

## Sports

# Spurs sink Leicester to stay in Premier League title hunt

## Leicester have lost four of their last five league games

**LONDON:** Tottenham kept alive their bid to gate-crash the Premier League title race as Davinson Sanchez's first goal for the club and Hugo Lloris's penalty save inspired a 3-1 win over Leicester yesterday.

Mauricio Pochettino's side took the lead through Sanchez's first half header, but they were indebted to Lloris for keeping out Jamie Vardy's spot-kick after the interval at Wembley.

Christian Eriksen netted moments later and although Vardy got one back, Son Heung-min's late strike ensured third-placed Tottenham clinched a fifth win in their last six league games.

The north Londoners are five points off the top of the table as they try to catch pace-setters Liverpool and Manchester City. While Tottenham are still outsiders to win their first English title since 1961, their ability to stay in contention, despite injuries to key players Harry Kane and Dele Alli suggests they shouldn't be completely written off.

This gritty success was the ideal preparation for hosting Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League last 16 first leg on Wednesday. Leicester have lost four of their last five league games, increasing the pressure on under-fire boss Claude Puel.

Puel has reportedly lost the support of several influential players, including England striker Vardy, who was left on the bench for the first 60 minutes before coming on to miss the penalty with his first touch.

With the Dortmund clash looming on Wednesday, Pochettino tweaked his team, leaving out Toby Alderweireld and Lucas Moura and recalling Fernando Llorente. Llorente was caught napping early on when Harry Maguire evaded the Spanish striker's marking and met James Maddison's free-kick with a towering header that Hugo Lloris tipped over.

That chance was symptomatic of a disjointed start

from Tottenham. Leicester's Harvey Barnes was allowed too much space in the penalty area as he raced onto Yuri Tielemans' pass, but a poor finish wasted a gilt-edged chance.

Finally piecing together an incisive raid, Tottenham were furious when Son's penalty appeal ended in a booking for diving after Maguire stuck out a leg to halt the South Korean.

Pochettino's men channelled their frustration into a sustained assault on the Leicester goal.

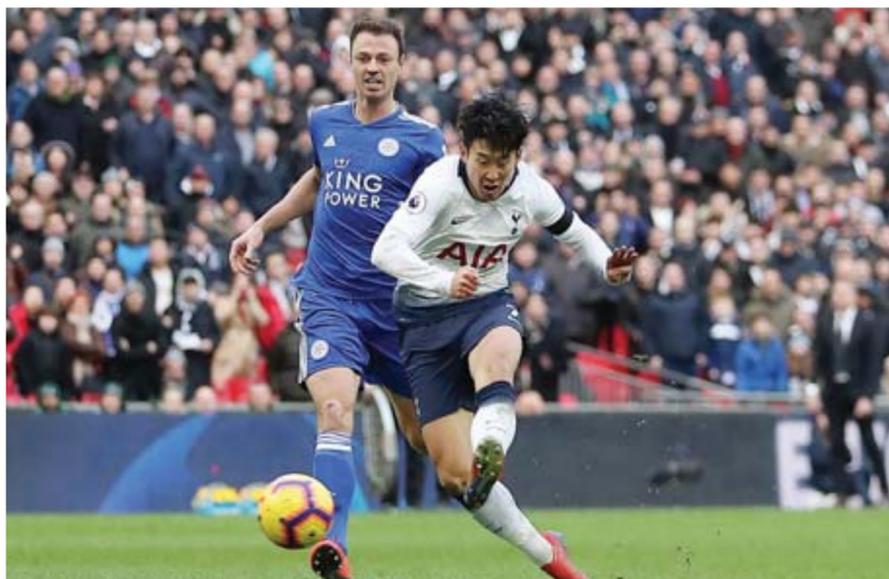
Danny Rose's surging run ended with a close-range effort that brought a good save from Kasper Schmeichel. Tottenham kept pressing and were rewarded with a well-worked 33rd minute opener.

Trippier's short corner found the unmarked Christian Eriksen and he whipped a pin-point cross towards Sanchez six yards from goal. Leicester called for off-side, but their protests were in vain as Sanchez launched himself into a diving header that flashed past Schmeichel.

Replays showed the Colombia defender was just outside as he scored his first goal for Tottenham since his 2017 move from Ajax. Demarai Gray should have done better than head Ricardo Pereira's cross tamely at Lloris from 10 yards out soon after the interval.

Leicester's positive start to the second half brought a golden opportunity to equalise with their 60th minute penalty. A rapid exchange of passes opened up a chance for Maddison, prompting Jan Vertonghen to rashly bundle over the midfielder.

Vardy had been warming up in preparation and was immediately introduced, jogging forward to take the ball from Maddison. But Lloris came to Tottenham's rescue, plunging to his right to keep out Vardy's spot-kick. Tottenham made the most of their escape as Eriksen doubled the lead three minutes later. Llorente



**LONDON:** Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean striker Son Heung-Min (R) scores his team's third goal during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Leicester City at Wembley Stadium in London. —AFP

pounced on Pereira's poor clearance and teed up Eriksen for a superb strike from the edge of the area for his first goal since January 1.

Vardy gave Leicester hope in the 76th minute,

pouncing from close-range to convert Pereira's cross in typically predatory fashion. But Son had the last word in the 90th minute as the winger raced clear to slot past Schmeichel for his 15th goal of the season. —AFP

## Six of world's top 10 to play in Qatar

**DOHA:** Despite the loss of world number one Naomi Osaka through injury, six of the women's top 10 players descend on Doha this week for the Qatar Open. Australian Open champion — and the sport's new superstar — Osaka withdrew last week due to a back injury, leaving a big hole to fill for tournament organisers, which they have done with a strong field including three former world number ones.

Simona Halep is now the top seed and the Romanian will be joined by the Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova

and Germany's Angelique Kerber as the top seeds. All three were formerly at the top of the women's rankings, Halep only being ousted by Osaka last month after Melbourne.

Halep, now ranked three in the world, and Kerber, sixth, are both Grand Slam winners. Pliskova, the world number five, is a former US Open finalist. Kerber is the first of these to arrive in Doha as she seeks to erase the memory of her crushing straight sets fourth round defeat against Danielle Collins in Australia.

"It's a tough draw [in Doha]," Kerber told reporters yesterday. "But this is a challenge, and I'm always looking forward to coming here." All three top seeds have a good record in Qatar.

Halep and Kerber met in the 2014 final, with the Romanian winning, and Pliskova won the title two years ago. World number seven Elina Svitolina of Ukraine-a

wildcard replacement for Osaka-is the fourth seed.

Also in Doha from the top 10 will be world number eight Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands and Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki, ranked tenth. The Dane was the runner-up to Pliskova in 2017.

Svitolina said she had changed her mind about playing in Doha after initially deciding she needed more rest after Australia where she struggled with a shoulder and neck injury. But the 24-year-old now feels she is ready to return to the court earlier than anticipated.

"This tournament, you know, here is always tough," she said. "Everyone wants to play, everyone wants to play well. That's why it makes it not easy at all." The top four seeds are expected to be in action from tomorrow.

Halep and Pliskova could meet in the final in Doha, just days after the pair were set to meet against each other this weekend in the Fed Cup. —AFP

## PSG's Cavani out of Man Utd game with torn thigh muscle

**PARIS:** Edinson Cavani will sit out the first leg of Paris Saint-Germain's Champions League encounter with Manchester United, French sports daily L'Equipe and the daily Parisien newspaper reported yesterday, while club coach Thomas Tuchel described his participation as highly unlikely.

L'Equipe reported that a medical on Sunday had revealed a torn thigh muscle and suggested Cavani, known as El Matador for his clinical finishing skills, would also miss the return leg March 6. Earlier yesterday Tuchel described Cavani's situation, stemming from a fiercely converted penalty on Saturday, as bleak.

"There is no good news for Edi this morning, there are still examinations today at our training centre, the club will speak a little later, but in my opinion the news is not going to be very good," Tuchel said.

"It will be very difficult for him to play." The Uruguayan centre-forward has scored 17 times in the French league and twice in the Champions League this season. PSG visit Old Trafford on Tuesday for the first leg of their encounter in the round-of-16, the stage at which the French champions went out in the last two seasons. Cavani suffered what L'Equipe reported Sunday as a torn thigh muscle, probably when blasting home the 42nd minute penalty that gave PSG a 1-0 victory in Bordeaux. He did not play the second half. "We always hope but the first exams are not good," Tuchel said. He said the club would make a statement later in



**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's Uruguayan forward Edinson Cavani jumps for the ball during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and FC Girondins de Bordeaux at the Parc des Princes Stadium, in Paris, on Saturday. —AFP

the day. PSG will already be missing superstar striker Neymar, sidelined until at least April with a foot injury. Tuchel said there was good news for another of his key players, midfielder Marco Verratti who started against Bordeaux after three weeks out with an ankle problem.

"Verratti can play and will play," said the German coach. "I'm worried because we are missing key players," said Tuchel. "For the big games in the Champions League, it is absolutely necessary to have key players with a lot of experience". —AFP

## Big spenders under pressure to deliver Champions League returns in last 16

**MANCHESTER:** One of Europe's traditional financial powerhouses Manchester United meet the nouveau riche Paris Saint-Germain as the Champions League last 16 gets underway tomorrow with both sides hoping to finally reap some reward on the biggest stage from record levels of investment.

Despite splashing hundreds of millions on new players since taking over in 2011, PSG's Qatari owners have not been able to buy success in the competition they crave the most with four successive quarter-final exits

between 2013 and 2016 the furthest they have progressed.

Barcelona and Real Madrid have ended the French champions' dreams at this stage in each of the past two seasons. Once again in the last 16 PSG must face one of the few clubs in the world that can boast greater revenue than they can thanks to United's commercial power and the riches of the Premier League's TV contracts.

But, unlike the two Spanish giants who have used their financial muscle to win seven of the last 10 Champions League titles between them, United have made even less of an impression on the competition than PSG since making three finals in four years between 2008 and 2011.

Both clubs can be accused of being too star struck in their transfer policy, more focused on big names that reign in lucrative commercial deals than striking the right balance on the field to compete with the best when the margins become fine in the knockout stages of the Champions League.

Hitting form and finding fortune at the right time of the season is also key as PSG have found to their cost in the case of the world's most expensive player Neymar.

The Brazilian will miss both legs of the tie against United due to a metatarsal injury in his right foot, the same problem that forced him to miss the second leg of PSG's defeat to Madrid last year.

Should Thomas Tuchel's men not make it past a United rejuvenated under caretaker boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, Neymar, the man signed to lead PSG to Champions League glory, will have played one knockout game in two years since his 222-million-euro (\$252 million) move from Barcelona.

Uniting Neymar in a stellar forward line alongside Kylian Mbappe and Edinson Cavani has also left PSG short-handed in other areas due to financial fair play restrictions, particularly in central midfield.

United have made similar mistakes in the six years since Alex Ferguson retired and only now under a former pupil of the Scot in Solskjaer are recovering some of the principles that once made them a dominant force in Europe. "That is what we have to strive for. If we don't dream and we don't have that vision of where we are going, then we will just falter," said Solskjaer.

"So for us, or me, I am only used to this club challenging for trophies so that is where I see us."

Angel di Maria's return to Old Trafford as a PSG player is a reminder of his one underwhelming season for United after joining for a then British record £60 million (\$78 million).

Romelu Lukaku and Alexis Sanchez have failed to make a sustained impact despite big-money moves and have fallen behind a homegrown talent in Marcus Rashford in Solskjaer's pecking order. And even Paul Pogba has only begun to deliver on his £89 million fee in the two months since Solskjaer took charge after a long-running feud with previous boss Jose Mourinho.

However, United and PSG are not alone in funding the arms race to Champions League glory. Juventus spent 112 million euros on a 33-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo in July to take them one step further after reaching the final in 2015 and 2017, when Ronaldo scored twice in a 4-1 win for Madrid.

Ronaldo returns to the Spanish capital in the last 16, but at Atletico Madrid, who have also stretched their financial resources in the transfer market and increased wages to keep hold of Antoine Griezmann in the hope of winning the competition for the first time in their own stadium come June's final. —AFP



### Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Wolverhampton Wanderers v Newcastle United	23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Deportivo Alaves v Levante	23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3	

## Davis destroys Ruiz to retain WBA super featherweight title

**LOS ANGELES:** Gervonta Davis retained his World Boxing Association super featherweight world title with a vicious first-round knockout of former world champion Hugo Ruiz on Saturday. Unbeaten Davis lived up to his knockout-artist reputation with his 20th win inside the distance out of his 21 victories.

The powerful southpaw hurt Ruiz with a straight left and then followed up with a three-punch combination capped by a right hook to the side of Ruiz's face that dropped the challenger to a knee.

Ruiz, blood streaming from his nose, was able to rise but referee Jack Reiss called a halt at 2:59 of the first round. "Tonight I just wanted to put on a great performance," said Davis, who posted his 12th straight knockout.

Ruiz was a late replacement for three-division champion Abner Mares, who withdrew from the bout two weeks ago with a detached retina in his right eye. Ruiz, a former super bantamweight world champion, was coming off a unanimous 12-round decision over Alberto Guevara on the undercard of Manny Pacquiao's 12-round demolition of Adrien Broner and took the fight on 10 days' notice.

Reiss said he stopped the fight when Ruiz failed to say if he felt he could continue. "Ruiz didn't answer me," Reiss said. I told them clearly in the dressing room that you've got to show me you want to be in this fight.

"When I asked him 'Can you continue' in Spanish he kind of just looked down and didn't answer. He was really hurt, that nose was broken earlier and then he got hit on it again." —AFP