



In this Wednesday, June 10, 2020 file photo, Red Star fans watching a Serbian National Cup semifinal soccer match between Partizan and Red Star in Belgrade, Serbia. Red Star Belgrade said, June 22, five players have tested positive for the coronavirus. The match against Proleter was attended by about 20,000 fans, drawing criticism from the public as Serbia records dozens of new coronavirus cases each day. (AP)

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Faltering restart for Liverpool title charge

Chelsea strengthen hold on 4th

LIVERPOOL, England June 22, (AP) — Liverpool's title charge has been slowed by the pandemic, and their attacking ruthlessness blunted.

After a wait of 103 days, Jürgen Klopp's team returned to action with a 0-0 draw at Everton as they near the end of a 30-year title drought.

It means the world champions can no longer be sure of sealing the English title with a victory against Crystal Palace on Wednesday. Liverpool can become champions with a win if Burnley does not lose at second-place defending champions Manchester City on Monday.

Liverpool lost to Watford in the penultimate Premier League match before the unexpected break in the league. But when the team are 23 points in front with eight games remaining there is hardly much to grumble about.

The need to prevent the coronavirus spreading meant this was an unusually quiet Merseyside derby with fans prohibited from Goodison Park and even the teams having to enter the field

separately. Liverpool used a temporary dressing room outside the stadium so they could socially distance.

"Obviously everyone didn't know really what to expect, the whole procedure before the game and how things will go," Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk said. "Obviously we wanted to win, we wanted to get the three points today, but we're another step closer. We'll try to improve every time."

That has been the message since the week before the football shutdown in March when Liverpool were also knocked out of the Champions League and FA Cup.

But Liverpool saw just why Everton are unbeaten at home since Carlo Ancelotti was hired. He has steered the team 11 points clear of the relegation zone which they dropped into after losing at Anfield in December in Marco Silva's final game before being fired.

The search for a goal saw Joel Matip's header go wide in the first half and Fabinho having a free kick tipped over by goalkeeper Jordan Pickford late on.

Liverpool should have striker Mohamed Salah back fit for the visit of Palace to Anfield after not being risked from the substitutes' bench.

"After four weeks' pre-season and preparation," Klopp said, "we cannot ignore that we play again on Wednesday."

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With the impending arrivals of Hakim Ziyech and Timo Werner, Christian Pulisic and Olivier Giroud could find game time increasingly hard to come by at Chelsea next season.

They gave manager Frank Lampard a reminder of their qualities against Aston Villa.

Pulisic scored five minutes after coming on as a substitute and Giroud added a second soon after, as Chelsea rallied for a 2-1 win at Villa Park to strengthen the team's hold on fourth place.

Chelsea are five points clear of Manchester United in fifth place, which will be enough to qualify for next season's Champions League if Manchester City fail to overturn its two-year European ban.

Pulisic, the U.S. winger, hadn't played for Chelsea since Jan. 1 because of injury and then the league's suspension. It was his sixth league goal in his



Everton's Tom Davies challenges Liverpool's Naby Keita during the English Premier League soccer match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park in Liverpool, England, June 21. (AP)

first season in England, and seventh in all competitions.

If Saudi Arabia's sovereign fund does eventually complete its protracted purchase of Newcastle, it will take over a club almost guaranteed to be in the Premier League next season.

A 3-0 win over 10-man Sheffield United lifted Newcastle 11 points clear of the relegation zone with eight games

remaining. Allan Saint-Maximin, Matt Ritchie and Joelinton scored after John Egan was sent off in the 50th minute for a second yellow card.

It was Newcastle's first game since the restart after a three-month hiatus when the club's future was one of the big talking points. League officials are deciding whether to approve the Saudi Public Investment Fund buying an 80%

stake in Newcastle as part of a takeover alongside the wealthy British-based Reuben brothers and financier Amanda Staveley.

Sheffield United missed a chance to climb to fifth place.

Surely Leeds are not going to have another end-of-season collapse?

Marcelo Bielsa's team played their first game of the restart in the second-

tier Championship and lost 2-0 at Cardiff, leaving Leeds second on goal difference and seven points clear of third-place Fulham. There are eight games left.

Leeds, out of the Premier League since 2004, looked like getting promoted last season only to lose in the playoffs after a poor run of form late in the season.

Celta rout Alavés for first win after break

Real Madrid retake Spanish league lead

MADRID, June 22, (AP) — Real Madrid took advantage of rivals Barcelona being the first to stumble after the Spanish league resumed, and retook the lead with a 2-1 win at Real Sociedad.

Sergio Ramos and Karim Benzema scored second-half goals as Madrid moved ahead of their rivals for the first time since the restart.

Ramos converted a 50th-minute penalty kick and Benzema added to the lead in the 70th to move Madrid in front of the Catalan club, which on Fri-

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day were held by fourth-place Sevilla to a 0-0 draw. Madrid and Barcelona are level on 65 points, but Madrid have a better goal difference and a better head-to-head record against their rivals.

Madrid had led five of the last seven rounds before the break, but Barcelona went in front just before the league was suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic more than three months ago. Barcelona had stayed ahead after two straight victories since the league restarted. The defending champions have eight rounds left to try to retake the lead.

"There are still a lot of games left, coming every three days, and the pressure remains the same," Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said. "It's a good victory but it doesn't change our way of thinking. Everything will be decided in the end."

Madrid kept their perfect record on their return despite a lackluster first half at Sociedad. Ramos broke the deadlock from the penalty spot after Vinicius Júnior was fouled, and Benzema sealed the victory from inside the area for his third goal after the break. The French striker — who had a double in the team's 3-0 win over Valencia on Thursday — reached 17th league goals, four behind scoring leader Lionel Messi.

Sociedad had a goal disallowed for offside just before Benzema's goal. Mikel Merino eventually pulled the hosts closer in the 83rd with a shot that struck the crossbar before going in, but Sociedad were not able to get the equalizer.

It was the third straight setback for Sociedad since the league resumed, dropping the Basque Country club to seventh place. They had returned from the break in fourth place, the final Champions League spot.

Ramos was substituted 10 minutes after scoring. He had needed medical assistance a few moments earlier for an apparent knee injury.

Colombia midfielder James Rodríguez made his first start for Real Madrid since October. He was substituted in the 78th.

Celta Vigo earned their first win after the break with a 6-0 rout of 10-man Alavés.

Rafinha scored twice and newly signed striker Nolito added another on his return to Celta, which were coming off a draw and a loss after the league resumed.

Jeison Murillo, Iago Aspas and Santi Mina completed the scoring to lift Celta four points clear of the relegation zone.

Alavés, which dropped to 13th, played most of the match with 10 men as Martín Aguirregabiria was sent off with a straight red card for a hard foul in the 27th minute. The visitors were losing 4-0 by halftime.

Nolito, who converted a penalty kick in the 78th, was signed from Sevilla last week to replace the injured Sergio Álvarez after league approval was given. Nolito played for Celta before he was signed by Manchester City in 2016.



Real Madrid's Mariano Diaz goes past Real Sociedad's Diego Llorente during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Real Sociedad and Real Madrid at Anoeta Stadium, San Sebastian, Spain, June 21. (AP)

Title-chasing Inter edge Sampdoria

Atalanta win to bring joy to hard-hit Bergamo

MILAN, June 22, (AP) — Soccer resumed in one of the Italian cities hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic with a poignant Serie A match as Atalanta gave a much-needed boost to the residents of Bergamo.

Atalanta beat Sassuolo 4-1 in their first Serie A match in 112 days and the first in Bergamo since Feb. 15.

"There's a lot going on in the world and Bergamo has been hit hard. This win was for the city, the people, the club. The worst days are behind us, change is coming," Atalanta midfielder Marten de Roon wrote in a post on Twitter after the match.

More than 16,000 people have died from the virus in the Lombardy region containing Bergamo, and the small city

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was one of the epicenters of the outbreak.

Images of a convoy of military trucks driving coffins out of the city because the crematorium couldn't keep up were beamed around the world.

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini — who revealed last month that he acquired COVID-19 — had vowed before the match to help make the people of Bergamo smile again.

"A first smile. It's nice to say that we're back and we have restarted from where we were stopped," Gasperini said. "It's obvious that some things will never be deleted. But soccer which is entertainment and an incredible passion can help people rejoice again."

"Our biggest satisfaction will be when fans can return to the stadium because playing in these conditions is really a shame. A win like today with fans would have been a completely different thing."

The minute's silence before kickoff in tribute to those who have died with the coronavirus was accompanied by a video of the city during the crisis, along with the song "Rinascero, rinascerei" (I will be born again, you will be born again).

Serie A has resumed this weekend with four catchup matches. There were two on Saturday and title-chasing Inter Milan beat Sampdoria 2-1 in Sunday's late match.

All matches are being played in empty stadiums. Some fans were outside Atalanta's Gewiss Stadium and they could be heard chanting against the league's governing body.

The match was all but over by halftime following strikes from Berat Djimsiti and Duván Zapata and an own-goal by Sassuolo midfielder Mehdi Bourabia.

Atalanta had also hit the crossbar and had a goal ruled out for handball.

Zapata added a second after the break and Atalanta also had penalty appeals waved away on a tight decision by the video assistant referee. Gasperini was so incensed by the decision that he was sent off for dissent.

Bourabia made up for his own-goal by scoring at the right end in stoppage time.

Atalanta remained fourth but moved six points above Roma in the fight for the final Champions League spot.

Atalanta are playing in their first season in Europe's premier club competition. Many experts have pointed to the round of 16 match between Atalanta and Valencia on Feb. 19 in Milan as one of the biggest reasons why the virus was so deadly in Bergamo. The match has been dubbed "Game Zero" by the local media.

Romelu Lukaku marked his goal by taking a knee.

Lukaku, who is Black, showed his support for the Black



Inter Milan's Lautaro Martínez, (left), scores his side's second goal past Sampdoria's goalkeeper Emil Audero during the Serie A soccer match between Inter Milan and Sampdoria at the San Siro Stadium, in Milan, Italy, June 21. (AP)

Japan to withdraw bid for 2023 Women's World Cup

TOKYO, June 22, (AP) — The Japan Football Association is expected to pull out of bidding for the 2023 Women's World Cup.

The Japanese news agency Kyodo on Monday reported the pending withdrawal and cited unnamed sources at the JFA.

That would clear the way for a joint bid by Australia and New Zealand. That bid received the highest evaluation from FIFA earlier this month with Japan rated second and Colombia third.

FIFA is to announce the winner on Thursday.

The Japan Football Association did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

Australia and New Zealand received the highest rating score of 4.1 out of 5. Japan was second at 3.9 and Colombia had 2.8. Scores were based on criteria including hotel availability, stadiums and other infrastructure.

Lives Matter movement after scoring Inter's opener in the 10th minute — finishing off an impressive team move.

The Belgium forward posted a photo of that moment on social media after the match with the words: "This one is for all the people who's fighting for injustice. I am with you."

Lautaro Martínez doubled Inter's lead before Morten Thorsby pulled one back for Samp eight minutes into the second half.

Third-place Inter moved six points behind leaders Juventus and five below second-place Lazio. Sampdoria remained a point above the relegation zone.

Sampdoria were one of the teams which announced the highest number of cases of COVID-19, including at least seven players, with the team doctor hospitalized.