



Both the Liverpool and Tottenham squads were hard at work yesterday, gearing up for what should be a sensational clash between the sides in the UEFA Champions League final tonight. This will be the second time Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp will have a go at the title while it will be the first for Tottenham coach Mauricio Pochettino.

Chase for the biggest win

Among the rewards for the Champions League winners on Saturday will be silverware, status and history but the greatest prize awaiting Liverpool or Tottenham might be an end to the agonising wait.

Combined, it has been 18 years -- seven for Liverpool, 11 for Tottenham -- since either lifted a trophy, despite huge strides made in recent years under the much-praised Jurgen Klopp and Mauricio Pochettino.

Klopp and Pochettino have been singled-out as two of Europe's best coaches after crafting teams that reflect their personalities -- Liverpool thrilling and fearless, Spurs brave and unrelenting.

And while scepticism has greeted the perfection of Manchester City's star-studded squad in England, approval has also followed Liverpool and Tottenham's nurturing of youngsters.

Trent Alexander-Arnold and Harry Winks came through the clubs' youth systems while Andrew Robertson, Dele Alli and Kieran Trippier joined aged 24 or younger.

All of them could start at the Wanda Metropolitano.

But any admiration still comes with an asterisk. Liverpool's last trophy was in 2012, a League Cup that remains their only success since they won the FA Cup in 2006.

And Tottenham's barren spell goes further back to the League Cup in 2008, which was their first trophy since winning the same competition in 1999.

Pochettino has tended to bristle at suggestions his team have a habit for coming close but failing to get over the line.

When asked in January if the club needed a trophy, he said: "I don't agree with that, it's good for the ego. But in reality the most important thing is to build a team that is always going to be in the top four."

The expectations are higher at Liverpool, where Klopp's vow to win something within four years of taking charge reaches its end-point this weekend.

"It didn't happen yet," said Klopp in April. "How long it will take I have no clue."

Klopp's also denied a personal need for silverware after having lost six cup finals in a row as coach, three of them with Liverpool.

"I don't think that way at all," he said earlier this month. "In football if you want to win you have to accept that there are occasions when you also might lose."

FALLING SHORT

The pressure on Liverpool may be more intense, not just because of their success-laden past but because of a craving for satisfaction after a season in which they amassed 96 points in the Premier League but still fell just short of champions City.

They will be favourites, having beaten Tottenham home and away already this season and with their experience of last year's final in Kiev. In the Spurs squad, only Toby Alderweireld has played on this stage, losing with Atletico Madrid in 2014.

For a shot of belief, Pochettino might instead turn to Harry Kane, who has declared himself fit after recovering from an ankle injury.

Kane has not played a competitive match since April 9 and Tottenham have survived without their star striker, even if a storming run in the Champions League belied a collapse in form domestically.

If he is fit, Kane's goal threat means he will start, most likely

at the expense of Lucas Moura, despite the Brazilian's dizzying hat-trick against Ajax in the semi-final.

Liverpool's own front man, Roberto Firmino, is also expected to play after sitting out the last three matches with a groin strain.

Harder to predict will be Klopp's selection in midfield, where he must choose three from James Milner, Jordan Henderson, Georginio Wijnaldum and Fabinho.

Considerably more than the 32,000 ticket-holding fans were predicted to descend on Madrid, with police deploying "unprecedented security" around the final, involving drones to monitor behaviour and 4,700 personnel.

When the Spanish capital was picked as host, there was an added lure for Real Madrid, who might have defended the title in their own city, and Atletico, who could have snatched it off them at their own home ground.

Instead, after Barcelona crashed out, Spain were left with no European finalists for the only second time in 10 years.

A new era, perhaps, for the Premier League. For Liverpool and Tottenham, another chance to end the wait.

Inter turn to Conte

Inter Milan on Friday announced the appointment of former Chelsea and Italy boss Antonio Conte as coach with the ambition of moving the club out of Juventus' shadow.

The 49-year-old former Chelsea manager has signed a three-year contract worth nine million euros (\$10 million) plus bonuses, according to press reports.

He replaces Luciano Spalletti who secured Chinese-owned Inter's Champions League berth for a second consecutive year on the final day of the Serie A season last Sunday.

Conte won the first three of Juventus' eight straight Serie A titles and the Premier League and FA Cup as Chelsea boss.

"A new chapter is opening in my life," Conte said. "I can't wait. I have chosen Inter because of the club it is, for its plans and ambition."

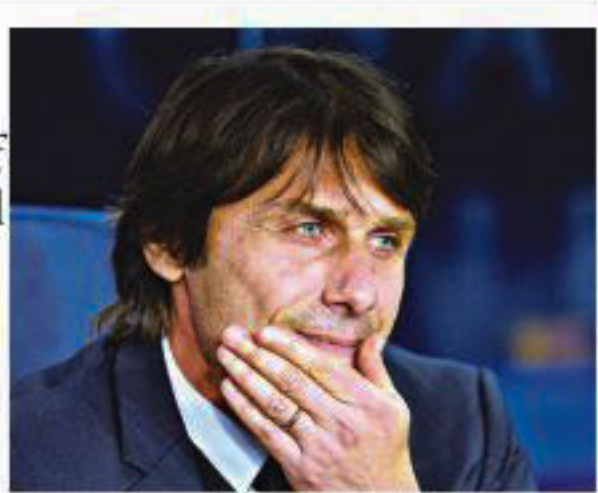
Inter chairman Steve Wang added: "I am sure Antonio Conte is one of the best coaches."

"I am sure he will help us to reach our target ... to make this club one of the best in the world again."

Conte had also been linked with a return to champions Juventus, after his successor in Turin Massimiliano Allegri announced he was leaving the club.

Spalletti took over at Inter in mid-2017 having previously coached Zenit Saint Petersburg and Roma.

But it proved a season of highs and lows with the club eliminated at the group stage of the Champions League in which they were drawn with Barcelona and Tottenham.



Bangladesh in Pool B

Bangladesh have been pitted against hosts Singapore, Hong Kong and Uzbekistan in Pool B of Women's Junior (U-21) AHF Cup hockey qualifiers, which is scheduled to be held in Singapore from September 9 to 15.

Pool A features Chinese Taipei, Kazakhstan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The champions and runners-up teams will enter the eight-team final round where China, Japan, South Korea, India, Malaysia and Thailand will play directly.

Bangladesh women's team will take part in an AHF-sanctioned hockey tournament for the first time and they have been in preparation camp which started in the middle of last month.

Bangladesh will take on Hong Kong on September 9 before playing against Uzbekistan on September 11. The last pool match against Singapore will be held on September 12.

Norway booter hits record nine goals

Norway's Erling Haland smashed the Under-20 World Cup record for goals scored in a single match when he hit a whopping nine in a 12-0 thrashing of Honduras on Thursday, the biggest win in the competition's history.

The 18-year-old RB Leipzig starlet opened the scoring in the seventh minute, had another three by half-time before ramming home an incredible five after the break, including two in the final two minutes.

His remarkable tally eclipsed the previous record of six made by Adailton in Brazil's 10-3 hammering of South Korea in 2007.

Pliskova knocked out

Karolina Pliskova's quest for a maiden Grand Slam title at the French Open came to an end on Friday as the second seed lost 6-3 6-3 to Croatia's Petra Martic.

The powerful Czech struggled throughout to find the range on her feared serve and forehand as 31st seed Martic matched her best performance by reaching the last 16.

Martic broke in the seventh game and then again two games later as Pliskova hit a backhand long to drop the opener.

A lacklustre Pliskova then dropped serve again at the start of the second set before hitting back with a flurry of winners to break her 28-year-old opponent twice in a row.

The fightback did not last though and Martic regained control with two more breaks before serving it out at 5-3.

"I think the score was closer than it looked in the end," a disappointed Pliskova told reporters. "I had chances in

a couple of games but it was difficult for me today."

The 27-year-old Czech made twice as many unforced errors as Martic and complained that the Philippe-Chatier court was slow, and therefore did not suit her game.

"She (Martic) played clever. She was patient too. I just made too many mistakes," added Pliskova, who came to Paris having won in Rome.

Martic, who will play an unseeded player next, either Estonia's Kaia Kanepi or Russian Veronika Kudermetova, tried to dominate Pliskova and mostly the tactic worked.

"The key was to focus on my game and try to dictate instead of letting her dictate, which is her biggest strength," said the Croat.

"I had to kind of try to take it away from her, and at times it was difficult, especially when she broke me and when she got a few winners, which she's known for. And I'm just happy that I managed in the end to hold my nerves and to finish it off."



Coach Jamie Day (L) instructs his charges during their training session at the SP FC Academy ground in Bangkok, Thailand yesterday.

Booters' 2nd practice match today

Bangladesh football team are looking forward to putting a positive performance in their second and final preparation match ahead of the Laos tie when they take on Thai League-2 side BG Pathum United FC in Bangkok today.

The match will get underway at 5:00pm (Bangladesh time).

Despite playing out a 1-1 draw against Air Force United FC on Tuesday, Bangladesh coach Jamie Day was happy with the performance of his charges because of the players' good shape, organised

and disciplined performance, giving him confidence ahead of the match against Laos on June 6.

"We are looking for a positive performance from everyone involved and some confidence going into the Laos match," Day said on the eve of the second warm-up match.

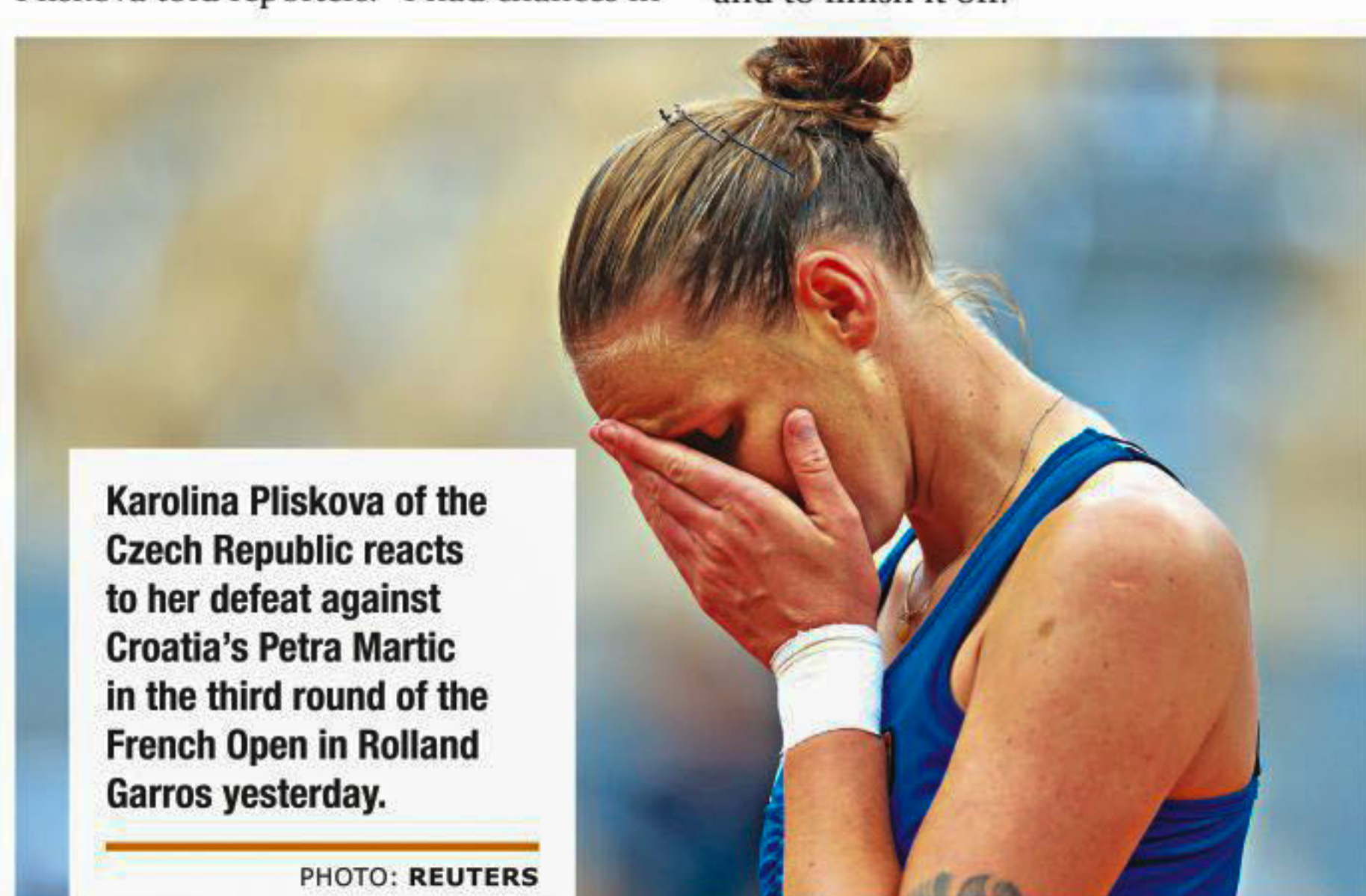
Day is not thinking of the outcome of today's match, rather he is planning to field separate elevens in either half like the first match to give enough game-time to each of the players before the Laos match.

After Tuesday's match, the players have gone through training on how to defend set-pieces, taking set-pieces and improving individual skill as the Bangladesh forwards squandered

some good chances against Air Force United FC.

"In the last two days, we tried to rectify the silly mistakes we made in the first match and hopefully we won't repeat those mistakes in our second practice match," midfielder Mamunul Islam said. "I also hope that the forwards will not waste opportunities in one-on-one situations and they will try to convert 50 percent chances into 100 percent."

The experienced midfielder also believes two practice matches in Thailand will help them make less mistakes in the match against Laos and they will be able to return home with a good result ahead of the home fixture.



Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic reacts to her defeat against Croatia's Petra Martic in the third round of the French Open in Roland Garros yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

WHAT TO WATCH

GTV, BTV & MAASRANGA
ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP
NEW ZEALAND V SRI LANKA
LIVE FROM 3:30PM
AFGHANISTAN V AUSTRALIA
LIVE FROM 6:30PM

TEN 2
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL
TOTTENHAM V LIVERPOOL
LIVE FROM 1:00AM (SUNDAY)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1 & 2
FRENCH OPEN ROUND-3
LIVE FROM 3:00PM