

# Atletico break the curse

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid rounded off the best season in the club's 111-year history on Saturday by claiming their 10th La Liga title with a 1-1 draw away to Barcelona.

A first league title for 18 years under former player Diego Simeone completes the remarkable transformation of the club that once nicknamed itself "the cursed ones".

When Simeone arrived back at Atletico two days before Christmas in 2011, the club sat four points from the relegation zone and had just been eliminated by third tier Albacete over two legs in the Copa del Rey.

Nearly two-and-a-half years later nine of those beaten by Albacete were parading around Stamford Bridge having just defeated Chelsea 3-1 to reach the club's first Champions League final for 40 years.

Simeone had been welcomed back as a prodigal son straight away. A key component of the side the last time Atletico won the league 18 years ago, the club's spiral coincided with his departure as just four seasons later they were relegated.

Led back to the top flight by a fresh-faced Fernando Torres, the Atletico fans became accustomed to loving and losing as one by one each of their heroes was picked off by richer foes abroad.

Torres' transfer to Liverpool in 2007 was followed by the departures of Sergio Aguero, Diego Forlan and David de Gea before Simeone's appointment.

Even a period of sustained success under the Argentine which reaped the Europa League in 2012, Champions League qualification and a first victory over Real Madrid in 14 years in the Copa del Rey final last season, Atletico couldn't hold onto their star player.

When Valencia last achieved the feat 10 years ago, the world and Spanish football was in a different place. An economic boom had allowed the likes of Valencia and Deportivo la Coruna to spend well beyond their means to compete at home and abroad.

Whilst the financial crisis has crippled the rest of Spanish football in the meantime, Barcelona and Real have continuously got richer thanks to their expanding brands around the globe and an imbalanced TV deal structured to allow the big two to take nearly 50 percent of the total value of the rights.

Last summer every single La Liga side lost one or more of their best players barring Barca and Madrid. The continued exodus of the likes of Alvaro Negredo, Jesus Navas, Roberto Soldado, Falcao and Fernando Llorente only serving to increase the gap.

When Valencia won the league 10 years ago they did so with 77 points. For the past two seasons Real and Barca were crowned champions respectively with 100.

A three-way race has lowered that tally slightly this season, but Atletico easily surpassed their club record of 87, which came in a 22-team league in 1995/96, to register 90.

To keep that level of consistency up for 38 games is extraordinary in itself, to do so in a season in which they will play 61 matches in total speaks volumes of Simeone's ability to motivate and manage his squad throughout the season.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich players celebrate with the trophy after winning the DFB German Cup final against Borussia Dortmund at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on Saturday.

## Bayern Munich snag the Pokal

AFP, Berlin



Arjen Robben and Thomas Mueller scored extra-time goals as Bayern Munich won the German Cup with a 2-0 victory over Borussia Dortmund on Saturday.

After the first 90 minutes finished goalless, Robben broke the drought in the 107th-minute before Mueller added a second in time added-on.

Coach Pep Guardiola finishes his first season in charge of Bayern with four trophies having already won the Bundesliga title, Club World Cup and UEFA Super Cup.

"When a team wins the German league title, it's already been a good season," said Guardiola.

"That was the most important title, but of course we are very happy that we have won the cup."

Bayern lifted the German Cup for a record 17th time to claim the domestic league and cup double -- the Champions League was the only title to evade the Bavarian giants this season.

But Guardiola admitted he deserved criticism from the German

media in the wake of their 4-0 home drubbing by Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-final, second-leg.

"The criticism was quite justified, I did things I shouldn't have done," said Guardiola.

"I made mistakes in our playing style and tactics against Real, but things like that can happen in big games against big clubs."

Having also scored the late winner in the 2013 Champions League final against Borussia at Wembley, Netherlands winger Robben again broke Dortmund hearts.

"We were finished at the end," admitted Dortmund's coach Jurgen Klopp, who was left fuming after television replays showed a second-half Mats Hummels header crossed the line, but was not given.

"We tortured ourselves and gave everything. In the phase when we were stronger, we scored a goal, which wasn't given.

"That should have been seen (by the referee) even without goal-line technology."

There was no fairytale finish for

Poland striker Robert Lewandowski who had promised to finish his four years at Dortmund by lifting the cup before joining Bayern next season.

This was the fourth and final time Germany's top two sides met this season with both teams finishing with two wins a piece.

Bayern were forced into a late change when Austria left-back David Alaba dropped out with a stomach muscle injury and Brazil's Rafinha slotted into his place.

Munich were already without defensive midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger, ruled out with a knee injury while striker Mario Mandzukic having been dropped.

Guardiola opted to play a new 3-4-3 system and included 18-year-old midfielder Pierre-Emile Hoejbjerg, who was making only his 11th first team appearance.

Dortmund were at near full strength with Lewandowski making his final appearance in the yellow-black shirt.

Bayern made a bright start as Mueller and Robben both forced Dortmund captain and goalkeeper Roman Weidenfeller into early saves.

The Bayern bench said Lahm had taken a knock to the fibula, but it was not serious and he is expected to join the Germany training camp which starts on Wednesday.

Hoejbjerg squandered a great chance with half-time approaching when he fired wide from the penalty area after being left unmarked.

At the other end, Lewandowski cannoned his shot over the bar moments later.

Both teams had clear chances in the second half as Mueller's shot at point-blank range was smothered by Weidenfeller on 56 minutes.

And at the other end, Dortmund defender Mats Hummels' header was saved off the line on 64 minutes by Bayern's Dante.

After the game went to extra-time, Robben broke the drought when he fired home at the near post from five metres out.

Mueller then took advantage of tired Dortmund legs when he held off Germany team-mate Marcel Schmelzer and rounded Weidenfeller just before the final whistle as Bayern defended their cup title.

## Tata Martino bids farewell

THE GUARDIAN

Gerardo Martino said he is leaving Barcelona after a disappointing first season that ended with his team losing their Spanish league title in the season's final game.

The Argentinian manager said he has reached an agreement to cease being the coach after Barcelona were held 1-1 by Atletico Madrid, who were crowned as champions of Spain.

"I want to tell you that I have agreed with the club that I will no longer be Barcelona's manager," Martino, known as Tata, said. "I would like to thank everyone for trusting me in me."

"I am sorry that we did not achieve the objectives that this club had been achieving year after year. I would like to thank absolutely everyone. I want to thank the players. I would rather not talk about their qualities as footballers but as people; this club has great people here."

## Mandanda to miss WC

AFP, Paris

France's second choice goalkeeper Steve Mandanda faces a battle to be fit for the World Cup finals after it was announced on Sunday he would be sidelined for six weeks.

The 29-year-old Marseille keeper, who is the understudy in the French national team to Hugo Lloris, suffered a cracked vertebra in his neck following a collision with Guingamp striker Mustapha Yatabare in Saturday's Ligue 1 match.

"Mandanda will wear a neck brace for three weeks and then undergo a similar period of rehabilitation," Marseille said in a statement.



Arsenal players celebrate with the FA Cup outside the Emirates Stadium as part of their victory parade in London after beating Hull City 3-2 in the final on Saturday.

## The drought is over

REUTERS, London



Tens of thousands of raucous Arsenal fans filled the streets of Islington in north London on Sunday to hail their team's comeback victory in Saturday's FA Cup final.

In warm sunshine under blue skies, on the capital's hottest day of the year, manager Arsene Wenger and his squad laughed, danced and waved during a celebratory open-top bus tour.

Arsenal recovered from two goals down in the opening eight minutes to defeat Hull City 3-2 after extra time at Wembley and lift their first trophy in nine years.

Their previous success came after beating Manchester United 5-4 on penalties in the 2005 final.

'After 8 years, 11 months, 26 days, 38 minutes and 20 seconds... Arsenal win a trophy' declared The Sunday Times, with a Jose Mourinho-esque sense of irony.

Wenger, who said it was the most important win of his career, had signalled that he was also set to stay at the club following the

imminent expiry of his contract, but there was no official statement to confirm he will extend his 18 years' in charge.

"This trophy is for him," match-winning goalscorer Aaron Ramsey told Sky Sports News. "He's backed us and stood by us and he is so instrumental in the way we play."

Wenger, soaked in champagne and given 'the bumps' by his players on Saturday, was once again dressed in his pristine uniform - of white shirt and black trousers - as he smiled for photographs.

His team's success had not only ended the club's second-longest spell without success since 1930, but also answered their critics, including Chelsea boss Mourinho, who had labelled Wenger as a 'specialist in failure'.

"The happiness is linked sometimes with the suffering, and the time you have to wait, and that's why it's such a great moment," said Wenger, who has won the FA Cup five times with Arsenal.

In less sober style, his players shared a microphone to perform an impromptu karaoke of football anthems. Lanky German defender Per Mertesacker's rendition of 'Arsenal 'till I die' triggered an impassioned chorus as past impatience was set aside and a new era of hope ushered in.

## Djokovic Rome master

AFP, Rome

Novak Djokovic fought back to stun defending champion and seven-time winner Rafael Nadal to claim the Rome Masters 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 on Sunday.

Serbia's world number two Djokovic claimed his third title on the red clay of Rome, having won in 2008 and 2011, the latter with victory over his Spanish rival.

Sunday's win was also Djokovic's 19th career Masters title and his 19th win against Nadal in 41 meetings.

Nadal had been looking to stretch his record of seven titles in the Italian capital.

But despite a dominant first-set

unforced errors to creep into his game as Djokovic launched a valiant fightback to put himself in pole position to win a first title at the forthcoming French Open.

Nadal came into Sunday's final expected to claim an eighth Italian title having won at the Foro Italico every year since 2005 except in 2008 and 2011.

He booked his final ticket with a straightforward win over outclassed 12th seed Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria, while Djokovic had been stretched by hard-hitting Canadian Milos Raonic.

It certainly seemed it would be Nadal's day when he broke the Serb twice on his way to a quick 4-1 lead in the opening set, which he went on to win 6-4 as Djokovic made a series of

breaks.

Djokovic, however, pulled his game together early in the second set, break-

ing Nadal's serve as early as the second game.

Although Nadal defiantly broke back to 3-2, Djokovic went on to level the contest, taking the second set 6-3.

Djokovic had hit eight forehand and four backhand winners to Nadal's one in the second set, and the Serb carried the momentum into the deciding set, breaking Nadal early for a 2-0 lead.

Nadal pumped his fists when he saved serve in a tightly-contested fifth game and was given more hope when he broke to 3-3 in the next.

But the 27-year-old crucially hit a forehand return long in the next game to hand Djokovic the break and a 4-3 lead.

Djokovic held on to his service game and with Nadal struggling broke the Spaniard again to seal a memorable win.



Bangladesh Hockey Federation, in support with long-time sponsors Green Delta Insurance Company, published a souvenir recently showcasing the glorious achievements in the sport in the country. The photo shows guests and officials of both the federation and sponsors holding the souvenir during the launching ceremony.

PHOTO: COURTESY