

# Jittery Arsenal losing their grip with summit in sight



Arsenal's Gabriel (C) looks dejected after a 2-2 draw against West Ham United in the Premier League at the London Stadium, London, Britain, on April 16, 2023.  
● MATTHEW CHILDS/REUTERS

Even when Arsenal were building a daunting lead at the top of the Premier League and excitement was building in north London there were those who questioned whether Mikel Arteta's side would be able to cope when Manchester City turned up the heat. Until a week ago it appeared they were taking it all in their stride as they arrived at Anfield on a seven-match winning run in the league and then went 2-0 ahead against Liverpool inside a scintillating half an hour; Reuters reported.

Perhaps then the enormity of what was looming on the horizon – a first league title since 2004 – began to sink in. Liverpool roared back to draw 2-2 and were unlucky not to claim all three points as Arsenal visibly shrank. When the Gunners went 2-0 ahead at West Ham United on Sunday, this time inside 10 minutes, it seemed they had recovered their poise after the trauma of last weekend on Merseyside. But, again, Arsenal stopped doing what they have done so well all season as

the weight of expectation weighed on their shoulders and West Ham, just like Liverpool, took advantage to seize control having been initially outplayed. A needless penalty converted by Said Benrahma and a superb volley by Jarrod Bowen cancelled out early strikes from Gabriel Jesus and Martin Odegaard in a thrilling 2-2 draw. To make matters worse Bukayo Saka had sent a penalty well wide a couple of minutes before Bowen's equaliser. City, who have won six

league games in a row and are four points behind Arsenal with a game in hand and a home match to come against Arteta's side, certainly do not need any help to win titles. But Arsenal have offered up the sort of gifts that Pep Guardiola's ruthless side are unlikely to reciprocate as they seek a fifth Premier League crown in six seasons.

## Game management

Arteta's face at the final whistle said it all and he knows that Arsenal have lost control of the title race.

The Spaniard would not accept that nerves were a factor but was right to criticise his side's lack of game management and killer instinct. "When I see a team playing with that flow at 2-0 certainly it's not the pressure," Arteta told reporters. "It's that we misunderstood what the game needed in that moment. "There is a moment where you could go 3-1 up after 50 minutes and probably the game is over. Two minutes after that you concede the equaliser. This is part of football.

## Osimhen is back as Napoli, Milan chase CL glory



● FRANCO FERRARI/GETTY IMAGES

Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen and French keeper Mike Maignan will face off for a place in the Champions League semi-finals today when AC Milan travel south to Naples for the decisive second leg of the all-Italian quarter-final. Osimhen hadn't played for Napoli since the last international break before making a substitute's appearance in Saturday's goalless draw with Verona which cut his side's imposing Serie A lead to 14 points, AFP reported. Osimhen's devastating efficiency in front of goal was sorely missed in last week's single-goal defeat which gave Milan a slender advantage to take into Tuesday's showdown at the Stadio Maradona.

"Osimhen has such a physical presence and speed you can chuck the ball at him and he'll hold onto it, use his head or unleash a change of pace. He has so many different options when he has the ball," Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti said on Saturday. Napoli wasted a host of chances to get something from the game at a packed and soaking wet San Siro in which Maignan produced the sort of display which has made him a natural successor to Hugo Lloris as Les Bleus' goalkeeper.

The 27-year-old's return between the sticks in late February following five months out injured has given Milan more security at the back, with five clean sheets in their last nine matches in all competitions. His superb stop in the dying seconds on Wednesday denied Giovanni Di Lorenzo from giving Napoli, at that point down to 10 men following the harsh sending off of Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, what would have been a deserved draw.

Former Milan manager Fabio Capello said Maignan was Milan's best player in the first leg and the seven-time European champions will need him in similar form today if they are to have a chance of winning number eight.

While 25-goal Osimhen will be back in Naples, Spalletti will have to do without Anguissa and South Korean defensive revelation Kim Min-jae, who is suspended. What Napoli lose on the pitch they will gain off it however, as hardcore supporters agreed a truce in their feud with owner Aurelio De Laurentiis which had made the atmosphere at Napoli's recent home matches toxic. Supporters made a colossal racket on Saturday and will no doubt make the Stadio Maradona a seething cauldron for possibly the biggest match in Napoli's history.

# Injury fears for Giannis, Morant as Lakers, Heat win in NBA Playoffs

Milwaukee superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo and Memphis star guard Ja Morant suffered serious injuries that threatened to disrupt two title contenders on Sunday in NBA playoff series-opening defeats.

The Los Angeles Lakers took advantage of Morant's absence late in the fourth quarter for a late surge that produced a 128-112 victory at Memphis while the top-seeded host Bucks, who lost their Greek star in the first quarter, fell 130-117 to the eighth-seeded Miami Heat, AFP reported.

But injury fears for Antetokounmpo and Morant, two of the NBA's most electrifying stars, were amplified by upset home losses for their clubs in best-of-seven first round openers. Antetokounmpo averaged 31.1 points and 11.8 rebounds a game this season for an NBA-best 58-24 Bucks squad while Morant averaged 26.2 points for a Grizzlies team that was 51-31.

Morant hurt his already-sore right hand midway into the fourth quarter trying to brace a hard landing to a high fall after contact while driving to the basket.

"I'm in a good bit of pain," Morant said after the game, declaring his status was "in jeopardy" for game two on Wednesday. Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins said

after the game that x-rays on Morant's right hand were negative but he would likely be kept out of workouts, his status "one game at a time."

At Milwaukee, Antetokounmpo went onto the floor in the first quarter after defensive contact on a move to the hoop and suffered a lower back bruise that ended his night with game two in Milwaukee on Wednesday.

"We'll monitor him," said Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer, who added an x-ray came back "clear" on Antetokounmpo.

"We have to wait and see what the doctors say... you've got to take it day by day and see how he's doing and how he feels."

The Heat, among the NBA's worst 3-point shooting teams this season, made 15-of-25 from beyond the arc at Milwaukee.

While the Bucks had gone 11-8 in games without Antetokounmpo this season, the Heat led by as many as 15 points with the big man gone.

Jimmy Butler led Miami with 35 points and 11 assists. Gabe Vincent was 4-of-5 from 3-point range and Kevin Love was 4-of-7 on 3-pointers. With Antetokounmpo scoring only eight points, Khris Middleton led the Bucks with 33 points.

Elsewhere, Kawhi Leonard scored 13 of his game-high 38 points in the fourth quarter to spark the Los An-

geles Clippers to a 115-110 victory at Phoenix in their series opener.

Russell Westbrook had nine points, 10 rebounds, eight assists and three blocked shots, the biggest on Devin Booker in the final seconds to help seal victory.

Kevin Durant had 27 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds but suffered his first loss since joining the Suns from Brooklyn.

Clippers forward Paul George was out with a sprained right knee and is questionable for the playoffs. Japan's Rui Hachimura came off the Lakers bench to match an NBA record for reserve playoff scoring with 29 points while a closing 30-11 LA run.

Austin Reaves, making his playoff debut, scored 14 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter for the Lakers after Memphis opened the period with an 11-2 run for a 101-98 lead.

Anthony Davis had 22 points, 12 rebounds and seven blocked shots for the Lakers while LeBron James contributed 21 points, 11 rebounds and five assists and D'Angelo Russell added 19 points and a game-high seven assists.

It was the first time since 1988 the Lakers had four players with 20 or more points in a playoff game.

Jaren Jackson led Memphis with 31 points.



Lakers' LeBron James goes up for a layup during a victory over Grizzlies in Game 1 of a first-round NBA playoff series in Memphis, TN, US, on April 16, 2023.  
● JOE MURPHY/GETTY IMAGES