

Boost for Europa champs

AFP, London

The winners of the Europa League will automatically qualify for a place in the lucrative Champions League from 2015, UEFA announced on Friday.

UEFA president Michel Platini said the winner of the 2014-15 Europa League would play in the 2015-16 Champions League.

The move comes in a bid to boost the appeal of the second-tier tournament.

"As was proven with this year's magnificent final, the UEFA Europa League has gone from strength to strength, but we wanted to give clubs a further incentive, so that all of them play with a desire to win the competition," Platini said.

"By guaranteeing access to the UEFA Champions League for the winners, we are convinced that the UEFA Europa League will increase its appeal for clubs and their supporters."

'2 phenoms better than 1'

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona full-back Dani Alves has claimed the signing of his Brazilian international colleague Neymar would help ease the burden that has been placed on Lionel Messi this season.

The four-time World Player of the Year has scored 60 times this season despite an injury-hit last couple of months to the campaign, whilst the second-highest scorer in the squad, David Villa, has only registered 14 goals.

And Alves doesn't believe pairing Neymar and Messi together would be a problem should Barca finally complete their pursuit of the 21-year-old before the start of next season.

"Two phenomenons are better than one," he told Barcelona sports daily El Mundo Deportivo.

"They are two good players and play in different positions. They would understand each other."

"It doesn't bother Neymar to be the protagonist or not, although his way of playing will always attract attention. Neymar would be a relief, he would help Leo a lot."

BVB 09

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

JURGEN KLOPP (GER)

FINAL

FC BAYERN MÜNCHEN EV

BAYERN MUNICH

JUPP HEYNCKES (GER)

ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI

THOMAS MULLER

Wembley Stadium, London

Kick off 1245 BST

Referee Nicola Rizzoli (ITA)

GS 23

GA 12

GS 31

GA 8

12 MATCHES PLAYED

The deadly Robert Lewandowski plundered a hat-trick against Real Madrid in the semifinal, while the crafty Thomas Müller is excelling at playing behind the striker

10 GOALS

8 GOALS

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2012	CHELSEA
2011	BARCELONA
2010	INTER MILAN
2009	BARCELONA
2008	MAN UNITED
2007	AC MILAN

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Dortmund will look to use the speed and directness of **Marco Reus** to get at Bayern's stingy defence

Ilkay Gündogan is the fulcrum of the Dortmund side; his playmaking is integral to Dortmund's approach

The dynamic **Franck Ribery** is perhaps Bayern's best player, cutting in from the left to deadly effect

Bastian Schweinsteiger will look to stamp his authority on the game to give Bayern the edge

HISTORY

2

In 2012-13, Dortmund have won only two of their seven competitive matches without Mario Götze

3

Bayern Munich have lost 3 CL finals (like Juventus and AC Milan) - no side has ever lost four finals in the CL

1st ever all-German final tonight

AFP, London

The home of English football will reverberate to the roar of German voices on Saturday when Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund collide at Wembley Stadium in the first all-Bundesliga final in Champions League history.

It is only two years since Barcelona confirmed their status as Europe's pre-eminent side by outclassing Manchester United in the same arena to win the 2011 tournament, but the way that Bayern and Dortmund have torn through this season's competition suggests a new continental order is asserting itself.

Bayern left Barca in ruins with an incredible 7-0 aggregate win in the semi-finals, while Dortmund's 4-1 defeat of Real Madrid in the same round left the football world open-mouthed in amazement.

Irrespective of the result, it is certain to be a monumental evening for German football, but the two sides approach the game driven by very different motivations.

For Bayern, the game represents an opportunity to make amends for painful final defeats in 2010 and, in particular, 2012, when a heart-breaking penalty shoot-out loss to Chelsea was played out before a crowd of horrified and disbelieving fans at their own Allianz Arena.

Dortmund, the 1997 champions, yearn to inflict further misery upon Bayern, who have gravely undermined their opponents' attempts to establish themselves as credible long-term rivals by snatching away star playmaker Mario Goetze in a sensational 37 million euros (£31.7 million, \$47.8 million) transfer.

A hamstring injury to Goetze has reduced the risk of diplomatic embarrassment on Saturday, but Bayern are also believed to lead the race for Dortmund's Polish striker Robert Lewandowski, who put Madrid to the sword with an extraordinary four-goal haul in the first leg of their semi-final.

Goalkeeper Roman Weidenfeller has tried to downplay the significance of Goetze's injury by pointing to the 2012 German Cup final, when Dortmund thrashed Bayern 5-2 in his absence.

"It goes without saying that with him we

have a different quality," he said. "But every thing shouldn't rest on him. In the DFB-Pokal final in 2012, Mario also didn't play."

After losing five times in a row to Dortmund during the Ruhr club's back-to-back Bundesliga title successes in 2011 and 2012, Bayern have redressed the balance this season, avoiding defeat in all four of their most recent contests en route to a night-on flawless triumph in the German title race.

Saturday's game will be the 101st competitive meeting between the sides and after seven encounters over the last two seasons, Bayern manager Jupp Heynckes believes there is little scope for sleight of hand.

"Both teams know each other very well, both trainers are fully informed about the opponent, so there are no secrets," he said.

Heynckes can become only the fourth coach to win the competition with two different clubs, having previously led Madrid to their eighth Champions League title in 1998.

It will, however, be the 68-year-old's final match in the dug-out.

He has announced his retirement after former Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola was appointed to succeed him, despite a phenomenal campaign that could end with Bayern claiming their first ever treble of league, German Cup and Champions League honours.

Nine years after almost going bust, Dortmund hope to repeat their shock 1997 success, when a young Lars Ricken, now the club's youth team co-ordinator, came off the bench to seal a 3-1 win over Juventus at Munich's Olympiastadion with an audacious 25-yard chip.

Juergen Klopp's side have charmed neutrals with their breathless counter-attacking football over the last three seasons and the likeable 45-year-old Dortmund manager hopes their rise has not left the impartial observer unmoved.

"We are a club, not a company, but it depends on which kind of story the neutral fan wants to hear," he told British newspaper The Guardian.

"If he respects the story of Bayern, and how much they have won since the 1970s, he can support them. But if he wants the new story, the special story, it must be Dortmund."

Monaco sign Porto duo

AFP, Paris

AS Monaco have reached agreement with Porto to sign Joao Moutinho and James Rodriguez, the club announced on Friday.

The Portuguese champions revealed that the deal was worth a combined fee of 70 million euros (\$90.6m).

Monaco, who will be back in the French

top flight next season after winning the second-tier title, said 26-year-old Portuguese international midfielder Moutinho and 21-year-old Colombian international forward Rodriguez had both agreed five-year deals.

Porto said Rodriguez was valued at 45 million euros and Moutinho at 25 million, with the deal "the biggest in Portuguese football history."

Porto will make a massive profit on both.

Half-fit Messi called up SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Sergio Romero (Sampdoria, ITA), Mariano Andujar (Catania, ITA)

Defenders: Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City, ENG), Ezequiel Garay (Benfica, POR), Federico Fernandez (Getafe, ESP), Marcos Rojo (Sporting Lisbon, POR), Hugo Campagnaro (Napoli, ITA), Jose Basanta (Monterrey, MEX), Fabricio Coloccini (Newcastle, ENG)

Midfielders: Javier Mascherano (Barcelona, ESP), Ever Banega (Valencia, ESP), Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid, ESP), Jose Sosa (Metallist Kharkiv, UKR), Pablo Guinazu (Libertad, PAR), Augusto Fernandez (Celta Vigo, ESP), Erik Lamela (AS Roma, ITA), Lucas Biglia (Anderlecht, BEL), Walter Montillo (Santos, BRA)

Forwards: Lionel Messi (Barcelona, ESP), Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid, ESP), Sergio Aguero (Manchester City, ENG), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Paris Saint-Germain, FRA),

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Alejandro Sabella has called up Lionel Messi for the forthcoming World Cup qualifiers against Colombia and Ecuador, even though the Barcelona forward is only half-fit.

Messi, recovering from a thigh injury which limited his participation in the Catalan club's Champions League semi-final rout by Bayern Munich, is a key figure in the squad to play Colombia in Buenos Aires on June 7 and then travel to Quito for a match against Ecuador four days later.

Sabella can also call on Ezequiel Lavezzi but is without his Paris St Germain colleague Javier Pastore.

Argentina currently top the South American qualifying group on 24 points, ahead of Ecuador, with 20, and Colombia, on 19.

PHOTO: AFP

Paris Saint-Germain midfielder David Beckham smiles as he poses at a Swedish multinational retail-clothing company H&M store in Paris yesterday.

City win 7 goal thriller

AFP, St. Louis

Micah Richards scored in the 90th minute to complete a stunning comeback from a three-goal deficit and give Manchester City a 4-3 victory over Chelsea in an exhibition thriller Thursday.

The English Premier League sides, both bound for next year's European Champions League after top-three finishes behind league winner Manchester United, attracted 48,263 to the home of baseball's St. Louis Cardinals.

Demba Ba's header in the 15th minute gave Chelsea the lead and Cesar Azpilicueta

netted his first goal for the Blues on a penalty kick in the 44th minute.

Oscar made the lead 3-0 nine minutes into the second half and Rafael Benitez's side appeared on the way to victory.

But Javier Garcia put City on the scoreboard in the 61st minute and Edin Dzeko followed in the 64th to breathe a spark into City.

Dzeko then netted the equalizer in the 85th minute, setting the stage for Richards to convert the winner off a Garcia cross in the dying seconds.

Both teams wore black armbands as a mark of respect for those who lost their lives in the tornado tragedy earlier in the week in nearby Oklahoma.

"I am going to Spain to watch Real Madrid vs Barcelona Live!"

-Omar Faruk, Dhaka. WINNER OF THE WEEK

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For details: Log on to /clear and keep your eyes on at 1:30pm and 11:30pm today

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*Conditions apply