

Sanchez caps Arsenal fightback



Arsenal's Chilean striker Alexis Sanchez (L) celebrates scoring the second goal with Arsenal's Brazilian defender Gabriel

Londres

Alexis Sanchez earned Arsenal an FA Cup final showdown with Chelsea and gave Arsene Wenger renewed hope of salvaging a troubled campaign as the gritty Gunners fought back to beat Manchester City 2-1 yesterday.

When Sergio Aguero put City ahead in the second half of a bruising semi-final, Wenger's side were on the verge of another dispiriting defeat in arguably the worst season of the Frenchman's 21-year reign.

But, despite being outplayed for long periods, Arsenal summoned a spirit and desire too often missing from their performances this term.

Nacho Monreal's equaliser forced extra-time and Sanchez's predatory finish in the additional period secured a final date with Premier League leaders Chelsea back at Wembley on May 27.

Arsenal's third FA Cup final in the last four years -- they won it in 2014 and 2015 -- gives them a record 20 appearances in the showpiece match of the famous old competition.

Crucially, it presents Wenger with a chance to mute the mounting criticism from his club's supporters who want him to resign.

City came close to striking first when the diminutive David Silva rose to meet Aguero's cross with a header that Petr Cech pushed over.

Silva departed due to injury soon after, but City monopolised possession and Arsenal were often reduced to kicking their opponents out of their rhythm.

Aguero and Raheem Sterling combined to bundle the ball into the net just before

half-time, but the goal was controversially ruled out because Leroy Sane's cross was adjudged to have gone out as it looped over the bar before curling back into play.

To City's frustration, television replays suggested a tiny part of the ball was still in play before it reached Aguero.

Yet Arsenal's play still lacked conviction and by the 62nd minute the scoreline finally reflected City's dominance.

When Yaya Toure seized the ball after Aaron Ramsey's mistake deep in City's half, the Ivorian spotted Aguero and sent a long pass towards the striker.

Aguero surged away from Monreal and, although his first touch almost ruined the chance, he recovered to lift a deft finish over Cech for his 30th goal this season.

If that felt like the knockout blow, Monreal had

other ideas and he hauled the Gunners off the canvas in the 71st minute.

Having laboured for so long, Arsenal suddenly sprang to life and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain swung over a superb cross to the far post, where Monreal timed his run perfectly to slot home from close-range for his first Arsenal goal in over two years.

City almost hit back immediately, with Toure's 25-yard volley pushed onto a post by Cech before Fernandinho headed against the crossbar from Kevin de Bruyne's corner.

Danny Welbeck couldn't win it for Arsenal with a fine curling strike before extra-time, but Sanchez came to Wenger's rescue with a far more prosaic effort in the 101st minute.

Sanchez has been a problem for Wenger with his mood swings this season and he was well below his best for long periods once again. (AFP)

Nadal wins 10th Monte Carlo title

Monte Carlo

Rafael Nadal won the Monte Carlo Masters for a record-breaking 10th time with a dominant 6-1, 6-3 defeat of Spanish compatriot Albert Ramos-Vinolas yesterday.

The 30-year-old Nadal, who now has 50 clay court titles and 70 in all, will be aiming for a 10th French Open title as well next month.

It was Nadal's first title in almost a year and further cemented his place in history as he became the first man in the Open era to win the same event 10 times.

He won eight Monte Carlo titles in a row from 2005 to 2012 but then lost to Novak

Djokovic in the 2013 final.

He won the title again last year and then added the Barcelona crown a week later, yet had not lifted a trophy since, losing three finals already this year, including January's Australian Open against Roger Federer.

Nadal's 50 clay titles breaks the record he shared with Guillermo Vilas since April last year when he lifted his ninth trophy in Barcelona.

"I cannot explain the feelings that I have," Nadal said.

"I had a tough start to the season. When I first played here in 2003 as a qualifier I reached the third round.

"Now, a lot of years later, this is something I could have never dreamt. Thanks to life for giving me this opportunity."

The great Spaniard needed just 76 minutes and three match points to see off his compatriot on Sunday.

The left-hander now has 29 Masters titles, one behind the all-time record of 30 held by Novak Djokovic.

He has now won an ATP event for the 14th consecutive year after losing his first three finals of 2017.

Nadal was hardly challenged by his 29-year-old countryman, who was playing the best tennis of his career after seeing off world number one Andy Murray on his way to the final. (AFP)



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates and bites the trophy during the prize ceremony after winning the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series Tournament final tennis match

Valverde wins fourth Bastogne-Liege title

Ans

Spain's Alejandro Valverde continued his stunning start to the season by winning the prestigious Liege-Bastogne-Liege race for the fourth time yesterday. The 36-year-old overhauled Irishman Dan Martin in the final 300 metres to add to his fifth win at Fleche Wallonne on Wednesday.

It has been a remarkable start

to the season for a man turning 37 on Tuesday.

He has won four stage races -- the tours of Catalonia, the Basque Country, Andalusia and his home region of Murcia -- already this season, and two one-day classics.

On Wednesday he extended his record of Fleche Wallonne successes to five and has now added a 'Monument' victory to

his remarkable accolades.

Only the great Eddy Merckx, with five, has won Liege more times than Valverde.

Victory in the epic 258km race came 11 years after Valverde first tasted success at Liege.

The day started with a minute's applause in memory of Italian Michele Scarponi, who died on Saturday in a training accident with a van in central Italy.

Spain's Alejandro Valverde of the Movistar team, celebrates as he crosses the finish line in Mur de Huy during the Fleche Wallonne cycling race

