

Sports

Man City face Man Utd test on march towards history

Victory could put City on brink of Premier League title win



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola reacts during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on March 2, 2021. — AFP

LONDON: Manchester City have history in their sights as the runaway leaders bid to take a huge step towards the Premier League title in tonight's showdown with fading challengers Manchester United. City are 14 points clear of United with 11 games left and victory in the derby would effectively end their second placed rivals' faint hopes of catching them.

Pep Guardiola's side have been so dominant since the end of last year that it is the landmarks they can shatter on the way to a third title in four seasons that now hold the greatest interest. They are unbeaten in 28 games and will set a new club record if they avoid defeat tonight. That could be the first of many milestones to fall for City, who are on an English top-flight record run of 21 successive wins in all competitions.

The only teams from the top five European leagues ever to record longer winning streaks in all competitions are Bayern Munich (23) and Real Madrid (22). City can edge closer to Bayern's tally if they clinch a 16th successive Premier League victory this weekend, which would also take them to the brink of their own record of 18 consecutive Premier League wins, a mark shared with Liverpool. Guardiola's team are six wins short of equaling the world record for consecutive vic-

tories in all competitions by a top-flight side — set by Welsh team The New Saints in 2016.

City's incredible run is all the more remarkable given their troubled start to the season. When they were held to a 0-0 draw at United in December, they were a point behind their rivals in ninth place and the death knell was ringing for their title hopes. But, aided by some clever tactical tweaks from Guardiola, including the use of full-backs Joao Cancelo and Kyle Walker as auxiliary attackers, they have been perfect since then.

City have not trailed in a league fixture for 19 games despite being without the injured Sergio Aguero and Kevin De Bruyne for long periods. While United's inconsistencies and the collapse of champions Liverpool have contributed to City's surge to the top, the leaders' supremacy has not been restricted to the league.

'Something special'

An unprecedented quadruple is within City's reach, but Guardiola is determined to keep his players from getting complacent. "To do what we have done in these four years, still winning, these guys have something special like my time at Barcelona and Bayern

Munich," he said. "We are in a really good position. I did not expect to be in this position two or three months ago but we needed to be calm."

United have stumbled recently, drawing four of their past five league games, and their title ambitions faded into the south London fog during Wednesday's goalless stalemate at Crystal Palace. Even so, United are unbeaten in their past 21 away league games and Guardiola is well aware of the threat they could pose.

United are the only side in any of the top five European leagues yet to lose an away league match this season, while Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has won on both of his visits to the Etihad since taking charge in 2019. "I know how difficult United are," said Guardiola. "More than one year not losing away and they have good results at the Etihad."

Realistically United, who are five points clear of fifth-placed Everton, have to focus on qualifying for the Champions League, either via a top-four finish or winning the Europa League. "Our focus is just on this one game and not where we're going to end up," Solskjaer said. "They're ahead of us by a fair distance at the moment, so Sunday is a chance to test ourselves against a very good team." — AFP

Liverpool's 'power' will ensure Euro berth: Klopp

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp insists the solid foundations he has laid at Liverpool will ensure his troubled club are never faced with a long absence from the Champions League. Klopp is fighting to salvage a dismal season by lifting Liverpool into the Premier League's top four to guarantee qualification for next season's Champions League.

They are currently four points behind fourth placed Chelsea after five successive home defeats. If Liverpool cannot finish in the top four, the soon-to-be dethroned English champions will have to qualify for Europe's elite club competition by winning the Champions League this term. They hold a 2-0 first leg lead against Leipzig in the last 16. But regardless of Liverpool's fate this season, Klopp is convinced the six-time Champions League winners won't go back to the wilderness years when they spent six campaigns from 2010-11 either in the Europa League or out of Europe completely.

"This club will not be a regular out of the Champions League - this year is difficult we know that, but the potential and the power of the club is a completely different one," Klopp said. "I do not know the team 10 years ago but we are ready for a battle in this era, and with the team we have together. Seasons have momentum and we never really got it this year, that is true, but this club is in a really good position. In a difficult time obviously, but in a better position than other clubs I would say. I obviously did not think about what happened in the past but what I can say nobody has to worry about the future of the club because it is in good hands and has a really good team together, and so that is obviously the basis for a good future."

The loss of Champions League football would mean Liverpool take a significant financial hit on top of the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic. It could also affect the composition of the squad in the summer transfer window. But Klopp struck a hard line when asked if players for whom the Champions League was a priority might consider leaving.

"I know we have loyalty from the players. It is not a situation where a player in the squad says, 'We are not in the Champions League so I have to leave'. That will not happen. I know them well enough to know that," he said. "The club is in a different situation and it will not be an issue with new players I can say that. We said it years back if a player does not want to come to us because we don't play Champions League next season then I don't want him. And if a player wants to leave because we don't play Champions League then I don't want him. It is not a personal thing, but it is always like this." — AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
West Bromwich Albion v Newcastle Utd	15:00 beIN Sports
Liverpool v Fulham	17:00 bein sports
Manchester City v Manchester United	19:30 beIN Sports
Tottenham Hotspur v Crystal Palace	22:15 bein sports
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Huesca v Celta de Vigo	16:00 beIN Sports
Atletico de Madrid v Real Madrid CF	18:15 beIN Sports HD 1
Real Sociedad v Levante	20:30 beIN Sports
Athletic de Bilbao v Granada CF	23:00 beIN Sports
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
AS Roma v Genoa CFC	14:30 beIN Sports HD 3
Hellas Verona FC v AC Milan	17:00 beIN Sports HD 3
ACF Fiorentina v Parma Calcio 1913	17:00 beIN Sports HD 2
Crotone v Torino FC	17:00 beIN Sports
UC Sampdoria v Cagliari Calcio	20:00 beIN Sports HD 3
SSC Napoli v Bologna FC	22:45 beIN Sports HD 3
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
FC Koln v SV Werder Bremen	17:30 beIN Sports
DSC Arminia Bielefeld v FC Union Berlin	20:00 beIN Sports



Zlatan Ibrahimovic

Ibra poised for Sweden comeback?

STOCKHOLM: Zlatan Ibrahimovic will return to international football at the age of 39, Swedish media reported yesterday. Sweden, coached by Janne Andersson, have qualified for the Euros and kick off their campaign against Spain in Bilbao on June 14.

The return has been under discussion for several months, according to reports, but has not been confirmed by the Swedish football federation (SvFF). "It is certain that the Milan star is making a comeback in Janne Andersson's squad for the World Cup qualifiers," said the site FotbollDirekt, in a report that was picked up by the Swedish national press.

The striker, who has 116 caps and 62 goals, has not worn the Swedish jersey since Euro 2016, where he was captain but failed to score as Sweden finished bottom of their group. Last autumn, he said he "missed" wearing the yellow jersey. The SvFF said that the player then had a "good and fruitful" meeting with Andersson.

"The dialogue with Zlatan continues," SvFF spokesman, Jakob Kakebo Andersson, told AFP on Saturday, adding that the players selected for the next matches, a pair of World Cup qualifiers against Georgia and Kosovo and a friendly against Estonia, will be announced on March 16. Ibrahimovic has scored 14 goals in 14 Serie A matches for AC Milan this season.

Ibrahimovic expressed an interest in playing in the 2018 World Cup, but Andersson opted not to recall the star. Sweden reached the quarter-finals. The team then qualified without him for the Euro-2020, postponed to June and July 2021 because of COVID-19. They will face Spain, Poland and Slovakia in their group in the first round. — AFP

Arsenal frustrated by Xhaka blunder

BURNLEY: Arsenal midfielder Granit Xhaka compromised his side's faint hopes of a top four finish in the Premier League as the Swiss midfielder's embarrassing mistake gifted Burnley a 1-1 draw yesterday. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang put Arsenal ahead early on at Turf Moor, but Xhaka's farcical howler allowed Chris Wood to equalize before half-time. Xhaka foolishly tried to pass the ball out of his own six-yard box instead of clearing it and his miscued effort bounced off Wood into the Arsenal net. Mikel Arteta's team couldn't make amends for Xhaka's blunder and 10th placed Arsenal are now nine points behind fourth placed Chelsea.

Arteta had warned Arsenal's players this week that their league position was unacceptable for a club with such a rich history. But, with their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League via a top four finish in tatters, Arsenal will have to prioritise their trip to Greece to play Olympiakos in the Europa League last 16 first leg on Thursday. Aubameyang's own goal had given Burnley their first win at Arsenal since 1974 when they last met in

December. But this time the Gabon forward made his presence at the right end to open the scoring in the sixth minute. Picked out by Willian's pass after a strong break from the Brazilian, Aubameyang cut in from the left flank and used a nimble step-over to ease past Matt Lowton into the Burnley area.

With six Burnley players too slow to respond to the danger, Aubameyang had space to drill a low drive from 12 yards that beat Nick Pope's weak attempted save at his near post. It was Aubameyang's 14th goal of the season in all competitions and his eighth against Burnley in his Arsenal career. Arsenal were well on top but Xhaka handed Burnley their comical equalizer in the 39th minute. Pablo Mari passed back to Bernd Leno and the Arsenal keeper opted to find Xhaka inside his own area rather than boot it clear. Xhaka had to get rid of the ball quickly as Matej Vydra pressed, but the midfielder's woeful pass hit Wood on the hip and cannoned into the net. It was the latest Burnley nightmare for Xhaka, who was sent off for grabbing Claret's midfielder Ashley Westwood by the throat in the December.

Since the start of 2016-17, Xhaka has made more errors leading to Premier League goals (8) than any other outfield player. He returned for the second half with a torn shirt, sparking mischievous social media suggestions of a dressing room row with team-mates. — AFP

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Samir Mohammad Ali Shaikh, son of Mohammad Ali Sheikh, holder of Indian Passport number M6713212 issued at Kuwait on 10/06/2015 & Civil ID No. 286010100562 would like to announce that there is a minor correction in my name. It has been misprinted as "Shaikh" instead of "Sheikh". The correct given name is "Samir Mohammad Ali" and the correct surname is "Sheikh". (C0226) 5-3-2021

I, Banshi Lal S/o Natha Ji holder of Indian Passport No. S4699977 issued at Kuwait on 11/06/2018 & Civil ID No. 276031204249 has changed my name from Banshi Lal to Banshi Lal Patel in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Banshi Lal (Given Name)

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