

A superstitious top-tier Chinese team repainted their whole stadium gold to bring better luck following a dismal run -- and this week duly celebrated a fifth big home win on the bounce. Guangzhou R&F last month took the drastic action believing that gold made for better feng shui than blue, the colour of the Chinese Super League club's strip, badge and originally its home ground too. It followed a rotten sequence of just one home win in four months. But since painstakingly repainting their 20,000-capacity Yuexiushan Stadium in mid-July, the team in southern China have seen their fortunes dramatically reverse. On Wednesday they beat Fabio Capello's big-spending Jiangsu Suning 4-2 at home to climb to third in the CSL and make it four home wins on the trot in the CSL, scoring 18 goals in the process. They also beat city rivals Guangzhou Evergrande in a home cup game, and R&F coach Dragan Stojkovic told the club website: "After we changed the colour of our home stadium we got five wins and a high goal-scoring rate as well."



Manchester plots a London heist

Arsenal face Leicester in league opener tonight

STAR SPORT DESK

Premier League As Arsenal's usher in the new Premier League season against Leicester City at the Emirates today, there remain numerous questions and expectations from the coming season.

Unlike the last season -- where Antonio Conte, Pep Guardiola and Jose Mourinho had entered their first season with Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United respectively and were expected to adjust to their new surroundings -- this time around there is expected to be little in the way of a learning curve.

Although one could say that there was next to learning curve for Conte then as he marched to the Premier League title with no hiccups along the way. The Italian came in and took the league by storm, upstaging the more hyped Mourinho and Guardiola along the way as his side finished some distance ahead of second-placed Tottenham Hotspurs.

Prior to the last season, the buzz was all around two of the highest-profile managers in the world arriving to do battle in Manchester and although that buzz has now gone, expectations have only been heightened as the duo splashed the cash on their team.

Guardiola was one of the most heralded managers in the world following the exploits of his all-conquering Barcelona side, but his European struggles with Bayern Munich and the decline of his patented 'tiki-taka' football have seen many critics label him a 'chequebook manager'. However he has wielded that chequebook thoroughly this time around as well, breaking the record for a defender twice in the span of weeks.

On the other hand, Mourinho will be entering the period that has never failed him -- the second season. He has won the league title

in each of his second seasons at Chelsea, Inter Milan -- where he added a Champions League in his second year as well -- and famously at Real Madrid in 2011-12 when he ended Barcelona's stranglehold over the La Liga trophy after four barren years for Los Blancos. Even after a disappointing third-place finish on his return to Chelsea, he went on to conquer the league in the second season.

Chelsea looked a settled side last season, but Conte knows that there is a bull's-eye on his back and he has repeatedly requested the Chelsea board to help him shore up his team; pleas which have fallen on deaf ears.



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola (L) and his Manchester United counterpart Jose Mourinho (R) will both be wondering how to stop Antonio Conte's Chelsea juggernaut as the new Premier League seasons begins today.

Lukaku in attack and Victor Lindelof.

Paul Pogba will also be expected to come of age this season. The 105-million-euro signing had a good first season, but fell well short of what was expected of a then world-record signing. Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial, among others in United's young core, will be expected to step up as well.

Meanwhile, City have added Ederson, who is believed to be the answer to their goalkeeping troubles, and Bernardo Silva to midfield. Kyle Walker, signed from Spurs, and France international Benjamin Mendy



perhaps take them to the league. More realistically however, Tottenham have contracted the fever that has plagued their North London neighbours Arsenal for years -- satisfaction with being in the top four.

The Gunners themselves however have strengthened in some of their more lackadaisical departments. Alexander Lacazette will add a whole new dimension up front while the retention of Mesut Ozil and, for the moment at least, Alexis Sanchez will no doubt be treated by Wenger as new signings after their worst finish in the past 21 years.

Liverpool are hopeful of keeping Philippe



Where the Manchester clubs have spent upwards of 200 million pounds on their teams, Chelsea -- who have a small squad as it is -- have brought in just Tiemoué Bakayoko and Alvaro Morata, both talented players but unaccustomed to the rigours of the Premier League.

Manchester United perhaps dealt the most fierce blow to the Blues before the season even began, prying away defensive midfielder Nemanja Matic and reuniting him with Mourinho, under whom the Serbian had his best season till date.

Alongside that they have also added Romelu

will improve their fullback positions, a key position in Guardiola's playbook. They will also have a fully-fit Gabriel Jesus to back up the firepower provided by Kevin De Bruyne, Sergio Aguero, David Silva, Raheem Sterling and Leroy Sane.

But if you're wondering why the Manchester clubs have been dominating headlines in England, it's because the rest of the big teams have been doing little online.

Tottenham, second last season, have not signed a single player yet; instead hoping that their young core will shift gears and

Coutinho at the club and it is likely that they will do so, but the Merseyside club -- whose only big-name move was the acquisition of Mohamed Salah -- will be another team hoping that existing players such as Philippe Coutinho, Roberto Firmino and Leroy Sane produce their best consistently if they are to have a shot at the league.

All the teams have a shot at the title as evidenced by Leicester City's triumph two seasons ago, but the focus will be on Conte ahead of what he labeled his 'toughest challenge' yet.

TOP 10 TRANSFERS

Romelu Lukaku Everton to Manchester United
£75 million rising to £90 million

After four prolific seasons at Everton, Belgium striker Lukaku has been given another shot at the big time with Manchester United. The 24-year-old will hope to do a better job of impressing manager Jose Mourinho than he managed during their time together at Chelsea.



Alvaro Morata Real Madrid to Chelsea
£58 million

With Diego Costa having been publicly frozen out by Antonio Conte, Chelsea broke their transfer record to sign 24-year-old Morata, who however made an inauspicious start to his Chelsea career by squandering his spot-kick in a Community Shield penalty shootout loss to Arsenal.



Benjamin Mendy Monaco to Manchester City
£52 million

Saddled with an ageing group of full-backs, Pep Guardiola found it difficult to play the kind of football he loves. So he has taken remedial action during the close season, forking out £52 million to make left-back Mendy the game's most expensive defender.



Alexandre Lacazette Lyon to Arsenal
£46.5 million to £52.6 million

Lacazette had been poised to join Atletico Madrid, only for Court of Arbitration for Sport to uphold a transfer ban against the Spanish club. Arsenal stepped in, breaking their transfer record to sign the 26-year-old, who was the top-scoring Frenchman in Ligue 1 in the last three seasons.



Kyle Walker Tottenham Hotspur to Manchester City
£45 million rising to £50 million

The second of Manchester City's three new full-backs (the other being Danilo), Walker arrived from Spurs. His flying raids down the right flank for Tottenham have turned him into England's first-choice number two and Pep will be hoping to make him even better.



Bernardo Silva Monaco to Manchester City
£43 million

Portuguese playmaker Silva pitched up at City after his 11 goals and 12 assists inspired Monaco to Ligue 1 glory and a place in the Champions League semifinals. The 22-year-old is expected to line up on the right, but is likely to have been earmarked as the successor to David Silva.



Tiemoué Bakayoko Monaco to Chelsea
£40 million

The third player to have left Monaco for England, France midfielder Bakayoko will make Chelsea's midfield an even more intimidating prospect. Tall and muscular, the former Rennes player will provide a redoubtable physical presence alongside the buzzing N'Golo Kante.



Nemanja Matic Chelsea to Manchester United
£40 million

Deemed surplus to requirements at Chelsea, Matic moved to United to link up with Mourinho. A stylish but steely holding midfielder, the 28-year-old Serbia international will provide a counterweight for the forward runs of last year's star signing, Paul Pogba.



Wayne Rooney Manchester United to Everton
Undisclosed Fee

Manchester United's record all-time goalscorer Wayne Rooney made his way back to his boyhood club of Everton after achieving all there was to at club level. The acquisition may prove to be a shrewd move for the Merseyside club as they look to battle for the Europa League spots.



Mohamed Salah Roma to Liverpool
£34 million

A bright light in a gloomy transfer window for Liverpool. Egyptian winger Salah did not get a look-in during his previous spell with Chelsea, but he excelled in Serie A with Fiorentina and Roma, scoring 35 goals in 81 games.



Naogaon pip Jamalpur to h'ball title

SPORTS REPORTER

Naogaon emerged champions in the Walton National Youth Women's Handball Championship after beating Jamalpur 27-17 in the final at Shaheed (Cap) M Mansur Ali Handball Stadium yesterday.

Nur Jahan top-scored with 12 goals while Purnima, who was later adjudged the best player of the tournament, struck six goals for Naogaon, who dominated the first half 13-8.

Alapan and Misti netted five and four goals respectively for Jamalpur, who also saw its goalkeeper Fauzia named the best custodian of the tournament.

Coutinho not leaving: Klopp

REUTERS, London

Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp said midfielder Philippe Coutinho would not be sold at any price, as British media reported the club had rejected a second bid worth 100 million euros from Barcelona.

Barcelona had already been rebuffed last month in an 80 million euro bid for the 25-year-old.

The 24-time Spanish league champions increased the offer to 85 million euros plus 15 million in add-ons but Liverpool rejected the second bid, maintaining their stance that the player is not for sale.

"Liverpool is not a club that has to sell players. That is set in stone. So what they offer in the end doesn't matter," Sky Germany quoted Klopp as saying.

"From a financial standpoint, there is no price limit to let him go. No price at which we are ready to give in. Our goal is to have the best possible team. So we want to keep our guys and add new ones. That is our plan."

The Merseyside club's position on the Brazil international is boosted by Coutinho's signing of a new five-year contract last season.



Norway's Karsten Warholm accidentally recreated Edvard Munch's famous painting, 'The Scream', in disbelief after winning the 400m hurdles at the IAAF World Championships in London on Wednesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Warholm hits the big time

REUTERS, London



Norway's Karsten Warholm announced himself as one of the sport's brightest new powerhouses as he recorded a magnificent gun-to-line triumph to lift the world 400 metres hurdles title in the pouring rain on Wednesday.

The 21-year-old former decathlete demonstrated all the strength he has acquired from competing in the multi-event discipline as he led from the first hurdle and held off his pursuers on the home straight to win in 48.35 seconds.

Still effectively a novice at the "man-killer" event, the youngster clasped his face in disbelief as it dawned that he had beaten Turkey's European champion Yasmani Copello (48.49) into the silver medal position.

Still barely able to comprehend what had happened after world champion, Warholm looked straight at photographer Phil Noble and said: "What's going on, is this real?" the 21-year-old asked Noble. When assured it was, Warholm still wasn't satisfied. "Pinch me," he demanded.

A surprised Noble leant across and did as he was told, pinching the youngster's wrist, at which point Warholm concurred. "Yes, it's real," he said before disappearing for his lap of honour in a viking helmet.

Warholm also spoiled Olympic champion and favourite Kerron Clement's dream of becoming the first man to win three world titles at the discipline as the 31-year-old American had to settle for bronze in 48.52.

It was the first track victory at any World Championships by a Norwegian since

Ingrid Kristiansen's 10,000 metres triumph in Rome in 1987 and Warholm's smile of incredulity said it all.

"I truly don't believe it. I've worked so hard for this but I don't know what I've done. This is an amazing feeling," he told the 55,000-strong crowd after somebody gave him a viking helmet to wear on his lap of honour.

"I found the helmet in the crowd and it just felt right. I thought it was suitable for the occasion. It is cold and wet like Norway so I guess it suited me!"

Warholm had been touted as one of the bright new faces of global athletics all year, especially after sending his compatriots into raptures at his home Bislett Games in Oslo in June when he triumphed, breaking the national record in 48.25 seconds.

That he should finish just a 10th of a second outside that mark on a wretched night with the rain tumbling down and puddles on the track suggests it was a superior run. "I'm world champion, that's crazy. A lot of hard work and dedication has got me here so thank you to my coach (Arve Hatloy) for getting me in a position to challenge for a world title."

Warholm, world champion in the octathlon just three years ago, decided on a simple tactic from the gun, taking out the pace as hard as he could and holding on for dear life.

It was a joyous ride, which only really looked as if it might be upset in the run-in by Qatar's little-known Abderrahman Samba who was timing his run well until hitting the last barrier.

"I got out well and managed to hold it really well," said Warholm. "I'm so proud of my performance. I hope people back in Norway are as happy as I am."

BANGLADESH C'SHIP LEAGUE

Win for Uttar Baridhara

SPORTS REPORTER

Uttar Baridhara Club registered a single-goal win over Kawranbazar Pragoti Sangha in the Marcel Bangladesh Championship League at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Sumon Reza struck the all-important goal for Uttar Baridhara Club, who played out a 2-2 draw against Bashundhara Kings in the first match.

In the day's other match, Bashundhara Kings were again held to a 2-2 draw by Feni Soccer Club, who lost to Nofel SC in their first match.

Krishna Barman gave Bashundhara Kings a lead in the seventh minute before Abu Sufian doubled it in the 16th minute but their lead was erased thanks to a brace from former national striker Kanchan, who netted in the 17th and 49th minutes respectively to bag the first point for Feni Soccer Club.

Feni are now tied at the top of the table alongside two other teams with three points. Bashundhara and Baridhara meanwhile are joint-second with two points each.

Brazil top of FIFA rankings

AFP, Paris

Captained by the Paris Saint Germain striker Neymar, Brazil have knocked Germany off the top of the FIFA rankings released on Thursday.

Germany dropped to second despite winning the Confederations Cup last month after some historical results were devalued.

In a context closer to home, Bangladesh moved up one place in the rankings. They are now 189th.

TOP TEN

1. Brazil (+1)
2. Germany (-1)
3. Argentina
4. Switzerland (+1)
5. Poland (+1)
6. Portugal (-2)
7. Chile
8. Colombia
9. Belgium (+1)
10. France (-1)

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