

Sports

Ritchie stars as Newcastle hit back to down Arsenal

Newcastle's fourth successive win end Arsenal's unbeaten run

NEWCASTLE: Arsenal crashed to a fifth consecutive away defeat in the Premier League as Matt Ritchie fired Newcastle to a 2-1 win at St James' Park yesterday. Arsene Wenger's side took an early lead through Alexandre Lacazette, but Ayoze Perez equalised before Ritchie bagged the second half winner. Newcastle's fourth successive win ended Arsenal's unbeaten run of seven games in all competitions.

The sixth-placed Gunners are 13 points behind fourth-placed Tottenham with only five games remaining in the race to qualify for the Champions League. Realistically, Arsenal already had no chance of making the top four and Wenger had been prioritising their Europa League campaign for several weeks. Arsenal saw off CSKA Moscow in the Europa League quarter-finals on Thursday. They face Atletico Madrid in the last four and will qualify for the Champions League if they win the competition.

With little to play for in the league, Arsenal were unable to find enough momentum to maintain their recent revival, even though Lacazette opened the scoring in the 14th minute.

Just moments after he was left writhing on the turf following a crunching challenge from Kenedy, Lacazette exacted revenge. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang ran onto a long ball into the Newcastle

area and picked out Lacazette, who stretched to volley home at the far post for his 13th goal of a difficult first season following his move from Lyon. Alex Iwobi almost doubled Arsenal's lead moments later with a stinging strike that forced a good save from Martin Dubravka. Jonjo Shelvey's long pass picked out Dwight Gayle in the Arsenal area and, with Gunners defender Shkodran Mustafi out of position, he was able to lay off to DeAndre Yedlin. Perez made a perfectly-timed run to meet Yedlin's cross with a fine finish that flashed by Petr Cech at his near post.

The Spanish forward's third goal in his last three appearances was a clinical effort, but Wenger would have been furious with how easily Newcastle carved open his defence.

Calum Chambers could have restored Arsenal's lead before the interval, but the defender shot wide from Mustafi's knock down. Ritchie tested Cech before 18-year-old Arsenal midfielder Joe Willock's poor finish wasted an opportunity to mark his Premier League debut with a goal. Iwobi lashed narrowly wide from long-range as Arsenal chased their first away point of 2018.

But it was Newcastle who landed the knockout blow in the 68th minute. More sloppy Arsenal defending led in Islam Slimani and his header was flicked on by Perez to Ritchie, who beat Cech from close-range. Ritchie clearly saves his goals for the big occasion, having



LONDON: Newcastle United's Scottish midfielder Matt Ritchie (R) scores their second goal past Arsenal's Czech goalkeeper Petr Cech (C) as Arsenal's English defender Rob Holding slides in during the English Premier League football match between Newcastle United and Arsenal at St James' Park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. —AFP

scored the winner against Manchester United in February. Kenedy, on loan from Chelsea, came close to putting the result beyond doubt with a looping effort

that hit the crossbar with Cech beaten. Lacazette should have equalised in the closing stages, but he shot into the side-netting. —AFP



To face Atletico in the last four

Naldo screamer seals Schalke win over rivals Dortmund

BERLIN: A 30-metre rocket from Naldo fired Schalke 04 to a 2-0 victory over arch rivals Borussia Dortmund yesterday and strengthened their grip on second place in the Bundesliga. Naldo's superb strike sent the blue half of the Ruhr region into raptures as Schalke recorded their first win over Dortmund since September 2014. The Brazilian, who scored a last-minute equaliser in Schalke's dramatic 4-4 draw with Dortmund earlier in the season, was the hero again on Sunday, as he secured three points for his side late in the second half. "To win the derby towards the end of the season is a real highlight," Schalke sporting director Christian Heidel told Sky. "It was a deserved victory."

Always a fiercely contested derby, there was even more at stake than usual in yesterday's game, with just one point separating second-placed Schalke from third-placed Dortmund before kick-off.

Victory saw Schalke pull four points clear of third place, while Dortmund dropped to fourth. Schalke came close after just five minutes, Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Burkli diving at full stretch to turn Alessandro Schoepf's shot around the post. At the other end, Marco Reus forced a flying save from Ralf Faehrmann as his long range free-kick fizzed towards the top corner. "We need to look at what went wrong in the first 45 to 60 minutes today," Reus told Sky. "We didn't play well in that period." The home side had the better of the first half, however, and could have taken the lead on the



GELSENKIRCHEN: Schalke's German headcoach Domenico Tedesco celebrates with fans after the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Schalke 04 vs Borussia Dortmund, in Gelsenkirchen. —AFP

stroke of half-time when Yevhen Konoplyanka curled a low shot around the far post.

Konoplyanka had better luck five minutes after the break as he fired Schalke in front. Set free by Daniel Caligiuri on the counter-attack, the Ukrainian smashed a powerful shot past Burkli to give his side a well deserved lead. Dortmund rallied in the last 20 minutes, with chances falling to Christian Pulisic and Reus. Yet with eight minutes to play, Schalke were awarded a

free-kick around 30 metres from goal. Caligiuri rolled the ball to Naldo, who blasted it into the bottom corner to secure victory. Dortmund's misery was compounded in stoppage time, when striker Michy Batshuayi was carried off on a stretcher after clashing with Benjamin Stambouli. RB Leipzig could close to within two points of Dortmund in the race for the final Champions League spot in Germany with a victory at Werder Bremen later. —AFP

Celtic rout Rangers to reach Scottish Cup final

GLASGOW: Celtic will face Motherwell in the Scottish Cup final after the holders thrashed arch rivals Rangers 4-0 yesterday. Brendan Rodgers' side cruised to victory in the semi-final at Hampden Park thanks to goals from Tom Rogic, Callum McGregor, Moussa Dembele and Olivier Ntcham.

Rangers had Ross McCrorie sent off when they were two goals down as they lost against their Glasgow neighbours for the eighth time in their last 10 meetings in all competitions.

Celtic, who have won the Scottish Cup 37 times, are chasing a domestic treble, having already beaten Motherwell in this season's Scottish League Cup final. The Scottish Premiership leaders are 37 points clear of Motherwell, who beat Aberdeen 3-0 in the other semi-final on Saturday. Interim Rangers boss Graeme Murty was

left to rue a damaging defeat that could ruin his chances of landing the Ibrox job on a permanent basis. Murty had revealed Rangers players cheered when they heard they would play Celtic in the semi-finals, but that optimism quickly turned sour. Rogic struck in the 22nd minute when he took a pass from James Forrest and turned back on to his right foot, leaving McCrorie for dead, before shooting past Rangers goalkeeper Wes Foderingham.

Rangers defender Russell Martin handed Celtic their second in the 38th minute. Martin's attempted clearance from Kieran Tierney's cross went straight to McGregor, who quickly curled the ball past Foderingham. Any thoughts of a comeback ended when McCrorie pulled back Dembele as he raced through on goal in the 52nd minute.

After McCrorie was given his marching orders, Dembele dinked his spot-kick down the middle for his seventh goal in nine Old Firm derbies. Forrest bent a shot wide of the target before Rangers substitute Jason Holt conceded a penalty for a foul on Patrick Roberts in the 78th minute.

Ntcham despatched the spot-kick into the corner of the net to keep Celtic on course for a second successive treble. —AFP

Wolves celebrate promotion to Premier League in style

LONDON: Championship leaders Wolverhampton Wanderers marked their promotion to the English Premier League with a commanding 2-0 win over struggling Birmingham City yesterday. Nuno Espirito Santo's side had already been guaranteed a lucrative place in the top flight 24 hours earlier when promotion rivals Fulham were held to a draw by Brentford.

Diogo Jota got the party started at Molineux as his 17th goal of the season put Wolves on course for victory after 21 minutes. Birmingham were reduced to 10 men in the 52nd minute when Harlee Dean was sent off for his challenge on Helder Costa.

Wolves substitute Benik Afobe made the game safe three minutes from time. Wolves, back in the Premier League after a six-year absence, need one more point to be sure of going up as second-tier champions. Their superior goal difference over second-placed Cardiff City means that honour is almost secured already.

"I am very pleased. This is a big moment, first for the fans. It is why we work, for our fans," Nuno said. "The players have been fantastic from day one. It was a very hard season but the players deserved to be promoted.

"They believed in something that was changing. They trust and believe and they kept doing that." Nuno allowed his players to celebrate with a beer in the changing room after the game and he added: "That is something I have never allowed. It was the first time."

While Wolves look to a bright future, their local rivals Birmingham are in danger of dropping into the third tier. They are only two points clear of the relegation zone and have managed only one point from their last three games. Wolves were indebted to goalkeeper John Ruddy for preventing Birmingham from taking the lead in the 11th minute. Lukas Jutkiewicz prodded a pass through the Wolves defence and the ball was collected by Maxime Colin.

Colin only had Ruddy to beat from 12 yards but saw his shot beaten away and when the rebound flew straight back to Colin, his second attempt was also saved by Ruddy. Wolves finally mounted a threat of their own when Ruben Neves tried his luck from 30 yards only to see his shot comfortably dealt with by goalkeeper David Stockdale.

But, while Stockdale was able to deny Neves, he was powerless to prevent Jota breaking the deadlock four minutes later. Matt Doherty crossed from the right and his centre into the six-yard box was an invitation that Jota was not going to turn down as he bundled the ball into the net from close range. Birmingham's task became even harder when Dean was dismissed for bringing down Costa as he raced towards the penalty area. Jutkiewicz was then denied by Ruddy five minutes from time before Afobe ended their challenge, lifting the ball over Stockdale after a pass from ex-Dundee United man Barry Douglas. —AFP

Asia's WCup build-up hit by poor results

HONG KONG: Asia's record number of teams preparing for the World Cup have found themselves increasingly challenged by poor results amid several coaching changes ahead of the finals in Russia.

Five nations will represent the Asian Football Confederation at this year's tournament, the first time that many countries from the region have qualified for the World Cup.

But only one of the Asian teams will travel to the June 14-July 15 finals with the coach who was at the helm a year ago.

Carlos Queiroz's tempestuous seven-year reign with Iran has been serene compared to that of his counterparts in Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Australia, with those countries heading to Russia with uncertainty clouding their potential progress.

The decision by the Japan FA to replace Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic with Akira Nishino last week followed in the wake of Ange Postecoglou's decision to resign as Australia coach and Dutchman Bert van Marwijk's departure from Saudi Arabia.

The Koreans, meanwhile, fired Uli Stielike last June after a loss to Qatar put the country's hopes of a ninth straight appearance at the World Cup in jeopardy. The German's replacement, Asian Champions League-winning coach Shin Tae-yong, has at least been given time to fashion his own team.

Steering the nation to a pair of scoreless draws against Iran and Uzbekistan ensured the Koreans qualified for the finals, allowing Shin the chance to build towards Russia. Not that their progress has been entirely smooth. After winning an East Asian Championship in Japan in December that did not feature any of the region's Europe-based player, Shin's side suffered back-to-back defeats against Northern Ireland and Poland last month.

SAUDI PROBLEMS

Saudi Arabia's preparations have been even more fraught, with van Marwijk's initial replacement Edgardo Bauza fired after three games, to be replaced with Juan Antonio Pizzi.

Pizzi, too, has had problems. Any encouragement from a 1-1 draw with Ukraine was dashed by Roberto Martinez's Belgium side who thrashed the Saudis 4-0 with Romelu Lukaku scoring twice.

While Saudi Arabia stumble towards the World Cup's opening game against hosts Russia, their ex-coach van Marwijk has been parachuted into Postecoglou's old position with the Socceroos. Given barely three months to fine-tune an Australia team that struggled in the latter stages of qualifying, he oversaw an encouraging 0-0 draw with Colombia last month after a 4-1 debut thrashing against a Norway side who failed to reach the finals. —Reuters

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
West Ham United v Stoke City	22:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 2			
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA			
FSV Mainz v Freiburg	21:30		
beIN SPORTS HD 5			