



## A rematch of the 2018 final in Paris

AFP, Paris

A third all-English Champions League final in four years seemed to be on the cards but Real Madrid's incredible late comeback against Manchester City on Wednesday has set up a rematch between the Spanish club and Liverpool in Paris on May 28.

Madrid's epic European campaign hit new heights as they came back from the dead against Pep Guardiola's City, trailing 1-0 on the night and 5-3 on aggregate.

Liverpool survived a first-half scare to reach the Champions League final with a 3-2 win at Villarreal on Tuesday, for a 5-2 aggregate victory, after the night had threatened to turn sour for Jurgen Klopp's side.

The final at the Stade de France will be a repeat of the 2018 showpiece, when Gareth Bale's stunning double secured a 3-1 win for Real Madrid in Kiev and gave them their record-extending 13th European Cup.

Seven members of the Real team involved that night four years ago also featured against City on Wednesday, just as seven Liverpool players in 2018 played in the win at Villarreal.

"We have a score to settle," wrote Mohamed Salah on Twitter as the Liverpool forward kicked off the hostilities early.

It will be Liverpool's third final in five seasons



# A surreal night of 'FOOTBALL MADNESS'

NABID YEASIN

It can't just be luck. But logic doesn't explain it either. What had transpired at the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday night was something so improbable that it almost seems scripted.

Real Madrid were dead and buried. They were chasing the Premier League leaders, Manchester City, by a goal in the match, trailing 5-3 on aggregate, up until the stroke of second half's stoppage time of the second leg of a Champions League semifinal. Most teams would not even dare to dream of a resurrection from then on, let alone actually pulling it off.

But Real Madrid aren't most teams. With the game in its final minute of regulation time, Karim Benzema leaped into the air to cushion a cross back in the box for Rodrygo who, as if from nowhere, emerged to tap it in. A minute later, the diminutive Brazilian, who came on as a substitute, would once again pop up to head in a perfectly floated cross as Real roared back to level terms on aggregate.

Five minutes into the first half of extra time and, in probably the most fitting way, Benzema, Los Blancos' talisman, earned and converted a spot-kick to complete a comeback so staggering that will probably be talked about over and over.

With a 3-1 on the night, and a 6-5 win on aggregate, Real head to their 17th Champions League final to vie for their 14th title. But as mentioned earlier, neither logic nor the factor of luck can explain yesterday's outcome and their path to the final. City coach Pep Guardiola rightly said after the match, "Football is unpredictable, it is a game like this. We have to accept it."

By logic, stats and numbers, Manchester City should have been the one heading to

**"We need time now, one or two days, but we'll rise, we come up, we have to do it with our people. That feeling that happens in football sometimes, that has happened in history, when you are leading but you get to the end and you are being dominated - that didn't happen to us."**

Pep Guardiola



Paris. But instead, it is Real Madrid who will be playing Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool in what promises to be an enthralling final on May 28.

Despite being assertive in the initial phase of the game, Benzema and Vinicius Junior, both of whom have often been the saviours for Real in crucial ties, were struggling to put the final touch.

In fact, Rodrygo's equaliser in the 90th minute was Real's first shot on target. By that time, City, however, had 10 shots with eight of those on target, dominated the possession, and also took the lead through a superb left-foot strike from Riyad Mahrez in the 73rd minute.

But despite failing to find their feet for the majority of the game, Real had once again found a way through, just as they did against

Paris Saint-Germain in the Round of 16 and Chelsea in the quarterfinal.

On each of these occasions, Real were never the superior side. They only had brief spells of, as Guardiola explained yesterday's game, 'football madness' that saw them beat PSG despite being 2-0 down till the first half of the second leg and overcome defending champions Chelsea even after losing the home-leg 3-2.

These consecutive comebacks can also not be only credited to luck as all these moments of individual brilliance were produced by players on the field due to their sheer determination.

One thing that could have worked here is the never-say-die attitude that gets instilled in every player's DNA that drapes himself in the all-whites. That could explain how a 21-year-old Rodrygo found in him the composure for those late finishes and a 19-year-old Eduardo Camavinga, who too came on as a substitute, played the two crucial passes leading to goals while City's more experienced, proven and much more expensive bench failed when playing under pressure.

One of City's star substitutes, Jack Grealish, the club's £100 million signing, looked ominous and was denied twice around the 88th minute when City were still leading - first by a goal-line clearance by a Madrid defender before Thibaut Courtois split his legs to deflect his drive heading for the bottom corner. But once Real had drawn level, Grealish couldn't be the same player thereafter.

It only shows that 'Until the end we go, Real!' is not just the club's anthem but it is instilled in the DNA of every player and management staff of the club and that's what make them the most successful club in Europe.

**"The greatness of this club is this. It is a club that does not allow you to lower your arms when it seems that everything is over. It is a feeling that gives you the strength to continue, to continue to believe... We played a match against a very strong rival, solid, competitive... When everything seemed to be over, we looked for the last bit of energy to match it."**

Carlo Ancelotti

# 'Greatest night in the history of the Bernabeu'

REUTERS

Spanish media heaped praise on Real Madrid after the La Liga winners pulled off a remarkable comeback win against Manchester City on Wednesday to advance to the Champions League final.

Leading 1-0 with minutes to go, City seemed to be heading for Paris before a late Rodrygo double and an extra-time penalty from Karim Benzema gave the hosts an unlikely 3-1 win on the night and secured a 6-5 victory on aggregate. Read full story

"Real Madrid are out of this world," Madrid-based AS said in their headline, accompanied by a picture of the squad celebrating in front of a section of the home crowd.

Sport newspaper simply went with "Incredible" after Real once again turned around a first-leg deficit following their last 16 win against Paris St. Germain earlier in the competition.

Marca hailed it as the "greatest night in the history of the Bernabeu".

"If PSG was already inexplicable, if Chelsea was already incredible, last night in Chamartin was, simply, the best night of a stadium that has seen this team in all colours and that is a lot to say," read their lead story.

The Barcelona-based Mundo Deportivo described it as "Groundhog Day" while Catalan radio station RACI said "this is not football, it's a paranormal phenomenon".

Real will take on Liverpool in a rematch of the 2018 Champions League final at the Stade de France on May 28.



Brazilian forward Rodrygo arrived as the saviour for Real Madrid against Manchester City during the UEFA Champions League semi-final second leg at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

This is Real Madrid's 17th UCL final, the most by any team in the history of the tournament.

Real Madrid is the first team in Champions League history to reach the final despite losing three games across the Round of 16, Quarterfinals and Semifinals.

Benzema now has scored 43 goals in 43 goals this season, 15 in this season's UCL campaign.

Rodrygo becomes the first player to score twice in the 90th minute of a Champions League knockout match

Karim Benzema has now equalled Cristiano Ronaldo's record of most goals in the knockout stage in a season of UCL (10).

Real Madrid vs Liverpool is the only encounter to occur in 3 European Cup finals (Liverpool defeated Real Madrid 1-0 in 1981; Real Madrid defeated Liverpool 3-1 in 2018).

Liverpool are one of only three teams in history to beat Real Madrid in a European Cup final and the last team to do so (1981, also in Paris).