



Manchester City celebrates their 4-0 thrashing of first-division side Fulham in the fourth round of the FA Cup at the Etihad on Sunday. Reuters

On cruise control

Manchester City continue their FA Cup defence with a dominant 4-0 win over Fulham

REUTERS

LONDON, JANUARY 26

MANCHESTER CITY served up an attacking masterclass as they thrashed 10-man Fulham 4-0 in the FA Cup fourth round on Sunday, with Gabriel Jesus scoring twice within three second-half minutes.

Any hopes of Championship side Fulham causing an upset at the Etihad Stadium were dented in less than six minutes after captain Tim Ream received his marching orders for dragging down Jesus inside the box.

"For a few moments I thought it would be a tough game," City manager Pep Guardiola said. "They're a team with a lot of courage but it was a bit different after the red card." Germany midfielder Ilkay Gundogan converted the resulting penalty for his fifth City goal of the campaign, before Bernardo Silva made it 2-0 for the hosts.

Phil Foden slid the ball across the edge of the box to Silva, who made a sharp turn before driving the ball past Fulham keeper Marek Rodak into the bottom right corner.

City continued to carve open Fulham in the second half, with substitute Raheem Sterling striking the crossbar from close range on the hour mark. Jesus eventually put the game to bed as he headed home a Joao Cancelo cross from the right wing.

The Brazilian striker made it four, 163 seconds later, when he pounced on a rebound after Foden's initial attempt had forced a save from Rodak. Having fallen 16 points behind leaders Liverpool in the Premier League title race, City are now focused on winning the remaining three cup competitions in the second half of the season. Guardiola's side are well placed to reach the League Cup final as they hold a 3-1 lead heading into the second leg of the semi-final against local rivals Manchester United on Wednesday.

However, a tougher test awaits in the

Pep's admission: Liverpool better than City

London: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola conceded the Premier League title to Liverpool and believes no team in the world would be able to stay with the European champions this season. Liverpool are well on course for a first league title in 30 years as they lead City by 16 points with a game in hand after winning 22 and drawing one of their 23 games. City have won back-to-back titles with a combined 198 points, denying Liverpool last season despite Jurgen Klopp's men posting 97 points - the third highest tally in top-flight English football history.

"Liverpool obviously will be champions of the Premier League, but they would be champions in Spain, champions in Italy, champions in Germany," said Guardiola. "They would be champions everywhere after 23 games, 22 victories, 1 draw," City have lost five league games this season, but Guardiola defended their record by pointing out it would still be good enough to mount a title challenge



Pep Guardiola's team is 16 points behind Klopp's.

in Europe's other top leagues.

"In the recent past when Chelsea won the league, the next season, they didn't qualify for the Champions League, Leicester the same and Chelsea again the same. When we won the league we repeated the league," added Guardiola. AP

Champions League, where City meet Spanish giants Real Madrid in the last 16 next month.

United thump Tranmere

Manchester United turned a potentially awkward away match on a poor playing surface into an FA Cup cruise by thrashing third-tier Tranmere 6-0 in the fourth round to ease some pressure on manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer on Sunday.

Manchester City piled on the goals against lower-league opposition, too, sweeping to a 4-0 win over 10-man Fulham to take its defense of the famous old trophy into the last 16. United chose an ideal time to record the biggest victory in its 13 months under Solskjaer, who has been under massive

high into the net from outside the area in the 10th minute. It was Maguire's first goal for United since his move from Leicester in the off-season. Well-taken strikes by Diego Dalot and attacking midfielder Jesse Lingard, with his first goal in any competition in 366 days, made it 3-0 after only 16 minutes, with Phil Jones and Anthony Martial adding further goals before halftime. Teenage striker Mason Greenwood converted a penalty in the 56th for the sixth goal and Solskjaer took the opportunity to give some of his key players a rest, with Martial, Nemanja Matic and Maguire coming off early to save their legs ahead of the second leg of a English League Cup quarterfinal against City on Wednesday.

Frustrated Lampard calls for Chelsea to make signings

Kingston Upon Hill: Frank Lampard called on Chelsea to back him in the transfer market after his side edged into the FA Cup fifth round with a 2-1 win at Hull. Lampard has bemoaned Chelsea's failure to kill off defensive opponents throughout his first season in charge and he believes signings in key attacking areas are the solution.

The Chelsea manager watched his team take control at second tier Hull thanks to Michy Batshuayi's early strike before Fikayo Tomori's header doubled the lead after half-time on Saturday. But the Blues should have been further ahead by that point after squandering several chances and Kamil Grosicki's late deflected free-kick for Hull set up a tense finale.

Chelsea survived but the inconsistent performance underlined Lampard's belief that new recruits are needed after his club were unable to sign players to replace Eden Hazard, who joined Real Madrid during the summer window when the Blues were serving a transfer ban. "It's a big test coming up for us. It's clear we've got a punishment where we couldn't bring in players and we lost one of the biggest players in our history (Hazard)," Lampard told BT Sport.

Tiger roars into contention for record US PGA win

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

LOS ANGELES, JANUARY 26

TIGER WOODS charged into contention for a record-setting 83rd all-time US PGA title on Saturday, shooting a three-under par 69 as he chases a ninth career victory at Torrey Pines. Woods began the third round of the Farmers Insurance Open six strokes adrift of leader Ryan Palmer, but stood on seven-under 209 after 54 holes, five back of leader Jon Rahm with the third-ranked Spaniard having two holes yet to finish. "I'm going to have to shoot a pretty good round tomorrow," Woods said. "I'll have my work cut out for me. I'll have to go out there and post a number and hopefully it will be good enough."

Second-ranked Rory McIlroy, needing a victory to return to world number one, moved into third with a stellar 67 to stand three adrift on 207, but the bid for history by Woods stole the spotlight.

The 44-year-old reigning Masters champion matched Sam Snead for the US PGA record of 82 triumphs with an October victory in Japan and could claim the mark alone on Sunday at the seaside San Diego layout.

Woods, a 15-time major winner, fought back from nine strokes down after 36 holes to win at Torrey Pines in 1999 and twice rallied from seven back in the last two rounds to win. Fog delayed the start by two hours but Woods shone brightly once he began.

Woods blasted from a fairway bunker to 13 feet and sank the putt to open with a birdie, conquering the same first hole where he four-putted to a double bogey on Friday. Woods curled in a seven-foot birdie putt on the par-3 third and rolled in a 17-foot chip to rescue par at the fourth.

After blasting out of the rough, Woods holed a 13-foot birdie putt at the par-5 sixth and dropped his approach three feet from the cup on the way to making birdie at the par-5 ninth to reach 8-under, only two off the lead. "Most of my putts I made were all uphill," Woods said. "It's important to leave the ball in the correct spots, and when I did I poured them in there." Woods made bogey at the par-3 11th, coming up six-feet short on a 62-foot birdie bid and missing his par putt.

From there, Woods grinded out seven concluding pars, the most crucial on a 15-foot putt--his longest putt of the day--at the par-5 18th after he found bunkers off the tee and with his third shot.

"It was important to save the round after I made a bogey back there," Woods said. "It was important to make that putt to sal-

I'm going to have to shoot a pretty good round tomorrow. I'll have my work cut out for me. I'll have to go out there and post a number and hopefully it will be good enough."

TIGER WOODS

vage the round a little bit and get some momentum going for the round tomorrow."

McIlroy packs patience

McIlroy sank a 19-foot birdie putt at the par-3 third, took his lone bogey at four, then birdied the par-5 sixth and ninth holes. On the back nine, McIlroy birdied the par-4 12th and 15th and par-5 18th -- the exact same trio of holes where he made bogeys on Friday. "I hit the ball well off the tee. I gave myself plenty of chances," said McIlroy. "If you can pack your patience around this place, just hang around, you should be OK."

"No one is going to go out here and shoot the lights out. If you keep putting it on the green and give yourself chances, you're going to do well out here." As much as McIlroy wants to reclaim the world number one spot for the first time since 2015, the four-time major winner from Northern Ireland wants to capture a title missing from his collection.

"I'd love to (be number one)," McIlroy said. "I want to win a golf tournament. I've never won here before. That's my goal here tomorrow -- let's go win a new event."

Proposed Premier Golf League to feature 48 players

The British-based World Golf Group (WGG) has finally publicly unveiled its plan for a new global tour that would comprise 18 yearly tournaments featuring 48 of the game's top players.

Nearly two years after Reuters first reported the group's plans, the Premier Golf League (PGL) hopes to launch in January, 2022, it said in a detailed news release on Saturday. Each tournament would have prize money of \$10 million.

Whether the tour is feasible remains to be seen on an already-crowded calendar. The PGL said it wanted to work with established tours rather than as a breakaway circuit, but the U.S.-based PGA Tour and European Tour have been all but dismissive about the proposed circuit. "We don't comment on the business of other tours, real or hypothetical. We're focused on our business," the PGA Tour said in a statement to Reuters. The European Tour has been similarly dismissive. REUTERS



Woods curled in a seven-foot birdie putt on the par-3 third and rolled in a 17-foot chip to rescue par at the fourth. AP

POWER EQUATIONS

Europe's interests are important, but it's time to ask what Africa needs

RORY SMITH

LONDON, JANUARY 26

THE IDEAS just keep coming. From Europe's leading clubs: a proposal to expand the Champions League, to squeeze four more lucrative matchdays into the competition's format. From UEFA: a whole new trophy to win, but one for countries that feel (rightly) excluded from the Champions League.

From FIFA: another new tournament, this one in the summer and based on the Club World Cup -- the one that was, in itself, an expansion of the old Intercontinental Cup -- but bigger, richer, and more in China. And, as my colleague Tariq Panja reported this week, from Stephen M. Ross and his Relevant Sports team: a version of the International Champions Cup that is conspicuously more than a meaningless pre-season moneymaking exercise.

They are all, for now, under consideration, despite the endless warnings from FIFPro -- the global players' union -- and from a number of leading managers, not least Jurgen Klopp, that players are already facing the risk of burnout, that soccer is in danger of strangling its golden goose. The meetings still go on,

in locked rooms and hushed tones in five-star hotels, the workshoping, the brainstorming. There is no such thing as a bad idea. Last week, it was confirmed that this year's African Cup of Nations -- Africa's equivalent of the Copa America, or the European Championship -- would, in fact, be next year's African Cup of Nations: Cameroon, the host, has noted that it is far too hot to play the tournament in June and July, and so it has shifted it, quite understandably, to January. (The fact its summer dates would have clashed with the new Club World Cup was a factor, too).

This is, in many ways, not a new idea: the Cup of Nations always used to be played in the (European) winter, until it was decided in 2017 that it should be played, instead, in the (European) summer. The thinking was flawed -- it did not require a meteorologist to work out that temperatures would rule out a swath of countries as potential hosts -- but the logic was simple: pretty much all of Africa's highest-profile players work for clubs in Europe. Switching it to the off-season made sense for them, and for their employers.

The switch back, then, is not exactly popular: Everyone in the corridors of power might be willing to contemplate almost any other



Africa supplies Europe with more and more players every year, but the continent's football needs are often an afterthought. Reuters

proposal for new tournaments or ruining existing ones, but the restoration of a historic, important competition to its usual dates is universally seen as A Bad Thing. Have the African authorities not thought about what effect they will have on the integrity of the Premier League at all? There will come a point when this Eurocentric thinking has to stop. Yes, that is where all the money is. But it is not the limit of soccer's horizons. It does not own the game.

Making sure everything works well for Europe will, eventually, have damaging consequences elsewhere: in terms of attendance and interest in local competitions (which has already happened across Africa) and, possibly, down the line, in the development of players. Europe has to start thinking of itself as the tip of the pyramid: the summit, yes, but in quite a bit of trouble if the rest of the edifice is not secure. There is one idea for a new competition that appeals. It came, back in November, from an unlikely source: Gianni Infantino, president of FIFA, the concept that a stoppered clock is right twice in a day fitted out in a finely-tailored suit. On a trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Infantino suggested that a Pan-African league should be under consideration. His theory was, obviously, based on money: he thought that

such a competition might be able to command revenues of \$200 million a year. But there is a sound logic behind it.

Africa is home to a couple of dozen major clubs: Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates in South Africa; Al Ahly and Zamalek in Egypt; Espérance and Étoile du Sahel in Tunisia; DR Congo's TP Mazembe; and Ghana's Asante Kotoko, among others. A league of 20 teams, as Infantino suggested, would be of a far higher standard than any of the national competitions they currently call home.

That would be beneficial, of course, for players, and the prospect of selling continental broadcast rights would help improve facilities and infrastructure. It might, even, enable teams to hold on to some of their brightest prospects for just a little longer, delaying the exodus for Europe. It might, in other words, provide the basis for another pole to emerge in soccer's firmament: not enough to compete with Europe, but to rebalance things just a little. Soccer is weaker if western Europe has a monopoly on talent, on wealth, on power, as it does now. It is healthier if Africa -- and Asia, and Americas and the rest -- can make decisions without having to think how Europe will react. This might be a step on that road. NYT

