

Esteghlal to Face Al Shorta in Must-Win Game



TEHRAN – Esteghlal football team will be desperate to not slip up when it hosts Al Shorta in the AFC Champions League Elite 2024-25 on Monday. Victory will keep Iran’s Esteghlal within touching distance of the knockout stage. Esteghlal blew hot and cold

prior to the continental championship going into the break, only managing one win and five points.

That, however, was enough to see it sits in eighth - the final qualifying spot - and victories in its remaining two matches will take the team through.

Al Shorta, however, is in a battle for survival as the Iraqi side has to win its final two matches to stand a chance of advancing.

Two points from six matches makes for grim reading but with nothing to lose, Al Shorta will be determined to fight till the end and Esteghal must not take victory for granted against the bottom-placed side in the West Zone standings.

Real Madrid’s Winning Run Surprisingly Ends in Loss at Espanyol

BARCELONA (AFP) - LaLiga leaders Real Madrid were stunned at lowly Espanyol after losing 1-0 thanks to a late Carlos Romero strike.

The result means Real, on 49 points, are one point clear of Atletico Madrid, who beat Mallorca 2-0, ahead of next weekend’s Spanish capital derby at Santiago Bernabeu. Third-placed Barcelona, who play Alaves on Sunday, are on 42 points.

Vinicius Jr appeared to have given Real the lead in the 21st minute after latching onto Kylian Mbappe’s pass. However, the goal was disallowed after the Frenchman had fouled Espanyol’s Pol Lozano in the build-up.

The hosts kept Real at



Real Madrid’s Vinicius Junior (right) prepares to shoot during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Espanyol and Real Madrid at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain, Feb 1, 2025.

bay in the second half, with Lucas Vazquez, Rodrygo and Jude Bellingham all having efforts brilliantly saved by goalkeeper Joan Garcia.

The visitors were aggrieved

when, on a breakaway attack, Romero fouled a running Mbappe from behind, but was only shown a yellow card as the Real players appealed for a VAR review.

“This foul is inexplicable, the decision they made, the referee, the VAR. The most important thing is to take care of the player and protect him. It was a very bad tackle that risked injury, which fortunately did not happen,” said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti.

The Italian manager brought on Luka Modric, Brahim Diaz and Raul Asencio, but they failed to conjure any magic and it was Romero who broke the deadlock in the 85th minute.

The defender latched onto Omar El Hilali’s through-ball and fired home to lift Espanyol to 17th on 23 points, one place above the relegation zone.

Wizards Beat Timberwolves 105-103



Washington Wizards guard Bilal Coulibaly, left, work around Minnesota Timberwolves guard Mike Conley during the second half of an NBA basketball game Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025, in Minneapolis.

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Kyle Kuzma scored a season-high 31 points and the Washington Wizards beat the short-handed Minnesota Timberwolves 105-103 on Saturday night to end a 16-game losing streak.

Jordan Poole scored 19 points, Bilal Coulibaly had 14 and Jonas Valanciunas added 13 points and 10 rebounds to help Washington win for the seventh time this season.

Washington, which led by seven with under four minutes to play,

turned the ball over with 11 seconds left clinging to a two-point lead. But a 3-point try by Minnesota’s Nickeil Alexander-Walker rimmed out with three seconds left. Corey Kispert grabbed the rebound and the Wizards ended a 21-game road slide.

Jaden McDaniels led Minnesota with 23 points and 12 rebounds — his first career game with at least 20 points and 10 rebounds. Rudy Gobert had 16 points and 16 rebounds, but Minnesota’s five-game winning streak ended.

Super Salah at Double as Liverpool Go Nine Clear



Liverpool’s goalkeeper Alisson clears saves during the English Premier League soccer match between Bournemouth and Liverpool at the Vitality stadium in Bournemouth, England, Feb 1, 2025.

BOURNEMOUTH (Reuters) - Liverpool opened up a nine-point lead in the Premier League title race as Mohamed Salah continued his sensational season with both goals in a 2-0 win at Bournemouth. Arne Slot’s side rode their luck at times against a side unbeaten in 11 league games but Salah once again proved the difference as he took his league tally to 21 this season.

Salah rifled home a penalty after half an hour and then curled home an exquisite second in the 75th minute and has now topped 20 goals in a Premier League season five times.

“It feels good to be fair, scoring goals, the team winning, it’s an incredible feeling,” Salah said.

“But I said many times before, the main target is winning the Premier League. We are going in the right direction.”

Bournemouth, who remain seventh, hit the woodwork twice -- through Antoine Semenyo when it was 0-0 and then Marcus Tavernier shortly before Salah wrapped up the points.

Liverpool have 56 points from 23 games, with second-placed Arsenal and Nottingham Forest on 47.

Andoni Iraola’s Bournemouth had beaten the other three members of the top four at home this season and there was huge expectation that they might slow Liverpool’s march.

But Liverpool showed the clinical edge that allows them to keep accumulating points even when not in top gear and with 15 games remaining, they look indestruc-

tible.

Salah’s second goal, a nonchalant left-footed curler from the right side of the penalty area, lifted the Egyptian into sixth place on the all-time Premier League scoring list with 178 goals, ahead of former Chelsea player Frank Lampard.

It was a cruel blow for Bournemouth who moments earlier had seen substitute Tavernier’s left-footed thud against the post with Justin Kluivert firing the rebound wide of a gaping goal.

Bournemouth had begun full of energy and visiting keeper Alisson was called into action after 15 seconds to save a shot by the dangerous Semenyo.

Semenyo then thumped an effort from tight-angle against the frame of the goal with Alisson beaten for pace.

But Liverpool, with captain Virgil van Dijk his usual calming influence in defense, gradually began to exert some authority and went ahead when Bournemouth’s Lewis Cook inadvertently clipped Cody Gakpo in a sprint inside the area and Salah dispatched his penalty in ruthless fashion.

Bournemouth thought they had leveled in the 37th minute as Semenyo played in the over-lapping Milos Kerkez down the left and his cross found David Brooks to fire home.

However, VAR confirmed that Kerkez had been fractionally off-side before his assist.

Bournemouth were always a danger while it was 1-0, but Salah condemned them to a first league loss since late November.

Kane Hits Double as Bayern Survive Kiel Comeback

BERLIN (AFP) - Harry Kane scored twice as Bayern Munich survived a remarkable comeback by strugglers Holstein Kiel to move nine points clear at the top of the Bundesliga on Sunday.

Kiel, who showed positive glimpses throughout the game, pulled the score back to 4-3 in stoppage time despite Bayern having been 4-0 up, but could not find an equalizer.

Bayern punished Kiel for missing early opportunities and went ahead after 19 minutes when Jamal Musiala slotted past Timon Weiner after Michael Olise threaded him through in the box.

The hosts were not in total control in the first half though, with Kiel continuing to defend well and cause problems for Bayern when they rushed forward in numbers on the counter-attack.

England captain Kane, however, dealt another blow shortly before the half-time whistle when he expertly nodded home a Kingsley Coman cross.

Kiel’s hopes of finding a way

back were dashed soon after the restart, with Kane getting his second of the game by guiding Raphael Guerreiro’s cross into the top corner with an excellent header in the 46th minute.

Half-time substitute Serge Gnabry then produced a superb piece of individual skill to seemingly put the game to bed after just 54 minutes, bringing an aerial ball down with his right foot inside the box and then sending a first-time finish past Weiner with his left.

Kiel earned consolation through Finn Porath driving a powerful strike into the top corner of Manuel Neuer’s goal, before Steven Skrzybski slotted home two goals in quick succession in stoppage time to give Bayern a significant moment of concern.

But Bayern held on to their lead and Vincent Kompany’s side are now nine points ahead of second-placed Bayer Leverkusen having played a game more, while Kiel are 17th, two points inside the automatic relegation places and six points adrift of safety.

‘The Prince is Back’- Santos Hails Neymar’s Return

MADRID (Reuters) - Neymar has left Saudi Arabian club Al-Hilal to return to Santos, the Brazilian club where both he and Pele made their names.

Santos posted a video captioned “ThePrincelsBack” on X in which Neymar said: “King Pele, your wish is my command, the throne and the crown they are still yours, because you are eternal.

“But the number 10, it will be an honor to wear the sacred jersey that represents so much for Santos and the world. I

promise to do everything I can to keep honoring your legacy, King.”

Neymar, 32, began his career aged 17 with Santos in 2009, racking up 136 goals and 64 assists in 225 matches to help the club secure their first Copa Libertadores title in nearly 50 years in 2011.

He joined Barcelona in 2013, before moving to Paris St Germain for a world record fee of 222 million euros in August 2017.

Neymar has played only seven



games for Al-Hilal since moving from PSG for a reported fee

of around 90 million euros (\$98 million) in August 2023.