The Peninsula
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SPORT

Amir Cup: Al Sadd look to reach final as Al Shahania eye another upset

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

Al Sadd are aware of a threat from Al Shahania as tournament's most decorated side meet the Second Division team in the first semi-final of the Amir Cup to be played at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium today.

Al Shahania have enjoyed a fairytale run in the prestigious tournament so far knocking out QNB Stars League (QSL) sides Al Wakrah and Al Gharafa on their way to the semi-finals.

Al Sadd coach Juan Manuel Lillo, whose side is eyeing a record-extending 19th Amir Cup crown, has said his team will take on Al Shahania with full strength with an eye on the final.

The winners of today's game will meet the victorious side of tomorrow's second semi-final between Al Arabi and Al Sailiya in the final. The title clash will take place at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on May 12.

Al Sadd have marched comfortably to the semi-finals, having thrashed Al Markhiya 4-0 in the Round of 16 before outplaying Umm Salal 3-1 in the quarter-final.

But Lillo was expecting a tough challenge from Al Shahania, who he said have the potential of pulling off another upset.





Al Sadd coach Juan Manuel Lillo (left) and Al Shahania coach Alvaro Mejia during pre-match press conferences yesterday. Pictures: Abdul Basit

"Al Shahania surprised everybody with their first win in the Amir Cup but their second victory [against Al Gharafa] wasn't a surprise. They have proved themselves as a strong side with their performance in the tournament as well as in the Second Division," Al Sadd coach told a press conference yesterday.

Al Sadd are in a unfamiliar situation as they are facing a trophy drought this season with Al Duhail capturing the Ooredoo Cup and Qatar Cup crowns, and are leading the QSL standings with three matches remaining. The Wolves, who are third on the points table, are trailing them by seven points in the league.



Al Sadd's Rodrigo Tabata, Guilherme and Santi Cazorla during a training session.

Lillo knows the coveted Amir Cup is the best chance of silverware for his side this season.

"We will give our best to reach the final. Our total focus right now is tomorrow's semi-final against Al Shahania and we will give them full respect," he said.

Sitting alongside the coach, Al Sadd's Ahmed Al Saeed said: "Al Shahania have been a surprise of the tournament. The match will not be easy but we hope to qualify for the final of the most prestigious tournament. As players, we must make full use of the opportunities provided to us by the coach and give our best."

Meanwhile, Al Shahania coach Alvaro Mejia said his team was confident ahead of the semi-final against Al Sadd.

"We are ready to face Al Sadd. We are proud of what we have achieved in the tournament so far. We are playing against a different team which has the best players in Qatar. But, we must not be afraid and we must focus on winning," he told reporters yesterday.

Al Shahania's Abdulrahman Mesaad said winning the Amir Cup was his team's main goal.

"This tournament is dear to us. There is no pressure on us ahead of this game against Al Sadd. Our goal is the Amir Cup and we have a great desire to beat Al Sadd and reach the final," he said.

The match will kick off at 6:45pm.

Lukaku double fires Inter to easy victory at Empoli

AFP – EMPOLI

Romelu Lukaku shot Inter Milan to a 3-0 win over struggling Empoli yesterday with his first Serie A goals from open play since the opening day of what has been a difficult return season in Italy.

Belgium striker Lukaku netted two fine low finishes in the second half at the Stadio Castellani to help Inter to their first win in Italy's top flight since early March and move them above AC Milan into fifth, two points from the last Champions League place currently held by Roma.

He struck his first from the edge of the area two minutes after the break following a quick exchange of passes with Marcelo Brozovic and doubled Inter's lead in the 76th minute by bursting past Ardian Ismajli and rifling home an angled drive.

Inter will host Juve in the second leg of their Italian Cup semi-final on Wednesday, a match which Lukaku will be allowed to play after his suspension for being sent off in the first leg was revoked.

Saqr wins Al Jumayliyah Cup in style

THE PENINSULA – DOHA



The connection of Saqr celebrate after the Khalifa bin Sheail Al Kuwari-owned gelding won the feature race, the Al Jumayliyah Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. Pic: Juhaim/QREC

The Khalifa bin Sheail Al Kuwari-owned Saqr (FR) made it a double on the day for trainer Jassim Ghazali in the feature race, the Al Jumayliyah Cup in Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club's (QREC) 51st Race Meeting at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The 5YO stayed on well, keeping his rivals at bay in the closing stages to record a one and a quarter length win under jockey Alberto Sanna, who got his name on the scoresheet in the 1700m contest for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds.

Abdulla Rashid Al Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, crowned the winners.

Earlier, having finished runner-up in her last two starts, Mohammed bin Fahad Al Attiya-owned Al Zain (FR) (Al Mourtajez x Manella) went one better to win the 1200m Maiden for 4-6YO Purebred Arabians to give Ghazali's first win of the day.

The 4YO filly was given a confident ride by Soufiane Saadi and once in the straight, she quickened up smartly and stretched clear to win with three and a half lengths to spare.

Earlier, Al Thumama Racing's X Force (IRE) regained the winning thread with a dominant victory in the 1200m Conditions for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds. The 6YO produced an impressive effort, clearing away by six lengths and completing a double on the day for the trainer-jockey combination of Hadi Al Ramzani and Faleh Bughanaim.

Prior to that, the Mansoor Mesfer Al Shahwani-owned and trained Shaleesh (QA) produced a superb performance in the 1200m Local Thoroughbred 3YO Open Race. Once in the straight, the bay colt did not look back and bolted seven and a half lengths clear of the field under jockey Meteb Ali Al Saaq, adding a second win to his three-start career.

The 1900m Handicap (0-90) for 4YO+ Purebred Arabians was taken by the Faisal Salem Al Shahwani-owned and Dr Fahad Salman Al Hajri-trained Mountasir (FR) in good style, as the 7YO horse responded nicely to jockey Mohammed Moussa in the last furlong and kicked on to win by two and a half lengths.

The 1900m Handicap (65-85) for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds saw Soufiane Saadi ride his second winner of the day, as the Rashid Awajan Al Khayarin-owned and Hamad Al Jehani-trained Toromona (IRE) galloped four lengths clear of the field.

A thrilling finish to the Handicap (0-80) for 4YO+ Local Purebred Arabians saw the Al Meqdam Stud-owned and Abdulrahman Abdulwahed-trained Khaldoun (QA) edge out Nomas Al Shajaa (QA) (AF AlBahar) and Hardan (QA) (Assy) to take the 1900m race by a short head and a head under jockey Trevor Patel.

Carrying the colours of Mohammed Abdulla Al Attiya, Dhi Qar (GB) enhanced his highly promising record with a second straight win in his fourth career start.

Under Faleh Bughanaim, the Hadi Al Ramzani-trained 3YO colt waited until the final furlong and then showed a brilliant turn of foot to come from off the pace and win by five lengths in the 1700m Handicap (0-70) for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds.



Qatar SC players celebrate after wining the match.

Benoun strikes late as Qatar SC beat Al Rayyan

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Qatar SC defeated Al Rayyan 1-0 in their postponed match from Week 18 of the QNB Stars League 2022-2023 season at the Al Gharafa Stadium yesterday.

The winning goal for Qatar SC came in the 83rd minute of the match from a penalty strike taken by their Moroccan professional Badr Benoun.

The victory took Qatar SC's points tally to 29 points being 6th in the league standings while Al Rayyan remained 9th with 17 points – tied with 10th placed Al Shamal.

Till the deciding spot kick, Qatar SC had held sway over 'The Lions'. They had made a flurry of raids on the Al Rayyan citadel when on one occasion a strike from Qatar SC substitute Jassim Ahmad Al Jalabi was 'handled' by Dami Terawari.

A VAR check made the referee signal to the spot and Benoun made no mistake in beating Al Rayyan goalkeeper Ivanildo Rodrigues to his right.

Al Rayyan's close chance came in the injury time of the opening half when Yohan Boli made a header off a corner kick but goalkeeper Al Abbasi was well in position to spoil the chance. The lurking Qatar SC eventually reaped the reward as Al Rayyan fumbled inside the danger zone while trying to defend, giving away the penalty. This was Al Rayyan's second successive loss after their 3-4 defeat to Al Duhail in their postponed match of Week 15 last Tuesday, while Qatar SC had lost their last game 0-2 to Al Sadd in Week 19.

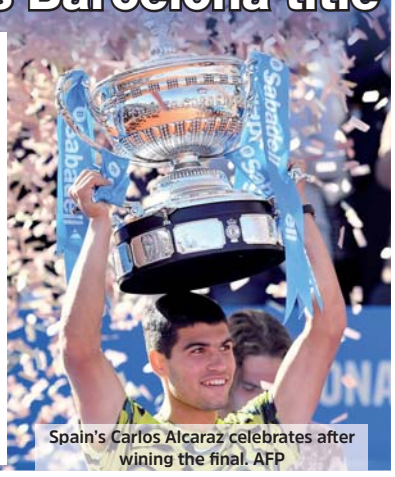
Alcaraz claims Barcelona title

AFP – BARCELONA

Carlos Alcaraz staked his claim as a French Open favourite when he brushed aside Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-3, 6-4 yesterday to win back-to-back Barcelona titles.

The 19-year-old world number two bagged his third trophy of 2023, after winning in Buenos Aires and Indian Wells, and the ninth of his career.

With 14-time French Open champion Rafael Nadal sidelined since January with a hip injury and world number one and two-time Roland Garros winner Novak Djokovic struggling with an elbow problem, Alcaraz will be a major contender to add the clay-court Grand Slam title to the US Open he captured last year.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates after wining the final. AFP

Swiatek beats Sabalenka to seal second straight Stuttgart crown

AFP – BERLIN

World number one Iga Swiatek defeated Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets to win her second consecutive Stuttgart title yesterday.

Swiatek eased past her second-ranked Belarusian opponent 6-3, 6-4 on the clay to give her a great boost ahead of her French Open title defence in May.

The US Open champion broke serve late in the first set and in the opening game of the second to clinch an impressive victory in what was a rematch of last year's final.

The 21-year-old Pole is the first player to win back-to-back Stuttgart titles since Angelique Kerber in 2015 and 2016.

It was the first time a world number one had faced the world number two on clay since the 2013 French Open final, when Serena Williams triumphed over Maria Sharapova.

Swiatek is the first player to win back-to-back Stuttgart titles since Angelique Kerber in 2015 and 2016. It was the first time a world number one had faced the world number two on clay since the 2013 French Open final, when Serena Williams beat Maria Sharapova.



Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates with the trophy. AFP

Kiptum wins London Marathon in 2nd fastest time, Hassan triumphs

AFP – LONDON

Sifan Hassan staged a remarkable rally to win the women's London Marathon yesterday in the Olympic track champion's first race over the distance as Kenya's Kiptum won the men's race in the second-fastest time in history.

It looked as if Hassan's debut marathon would end in disappointment when the 5,000 and 10,000 metres Olympic gold medallist from the Covid-delayed 2020 Tokyo Games was dropped from the leading group and left holding her side after the hour mark.

It would have been impressive enough had the Ethiopian-born Dutch runner, a Muslim who had been fasting due to Ramadan, just completed the course on the rain-swept streets of the British capital, with Hassan then grabbing her hip and stopping to stretch off the injury.

Hassan, however, recovered to rejoin the leaders with three miles to go.

Despite making a mess of collecting a drink from a water station and almost being hit by a race motorcycle, the 30-year-old recovered and even offered rival Yalemzerf Yehualaw, last year's winner, a swig from her bottle.

Hassan, 30, then burst clear in a sprint finish to win in a time of 2 hours, 18 minutes and 33 seconds.

Ethiopia's Alemu Megertu was second in 2:18:37, with Kenya's Peres Jepchirchir, the Olympic champion, third in 2:18:38.

This was the first time Jepchirchir had been defeated in a major marathon race.

"It was just amazing. I never thought I would finish a marathon and here I am winning it!" Hassan told the BBC. Hassan, 28 seconds behind the leaders at 25km (15.5 miles), added: "I can't believe it. I was going to stop at 25km.



Kenya's Kelvin Kiptum breaks the tape to win the men's race at the 2023 London Marathon. AFP

The 23-year-old Kiptum broke the course record in an astonishing time of 2:01:25.

Having broken clear of the field, Kiptum -- who became the third fastest male marathon runner of all time on his debut in Valencia in December -- faded towards the finish and missed out on Eliud Kipchoge's world record by 18 seconds.

Geoffrey Kamworor made it a Kenyan one-two, finishing second in 2:04:23, with Ethiopia's Tamirat Tola third in 2:04:59.

British distance great Mo Farah, in his last marathon before retirement, finished ninth in 2:10:28.

Farah, a four-time Olympic track champion, was not even the first Briton home.

Emile Cairess was sixth in 2:08:07, with Phil Sesseman overtaking Farah in the final few hundred metres.

"I gave it my all but my body just wasn't responding, and that's when you know when it's time to call it a day," said the 40-year-old Farah after confirming he will end his career at September's Great North Run in northeast England.

Marcel Hug won a fifth men's wheelchair race in London, just six days after taking the Boston Marathon title, with the Swiss star shattering his own course record in a time of 1:23:43.

Australia's Madison de Rozario, the 2018 champion, won the women's wheelchair race when she edged out four-time champion Manuela Schar in a sprint finish.

LONDON MARATHON RESULTS

Men (Top 10)
1. Kelvin Kiptum (KEN), 2hrs, 1min, 25secs
2. Geoffrey Kamworor (KEN) 2:04:23
3. Tamirat Tola (ETH) 2:04:59
4. Leul Gebresilase (ETH) 2:05:45
5. Seifu Tura (ETH) 2:06:38
6. Emile Cairess (GBR) 2:08:07
7. Brett Robinson (AUS) 2:10:19
8. Phil Sesemann (GBR) 2:10:23
9. Mo Farah (GBR) 2:10:28
10. Chris Thompson (GBR) 2:11:50

Women (Top 10)
1. Sifan Hassan (NED) 2:18:33
2. Alemu Megertu (ETH) 2:18:37
3. Peres Jepchirchir (KEN) 2:18:38
4. Sheila Chepkirui (KEN) 2:18:51
5. Yalemzerf Yehualaw (ETH) 2:18:53
6. Judith Jeptum Korir (KEN) 2:20:41
7. Almaz Ayana (ETH) 2:20:44
8. Tadu Teshome (ETH) 2:21:31
9. Sofiia Yaremchuk (ITA) 2:24:02
10. Susanna Sullivan (USA) 2:24:27

United beat Brighton on penalties to set up FA Cup final against City

AFP – LONDON

Manchester United beat Brighton on penalties at Wembley yesterday to set up an FA Cup final against treble-chasing Manchester City.

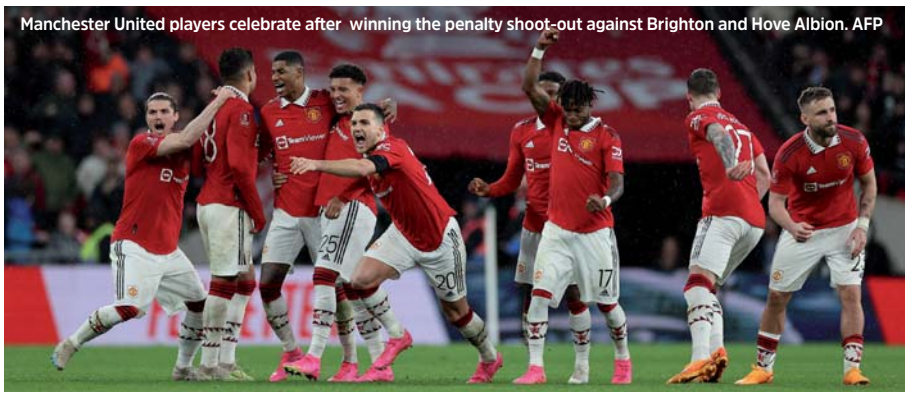
Victor Lindelof scored the decisive spot-kick as Erik ten Hag's team won 7-6, following a miss by Solly March, staying on course for a domestic cup double.

The semi-final finished 0-0 after extra-time, with neither side showing the cutting edge required to break the deadlock.

Ten Hag made three changes from his team's Europa League horror show in Sevilla in midweek.

Luke Shaw came in at centre-back for the suspended Harry Maguire, with Marcus Rashford and Bruno Fernandes replacing Jadon Sancho and Marcel Sabitzer.

The south-coast club settled first and had an early sight of goal when Kaoru Mitoma was brought down clumsily on the edge of the box by Antony in the sixth minute. Argentine World Cup winner Alexis Mac Allister hit a fine curling effort that David De Gea did well to keep out before Julio Enciso flashed a shot wide.


Manchester United players celebrate after winning the penalty shoot-out against Brighton and Hove Albion. AFP

Roberto De Zerbi's Brighton were dominating possession, with United apparently happy to sit back and try to exploit the pace of Rashford and Antony.

Brighton goalkeeper Robert Sanchez beat out a Bruno Fernandes effort in United's first meaningful effort. United, for long periods scrappy, produced a flurry of chances shortly before half-time.

Neither side could break the deadlock and referee Craig Pawson blew for extra-time.

The game became stretched, with half-chances at both ends before Rashford's deflected shot was turned away by Sanchez as the clock ticked down to the end of the first period of extra time. By now United had made five changes.

Top-scorer Rashford, who struggled to hit top gear, flashed wide with 10 minutes to go before De Gea cleared following a goalmouth scramble at the other end.

A high-quality shootout took place in front of the massed ranks of the Brighton fans but ultimately the Red Devils held their nerve.

TOP OF THE TABLE

Rahane magic helps CSK beat Kolkata

AFP – KOLKATA

An electric 71 not out off just 29 balls by Ajinkya Rahane helped Chennai Super Kings rack up this season's highest total of 234-5 as they blew away Kolkata Knight Riders and moved top of the IPL table yesterday.

Despite a blistering 61 off 26 by Jason Roy and a valiant half-century by Rinku Singh, Kolkata fell 49 runs short in front of 60,000 fans at a noisy Eden Gardens stadium to suffer their fourth straight defeat.

Put in to bat, opener Devon Conway hit his fourth consecutive half-century before Rahane and Shivam Dube launched into the Kolkata attack with a barrage of 10 sixes and eight fours to put on 85 off just 32 balls.

Once Kulwant Khejroliya dismissed Dube in the 18th over Rahane moved up a gear, smashing 21 runs off the final five balls he faced to give Chennai their third-highest total in IPL history.

Kolkata got off to a disastrous start, with Sunil Narine falling for a duck to Akash Singh and Narayan Jagadeesan back in the hutch for one to leave the hosts flailing on 1-2.

Venkatesh Iyer struck a useful 20 before falling leg-before to Moeen Ali and Nitish Rana made 27 as Roy raced to his 50 accompanied by the dangerous Rinku.

But the English bruiser was out-foxed by Maheesh Theekshana and Rinku -- who made 53 not out -- lost partners, with Andre Russell, David Wiese, Umesh Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy all out cheaply.

Theekshana ended with 2 for 32 and Tushar Deshpande figures of 2 for 43.

Maxwell's silver hammering

In the first game of the day Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell smashed another big partnership and Harshal Patel held his nerve as Royal Challengers Bangalore beat Rajasthan Royals by seven runs.

Trent Boult trapped Virat Kohli leg-before first ball for his 100th wicket and the Kiwi quick had Bangalore reeling on 12-2 with the scalp of Shahbaz Ahmed at Bangalore's M. Chinnaswamy Stadium.

But Du Plessis -- the top-scorer of the current Indian Premier League edition -- and Maxwell soon got Bangalore out of trouble and ended up hammering 127 runs off only 66 balls.

Du Plessis belted eight fours and two sixes before being run out for 62 off 39 deliveries. Maxwell switch-hit Ravichandran Ashwin straight to Jason Holder at backward point for 77 off 44 balls.

Dinesh Karthik again failed to ignite at the death, making just 16 off 13 and Bangalore ended with a total of 189-9 that gave Rajasthan a glimmer of hope.

But the pink brigade's Jos Buttler was the second star batter of the game to depart for a duck, cleaned up by a jubilant Mohammed Siraj on the England captain's second ball.

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Devdutt Padikkal then added 98 runs for the second wicket but they fell in the space of 12 deliveries.

Sanju Samson managed only 22, while Shimron Hetmyer was run out for three. Dhruv Jurel smacked 34 not out off 16 balls, while Ashwin threw his bat around to bring the game down to the last over.

But despite scoring 10 off three balls Ashwin was caught for 12 going for a big heave to give Harshal his third wicket of the game and Bangalore a seven-run victory.

BRIEF SCORES

Royal Challengers Bangalore 189 for 9 (Maxwell 77, du Plessis 62, Boult 2-41, Sandeep 2-49) **beat Rajasthan Royals** 182 for 6 (Padikkal 52, Jaiswal 47, Jurel 34*, Harshal 3-32) **by seven runs**

Chennai Super Kings 235 for 4 (Rahane 71, Conway 56, Dube 50, Khejroliya 2-44) **beat Kolkata Knight Riders** 186 for 8 (Roy 61, Rinku 53, Theekshana 2-32, Deshpande 2-44) **by 49 runs**

Barca end Atletico's winning run and move closer to title

AP – MADRID

Barcelona ended Atletico Madrid's unbeaten run - and its own slump - with a hard-fought 1-0 win in the Spanish league yesterday, moving closer to its first league title in four years.

The victory halted a six-game winning streak and 13-game unbeaten run for Atletico, which lost ground to Real Madrid in the fight for second place. Barcelona, meanwhile, restored a comfortable 11-point lead over Madrid with eight rounds remaining.

Madrid, focused on the Champions League and the Copa del Rey final, beat Celta Vigo 2-0 at home on Saturday.

Ferran Torres scored a 44th-minute winner at Camp Nou with a well-placed low shot from just inside the area, giving Barcelona its first victory after a three-match winless run that had prompted fears of a meltdown entering the final stretch.

Barcelona hadn't scored in three straight games after being humiliated at home by Madrid 4-0 in the Copa del Rey semifinals and held to scoreless draws against modest league opponents in Girona and Getafe. It was the 23rd clean sheet in the league this season for Barcelona, which last won the league title in 2019.

Third-place Atletico trails Madrid by five points.

It was the third straight win by Barcelona over Atletico, whose last win against the Catalan club was in 2021. It lost at home to Barcelona in their first league game this season.

Atletico, the 2021 champion, threatened first with a shot by Antoine Griezmann that hit the crossbar three minutes into the match, but Diego Simeone's team couldn't create many significant opportunities after that.

Atletico struggled early in the season, quickly falling out of contention for the league title and finishing its Champions League group in last place, but it had been the hottest team in Spain in 2023.

Newcastle crush troubled Spurs 6-1 to shatter their top four bid

AFP – LONDON

Tottenham's bid to qualify for the Champions League suffered a hammer blow as they conceded five times in the first 21 minutes of a humiliating 6-1 defeat at top-four rivals Newcastle yesterday.

Cristian Stellini's side were buried by an avalanche of goals from Jacob Murphy and Alexander Isak, who both netted twice, and strikes from Joelinton and Callum Wilson.

Harry Kane's reply was no consolation for woeful Tottenham, who look certain to miss out on a place in the Premier League's top four after a second successive loss.

The north Londoners are six points behind third-placed Newcastle and fourth-placed Manchester United, having played two more games than United and one more than Newcastle.

Fifth-placed Tottenham host United on Thursday and a defeat against Erik ten Hag's team would surely end their faint hopes of salvaging their troubled campaign.


Brazilian striker Joelinton (left) scores Newcastle United's second goal against Tottenham Hotspur. AFP

Newcastle took just 61 seconds to put Tottenham to the sword as Murphy fired into the roof of the net from close range.

They doubled their lead after six minutes when Joelinton rounded Lloris to slot into the empty net.

The rampant Magpies scored a stunning third goal in the ninth minute as Murphy unleashed a 25-yard drive that swerved past Lloris.

By the time Isak scored Newcastle's fourth and fifth goals, Tottenham's shell-shocked fans were already heading for the exits. It was the second fastest 5-0 lead in Premier League history after Manchester City, who took 18 minutes to do it against Watford in 2019.

Kane reduced the deficit in the 49th minute before Wilson stabbed home in the 67th minute to complete Tottenham's misery.