

Vardy double takes Foxes closer to title

Spurs stay in pursuit with 3-0 win over Man Utd

AFP, Sunderland

Jamie Vardy's second-half double helped Leicester City go 10 points clear at the top of the Premier League as they enjoyed a 2-0 win away to Sunderland on Sunday.

Claudio Ranieri's side are closing in on the English title after a fifth consecutive win put the pressure back on second-placed Tottenham Hotspur, who later defeated Manchester United 3-0.

But regardless of what the chasing pack do, Leicester will be crowned champions for the first time in their history if they win three of their remaining five league games.

Vardy broke the deadlock in the 66th minute, sprinting onto a long, lofted through ball from Danny Drinkwater to outpace his marker Younes Kaboul before finding the bottom corner from a narrow angle past keeper Vito Mannone.

The England striker sealed the win in stoppage time, taking a pass from substitute Demarai Gray to run beyond the trailing defence before rounding Mannone to slot into an empty net.

After the match, an emotional Leicester manager Claudio Ranieri hailed his side's "solid" victory. After Vardy put the result beyond doubt, it appeared Ranieri was crying tears of joy.

RESULTS				
Liverpool	4	-	1	Stoke
Moreno 8, Sturridge 32, Origi 50, 65				Kiric 22
Sunderland	0	-	2	Leicester
				Vardy 66, 90+5
Tottenham	3	-	0	Man United
Alli 70, Alderweireld 74, Lamela 76				

"We knew it would be tough, it is normal because Sunderland are fighting to be safe, but I am very happy for the three points," Ranieri said. "Our performance was solid, of course they had the chance to draw but we had three or four chances to finish it," the Italian added.

The new Foxes hero's Sunday double saw Vardy grab his first goals in open play for more than two months and a delighted Ranieri said: "It is important for Jamie Vardy to score because he made some good assists in the last game but he is our goalscorer and he needed to score again and I am very happy with him."

Nevertheless Ranieri tried to keep a lid on the hype surrounding Leicester by insisting: "The fans must continue to dream but we must continue to be concentrated and focused."

"Now we have two tough matches at home, the Champions League is on the table and we have to keep it. We didn't achieve anything yet. You make this job for the emotion you feel but it is difficult for me to say what kind of emotion."

Later in the day, Dele Alli, Toby Alderweireld and Erik Lamela struck in six second-half minutes as Tottenham swamped Manchester United to keep Leicester in sight.



Leicester City continued their fairytale run towards the English Premier League title after striker Jamie Vardy -- who had failed to score from open play in two months -- struck a brace to steer his side to victory against Sunderland at the Stadium of Light yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Title race blown wide open

Barca humbled at Sociedad; Messi's drought continues

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona suffered a second consecutive La Liga defeat to blow the title race wide open as Mikel Oyarzabal's header handed Real Sociedad a 1-0 win over them on Saturday.

Atletico Madrid are now only three points behind Barca after goals from the on-form Fernando Torres, Antoine Griezmann and Koke saw them come

from behind to win 3-1 at Espanyol. Cristiano Ronaldo also kept Real Madrid in the hunt a further point back in third with a goal and two assists in a 4-0 rout of Eibar.

Barca still need to drop points in two of their last six games thanks to their better head-to-head record with Atletico.

However, the pressure is now firmly on the Catalans after tasting defeat for the second time in a week after seeing a 39-game unbeaten run snapped by Real Madrid last weekend.

"It is an exciting and open league

which the best team will win," said Barca boss Luis Enrique.

"We played very badly in the first half. In football at this level against a team that defends like Real Sociedad defended we needed much more order, control and possession to do damage to the opponent."

Barcelona have now not won in their last seven visits to Sociedad and lost each of their last four league meetings in San Sebastian.

Just as in last season's 1-0 win under the tutelage of David Moyes, Sociedad

TOP FIVE					
Team	P	W	D	L	PTS
Barcelona	32	24	4	4	76
Atletico	32	23	4	5	73
Real Madrid	32	22	6	4	72
Villarreal	31	16	9	6	57
Celta Vigo	32	15	7	10	52

made the perfect start as 18-year-old Oyarzabal soared to power home Xabi Prieto's cross into the far corner.

Barca were without the suspended Luis Suarez and badly missed the 45-goal Uruguayan's presence as they struggled to create clear-cut chances.

Luis Enrique had rested Andres Iniesta, Ivan Rakitic and Jordi Alba with one eye on the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final at Atletico on Wednesday.

However, all three were called upon as Barca chased the game after the break and Geronimo Rulli had to produce a brilliant save to deny Iniesta's shot.



In a tempestuous affair at Real Sociedad on Saturday, Barcelona were all over the place in their loss and the brunt of their frustrations fell on the referee. PHOTO: AFP

Shakib-less KKR ease to win

STAR SPORT DESK

Despite opting not to play Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, the Kolkata Knight Riders began their campaign in the ninth edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) with a convincing win over the Delhi Daredevils.

Even without Shakib, who is ranked second in the world in the ICC Twenty20 all-rounder player rankings, Kolkata's bowlers had no trouble with the opposition on a spinning track.

West Indian pacer Andre Russell and Australian spinner Brad Hogg picked up three wickets each, while India's Piyush Chawla and Australia's John Hastings picked up two apiece as Delhi were bowled out for just 98 runs in 17.4 overs.

After the exchange, Kolkata bided their time as they chased down the target. Indian openers Robin Uthappa and Gautam Gambhir put on 69 runs in 9.4 overs, before the former departed for 35.

Another Indian, Manish Pandey, joined forces with skipper Gambhir as the pair chased down the total with consummate ease with just under six overs to spare.

Pogba winner takes Juventus nine clear

Napoli down Verona to keep titles hopes alive

AFP, Milan



Paul Pogba struck a second-half winner as Juventus continued their march towards a record-equaling fifth consecutive Serie A title with a 2-1 victory at AC

Milan on Saturday. Juventus, who last won five on the trot in 1935, are now nine points clear of second-placed Napoli, before they host basement side Verona on Sunday.

Milan's second successive defeat has put a further dent in the struggling Serie A giants' bid to qualify for next season's Europa League.

Ahead of the remaining fixtures on Sunday, Sinisa Mihajlovic's men remain sixth, but could be 10 points behind fifth-placed Fiorentina if they beat Empoli away.

"It's difficult to talk about a game you've lost when at least a draw would have been a fairer result," said Mihajlovic.

"We weren't perfect, but I'm overall satisfied with the lads because they put a lot of character and fight into the game. I hope they will show the same in the coming weeks."

Juventus have now gone 22 consecutive games unbeaten, getting 21 wins and a draw. But it was far from straightforward for Massimiliano Allegri's side, who went behind to an Alex header from a corner on 18 minutes -- only the 17th league goal they have conceded this season -- and levelled on the half hour through Mario Mandzukic.

Allegri said: "It wasn't a question of revenge for me. I'm still on good terms with

Milan, but when it comes to Juve obviously we're here to win. I expected Milan to be strong, they have good players and winning at the San Siro is never easy. They played well, we started badly and Gigi (Buffon) made a great save on (Mario) Balotelli's free kick.

"Then we turned things around in the second half. But we haven't won the title yet."

When Giacomo Bonaventura won a free kick just outside the area, Balotelli stepped up to force Buffon down low to stop his piledriver.

Balotelli was making a rare start after months of trying to make the grade and when he stole possession from Alex Sandro, it led directly to Milan's 18th minute opener. Balotelli's cross was deflected out for a corner and the Italian delivered an inswinger that Alex met with a powerful header.

Milan were living dangerously and paid the price when Alvaro Morata set up Mandzukic to beat Donnarumma low at his far post for a 27th-minute leveller.

In the 65th minute, Pogba was finally rewarded for his excellent play when he controlled a corner on his chest, following up with a half-volley that bounced over Donnarumma and into the net.

In Sunday's match, Manolo Gabbiadini opened the scoring as Napoli made light of Gonzalo Higuain's four-game ban to keep their Serie A title hopes alive with a 3-0 win at home to 10-man Verona on Sunday.

Maurizio Sarri's men stayed in the title hunt for one more week at least, thanks to goals from Gabbiadini, Lorenzo Insigne and Jose Callejon to bring the gap back to six points with six games remaining.

Pique, Arbeloa 'Tweet-war' heats up

REUTERS, Barcelona

Real Madrid defender Alvaro Arbeloa reignited his long-running war of words with Barcelona's Gerard Pique by suggesting that the Spanish League leaders manage to win only if opposing teams have had players sent off.

La Liga leaders Barca succumbed 1-0 to Real Sociedad on Saturday, a result that not only condemned the Catalans to their second successive league defeat but also blew the title race wide open.

They now lead second-placed Atletico Madrid by three points and third-placed Real by four.

"Look how difficult it is to win against 11 men," Arbeloa mocked on Twitter, referring to the fact that Barcelona have often benefited from opposing players being sent off.

Barca were trailing 1-0 in last Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final first leg with Atletico Madrid but secured a 2-1 win after Atletico goal scorer Fernando Torres was dismissed in the 35th minute.

Pique responded by belittling the 33-year-old's irregular run in the Madrid team, with Arbeloa starting just two league games this season.

"A player who has only started once in 32 games doesn't deserve a response," he told reporters. "I'll say to him what my friends say to me which is that when you're not a protagonist on the pitch you shouldn't try to be one off it either."

After Madrid were disqualified from the King's Cup in December, Spain international Pique expressed his glee in a Twitter post. Arbeloa later remarked: "My friend is obsessed with Real Madrid."

Pique responded by saying: "I want to make it clear that Arbeloa is not my friend, he is just an acquaintance."

BCCI shows Harsha the door

AGENCIES, New Delhi

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has terminated the Indian Premier League (IPL) contract of Harsha Bhogle, meaning the 54-year-old won't be heard commenting during the ongoing season of the highly popular IPL. Bhogle has been a regular in the commentary box since the inaugural season of the Indian Premier League in 2008 but the cricket board has decided to do away with his services for the current edition.

Citing a senior BCCI official, The Indian Express reported that the board may have reached the decision after taking feedback including that from the players.

"When deciding the commentators, we take feedback from everyone. We monitor social media reactions on commentators, and also take inputs from players," the official was quoted as saying on the condition of anonymity.

Schalke hold Dortmund

AFP, Berlin



Shinji Kagawa's superb chip was not enough to prevent Borussia Dortmund drawing 2-2 at Schalke on Sunday, edging Bayern Munich towards a historic fourth straight Bundesliga title.

The draw leaves Pep Guardiola's Bayern seven points clear of second-placed Dortmund with five games left. The Bavarians are hoping to become the first club to win the Bundesliga title four years in a row.

Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel gambled by resting many of his key players, with an eye on

their Europa League quarterfinal second-leg fixture against Liverpool.

The game at Veltins-Arena burst into life after a goalless first half when Japan midfielder Kagawa put Dortmund ahead with a perfectly-timed chip over Schalke goalkeeper Ralf Faehrmann on 49 minutes.

It sparked Schalke into life as they equalised two minutes later through German junior international Leroy Sane. Sloppy defending allowed Dortmund to go back in front when Schalke's Roman Neustaedter was out-jumped by Matthias Ginter from a free-kick and the defender headed home on 56 minutes.

However, Dortmund defender Sokratis brought down Schalke striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar in the area on 66 minutes he nailed the spot kick.



After a bland first half, Borussia Dortmund midfielder Shinji Kagawa (L) opened the floodgates when he scored the opener. Following his 49th minute strike, three more goals were scored in the next 17 minutes as Schalke claimed a draw. PHOTO: REUTERS

BFF ELECTIONS 2016 Draft voters' list released

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday revealed a draft voters' list of 134 delegates for its April 30 elections after a meeting of the BFF executive committee approved the list.

The game's governing body will publish the final voters' list on Wednesday after taking objections, if any, on the draft list in consideration after the election commission headed by Mezbah Uddin start the election procedure on April 15.

The delegates will elect 21 members -- one president, one senior vice president, four vice presidents and 15 members of the 21-member committee. In the last elections held in April, 2012, there were 122 delegates.

The meeting also approved the prices of nomination papers as a candidate willing to vie for the president post will have to pay Tk 100,000 while the price of nomination papers for senior vice president, vice president and members have been fixed at Tk 75,000, Tk 50,000 and Tk 25,000 respectively.

"We don't want that anyone buys nomination papers for his or her own publicity. We want someone who is willing to vie for post of the BFF president, buys nomination paper paying Tk one lakh. We saw in the past someone bought nomination papers for BFF presidency only for his publicity and he later withdrew his nomination. This is not a decent scenario," BFF vice president Kazi Nabil Ahmed told reporters after emerging from the meeting.