

Three games away from destiny

Manchester City v Lyon



With just one loss in their last 17 games in the competition and a convincing win over Real Madrid in the round of 16, Pep Guardiola's Manchester City finally appear to be a team worthy of the Champions League title.

The English club have an embarrassment of riches at their disposal and the quality of individuals such as Kevin de Bruyne, Gabriel Jesus, Raheem Sterling and Bernardo Silva coupled with Pep's tactics is a deadly combination.

Yet, Lyon have crashed the party in Lisbon by carving a Juventus-sized hole in the wall, banishing Cristiano Ronaldo's individual brilliance with a concerted team effort.

Lyon will likely not try anything to drastically different against City.

Their game plan will suit them perfectly fine and if all goes to plan, if Memphis Depay scores again as he has done on every European appearance this season, another famous win could be on the cards.



RB Leipzig v Atletico Madrid



Like Atalanta, RB Leipzig can also mark this season as their best-ever in Europe's elite competition. Leipzig saw off 2019 runners-up Tottenham in the round of 16 and the manner in which they did so -- 4-0 on aggregate -- brought them into notice.

Although Timo Werner has moved on and already joined Chelsea, they still have plenty of firepower and the mind of manager Julian Nagelsmann, who becomes the youngest manager to reach the tournament's quarterfinals, to draw inspiration from.

It will not be an easy task against Atletico Madrid, who have endured quite a tumultuous season, finishing 17 points off the pace in La Liga and losing twice in the Champions League's group stage. However, they also eliminated reigning champions Liverpool in the tournament's round of 16. Atletico have been mercurial if nothing else, although their defensive solidity should stand them in good stead in any one-off tie.

Lionel Messi and Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski have been in rich form over the season, but the Polish striker will be hoping to show up the Barcelona magician when the two sides meet in the Champions League quarterfinal.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Barcelona v Bayern Munich



A clash that not only promises to be a meeting between two of the most storied clubs in Europe -- both chasing a sixth crown in Europe's elite competition -- but also one that offers perhaps the two best players in the football world at the moment.

Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski has been smashing records for fun in the Bundesliga this season, but his dominance has extended across Europe. So much so that the pandemic forcing the tournament to shift from two legs to one from the quarterfinals onwards serves as the only real challenge to him overtaking Cristiano Ronaldo's record of 17 goals in a single campaign.

Lewandowski already has 13 goals in the tournament so far and is in red-hot form, as he showed by scoring three and assisting four other goals over two legs in Bayern's 7-1 win over Chelsea in the round of 16.

The Pole will certainly be the focal point for the Spanish outfit, but they will be careful not to take the rest of the double-winning Bavarians lightly even if they can cope with Lewandowski's otherworldly form.

Speaking of the ethereal, Lionel Messi forwent all his doomsday proclamations and showed exactly why he remains, regardless of any challengers offshore, the best player in the world. He put in one of his trademark performances against Napoli after a 1-1 draw in the first leg, scoring a goal, winning a penalty and ultimately securing a 3-1 win on the night.

However, the Argentine's worries will surely have not been allayed by his own performances. If that were the case, there would never be any trouble at the Camp Nou. After a series of stumbles cleared Real Madrid's path to La Liga glory, Messi said: "If we continue like this, we will lose the game against Napoli."

Barcelona did break the trend by defeating Napoli, but the collective effort, especially the kind needed to defeat Bayern Munich, is what they will be looking for.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Atletico Madrid have not had the best of seasons so far, but they have plenty of reason to smile as they are in with a decent chance of making the semifinals.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Despite their lack of individual stars, Lyon have presented a united front throughout the tournament and will hope to continue against Manchester City.

Atalanta v PSG



The surprise package on their Champions League debut, Atalanta blitzed into the quarterfinals after an 8-4 aggregate win against Valencia. Although they had struggled and looked set for a group-stage exit, La Dea bounced back gracefully and are now just three games away from the ultimate prize in club football.

The darlings of the 2019-20 season have not had much go their way as their title challenge fizzled out, but with league-high 98 goals in Serie A, Atalanta have the firepower to deal the knockout blow to any team, especially in a one-off scenario.

On the other hand are a team that have done everything but lift the Champions League, yet find their credentials and mentality questioned at every turn. A team that has one player, Neymar, as much as Atalanta pay their entire



PSG superstar Neymar may have to face the new reality without Kylian Mbappe, but the Brazilian will be the key man if the Parisiens are to break their Champions League jinx against a wary Atalanta.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



squad, claim La Gazzetta dello Sport.

Paris Saint-Germain, who by the by have already won a domestic quadruple this season, found themselves being encircled by the sharks no sooner had the final whistle blown on a 2-1 loss to Dortmund in the first leg of their round of 16 tie. They duly bounced back with a 2-0 win to advance to the quarterfinals for the first time after three seasons.

It is uncertain whether the injured Kylian Mbappe will be able to play in the game or not; the last thing PSG would want is for him to exacerbate any knocks. They have enough potency up front with Edison Cavani, Mauro Icardi and Angel di Maria to go along with Neymar. However, the big names have always been present, the results, not so much.

After years obsessing over the Champions League, it is three games away from Le Parisiens. Whether they can rise to the occasion this time around, only time will tell.

Lapses could endanger rights to hosting foreign teams

MAZHAR UDDIN



With authorities getting green signal to resume sporting activities in a limited scale and by maintaining proper health protocols following sport's ministry's clearance on Monday, the challenge for Bangladesh actually begins now.

As sporting activities -- mostly in terms of training -- are slowly resuming for the first time since the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in March, it will be important for all sports federations and the sports ministry to keep a close eye on the proceedings.

The latest development from cricket is that the Bangladesh Cricket Board is in discussion over the national teams' upcoming tour to Sri Lanka in late September while the New Zealand Cricket has also confirmed hosting 'Tigers' soon. The BCB has also initiated a residential camp for the under-19 team.

With the cricketers having already started individual training after BCB provided facilities across the country, the board is planning to arrange group training keeping the Sri Lanka tour in mind.

On the other hand, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has conducted Covid-19 tests, where 19 out of 36 players and officials were found to be positive even after some of those had initially tested negative two or three days prior to the second tests.

The differing results have created some confusion and health threat, posing serious question marks over the proper start to the camp.

Much like cricket and football,



Bangladesh Cricket Board's chief selector Minhajul Abedin briefs leg-spinner Aminul Islam during an individual training session for the cricketers at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

the under-21 national hockey team has also started fitness training from Monday after a gap of nearly six months. Sixteen hockey players took the Covid-19 test on Saturday where two tested positive. Those two will be at the Air Force isolation centre in cantonment while the rest are scheduled to start training at BAF Bangabandhu Base in Dhaka.

With the sporting world already starting to return to the new normal, the challenge for Bangladesh will be to maintain proper health protocol and remain

disciplined over handling of players' safety and creating a safe environment.

The challenge is not only in participating in different sports events around the world, for Bangladesh the challenge will also be in hosting sporting events since quite a few major tournaments and series have already been postponed in Bangladesh in sports such as cricket, football and hockey over the past four months or so.

Unfortunately, the widely-reported cases of fake testing have already created a negative image

for Bangladesh around the world. Hence it will be of paramount importance for Bangladesh to ensure the authorities maintain world standard when it comes to tackling the situation from their end.

There is no scope for the country's sports to take this matter lightly as international eyes will be on Bangladesh. Even a careless incident can have a huge consequence for the country's sports which will surely damage the image of Bangladesh sports worldwide.

BFF polls on Oct 3 pending govt, FIFA approval

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has fixed October 3 -- just five days before Bangladesh's World Cup Qualifying tie against Afghanistan -- as a tentative date for its much-discussed elections.

The decision was made at the executive committee meeting yesterday, some four and a half months after the local game's governing body postponed its April 20 elections on March 28 in the face of heavy criticism amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

"We have taken a preliminary decision to hold the annual general meeting and polls on October 3 at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel with 139 delegates eligible to cast their votes," said BFF senior vice president Abdu Salam Murshedy, adding that they will write to FIFA again about their latest decision to hold AGM and elections.

BFF vice president Mohiuddin Ahmed Mohi said if the government permits and FIFA has no objections to staging the elections, then October 3 will be the final date to hold the AGM and elections.

There had been some controversy surrounding the preparation of the voters' list and a lot of discussion took place about the list at the meeting but it finally approved a list of 139 delegates after excluding two delegates from Bangladesh Championship League sides Fortis FA and Uttara FC.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem

Shohag hopes to get FIFA approval and thus reinstate the three-member election committee to request them to take the next step.

"Bangladesh have already opened everything, with offices going on full-swing, two parliamentary elections took place and the government also gave approval to resume sports activities on a limited scale yesterday [Monday]," said Shohag.

All executive members except Badal Roy, Fazlur Rahman Babul and Sheikh Mohammad Aslam attended the meeting either physically or virtually. However, a decision could not be reached about when to start the 2020-21 season.

"The meeting asked professional league committee chairman Abdu Salam Murshedy to sit with the clubs and players to take the decision regarding the next season," said Shohag.

However, Mohi, also director-in-charge of Brothers Union, has been against the move to start the new season this year, citing the financial crisis of the clubs.

The meeting also decided to resume the women's football league in November-December but the women's committee must talk to the clubs before taking any final decision.

The meeting finally approved the income-and-expenditure of 2019 with Tk 37.3 crore expenditure against an income of Tk 36.9 crore. The meeting also approved an estimated budget Tk 52.31 crore for 2021.

