



Battle for top spot

AFP, Munich



TEN Action
UEFA Champions League
Man United v Shakhtar Donetsk
Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)
TEN Sports
UEFA Champions League
Bayern Munich v Man City
Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)

Coach Manuel Pellegrini admits Manchester City face an uphill task to break Bayern Munich's record winning streak in the Champions League in Tuesday's battle for top spot in Group D.

Bayern are on record runs in both the Bundesliga and Champions League and their 3-1 win at CSKA Moscow a fortnight ago was their tenth straight victory in Europe, breaking Barcelona's previous record.

Bayern have turned the Allianz Arena into something of a fortress of late, winning all 18 home matches in all competitions since their last defeat in Munich last March at the hands of Arsenal.

Both City and Bayern sides are through to the knock-out stages and all that remains to be settled is who will finish top of the group.

The defending champions have won their entire five group games so far, including a dominant 3-1 win last October at City, who are three points behind the German side.

Pellegrini's side would need to better that result at the Allianz Arena to knock Pep Guardiola's Munich from top spot.

City have already pulled off a landmark achievement by reaching the Champions League's knock-out stages, at the third attempt, with a 4-2 home win over Czech outfit Viktoria Plzen at home a fortnight ago.

"We have qualified for the next round and this is very good," said Pellegrini.

"It would be better to be first in the group, but we have already played against a very strong Bayern Munich team.

"They played better than us (in Manchester) and it will be very difficult to beat them 3-0 at their ground.

"But we will try to do a very good match and we will try to win."

Despite beating CSKA Moscow and Pilsen on the road in Europe this season, City's away record in the Premier League is

poor with only two wins in eight away games, including Saturday's 1-1 draw at Southampton.

Pellegrini is hoping to have Spanish playmaker David Silva back from injury.

The Spanish attacking midfielder has missed City's last five matches due to a calf injury.

Germany captain Philipp Lahm could return for Bayern having missed the last few weeks with a hamstring injury, but Bayern are definitely without winger Arjen Robben.

The Dutchman is recovering from a deep thigh cut, but the European champions showed no signs of missing Robben, who had scored in each of his four matches before injury struck, when they romped to a 7-0 win at Werder Bremen on Saturday.

It was the Bavarian giants' 40th unbeaten Bundesliga match since losing to Bayer Leverkusen in October 2012 and Guardiola said he was 'honoured' by his team's performance.

France's Franck Ribery showed he is back at his best after a rib injury with two goals and two assists in an outstanding display.

Despite becoming the first German team to win the treble of European, league and cup titles under Jupp Heynckes last season, his successor Guardiola is ensuring Bayern maintain their high standards.

Bayern face more international competition after the City game as they travel to Morocco to play in the Club World Cup and will want to finish their Champions League group campaign on a high.

FIXTURES

Manchester United (ENG) v Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR), Real Sociedad (ESP) v Bayer Leverkusen (GER), Galatasaray (TUR) v Juventus (ITA), FC Copenhagen (DEN) v Real Madrid (ESP), Benfica (POR) v Paris Saint-Germain (FRA), Olympiakos (GRE) v Anderlecht (BEL), Bayern Munich (GER) v Manchester City (ENG), Viktoria Plzen (CZE) v CSKA Moscow (RUS)



Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery eyes the ball during a training session in Munich yesterday on the eve of their Champions League match against Manchester City.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Messi, Ribery and Ronaldo shortlisted

AFP, Paris

Lionel Messi, Franck Ribery and Cristiano Ronaldo were on Monday shortlisted for this year's Ballon d'Or, football's world governing body FIFA and sponsors France Football magazine said.

Barcelona forward Messi has already won the title four times but seems less of a hot favourite this year after an injury-hit season.

French winger Ribery was part of a Bayern Munich team that claimed an unprecedented treble of Champions League, German title and German Cup, as well as the European Supercup.

Real Madrid's Portugal striker Ronaldo won the 2008 Ballon d'Or and has been tipped to win the award this time around.

The Ballon d'Or will be presented in Zurich on January 13.

Ribery's former Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes is up against ex-Manchester United supremo Alex Ferguson and Jurgen Klopp (Borussia Dortmund) in the male coach of the year nominees.

Ralf Kellermann (VfL Wolfsburg), Silvia Neid (German national team) and Pia Sundhage (Swedish national team) are the selected trio of coaches for women's football.

Nadine Angerer (Germany), Marta (Brazil) and Abby Wambach (USA) are the three three candidates for the FIFA Womens' Player of the Year award.

What's wrong with MU?

AFP, London



Manchester United's home defeat by Newcastle United at the weekend left them 13 points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal and in danger of missing out on a Champions League place.

With Everton having won at Old Trafford four days earlier, the 20-time English champions have now lost consecutive home league games for the first time since 2002.

Here are the factors behind United's alarming slump since David Moyes succeeded Alex Ferguson as manager in July.

Flimsy central midfield

Not since Roy Keane's pomp have United had a real driving force in the centre of the pitch and their lack of options in that area has been highlighted by an Achilles injury that has sidelined Michael Carrick. Moyes has tested two different partnerships in United's last two matches -- Marouane Fellaini and Ryan Giggs in the loss to Everton, Phil Jones and Tom Cleverley in the 1-0 defeat by Newcastle -- and neither worked. Giggs's age means that he must be managed carefully, while Fellaini is still finding his feet following his move from Everton and neither Jones nor Cleverley are specialist holding players. Former United youth-team player Robbie Savage, now a media pundit, said: "They have missed (Carrick's) ability to keep the ball, and they do not have another defensive-minded player in their squad."

Injury to Van Persie

Former Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini said that Van Persie was the deciding factor in last season's title race as the Dutchman's 26 league goals helped United finish 11 points clear at the top of the table. His recent absence with groin and toe injuries saw United held at Cardiff City and Tottenham Hotspur, before being beaten by Everton. He returned against Newcastle, but did not appear fully fit. Moyes admitted that he should have been substituted with 30 minutes to play, but with United chasing the game and Wayne Rooney suspended, the former Arsenal man stayed on.

Failure to strengthen

Fellaini, a £27.5 million (\$45 million, 33.2 million euros) recruit from Moyes's former club Everton, was the only major new arrival during the close season. Whereas United missed out on targets including Leighton Baines, Cesc Fabregas, Thiago Alcantara and Ander Herrera, all of their rivals strengthened. Arsenal were transformed by the £42.4 million record signing of Mesut Ozil from Real Madrid, while Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City all invested at least £50 million in new players - and all are now looking down on United.

Moyes's methods

Changing-room dissent was not tolerated by Ferguson, but Rio Ferdinand openly questioned Moyes's methods at the weekend when he said that the Scot's habit of waiting until the last minute before naming his starting XI was creating "nervous energy". Moyes pledged not to tinker with Ferguson's winning formula, but he has already overseen sweeping changes, notably with the introduction of a completely new set of coaches. Pundits including former United defender Gary Neville have observed that United appear to be taking up deeper defensive positions on the pitch, while they have also become more vulnerable at set-pieces. For his part, Moyes has emphasised that the club are going through a "great transition".

Loss of fear factor

West Bromwich Albion manager Steve Clarke said that his side felt no fear about visiting Old Trafford prior to a 2-1 win there in September and United's home ground is losing its capacity to intimidate. Teams who had the temerity to take the lead against Ferguson's United could expect a ferocious onslaught as the hosts pushed for an equaliser, but Newcastle saw out their victory in relative serenity. "Usually whenever we're chasing a goal at Old Trafford, especially at the Stretford End, we put teams under an enormous amount of pressure," said centre-back Jonny Evans. "But with the lack of confidence and creativity, we didn't produce that. It is hard to put your finger on it."

Owens's medal earns \$1.4m

AFP, Los Angeles

An Olympic gold medal won by Jesse Owens at the 1936 Berlin Games has sold at auction for 1,466,574 dollars, the highest price ever paid for a piece of Olympic memorabilia.

SCP Auctions based in Laguna Niguel, California, said the price for the medal in the auction that concluded on Sunday surpassed that of a silver cup won by the winner of the first modern-day Olympic marathon in 1896 that sold for 865,000 dollars in April 2012 and the highest price paid for a US Olympic item -- the "Miracle on Ice" hockey jersey worn by team captain Mike Eruzione -- that sold for 657,250 dollars in February of 2013.

The auction, including more than 1,000 sports memorabilia items, brought in a total of nearly 4.5 million dollars.

With Germany's Adolph Hitler using the Olympics as a backdrop for notions of an aryan master race, US legend Owens famously showed the power of a black athlete by capturing gold in the 100 and 200 meters, the long jump and the 4x100m relay.

The medal sold in the auction was not identifiable to a specific event but was given to famed dance and movie star Bill "Bojangles" Robinson by Owens after Robinson helped Owens find work in the years after his epic Olympic victories.

Waqar, Gilly in ICC Hall of Fame

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan's pace bowling great Waqar Yousif and former Australian wicket-keeper Adam Gilchrist were on Monday inducted into cricket's Hall of Fame, the International Cricket Council said.

Waqar joins Hanif Mohammad and former team-mates Imran Khan, Javed Miandad and Wasim Akram as the Pakistanis in the exclusive club. Gilchrist will be the 19th Australian male inductee, the ICC said.

Waqar will be honoured by the governing body during the Twenty20 international between Pakistan and Sri Lanka in Dubai on Wednesday.

WI look to NZ weak link

2nd Test starts tomorrow

AFP, Wellington



The West Indies are hoping to take advantage of an exhausted New Zealand attack in the second Test starting Wednesday after the home side's bowlers sent down more than 200 overs without a break in the series opener.

The visitors -- helped by wet weather -- battled to a draw in the first Test in Dunedin on Saturday after being forced to follow-on 396 runs behind but Darren Bravo mounted a stubborn rear-guard action, top-scoring in West Indies' second innings with 218.

New Zealand, who looked certain to wrap up victory on the final day, were left frustrated after rain washed out the final session of play, leaving them an agonising 33 runs short of their first win for more than a year.

Skipper Brendon McCullum must ponder how to manage his strike force in the second Test in Wellington while West Indies skipper Darren Sammy believes his team could benefit from the New Zealand bowlers' fatigue.

"Their bowlers toiled and that's a lot of yards in the legs," Sammy said. "I guess my bowlers will be much fresher than their bowlers so hopefully we can go into the second Test and they'll be a bit tired and we will be a fresher team."

C'Ron eyes goal record

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo can set a new record for goals scored in a Champions League group stage when already-qualified Real Madrid visit FC Copenhagen on Tuesday.

The Portuguese has found the net eight times in just four European appearances this season to equal the record jointly held by Ruud Van Nistelrooy, Filippo Inzaghi, Hernan Crespo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who has also scored eight times for Paris Saint-Germain this season.

Ronaldo has missed Madrid's last three games due to a slight muscular injury and suspension respectively, but Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti confirmed that he will return in midweek despite Madrid having already sealed their place in the last 16.

"Cristiano is fine, he is training with the rest of the team and he will play on Tuesday without any problem," said the Italian.

And despite a lot of talk surrounding what he may do at the World Cup next summer, Ronaldo insisted his primary focus is on delivering trophies for Madrid before making his way to Brazil.

"There's still a long way to go to the World Cup and I am focused on my club. I want to win everything and then we'll see about the World Cup," he said.

"We have to enjoy the present, right now we are playing well in the Champions League, La Liga and now the Copa del Rey.

"I hope Madrid can win something important. There is still a long way to go until the World Cup and anything could happen. My aim is to stay focused on my club and give my best."

Gareth Bale is also expected to return in the Danish capital as he trained alongside Ronaldo on Sunday despite missing Real's 0-0 draw away to third tier Olympic Xativa in the first-leg of their Copa del Rey tie on Saturday due to the flu.

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৩৫ **সোম ও মঙ্গলবার, রাত ৯.০৫ মিনিটে**

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