



Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne takes a knee in support of the Black Lives Matter movement before the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Arsenal at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, England, Wednesday, June 17, 2020. The English Premier League resumes Wednesday after its three-month suspension because of the coronavirus outbreak. (AP)

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Napoli win sixth Italian Cup



Napoli's Lorenzo Insigne holds up the Italian Cup trophy at the end of the final match between Napoli and Juventus, at Rome's Olympic Stadium, Wednesday, June 17, 2020. (AP)

Juve beaten in shootout

ROME, June 18, (AP): Cristiano Ronaldo never had a chance.

Arkadiusz Milik converted the decisive spot kick in a penalty shootout as Napoli won its sixth Italian Cup following a 0-0 draw with Juventus.

Ronaldo was likely Juventus' last penalty taker but after Paulo Dybala had his shot saved and Danilo blasted high over the goal, the five-time Ballon d'Or winner could only stand at midfield and watch as Napoli won the shootout 4-2.

Afterward, Ronaldo appeared on the verge of tears.

"He was a little sad at the result," explained teammate Juan Cuadrado. "It's always a lottery when it goes to penalties."

Ronaldo had a good look at the goal five minutes in but his effort was pushed away by Napoli's second-choice goalkeeper Alex Meret. As the match wore on, he made less of an impact.

Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri said Ronaldo is struggling to regain his famous acceleration speed after the shutdown forced by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Unfortunately that's normal when you're not playing games," Sarri said.

The game went straight to penalties without extra time being played -- a precautionary measure for players still getting back into shape in only their second match of the restart.

In the first half, Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne hit the post with a free kick.

Juventus controlled most of the possession but Napoli had the better chances as Juve's 42-year-old goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon made a series of difficult saves -- until the shootout.

Napoli coach Gennaro Gattuso, still mourning the recent death of his younger sister, was visibly emotional afterward.

Napoli were in complete disarray when Gattuso was hired in December amid a player mutiny over a forced training camp ordered by club president Aurelio De Laurentiis.

"Life and especially football has given me so much more than I gave to it," said Gattuso, who besides a trophy-laden career with AC Milan also played on the Italy team that won the 2006 World Cup. "In life, you always think of your parents and family first, so naturally what happened is hard to accept."

"I have such passion for football, I know that I can't let go even for a second."

While it was played in an empty stadium, the final was another sign of the return to normalcy in a country hard-hit by the coronavirus. The nearly 35,000 who died from COVID-19 in Italy could have filled half of the 70,000-seat Stadio Olimpico.

In an impromptu awards ceremony, Napoli president Aurelio Del Laurentiis and Juventus counterpart Andrea Agnelli placed the medals around players' necks. Italy's president usually does the honors.

The game was broadcast nationally

on free-to-air RAI state TV and was expected to draw a large audience.

"I strongly wanted soccer to restart with the Italian Cup," said sports minister Vincenzo Spadafora. "Tonight isn't merely a final. It's a message of renewal for the entire country."

The arena grew even quieter when the teams stood at the center circle for a minute of silence before kickoff to honor the virus victims.

"The country needs to bounce back and sports will be a motor for economic and social renewal," Spadafora added.

After a break of more than three months, soccer restarted in Italy last week with the second legs of the semifinals.

The final was originally scheduled for May 13.

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Serie A resumes Saturday.

The title provides Napoli with direct entry into next season's Europa League group phase. The Partenopei, though, still have to play the second leg of this season's Champions League round of 16 against Barcelona.

Meret, playing for the suspended David Ospina, set the tone for the shootout by blocking Dybala's effort on the first spot kick.

"Gigi (Buffon) is still the No. 1. He proved that tonight with three or four huge saves," Meret said. "It's an honor for me to play against someone who was and is still my idol, so that makes it all the more special."

It's the second trophy that Juventus has missed out on this season after losing to Lazio in the Italian Super Cup in December.

Hawk-Eye glitch mars 1st game back in Premier League

City beat Arsenal in muted atmosphere

MANCHESTER, England, June 18, (AP): When Manchester City scored the first goals the Premier League had seen in 100 days, only health workers were in the stands to applaud.

For the last three months, it's been the nation applauding the health workers.

In protective clothing, they were among only 300 people allowed into the Etihad Stadium for the game against Arsenal which helped end the Premier League's shutdown.

The 55,000 seats that would usually be filled were instead empty, mostly covered by banners. The only supporters seen celebrating goals from Raheem Sterling, Kevin De Bruyne and Phil Foden during City's 3-0 win were on big screens in the stands, streaming live from their homes.

The screens were also used to mourn some of those who died during the pandemic. The face of Glyn Pardoe, a former City player and coach, was shown three weeks after the virus killed him at the age of 73.

"Together we have been facing a health emergency," the City stadium announcer said. "Heroes have risen to challenges we never imagined."

The teams also used the occasion to pay tribute to George Floyd, with the players taking a knee around the center circle before kickoff in a gesture of solidarity against the racial injustice reinforced by his death at the hands of police in Minnesota.

All players also wore shirts with the text "Black Lives Matter" replacing the names on their backs.

"I see it as a massive step by the



Manchester City's Kyle Walker heads the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Arsenal at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, England, Wednesday, June 17, 2020. (AP)

Premier League to allow something like that to happen," said Sterling,

who has been an outspoken campaigner against racism. "It shows we're heading in the right direction. Little by little, we are seeing change and that's what everyone is hoping for, not just black players but the majority of the country."

It was Sterling who scored the Premier League's first goal since March 9 by capitalizing on an error by David Luiz in first-half stoppage time. The goal celebration featured a touch of elbows with teammates and a brief embrace to respect social distancing.

Substitutes also must remain two meters (6 feet) apart on the sidelines, leaving them sitting up in the stands closer to the press tribune than the bench. The voices of radio commentators and the shouts between the players and coaches only punctuated the unique lack of atmosphere in the world's biggest football league.

The medical staff, wearing protective equipment, twice had to enter the field in the opening 20 minutes when Arsenal players Granit Xhaka and Pablo Mari went down injured and had to come off.

Some in full white suits and face masks spent 10 minutes on the field in the second half to treat City defender Eric Garcia after a collision with goalkeeper Ederson -- a clattering sound that could be heard around the stadium.

He was carried off on a stretcher

wearing an oxygen mask as the stadium announcer said: "We wish Eric Garcia a full and speedy recovery."

It took just 41 minutes for the restarted Premier League to create another big controversy over technology.

This time, it wasn't a VAR decision that was the talking point. Instead, the typically reliable goal-line technology was at fault during the first game after a 100-day shutdown because of the coronavirus.

Hawk-Eye was forced to "unreservedly apologize" after failing to see Aston Villa goalkeeper Orjan Nyland carry the ball over his own goal-line after catching an inswinging Sheffield United free kick.

The technology company acknowledged that ball had crossed the line and blamed the error on its seven cameras located in the stands being "significantly occluded" by players and the goal post.

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"This level of occlusion has never been seen before in over 9,000 matches that the Hawk-Eye Goal Line Technology system has been in operation," Hawk-Eye said in a statement.

The match finished 0-0, depriving Champions League-chasing Sheffield United of two points that could yet prove decisive in its attempt to qualify for the lucrative European competition.

"I think the goalkeeper was in the Holte End when he caught it, or dragged it back," Sheffield United manager Chris Wilder said, referring to the giant stand at Villa Park. "My issue is obviously one of frustration. Seven cameras haven't picked it up -- the most technical league in the world -- everything we see at every angle and it hasn't seen a goal. That is disappointing from our point of view."

After the backpedaling Nyland was bundled into the side-netting of the goal by a teammate and tried to act like he hadn't taken the ball over the line, Sheffield United's players celebrated what would have been the first goal after the resumption of the league.

However, referee Michael Oliver didn't award it. He pointed to his watch, suggesting it hadn't vibrated to signal that a goal had been awarded by Hawk-Eye.

VAR was not called upon to intervene, either.

"Under the IFAB protocol, the VAR is able to check goal situations," said a statement by Professional Game Match Officials Limited, the referees body. "However, due to the fact that the on-field match officials did not receive a signal, and the unique nature of that, the VAR did not intervene."

Hawk-Eye insisted the technology was tested and "functional" throughout the game, in accordance with the laws of the game.



Napoli's Dries Mertens (left), and Juventus' Leonardo Bonucci vie for the ball during the Italian Cup soccer final between Juventus and Napoli, at the Rome Olympic Stadium, Wednesday, June 17, 2020. (AP)