

Arsenal guns down a lacklustre Manchester United

The win offers hope for a brighter future under new manager Arteta; Jesus' brace gives Manchester City a 2-1 victory over Everton

PREMIER LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Arsenal rang in the new year by giving boss Mikel Arteta his first victory as lacklustre Manchester United crashed to a 2-0 defeat.

Arteta had watched Arsenal take only one point from his first two matches, with last weekend's 2-1 defeat against Chelsea especially painful after the Blues scored twice in the final minutes.

But Arsenal had played well for long periods in that London derby and it produced an even more sparkling display to put United to the sword at the Emirates Stadium.

Close range

The Gunners took the lead in the eighth minute when Sead Kolasinac's cross ran through to Nicolas Pepe at the far post and the Ivory

Coast winger beat David de Gea from close-range.

Arsenal, which last won in the league at West Ham on December 9, got a deserved second goal in the 43rd minute when de Gea kept out Alexandre Lacazette's flick and Sokratis reacted quickest to lash home.

Nine adrift

Arteta's team is nine points adrift of the top four, but its second win in 16 matches in all competitions offers hope of a brighter future under the former Arsenal midfielder's management.

"It feels great, incredible. I'm so happy and proud of the players," Arteta said. "Physically the level dropped in the second half but the commitment and desire was terrific. The performances are getting better so I was desperate for the win."

United is fifth, five points behind fourth-placed Chel-

sea, after the latest in a long list of underwhelming performances in a troubled campaign.

Meanwhile, Manchester City remained third, a point behind Leicester, after its home win against Everton.

Gabriel Jesus scored twice in the second half at the Etihad before Richarlison pulled a goal back for Everton but City held on despite some nervy moments.

"This period is so tough. When you are far away from the first position sometimes people give up, but we never give up," City boss Pep Guardiola said.

The results:

Arsenal 2 (Pepe 8, Sokratis 43) bt Manchester United 0; Manchester City 2 (Jesus 51, 58) bt Everton 1 (Richarlison 71).

Norwich 1 (Cantwell 4) drew with Crystal Palace 1 (Wickham 85); West Ham 4 (Noble 17, 35-pen, Haller 25, Anderson 66) bt Bournemouth 0.



Clinical: Nicolas Pepe's early strike set the tone for Arsenal's dominant display against Manchester United. •GETTY IMAGES

Paul Pogba's new injury setback

Ankle surgery can keep the midfielder out for a month

AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Paul Pogba will undergo surgery on a recurring ankle injury and is expected to spend another month on the sidelines, Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer confirmed after his side's 2-0 defeat to Arsenal on Wednesday.

The French World Cup winner made his comeback after nearly three months out in a 2-0 defeat at Watford 10 days ago and also made an appearance off the bench in a 4-1 thrashing of Newcastle four days later.

"We've had scans and it's



Down and out: Pogba's influence in midfield has been badly missed with United sitting fifth in the Premier League. •AFP

nothing major, it's something that has to be sorted and dealt with. He's been advised to it as soon as," said

Solskjaer. Pogba has made just six starts in all competitions for United this season and his influence in midfield

has been badly missed with United sitting fifth in the Premier League.

His latest setback comes at a bad time for Solskjaer with Scott McTominay also sidelined for two months leaving the Norwegian extremely short on midfield options. "It's a big blow that Paul is out now that Scott's out, he'll be out for a few months. Paul will be back within a month."

Solskjaer denied suggestions it is Pogba's own medical team rather than the club's which has suggested to undergo surgery at this time.

Sodhi back at Royals, with twin roles

IPL

SPORTS BUREAU
JAIPUR

Ish Sodhi will have a dual role with the Rajasthan Royals this season. The 27-year-old leg-spinner from New Zealand will work as a spin consultant besides being an operations executive. It is a different kind of homecoming for the Ludhiana-born Sodhi, who played for the Royals the last two seasons.

"I am delighted to be taking on this new challenge at Rajasthan Royals with this dual role," he said. "I have formed a great level of understanding with all the people involved with the franchise, and they have always been very supportive of me."

"I did not have to think twice when this opportunity was offered to me by the Royals' management. I love this franchise and want to help us win the IPL this year."

Sodhi, who played 17 Tests, 31 ODIs and 40 T20Is, said it was a fascinating opportunity to be involved in a coaching role at such a young age. "I am looking forward to developing my coaching skills alongside Sairaj and learning from Jake on business operations," he said.



Ish Sodhi. •FILE PHOTO

Three football fans arrested for racist, homophobic abuse

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

A Brighton fan was arrested for racially abusing Chelsea players during a Premier League match, and two other soccer fans were arrested in separate incidents during the same game for hurling homophobic abuse at rival supporters.

Brighton chief executive Paul Barber called the abuse "disgusting" and urged supporters to report

wrongdoing at the stadium.

"If the prospect of a life ban from watching their clubs play football isn't a strong enough deterrent, we have to ask the question as to whether the courts should be given the power to hand out more severe punishments?" Barber said in a statement on Thursday.

"Football can only do so much, and we are sick and tired of the game's reputation being

tarnished by these people.

"I find it impossible to comprehend how and why some individuals think it's acceptable to behave in this way."

During a second division game on New Year's Day, an announcement was made in Huddersfield warning fans to stop offensive behaviour after sectarian abuse was allegedly aimed at Stoke player James McClean.

Sri Lankan team arrives for T20I series

Indian players expected to reach the city in batches on Friday



Here we come... The Sri Lankan team in Colombo before its departure to India. •COURTESY: SRI LANKA CRICKET

SL IN INDIA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI

The Sri Lankan cricket team, led by veteran pacer Lasith Malinga, arrived here on Thursday for the three-match T20I series against India amid tight security. The team headed straight to the hotel.

The members of the Indian team are expected to arrive in batches on Friday for the series opener on Sunday.

"Both the teams have optional training sessions, Sri Lanka followed by India in

the evening," an official of the Assam Cricket Association (ACA) said.

"The situation is absolutely normal now and tourism is back in the state. We are hosting Khelo India Games from January 10 and about 7000 will participate," ACA secretary Devajit Saikia said. "It's now safe as any other place in the country. The state government is looking after the security arrangement and there's no issue at all."

About 27,000 tickets of the 39,500-capacity Barasra Stadium have already

been sold out.

"We are expecting a last minute ticket rush now," he said.

The second T20I will be played in Indore on Jan. 7 while Pune will host the final match of the series on Jan. 10.

The short series will mark the T20 World Cup countdown for the two neighbouring countries.

Busy schedule

India will play eight T20Is, including five in New Zealand, ahead of its T20 World Cup opener against South

Africa in Perth on October 24.

Former skipper Angelo Mathews and Dhananjaya de Silva have been recalled to the 16-member Sri Lankan squad. Mathews last played a T20I against South Africa in August 2018.

For India, the series will mark the return of pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has recovered from a lower back surgery, while opener Shikhar Dhawan will also make a comeback.

Opener Rohit Sharma and pacer Mohammed Shami have been rested.

BCCI to set up medical panel at NCA

The Academy has been criticised for the way it has handled injury-related issues

BCCI-NCA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The National Cricket Academy (NCA), which has often been criticised for its handling of players' injuries, is set to get the help of a BCCI medical panel and a dedicated social media department as part of its revamp plan.

The need for a medical panel was discussed at NCA's recent meeting which was attended by all BCCI office-bearers, including president Sourav Ganguly and NCA cricket head Rahul Dravid.

The development comes after the criticism the NCA drew for the injury management of some leading India players, including Wriddhi Saha and more recently Bhuvneshwar Kumar.



Sourav Ganguly. •FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

All-rounder Hardik Pandya and premium pacer Jasprit Bumrah added to the NCA's woes by choosing personal rehabilitation over recovering in Bengaluru.

"The BCCI will consult a London-based clinic, Fortius, for setting up its medical panel," said a top BCCI official.

The head of fast bowling,

a position which has been lying vacant for a long time, will also be filled soon.

That person will be in charge of setting up a fast bowling programme at the NCA.

The board will also hire a nutrition head for the Bengaluru-based facility.

Social media manager

A social media manager will come on board to provide regular updates on the happenings inside the NCA.

The move could also go a long way in repairing its reputation, admitted the Board official.

The NCA had failed to detect Bhuvneshwar's sports hernia and was also criticised when it came to light that Bumrah and Hardik were taking outside help for

their recovery rather than relying on the NCA staff.

Primary centre

Going forward, Ganguly has already made it clear that the NCA will be the primary centre for cricket development programmes in the country and all India players will have to go to Bengaluru for rehabilitation. He expects the new NCA facility to be ready in 18 months' time.

The other recruitment, which will be done soon, is the head of data analytics.

The NCA will also be conducting Level 2 and Level 3 coaching courses at its premises with the State associations paying the bill for their respective coaches.

"Coach development consultants" will also be hired on a need basis.

Kiwis look to salvage pride in final Test

With bushfires raging, smoke haze could come into play

NZ IN AUSTRALIA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Smoke haze could come into play as New Zealand looks to salvage some pride from its miserable tour of Australia in the third and final Test which begins on Friday.

With bushfires raging across New South Wales state, day two of the match on Saturday shapes up as the biggest challenge with temperatures forecast to soar and smoggy conditions expected.

The issue of smoke is a difficult one for officials, who currently rely on a mix of air quality guidelines from the International Cricket Council, State governments and the Australian Institute of Sport.

Inconsistencies

But there are inconsistencies on what is considered "unsafe", with Cricket Australia and the players' association currently working to deve-



Lone warrior: Tom Blundell, coming in as makeshift opener, played a gritty knock for New Zealand in Melbourne. •AP

lop better protocols around visibility and air quality.

With the first two Tests at Perth and Melbourne ending in heavy defeats inside four days, New Zealand will need all the help it can get. Coach Gary Stead admitted the

Black Caps were "beaten up by Australia again" in their 247-run Melbourne thrashing and they have had to go back to the drawing board.

"We've got to find some areas where we can keep chipping away, make im-

provements and put Australia under pressure for longer," he said.

"When you are under pressure for the periods Australia have put us under, then you have to question what we're doing."

"Australia have three bowlers at 145 kph and a spinner (Nathan Lyon) who's taken over 300 Test wickets so you're always up against it. You don't get a reprieve and that's the hard thing for us."

Only bright spot The bright spot from Melbourne was makeshift opener Tom Blundell's gritty second innings century and he is set to retain the role alongside Tom Latham.

But there is doubt over skipper Kane Williamson, who has had a poor tour. He missed training on Wednesday with flu-like symptoms, with batsman Henry Nicholls suffering similar problems.

Jeet Raval is the only specialist batsman waiting in the wings, but he has been out of form.

Kohli-led India can win all ICC tournaments: Lara

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Batting legend Brian Lara believes the Indian cricket team, under Virat Kohli, is capable of winning all ICC tournaments it competes in.

"I think they are definitely capable of winning all tournaments that they play. I think what Virat Kohli and company and the Indian team has to appreciate the fact that everybody sort of target India," Lara was quoted as saying by India Today.

"Everybody knows that some point of time one team is going to play that important match against India. If it's a quarterfinal,

semifinal and final," he added.

Under Kohli's leadership, India has reached great heights in both Tests and ODIs but has failed to win an ICC tournament, fizzling out in crucial games.

The Men in Blue last won an ICC event in 2013 when Mahendra Singh Dhoni-led side lifted the ICC Champions Trophy.

Breaking the 400 score India will play eight T20Is, including five in New Zealand, ahead of its T20 World Cup opener against South

at No.4 for Australia. He is a great player but he doesn't dominate. You know a player like David Warner for sure," Lara said.

"A player like Virat Kohli, who gets in early and gets set. He is a very attacking player. Rohit Sharma on his day. So they have got quite a group of players who can do so," he added.

I think what Virat Kohli and company and the Indian team has to appreciate the fact that everybody sort of target India



Lara is bullish on Kohli's India. •VIVEK BENDRE