

HOLLIS SENDS APOLOGY TO FANS

Aston Villa chairman Steve Hollis has branded his side's disastrous Premier League campaign as "unacceptably fractured both on and off the pitch". Villa's relegation to the Championship was confirmed on Saturday as Marcus Rashford secured a 1-0 win for Manchester United at Old Trafford. "First, on behalf of the board, let me express my deep regret that I find myself writing this open letter to you, knowing just how much hurt and pain, anger and anguish will have been felt by you all after the club lost its Premier League status this weekend," Hollis said in a statement published on Villa's official website. "We must acknowledge that this weekend's confirmation has been the culmination of an unacceptably fractured season both on and off the pitch. That isn't down to bad luck."



Ten Foxes snatch a point

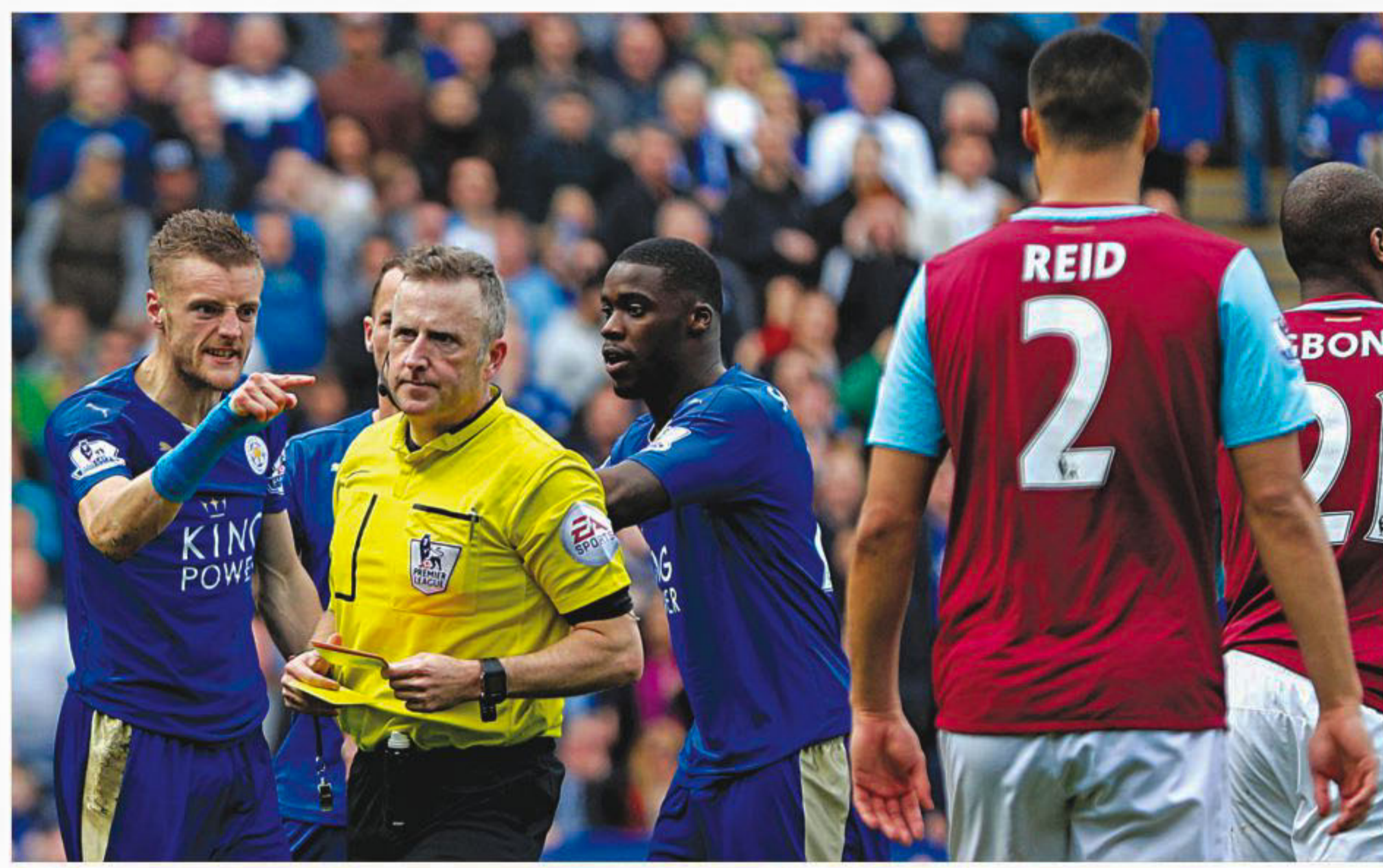
AFP, London

Leonardo Ulloa's penalty in the fifth-minute of stoppage-time rescued a point for 10-man Premier League leaders Leicester City in a dramatic 2-2 draw at home to West Ham United on Sunday that left the Foxes eight points clear at the top. England striker Jamie Vardy, who had given Leicester the lead with his 22nd league goal of the season, was controversially sent off by Jonathan Moss for what the referee ruled a deliberate dive in the box early in the second half as the forward tried to claim a penalty. It looked as if 10-man Leicester would cling on for all three points until, with six minutes left, Andy Carroll equalised from the penalty spot after Foxes captain Wes Morgan needlessly bundled over Winston Reid in the box. Two minutes later Aaron Cresswell gave visitors West Ham the lead at the King Power Stadium when he bent a

sublime shot into the top corner. Leicester then thought they should have been awarded a penalty when defender Robert Huth was grabbed round the neck inside the Hammers' box. But Moss was unmoved and it seemed the Foxes' best chance of an equaliser had disappeared. Claudio Ranieri's men, however, kept battling and in the 95th-minute of the match Moss, in what seemed a far less clear-cut case than the Huth incident, pointed to the spot following Carroll's challenge on Jeffrey Schlupp. Ulloa held his nerve with a well-struck penalty and a frenetic match ended all square at 2-2. However, second-placed Tottenham

RESULTS			
Bournemouth King 90+3	1 - 2	Liverpool Firmino 41, Sturridge 45	
Leicester Vardy 18, Ulloa 90+5-pen	2 - 2	West Ham Carroll 84-pen, Cresswell 86	
Arsenal Sanchez 45+1	1 - 1	Crystal Palace Bolasie 81	

Hotspur, chasing a first English title since 1961, will cut Leicester's lead to just five points remaining if they win away to Stoke City on Monday. "The sending off changed our match," Leicester manager Ranieri told Sky Sports, with the Italian refusing to comment on Moss's performance. "I judge my players not the referee, the referee is not my matter. "Our performance was fantastic, this is our soul, we play every match with this, blood, heart and soul, it was magnificent," he added. Arsenal's bid to play in the Champions League for a 19th consecutive season suffered a setback after they were held to a 1-1 draw by London rivals Crystal Palace on Sunday. Alexis Sanchez headed the Gunners in front on the stroke of half-time but FA Cup semi-finalists Palace equalised nine minutes before the final whistle at the Emirates Stadium when Yannick Bolasie's shot from the edge of the box somehow evaded Petr Cech at the Arsenal goalkeeper's near post.



An incredulous Jamie Vardy (R) reacts after being given his marching orders. He was shown a second yellow card for what referee Jonathan Moss deemed as simulation from the Leicester City striker.



King of Clay Rafael Nadal of Spain lets out a cry of joy after ending a near two-year drought of Masters 1000 titles and clinching his ninth Monte Carlos Masters trophy by beating Frenchman Gael Monfils in the final in Monaco yesterday.

Resurgent Rafa

AFP, Monte Carlo

Rafael Nadal needed nearly three hours to defeat Gael Monfils 7-5, 5-7, 6-0 on Sunday and win a record ninth title at the Monte Carlo Masters. The Spaniard claimed his first trophy in the Principality since 2012 as he played in his 100th final and tenth in Monte Carlo. Nadal's win pulled him level with ATP leader Novak Djokovic on 28 trophies at the Masters 1000 level. Nadal improved to 12-2 over Monfils as he won a first Masters honour since Madrid in May, 2014. Nadal and Monfils were both plagued by unforced errors in the tight contest, with the winner striking 36 while Monfils made more than 50. The match was also riddled with 34 break points, with Nadal converting on eight of 21 while Monfils managed five of 13. "It's great to win a Masters title again," Nadal said. "I had a tough season last year, but I've had better preparation this year, even with a tough start to the season."

"I hope this week will help me a lot," the Spaniard said as he prepared to move onto his home clay of Barcelona next week. Nadal now owns 68 titles and will carry on in the run-up to the French Open with renewed confidence; Monfils can take small consolation after winning his first-ever set against Nadal on clay. The opening set took almost an hour and a quarter and set the stage for the second, which at one point featured three consecutive breaks of serve out to 4-4. Monfils moved into winning position with a break for 6-5 and kept the struggle alive as he won the set for one apiece. But the third was all Nadal as the Spanish fifth seed swept to a love finish to win his eighth clay match against the Frenchman without a defeat. Nadal improved his superlative tournament record to 58-4 after winning eight straight titles from 2005-2012. His last finals appearance here was in 2013 when he lost to Novak Djokovic. Nadal's specialist record on his favoured clay is all but untouchable, with the 14-time Grand Slam winner standing 48-8 in clay finals.

De Kock wallops Delhi

IANS, Mohali

Riding on opener Quinton De Kock's heroics, Delhi Daredevils on Sunday defeated the Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) in the group stage match of the Indian Premier League (IPL) at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. Leading the run chase for the visitors, De Kock hit a superbly-crafted century, the first of IPL 9, with 15 fours and three sixes to guide his team to win the match by seven wickets in 19.1 overs. From an asking rate of 87 from 48 balls after 12 overs, the going got so easy that Delhi only needed 21 runs in 26 balls and just one run off the final six balls. In the early match, openers Murali Vijay and Manan Vohra produced excellent batting performances as Kings XI Punjab posted their first win of the season, outclassing Rising Pune Supergiants by six wickets at the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium. Needing 154 runs for a win in front of their home crowd, Vijay and Vohra saw Punjab off to an excellent start with a couple of half-centuries each. Vohra smashed 51 runs off 31 balls with seven fours, while Vijay top scored with a well-struck 53.

SCORES IN BRIEF
BANGALORE V DELHI
Bangalore: 191 for 5 in 20 overs (Kohli 79, de Villiers 55; Shami 2-34)
Delhi: 193 for 3 in 19.1 overs (de Kock 108, Nair 54; Watson 2-25)
Result: Delhi won by 7 wks.
Player-of-the-match: Q de Kock.
PUNJAB V PUNE
PUNE: 152 for 7 in 20 overs (du Plessis 67, Smith 38; Sharma 3-23)
PUNJAB: 153 for 4 in 18.4 overs (Vijay 53, Vohra 51; Ashwin 3-36)
Result: Punjab won by 6 wks.
Player-of-the-match: M Vohra.

Malinga out of IPL 2016

Mumbai Indians suffered a big blow as their pace spearhead, Lasith Malinga, was ruled out of the 2016 Indian Premier League due to injury. Malinga had also missed the recent World Twenty20 in India due to the injury. Malinga is also expected to miss Sri Lanka's upcoming tour of England, as well as the Caribbean Premier League. Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) medical staff will now assess Malinga's injury and decide whether he needs a surgery or not.

Barcelona's freefall continues
Lose 2-1 to Valencia; Atletico go joint-top, Real one behind

AFP, Madrid

Lionel Messi's 500th career goal couldn't prevent Barcelona's incredible slump in form from continuing with a fourth defeat in five games 2-1 at home to Valencia on Sunday. Atletico Madrid are now level on 76 points with Barca at the top remaining as they beat Granada 3-0, but the Catalans retain the lead courtesy of their superior head-to-head record. Third-placed Real Madrid are also only a point behind thanks to their 5-1 win at Getafe on Saturday. Valencia were beaten 7-0 by Barca on

RESULTS			
Malaga Iborra 21	0 - 1	Athletic Bilbao Raul Garcia 53	
Sevilla Javi Guerra 7, Miku 81	1 - 1	Deportivo la Coruna Riera 81	
Vallecano Koke 15, Torres 59, Correa 83	2 - 1	Villarreal Adrian 20	
Atletico Koke 15, Torres 59, Correa 83	3 - 0	Granada Messi 64	
Barcelona Messi 64	1 - 2	Valencia Rakitic 27-og, Mina 45	

their last trip to the Camp Nou just two months ago, but gained revenge thanks to Ivan Rakitic's own goal and Santi Mina's classy finish before half-time. Messi ended a five-game goal drought

to bring up his 500th for club and country, but couldn't inspire a Barca fightback as their alarming collapse in recent weeks continued after a 39-game unbeaten run. Having looked well set for a second consecutive treble just two weeks ago, Barca could now miss out on all three major trophies as they were dumped out of the Champions League by Atletico in midweek and have taken just one point from their last four La Liga games. Barca started brightly, but were repeatedly denied by fine saves from Valencia goalkeeper Diego Alves and Valencia amazingly took a two goal lead into half-time having had just one shot on target. While Messi equalised to give the Catalans hope, a second goal proved elusive.



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