

Manchester City keep quadruple dream alive, Chelsea also through

LONDON, JAN 29 /-/- Kevin De Bruyne starred as Manchester City stayed on course for an unprecedented quadruple as a 2-0 win at Cardiff on Sunday put the runaway Premier League leaders into the last 16 of the FA Cup.

City, 12 points clear at the summit of English football, are bidding to bring the Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup and Champions League titles to the Etihad. They made short work of second-tier Cardiff, with Belgian star De Bruyne putting them ahead in just eight minutes when he deceived the home side with a brilliant free-kick that he struck under, rather than over, the defensive wall. Bernardo Silva appeared to have doubled the visitors' lead with a thunderous 26th-minute shot but it was ruled out because the officials deemed Leroy Sané to be off-side and interfering with play. It appeared a harsh call but, with the controversial video assistant referee system that is being trialled in some English cup ties this season not in use for this match, there was no way of reviewing the decision. But the second goal Pep Guardiola's men had threatened arrived in the 37th minute when Silva's superb curling cross from the left was glanced in by Raheem Sterling. Sané was the victim of a bad tackle by Joe Bennett in first-half stoppage time and was replaced at the break by Sergio Aguero.

Cardiff defender Bennett was sent off for injury time at the end of the match when he received a second yellow card for another challenge, on Brahim Diaz. De Bruyne said there had been nothing complicated regarding his goal, telling the BBC: "The wall was not nine metres away from me and so they were very close and it was easy to put it under." But he was slightly bemused by the tactics employed by a Cardiff side pushing for promotion to the Premier League. "They played man against man all over the pitch - it was a little bit weird," De Bruyne said. "It left a lot of space." Earlier in the match, Batshuayi scored twice as Chelsea beat Premier League rivals Newcastle 3-0 to also advance to the fifth round. Batshuayi's goals in the 31st and 44th minutes and a Marcos Alonso free-kick 18 minutes from time were enough for Premier League champions Chelsea to see off Rafael Benitez's struggling side. The Belgian striker's first was the result of a neat team move, Pedro's superb through ball splitting the Newcastle defence and leading to Eden Hazard slipping a pass inside to Alonso, who set up Batshuayi for a finish from six yards out. The Belgian forward scored his second goal shortly before half-time when his shot took a huge deflection off Newcastle's Jamaal Lascelles. Alonso sealed victory with a well-struck free-kick.

Like Sir Richards, Kohli will learn to calm down: Holding

JOHANNESBURG, JAN 29 /-/- Virat Kohli can come across as intimidating but he is still learning and needs to become calmer as he grows on the job, feels West Indies' pace legend Michael Holding, who finds an uncanny similarity between the Indian skipper and Sir Vivian Richards. "At the moment he is a young captain, who is just learning and understanding what it takes to be a captain. He is a bit exuberant and very emotional. Sometimes he gets so emotional that it is intimidating not only for the opposition, but for his players as well. When I compare Virat to Vivian Richards, it is not just in the batting but captaincy as well," Holding told PTI. "It was similar with Viv. When he took over the captaincy, it was similar. And then he grew in the job. He learnt to be a little bit calmer and then his team got calmer as well. And then the results came. I think it should be a similar learning situation with Virat," he added. India clinched the third Test by 63 runs at Wanderers but lost the three-match series against South Africa after losing the opening two Tests. Kohli's selection decision came under the scanner in the Test series and Holding was critical of his chop-and-change policy which saw him play a different XI in each of the 35 Tests. "You're changing in so many different conditions, in so many foreign



countries, that you think this pitch now suits this person or doesn't suit someone else. Also, in the modern game, there is so much cricket that you tend to rotate players especially bowlers and give them a bit of rest. If that is a reason why he is doing it, you can understand that. But it is

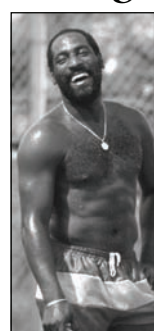
unhealthy making so many changes," said Holding. "When you go back to the great Test teams, they would change now and again, not every Test match, because then even the players are unsettled and they are going to play the next game or not. They

might be worried that if I don't perform today, I might be out tomorrow. "And you need settled players. You need them to think positively about their game. You need them to think I will go out there and even if I fail, I am good enough and they will give me another chance. It

doesn't happen with rotation constantly, which again is unhealthy," he said. One of the selection decisions was picking Rohit Sharma over Test specialist Ajinkya Rahane in the first two Tests and Holding said the latter's management must be more careful about selecting

their batsmen especially on overseas tours. "When they left out Ajinkya Rahane I was a bit surprised. Every one is saying that he didn't have a good series against Sri Lanka, but he has an excellent record away from home. A lot of Indian batsmen struggle when they leave India, but he has not (struggled). So once you leave India that's the first thing you think of," he said. "Rahane has to be back in the team even though he hasn't been making runs. Look at how he played at Wanderers (second innings). His record overseas is too good. You have got to think of batsmen, when you see them play what they will do on different surfaces," said Holding.

Holding further explained: "For example, everyone was suspecting that Shikhar Dhawan won't do well on hard bouncy pitches but they played him early. You have got to make early decisions. Perhaps if they had come here a few days earlier and played the first Test before the Test matches, they would have been able to deduce that before that first Test. You can't come to foreign countries thinking that you know everything about the conditions here and then you will play the first Test, and you will be okay. That doesn't work," he added. Kohli finished as the highest run-getter with 286 runs in the three-Test series and Holding was all



praise for the Indian skipper. "He is a top-class batsman. He is way above the rest of Indian batsmen in this team. When I think of the past Indian batsmen, Sachin Tendulkar was the best batsman in his team. But he was a bit far ahead of people like Rahul Dravid or VVS Laxman. He was better than them but not miles ahead," Holding said. "Virat is miles ahead of everybody on this Indian team but I don't think it influences his captaincy. And as soon as Virat gets some runs in England, I am happy to put the label great beside his name. At the moment I am just waiting," (PTI)



Barcelona's Lionel Messi celebrates scoring their second goal with Luis Suarez REUTERS

La Liga: Messi, Suarez fuel Barcelona's comeback win; Atletico Madrid beat Las Palmas

BARCELONA, JAN 29 /-/- Lionel Messi scored a spectacular free-kick to give Barcelona a 2-1 win over struggling Alaves on Sunday while Luis Suarez was also on target as the Catalans battled back from a goal down at half-time to stay 11 points clear at the top of La Liga. Alaves were the only team to win at the Nou Camp in the league last season and looked set to overshadow Philippe Coutinho's first start as Barça's Sweden striker John Guidetti gave them a shock lead in the 23rd minute, falling over as he lashed the ball past Marc-Andre ter Stegen. Suarez finally levelled for the Catalans in the 72nd minute, scoring for the eighth league game in a row after some impressive saves from visiting goalkeeper Fernando Pacheco kept Barca at bay, while Messi's sumptuous free-kick in the 84th gave them a seventh consecutive league win. Atletico Madrid overcame the absence of injured striker Diego Costa to beat Las Palmas 3-0 while Sevilla were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Getafe due to a controversial equaliser in injury time. Barca top the standings with 57 points, 11 above nearest challengers Atletico and 19

ahead of champions Real Madrid, who roared back from their miserable start to 2018 with an impressive 4-1 win at third-placed Valencia on Saturday. "If you don't concentrate you don't win and sometimes looking at the rival team's position in the league does you no good," Suarez told reporters. "In the second half we understood what was at stake and we managed to get the three points." Alaves went into the game two points and two places above the relegation zone but could have doubled their lead in the second half when a cross from Guidetti made its way to Ruben Duarte, whose shot was blocked by the body of Gerard Pique. Suarez's strike, which bounced off Pique on its way in but was awarded to the Uruguayan, preserved his side's status as the only undefeated team in Europe's top five leagues before Messi grabbed all three points, although Alaves were denied a late penalty when the ball struck the hand of Barca's Samuel Umtiti. "I asked Umtiti but apart from cutting his hand off I don't know what else he could have done," Barca coach Ernesto Valverde said. "For me it's accidental but every fan will see it from their team's point of view. Sometimes

the ball goes in and it's not given as a goal, other times this happens." Atletico's confidence had been knocked down a peg by their King's Cup elimination to Sevilla but they saw off 19th-placed Las Palmas with strikes from Antoine Griezmann, Fernando Torres and Thomas Partey in the second half. The visiting side deployed a high defensive line and paid the price for their risky approach when Griezmann latched on to a pass from Juanfran to race unchallenged towards goal and score in the 61st minute. Griezmann was the catalyst for the second goal, intercepting a pass to help work the ball towards Torres, while Partey nudged a Yannick Carrasco pass into an empty net in the 88th. Sevilla looked set to beat Getafe when Luis Muriel slid in to give them the lead in the 72nd minute but the visitors levelled in the 93rd when Angel Rodriguez lashed into an empty net from Juan Cala. Leganes beat Espanyo 3-2 at home with the help of two own goals from Mario Hermoso, who completed an unwanted hat-trick by scoring a late consolation strike for his side.

I would not play Jasprit Bumrah in England, says West Indies legend

JOHANNESBURG, JAN 29 /-/- West Indies legend Michael Holding has serious doubts over Jasprit Bumrah's ability as a new-ball bowler and said his specific skills does not make him an automatic choice in the playing eleven during India's tour of England later this year. "I am not sure he is going to be a good new ball bowler. He struggles to take the ball away from right-handers when bowling with the new ball. So he wouldn't be my first choice for the new-ball role," Holding said. "I always Bhuvneshwar Kumar," Holding said. "Then I would think about Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami. When India play in England, pitches will be drastically different to South Africa. I wouldn't play Bumrah because he bangs the ball in. Those pitches need someone to bowl so the bowler's hand in the third Test and Holding said the India pacer bowls a lot of variety with the old ball. "He hits the deck hard and that's why he got those two wickets in Centurion (second innings) and the fiver here at Wanderers. When he hits the deck hard, and the ball is keeping up and down, at his pace the batsmen do not have time to react," Holding said. "He did this very effectively, on pitches that offer this sort of assistance to him, and on such pitches, he will do a pretty good job. As the ball gets older, he bowls with a lot of variety." Indian bowlers took all 60 wickets on offer in this series, a first for India in an away three-Test contest and Holding was full of praise for the bowling contingent. "The Indian bowlers have done an excellent job. I will never fault them on this tour. It's the batting that has failed India. Bowlers have done a very

good job but then again pitches have been bowler friendly. You would want to be a bowler on these pitches especially in the first and third Tests," said Holding. Holding, however, was disappointed with off-spinner R Ashwin, who had played in the first two Tests. "I was disappointed with R Ashwin's bowling in the first Test, but the second innings, he bowled as if he was bowling in a limited over game. His line was wrong. For an off-spinner who spins the ball, it was not good. He was not as effective," he said. "He needed to pitch on off-stump and turn the ball into the batsmen. But he kept bowling middle/leg and bowled a straight ball. The spin of the spinner is the aspect of Indian bowling I am disappointed with (on this tour)." India won the third Test by 63 runs but lost the series to South Africa 2-1. Even so, they remain the ICC number one side. Holding said he doesn't pay attention to rankings. "Numbers don't tell the full story. I don't pay attention to the ICC ranking of teams or players. When India became no.1, I didn't think they were the best team. It was a similar situation when they went to England as the no.1 team a few years ago (2011) and lost every Test match," he said. "England became No. 1 team and lost to South Africa quite comfortably. So I just don't pay any attention to the rankings," said the former pacer. Holding said batsmen led India down on this tour. "This series hasn't gone too well from No.1 ranked India's point of view. It's not as good as it should be. At the same time, I wouldn't want to be a batsman making a living on the pitches I have seen in this series either," he said. "The Centurion wicket was fine for bowlers enjoyed it more than batsmen. Wanderers was a dangerous pitch. I would hate to be a batsman on such pitches," he added.

Churchill face NEROCA challenge in I-League

VASCO, JAN 29 /-/- Aiming to keep their unbeaten run in January intact, Churchill Brothers will be facing a stiff challenge when they take on NEROCA in an I-League encounter, here tomorrow. Churchill Brothers have remained unbeaten in their last four matches and now have 10 points from nine games. League debutants NEROCA have had an impressive run in this tournament are placed second with 21 points from 12 matches. Churchill Brothers assistant coach Alfred Fernandes said tomorrow's match is crucial as they are playing against second best team in the standing. "A win tomorrow will be a morale

boost for us as we play next two matches at home against Minerva Punjab who are leading the chart and Aizawl FC. "If we manage to win all three matches at home, it will help us achieve our goal of moving out of relegation zone and also lay a platform to finish among the top-five at the end of the season. NEROCA has been playing well but our boys know what to expect from them tomorrow," stated Fernandes. Minerva Punjab coach Gift Raikhan on his part said: "It is a must-win game as we have lost two consecutive matches after successive nine matches win and losing tomorrow it will put us in difficult position to fight them for the title. "Churchill Brothers is a good team and have won three matches in succession and are playing at home. They have a strong advantage as we will try to correct our mistake and come back strongly to win against Churchill Brothers tomorrow," stated Gift Raikhan. (PTI)

Former champions Saina, Sindhu start favourites at India Open

NEW DELHI, JAN 29 /-/- In-form Saina Nehwal and defending champion PV Sindhu will be the cynosure of all eyes when they start their campaign at the \$50,000 India Open, starting Tuesday. The marquee event will also feature 2014 champion Kidambi Srikanth beginning his new season after missing last week's Indonesia Masters. Saina, who had clinched the India Open Super Series in 2015, has made a superb start to the new season as she reached the final of Indonesia

Masters after recovering from an ankle injury and she would be one of the favourites this week. This was her first major final appearance for Saina since her injury-induced absence from the Rio Olympics. Sindhu, on the other hand, is difficult to consistently cross the second round, mainly due to her poor fitness level. However, now that she has displayed her new-found fitness at the Indonesia Masters, she will hope to keep that intensity going when she plays at the second successive tournament at Siri Fort

Sports Complex here. Placed in the bottom half, fourth seed Nehwal will face Denmark's Sofia Dahl in the opening round and fifth seed Beibei Zhang will be her likely opponent in the quarter-finals. Sindhu, on the other hand, has been simply sensational ever since her Olympic silver medal as she clinched three titles and three silver last season and rightly received top billing for the tournament here. The World Championship silver medalist will begin her campaign against Denmark's

Natalia Rodhe and barring any surprises her real challenge will come in the form of former world champion Ratchanok Intanon in the semi-finals. Interestingly, Sindhu's campaign at Jakarta was cut short by compatriot Saina in the quarter-finals and there is a realistic possibility that the celebrated duo can appear meet in an all-Indian final if they can live up to their reputation. In men's singles, Srikanth exceeded all expectations with four titles and runners-up finish last season but a leg injury

during the Senior National Badminton Championships in Nagpur affected his game as he had to sit out of the China Open and Hong Open last year. When he returned at the Dubai Super Series Final, lack of match practice affected his performance as he lost all his three matches in the group stage. Infact, Srikanth's stint at the Premier Badminton League also didn't turn out well as he lost three matches to see Avasthe Warriors crash out. The World No. 3 had to delay his start to the new

season after a minor injury saw him pull out of the Indonesia Masters at the last moment. However, he returned here in 2014 alongside Saina but his last campaign at the India Open ended in disaster as he failed to cross the opening hurdle after being outclassed in straight games by his rival world No. 1 Viktor Axelsen. However, the Indian duo was to such situations as he proved last year when he recovered from this loss and in the Open draw over the last season as he reached the semi-finals in Indonesia and French Open and clinched the US Open crown. The Gold and the Senior Nationals.

relatively short career. The second seeded India will open his campaign against Hong Kong's Lee Chuek Yua and if he can live up to the expectations, there is every chance that he might face off top seed and defending champion Viktor Axelsen in the final. If the Dane too can continue his red-hot form, World number 10 HS Prannoy Kong have been a revelation this season as he reached the semi-finals in Indonesia and French Open and clinched the US Open crown. The Gold and the Senior Nationals.