

Sports

Let's make history, Guardiola tells record-chasing City

City now within two points of Premier League points record

LONDON: Pep Guardiola challenged Manchester City to make history after the champions equalled the Premier League record for most wins in a season with an imperious 4-1 victory at West Ham yesterday. Guardiola's side now have 30 wins this term, matching the record set by Chelsea last season, and will take sole possession of the milestone with one more success in their last three games.

Sweeping West Ham aside with their trademark swagger, City went ahead through Leroy Sane before an own goal from their former defender Pablo Zabaleta doubled the lead. Aaron Cresswell's free-kick reduced the deficit before half-time, but Gabriel Jesus and Fernandinho netted for City after the interval. Simply uncatchable for most of the season, City are bidding to cement their status as one of the all-time great Premier League teams by rewriting the record books.

"We have a chance to be the best team in the history of England, with more points, we are trying to do it next Sunday (against Huddersfield)," Guardiola said. "Always you have to play for something. Once we won the Premier League, the target was the numbers."

"We have a chance to break the records, but it's not easy, we have to play good. It's good to fight." City have scored 102 league goals in 35 games, making them the fastest English top-flight side to reach the century mark since Everton in 1931-32. They are one goal short of the Premier League record of 103 set by Chelsea in 2009-10.

Guardiola's team also need three more points to eclipse Chelsea's 95-point Premier League record from 2004-05. "We are professional. We didn't celebrate the moment we were champions," Guardiola added.

"The numbers are there. Hopefully we will achieve one more win to get 96 points." Ominously for their title rivals, Guardiola believes City can be even better next season. "Always you can do better. Football is never done otherwise I wouldn't be here next season," he said.

"Next season the target will be to keep this consistency. In the recent past, teams couldn't do that. "Our level was so high, but there are 20 guys winning the Premier League for the first time. We are a young team. That's good." West Ham have won once in their last eight league fixtures and sit just three points above the relegation zone.

"I'm not as anxious as when I first came in because we were in the bottom three then," Hammers boss David Moyes said. "If we can win one of our home games I think we'll be ok." After being given a guard of honour by West Ham's players before kick-off, City set about dismantling

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their generous hosts.

NORMAL SERVICE RESUMED

It was Sane who landed the first blow in the 13th minute, although the German winger's 14th goal of the season owed more to good fortune than great inspiration. Taking possession on the right-hand side of the West Ham area, Sane was granted too much time and space by the home defence. He took full advantage, unleashing a powerful strike that took a wicked deflection off West Ham defender Patrice Evra on its way past the wrong-footed Adrian. When City struck again in the 27th minute, the farcical manner of the goal left the ragged Hammers red-faced. Adrian's rash sprint off his line let in Raheem



LONDON: Manchester City's German-born striker Lukas Nmecha (2nd R) vies with West Ham United's English midfielder Mark Noble (L), West Ham United's Senegalese midfielder Cheikhou Kouyate (C) and West Ham United's Portuguese midfielder Joao Mario (R) during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Manchester City at The London Stadium, in east London yesterday.—AFP

Sterling for a shot that was headed clear, but the ball was worked wide to Kevin De Bruyne. De Bruyne sent over a low cross which Adrian could only deflect towards Hammers defender Declan Rice, whose panicked clearance hit Zabaleta and trickled into the net.

City paid for a brief dip in the 42nd minute when Cresswell bent his free-kick over the wall and through

Ederson's weak attempted save. But normal service was resumed in the 53rd minute when Jesus bagged his 16th goal of the season. Sterling, picked out by Jesus, made a fine run and pin-point pass that allowed the Brazilian to steer home from close-range. City weren't finished yet and Fernandinho buried Sterling's pass in the 64th minute to seal the rout. —AFP

Juventus gains crucial title edge after late comeback downs Inter

MILAN: Juventus battled past 10-man Inter Milan with two late goals giving the champions a 3-2 win in the San Siro on Saturday to reopen a four-point lead at the top of the Serie A table. Inter looked as if they would pull off an unlikely victory as the hosts led until three minutes from the whistle despite playing more than 70 minutes a man down after Matias Vecino was sent off. But Milan Skriniar turned the ball into his own net after 87 minutes with Gonzalo Higuain heading in the winner two minutes later.

"I have to congratulate the lads, it was an important step towards the Scudetto," said Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri. "It was a beautiful night of football between two teams who had to win. "Winning at San Siro is very complicated, they did very well at 10. We know that to win the championship we have to win all of our games." Juve's lead had been cut to one point after their defeat by Napoli in Turin last week.

Maurizio Sarri's Napoli travel to Fiorentina bidding to match the champions and keep their push for a third title after 1987 and 1990 alive. Saturday's defeat damages Inter's hopes of Champions League football next season as they stay fifth behind Roma and Lazio with just three games to play. "It will be hard to put this defeat behind us," said Inter coach Luciano Spalletti. "This match meant a huge amount to us and the team deserved a different result. "We used up a lot of energy being a man down and in the final moments it hurt us."

Douglas Costa fired in the opener for Juventus after 13 minutes following a cross from Juan Cuadrado. Minutes later Vecino was shown red for a foul on Mario Mandzukic. Juventus thought they had scored a second just before half-time but the video assistant referee (VAR) showed Blaise Matuidi was offside when he found the net. Mauro Icardi headed in the equalizer for Inter seven minutes after the break for his 27th goal this season, and the hosts took the lead when the ball bounced in off Juventus defender Andrea Barzaghi.

But in a late flurry a Cuadrado shot across goal took a deflection off Skriniar and Higuain headed in from close range off a Paulo Dybala free-kick. In a bizarre finish, Allegri was sent to the stands for coming onto the pitch to celebrate. "It looked as if it was over, like against Napoli it looked as if it was going to end in a draw and we lost," said Higuain in reference to last week's 1-0 loss



MILAN: Inter Milan's defender Joao Miranda de Souza Filho from Brazil jumps for the ball with Juventus' midfielder Blaise Matuidi from France (R) during the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan Vs Juventus on Saturday at the 'San Siro Stadium' in Milan. — AFP

to second-placed Napoli. "It's a very important win and a great confidence booster."

ROMA WARM UP FOR LIVERPOOL

Earlier 10-man Roma warmed-up for next week's must-win Champions League clash with Liverpool by easing to a 4-1 win over struggling Chievo to consolidate third place. Eusebio Di Francesco's side are three points ahead of Lazio who play Torino on Sunday with Inter staying a further point back in fifth. Edin Dzeko scored in either half with Patrik Schick and Stephan El Shaarawy also on target as Roma overran the side from Verona despite being a man down after Juan Jesus saw red 10 minutes into the second half.

Roma next face Liverpool in the Stadio Olimpico on Wednesday where they have to overturn a 5-2 first-leg

the stats speak very well," the Italian manager added.

'KILL THE GAME'

"I think even today we could be more clinical to kill the game, but instead we kept the game in balance. "Against West Ham, it happened the same. We dominated and created many chances, but we scored only one goal. "It could have happened the same today. I think this season we are not clinical and in the last period we are winning but also playing a little bit where we could kill the game but don't."

Chelsea require Spurs to falter or for Liverpool to be so wrapped in their Champions League campaign they drop further points. The Blues are grinding out wins, as they did against a spirited but toothless Swansea, but they are reliant on others to slip up, regardless of whatever they achieve themselves in their three remaining league matches.

"The situation is not in our hands, but the only way to put a bit of pressure to Tottenham is to get three points in every game," said Conte. "It won't be easy, we know they (Tottenham) will play against Watford on Monday but you know very well football is not simple. "It is not simple to win a game in this league, but for sure our situation is not in our hands."

After Fabregas had curled home a sublime shot fol-

lowing Hazard seizing on a mistake by Andy King in the fourth minute, Chelsea failed to make the most of other clear opportunities. While Chelsea look upwards for others to stumble, Swansea are looking downward with increasing nervousness. This was their sixth game without a win and they are now just a point above the bottom three—the teams that will be relegated at the end of the season.

SWANS' PENALTY PAIN

There was urgency and desperation enough in Swansea's game, but little quality in front of goal and the biggest mark left by top scorer Jordan Ayew was on the neck of Chelsea skipper Gary Cahill when he arrived with a late elbow—an incident which referee Jon Moss somehow missed. Both managers claimed it escaped their attention, too, with Swansea boss Carlos Carvalhal more agitated by Moss's refusal to award a penalty after a lunge by Cahill on Nathan Dyer.

"I saw it," Carvalhal said. "The defender tries to get the ball but he doesn't see Dyer. He takes the ball and Dyer together. "Outside the area it's a foul, so in the area it must be a penalty." He added: "In general I think we did enough to achieve minimum one point. If we carry on playing like that, it's sure that we will win the points we need." — AFP

Celtic rout Rangers to secure another Scottish league title

GLASGOW: Celtic hammered arch Glasgow rivals Rangers 5-0 as they secured a seventh successive Scottish title with an emphatic Old Firm victory yesterday. This win, achieved in front of their own fans at Celtic Park, gave Brendan Rodgers' side an unassailable 10-point lead at the top of the Scottish Premiership table over Aberdeen, who can only take a maximum of nine points from their three remaining league games.

Rangers are three points further back in third place. Celtic are now just two shy of the record of nine Scottish titles in a row they already share with Rangers. The Hoops' title party started early as they went 3-0 up before half-time. Odsonne Edouard gave Celtic an early lead before Edouard and James Forrest added two more goals late in the opening period.

Two minutes after the break, Tom Rogic made it 4-0 with Callum McGregor scoring Celtic's fifth goal in the 53rd minute. Defeat did little for Rangers caretaker manager Graeme Murty's hopes of holding onto his job, amid speculation the Gers are set to appoint Liverpool great Steven Gerrard as their new permanent boss.

UNBEATEN STREAK

Rodgers, who was Gerrard's manager at Liverpool for the latter part of the celebrated midfielder's Anfield career, is now unbeaten in 11 games against Rangers since he arrived in Glasgow in 2016 — a run made up of nine wins and two draws. The Northern Irishman is also just a Scottish Cup final win over Motherwell away from guiding Celtic to an unprecedented second successive domestic treble. "The performance was really pleasing, under the pressure and given the game," Rodgers told Sky Sports.

"You have to play football and today we did the basics really well," he added. "We were outstanding and could have had more goals...It's been a brilliant season by the players." Rangers goalkeeper Jak Alnwick made his Old Firm debut in place of the injured Wes Foderingham. Alnwick made a couple of saves but the writing was on the wall for Rangers, with Edouard opening the scoring in the 14th minute when he turned in a Kieran Tierney cut-back from close range. It looked like Rangers might head into the break just a goal behind but that hope was dashed four minutes before half-time. Rangers' Graham Dorrans lost possession and Forrest sent Edouard clear into the visitors' box, where he drove a low shot past Alnwick and into the far corner. And there was still time for Celtic to extend their lead prior to the end of the first half when Forrest struck from 10 yards.

Barely had the second half got underway before Rogic made it 4-0 from the edge of the box and McGregor added a fifth goal after he was played in by Edouard. There was still plenty of time left in the game for Celtic to surpass their biggest win over Rangers—a 7-1 success back in 1957 — and the only surprise was that they didn't add to their tally of goals. Celtic fans, however, were more than happy with a final scoreline of 5-0. —AFP

Goals are the missing ingredient for Chelsea

SWANSEA: Antonio Conte may have kept alive Chelsea's hope of Champions League football, but he admitted Saturday there has been something missing this season—goals. The Blues manager achieved his 50th victory in the Premier League, a 1-0 win away to Swansea, thanks to Cesc Fabregas's 50th goal in the competition, but Conte was dissatisfied by the London club's fourth successive victory in all competitions.

The win in south Wales saw fifth-placed Chelsea close to within two points of capital rivals Tottenham Hotspur in the race for a top-four finish. Spurs play Watford today. But Eden Hazard, who set up Fabregas for his fourth-minute winner, is Chelsea's leading scorer this season with a modest 12 goals. "Our top scorer has scored only 12 goals, and if your best scorer has scored only 12 goals it means it is very difficult to fight for something this season," said Conte. "That is the reality-

Live

Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Tottenham Hotspur v Watford	22:00
<small>beIN SPORTS HD 2</small>	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Real Betis v Malaga	22:00
<small>beIN SPORTS HD 3</small>	