





CRICKET

# Gill ton trumps Kohli's 101 as Bangalore knocked out

Cameron Green blasts a century to help former champions Mumbai Indians qualify for the IPL play-offs

AFP  
Bengaluru

Shubman Gill hit an unbeaten 104 to trump Virat Kohli's record century as holders Gujarat Titans knocked Royal Challengers Bangalore out of the IPL with a six-wicket victory yesterday.

The result allowed five-time winners Mumbai Indians to fill the fourth play-off spot after they hammered Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets in the first match of the day.

Gill starred in the final group match with a 52-ball knock that steered Gujarat to victory with five balls to spare.

Gill hit the winning six to raise his second straight ton and the event's third of the day after Cameron Green's match-winning 100 for Mumbai and then Kohli's 101 not out.

Gill, the Player of the Match, said yesterday: "It's all about getting a start and converting it into a big one. Thankfully it's working out for me in the business end. You have to keep applying yourself, that's important. The new ball was holding on a bit. The ball was getting wet with the dew. I thought Vijay Shankar was trying to go too hard. Once he found the momentum, he hit it a long way. I know my game... for any player it's important to know who you are. I think we have a great bowling attack for that (Chennai) wicket."

Kohli hit his second successive hundred and seventh in the IPL to overtake Chris Gayle's six and steer Bangalore to 197-5 in a



Gujarat Titans' Shubman Gill watches the ball after playing a shot during the IPL match against Royal Challengers Bangalore in Bengaluru yesterday. **Right:** Mumbai Indians' Cameron Green plays a shot as Sunrisers Hyderabad's wicketkeeper Heinrich Klaasen watches during the IPL match at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)



match that started an hour late due to rain in Bengaluru.

The effort was in vain as Kohli's wait for an elusive IPL title goes on for another year.

Mumbai will play Lucknow Super Giants, who became the third team to make the play-offs on Saturday, in the eliminator next week.

Table-toppers Gujarat and second-placed Chennai Super Kings will clash in the first qualifier tomorrow.

The winner of Qualifier 1 will head straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser will play the winner of the eliminator.

Kohli started strongly in a 67-run opening partnership with skipper Faf du Plessis, who made 28 to stay on top of the batting chart with 730 runs.

Kohli, who made a match-winning 100 in Bangalore's previous game, had moved behind Du Plessis in the batting list with

639 runs but Gill topped the senior star to take second spot with 674 runs.

In the first match, Green starred for Mumbai as he hit a 47-ball unbeaten 100 to drive his team home with two overs to spare.

Green, a big buy for Mumbai for \$2.11mn in the auction, stood out with eight fours and eight sixes.

Green said yesterday: "Great

stand with Rohit, he's experienced. Having his leadership at the other end helped. The setup has been great, I've been well looked after. No pressure despite the price tag. The intent at the top is important, with Ishan and Rohit above and SKY below me. Pollard has helped with range hitting too. When we had 20 to get, I told SKY to finish it. But with two runs to go, we just trickled over the line."

After Rohit Sharma's departure, Green kept up the charge and put on an unbeaten partnership with Suryakumar Yadav, who hit 25, to register their eighth win in 14 group matches.

Medium-pace bowler Akash Madhwal set up victory with figures of 4-37 to check Hyderabad to 200-5, a total that looked to go bigger but for some disciplined bowling.

Hyderabad, led by Aiden Markram, took the wooden spoon in the 10-team table.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Gujarat Titans 198 for 4 (Gill 104\*, Shankar 53, Siraj 2-23) beat Royal Challengers Bangalore 197 for 5 (Kohli 101\*, Noor 2-39) by six wickets**

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Mumbai Indians 201 for 2 in 18 overs (Green 100\*, Rohit 56) beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 200 for 5 in 20 overs (Agarwal 83, Virrant 69, Madhwal 4-37) by eight wickets**

CYCLING

# McNulty wins Giro stage 15 as Armirail retains leader's jersey

Reuters  
Bergamo

American Brandon McNulty of UAE Team Emirates held off Ben Healy and Marco Frigo to win stage 15 of the Giro d'Italia yesterday, after a 195km ride from Seregno to Bergamo.

McNulty turned on the afterburners with a perfectly-timed sprint to race past Healy (EF Education-Easy Post) and Frigo (Israel-Premier Tech) in the final 100m to snatch victory, while Bruno Armirail of Groupama-FDJ retained the leader's maglia rosa jersey.

"Indescribable. On the last long climb I tried to go. I thought my race was done there because Ben was so strong," McNulty said. "I clawed back and rested and then we played games on the flats. In the end it came down to the last kick and the sprint."

"I knew (Frigo) was coming and he ended up coming just at the right moment because we could swing over. I caught the draft and then at 150-200 metres I just went for it."

Healy finished second, ahead of Frigo, who appeared to drop off the pace but exerted a superhuman effort in the home straight to finish inches short of a stage win.

"You never give up. I had really good legs. Of course the first two maybe had something else on me. I gave everything and they gave everything," Frigo said.

"The descent in the final gave me a chance to get back and I knew that. I played that, and that's how it went. In those moments the head is gone, is spent, but you carry on pushing."

A group of 15 riders, including former Giro d'Italia stage winner Alberto Dainese, built an advantage of over 6:30 after the category one ascent in the first half of the race.

Niccolo Bonifazio (Intermarche-Circus-Wanty) at-



American rider Brandon McNulty (left) sprints in the last metres on his way to win the 15th stage Giro d'Italia 2023 ahead Irish rider Ben Healy (centre) and Italian rider Marco Frigo yesterday. (AFP)

tacked with just under 50km left, but was quickly reeled in with 35km to go by the trio of Healy, Frigo and McNulty, who never looked back.

Armairail, who took the overall lead on Saturday, had his gap to second-placed Geraint Thomas reduced by 33

seconds to a minute and eight seconds. Race favourite Primož Roglič (Jumbo-Visma) is third.

Today is a rest day on the Giro. Tomorrow's stage 16 is a mountainous 203km ride from Sabbio Chiese to Monte Bondone, with over 5,000 metres of elevation.

## Perez shaves 29 seconds off 35km race walk world record

**Madrid:** Spain's Maria Perez broke the women's 35km race walk world record by nearly half a minute at the European Race Walking Team Championships yesterday, eclipsing the mark set by Peru's Kimberly Garcia just two months ago. Holding a Spanish flag, Perez broke the tape at the World Athletics Race Walking Tour Gold event with a time of two hours, 37 minutes and 15 seconds in Czech Republic town of Podebrady - 29 seconds faster than Garcia's mark.

Perez completed a Spanish clean sweep of the podium, finishing more than eight minutes ahead of Raquel Gonzalez while Cristina Montesinos was third. Garcia, the world champion in both the 20 km and 35 km walk, had set the record in March with a time of 2:37:44 in Dudince, Slovakia.

## Cavendish calls press briefing, feeding retirement speculation

**Seregno, Italy:** As Mark Cavendish celebrated his 38th birthday yesterday slogging up hills in the Giro d'Italia, local newspapers said that he would use today's rest day to announce he planned to retire. The British sprinter's team, Astana, said yesterday he would hold a rest-day press conference at the team's hotel just south of Lake Como "to talk about the Giro d'Italia and the rest of the season".

Italian newspaper *Gazzetta dello Sport* immediately reported that the rider, who has amassed 161 victories over a 17-year career, would reveal that he will ride into the sunset at the end of the season.

Contacted by AFP, Astana declined to comment.

Cavendish is planning to ride the Tour de France in July, chasing one more stage victory to break a tie with Belgium great Eddy Merckx for the record in the race. Both have 34.

This season Cavendish joined the Astana team, managed by his former teammate Alexandre Vinokourov. The Manxman won the world title in 2011 and the Milan-San Remo classic in 2008. In addition to 34 individual stage wins in the Tour de France, he has 16 in the Giro and three in the Spanish Vuelta.

He was won the points classification in all three major Tours. While he has not yet won this season, he has shown in the Giro that he is still competitive. With the race dominated by breakaways, Cavendish has contended in the few massed sprint finishes, coming in third on stage 11 and fourth, after falling off his bike, in stage five.

BOXING

# American Haney downs Ukraine's Lomachenko to retain undisputed crown

AFP  
Los Angeles

American Devin Haney retained his undisputed lightweight world title on Saturday, defeating Ukrainian former champion Vasiliy Lomachenko by a unanimous points decision in Las Vegas.

A bruising 12-round battle that featured several close rounds finished with

Haney shading it on all three scorecards, with judges scoring it 116-112, 115-113, 115-113 in his favour.

The unbeaten 24-year-old Haney, who improves to 30-0 with 15 knockouts, started the fight aggressively to win the opening round.

But veteran Lomachenko, 35, battled back brilliantly to land several hard shots in the second and third rounds, wobbling Haney with a solid uppercut in the third.

Haney appeared to just gain the edge

in the middle rounds of the fight before Lomachenko finished strongly with the crowd in the MGM Grand Garden Arena roaring the former champion on.

Haney though rocked Lomachenko with a left hook in the seventh round and continued to find his target with crisp counter-punching even though the Ukrainian eventually landed more punches throughout the fight, 124 to the American's 110.

The win means Haney retains his World Boxing Association, World Box-

ing Council, International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Organisation belts.

He became the first undisputed lightweight world champion since Pernell Whitaker in 1990 with a lopsided decision over George Kambosos in Melbourne in June 2022.

Lomachenko returned to the ring in October last year after enrolling in a territorial defence unit for Ukraine after the invasion of the country by Russia.

The veteran's record fell to 17-3 with 11 knockouts after Saturday's defeat.

**Cameron defeats Taylor to retain super-lightweight crown**

England's Chantelle Cameron scored the biggest win of her career by handing Irish fighter Katie Taylor her first professional defeat to retain her undisputed super-lightweight world championship title at the Three Arena.

The majority decision win on the judges' scorecards moves Cameron to

18-0 as a professional while Taylor, the undisputed lightweight champion and one of the most influential figures in women's boxing, drops to 22-1. "It was a close fight. Katie is a great fighter, pound for pound the best woman fighter there is, but I turned up for the occasion," Cameron said in a post-fight interview. Taylor, who won gold at the 2012 Olympics in London, was fighting on home soil for the first time as a professional, and the raucous sold-out crowd backed her all the way.



TENNIS

# Medvedev clinches maiden clay court title at Italian Open

The Russian proves too strong for Holger Rune for his fifth trophy of the season



Russia's Daniil Medvedev celebrates with a trophy after winning the Italian Open final against Denmark's Holger Rune in Rome yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Rome

Daniil Medvedev claimed the first claycourt title of his career ahead of the French Open as the Russian world number three beat Denmark's Holger Rune 7-5 7-5 in a gripping Italian Open final that began after a rain delay yesterday.

Medvedev's fifth title of a stellar season and 20th overall leaves him as one of the top contenders for Roland Garros which begins on May 28.

The 27-year-old, who was out of the top 10 in February, is set to climb to number two in the world and will take the second seeding behind Carlos Alcaraz in Paris, with Novak Djokovic dropping down to number three.

Medvedev drew first blood in the first Rome final since 2004 not to feature 22-times Grand Slam champions Rafa Nadal or Djokovic, breaking in the 12th game where he met a feeble drop shot from Rune with a powerful drive to wrap up the first set.

Rune, at 20 the youngest finalist at the Foro Italico since Spaniard Nadal 17 years ago, broke to love in the first game of the second set and pounced again for a 4-3 lead after Medvedev hit back to level the scores.

But the aggressive world number seven appeared to run out of steam late in a physically demanding spell to

hand the advantage back to Medvedev, who produced a tight hold thanks to two huge serves before closing out the victory in style.

"I always want to believe in myself and I always try to do my best as I want to win the biggest tournaments in the world," Medvedev, who had not won a match in Rome before this year's tournament, said.

"At the same time, honestly I didn't believe much I can win a Masters 1000 on clay in my career because usually I hated it and I didn't feel good on it, nothing was working. Before this tournament already in Madrid and Monte Carlo I was not feeling too bad. I didn't have any big tantrums and was like 'OK, let's continue' and here I felt amazing in practice.

"But then you need to play the toughest opponents in the world and try to make it. I'm really happy that I managed to do it and prove to myself and everybody that I'm capable.

"It was a tough match," Medvedev said. "I think we were both a bit nervous at the start and I think we were both missing our basics. We were missing some easy shots, so I am happy I managed to step it up at the end of the first set. But then at the start of the second set he stepped it up straight away and I was like 'OK, this is the moment I have to start playing better and go to his level.' Then it was a top match from this stage."

In an entertaining final, Medvedev demonstrated pa-

tience to hang in rallies and frustrate Rune. The 27-year-old won 83 per cent (20/24) of his first-serve points in the first set and earned the decisive break of the set in the 12th game. Rune responded by breaking Medvedev's serve at the start of the second set and was in consistent dialogue with coach Patrick Mouratoglou during changeovers. However, from 5-3 up, Rune faltered.

Medvedev locked in from the baseline and refused to miss, piling the pressure on Rune, who failed to serve out. Rune was then unable to hit through Medvedev in the 12th game of the second set, with the 27-year-old breaking again to improve to 1-1 in his ATP Head2Head series against the Dane.

Meanwhile Marco Cecchinato found his groove against the lively lefty serve of Ben Shelton yesterday at the Gonet Geneva Open, where the Italian downed the NextGenATP American 7-5, 2-6, 6-2 at the ATP 250.

Taking on one of the ATP Tour's brightest young talents for the first time, Cecchinato converted four of his 11 break points in the first-round encounter. He rallied from 3-5 to take the first set and dominated the third to clinch a two-hour, two-minute triumph.

Cecchinato also reached the second round in Geneva in 2021 and 2022. The World No. 83 will attempt to reach the quarter-finals for the first time in four appearances when he takes on home favourite Marc-Andrea Huesler or Wu Yibing next in Switzerland.

FOCUS

## Rybakina targets deep run at Roland Garros after Rome triumph on clay



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina celebrates with the Italian Open trophy after winning final against Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina in Rome on Saturday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Rome

Elena Rybakina will head to the French Open with the confidence that she can be as effective on clay as she is on the other two surfaces with her booming serve and groundstrokes after the Kazakh world number six won the Italian Open on Saturday.

The Moscow-born 23-year-old bagged her second title of 2023 after her Indian Wells triumph and fifth overall when Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina retired while trailing 6-4 1-0.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina became the sixth woman since the introduction of the WTA 1000 format in 2009 to win a Grand Slam or Masters title on every surface after Serena Williams, Petra Kvitová, Simona Halep, Garbine Muguruza and Ash Barty.

"I think with my game, I can play good on all the surfaces," said Rybakina, who also reached the Australian Open and Miami finals this season.

"It's just maybe for clay I need to be ready more physically and have a lot of preparation which I don't always have the time for after the hardcourt season."

Rybakina reached the third round at Roland Garros last year and hoped playing in Paris would be easier this time.

"The tournament is pretty long.

"Hopefully I can go far. I have good memories playing there," Rybakina said.

"Now I've got more matches on clay, so it's a bit easier and there's a bit more confidence, definitely."

Kalinina, whose hopes of a first title were dashed due to a leg injury, said Rybakina had the qualities to succeed on clay.

"She's serving at 200kph. She's making winners like no one on tour... anyone can win in Paris, but she has good chances," Kalinina said.

"She's an amazing player, a top player. I'm sure if she's going to (play) like this, maybe new world number one for sure."

The French Open begins on May 28.

## Former No.1 Murray pulls out of French Open

**Paris:** Former world number one Andy Murray has withdrawn from the French Open. The 36-year-old, who has made just one appearance at Roland Garros since reaching the semi-finals in 2017, last month said he wanted another chance to play at the clay court Grand Slam while he is still fit and healthy.

Three-times Grand Slam champion Murray won the second-tier Aix-en-Provence Challenger Tour crown earlier this month, but suffered early exits in Monte Carlo, Madrid, Rome and Bordeaux.

The Scot, who reached the final of the French Open in 2016, has opted to skip tournaments during the claycourt season in the past to focus on the grasscourt swing heading into Wimbledon.

In February, he said Wimbledon offered him the best chance of going deep at a Grand Slam.

The French Open runs from May 28 to June 11. Holder Rafa Nadal, who has won the French Open a record 14 times, also pulled out of the tournament after failing to regain full fitness from a hip injury. Australian Nick Kyrgios and Matteo Berrettini of Italy will also miss the tournament.

BADMINTON

# China claim record 13th Sudirman Cup title

AFP  
Suzhou, China

China claimed a record 13th Sudirman Cup title yesterday, defeating South Korea on home soil at the first major sporting event in the country since the lifting of pandemic restrictions.

Cheered on by a raucous crowd brandishing red and white thundersticks and loud horns in the eastern city of Suzhou, China made short work of the Korean side, beating them 3-0.

Chen Yufei defeated world number two An Se Young 21-16, 22-20 in the women's singles to seal victory, prompting the packed stadium to erupt in cheers and the entire Chinese team to rush onto the court to dance in a circle.

The mixed team event is one of badminton's most important tournaments, and the stakes were higher than usual this year because performances will count towards qualification for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

"I am very happy to play at home," men's singles player Shi Yuqi said.

PAST CHAMPIONS			
Hosts	Winner	Runners up	Semi-finalists
1989 Indonesia	Indonesia	South Korea	China, Denmark
1991 Denmark	South Korea	Indonesia	China, Denmark
1993 England	South Korea	Indonesia	China, Denmark
1995 Switzerland	China	Indonesia	Denmark, South Korea
1997 Scotland	China	South Korea	Denmark, Indonesia
1999 Denmark	China	Denmark	Indonesia, South Korea
2001 Spain	China	Indonesia	Denmark, South Korea
2003 Netherlands	South Korea	China	Denmark, Indonesia
2005 China	China	Indonesia	Denmark, South Korea
2007 Scotland	China	Indonesia	England, South Korea
2009 China	China	South Korea	Indonesia, Malaysia
2011 China	China	Denmark	Indonesia, South Korea
2013 Malaysia	China	South Korea	Denmark, Thailand
2015 China	China	Japan	Indonesia, South Korea
2017 Australia	South Korea	China	Japan, Thailand
2019 China	China	Japan	Indonesia, Thailand
2021 Finland	China	Japan	South Korea, Malaysia
2023 China	China	South Korea	Malaysia, Japan

"When you can feel that the audience is cheering you on, your own state will also be mobilised very well."

Virtually all international sports events ground to a halt in China after the coronavirus pandemic emerged there in late 2019, with the notable exception of last year's Beijing Winter Olympics where were held in a virus-secure "bubble".

China had come through a tricky semi-final against Japan on Saturday, with the men's doubles pair of Liu Yuchen and Ou Xuanyi saving four match points before finally prevailing.

"Watching the game yesterday gave me a stomach ache and a little dizziness, so I didn't sleep until after two o'clock," Shi said.

South Korea beat Malaysia 3-1 on their way to the final

on Saturday. Yesterday, Zheng Siwei and Huang Yaogong lost the opening game of the mixed doubles but pulled it back in a tense point-for-point second game to eventually triumph 18-21, 22-20, 21-8.

A jubilant Zheng jumped up and down in excitement, ripped off his shirt and threw it into the crowd. His partner Huang threw her racket to a delighted



China's players celebrate with the trophy after their victory over Korea in the 2023 Sudirman Cup world badminton championships in Suzhou, China, yesterday. (AFP)

spectator. Asked afterwards about how they were preparing for the Olympics, they said "let's just get the (qualification) points first".

South Korea's Lee Yun Gyu

was easily outmatched in the men's singles, unable to deal with Shi's powerful smashes and laser focus.

The long rallies between Chen and An drew gasps from the

crowd, with the world number two looking increasingly frustrated as the match wore on.

But Chen managed to get the upper hand, ensuring that China defended their title yet again.



## LA LIGA

# Real Sociedad earn crucial win at champions Barcelona

‘THOSE THAT HAVE FILLED THE STADIUMS, THOSE THAT WERE AT THE BUS PARADE. IT’S GIVEN ME GOOSEBUMPS’

AFP  
Barcelona

New La Liga champions Barcelona tumbled to a 2-1 defeat to Real Sociedad on Saturday before receiving their trophy at a packed Camp Nou.

Mikel Merino and Alexander Sorloth struck for the visitors, who defended their hold on fourth place, restoring a five-point gap on Villarreal, fifth, in the fight for Champions League qualification.

Earlier, Villarreal snatched a 2-1 win at Girona through Gerard Moreno's stoppage time strike.

Robert Lewandowski pulled one back late on for Barcelona, who clinched the title last weekend with a thumping 4-2 win at Catalan rivals Espanyol, and were given a guard of honour before the game.

Barcelona's celebrations in Cornellà were disrupted by Espanyol fans' pitch invasion, but they made up for it after defeat as they lifted their 27th league title. "Thank you to the staff, the players who have given everything on the pitch," Xavi said in a speech.

"And to the fans. Without you it would not have been possible. You have been spectacular. "Those that have filled the sta-



Barcelona's coach Xavi and players celebrate with the trophy after the La Liga match against Real Sociedad at Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona. The new La Liga champions Barcelona tumbled to a 2-1 defeat by Real Sociedad before they were presented with their trophy. (AFP)

diums, those that were at the bus parade. It's given me goosebumps."

Imanol Alguacil's La Real fought hard to dampen the celebrations in Catalonia with an impressive victory. "Winning

here) is something historic for the club, it's such a tough place to come," Merino told DAZN after his side's first La Liga win at Camp Nou since 1991.

"I wasn't even close to being born last time La Real won here.

"We needed to win because behind us they're coming up strong and we played a great game today."

Xavi picked a solid Barcelona line-up despite already wrapping up the title, but they fell be-

hind early on and could not turn the game around.

Jules Kounde carelessly lost the ball in a dangerous area and Sorloth fed Merino, who fired through Marc-Andre ter Stegen's legs after five minutes.

It was the first goal the German goalkeeper has conceded from open play at Camp Nou in La Liga this season, with the exception of a Ronald Araujo own goal. Ter Stegen has 25 clean sheets this season and needs one more to match the league record of 26, although it will not be easy if Barcelona defend as casually in their final three matches.

La Real doubled their lead in the second half when Martin Zubimendi tackled Frenkie de Jong to spark a counter-attack.

Takefusa Kubo teed up Sorloth, who fired past Ter Stegen, who has now conceded 15 La Liga goals, three fewer than the record lowest tally of 18 for a 38-match season.

Barcelona captain Sergio Busquets was given a standing ovation as he was substituted in the final stages, in his penultimate home game before he leaves in the summer.

La Liga's top scorer Lewandowski nodded home his 22nd goal of the campaign to give Real Sociedad a nervy finale but they held on for an important win.

"After winning the title maybe we lacked intensity," Jordi Alba told DAZN. "But it's a day to enjoy ourselves, having a good time with our people."

After Busquets collected the trophy Xavi was thrown into the air by Barcelona's players in

celebration, before they danced around a banner in the centre circle proclaiming "La Liga is ours, the future too."

"No one doubt that this is just getting started," said Busquets in a speech on the pitch.

"Thanks to all the fans because it's not possible without you. Thanks to the staff for helping us be at our best."

Real Sociedad's win was essential after Villarreal piled pressure on them earlier.

Jeremy Pino opened the scoring for the visitors at Girona after being teed up by Nicolas Jackson but David Lopez pegged Villarreal back.

Jackson also set up Moreno's late strike with a sprint down the left and an inviting cross for the forward to gleefully slam home.

Lazaro Vinicius hit a hat-trick for Almeria as they beat Real Mallorca 3-0 to climb away from danger. Rubi's side rose to 13th, four points clear of the relegation zone. Getafe were held to a 1-1 draw by relegated Elche which leaves them 17th, level on points with Real Valladolid, 18th, who they face on the last weekend of the season.

Athletic Bilbao beat Celta Vigo 2-1 to leave the Galicians 14th, level on points with Almeria and still not completely safe after six defeats in their last seven matches.

## BUNDESLIGA

## Dortmund move to brink of title

AFP  
Berlin

Borussia Dortmund are one win away from their first Bundesliga title in a decade, after two second-half goals from Sebastian Haller delivered a 3-0 win at Augsburg yesterday.

Dortmund are now two points clear of Bayern Munich, who lost 3-1 at home to RB Leipzig on Saturday, with one match remaining.

They now need to better Bayern's result next week at home against Mainz to lift the Bundesliga shield for the first time since 2011-12.

Despite Augsburg being reduced to 10 men late in the first half, the game was scoreless until the 58th minute, when Haller pounced on a rebound to score the opener.

Haller, who missed the first half of the season as he overcame testicular cancer, scored another with six remaining to send the visiting fans into raptures.

Julian Brandt added a goal in injury time.

"We're very happy, but not completely satisfied" Dortmund manager Edin Terzic told DAZN, "we've got a next step we need to take".

A "happy and proud" Haller told DAZN "we've got a huge chance to achieve something big".

Augsburg manager Enrico Maassen said "the red card was the crucial moment... you can give it, but that's a hard decision".

Dortmund, who came into the game knowing victory would put them in control of the title race, were winless on the road since February.



Dortmund's Sebastian Haller celebrates scoring the opening goal during the Bundesliga match against FC Augsburg in Augsburg yesterday. (AFP)

The visitors made the trip south without star midfielder Jude Bellingham, who failed to recover from a knee complaint.

Stuttgart's earlier win at Mainz meant Augsburg were only two points clear of the relegation zone.

Dortmund, who scored 11 goals in their past two games, were dominant in the first half but could not find a breakthrough, Haller forcing a fingertip save from Tomas Koubek.

With 33 minutes gone, Julian Brandt latched onto a 40-metre defence-splitting pass from Emre Can but blasted directly into Koubek when one on one with the Augsburg 'keeper.

Shortly before half-time last-man Felix Uduokhai earned a red card, tackling Donyell Malen on the edge of the penalty box.

Augsburg dug deep despite losing a man in the hope of snatching a point.

Haller finally broke through for the visitors, collecting a rebound off Koubek before turning and threading the ball into the far corner.

With just over five minutes remaining, Haller repeated the trick, pouncing on a rebounded Marco Reus shot to tap Dortmund 2-0 up, sending the visiting fans into a chant of "German champions, only Dortmund".

With the clock winding down,

Dortmund captain Mats Hummels was helped off the field after copping a boot to the face.

The centre-back's replacement, Nico Schlotterbeck, put the ball through for Brandt to score a third.

Earlier, a goal and two assists from substitute Chris Fuehrich gave Stuttgart a massive boost in their relegation fight, with a 4-1 win away at Mainz.

Brought on with 30 minutes remaining with the scores locked 1-1, Fuehrich laid on a goal for Serhou Guirassy just two minutes later, before adding one of his own.

The winger laid on another goal in injury time for Tanguy Coulibaly to take his side from the relegation places to the safety of 15th with one matchday remaining.

Having lost only one of their past eight home games, the home side hit the lead after 23 minutes, Marcus Ingvartsen wading through a sea of Stuttgart defenders to tap in a deflection off Wataro Endo.

Japan international Endo levelled things up for Stuttgart late in the first half, finishing off a counter from a Mainz corner with a superb volley past a helpless Finn Dahmen in goal.

Fuehrich laid a goal on for Guirassy midway through the second, before scoring one of his own, the winger shedding two defenders before curling in his fifth goal of the season.

Fuehrich then set up a fourth for Coulibaly in injury time, sealing a superb Sunday for Stuttgart.

In Sunday's late game, sixth-placed Bayer Leverkusen can improve their chances of European football next season with a win at home against Borussia Moenchengladbach.

## LIGUE 1

## Lens win forces PSG to wait for title

AFP  
Paris

Lens came from behind to win 3-1 at Lorient yesterday to all but secure a place in next season's Champions League group stage and deny Paris Saint-Germain the chance to wrap up the French title this weekend.

PSG started the day six points clear at the top of Ligue 1 and needed Lens to drop points in Brittany to be able to be crowned champions at Auxerre later.

It was looking good for Paris when Romain Faivre put Lorient ahead inside six minutes, pouncing to score after Lens goalkeeper Brice Samba was put under pressure at a throw-in.

Yet Lens have enjoyed a fantastic campaign and came roaring back to record a fifth straight victory, equalising when a Florian Sotoca shot deflected in on 20 minutes.

Adrien Thomasson pounced on poor defending to put Lens in front five minutes later. Cap-

tain Seko Fofana wrapped up the points on the counterattack late on.

Lens have won nine of their last 10 games, the exception being a 3-1 defeat away to PSG last month.

The Qatar-owned club's celebration champagne will therefore have to remain on ice in Auxerre, although a win for Christophe Galtier's side will mean they are champions in all but name.

PSG would be once again six points ahead with two games left, and with a far superior goal difference, as they eye a ninth title in the last 11 seasons and a record 11th French crown overall.

Lens, however, are chiefly focused on securing second place and direct qualification for next season's Champions League group stage, a level the club last appeared in two decades ago.

They are five points ahead of third-placed Marseille with two games to go. Third place enters the Champions League in the third qualifying round.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Rennes kept alive their hopes of

qualifying for Europe for a sixth consecutive season as Amine Gouiri scored a hat-trick in their 5-0 win away at already-relegated Ajaccio.

Baptiste Santamaria and Belgian international Jeremy Doku also scored for Rennes, who remain sixth with two games left, and with only the top five qualifying for Europe.

However, they are just a point adrift of Lille and three points behind fourth-placed Monaco, who they face next weekend.

Fourth place goes into the Europa League while fifth qualifies for the Europa Conference League.

Polarin Balogun completed the week in which he switched international allegiance from England to the United States by scoring his 20th Ligue 1 goal this season for Reims as they drew 2-2 with Angers.

Brest secured top-flight survival by coming from behind to win 2-1 at home to Clermont, while Strasbourg's 1-1 draw away at Troyes means they are all but safe, sitting six points clear of the bottom four with six points to play for.



Lens' players celebrate after they win against Lorient in the Ligue 1 match in Lorient, France, yesterday. (AFP)

## Napoli beat shorthanded Inter to continue Serie A title party

**ROME:** Napoli continued their Serie A title party yesterday with a 3-1 home victory over 10-man Inter Milan that jeopardised the visitors' Champions League hopes.

Inter remained third in the table but only a point ahead of Lazio, who visit Udinese in the late game, and two clear of AC Milan. Yet with two finals looming - against Fiorentina in the Italian Cup on Wednesday and Manchester City in the Champi-

ons League on June 10 - coach Simone Inzaghi made eight changes from the team that beat AC Milan in the second leg of their European semi-final last Tuesday.

Inter's task became even tougher when veteran centre back Roberto Gagliardini picked up a second yellow card in the 41st minute. Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa put Napoli ahead after 67 minutes, spinning and volleying a shot into the corner of the net.

Inzaghi threw on some regular starters and one of them, Denzel Dumfries, set up Romelu Lukaku for a close-range equaliser after 82 minutes.

Napoli skipper Giovanni Di Lorenzo curled a 20-metre shot into the top corner to restore the lead three minutes later.

As Inter pressed desperately, Gianluca Gaetano finished off a Napoli counter-attack with his first league goal for the club deep into added time.

Inter's European chances could be enhanced on Monday when second-placed Juventus face a second Italian Football Federation ruling on illicit transfer activity. An original 15-point deduction was later revoked by the country's highest sports court. Fiorentina, who also have two cup finals coming up, against West Ham in the Conference League as well as the Italian Cup, drew 1-1 at Torino in the afternoon. (AFP)

## Pogba promises to return after 'very complicated' year

**ROME:** Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba vowed yesterday to give his all to return next season at his best after a trying time both on and off the pitch.

The French 2018 World Cup winner hobbled off in the first half last Sunday on his first competitive Serie A start of the campaign.

Tests revealed a thigh problem, an unwelcome new medical issue after injury to his right knee in pre-season training forced him to miss a huge chunk of games on his return to Juve from Manchester United.

Off the pitch, he has had to contend with a multi-million euro blackmail plot involving one of his brothers, Mathias.

"The year has been very, very complicated with the problems outside football and on the pitch," he reflected on Instagram.

"Off the pitch it's been really hard for me. What went on has been tough mentally. I tried to take refuge in what I love, playing football, to escape on the pitch, but that wasn't possible because physically I've had a load of problems."

The 30-year-old, who had to sit out France's run to the World Cup final last year, continued: "I just have to be patient. Mentally, I'm a lot better." "I've got to retain hope," he added.

"Mentally and physically I'm going to give it my all to come back at my best, to help the team win titles, that's the reason I returned here. (AFP)