

BECKS DREAMS OF UNITING RONALDO, MESSI

David Beckham has not ruled out attempting to bring Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo to Inter Miami, but acknowledged the prospect of achieving such a stunning coup is unlikely. Former LA Galaxy star Beckham is preparing for the new Miami franchise's introduction to Major League Soccer next season, amid speculation over potential marquee signings. The ex-Manchester United, Real Madrid and England star, who also appeared for AC Milan and Paris Saint-Germain, humoured links with two of world football's biggest stars, but played down his fledgling club's chances of prising Messi away from Barcelona or convincing Juventus to part with Ronaldo. "Everyone has their wish list -- everyone does! But if you look at the way Leo and Cristiano are still playing, even at what you might think is the later stage of their careers, I don't see it ending for them," he told reporters. "They're playing at such a high level that it's hard to see them leaving the clubs they are at. But we will see. You never know what can happen in football."

--AGENCIES



Reds survive scare to reclaim top spot

AFP, London



Liverpool usurped Manchester City to take top spot in the Premier League but needed a James Milner penalty nine minutes from time to see off lowly Fulham 2-1 at Craven Cottage on Sunday.

The on-form Sadio Mane put the visitors in front midway through the first half, but a rare defensive mix-up between Virgil van Dijk and Alisson Becker allowed Ryan Babel to give his former club a huge scare 16 minutes from time.

Fulham's awful defending all season is the reason they are heading back to the Championship after just one season back in the top flight, and the hosts gave Jurgen Klopp's men a much-needed gift when goalkeeper Sergio Rico bundled over Mane and Milner secured all three points from the spot.

Liverpool now hold a two-point lead over City, but the champions have a game in hand. "Average game, sensational result," said Klopp. "City don't look like they will drop a lot of points, so we have to win and win and win. That's our job to do."

Most of the visitors' attacking threat came down the left through Mane and he proved the source of the breakthrough on 26 minutes.

However, as a torrential rain poured to make conditions hazardous, Liverpool's slender lead proved a dangerous one.

Floyd Ayite was rightly flagged offside as he headed a deflected shot past Alisson before the Brazilian number one got down well to save from Andre Zambo Anguissa.

Disaster seemed to have struck for Liverpool when Van Dijk's header back towards Alisson didn't have enough purchase and Babel stepped in with the break of the ball to tap into an empty net.

"I am not giving excuses. I should have handled it better," admitted Van Dijk.

However, the league leaders showed why they are in the running to end a 29-year title drought to get a vital three points with the help of some erratic goalkeeping from Rico.

EVERTON DENT CHELSEA'S TOP-FOUR HOPES

In the day's later game, Maurizio Sarri endured a frustrating afternoon as his Chelsea side's second-half collapse saw them suffer a 2-0 defeat at Everton.

Richardson and Cylfi Sigurdsson, converting after his own saved penalty, scored the goals at Goodison Park that halted Chelsea's recent good run and weakened their bid to secure a top-four finish.



James Milner (C) lets out a roar of relief after scoring a crucial late penalty to give Liverpool a hard-fought 1-2 win over Fulham at Craven Cottage yesterday. The win sent the Reds back to the top of the Premier League.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Nadal pulls out before Federer clash

AFP, Indian Wells



A dejected Rafael Nadal pulled out of his Indian Wells semifinal against old foe Roger Federer on Saturday with a right knee injury and said he'll turn his attention to getting fit for the claycourt season.

"What I'm going to do is come back home and try to do a smooth transition to clay, try to be 100 percent for the first event, that's going to be Monte Carlo [starting April 14] for me."

World number two Nadal had made it to the last four without dropping a set, so it was especially devastating when knee pain flared up during his 7-

6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/2) quarterfinal victory over Russian Karen Khachanov on Friday.

He soldiered through to what would have been a 39th career meeting with Federer, but said he knew when he practiced Saturday morning that he wouldn't be able to play to an adequate standard.

"I wanted to try my best to be competitive today," he said. "I warmed up today in the morning, and I felt that my knee was not enough good to compete at the level that I need to compete, to play semi-finals match of this event."

While Nadal said he feels knee pain "almost always", in the face of this latest setback he insisted: "My goal doesn't change."

"Even if sometimes it's tough for me to accept all these things that I am going through during all my career, sometimes I feel sad because I feel always in disadvantage compared with all my opponents in terms of preparation and in terms of practice and sometimes under competition," an emotional Nadal said.

"But at the same time, in the other hand, I went through fantastic moments and still going with that feeling a lot of times. So I'm just going to keep going. I'm just going to keep doing the things that work well for me and accepting that sometimes these issues can happen."

"All the things that are in my hands I am doing well. The things that I can't control, I can't control."

Wolves feast on 'poor' MU

AFP, Wolverhampton

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted Manchester United produced the poorest performance of his reign as Wolves sent them crashing out of the FA Cup on Saturday with a 2-1 quarterfinal win.

But United's interim manager was remarkably upbeat despite his side's flat performance, saying they had plenty more to fight for as they aim for a top-four finish in the Premier League and look towards a Champions League last-eight tie against Barcelona.

United were well beaten by an eager Wolves side who scored two goals in six second-half minutes through Raul Jimenez and Diogo Jota, with Marcus Rashford's injury-time effort a consolation.

"Today was the poorest performance we've had since I've been here," said Solskjaer. "It was a big step backwards. There was a lack of urgency going forwards and a lack of forward passing and a lack of regains."

But Solskjaer delivered a positive message to fans.

"We're in a great position in the league, we've got the Champions League," he said.

"You can't sulk for too long. We've got so much to play for. Man United in April and May always find their form. We can't wait for the challenge when Barcelona come."



Wolverhampton Wanderers striker Diogo Jota celebrates after scoring his side's second goal in a 2-1 win against Manchester United in an FA Cup quarterfinal on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SHORT CORNER

Rooney gets first MLS hat-trick in thrashing of Real Salt Lake

Former England star Wayne Rooney scored three goals on Saturday night to lead D.C. United to a crushing 5-0 victory over Real Salt Lake.

Rooney registered his first three goals of the new season and also his first hat-trick since signing on with Major League Soccer in July 2018. He now has five multi-goal games.

Lucas Rodriguez and Ulises Segura also scored for host D.C. United, who peppered the Salt Lake goal with 22 shots.

Goalkeeper Bill Hamid made two stops to earn his third straight shutout as D.C. United is the lone team to have not allowed a goal this season.

Rooney scored on a penalty kick in the 34th minute and then added another with a chip shot over the goalkeeper in the 41st minute. He completed the hat-trick with a perfectly-timed sliding score at the 65th minute of the second half.

Bottas storms to title at Australian GP
Valtteri Bottas upstaged his Mercedes world champion teammate Lewis Hamilton Sunday to win the season-opening Australian Formula One Grand Prix in a sizzling performance that he called his "best ever".

The flying Finn started second on the grid but got a jump on the pole-sitting Briton at the first corner and never looked back, scorching round the Albert Park

circuit to take the chequered flag a massive 20.9 seconds ahead of Hamilton.

Red Bull's precocious Max Verstappen came third to join them on the podium after audaciously overtaking Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel midway through the race.

"How about that! Yes!" said Bottas over the team radio after also taking the new bonus point for the fastest lap. "I don't know what just happened. I don't know what to say. It was definitely my best race ever," he said after. "I felt so good and the car was so good."

"It's a good weekend for the team," said Hamilton. "Valtteri drove an incredible race today so he deserved it. We have some work to do, (but) it is more than we could have hoped for as a team."

BCB to hold special prayer for safe return of cricketers

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will hold a special prayer in Mirpur today to offer thanks to the Almighty for the safe return of the cricketers who were outside the mosque in Christchurch that was the site of a gun attack that claimed the lives of 50 people on March 15.

According to a BCB press announcement, a special prayer will be offered today at 2:00pm at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium premises, to express gratitude to the Almighty for the safe return of the cricketers from New Zealand and in memory of the lives lost in the tragic shooting at two mosques in Christchurch.

-- STAR SPORT DESK



Valtteri Bottas celebrates on the podium after winning the Formula One season-opening Australian Grand Prix yesterday, finishing an incredible 20.9 seconds ahead of second-placed Lewis Hamilton.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ronaldo-less Juve crash to first loss

AFP, Milan



Juventus fell to their first Serie A defeat of the season on Sunday as Genoa ran out 2-0 winners days after the Turin club's Champions League heroics against Atletico Madrid.

Stefano Sturaro put the home side in front in the second half before fellow substitute Goran Pandev secured the shock result with 10 minutes remaining.

Cristiano Ronaldo inspired a remarkable European comeback for the Italian champions on Tuesday when he scored a hat-trick to overturn a 2-0 first-leg defeat against Atletico. However, the Portuguese was left out of the squad for the trip and Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri was left frustrated as Genoa took points off his side for the second time this season, having drawn 1-1 in Turin in October.

"I expected a different Juventus," Allegri said. "We did not have a good performance, we made mistakes and the goal came from nowhere."

"Much like the Coppa Italia defeat to Atalanta, we picked the right game to lose, because it's just before the break for international duty, so we have time to unplug and rest."

Juve had dropped points just three times this season going into the game, with draws against Genoa, Atalanta and Parma. The hosts were awarded a penalty for handball, only for a Video Assistant Referee (VAR) review to overturn the decision and Juve felt the same pain when Paulo Dybala swept home a finish, but VAR chalked the goal off for offside.

Despite the result, Juventus remain 18 points clear of second-placed Napoli at the summit of the table.

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