

Arsenal blink, Chelsea run away with win

Leading 1-0 with seven minutes to final whistle, Arteta’s men pay the price for a ‘keeping blunder as Abraham seals the deal

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LONDON, DECEMBER 29

CHELSEA RUINED Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta’s home debut as Tammy Abraham’s late strike sealed a dramatic 2-1 win after Bernd Leno’s horrific blunder turned the tide in a thrilling London derby on Sunday.

Leading through Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang’s early goal at the Emirates Stadium, Arteta was just seven minutes away from securing his first victory in his second game in charge.

But Gunners goalkeeper Leno made a hash of coming to catch a free-kick and Jorginho tapped in to spark a Chelsea fight-back that climaxed in Abraham firing home with three minutes left.

After dominating the first half, it was a shocking but familiar collapse from Arsenal, whose lack of steel was the key element in the downfall of Arteta’s predecessor Unai Emery. In their final game of the decade, Arsenal showed just how much work Arteta has to do to steer the Gunners back to respectability in his first managerial role.

After coming from behind to rescue a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth in his first match on Thursday, Arteta would have been encouraged by their bright start -- but not the woeful meltdown that leaves Arsenal with only one win in their last 15 games in all competitions.

Arsenal, 12 points adrift of the top four, have lost four consecutive home fixtures in all competitions for the first time in 60 years.

They also suffered three successive top-flight home defeats for the first time since 1977. While Arteta held his head in despair after Abraham’s winner, Frank Lampard’s wild celebration showed Chelsea’s need for the win after a difficult period of their own.

Fourth placed Chelsea had lost five of their last seven league games, but a second successive away win -- following their recent impressive success at Tottenham -- moves them four points clear of fifth placed Manchester United.

There was no fanfare for Arteta before kick-off, the Spaniard quietly take his place on the bench to applause from Arsenal fans but without any elaborate introduction.

Chelsea went close early on when Willian’s quick free-kick caught Arsenal flat-footed, allowing Mason Mount to drift



Chelsea’s Tammy Abraham slots home the late winner past Chelsea custodian Bernd Leno on Sunday. Reuters

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into space for a fierce strike that stung Leno’s palms.

Arsenal collapse

But, initially vibrant in possession and tireless without the ball, Arsenal exposed Chelsea’s own problems at the back to take the lead with a well-rehearsed set-piece routine in the 13th minute.

Calum Chambers was positioned perfectly to rise above Fikayo Tomori and glance Mesut Ozil’s corner towards Aubameyang,

The Gabon striker, who also scored in Arteta’s first game, applied the finishing touch, escaping Emerson’s slack marking to guide a diving header past Kepa Arrizabalaga for his 15th goal of the season. Arteta didn’t hide his delight, fist-pumping in celebration of the first home goal of his reign.

Aubameyang’s goal meant Chelsea had kept just two clean sheets in their last 11 league fixtures and, with Arsenal well on top and threatening to score again, Lampard was forced to take drastic action.

In a bid to shake Chelsea out of their lethargy, Lampard hauled off Brazilian wing-back Emerson and sent on Italy midfielder Jorginho as he ditched his 3-4-3 formation after just 33 minutes.

The switch proved an inspired move but not before Mount, N’Golo Kante and Antonio Rudiger were all booked in quick succession as Chelsea used brute blunt Arsenal’s mo-

mentum. Chelsea were on top in the second half and teenage debutant Tariq Lamptey led the charge when his surge ended with Abraham’s shot being blocked by David Luiz.

Leno’s game-changing 83rd minute howler was truly farcical, the German lying with his head in his hands after his misjudgement of Mount’s high free-kick allowed Jorginho to tap into the empty net.

Suddenly, Arsenal reverted to their nervous former selves and Chelsea took full advantage to complete a remarkable fightback four minutes later.

Willian broke into the Arsenal area and crossed to Abraham, who turned unchecked by the ponderous Shkodran Mustafi to fire a cool strike under Leno.

VAR sours festive spirit

Festive spirit was in short supply from video assistant referees in the Premier

League on Saturday as three goals were ruled out for marginal offside calls, exacerbating frustration about the technology being used for the first time in England this season.

On a day when Manchester United moved up to fifth place with a 2-0 win at Burnley and West Ham fired manager Manuel Pellegrini after a 2-1 home loss to Leicester, much of the debate in stadiums and on social media centered on disgruntlement at the forensic geometry being used to call on tight offside decisions - even if the correct calls were ultimately made.

“If VAR was a manager, he’d have been sacked weeks ago,” former England captain Gary Lineker tweeted to his 7.5 million followers after Norwich striker Teemu Pukki had a goal disallowed for offside that required the VAR in a room outside London to apply lines and dots on the screen to judge.

Murray out of Aus Open; Grand Slam return on hold

REUTERS
LONDON, DECEMBER 29

ANDY MURRAY has withdrawn from next month’s Australian Open because of a pelvic injury, the three-time Grand Slam champion’s management team announced on Saturday.

The former world number one, who has been making an inspirational comeback after hip resurfacing surgery, has decided not to travel to Melbourne after the injury he sustained at the end of the season failed to improve as he had hoped.

Murray, who has been able to train on court this week, will miss the Jan. 20-Feb. 2 Grand Slam where he has been a five-time losing finalist and will also not play for Britain in the inaugural ATP Cup in Australia, starting on Jan 3. "Unfortunately, I've had a setback and as a precaution need to work through that before competing," the Scot told the BBC.

"I've worked so hard to get myself into a situation where I can play at the top level and I'm gutted I'm not going to be able to play." His management team said in an email: "It was always going to be a tight turnaround, but the team took the decision not to rush back, so he'll continue hitting on court and building up fitness in January."

It was at last year's Australian Open that Murray was left in tears at a news conference where he told reporters that he was in such pain from a chronic hip injury that it might be his last tournament.

Yet, amazingly, the 32-year-old had looked on course to play in his first Grand Slam singles event since Melbourne after his recovery from major hip surgery 11 months ago had seen him climb back to No. 125 in the world.

After returning to competitive singles play in August, he even won the European Open in Antwerp, beating his old rival Stan Wawrinka in the final to secure his first triumph for more than two years. Yet Murray has not played since Britain's opening tie at the Davis Cup finals in Madrid last month when the pelvic bruising flared up. Subsequently, he did not travel to Miami for his usual training stint, deciding instead to stay at home to train.

The Scot will now not play until February at the earliest, with his first tournament scheduled to be the Open Sud de France in Montpellier.

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Long-time friends Serena, Wozniacki to pair-up on court



Serena was Wozniacki’s bridesmaid at her wedding earlier this year. Reuters

ASSOCIATE PRESS
DECEMBER 29

LONG-TIME friends Serena Williams and Caroline Wozniacki will play doubles together for the first time at the WTA Tour’s ASB Classic in Auckland beginning on Jan. 6.

Former No. 1 Wozniacki has started her season in Auckland every year since 2015 and has made the hard court tournament the first stop of her short farewell tour.

The 29-year-old Wozniacki was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis shortly after winning her the 2018 Australian Open and will retire from tennis after playing the Open in Melbourne next month.

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam winner, has not played doubles with anyone other than her sister Venus since the Fed Cup World Group playoff in 2015. Her last WTA tournament in doubles without Venus was in 2002.

Wozniacki hasn't played doubles for more than three years.

The pair are close friends. Williams was Wozniacki’s bridesmaid at her wedding earlier this year and will play an exhibition in Copenhagen in May, Wozniacki’s final match before retirement.

“We’ve been wanting to play doubles together for a long time but it just hasn’t worked out so I’m really excited that it’s finally going to happen, especially at one of my favorite tournaments on tour,” Wozniacki said. “It’s going to be so much fun!”

“This is a pairing that I think tennis fans have been waiting to see for a long time,” tournament director Karl Budge said Tuesday. “To have Serena and Caroline on

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CAROLINE WOZNIACKI
WORLD NO 38

court together, on the same side of the net, is an amazing opportunity for tennis fans to see history being made.”

Australian Open increases prize money

The Australian Open says prize money for the first Grand Slam tennis tournament of next year will be increased by 13.6% to 71 million Australian dollars (\$49.1 million).

Tournament organizers said in a statement Tuesday that the women’s and men’s singles winners will each receive \$54.12 million, or US\$2.85 million based on current exchange rates.

Prize money has increased 61.4% at the Australian Open over the last five years, generally in keeping with prize money increases at the other Grand Slam tournaments – the French Open, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, where this year’s championship at Flushing Meadows paid \$57 million in prize money and \$3.85 million to the singles winners. The Australian Open runs from Jan. 20 to Feb. 2 at Melbourne Park.

Humpy bags women’s World Rapid C’ship title

PRESSTRUST OF INDIA
MOSCOW, DECEMBER 29

INDIAN GRANDMASTER Koneru Humpy claimed the World Women’s Rapid Chess Championship title after drawing the Armageddon game against Lei Tingjie of China. The 32-year-old Indian made a stunning comeback, winning the 12th and final round game against another Chinese Tang Zhongyi, to force the tie breaker against Tingjie.

"When I started my first game on Day 3 I did not imagine I would be at the top. My hope was to reach top three. I didn't expect to play the tie-break games," said Humpy, who had taken a two-year sabbatical from 2016 to 2018 after she became a mother, in an interview with FIDE. "I lost the first game on time but came back in the second game. It was a gambling game, but I won. In the final game, I had a better position and it was a comfortable win."

Starting as the thirteenth seat, Humpy scored 9 points in all to match Tingjie and Ekaterina Atalik of Turkey.

Humpy had a good beginning to the event scoring 4.5 points in the first five rounds, and then a loss against Irina Bulmaga of Russia pulled her back a little. Needing a strong finish, Humpy won the last two rounds.

However, the Indian ace required a little luck as Tingjie had to lose to Atalik, which happened. The drama was still not over as Humpy lost the first tie-break game, and then won the second to reach the Armageddon.

Humpy drew black colour, which meant that a draw was enough for her to clinch the gold. Tingjie had to settle for the silver and bronze went to Atalik.

Humpy got a winning position after a tactical stroke that netted her queen for a rook by move forty. Twenty-six moves later Tingjie agreed to draw in a hopeless situation. After Vishwanathan Anand won this title in the open section in 2017, Humpy is only the second Indian to win the rapid gold in the current format. Meanwhile, Magnus Carlsen of Norway won the open section scoring 11.5 points out of a possible fifteen rounds.

Iranian star Firouza Alireza, who played under FIDE flag, won the silver ahead of American Hikaru Nakamura.

SHOPLIFTERS

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Director: Hirokazu Koreeda | Curator: Shubhra Gupta, Film Critic, The Indian Express

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