

SPORTS  
sports

# Barcelona dispatch Eibar

● Antoine Griezmann, Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez score as Barcelona beat Eibar

● Barcelona moved to the summit of La Liga with their sixth league win of the season

AFP | Madrid

Barcelona's 'MSG' is finally up and running as Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Antoine Griezmann all scored in a ruthless 3-0 victory over Eibar yesterday.

Griezmann's place in the newly-formed attacking trident has not been secure this season but the Frenchman opened the scoring at Ipurua before teeing up Messi and then playing the crucial pass for Suarez to make it three.

An authoritative Barca display thrusts them to the top of La Liga, for a few hours at least before Real Madrid play Real Mallorca, and dismissed suggestions the players might be affected by Friday's postponement of the Clasico due to protests in Catalonia.

Violence in the city of Barcelona and disruptions at El Prat airport meant Ernesto Valverde's side chose to alter their pre-match routine and embark on a 589-kilometre bus trip to



Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (L) challenges Eibar's Portuguese Serbian goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic

the Basque County on Friday.

And all the while, discussions continued over the Clasico against Real Madrid, which had originally been scheduled for next Saturday at Camp Nou but was postponed on Friday and is expected now to go ahead in December.

Perhaps chaos off the pitch inspired Barca to unite on it.

This was their fifth consecutive victory in all competitions, a sequence which is swiftly erasing memories of their stumbling start to the season.

The resurgence has coincided with Messi's return from injury but it was the fluidity and co-

hesion of the front three, rather than the Argentinian's familiar solo brilliance, that will have been most pleasing for Valverde.

Griezmann now has four goals since joining Barca from Atletico Madrid last summer but he has not entirely convinced so far, a series of underwhelming showings leading to Ousmane Dembele taking his starting spot against Sevilla before the international break.

Dembele might even have continued had he not been sent off and suspended for this game but Griezmann certainly took his chance. This was the third time he has started alongside

Messi and Suarez but the first that they have really gelled as a trio. There was good news too for Barcelona in defence, where Samuel Umtiti came through 90 minutes in what was his first appearance of the season. Umtiti, who has been out with a foot injury, replaced the banned Gerard Pique.

The only blot on the afternoon was an injury to Sergi Roberto, who hurt his left knee and was replaced at half-time.

The visting fans chanted in support of the nine Catalan leaders imprisoned last week for their failed independence bid in 2017.



Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine midfielder Angel Di Maria (R) shoots and scores a goal against Nice's Argentine goalkeeper Walter Benitez

## Di Maria, Mbappe guide PSG past nine-man Nice

AFP | Cardiff

Angel Di Maria grabbed two goals while Kylian Mbappe struck on his return from injury as Paris Saint-Germain won 4-1 at Nice on Friday to surge five points clear at the top of Ligue 1.

PSG lost Neymar and the influential Idrissa Gueye to injury over the international break while Mbappe and Edinson Cavani were only fit enough to make the bench for the trip to the Cote d'Azur.

"At the start of a run of six very intensive matches, it's always good to start with a win," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel.

"We had a good first half, I was happy. We had chances to control the match but at the start of the second half, we forgot to close it out."

A spectacular triple save by Walter Benitez kept out Presnel

Kimpembe and Abdou Diallo in the opening minutes at the Allianz Riviera but PSG soon made the breakthrough.

Di Maria raced on to a first-time pass from fellow Argentine Mauro Icardi before calmly guiding beyond Benitez in the Nice goal on 15 minutes.

Only Mbappe has been involved in more goals in France

this year than Di Maria, who duly doubled his tally six minutes later with a sublime lob from an unfavourable angle.

Marquinhos replaced PSG captain Thiago Silva at half-time and headed against the crossbar at a corner, but a mistake from the Brazilian presented Nice a lifeline on 67 minutes.

An ill-advised attempt at chesting down a cross allowed Kasper Dolberg to tee up Ignatius Ganago to blast home via the underside of the bar.

Any chance Patrick Vieira's side had of salvaging a result effectively evaporated

though with the dismissal of Wylan Cyprien and Christophe Herelle in a matter of minutes.

Cyprien was shown a second yellow card for dissent with Herelle sent off following a VAR review for a petulant slap on Leandro Paredes.

Tuchel threw Mbappe, restricted to just two substitute appearances since August, for the final eight minutes and PSG made the most of their two-man advantage.

Mbappe drove low under Benitez to claim his first goal since August 11 and then laid on an assist for Icardi to tap home in stoppage time.

**“We had a good first half, I was happy. We had chances to control the match but at the start of the second half, we forgot to close it out”**

THOMAS TUCHEL

## Bahrain ITF Juniors tournament kicks off

TDI | Manama

Bahrain Tennis Club (BTC) hosted a total of 22 matches yesterday in the qualifying draws for both the Boys' and Girls' Singles in the 11th Bahrain ITF Juniors Championship 2019.

Many of the best up-and-coming under-18 players from around the world feature in the competition, which is be-

ing held in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs, the Bahrain Tennis Federation and the International Tennis Federation (ITF).

It is being supported by Bahrain National Gas Company, Bapco and Ebrahim K Kanoo.

More than 100 players from around 30 countries are participating in the tournament. It is a part of the ITF World Tennis

Tour Juniors, and it continues the tradition of BTC's hosting world-class tennis tournaments each year.

Twenty-seven boys and 11 girls are competing in qualifying. Up for grabs are four spots each in the 32-player Boys' and Girls' Singles main competitions.

From the 27 boys, five are flying Bahrain's flag at home. They include Shadi Kallel, Mo-

ammed Aljishi, Jaber Abdulla'al, Essa Alqattan and Faris Altoobli. Vivek Kolluru of India is the Boys' top seed in qualifying.

Among the 11 girls, there are no Bahraini players. They are led by number one seed Jermine Sherif of Egypt.

Many of the participating players have been practising at the BTC hard courts over the past few days.

## Andy Murray reaches first finals since 2017

AFP | Antwerp

Former world number one Murray, who underwent career-saving hip surgery in January, showed his trademark stubbornness to win 3-6 7-5 6-2.

France's Humbert played aggressively but 32-year-old Murray outlasted him over two hours 23 minutes.

He will face fellow three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka in the final.

It is Murray's first final appearance since the Dubai Championships in March 2017, when he was then the world number one.

No player had ever returned from a hip resurfacing operation to play singles before Murray.

And he has managed to reach a final just two months after making his singles return, at Winston-Salem in August.

The Scot has played four tournaments in just over four weeks and showed signs of fatigue and frustration in the opening set.

He struggled on his serve, producing three double faults in the first six games, which allowed Humbert to force the first break of the match.

By contrast, Humbert wrapped up the first set with an ace, and kept up his aggressive play with some deep hitting in the second set.

The two traded breaks in the second before Humbert, serving to force a tie-break, lost his rhythm, and handed Murray the



Britain's Andy Murray returns a shot

set on a double fault.

Five games in a row went to Murray, allowing him to open

up a 3-0 lead in the decider, and his serving grew stronger as the match progressed.



**Two years and eight months after winning his 45th tour-level trophy in Dubai, Andy Murray returned to an ATP Tour championship match**

He appeared to have some trouble with his right elbow, which may have affected his

serve, but he finished the match with six aces and won 77% of points on his first serve.

He holds an 11-8 head-to-head record over Switzerland's Wawrinka, 34, and both players have struggled with injuries in recent years.

Murray injured his hip in his 2017 French Open semi-final against Wawrinka, while the Swiss had a disrupted two years with a knee injury.

Antwerp is likely to be Murray's last tournament of the year, with the possible exception of the Davis Cup, for which Great Britain will announce their squad on Monday.

He could still leave early if his wife, Kim, goes into early labour with their third child.