

Sports

Atletico denied derby victory by late Benzema equalizer

Simeone's side failed to go eight points clear on top

MADRID: Atletico Madrid squandered the chance to inflict a heavy blow on Real Madrid's La Liga title hopes on Sunday as Karim Benzema's late equalizer earned the champions a 1-1 draw and kept them in the race at the top. Luis Suarez's flicked finish early in the first half looked to be enough to give Atletico a crucial win that would have put them eight points clear of their opponents, with a game in hand.

But they failed to make their authority count and Benzema punished them in the 88th minute, his goal earning Real Madrid a draw that ensures the gap between the two city rivals stays at five points. "They took the first half and we took the second, the draw was more or less a fair result," said Zinedine Zidane. "There remains a lot of the season left and we'll fight to the end."

Atletico's lead is still considerable and they can extend it to eight points with 12 matches left if they win their game in hand at home to Athletic Bilbao tomorrow night. Yet at full-time, it was Real Madrid's players who had smiles on their faces, while Suarez left the pitch shaking his head, with Atletico only too aware this was a huge opportunity missed.

"It depends which way you look at it," said Diego Simeone. "In the negative, they equalized in the last minute, or the positive, that we played very well in general, that we absolutely controlled the first half, and dominated the second."

The title race remains very much in Atletico's favor but still up for grabs, especially for Barcelona, who were perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of this result. Barca now sit three points behind Atletico, having played a game more. They also face Simeone's side at Camp Nou in May. "It's a long and difficult competition," added Simeone.

"I don't know what people expected, that we were going to win it by 20 points? We know it is going to be difficult."

Kieran Trippier played his first game since January after serving his 10-week ban for breaking betting rules while Benzema proved his worth again, after being deemed fit enough to start following time out with a groin strain.

Atletico were far superior in the first half, stronger, more aggressive, better on the ball and with a clearer plan that restricted Real Madrid to one long-shot from Casemiro and a glancing Benzema header.

By then, Real were behind, the opening goal coming from a familiar combination down the right. Trippier played out from deep into the path of the excellent Marcos Llorente, who nipped the ball away from the diving Nacho Fernandez. A poked pass behind Raphael Varane found Suarez and he flicked a superb finish with the outside of his foot around goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and into the far corner.

Atletico won every challenge and loose ball but missed a second goal. Madrid wanted a penalty at the end of the half after the ball struck Felipe on the hand but the referee was unconvinced, even after consulting the monitor.

Real Madrid rallied and for a while the game opened up. Nacho went close at the back post before Yannick Carrasco twice got the better of Lucas Vazquez, the second time pulling back for Suarez, whose finish was blocked. Angel Correa scuffed when free from six yards out.

Atletico appeared to have regained their authority but they failed to give themselves a cushion and tension grew. Benzema fired over and



MADRID: Real Madrid's Spanish defender Nacho Fernandez (left) challenges Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez during the Spanish league football match Club Atletico de Madrid against Real Madrid CF at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid on Sunday. —AFP

then Jan Oblak pulled off an incredible double save, denying the Frenchman from point blank before getting up to block the rebound. Two minutes remained when Benzema finally struck. He

bundled through, the ball cannoning through kindly for Casemiro, who capitalized with an ice-cold pull-back for his team-mate, who had an open net. —AFP

Rangers win Scottish Premiership for first time in 10 years

GLASGOW: Rangers' first Scottish Premiership title for 10 years was confirmed Sunday after Celtic's 0-0 draw at Dundee United left them 20 points behind their Glasgow rivals with six games left to play. Steven Gerrard's men have stormed to the title without losing a game to end Celtic's stranglehold of a record-equaling nine consecutive Scottish league titles.

Rangers were not even in the top-flight for four of those seasons after the club was demoted to the fourth tier after being liquidated in 2012 due to financial troubles. "This club has been to hell and back over the past 10 years," said Gerrard after Saturday's 3-0 win over St Mirren put Rangers on the brink of a first major trophy since 2011. "I've only been part of it for three, but I can certainly relate and I've got that feeling and that affection with the fans and I know what they have been through."

The former England and Liverpool captain never won a league title during his legendary 17-year career at Anfield. However, Gerrard has transformed Rangers' fortunes both domestically and in Europe since taking his first senior managerial role in 2018. The newly crowned Scottish champions have reached the last 16 of the Europa League for the second consecutive season, where they face Slavia Prague on Thursday.

Rangers were denied rubbing salt into Celtic wounds by winning the title at Celtic Park in two weeks' time in their next league fixture after they dropped points for the 12th time in the league this season. Caretaker manager John Kennedy was taking charge for just the second time since Neil Lennon resigned last month. The same issues that have dogged Celtic all season cost them at Tannadice as the visitors dominated but failed to find the net with 27 attempts on goal. —AFP

Red Bull athletes aim for the sky over the world's largest fountain

DUBAI: What happens when two of the world's top paragliding pilots are introduced to the world's largest fountain? A whole lot of fun (not to mention some spectacular content). In the spirit of demonstrating that anything is possible - by even pushing their own adventurous boundaries - Red Bull athletes Horacio Llorens and Rafael Goberna teamed up to take part in an exclusive one-off stunt to showcase the beautiful Palm Fountain at the Pointe, Palm Jumeirah in Dubai.

And this performance - now showing in a new Red Bull TV short film, "The Breaking Pointe" - didn't just involve your typical paraglide... With the world-renowned Atlantis, The Palm Jumeirah resort as a backdrop, Llorens and Goberna donned special paramotors to take to the sky; gliding between the Palm Fountain's jets of water that were so close they could feel them.

In the film, the athletes - along with a large team of specialists - demonstrate just what it takes to plan a stunt of this kind. It's definitely not just a case of turning up and flying - there's pre-event training, there's engineering, there are multiple safety precautions, as well as intensive training sessions and practicing choreography.

"As soon as we got the opportunity, we wanted to fly there!" explains pro paragliding pilot, Llorens. "The ultimate challenge is that we were flying in the night, which means low visibility. Therefore, we needed to know the area really well beforehand. "Also - we needed to know how to 'play' with The Palm Fountain... this was new for us. And with such strong streams of water shooting up, 100 metres, is a lot so we had to be really

Milan close gap on Inter in Serie A

MILAN: Rade Krunic and Diogo Dalot scored in either half as AC Milan beat Hellas Verona 2-0 to close the gap on Serie A leaders Inter before this week's Europa League trip to Manchester United. Krunic curled in a free-kick after 27 minutes with Manchester United loanee Dalot doubling the visitors' account five minutes after the break to pull Milan three points behind Inter, who host in-form Atalanta last week. Champions Juventus are four points behind Milan in third, with a game in hand, after claiming their seventh straight win at home, 3-1 against Lazio on Saturday.

Despite the absence of key players including star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, winger Ante Rebic and defender Theo Hernandez, Milan kept the pressure on their city rivals two weeks after their 3-0 derby defeat. Ibrahimovic, who has scored 14 goals in as many league games for the club, joined the team at Verona despite a leg muscle problem.

"Today we've shown that we are there, that we are a team and still believe," said coach Stefano Pioli. "We are stronger when we're all together, but we're also strong with absences. Ibrahimovic arrived before the game, followed the technical meeting, and helped to stimulate us as

great champions do. He is a pack leader."

Rafael Leao started up front in Ibrahimovic's absence, and the Portuguese forward threatened after quarter of an hour with a header which went over the bar. The breakthrough came when Krunic was brought down just outside the box. The Bosnian midfielder dusted himself down and whipped a free-kick past a stunned Marco Silvestri from a tricky angle for his first league goal in Milan colours.

Defender Dalot also got off the mark in Serie A four minutes after the break, blasting in an Alexis Saelemaekers cross. Milan took a valuable three points before they travel to Manchester for the first leg of their Europa League last 16 tie with United before hosting Napoli in the league next weekend. Verona, in eighth, fell to their first home defeat since losing to Inter before Christmas.

Insigne double lifts Napoli

Roma moved up to fourth, one point ahead of fifth-placed Atalanta thanks to a Gianluca Mancini goal, ahead of their Europa League tie against Shakhtar Donetsk in Rome. Mancini jumped highest to turn in a Lorenzo Pellegrini corner after 24 minutes at the Stadio Olimpico, beating second choice goalkeeper Federico Marchetti who replaced Mattia Perrin. Roma sit nine points behind Inter after the win. "One more step is missing to beat the big teams, we need to improve because something more is needed to reach



VERONA: AC Milan's Portuguese defender Diogo Dalot celebrates after scoring with his teammates during the Italian Serie A football match Hellas Verona vs AC Milan played behind closed doors at the Marcantonio Bentegodi Stadium in Verona on Sunday. —AFP

the Champions League," said Mancini.

In Naples, Lorenzo Insigne scored twice with Victor Osimhen adding a third as Napoli consolidated sixth place, three points off the Champions League berths, with a 3-1 win over Bologna. Nigerian Osimhen returned after taking a knock to his head two weeks ago, coming off the bench eight minutes after the break. A minute's silence was observed before kick-off after the death of Mirko Pavinato, captain of the Bologna side who won the league in 1964.

Insigne opened the scoring after eight minutes, latching onto a Piotr Zielinski's back-heel kick. Osimhen

scored eight minutes after coming on and was involved in Insigne's second 12 minutes later off a rebound just after Roberto Soriano had pulled a goal back for Bologna.

Bottom side Crotone ended their seven-match losing streak with a 4-2 win over coronavirus-hit relegation rivals Torino. The Turin club's last two games, against Sassuolo and Lazio, were unplayed because of a COVID-19 outbreak. Crotone are a point behind second-last Parma, who stretched their winless run to 17 games after defender Simone Iacopini turned into his own net just before the final whistle to hand 14th-placed Fiorentina a 3-3 draw. —AFP

prepared!"

Llorens, along with fellow athlete and friend Goberna had been discussing and practicing tricks and choreography for some time prior to arriving in Dubai. Once in the emirate, the duo - along with the entire project team - conducted trial runs in the Margham Desert in daylight for two days.

Adjusting to the climate

Paragliding with a paramotor is a complicated process and requires skill, patience and very, very precise planning. What many extreme adventure and sporting fans might not know is that paramotors require to be adjusted according to the location they're in. "During training that's when we were testing the paramotors, adjusting the gliders and the brakes," continues Llorens. "Rafael [Goberna] did have a little problem with his motor."

Goberna elaborates: "The motor wasn't flying so good, because prior to arriving in Dubai, it was last used in Europe at high altitude. Therefore, I needed to adjust the carburettor in the air inside the motor. "In the first practice flight over the water, I broke one propeller. I really couldn't understand what was happening. And then another one broke. Eventually, a back-up motor was required."

Refusing to give up, the entire team worked tirelessly to be "fountain-ready" and show day - and the results, as showcased in the video, are spectacular. "It was super nice for us to have finished for us this way - the process was definitely challenging from the very beginning," concludes Goberna. "After a long journey, the result was beautiful! The team worked incredibly hard to make it. The highlight for me was playing between the super shooters with Rafael, because it's something we've never done before; it felt really new and really powerful - with the water coming to our sides extremely high."



Goberna adds: "You feel the air coming up with the water - and the water splashes against your face because it's so strong. It was such a nice experience."

Safety and Precision

As "The Breaking Pointe" demonstrates, a lot of work went into the showcase - one of the most important aspects being learning how to navigate The Palm Fountain. With both sides having different choreography, Llorens and Goberna had to study the movement of the water with great precision in order not to get caught up in the jets of water.

"Obviously, safety is paramount, and there are a

multitude of safety devices we use on paramotors," explains Director of Safety, Alan Gates. "Each athlete used two parachute systems - the main which they fly normally. In the case of an emergency or when they have a technical issue, they would use a reserve parachute."

"When we're flying over water, it's also mandatory to wear a life jacket with automatic and manual inflation. We always have rescue boats, jet skis and divers... it's important we have multiple teams for rescue and safety." Watch the full video here or via Red Bull Kuwait's Instagram page @RedBullKuwait and YouTube page @RedBull.