

Sports

# Lyon see off Reims to climb to provisional 2nd in Ligue 1

## Neymar scores his 50th league goal; PSG held

**DECINES-CHARPIEU:** Lyon continued their fine run of form with a 3-0 win over Reims in yesterday's early game which lifted them provisionally to second in Ligue 1. Karl Toko Ekambi, Bruno Guimaraes and Moussa Dembele scored for Lyon as they made it 16 points from their last six matches to sit two points behind leaders Paris Saint-Germain. Lille can leapfrog them if they win at Saint-Etienne. Reims, who had Moreto Cassama sent off after 33 minutes, remain fourth from bottom and look destined for a relegation dog fight.

Toko Ekambi, returning from suspension, proved the key for Lyon, hitting the post early on before scoring the opener in the 22nd minute with a header at the back post from a cross by Memphis Depay. He also created the second - Guimaraes's first for Lyon - four minutes after the break, the Brazilian's shot taking a deflection off Marshall Munetsi. Toko Ekambi also teed up Dembele for the third shortly after he came on as a substitute for Tino Kadewere who had hit the post in the first half and had a goal ruled out for offside. Cassama was sent off for a foul on Depay when he looked to be in on goal.

Meanwhile, Neymar scored his 50th league goal for Paris Saint-Germain but warned the Ligue 1 leaders needed to improve quickly as they prepared for a crunch European clash with Manchester United by drawing 2-2 with Bordeaux on Saturday. The world's most expensive player scored a penalty to cancel out an early Timothee Pembele own goal and become the quickest to reach a half century of league goals in a PSG shirt, outdoing Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Moise Kean then put PSG in front only for Yacine Adli to fire in a superb second-half equaliser for mid-table Bordeaux, who deserved their draw. It is a setback for the reigning French champions, a week after they lost 3-2 at Monaco, and nearest challengers Lille can move level on points at the top of the table with victory at Saint-Etienne. "If we don't improve it's going to be diffi-

cult for us in the league and in the Champions League," Neymar told Canal Plus ahead of the trip to Old Trafford on Wednesday.

PSG were again missing key players, as has often been the case this season, with goalkeeper Keylor Navas and captain Marquinhos among those absent at an empty Parc des Princes. Yet, regardless of that, the performance will do little to ease concerns that have been growing since they succeeded in beating RB Leipzig in midweek despite a disjointed display. "We know how important Wednesday's match is. It's decisive. We didn't play well (against Leipzig) but we won. On Wednesday we will try to play our best game. We need to play more as a team and be better organised, otherwise it will be difficult," Neymar added.

A failure to beat United at Old Trafford could leave last season's Champions League runners-up staring at a group-stage exit from the competition for the first time in the Qatar era. Bordeaux took a 10th-minute lead when 18-year-old defender Pembele, making his first senior start, turned a corner into his own net as he jumped with Josh Maja at the near post. PSG honored the late Diego Maradona with a minute's silence before kick-off and a banner at one end of the empty Parc des Princes which read, in Spanish, 'Goodbye number 10! Rest in Peace!'. But, rather than an Argentine, it was their own Brazilian superstar who turned this game around before the half-hour mark. A foul in the box on the ex-Barcelona forward by Otavio was spotted by the referee following a VAR review, and Neymar rolled in the resulting spot-kick, just as he had done against Leipzig. Signed for 222 million euros (\$264m) in August 2017, Neymar has needed just 58 matches to score 50 goals in Ligue 1, fewer than any other player. Ibrahimovic required 59 games to get to the milestone.

### Marseille bounce back

Within a minute of equalising, PSG went ahead, with goalkeeper Benoit Costil parrying



**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar fights for the ball during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Girondins de Bordeaux (FCGB) at the Parc de Princes stadium on November 28, 2020. —AFP

Neymar's fizzing shot and Kean following in to score his sixth goal since signing on loan from Everton. PSG should then have put the game to bed but Costil tipped a Kylian Mbappe shot onto the post on 35 minutes and then denied Mbappe again early in the second half when he dived at the feet of the France star. Instead Bordeaux drew level on the hour mark when Hatem Ben Arfa set up former PSG youngster Adli to score with a fine first-time strike.

"Normally I protect my team but our second-half performance was not ok. There is no way we

can repeat our second-half showing when we play in Manchester," Tuchel said. Earlier Marseille put their humiliating losing run in the Champions League to one side as they beat Nantes 3-1. Florian Thauvin and Dimitri Payet scored before Dario Benedetto made it three from a penalty. Ludovic Blas pulled a goal back for Nantes. It was a fourth straight Ligue 1 victory for Marseille, moving them up to third. Andre Villas-Boas's team suffered a Champions League record 13th straight defeat in the competition in midweek when they lost 2-0 at home to Porto. —AFP

## Ronaldo-less Juventus held 1-1 at Benevento

**MILAN:** Juventus again showed their reliance on Cristiano Ronaldo as, with the superstar attacker absent, they drew 1-1 at promoted Benevento on Saturday, while Serie A title rivals Inter Milan beat high-flying Sassuolo 3-0 to move second. The champions' fifth draw in nine league matches leaves Andrea Pirlo's side fifth, three points behind leaders AC Milan who faced Fiorentina yesterday. Ronaldo did not play after scoring in Juventus's 2-1 victory over Ferencvaros on Tuesday which sealed their berth in the Champions League last 16.

"Every team is addicted to Ronaldo, even at Real Madrid he scored a lot," said Pirlo, describing the Portuguese star as "a catalyst". "He is an important player and it's normal that he makes you win games, but even without Ronaldo we have to be good at winning games." Alvaro Morata and Paulo Dybala started up front in Ronaldo's absence, which Pirlo put down to "tiredness". "(Ronaldo) had a little problem and he wanted to play anyway in the Champions League. "He had played many games with the national team, it is normal for

him to get tired and rest."

Morata, who scored the late winner on Tuesday, opened the scoring in the 21st minute after collecting Federico Chiesa's cross-pitch pass to bring his tally to eight goals in all competitions this season. Gaetano Letizia's volley just before the break earned a point for 13th-placed Benevento. Dybala wasted chances to score his first league goal this season, including one four minutes from time when goalkeeper Lorenzo Montipò tipped over the bar. Morata also missed opportunities to rescue Juventus before being shown a red card after the final whistle for arguing with the referee. "When we lack players of experience and personality, we struggle," added Pirlo, also without injured defenders Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci.

### Inter defy 'mud slingers'

In Emilia-Romagna, Antonio Conte's Inter bounced back from the 2-0 loss to Real Madrid which left their Champions League hopes dangling by a thread, inflicting this season's first defeat on Sassuolo. Inter move second ahead of Sassuolo, with both teams on 18 points after nine games, two points behind AC Milan and one ahead of Conte's old team Juve. "It's not easy, especially at Inter, because many people can't wait to criticise, to throw mud at us," said Conte. "But we are united and such situations should provide us



**BENEVENTO:** Juventus' Welsh midfielder Aaron Ramsey (right) outruns Benevento's Finnish midfielder Perparim Hetemaj (left) after colliding with Benevento's Italian midfielder Riccardo Improbato (Bottom left) during the Italian Serie A football match Benevento vs Juventus on November 28, 2020. —AFP

with more strength."

Alexis Sanchez opened the scoring in the fourth minute following good work from Lautaro Martinez and poor defending from Sassuolo's Vlad Chiriches. It was a nightmare match for Chiriches who 10 minutes later accidentally turned a powerful Arturo Vidal centre into his own net, with the Romanian later limping off with a muscular problem. Roberto Gagliardini added a third just before the hour mark, sealing a win that will boost Inter

before Tuesday's European trip to Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Romelu Lukaku and Ashley Young came on in place of Lautaro and Sanchez for the final 10 minutes, with the Belgian forward having a goal ruled out for offside. Conte also brought on Christian Eriksen, who looks set to leave Inter in January after just one year. The Danish midfielder came on for Ivan Perisic for the final five minutes to make his first appearance in more than a month. —AFP

## Real Madrid slump to 2-1 loss at home

**MADRID:** Real Madrid slumped to a 2-1 loss at home to Alaves in La Liga on Saturday as city rivals Atletico moved level with leaders Real Sociedad after extending their winning run to six matches. Lucas Perez scored a fifth-minute penalty at Alfredo di Stefano stadium and Joselu added a second just after half-time following an awful mistake by goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

Casemiro gave Real a lifeline on 86 minutes but Alaves held on for a victory that lifted them to ninth. Madrid remain in fourth place and six points behind Real Sociedad and Diego Simeone's Atletico. "I don't have any explanations," said Real coach Zinedine Zidane, whose side followed an impressive 2-0 midweek win at Inter Milan by losing for the third time in 10 league games this season. "We alternate between good and bad moments. The other day in Milan we played a good match, and today, three days later, we put in a display like that at home."

"It was our worst start to a match this season," he added. "We can't

change the flow of the match. It bothers me, and the players too I think. The problem we have right now is consistency." After a minute's silence in honor of Diego Maradona, in keeping with the poignant tributes around Spain this weekend following the death of the Argentine legend, Real soon fell behind when Nacho handled a corner. Perez powered the spot-kick beyond Courtois to give Alaves the lead, and the forward should have struck a second when he was played clean through, his attempted chip superbly swatted aside by the Real keeper.

Madrid's night went from bad to worse when Eden Hazard was forced off on 28 minutes after taking a knock, the latest in a long list of injury setbacks for the Belgium star. While a terrific double save by Fernando Pacheco denied Toni Kroos, a howler from Courtois presented Joselu with the second goal on 49 minutes when a wayward pass went straight to the forward who steered home from 30 yards. Mariano Diaz's header was cleared off the line before Casemiro tapped in from close range after Pacheco kept out Vinicius Junior's effort, but Alaves clung on as Isco clipped the bar with the final kick.

Earlier in the day, Atletico edged a tight contest at Valencia 1-0 that stretched their unbeaten league run to 25 matches. They stay second but are



**MADRID:** Alaves's Spanish defender Ximo Navarro (left) vies with Real Madrid's Brazilian midfielder Casemiro during the Spanish League football match between Real Madrid and Deportivo Alaves on November 28, 2020. —AFP

equal on 23 points with Sociedad with a game in hand thanks to Toni Lato's own goal 11 minutes from time. Stingy Atletico have conceded just twice in their nine league matches so far this season and have only scored two less than La Liga top scorers Sociedad, who hosted third-placed Villarreal yesterday.

"We have made huge progress since April, since that wonderful match at Liverpool," said Simeone, referring to the Champions League last-16 tie his team won 4-2 on aggre-

gate. "The return to La Liga (after the first lockdown) was very good and the team was already starting to show encouraging signs. This is the result of the progression of all of the players." Simeone applauded his former teammate and friend Maradona while teams held a minute's silence before kick-off. Barcelona are 12 points back in 14th place, although they hosted Osasuna in yesterday's early match and will still have two games in hand on Sociedad come the end of the weekend. —AFP

## England do enough to subdue Wales, secure top spot

**LLANELLE:** England had took much power and strength in depth as they overcame a spirited but limited Wales with a 24-13 victory in Llanelli on Saturday to secure top spot in Autumn Nations Cup Group A and set up a title decider against France at Twickenham next week. A Johnny Williams try gave new-look Wales an early lead but they were second-best for most of a messy, largely forgettable match as Henry Slade and Mako Vunipola crossed for England and, after their powerful bench wrestled control, captain Owen Farrell brought them home with four penalties.

"It was a dogged game, no-one could really get a foothold and we couldn't really get any momentum until the end," Farrell said. England topped the group with 13 points from their three wins. Ireland, who play Georgia on Sunday, are on four points and are very likely to finish second, with Wales third, also on four. In the decider at Twickenham next Sunday, England will play France who, despite fielding a largely second-string team due to club commitments, outclassed Italy 36-5.

England fielded their most experienced starting team, boasting 807 caps, while the Welsh, who broke a run of six successive defeats with an unimpressive victory over Georgia last week, had very much a side building to a new era. The hosts struck first when Dan Biggar charged down a Slade clearance and kicked ahead, with centre Williams - who scored a try for England in a non-cap game against the Barbarians last year - first to the ball. Slade made amends with England's first try after man of the match flanker Sam Underhill and Kyle Sinckler made deep inroads and Farrell shifted the ball wide.

England were on top for most of the half, though it was a disjointed effort, and could manage only two Farrell penalties to take them to the break 11-7 ahead. England stretched the lead when Vunipola cleverly spun off the side of a tryline ruck but they were unable to build on that score in a messy period for both teams. Wales did gain some territory and earned two penalties that Biggar slotted to move within five points and spark hopes of an upset. However, England quickly regained control on the pitch and the scoreboard as Farrell landed two more penalties to take them safely clear, and they finished in comfortable control without ever really threatening any fireworks. —Reuters



### Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Leicester City v Fulham	beIN Sports HD 1	20:30
West Ham v Aston Villa	beIN Sports HD 1	23:00
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Real Betis v SD Eibar	beIN Sports	23:00
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Torino v Sampdoria	beIN Sports	20:30
Genoa CFC v Parma	beIN Sports HD 4	22:45