

Wolves rally past Celtics, Nuggets sink Blazers



Minnesota's Bones Hyland celebrates a three-pointer in the Timberwolves win over the Boston Celtics

AFP | London

The Minnesota Timberwolves shrugged off the injury absence of Anthony Edwards to complete a come-from-behind 102-92 road victory over the Boston Celtics on Sunday.

Minnesota trailed by 15 points early in the second quarter but rallied decisively in the fourth with a 16-0 run to outscore the Celtics 26-15 and silence a 19,156 crowd at Boston's TD Garden.

With Edwards missing due to right knee inflammation, Bones Hyland led Minnesota with 23 points off the bench, while Jaden McDaniels had 19 points and Ayo Dosunmu 17.

Minnesota improved to 44-28 and remain in sixth place in the Western Conference.

The New York Knicks improved to 47-25 to remain hard on the heels of the Celtics in the East with a 145-113 demolition of the Washington Wizards.

Karl-Anthony Towns finished with 26 points, 16 rebounds and three assists while Jalen Brunson added 23 points as the Knicks cruised to a wire-to-wire victory over a Wizards team who have lost 16 games straight.

Washington are one place off the bottom of the Eastern Conference at 16-55 and are vying with the Indiana Pacers (15-56) for the worst record in the league.

In the Western Conference, Nikola Jokic's 35th triple-double of the season powered the Denver Nuggets to a 128-112 defeat of the Portland Trail Blazers.

Man City's League Cup glory adds **twist** to title race

City boss tempers expectations as Arsenal remain firm favourites for Premier League

● **Guardiola wins fifth League Cup**

● **Arsenal lead Premier League by nine points**

● **Guardiola downplays title race impact**

● **Arteta vows strong response**

AFP | London

As Pep Guardiola wiped away the sting of the Champagne sprayed by his jubilant players after Sunday's League Cup final triumph against Arsenal, the Manchester City boss was confronted with a burning question.

Nico O'Reilly's second-half double had just sealed a 2-0 win in the Wembley showpiece, handing City a psychological boost at the expense of their Premier League title rivals.

But will Guardiola's record fifth League Cup serve as a catalyst to catch Arsenal in the title race?

The City boss, who hadn't masterminded a victory over his old assistant Mikel Arteta since 2023, knows beating Arsenal in a one-off showpiece occasion is difficult enough.

Finding a way to overhaul Premier League leaders Arsenal, who hold a nine-point advantage over second-placed City, is an even more daunting proposition.

"I would like to have nine points in front of Arsenal," Guardiola said.

"I said to the players: 'Today, we are going to see what our level is'. They are the best so far, no doubt about that, so let's prove ourselves and in the second half, I could not believe we could do it against Arsenal."

"But this win will have no impact (on the title race). It is a different competition."

City have a game in hand on



Manchester City's English midfielder #33 Nico O'Reilly poses with the trophy as City players celebrate

Arsenal and host the Gunners at the Etihad Stadium in April.

Yet Guardiola acknowledged even winning those two matches won't be enough for City unless Arsenal slip up elsewhere.

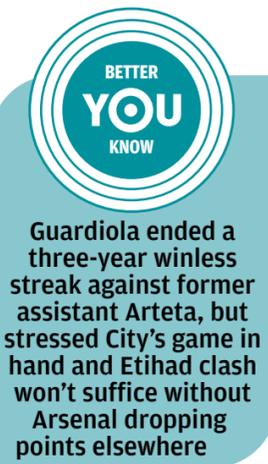
"They will be more controlled when they come to the Etihad. Maybe for that game it will help us, but the Premier League is in their hands," he said.

"Is that team going to drop points? We will try to win our games and then see what happens."

After recent damaging draws in the league against lowly West Ham and Nottingham Forest, as well as a limp Champions League last-16 exit against Real Madrid, City badly needed a trophy to lift the mood at the Etihad.

'Fire in the belly'

They went without silverware last term, but Guardiola believes this can be the start of a new era



for a club with 19 trophies in all competitions since he arrived a decade ago.

"When you start to win and the generation is young you can continue that. I need to know how they behave in certain moments," Guardiola said of a team

expensively revamped in the last 18 months.

"I can smell something that can flourish. Winning helps to anticipate the process."

"We are much better than last season but still we are not the team we should be. That requires time. Hopefully by the end of next season we will be."

Arsenal went into the final as firm favourites as they chased a first trophy in six years.

But they departed still waiting for the second major prize of the Arteta era, assailed with questions about their manager's selections and tactics, as well as a recurring habit of choking on the big stage.

Runners-up in the Premier League for the last three seasons, Arsenal cannot afford to let the Wembley defeat impact the rest of their treble-chasing campaign.

Arteta's decision to pick Kefa Arrizabalaga instead of regular

goalkeeper David Raya backfired when the understudy fumbled Ryan Cherki's cross as O'Reilly bagged City's first goal.

Arteta's conservative game-plan also came under fire, but the Arsenal boss vowed his team would use the pain as fuel to win the Premier League for the first time since 2004.

"We need to have some perspective on it. We are going to use this disappointment and this fire in the belly to have the most amazing two months that we have ever had together," said Arteta, whose side are in the Champions League and FA Cup quarter-finals.

"That's on us and we'll manage that energy in the right way. Now we have to go through that pain and disappointment."

"The good thing is that we have a very recent history with reacting in these moments, and I'm sure that we're going to do it again."

Arteta defends Kepa selection after blunder

AFP | London

Mikel Arteta defended his decision to select Kefa Arrizabalaga in the League Cup final after the Arsenal goalkeeper's costly mistake sparked a 2-0 defeat against Manchester City on Sunday.

Kepa was guilty of a horrendous blunder in the second half at Wembley when he let Ryan Cherki's cross slip through his fingers, gifting Nico O'Reilly the chance to head in City's opener. Arsenal never recovered and O'Reilly struck again four minutes later to leave the Gunners still waiting for their first major trophy since 2020.

Arteta had opted to keep faith with Kepa instead of picking first-choice stopper David Raya because the former Chelsea star has been a regular in the League Cup this season.

The gamble backfired as Kepa endured another League Cup final moment to forget after his 2019 refusal to be substituted by Chelsea boss Maurizio Sarri prior to a penalty shoot-out defeat against Manchester City in which he failed to save a kick.

Kepa also missed a penalty in a shoot-out loss to Liverpool three years later.

Asked about the criticism of his decision, Arteta said: "I understand but I have to do what is right and fair."

"Kepa had played all the competition, I think it would have been unfair to him and the team to do something different."

"He had gone all the way through this competition. Errors are part of football and unfortunately it happened today at a crucial moment."

Sitting nine points clear at



Arsenal's Spanish goalkeeper #13 Kefa Arrizabalaga fails to gather the ball leading to the first City goal

the top of the Premier League, Arsenal were favoured to beat City but they failed to rise to the occasion.

Far too conservative for long periods at Wembley, Arsenal remain without a trophy since the 2020 FA Cup after their quadruple bid came to a painful end.

"Very sad, very hard one to take. We know how much it means and how much we wanted it. The fact we haven't delivered that is disappointing and leaves a bad taste," Arteta said.

"First half we were the better team and had the biggest chance of the game, if we scored that it would have changed the game."

"In the first 20 minutes of the second half we weren't at our best. We struggled to get out of our block and conceded the goal in an unexpected manner obviously."