

Arsenal miss chance to stretch lead in Liverpool stalemate

Gunners fail to capitalise as Liverpool hold firm in storm-hit Emirates stalemate

● Arsenal miss chance to go eight clear

● Liverpool strike crossbar through Bradley

● Stormy conditions blunt both attacks

AFP | London

Arsenal wasted the chance to move eight points clear at the top of the Premier League as Liverpool came to life in a 0-0 draw at the Emirates Stadium.

The Reds are one of only two sides to beat Mikel Arteta's men this season and came closest to breaking the deadlock when Conor Bradley hit the crossbar.

Arsenal failed to score for the first time at home all season but did enough to extend their advantage over second-placed Manchester City to six points.

Three consecutive draws for City over the past week had opened the door for Arsenal to close in on their first league title in 22 years.

The Emirates was bouncing before a ball was kicked in anticipation, but the spectacle between the defending champions and apparent champions elect fell flat.

Both sides struggled to deal with the treacherous conditions as Storm Goretti unleashed torrential rain and swirling winds.



Arsenal's Brazilian striker #09 Gabriel Jesus reacts after a final chance at the back post from a corner as the last action of the game

Liverpool have long since fallen out of the title race since beating the Gunners at Anfield in August, but are now 10 games unbeaten to consolidate their place in the top four.

The visitors were penned in for much of the first 45 minutes but still came closest to opening the scoring before the break.

William Saliba's backpass nearly caught out David Raya and, with the Spanish goalkeeper stranded, Conor Bradley's lob came back off the underside of the crossbar.

The roles were reversed in the second period as Liverpool

Every time you don't win (it is a missed opportunity). I have to really praise the team for what they have done in this Christmas period. To come out of this period with all the issues we had the boys deserve all the credit. We are in a really strong position and we have to go again

MIKEL ARTETA

dominated possession and territory.

However, the Reds were shorn of three of their biggest attacking threats with Alexander Isak and Hugo Ekiti out injured and Mohamed Salah away at the Africa Cup of Nations.

That lack of firepower in the final third showed as Arsenal were only ever troubled by the pace of Jeremie Frimpong, who lacked the final ball to make his dangerous bursts count.

Dominik Szoboszlai's stunning free-kick separated the sides when the last met and

Arsenal increased their lead over Manchester City to six points despite failing to score at home for the first time this season, benefiting from City's recent run of three consecutive draws

nearly repeated the trick with a powerful effort that dipped just too late.

At the other end, Viktor Gyokeres was hauled off by Arteta after another poor performance as his goal drought from open play extended to 10 games.

Arteta had to turn to his wealth of options off the bench to try and turn the tide as Gabriel Jesus, Noni Madueke, Eberechi Eze and Gabriel Martinelli were all introduced in the hunt for a winner.

But they took until stoppage time to register a shot on goal in the second half as Jesus and Martinelli fired too close to Alison Becker.

A point edges fourth-placed Liverpool three points clear of Newcastle and Manchester United in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League.

Swiatek wins in 58 minutes as Poland reach United Cup semis



Iga Swiatek
AFP | Perth

World number two Iga Swiatek defied a partisan crowd to thrash Australian Maya Jant in Sydney yesterday and help take Poland into a United Cup semi-final clash with the USA.

Joint is a talent at age 19 but she was blown away by the six-time Grand Slam champion, Swiatek teaching her a lesson in a 6-1, 6-1 victory in 58 minutes.

The 24-year-old Swiatek will be among the favourites when the Australian Open starts on January 18 and this showed why as she won a third match in a row.

Alex de Minaur defeated Hubert Hurkacz 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in the men's singles to level the quarter-final at 1-1 and give the hosts hope.

However, Poland won the deciding mixed doubles to set up a last-four showdown with reigning champions the United States in a repeat of last year's final.

That tees up Swiatek against world number four Coco Gauff.

The other semi-final on Saturday is between Belgium and Switzerland.

The United Cup is a mixed-teams competition featuring 18 countries and serves as build-up to the Australian Open.

Wawrinka gets Melbourne wildcard but Kyrgios to play doubles only

AFP | Melbourne

Former champion Stan Wawrinka was handed a wildcard yesterday for the Australian Open in his final season but home favourite Nick Kyrgios will play only doubles.

With Kyrgios saying he was not ready for singles matches after injury, the final three wildcards went to three-time Grand Slam winner Wawrinka and Australians Jordan Thompson and Chris O'Connell.

Switzerland's Wawrinka, 40, is playing his last season before retiring.

He won the first of his majors at Melbourne in 2014, a season during which he peaked at world number three, and reached two other semi-finals.

"To have the chance to play the AO at the beginning of my final year on tour means the world to me," said Wawrinka, now ranked 156.

The 2022 Wimbledon finalist Kyrgios made his comeback after an injury-ravaged three years in Brisbane this week but lost in the opening round to American



Stan Wawrinka in action

Aleksandar Kovacevic.

Despite being in the running for a wildcard at his home Grand Slam starting on January 18, the Australian showman said he was not ready.

"After some good conversations with TA (Tennis Australia) I've made the call to focus on doubles for this year's Australian Open," he said on Instagram.

"I'm fit and back on court but

five-setters are a different beast and I'm not quite ready to go the distance yet."

The defeat to Kovacevic was his first singles ATP Tour match since March last year and he conceded afterwards that he would never be the player he once was.

Kyrgios, who has tumbled to 670 in the rankings after reaching a high of 13 in 2016, said he

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NICK KYRGIOS

was happy to give the opportunity to someone else.

"This tournament means everything to me but I'd rather give my spot to someone who's ready to make their moment count," Kyrgios said.

While giving singles a miss, Kyrgios will play doubles with fellow Australian Thanasi Kokkinakis.

He has previously committed to playing singles at the Kooyong Classic in Melbourne, which gets under way on Tuesday.

Real Madrid's Mbappe fit to play Super Cup final: Alonso

AFP | Madrid

Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said that superstar French striker Kylian Mbappe is fit to play in the Spanish Super Cup final against Barcelona after a knee sprain.

The forward was left out of Madrid's travelling party to Saudi Arabia, with Los Blancos beating city rivals Atletico Madrid 2-1 in the semi-final on

Thursday to set up a Clasico final on Sunday.

"(Mbappe) is a lot better, he is feeling good, and he has the same chance of playing as his team-mates," Alonso said in Jeddah.

Alonso said Mbappe would fly to join the squad yesterday.

The 27-year-old is Madrid's top goalscorer with 29 goals this season across all competitions in 24 appearances.

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