

**25** Ferrari's Leclerc on pole in Russia with his fourth victory in a row

**26** World Cup explodes into life as hosts Japan stun Ireland

**27** Chepngetich takes marathon gold as heat decimates rivals



SHEFFIELD: Sheffield United's English defender Jack O'Connell (L) and Liverpool's Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk (R) go for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Sheffield United and Liverpool at Bramall Lane in Sheffield, northern England yesterday. —AFP

## Liverpool win to romp clear in EPL

Kane saves Spurs, first league win of the season for Wolves

**LONDON:** Liverpool sent out an ominous warning to the rest of the Premier League yesterday, proving they can win ugly as Harry Kane rescued 10-man Tottenham. Elsewhere, there was a first league win of the season for Wolves, against bottom club Watford, while West Ham's draw at Bournemouth lifted them to third in the table.

Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool won their seventh Premier League game out of seven to pull eight points clear ahead of Manchester City, thanks to Georginio Wijnaldum's fortunate strike in a 1-0 victory at Sheffield United. The European champions looked short on invention against the well-organised Blades until Wijnaldum's shot from the edge of the box 20 minutes from time trickled between the legs of United goalkeeper Dean Henderson.

Liverpool, who have won 16 consecutive league games, finished a single point behind champions

Manchester City in the Premier League last season but are now setting a searing pace as they chase their first top-flight title since 1990.

"For us it was important to win, we had unbelievably big chances," Klopp told BT Sport. "In the first half we had two big chances and in the second one which we scored from. These games, they are not all beauties and you have to work hard for the results."

The hosts had their chances to spring a huge shock against their off-colour opponents but all of their good work was undone with one mistake when Wijnaldum pounced on a loose ball 20 yards from goal. His strike should have been easily handled by Henderson, who instead watched on in horror as the ball slipped under his grasp.

### KANE STRIKES

Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino recalled his

big guns for the Premier League game against Southampton at home, making 11 changes from the side that suffered a shock League Cup loss at Colchester in midweek.

Spurs had won just two of their opening eight games in all competitions before and looked in deep trouble when they were reduced to 10 men against Brighton. Tanguy Ndombele fired the home side ahead in the 24th minute but they suffered a blow when Serge Aurier was sent off after half an hour for two yellow cards.

Hugo Lloris then gifted Southampton an equaliser with a goalkeeping howler, Danny Ings dispossessing the Frenchman in his six-yard box and forcing the ball home before Kane restored the home side's lead shortly before half-time.

The win lifted Spurs into fourth place in the Premier League, one spot behind West Ham, who drew 2-2

away to Bournemouth after beating Manchester United last week. Crystal Palace were 2-0 winners against Norwich, thanks to a Luka Milivojevic penalty and a late Andros Townsend goal while a Matt Doherty strike and a Daryl Janmaat own goal gave Wolves a much-needed 2-0 victory against Watford.

Aston Villa's John McGinn gave his side a 2-1 lead in the 79th minute but Chris Wood levelled for Burnley just two minutes later and the match finished level.

Pep Guardiola's City face a tricky-looking trip to Goodison Park to take on Everton in the late kick-off, knowing they must win to cling onto Liverpool's coat-tails, even this early in the season.

Early team news revealed Sergio Aguero, Bernardo Silva and David Silva were all on the bench for City. High-flying Leicester host struggling Newcastle today while Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's misfiring Manchester United are at home to Arsenal tomorrow. — AFP

## Sabalenka beats Riske in WTA Wuhan final

**WUHAN:** Aryna Sabalenka was in disbelief after she became the first player to claim back-to-back titles in Wuhan thanks to a 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 victory over American Alison Riske in the final yesterday. The 21-year-old improved her record at the event to a perfect 12-0 and joins Petra Kvitová as the only player to have won the tournament twice.

"I can't believe that I defended this title. I couldn't even imagine that I would be able to do this," she said. In a rematch of their final in Shenzhen last January, Sabalenka utilised her power game once again to overcome Riske in 114 minutes in front of a 13,000-strong centre court crowd. She unleashed 18 aces and won 79 percent of her first-serve points. Sabalenka was emotional during the trophy ceremony as she addressed her coach Dmitry Tursunov, after the duo briefly split following her second round exit in the US Open. "Special thanks to my team, this year has been really tough for us, and I think because of Wuhan, because I was really afraid of this title and I defended," she said.

Both players have enjoyed their greatest success at Chinese tournaments, with Sabalenka lifting her first Premier-level trophy in Wuhan 12 months ago — one of two titles she had previously won in China — and Riske reaching six of her nine career finals in the country.

Sabalenka had the better start, racing to a 5-1 lead before Riske slowed her down, breaking the Belarusian as she was serving for the opening set. But the number nine seed was unfazed, and converted on her third set point with a smooth volley winner to snatch the first set in 35 minutes.

She survived a 13-minute eight-deuce game to hold for 1-1 in the second, but dropped serve in game six to hand Riske a 4-2 advantage. It was all the 29-year-old needed to draw level and force a decider. Sabalenka broke early in the final set and raced to a 5-0 lead and soon wrapped up the win to secure a fourth career WTA crown.

The world number 14 heads to Beijing next, where she faces either Daria Kasatkina or Peng Shuai in her opening match. Meanwhile, Riske, who is set to break the top 30 for the first time on Monday, rued her missed opportunities in the Wuhan final.

"I'm really disappointed in my mentality in the third set. I think I could have brought more out of myself. Still moving forward, I think that's something I have to work on." — AFP



WUHAN: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus holds the trophy after her victory in the women's singles final match against Alison Riske of the US at the Wuhan Open tennis tournament in Wuhan yesterday. — AFP