

SPORTS
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Man Utd did not deserve the points against Saints: Solskjaer

Manchester United stunned by Obafemi as Southampton mixed up top-four race

● **Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men were unable to take advantage of weekend defeats for Chelsea and Leicester to remain in fifth**

Reuters | London

Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said his side did not deserve the three points after a stoppage-time equaliser from Michael Obafemi gave Southampton a 2-2 draw at Old Trafford on Monday.

United had been 2-1 up after goals from Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial in response to Stuart Armstrong's early opener for the visitors.

Instead of moving into third place, United stay fifth and face a real fight to qualify for the Champions League with a top-four finish.

"You think you have three points in the bag but we probably didn't deserve three points today," said the Norwegian coach.

"Southampton are a good team, they run, and run and chase. We never got into our rhythm today. We played some fantastic football at times. The two goals we scored were very, very good.

"It was the worst time to con-



Anthony Martial of Manchester United shoots as he is challenged by Jack Stephens of Southampton

cede a goal but it happens in football. We have won so many games in that way. It is all part of the learning for this team," he added.

United played the same starting team for the fifth straight league game, the first time they have done so since 1993, but Solskjaer did not feel his side had suffered from fatigue.

"I don't think tiredness was the case. It was just one of those days we did not take our chances and they took theirs.

"David de Gea had one really good save but apart from that we had the bigger chances but you are not going to be given



United had become the first side in Premier League history to win four consecutive games by a three-goal margin, but there was no cruise for the Red Devils this time even after they responded to Stuart Armstrong's early opener

three points and Southampton are a very good side," he said.

Saints boss Ralph Hasenhuetl was delighted with the way his vastly improved 12th placed team approached the match.

"We developed our game with the ball extremely (well) in the last few weeks. We are becoming more brave. We are taking more risks. If you take more risks things can happen," he said.

"We wanted to be brave, we have nothing to lose and we can play free. You can feel the guys really enjoy (it) at the moment."

Sergio Ramos laments Madrid's lack of focus



Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos reacts after sustaining an injury

Reuters | Madrid

Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos criticised his side for falling into the trap of complacency in Monday's 2-1 win at Granada in La Liga as they were left desperate for the final whistle after strolling into a two-goal lead in the opening 16 minutes.

Zinedine Zidane's side relaxed after goals from Ferland Mendy and Karim Benzema had got them off to a dream start and they nearly paid for it as Granada peppered their area in the second half after Darwin Machis pulled a goal back.

"Without realising it, we made the mistake of letting our guard down after getting a scoreline which we would have been very happy with," Ramos said.

"But it wasn't good enough and today you can't beat anyone unless you are fully focused for 90 minutes. We won the first half and lost the second and although we got the victory we did things we should never do, like conced-

ing a cheap goal."

Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois had to make a brilliant save late on to preserve Real's lead while Ramos blocked a shot on the goal-line, but his side recorded a ninth consecutive win to move within range of securing the title.

Real will land their first La Liga crown since 2017 with victory at home to Villarreal on Thursday before they visit Leganes on the final day of the season next Sunday.

"Winning the league would mean a lot to us, it would be the reward for the consistency we have shown and for how hard we have worked throughout the year," added Ramos, whose side were two points behind Barcelona when the season was halted in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The lockdown served us well and proved to be a turning point as we worked on preparing to return to action and set ourselves the objective of winning the title.

"Now we are in the title fight and I hope that on Thursday we can celebrate it properly."

Le Tissier expects top-half finish for Southampton next season



Southampton's Michael Obafemi celebrates equalising against Manchester United

Reuters | London

Southampton's performance since the Premier League restart are a credit to manager Ralph Hasenhuetl and the team has the potential to finish in the top half of the table next season, club great Matt Le Tissier has said.

Southampton have lost just once since the league resumed following the COVID-19 shutdown, winning three matches and drawing twice, including a 2-2 draw at Manchester United on Monday.

"It's professional pride, but it's also what the manager in-

stills in them, wants from them and demands from them," Le Tissier, who scored 209 goals for Southampton during his 16 years at the club, said.

Hasenhuetl also guided Southampton to a 1-0 win over second-placed Manchester City earlier this month and Le Tissier said their form against the top sides showed what they could accomplish.

"When you look at what we've been capable of in the past few weeks -- we've just played City at home, Manchester United away, Everton away," he said.

England to back Buttler, but Denly in the firing line

Reuters | London

England are set keep faith with Jos Buttler despite defeat to West Indies in the first Test of a three-match series, but time may be up for Joe Denly.

Captain Joe Root is set to return for the second Test starting on Thursday at Old Trafford after missing the four-wicket defeat in Southampton to attend the birth of his second child.

The England selectors have big decisions to make after again losing the game with the bat rather than the ball despite the controversial omission of Stuart Broad.

An under-par 204 in the first innings and the loss of five wickets for 30 runs on the fourth evening set the platform for the tourists to take first blood.

Denly and Buttler were involved in both passages and find themselves increasingly under pressure for their places -- the former being squeezed by Root's return and Zak Crawley's fine 76 on Saturday, the latter from Surrey gloveman Ben Foakes.

England head coach Chris Silverwood, though, has only offered strong reassurance to one of the duo.

Buttler has a Test average of just 23.22 since the start of 2019



England players Joe Denly (l) and Jos Buttler share a joke during England nets (file photo)

and now only one hundred in 75 innings.

"I'm not gonna go down that road yet of putting Jos under pressure, because I don't think it's going to help him," said Silverwood. "First and foremost we want to give Jos the best opportunity to succeed.

"But I'm sure he is asking the same questions. He looked brilliant coming into this game, in practice and everything and he looked very good in the first innings. He just needs to go and make those big scores now doesn't he? He knows that as

well.

"From our point of view it's just making sure that he feels confident in the environment he's in."

There looks certain to be change higher up the order, though, with Denly's knocks of 18 and 29 doing little to show that he can haul his performances up to the required standard for a long-term Test number three.

At just 22, Crawley is 12 years Denly's junior and by producing England's top score of the match in tense circumstances in

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CHRIS SILVERWOOD

the second innings he appeared to make an irresistible grab for the shirt.

"We're all desperate to see Joe do really well. We can see he's trying hard, he's training hard and he's a great bloke, hence why we all went to see him do well," said Silverwood.

"But obviously he's under pressure a little bit, yes. Zak is improving constantly. I think he certainly showed maturity and the innings he played was very good.

"We have some young players in that side that seem to have good heads on their shoulders, and he's one of them. That's what we are looking for."