

HIGHLIGHTS

Thomas Tuchel is the first manager in the UEFA Champions League/European Cup history to reach the final in consecutive seasons with different clubs.

Since taking over as Chelsea boss in January, Tuchel has now beaten Zinedine Zidane, Pep Guardiola, Jurgen Klopp, Jose Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti, and Diego Simeone (twice).

Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy has kept eight Champions League clean sheets this season, the most ever by a goalkeeper for an English club in a single season.

This season's Champions League final will be contested by two English teams for the third time, also occurring in 2008 (Chelsea v Manchester United) and 2019 (Liverpool v Tottenham Hotspur).

"I can't put it into words at the moment. It was a great performance. We should have had about five, but the most important thing is that we won. To get that goal late on, you could see by the celebrations how massive it was, giving us breathing space in the last five minutes."

MASON MOUNT



Chelsea's Mason Mount (R) celebrates his side's second goal with Christian Pulisic during their 2-0 victory over Real Madrid in the Champions League semifinal second-leg match on Wednesday. Mount (22 years and 15 days) became the second youngest Englishman to score in the semifinal of the competition after Wayne Rooney (21 years 182 days).

PHOTO: TWITTER

ALL-ENGLISH FINAL IN ISTANBUL

Tuchel's Midas touch

AGENCIES

Since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January, Thomas Tuchel has overseen a remarkable revival in Chelsea's fortunes. His finest moment came in Wednesday's Champions League semi-final second leg as Chelsea beat Real Madrid 2-0 at Stamford Bridge to clinch a 3-1 aggregate success.

Goals from Timo Werner and Mason Mount booked an all-English Premier League showdown with Manchester City in the final in Istanbul on May 29.

Tuchel arrived with a solid CV after leading Paris Saint-Germain to the French title and last season's Champions League final. But few expected him to have such an immediate impact on under-performing Chelsea. Lampard loyalists even cried foul at the brutal sacking of the club's leading scorer and they were singing his name loudly outside the ground before the kickoff of the return leg.

But with Tuchel having taken Chelsea from ninth in the Premier League to fourth, into the FA Cup final and now into their first Champions League final since 2012, few would deny that hiring the 47-year-old German was anything other than a masterstroke.



Defensive excellence has been the trademark of Tuchel's reign and once again he organized Chelsea superbly as they kept Real at bay and posed a sustained threat on the counter. Under him, big-money signings Kai Havertz and Timo Werner have begun to flourish, young English midfielder Mason Mount has taken his game to another level and N'Golo Kante has rediscovered his best form.

It was Chelsea's 18th clean sheet under Tuchel and the statistic could hint at a defensive, cautious approach. But the opposite is true. Tuchel's side produced a dazzling display of fluent attacking football against Real and but for a flurry of missed chances that had the German raging on the touchline, it could have been a rout.

While Chelsea enjoyed a possession figure of only 32 percent against Real, their

appetite to win the ball back was as great as ever. The central pair of Jorginho and Kante disrupted Zinedine Zidane's team's build-up play by making interceptions. Mount's three tackles, the joint-highest for the Blues', showed the idea to shut Real down all over the pitch.

When asked if the world had seen a 'Thomas Tuchel style' or he was getting the job done 'on a week to week basis' in the post-match press briefing, he replied, "I am pretty happy with what I see. When I came out, I was pretty happy with what I saw from the first training session ahead of Wolves."

"I don't have the feeling that it is only me. I played my part but the players did what we see here. What we saw was pretty strong because we adapted to multiple situations. We have answers to a lot of questions that are asked. Today, for example, we cannot always find a skillful solution," Tuchel added.

"At times, we hang in and fight. We use our bodies, we use our work rate and if we couldn't outplay them we were ready to outwork them with hunger and energy."

Tuchel has already masterminded a victory over Manchester City in the FA Cup semi-final and a repeat in Turkey would cap an incredible debut season.

Mustafizur, Shakib back home

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman returned home yesterday after the Indian Premier League (IPL) was suspended indefinitely on Tuesday.

The two players boarded a flight from Ahmedabad at 1:00pm and landed in Dhaka at 4:00pm.

"Thank you @Sah75officiala, happy to know you've landed home safely in Dhaka with Bangladesh teammate @Mustafiz90 from Ahmedabad," tweeted Shakib's franchise Kolkata Knight Riders.

"Alhamdulillah, we are safely back in Bangladesh without any trouble. I would like to thank @rajasthanroyals and @KKRiders franchises for making it happen. I would also like to thank our health ministry for its contribution," wrote Mustafizur on facebook.

The chartered flight that Rajasthan Royals' Mustafizur and Kolkata's Shakib boarded were arranged by the BCCI with their respective franchises sharing the cost of the flight.

Even though the Directorate General of Health Services had earlier confirmed that both players will have to complete mandatory 14-day institutional quarantine, it is possible that the decision on the number of days in institutional quarantine for the two players will be made within two days.

"They just returned. Now let's see what happens with their quarantine time," said a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official.

Shakib and Mustafizur will be staying at different city hotels.

The Bangladesh team management is looking forward to getting back their two key players in time ahead of their crucial ODI series against Sri Lanka later this month.

The Tigers will play Sri Lanka in the upcoming three-match ODI series from May 23, and even if the star duo has to quarantine for 14 days, they will be able to take the field in time before the first ODI. The question, however, remains whether it will be possible for them to practice together for a few days ahead of the series.



Pakistan eye series clean sweep

ICC



Babar Azam will look to continue his unbeaten record as Pakistan Test captain when Zimbabwe and Pakistan meet for the second Test on 7 May at the Harare Sports Club.

Pakistan won the first Test comprehensively beating Zimbabwe by an innings and 116 runs. Hasan Ali's nine wickets coupled with Fawad Alam's knock of 140 helped Pakistan cruise to a comfortable victory. Babar is yet to face defeat as Test captain of Pakistan.

With a solid team in place, it will be interesting to see whether Pakistan give a chance Haris Rauf or Shahnawaz Dhan.

Zimbabwe meanwhile will be hoping for better performance with bat and ball. Apart from the opening pair of Kevin Kasuza and Tarisai Musakanda, none of the Zimbabwe batsmen were able to deal with the Pakistan bowling attack in the second innings of the Test.

Their regular captain Sean Williams is expected to return to the fold after missing the missing the first Test because of an injury. He will likely replace one among Tarisai Musakanda and Roy Kaia.

The hosts might also look to give a chance to Luke Jongwe, who had a successful T20I series.

India confident of hosting T20 World Cup

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's cricket board is hoping it might be able to squeeze the remainder of its lucrative Indian Premier League into a crowded calendar and is still confident of hosting the T20 World Cup later this year, a top official told Reuters on Thursday.

Already looking at a \$270 million revenue loss following the suspension of the IPL, the board faces a second financial hammer blow if the Covid-19 pandemic prevents India staging the ICC tournament in October and November.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), however, has not given up hope of cramming the 31 remaining IPL matches into the season, despite the tight demands of cricket's international schedule.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) have lined up the United Arab Emirates as the back-up T20 venue in case there is no improvement but BCCI Treasurer Arun Singh Dhumal told Reuters by telephone that he was confident there would be no need. "We will keep monitoring the situation but as of now we are going ahead as per our original plan," he said.

"Hopefully things will get better and we'll be able to organise it in India. Given the experience in other countries, (the coronavirus surge is) likely to come down.

Bangladesh, SL eye rise in Super League standings

AGENCIES



Sri Lanka will arrive in Dhaka on May 16 to play three ODIs against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The series presents both teams with the chance to move up the ICC Cricket World Cup Super League ladder.

Sri Lanka currently sit 12th on the standings with -2 points and can climb as high as ninth if they win the series 3-0, while Bangladesh could skyrocket to the top of the ladder with

a series win.

The Tigers currently sit sixth but only trail top-placed England by 10 points. A 2-1 series win would lift them to 50 points, 10 more than England, Pakistan and Australia, who all have 40 points.

Bangladesh will be desperately looking to win the series against Sri Lanka at home after a disappointing 1-0 Test series loss away to the Lankans.

Sri Lanka local newspaper reports suggested that the selectors have decided to infuse plenty of young blood in their ODI team for the series. And according to reports, they have dropped

Hubbard set to become first transgender Olympian

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard is poised to become the first transgender athlete to compete at the Olympic Games, in a move that will reignite the often vitriolic debate over the ethics of sport.

The 43-year-old, who was born male but transitioned to female in her 30s, is on the verge of reaching the Tokyo Olympics under coronavirus-enforced new qualifying rules.

Hubbard, who also competed as a male, became eligible to lift as a woman after showing testosterone levels below the threshold required by the International Olympic Committee.

She is aiming to make New Zealand's Tokyo Olympics squad to contest the women's +87kg category, an event in which she is currently ranked 16th in the world.

Hubbard is already in the history books after becoming the first transgender Commonwealth Games athlete at the Gold Coast in 2018, when she had to withdraw after suffering an elbow injury that almost ended her career.

While the New Zealand team is yet to be named, officials said Hubbard was likely to meet new qualification criteria that have been simplified by the International Weightlifting Federation because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The NZOC can confirm that revised international federation (IF) qualification systems are very likely to see a number of New Zealand weightlifters, including Commonwealth Games transgender athlete Laurel Hubbard, allocated an IF quota spot for Tokyo 2020," the



New Zealand Olympic Committee said.

The NZOC has strongly backed Hubbard's right to compete in the past, and said all athletes selected for Tokyo would receive its support.

"The New Zealand team has a strong culture of manaaki (caring), inclusion and respect for all," it said.

Not all in the sporting world have been so welcoming and Hubbard's appearance at the Games is sure to generate intense interest and spotlight the thorny issue of transgender athletes.

She has become an unwitting lightning rod for discussion on the issue, with some arguing she has an unfair advantage over female-born athletes and others saying she meets the criteria laid down by the IOC. In a vastly complex debate, both sides claim to have science on their side. Current IOC rules state a trans woman can compete provided her testosterone levels are below 10 nanomoles per litre, a criteria Hubbard meets.

In 2018, Oceania Weightlifting Federation

a few veterans such as Dimuth Karunaratne, Angelo Mathews and Dinesh Chandimal.

Karunaratne was the former Sri Lanka ODI skipper and Mathews was the one who led Sri Lanka in their previous T20I series against West Indies, in the absence of regular skipper Dasun Shanaka.

Chandimal, notably, had already been dropped from the Sri Lanka team in the recent Test series against Bangladesh.

Kusal Mendis, who had been dropped from the national side due to poor form, has been recalled for the Bangladesh tour, the report added.

general secretary Paul Coffa defended Hubbard's participation in the Commonwealth Games.

"She's done everything according to the IOC rules and she's proven that she's a woman... so give her a chance and let her continue," he said.

But the Australian Weightlifting Federation unsuccessfully tried to have her barred from the event, arguing the physique and power she developed as a male before transitioning gave her a physical advantage regardless of testosterone levels.

"In our respectful view, the current criteria and its application has the potential to devalue women's weightlifting and discourage female-born athletes from pursuing the sport at an elite level in the future," it said.

While there are genuine issues to be debated, discussion about transgender sport is a hot-button topic that frequently descends into acrimony and name calling, particularly online.

British television presenter Piers Morgan targeted Hubbard last year, when her Olympic berth began looking a realistic prospect after strong comeback performances following the elbow injury. "This is insane. Women's rights to basic fairness & equality are getting destroyed at the altar of political correctness," Morgan tweeted.

Hubbard rarely gives interviews but told Radio New Zealand in 2017 that she just wanted to compete in the sport she loves and "blocked out" criticism. "If I try and take that weight on board it just makes the lifts harder... I am who I am," she said. "I don't want to change the world. I just want to be me and do what I do.