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Bucks Free Press

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Glasgow resurrect their cup campaign

EXETER Chiefs' Joe Simmonds kicks a conversion

GLASGOW resurrected their Champions Cup campaign and delivered a serious – but not fatal – blow to Exeter's quarter-final aspirations with a well-deserved 22-7 victory on a foggy night at Scotstoun.

Visibility was so poor that there was a real danger that the game would not go ahead just an hour before kick-off.

The hosts adapted better to the conditions and after several minutes of pressure they edged their way into a 3-0 lead through a Ross Thompson offside penalty from almost directly in front of the posts.

While the Warriors coaching team will have been encouraged by the pattern of play throughout the opening quarter, they will also have been mindful that all the possession and territory had not translated into a more commanding advantage on the scoreboard.

With just over half an hour played, Exeter had their first period on the front foot and it took some excellent defensive work from the hosts to keep their try-line unbreached, before Zander Fagerson won a scrum penalty which allowed Thompson to clear the threat.

Warriors started the second half as they finished the first, with Sione Tuipulotu carrying well on three occasions before a side-entry penalty gave Thompson a chance to edge the hosts further ahead – but his effort rebounded off the left post.

However, the Warriors stand-off did not let that shake his focus and when Exeter gave away another penalty two minutes later for going off their feet, he fired home the three points.

He was on target again to make it 9-0.

NEWCASTLE United's Ryan Fraser appeals for a penalty during the Premier League match at St. James' Park

No respite for struggling Toon

BERNARDO Silva staged a midfield masterclass as Premier League leaders Manchester City swept aside struggling Newcastle 4-0 to claim a record 34th win of 2021.

The Portuguese, aided and abetted by Rodri and Kevin De Bruyne, steered City to a commanding victory at St James' Park to eclipse Liverpool's mark of 33 top-flight wins in a calendar year set in 1982.

Goals from Ruben Dias and Joao Cancelo before the break and Riyad Mahrez and Raheem Sterling after it secured the points with the minimum of fuss as Newcastle were once against left to count the cost of a combination of dreadful defending, shot-shyness and questionable decisions.

Eddie Howe's men have now won just one of the 18 league games they have played this season and while their fate will not be dictated by what they achieve against the division's powerhouses, a worrying trend shows little sign of abating.

City are four points clear at the top of the Premier League, ahead of Liverpool's game at Tottenham, but the boss wants more.

Covid-hit Chelsea lose more ground

By **PA Sport**
Press Association

COVID-HIT Chelsea ground out a goalless draw with Wolves at a foggy Molineux to lose further ground on Premier League leaders Manchester City.

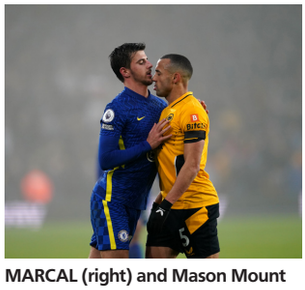
Daniel Podence had a first-half tap-in chalked off for offside and Leander Dendoncker spurned a glorious chance as luckless Wolves forced Chelsea to settle for a fourth draw in eight top-flight matches.

Chelsea travelled to the midlands without at least eight senior players but still managed to field a strong XI.

The Blues again struggled for fluency however, eventually slipping six points behind leaders and defending champions City.

As the Molineux mist thickened, so too did the clouds of portent descend on Chelsea's title bid.

While the Blues laboured without reward, Pep Guardiola's City swept to their eighth straight Premier League win with an ominous 4-0 hammering of Newcastle.



MARCAL (right) and Mason Mount

Chelsea were left "deeply disappointed" by the Premier League rejecting their request to postpone the Wolves trip, given their rising Covid-19 cases.

The Blues were without seven top stars at Molineux due to coronavirus, with Jorginho removed as a precaution, having returned one positive and then one negative test.

Manager Thomas Tuchel even conceded the Blues were "a bit angry" to be forced to play, while Premier League bosses did not consider the Blues' situation merited a postponement.

N'Golo Kante and Mateo Kovacic were pressed into premature service after long-term injuries then, with Chelsea only able to name four outfield players on their bench.

Kovacic only returned from Covid isolation on Friday, to add to almost two months of being sidelined after a hamstring strain.

Wolves could so easily have been two goals to the good at the break.

Podence tapped home to cap a smart move, thinking he had put Wolves into the lead inside the quarter-hour.

But the goal was finally chalked off for Raul Jimenez's offside, with the Mexico striker having played and missed Marcal's teasing low ball across the area.

Sutton in promotion places

DONOVAN Wilson's first league goal since October fired Sutton into the automatic promotion places in Sky Bet League Two with a battling 1-0 win against Harrogate.

Matt Gray's side, playing in the Football League for the first time in their 123-year history, took full advantage of games being called off due to Covid-19 outbreaks to go third.

It was a third straight home win without conceding for the Yellows – who have lost just three times at Gander Green Lane all season.

It was a slow start to proceedings until Omar Bugiel expertly slipped Wilson in to coolly slot home the only goal of the game on the half-hour mark.

Sutton goalkeeper Dean Bouzanis produced a good save to beat away Alex Pattison's near-post strike after the break.

Blackburn go third

BEN Brereton Diaz scored a brace as Blackburn climbed up to third in the Sky Bet Championship after thrashing Birmingham 4-0.

Before the game, Blues boss Lee Bowyer said Blackburn were clinical in every department and it took six minutes to prove that theory as the division's form side opened up Birmingham.

Although the visitors rallied towards the end of the half Blackburn ruthlessly put them to the sword with three second-half goals.

Reda Khadra's composed finish made it 2-0 and Brereton Diaz slotted home a penalty.

England need to learn fast says Root

ENGLAND'S Joe Root during a press conference

JOE Root demanded his England side start learning from their mistakes if they want salvage their Ashes campaign from 2-0 down.

Root watched his team make a game attempt at snatching a draw in the day/night second Test in Adelaide, with Jos Buttler's determination taking a largely one-sided contest into a final session before standing on his own stumps to usher in a 275-run defeat.

But that backs-to-the-wall effort was scant mitigation for some familiar shortcomings that have seen England outclassed in each of the first two games.

Whispers of another whitewash to follow 2006/07 and 2013/14 are already growing in volume Down Under but although that is a fate Root does not expect, he insists change must come quickly.

He was keen to address the bowling and struggled to conceal his frustration at the collective failure to pursue the fuller lengths which have so far proved most effective in these conditions.

Having diagnosed a similar flaw on the same trip four years, it is an appeal Root is tiring of.

"First of all we need to learn and learn fast. We can't make the same mistakes that we have made so far," he said.

"We've got three massive games now, with the Ashes on the line. If that's not motivation enough, I don't know what is.

"The disappointing thing about this week is that we made the same mistakes as last week in Brisbane. We just can't afford to do that. That's the frustration.

"In the first innings in particular, we were a little bit short with the ball. We need to be a little bit braver."

RAFAEL Nadal has tested positive for coronavirus in a development that could throw his Australian Open into doubt

Nadal tests positive for Covid-19

RAFAEL Nadal has tested positive for coronavirus in a development that could throw his Australian Open participation further into doubt.

The 20-time grand slam champion returned to the match court last week after more than four months out with a foot problem, suffering defeats to Andy Murray and Denis Shapovalov on Friday and Saturday at an exhibition event in Abu Dhabi.

Posting on social media on Monday morning, Nadal wrote: "Hello everyone. I wanted to announce to you that on my return home after contesting the Abu Dhabi tournament, I have tested positive for Covid in the PCR test that was performed on me upon arriving in Spain.

"Both in Kuwait and Abu Dhabi we passed checks every two days and all came back negative, the last being on Friday and having results on Saturday.

"I am having some unpleasant moments but I hope that I will improve little by little. I am now confined at home and I have reported the result to people who have been in contact with me."

Raducanu reflects on 'insane' year

By **Jamie Gardner**
PA Sport

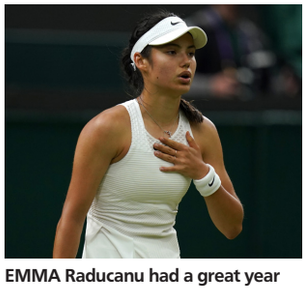
EMMA Raducanu hailed the "insane" support she has received in 2021 after capping an incredible 12 months by being voted the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year.

The 19-year-old completed a fairytale in New York in September as she secured the US Open title, becoming the first qualifier ever to win a grand slam tennis tournament.

She also became the first British woman since Virginia Wade in 1977 to win a grand slam, and claimed the prize without dropping a set.

Her achievements have made her one of British sport's biggest stars, and she claimed the prestigious BBC prize ahead of Olympic gold medallists Tom Daley and Adam Peaty.

Raducanu, who is isolating in Abu Dhabi after testing positive for Covid-19 on arrival in the United Arab Emirates last week, told the BBC: "It's such an honour just to be among these nominees – to win it is pretty amazing.



EMMA Raducanu had a great year

"I watched Sports Personality of the Year growing up, so I'm really humbled to join the amazing past winners – I'm also really happy for British tennis that we managed to get this award again.

"All the support I've received this past year has been absolutely insane, and the energy I felt at Wimbledon this year playing in front of my home crowd is something I've never felt before."

Raducanu entered the New York tournament ranked 150th in the world and now has to contend with additional pressure on her shoulders, but she insists her family have helped to keep her grounded.

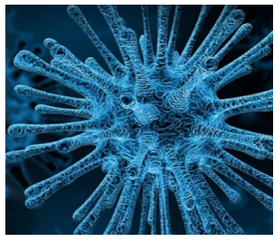
Speaking before her victory had been announced, Raducanu said: "The self-belief, I feel like I just had that as a child growing up.

"It's been instilled into me from a young age and I think sport gave me that inner belief and confidence.

"I feel completely the same and everyone around me is definitely the same and keeping me in my place.

Diving star Daley, who had missed out on gold at three previous Olympic Games, finally took the top step on the podium in Tokyo alongside his 10m synchro partner Matty Lee.

Omicron wreaks havoc



BOXING Day fixtures at Cardiff, Northampton and Newport have been postponed as coronavirus outbreaks continue to cause chaos in the English Football League.

Cardiff were scheduled to host Coventry in the Sky Bet Championship on Sunday but they have "several cases of Covid-19" among their playing squad and staff.

Northampton were set to play at home to Walsall in League Two, while Newport were due to take on leaders Forest Green in the same division.

A host of EFL games have been postponed during the past week following an increased transmission of the Omicron variant prompting calls for a 'circuit break' suspension.

Table-topping Forest Green have now seen their last three fixtures called off.

Hogan set to retire

GLAMORGAN seamer Michael Hogan is to retire from cricket after his testimonial year in 2022.

The 40-year-old Australian has made 248 appearances across all formats since joining the Welsh county in 2012.

Hogan has taken 589 wickets and earlier this year became the 22nd Glamorgan bowler to go pass the 400 mark in first-class cricket.

Announcing his retirement, Hogan said: "I am extremely grateful to the club for postponing my testimonial and allowing me to hold it next year.

"I'm looking forward to another successful season."

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League games go on despite Covid threat

Photos courtesy of PA

By BFP Sports Reporter

THE EFL has confirmed that its programme of games in the League will continue, with fixtures set to be played "where safe to do so" amid rising Covid-19 cases in the sport.

While the EFL acknowledged there were likely to be several more future postponements, which has already proved the case, it expressed its "optimism that disruption can be minimised following implementation of RED protocols, a daily testing regime and ongoing vaccination rollout."

While games in England on Boxing Day are set to be played as scheduled and with fans present, that is not the case in Wales, with all sporting events in the country to be held behind closed doors from December 26 due to a change in coronavirus regulations.

Wycombe are due to play Cambridge United at home on Boxing Day before heading to Portman Road on December 29 to play Ipswich Town.

Reading, Bolton and Crawley have become the latest teams to postpone their Boxing Day matches, against Peterborough, Morecambe and Stevenage respectively, due to Covid-19 outbreaks.

EFL Chief Executive Trevor Birch said: "Throughout the pandemic, our two priorities have been ensuring the welfare of those involved in EFL competitions and ensuring the fixture schedule can continue where it is safe to do so.

"We will continue to work with clubs, authorities and other agencies to monitor the Covid-19 case rate and be prepared to respond accordingly, yet for now the view remains that we can continue to deliver games safely where clubs have sufficient healthy personnel in place, on and off the pitch.

"With club mitigation measures, the mass adoption of booster jabs and Covid certification now required for larger crowds, we are sure many fans will continue to feel confident in attending matches over the Christmas period and we look forward to welcoming them."

A total of 19 games had to be postponed on Saturday, December 18, including Wycombe's game against Bolton Wanderers.

The EFL announced on December 16 a regime of enhanced training ground protocols and increased testing amid rising Omicron cases.

As part of the enhanced guidance, clubs are expected to implement a daily screening programme of testing, subject to supply chain availability of lateral flow tests.

Any person with a positive test of symptoms will then be required to take a PCR test and isolate in line with Government guidance.

Social distancing measures will be required outside of physical sessions, along with restrictions to the use of indoor facilities, manual therapy and group travel, amongst others.

Chairgirls in five-goal thriller

THE Chairgirls Reserves went into the last game of the year in high spirits and wanting to avenge the defeat by Milton Keynes City a few weeks ago.

Their intentions were clear from the kick-off with Sally Grimm seeing a long-range effort cleared by the keeper, and striker, Naimh Creighton, not quite able to get enough on the follow-up.

For the first 15 minutes, the game was played firmly in MK's half, with shots from Creighton, Sally Grimm and Amelia Gilbert going wide, hitting the crossbar and being saved.

Wycombe were left to rue missed opportunities in the 17th minute when a counter-attack from MK saw the ball beat Blues' keeper Lillie Eames in the bottom corner.

Wycombe looked to hit straight back three minutes later, with Emily Norfolk's back-post header going just wide on 20 minutes and Grimm having another effort parried wide a minute later.

The Chairgirls were at last rewarded for their attacking endeavours in the 22nd minute when Amelia Sage hit her 25-yard free kick over the keeper and into the top of the net.

Looking to get in on the act, Amy Norfolk rounded the keeper on the 33rd minute, only to see her shot cleared off the line. But the Chairgirls got the second goal they deserved a minute later when Amelia Gilbert took Emma Dean's cross on the chest and volleyed in. Despite an attempted lob by MK and an effort from Jorja-Louise Bray following a fantastic through-ball from Norfolk, the first half finished 2-1.

Starting the second half like they finished the first, Wycombe went on the attack. Midfielder Charlotte Hill saw her effort deflected wide on 47 minutes and Rohanna Myers having her effort saved a minute later. Wycombe were reminded of MK's threat on 60 minutes, when a corner made its way just over the bar.

Looking to make sure of the game, from the resulting goal kick, Charlotte Hill made a defence-splitting through-ball to Rihanna Myers, whose shot was heading towards the bottom corner, with the in-form, Jorja-Louise Bray, making sure it was 3-1 to Wycombe.

The game slowed slightly until the 80th minute when, despite only having ten players on the pitch, MK were the only team to play to the whistle when two players went down, running through to halve the deficit. The goal led to a nervy final 10 minutes in which Wycombe were intent on attacking. But thankfully, there was no MK equalizer and the Chairgirls finished 2021 on a high.

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