

18 World number one Djokovic puts positive spin on US Open plan



19 Bergamo wakes from virus nightmare to resume Atalanta football dream



19 Neymar ordered to pay Barcelona 6.7m euros



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Ivorian defender Serge Aurier (L) vies with Manchester United's Scottish midfielder Scott McTominay (R) during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. —AFP

Penalty denies Man Utd in draw at Tottenham

United remain in fifth, two points behind Chelsea

LONDON: Bruno Fernandes's penalty salvaged a 1-1 draw for Manchester United at Tottenham as the Red Devils had another late spot-kick overturned by a VAR review on Friday. Jose Mourinho was on course to get the better of his former club when Steven Bergwijn's strike gave Spurs a half-time lead.

However, United's second half pressure finally told nine minutes from time when Fernandes converted from the spot after Paul Pogba had been brought down in the box.

Fernandes then thought he had won a second penalty, but a VAR review decided there was little contact as he went down under a challenge from Eric Dier. A point does little for either side's chances of breaking into the top four.

United remain in fifth, two points behind Chelsea, while Spurs are four points further back in eighth. In keeping with all matches since the Premier League's return earlier this week, all players and officials took

a knee before kick in protest against racial injustice.

Once the action did get underway, United settled quickest to the eerie surroundings of a 62,000 seater stadium draped in banners with the only fans appearing on giant video screens behind each goal.

Marcus Rashford has had a momentous week as the English international's campaign to ensure vulnerable children are not left without food vouchers during the English school holidays forced a government U-turn.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer described the 22-year-old's action as far "more important than any game of football that he would probably play." However, the England international admitted he was also desperate to get back to the day job after being sidelined since January with a back injury prior to the coronavirus-enforced shutdown of football for three months.

Rashford had the best chance to turn the visitors' early control into a goal as his low shot was beaten

away by the legs of Hugo Lloris. Tottenham could be the Premier League side with most to gain from a three-month stoppage.

Prior to lockdown, Mourinho spoke of his desire to fast forward to the end of the season when he would have Harry Kane, Son Heung-min, Moussa Sissoko and Bergwijn fit again. All four were fit to return to the starting line-up and it was an inspired moment from the Dutchman which opened the scoring.

Bergwijn surged past the leaden-footed Harry Maguire before David de Gea could only parry his powerful shot into the roof of the net. De Gea made amends moments later with a stunning save to prevent Son's looping header from Bergwijn's cross doubling Tottenham's lead.

However, that was the last time the Spaniard was troubled as Tottenham sat on their lead after the break and invited plenty of United pressure. The arrival of Fernandes in January played a huge part in

an 11-game unbeaten run for Solskjaer's men before the break.

Fernandes was inches away from an equaliser as his low drive fizzed just wide. Lloris then produced a stunning save to tip Anthony Martial's rising effort over. Solskjaer had left Pogba on the bench from the start, but the Frenchman made a big impact after being introduced for his first appearance since December 26. Pogba's quick feet left Eric Dier in his wake and Dier then pushed the midfielder over inside the box as he tried to recover.

Fernandes coolly sent Lloris the wrong way from the penalty spot to deservedly level. And United thought they had the chance to win the game when Jon Moss pointed to the spot again in stoppage time.

Rashford was set to take the penalty this time, but was denied the chance to round off his momentous week as VAR overruled the referee's original decision and United had to settle for a point. —AFP

Barcelona held to a goalless draw at Sevilla

MADRID: Gerard Pique said La Liga's title race is Real Madrid's to lose after Barcelona were held to a goalless draw against Sevilla on Friday. Barca's first slip-up since returning from the three-month hiatus hands Madrid the chance to regain top spot this weekend.

After their emphatic 3-0 win over Valencia on Thursday, Zinedine Zidane's side will move level on points with the Catalans if they beat Real Sociedad on Sunday and above them due to their superior record head-to-head.

"Seeing what we've done in the last two rounds, it's going to be very difficult to win this league," said a despondent Pique afterwards.

"From what I've seen, it's very hard to see Real

Madrid dropping points."

Sevilla, in third, and Valencia, in eighth, always looked capable of shifting the dynamic at the top of the table, with Madrid capitalising to climb back to the summit for the first time since they beat Barcelona on March 1.

Asked about Pique's analysis, Barcelona coach Quique Setien said: "I think it comes from frustration. I am optimistic. I think it will be tough for anyone to take maximum points." A valuable point for Sevilla, meanwhile, gives them a five-point cushion over Getafe in fifth, albeit having played a game more.

Barca could have few complaints at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan.

They never really troubled Sevilla for any prolonged period and the closest Lionel Messi came to scoring the 700th goal of his career were a pair of free-kicks tipped over.

The sight of goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen jogging up for a late corner demonstrated how big a blow they considered dropping points to be.

Yet Real Sociedad are still in the hunt for Champions League qualification and will offer

Madrid no guarantees on Sunday while games against Getafe, Athletic Bilbao and Villarreal mean there are still plenty of hurdles for Zidane's team to overcome.

Barcelona though would appear to have the tougher run-in, with Athletic Bilbao, Atletico Madrid, Villarreal and local rivals Espanyol coming up.

Messi was well-contained by Sevilla and it could be the Argentinian was feeling the effects of a third consecutive 90 minutes in nine days.

Setien chose not to rest his captain in either of two comfortable wins over Leganes or Real Mallorca.

Instead, Antoine Griezmann dropped to the bench, with Martin Braithwaite preferred in the front three alongside Messi and Luis Suarez, who made his first start since January after recovering from a knee injury.

Sevilla's Jules Kounde shot just wide of the post early on but Barcelona controlled the opening 30 minutes, even if chances were few and far between.

Messi's curled free-kick was headed off the line by Kounde and Braithwaite almost had a tap-in when

Tomas Vaclik spilled, but the ball was hacked away.

The half ended with a scuffle and Messi was at the heart of it, squaring up to and then pushing over Sevilla's centre back Diego Carlos. Messi was unhappy with Carlos' challenge on Suarez but escaped punishment. Ever Banega came on at half-time for Sevilla and gave them more purpose in midfield. Munir El Haddadi's shot from the angle was palmed away by Ter Stegen.

The game opened up in the final 15 minutes as Jordi Alba made a crucial block to prevent Munir's pass setting up an easy finish in the middle.

Alba might then have teed up a winner too but Suarez swept the defender's pull-back over the bar.

Sergio Reguilon, on loan at Sevilla from Madrid, had the best chance but he failed to connect with his weaker right foot.

Earlier, Gerard Moreno's winner gave Villarreal a 1-0 win away at Granada, putting them within touching distance of the top four.

Real Mallorca claimed a 1-1 draw against fellow strugglers Leganes thanks to a stunning late free kick from Oscar Rodriguez. —AFP