



Roma's Roger Ibanez celebrates scoring during the Serie A soccer match between Roma and Spezia at the Olympic Stadium in Rome. Roma won 2-0. (AP) - See Page 14

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Rejuvenated Rams close in on Cardinals

Stafford stars

GLENDALE, Ariz., Dec 14, (AP): From the first play to the last, Aaron Donald and the Los Angeles Rams showed they're still a heavyweight in the NFC West.

The six-time All-Pro finished with three sacks - the first on the initial play from scrimmage and the last as time expired - while Matthew Stafford threw for 287 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Rams past the Arizona Cardinals 30-23.

The Cardinals (10-3) will have to wait at least one more week before clinching their first playoff spot since 2015. Tyler Lockett threw two interceptions that led to Rams touchdowns.

Cooper Kupp and Odell Beckham Jr. both caught touchdowns for the Rams (9-4), who won their second straight, pulled within one game of the Cardinals in the division and look rejuvenated following a three-game losing streak in November.

Kupp had 13 catches for 123 yards, the eighth 100-yard game this season for the NFL's receiving leader.

FOOTBALL

The Cardinals had a chance to tie the game in the final seconds after recovering an onside kick. But a holding call wiped out Murray's long run on the first play of the drive and Arizona couldn't produce a last-second miracle. On the final play, Donald charged toward Murray and the quarterback fell to the turf instead of getting run over by the 280-pound defensive lineman.

Stafford - who had plenty of protection and time to throw most of the night - hit Van Jefferson on a high-arching pass for a 52-yard touchdown to push the Rams ahead 20-13 early in the third quarter. The veteran quarterback dissected a Cardinals defense that had been among the best against the pass in the NFL this season.

A few plays later, Murray was picked off for the second time. Leonard Floyd tipped the ball into the air, caught it and then rumbled downfield to the Arizona 19. Seven plays later, Stafford hit a diving Kupp for a 4-yard touchdown and the Rams led 27-13.

James Conner sliced through the Rams' defense for an 8-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter to cut the deficit to 27-20.

Murray finished with 383 yards passing as the Cardinals tried to catch up late.

Arizona's Matt Prater made his second 53-yard field goal of the first half - moments after Murray scrambled for 16 yards and got out of bounds with 1 second left - to tie the game 13-all at halftime. The six-play, 35-second drive ended a back-and-forth first half that saw both teams take the lead and then lose it.

Prater opened the scoring with his first 53-yard kick. Arizona was threatening to score again later in the first quarter, but Murray was picked off by Ernest Jones on second-and-goal from the 4 after Donald deflected the pass.

Donald had a big first quarter that also included a sack, a tackle for loss and a quarterback hurry. He has 10 sacks this season.

The Rams converted Jones' interception into a touchdown when Stafford found Beckham for a 2-yard score. Stafford completed all seven of his passes on the drive.

It was Beckham's third touchdown since joining the Rams last month. He did not have a touchdown in six games with Cleveland this season. It was also the first time he's scored touchdowns in three straight games since 2015.

Conner scored his first TD from 1 yard out late in the second quarter, bursting into the end zone on a second effort after bouncing off a pile. He has scored a touchdown in seven straight games, tying a Cardinals record set by John David Crow in 1960.



Los Angeles Rams wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. (3) makes a touchdown catch against Arizona Cardinals cornerback Marco Wilson (20) during the first half of an NFL football game in Glendale, Ariz. (AP)

NFL Standings

WASHINGTON, Dec 14 (AP) NFL standings after Monday's game.

| American Conference | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| East | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| New England | 9 | 4 | 0 | .692 | 350 | 200 |
| Buffalo | 7 | 6 | 0 | .538 | 363 | 229 |
| Miami | 6 | 7 | 0 | .462 | 254 | 288 |
| N.Y. Jets | 3 | 10 | 0 | .231 | 226 | 397 |
| South | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| Tennessee | 9 | 4 | 0 | .692 | 324 | 290 |
| Indianapolis | 7 | 6 | 0 | .538 | 371 | 283 |
| Houston | 2 | 11 | 0 | .154 | 177 | 356 |
| Jacksonville | 2 | 11 | 0 | .154 | 180 | 340 |
| North | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| Baltimore | 8 | 5 | 0 | .615 | 304 | 284 |
| Cincinnati | 7 | 6 | 0 | .538 | 354 | 293 |
| Cleveland | 7 | 6 | 0 | .538 | 278 | 289 |
| Pittsburgh | 6 | 6 | 1 | .500 | 272 | 322 |
| West | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| Kansas City | 9 | 4 | 0 | .692 | 351 | 268 |
| L.A. Chargers | 8 | 5 | 0 | .615 | 351 | 336 |
| Denver | 7 | 6 | 0 | .538 | 275 | 228 |
| Las Vegas | 6 | 7 | 0 | .462 | 283 | 320 |
| National Conference | | | | | | |
| East | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| Dallas | 9 | 4 | 0 | .692 | 380 | 287 |
| Philadelphia | 6 | 7 | 0 | .462 | 337 | 291 |
| Washington | 6 | 7 | 0 | .462 | 266 | 324 |
| N.Y. Giants | 4 | 9 | 0 | .308 | 232 | 310 |
| South | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| Tampa Bay | 10 | 3 | 0 | .769 | 410 | 297 |
| Atlanta | 6 | 7 | 0 | .462 | 245 | 353 |
| New Orleans | 6 | 7 | 0 | .462 | 304 | 285 |
| Carolina | 5 | 8 | 0 | .385 | 257 | 282 |
| North | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| Green Bay | 10 | 3 | 0 | .769 | 328 | 272 |
| Minnesota | 6 | 7 | 0 | .462 | 344 | 333 |
| Chicago | 4 | 9 | 0 | .308 | 231 | 332 |
| Detroit | 1 | 11 | 1 | .115 | 213 | 354 |
| West | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA | |
| Arizona | 10 | 3 | 0 | .769 | 366 | 254 |
| L.A. Rams | 9 | 4 | 0 | .692 | 366 | 293 |
| San Francisco | 7 | 6 | 0 | .538 | 329 | 301 |
| Seattle | 5 | 8 | 0 | .385 | 272 | 262 |

The Rams played without defensive back Jalen Ramsey and tight end Tyler Higbee, who were both put on the COVID-19 list earlier Monday. It was the first game both players have missed this season.



Los Angeles Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford (9) throws a pass to Rams wide receiver Cooper Kupp (10) as Arizona Cardinals linebacker Dennis Gardeck (left) is blocked during the first half of an NFL football game in Glendale, Ariz. (AP)

Lindeloof undergoing tests after breathing problems

Man U game postponed as virus cases hit high

LONDON, Dec 14, (AP): The English Premier League reported its highest weekly coronavirus infections as Manchester United's meeting with Brentford became the second match in three days to be postponed due to outbreaks. There were 42 cases of COVID-19 in the week to Sunday after 3,805 players and club staff were tested, a jump on the 12 cases in the previous seven days of testing.

SOCCER

Some United players and staff returned positive tests following the 1-0 win over Norwich on Saturday evening. The Premier League board accepted United's request to postpone Tuesday's scheduled match at Brentford in London less than 24 hours before kickoff.

"The decision was taken following guidance from medical advisers due to the exceptional circumstances of an ongoing COVID-19 outbreak within Manchester United's squad," the Premier League said in a statement late Monday. "First team operations at the club's Carrington Training Complex were closed down today to help control the outbreak and minimize risk of further infection among players and staff. The league wishes a quick recovery to those players and staff with COVID-19." The first game to be called off this season due to coronavirus cases was Tottenham's trip to Brighton last Sunday due to at least eight players at the north London club contracting COVID-19.

Norwich and Aston Villa have also reported coronavirus cases at their clubs. They come amid growing concerns in Britain about the spread of the omicron variant, which has led to the reintroduction of some coronavirus restrictions.

The Premier League has emulated national regulations by asking for face masks to be worn again around clubs, while going further than the government by reintroducing social distancing. The frequency of testing on players and staff will also increase.

"The safety of everybody is a priority and the Premier League is taking all precautionary steps in light of the recent rise in COVID-19 cases across the country," the competition said in a statement. "We will continue to work closely with the government, local authorities and supporter groups, while being responsive to any future changes to national or local guidance." The government's appeal for people to get booster vaccines against the coronavirus was backed on Monday by Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola, who urged his staff and players to get



Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (centre) challenges for the ball with Liverpool's Fabinho (left), and Liverpool's Joel Matip during the English Premier League soccer match between Liverpool and Arsenal at Anfield Stadium. (AP)

Auba 'stripped' of captaincy, dropped for West Ham game

LONDON, Dec 14, (AP): Arsenal stripped Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of the captaincy on Tuesday after another disciplinary breach, saying the striker hadn't worked "to the rules and standards" set by the club.

Aubameyang, Arsenal's highest-paid player, was also told he would not be considered for selection for the English Premier League game against West Ham on Wednesday.

The Gabon striker was left out for the 3-0 win over Southampton on Saturday because of what manager Mikel Arteta described as a "disciplinary breach." Aubameyang reportedly was allowed by the club to travel to France for a family matter last week, after the 2-1 loss at Everton

jabbed. "The doctors suggest that they have to do it," Guardiola said. "Most of us have (had) it already. The players, for their age, the moment they have to do

on Dec. 6 which he started as a substitute, but returned a day later than agreed.

Arteta said it was a "really unpleasant situation" but the decision was taken in a bid to "build that trust and strong culture around the club."

"They have demanded that we ... take our culture, our demands and who we want to be as a club - and how we want to represent this football club - to a different level," Arteta said of his squad. "And when those standards are not met, you know you cannot participate



Arteta

SOCCER

received at least one dose.

The Premier League has avoided a shutdown since the 100-day pause in the season from the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

The 40 positive cases at the turn of 2021 was the previous highest number of infections at Premier League clubs in a week since testing started to be announced in May 2020.

Manchester United defender Victor Lindeloof was undergoing "precautionary investigations" after suffering breathing difficulties during an English Premier League game, the club said Tuesday.

La Liga 'sells' its broadcast rights

MADRID, Dec 14, (AP): Spain's top soccer league has generated 4.95 billion euros (\$5.6 billion) from the sale of subscription broadcast domestic rights for five seasons.

La Liga has sold games for live broadcast in Spain to a streaming service for the first time with DAZN picking up the rights to 175 matches per season.

Telefonica-owned Movistar has the rights to the other 205 games, including three complete rounds.

La Liga will be making 990 million euros per season from these rights packages, a slight uplift from 980 million euros a year in the current deals.

More cash will be generated in Spain from live free-to-air rights, the packages to show games in bars, hotels and airports, as well as for the second division.

Meanwhile, Barcelona striker Sergio Agüero will make an announcement about his future on Wednesday.

Agüero hasn't played since undergoing heart tests after complaining of feeling unwell during a match against Alaves in the Spanish league on Oct. 30.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta will join Agüero at the news conference at Camp Nou, the Catalan club said Tuesday.

Agüero joined Barcelona in the off-season after 10 years at Manchester City, where he scored a club-record 260 goals and became a great of the English game. He was previously at Atletico Madrid.

The Argentina international has played five games for Barcelona.

United said the Sweden international "has recovered well" from the incident during the 1-0 win over Norwich on Saturday. He had to be replaced in the second half.