

Gakpo stars as Liverpool eye EPL title

Arsenal survive red card drama to beat Wolves

AFP, LONDON: Cody Gakpo struck twice as Premier League leaders Liverpool thrashed Ipswich 4-1 to maintain their six-point lead over Arsenal, who survived Myles Lewis-Skelly's controversial red card to snatch a 1-0 win against top four rivals Chelsea.

Troubled champions Manchester City recovered from Abdoukodie Khusanov's debut disaster to move into fourth place with a vital 3-1 win against top four rivals Chelsea.

At Anfield, Liverpool cruised to their second successive league victory thanks to a first half goal-spree. Dominik Szoboszlai's 11th-minute opener fizzed past Ipswich goalkeeper Christian Walton from Ibrahima Konate's assist.

Mohamed Salah doubled Liverpool's advantage in the 35th minute with a fierce strike for his 23rd goal in all competitions this term. It was also the Egypt forward's 100th Premier League goal at Anfield.

Gakpo killed off Ipswich before half-time when he bundled home after Walton parried Szoboszlai's shot in the 44th minute. The Dutch forward netted again in the 66th minute, heading past Walton from Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross.

Jacob Greaves' stoppage-time diving header was little consolation for third-bottom Ipswich.

Liverpool's 16th win from 22 league games this



Liverpool's Dutch striker #18 Cody Gakpo (third right) celebrates after scoring the team's third goal during the English Premier League match against Ipswich Town at Anfield in Liverpool, England

season keeps them on course for a first English title since 2020.

The quadruple-chasing Reds have a game in hand on second-placed Arsenal, who left it late before keeping the pressure on the leaders. Arsenal had Lewis-Skelly contentiously sent off for tripping Matt Doherty to stop a Wolves counter-attack in the 43rd minute.

Arsenal were furious, protesting that the 18-year-old defender's tackle was too far from goal to warrant

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS
Bournemouth 5 (Kluivert 9, Ouattara 55, 61, 87, Semenyo 90+1) Nottingham Forest 0, Brighton 0
Everton 1 (Ndiaye 42-pen), Liverpool 4 (Szoboszlai 11, Salah 35, Gakpo 44, 66) Ipswich 1 (Greaves 90), Manchester City 3 (Gvardiol 42, Haaland 68, Foden 87)
Chelsea 1 (Madueke 3), Southampton 1 (Bednarek 10)
Newcastle 3 (Isak 26-pen, 30, Tonali 51), Wolves 0 Arsenal 1 (Calafiori 74)

a red card.

But Wolves were also reduced to 10 men in the 70th minute when Joao Gomes earned a second booking for a foul on Jurrien Timber.

And Italy defender Ric-

cardo Calafiori won it for Arsenal in the 74th minute with a half-volley that went in off the far post.

At the Etihad Stadium, Uzbekistan defender Khusanov, signed from Lens

as part of struggling City's January overhaul, made a woeful start when his miscued header allowed Noni Madueke to give Chelsea a second minute lead.

But City, who also gave a debut to Egypt forward Omar Marmoush after his move from Eintracht Frankfurt, hit back to equalise with Josko Gvardiol's 42nd minute strike.

Erling Haaland chipped out of position Chelsea keeper Robert Sanchez to put City ahead in the 68th

minute. Phil Foden sprinted clear to score his sixth goal in his last four league games in the 87th minute as Pep Guardiola's side climbed one point above sixth-placed Chelsea.

It was a much-needed win for City, who suffered a damaging loss at Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday and must beat Club Brugge next week to have a chance of reaching the Champions League play-off round.

Dango Ouattara hit a hat-trick as Bournemouth dented Nottingham Forest's top four charge with a 5-0 demolition at the Vitality Stadium.

Andoni Iraola's side are undefeated in their last 11 league games and up to seventh place after ending third-placed Forest's own impressive run of eight top-flight matches without losing. Justin Kluivert bagged Bournemouth's opener and Ouattara completed a memorable treble before Antoine Semenyo sealed the Cherries' biggest victory this season.

Alexander Isak starred as fifth-placed Newcastle won 3-1 at bottom of the table Southampton. Jan Bednarek put Southampton ahead but in-form Isak struck twice before Sandro Tonali scored Newcastle's third.

Everton boss David Moyes celebrated becoming the third manager to reach 700 Premier League games with a 1-0 win at Brighton secured by Iliman Ndiaye's 42nd minute penalty.

sportspopup

Wanted to take on England's best bowler so others feel pressure: Tilak on Archer assault
CHENNAI: India's middle-order batter Tilak Varma said his breathtaking assault on pacer Jofra Archer in the second T20I here was pre-planned and was intended to neutralise England's best bowler, which in turn demoralised the rest of the pack. Tilak, who made an unbeaten 72 off 55 balls, creamed Archer for four sixes, including a scarcely believable pick-up flick over deep fine leg, as the Sussex man leaked 60 runs in his four overs at Chepauk. Archer had figures of 4-0-21-2 in the first match at Kolkata, underlining the success Tilak's strategy had here. "I wanted to target their best bowler. If you take on the best bowler, other bowlers will be under pressure. So, when the wickets are falling (at the other end), I want to take on their best bowlers," Tilak said in the post-match press conference. "If I do that it makes it easier (for other batters). So, I backed myself and took chances against him and also whatever shots that I have played against Archer, I have worked in the nets, mentally I was ready for them. So it has given me a good result," he added. Tilak said he was mentally prepared to stay till the end and was ready to tweak his game according to the team's needs.

Pak's Saim ruled out of Champions Trophy
KARACHI: PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi ruled out young opener Saim Ayub of the ICC Champions Trophy tournament due to an ankle injury for which he is taking treatment in London. Saim had fractured his ankle on the first day of the second Test against South Africa earlier this month in Capetown. Naqvi told reporters that no risk would be taken with Saim's future and he was personally monitoring his rehabilitation progress. "I am in touch with his doctors on daily basis and his ankle plaster will come off in next few days," Naqvi said. "But it will take time for his complete recovery and we are not going to risk his future career just for the Champions Trophy. He is our asset and we him fully fit whatever time is required. I am personally monitoring his progress," Naqvi said. The Pakistani selectors have held back naming their CT squad as they waited to know if Saim would be available for the mega event being held in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19.



Former cricketer Sachin Tendulkar and Tamil film actor Suriya during the second season of the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL), in Thane, on Sunday

ICC doesn't run cricket, it is widely regarded as an event management company: Ian Chappell
NEW DELHI: Describing the ICC as an "event management company", former Australia captain Ian Chappell has observed that the financially stronger boards are getting their way in producing self-serving schedule while harming the interest of Test cricket. Chappell also felt that a viable two-tier system for Test cricket should have been in place by now but added that there are other pressing matters that need urgent attention to keep the game's traditional format relevant. "On the subject of a two-tier Test system, former West Indies pace-bowling champion Michael Holding noted: 'For all its faults, at least FIFA actually runs soccer. The ICC must run cricket,'" Chappell wrote in his column for 'ESPNcricinfo'. "Therein lies a perplexing problem. The ICC doesn't run cricket, and unless there's a major change of heart, the financially desirable nations will continue to have a huge say in producing a self-serving schedule." Chappell though agreed that the game's financial engine India's influence is proportional to their contribution. "Then there's the major issue of the financial split. The big three -- India, Australia and England -- despite being the wealthiest cricket nations claim a large slice of the money divided among cricket bodies, and yet they agitate for an even larger share. 'India's powerful presence in the ICC is in direct proportion to their contribution of around 70 per cent of cricket's income. It's a complex issue to which cricket hasn't found a workable solution'."

The country has given me more than what I have given to Indian hockey: PR Sreejesh
NEW DELHI: Playing down his enormous contribution to Indian hockey, Padma Bhushan PR Sreejesh has concluded that the country has given him more than what he has done for the sport, the views reflecting the legendary goalkeeper's modesty and humility. From first taking up the sport with the motive of getting grace marks in board exams to becoming only the second hockey player to be honoured with the Padma Bhushan after Major Dhyan Chand, Sreejesh has come a long way. "I got a call from the Sports Ministry in the morning but was waiting for the official announcement till evening. All this time everything was going on in my mind like a flashback. I was watching a Hockey India League match in Rourkela when the awards were announced," Sreejesh told PTI Bhasha in an interview. The 36-year-old Sreejesh, who retired after winning a second successive Olympic bronze with the national team in the Paris Games last year, is currently the head coach of the junior India men's team. Considered one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time, Sreejesh played a stellar role in India's Olympic resurgence. "Receiving this award after retiring from the game has made me feel that the country is honouring me for whatever I have done for Indian hockey in the last 20 years. I want to thank my country which has given me back more than what I gave," he said.

Ahead of Ranji comeback, Kohli summons former India batting coach Bangar for help
NEW DELHI: Sanjay Bangar was a ringside witness to Virat Kohli's peak as an international cricketer between 2014 to 2019 and it was hardly surprising to find the former India batting coach being summoned by the star for a special net session ahead of his Ranji Trophy comeback after more than 12 years. Following the BCCI's diktat to all centrally contracted cricketers to be available for domestic cricket, Kohli, who has been struggling for form, will be playing in Delhi's last league game against Railways at the Kotla from January 30. Kohli's national team colleagues like skipper Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja all fulfilled their 'SOP duty' by playing the just-concluded round of Ranji Trophy. Among the stars, only Jadeja (12 wickets, 38 runs) and Gill (second innings 102) enjoyed fruitful outings.

'Tilak's mature, smart innings was the difference'

PTI, CHENNAI: Middle-order batter Tilak Varma's "mature" unbeaten 72 was the difference between India and England in the second T20I here, reckoned visitors' pace bowling all-rounder Brydon Carse.

"I felt like we got a decent score on the board towards the end. We kept on taking wickets throughout the game. But, you know, credit goes to Tilak and I think he played a very mature, smart innings and ultimately he was the difference," said Carse in the post-match press conference.

"A couple of nights ago, Jofra had an amazing spell up front. I still think he bowled pretty well tonight. He was pretty unfortunate. I don't know the exact number, but a lot of runs (were scored) over the keeper's head behind square.

"I suppose that sometimes happens, you know, when you bowl 90 mile an hour," said Carse. England's downright aggression with both bat and ball has not really paid any dividends in the series so far, but Carse found no reason to change their approach.

Sinner retains Australian Open title

The emphatic victory also thrust him alongside Agassi, Federer and Djokovic as the only men to successfully defend their Melbourne Park titles this century

AFP, MELBOURNE: A clinical Jannik Sinner "emptied the tank" to sweep past Alexander Zverev and retain his Australian Open title on Sunday, cementing his status as the world's dominant player in men's tennis.

The 23-year-old Italian came through a tense final between the two highest-ranked players 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 on Rod Laver Arena, raising his arms in the air and looking to the sky in celebration.

In doing so he became the first Italian, man or woman, to win three Grand Slams, surpassing Nicola Pietrangeli.



The emphatic victory also thrust him alongside Andre Agassi, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic as the only men to successfully defend their Melbourne Park titles this century.

Sinner, who has a doping case hanging over his head, said he was fired up coming into the match despite his calm exterior.

"In your mind there is only one match left. You want to empty your tank a



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates with the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup trophy after defeating Germany's Alexander Zverev during their men's singles final match on Day 15 of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on Sunday

little bit. That was what I was trying to do," he said. "It is definitely a different feeling for sure," he added of winning a second Melbourne crown.

"I know how much work I put into this one and having this one twice it's amazing." The win proved more misery for Germany's Zverev, who remains one of the

world's best players never to taste Grand Slam glory, falling short once again in his third big final.

"It sucks standing here next to this thing (trophy) and not being able to touch it, I'll be honest," said the 27-year-old.

"But congratulations to Jannik. You more than deserve it. You're the best

player in the world by far. I was hoping that I could be more competitive today, but you're just too good. It's as simple as that."

Ice-cool Sinner proved to be a tower of mental strength again in Australia, with his defence coming against the backdrop of an ongoing doping case after he twice tested positive for traces of the steroid clostebol last year.

The World Anti-Doping Agency appealed against his exoneration and is seeking a ban of up to two years. He denies knowingly doping. A hearing is scheduled at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) for April.

He cast all the worries aside to notch a 19th career title and extend his incredible winning streak to 21 matches, sharing words of consolation with Zverev.

"A tough day for you. You're an amazing player. Keep believing in yourself because I think we, all the players and the coaches, whoever is involved in the sport, know how strong you are, not only as a player, but also as a person."

"So keep it up. Keep working hard because we all believe that you can lift one of these very, very soon."

Vijayan hopes his Padma Shri honour encourages youngsters to 'pursue' football

PTI, NEW DELHI: Honoured with the Padma Shri, Indian football legend IM Vijayan on Sunday hoped this honour encourages the country's youngsters to "pursue" the sport.

One of India's greatest footballers, the 55-year-old is serving as the assistant commandant in the Malabar Special Police and is the director of the Kerala Police Football team. He is also the chief of the Technical Committee in the All India Football Federation (AIFF).

"I am happy, extremely happy. You ought to feel satisfied when your services are recognised," Vijayan told the AIFF.

"I don't know how much

this award will help Indian football. At the same time, this may encourage some youngsters in some parts of the country to pursue football. If so, it would give me a deep sense of fulfilment."

The accomplished striker of the '90s, who has been conferred the country's fourth highest civilian award for his distinguished career in the game, has also served as the captain of the Indian football team.

"I dedicate my award to every football fan in the country. What I am today is because of them," Vijayan said from his home in Kerala.

"I am not sure how good

"I don't know how much this award will help Indian football. At the same time, this may encourage some youngsters in some parts of the country to pursue football. If so, it would give me a deep sense of fulfilment. I dedicate my award to every football fan in the country. What I am today is because of them. I am not sure how good I was as a footballer. But the love I received from the fans was the biggest achievement of my career. They are the people who are responsible for taking The Beautiful Game to this height

— IM Vijayan, Indian football legend

I was as a footballer. But the love I received from the fans was the biggest achievement of my career. They are the people who are responsible for taking The Beautiful Game to this height," said the man, who donned the senior India colours 88 times, scoring

39 goals. Having started his national team journey in January 1991 against Romania in the Nehru Cup in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, Vijayan remained the backbone of the Blue Tigers for 12 years. By the time he hung



up his boots after the Afro-Asian Games final in Hyderabad in October 2003, he became a legendary figure on the pitch.

He, along with another Indian football great Bhachung Bhutia, formed a deadly attacking duo that once instilled fears in the

minds of many a defence. The Padma Shri award is another feather in the cap of his decorated career.

The scorer of India's fastest hat-trick in international football (against Pakistan, 1999 SAF Games), Vijayan was three times adjudged the AIFF Player of the Year (1992, 1997, 2000) and was conferred the prestigious Arjuna Award in 2003.

Vijayan is the ninth Indian footballer to be conferred the Padma Shri after Gostho Paul, Sailen Manna, Chuni Goswami, PK Banerjee, Bhachung Bhutia, Sunil Chhetri, Bembem Devi, and Brahmanand Sankhwalkar.