom left corner from six yards out. It was his first goal since February and his first since joining Bournemouth. The action quickly moved down to the other end where Wayne Routledge's attempt for a quick equalizer was denied by Cherries goalkeeper Adam Federici. An entertaining first period saw King going close to getting a double. On 26 minutes Gosling did stretch the visitors' lead, rifling a fine shot high past Lukas Fabianski and into

the top corner after enterprising work from Matt Ritchie.

Within two minutes Ayew silenced the travelling fans' celebrations when he latched on to Shelvey's header to foil Federici with a neat close-range back heel. Six minutes from the break, Swansea were back level, when Simon Francis was judged to have felled Ayew, Shelvey stepping up to drive home the ensuing penalty. Bournemouth began the second half as they had the first, in spirited fashion, with Swansea keeper Fabianski denying Harry Arter's long-range attempt and Steve Cook missing the target with a far-post volley. As the final 20 minutes of an enthralling encounter approached Ayew had a shot blocked, but neither side could break the deadlock in a result that arguably flattered the hosts.—AFP