

Star SPORT

DHAKA MONDAY MAY 30, 2022, JAISHTHA 16, 1429 BS

What to WATCH | **TEN 2 & SONY SIX**
 French Open
 Quarter-finals
 Live from 03:00 pm onwards



Thibaut Courtois was Real Madrid's hero in the Champions League final in Paris on Saturday as Liverpool couldn't find a way past the Belgian, who tipped Sadio Mane's first-half shot onto the post and produced an even better save to turn away Mohamed Salah's effort in the 81st minute. Real Madrid became kings of the continent once again, thanks to Vinicius Junior's strike in the 59th minute.

PHOTO: REUTERS/TWITTER

Courtois 'redemption' disrupts hegemony of strikers

ASHFAQ UL MUSHFIQ

Ahead of the biggest night of European club football, numerous tactical analysis, speculations and predictions were made on how the match between Liverpool and Real Madrid would play out. In football, a game where goals define the result, marksmen like Karim Benzema, Mohamed Salah, Sadio Mane and Vinicius Jr. predictably garnered the most attention on the occasion. And all but certainly, nobody anticipated that a goalkeeper would decide the outcome of the Champions League final at Stade de France on Sunday; and he was none other than Real's Thibaut Courtois.

The Belgian shot-stopper denied Liverpool nine times throughout the match, the highest number of saves made by any keeper in an UCL final since 2003/04. Notably also, Los Blancos' number one pulled off a record number of 59 saves in a



Champions League campaign since the aforementioned period.

The Belgian's resistance began from the 16th minute of the match when Courtois dropped down sharply to his left to deny Salah's close-range effort, which sparked the ignition in him for the rest of the match. Five minutes later, a long-range effort from Mane stretched the six and a half feet keeper to his right to finger-tip the ball away from danger.

As Real got the lead around the



hour mark, Liverpool came firing in all cylinders. However, the Belgian appeared taller than his stature in front of the goal as he frustrated the reds on several occasions.

When Salah drifted in from the right and crafted a curler on the far corner from outside the box in the



64th minute, Liverpool fans probably had their fingers crossed in optimism. However, Courtois's high-flying dive to the right parried the ball away from target. And moments later, Salah's attempt to avenge for the Kyiv 2018 final had to wait another day as the Belgian closed his shot down from a tight angle in the near-post.

The Courtois show continued as he denied the Egyptian forward, yet again, who was free on goal and his shot was elevated away by the Madrid keeper's spectacular reflex in the 83rd minute.

As the final was heading towards its last minutes, Courtois probably had recalled his previous Champions League final, when he was playing against Real and Atletico Madrid was leading by a goal. But a thumping header from Sergio Ramos in the 93rd

- Real Madrid have now won twice as many European Cups as any other club (AC Milan have won seven); they have won all eight finals in which they have played in the UEFA Champions League era.

- Carlo Ancelotti is the first coach to win the European Cup four times; he is also the only one to have taken a team to five finals.

minute spoiled his first UCL final.

Conversely, this time playing for Los Blancos, he wouldn't allow history to repeat for himself this time around. His sharpness and ice-cold nerves till the final whistle ensured that the Spanish giants could keep their lead intact and head towards their 14th Champions League title.

"It's incredible, so many years, so much work. Come to the club of my life. I saw many criticising me. Today we have shown who is the King of Europe," Courtois said after the match.

"I needed to win a final for my career, to put some respect on my name."

The initial days Courtois spent at Real after signing from Chelsea were dim, to say the least, as he had a hard time fitting in as his low confidence during the games cost his side to lose games on multiple occasions. He had to talk with psychologists to get his focus back on the game and the result arrived in flying colours as he won two league titles with Real Madrid and when the Los Blancos needed him the most, he rose to the occasion and single-handedly won his first Champions League.

"I saw a lot of tweets saying I will get humbled. But it was the other way around today," the shot-stopper said following his redemption.

Ancelotti's calm approach pays dividends

AGENCIES

Real Madrid became champions of Europe for a record-extending 14th time after Carlo Ancelotti's side beat Liverpool 1-0 in Paris on Saturday, but rarely have the Spanish champions taken a more chaotic road to glory.

Madrid only made it to the French capital, thanks to stirring fightbacks at the Santiago Bernabeu to see off Paris Saint-Germain, Chelsea and then Manchester City in the knockout rounds.

However, barring the game being delayed due to spectators' unrest, there was no such drama at the Stade de France on Saturday where, after surviving some early Liverpool dominance and suffering the setback of a disallowed Benzema goal, Real took a grip on the game after halftime and got their goal and then, with help from goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, defended their lead.

Ancelotti's success has been founded on strong and trusting relationships with his players, especially the seniors.

The understated confidence was evident from the moment Real entered the ground in sharp suits and ties, as if they knew they were attending an awards ceremony.



The Italian adopts the same approach on the touchline -- rarely showing emotion, trusting his players to follow his gameplan without the need for arm-waving and shouting.

But that restrained demeanour, disguises a too-

often underrated tactical astuteness from the Real coach.

Ancelotti's side defended deep, an approach which forced Liverpool to choose between pushing on and risking leaving space for Real's deadly counter-attacks or sitting in space themselves and playing a slower passing game.

Klopp's players adopted the latter approach and that meant they were forced to abandon their signature style of play.

With the ball Real were patient but they, and particularly Modric, frequently looked to play the ball over the back of Liverpool right-back Trent Alexander-Arnold, an approach which created some of their better moments.

After the break, Real stepped up their tempo with the ball, imposing themselves in midfield and Liverpool struggled to move into a higher gear they desperately searched for the late equaliser.

Although Courtois was forced into action on several occasions, there was never a hint of panic in the way Real defended.

It was the performance of a Real team which knows how to win in the biggest games, something which Klopp's side for all their qualities - and despite one Premier League title and one Champions League triumph -- have yet to truly learn.

A 'winning culture' may be one of the most over-used terms in modern football but for Real Madrid and Carlo Ancelotti, there truly is meaning and value in the concept.

Pandya leads Gujarat Titans to IPL glory

AFP, Ahmedabad

Hardik Pandya starred with bat and ball as Gujarat Titans clinched the IPL title in their debut season with a seven-wicket victory over Rajasthan Royals in front of a record crowd of 104,859 in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

Pandya returned figures of 3-17 to restrict Rajasthan to 130 for nine in the lop-sided final at the world's biggest cricket stadium and Gujarat's home ground.

The captain then made 34 with the bat before Shubman Gill (45) and David Miller (32) steered the team home in 18.1 overs to bring the house down at the 132,000 capacity stadium.

It was a fairytale finish for a team that entered the world's richest domestic cricket tournament alongside Lucknow Super Giants in the expanded 10-team IPL this year.

Pandya set up victory with his key wickets including Jos Buttler's prized scalp for 39 after Rajasthan, led by Sanju Samson, elected to bat first.

Buttler finished this season as the leading batsman with 863 runs and his wicket raised the roof at a stadium bigger than the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Afghanistan's Rashid Khan returned impressive figures of 1-18 from his four overs of leg spin to keep down the opposition scoring.

Pandya, who sent back his opposite

number Samson for 14, kept up the pressure and got the big-hitting Shimron Hetmyer out for 11 with a caught and bowled.

Fast bowlers Mohammed Shami and Yash Dayal, who got opener Yashasvi Jaiswal for 22, worked up good pace to keep Rajasthan on the backfoot from the start.

In reply, Gujarat lost Wriddhiman Saha for five and Matthew Wade for eight before Shubman and Gill and Pandya put the chase back on track.

The pair put on 63 runs for the third wicket to put the pressure back on the bowling side as Pandya smashed Ravichandran Ashwin for a four and six in the 12th over.

Yuzvendra Chahal got Pandya out with his leg spin to overtake Wanindu Hasaranga of Royal Challengers Bangalore as the leading wicket-taker of the tournament and finished with 27 scalps.

But Gill, who was dropped on nought by Chahal, stood firm to put on an unbeaten 47-run stand with left-handed South African batsman David Miller, who made 32 off 19.

Gill's 45 came from 43 balls and ended with a six that secured the victory. The two batsmen hugged and, as the fireworks erupted, the Gujarat players came running on to the pitch to celebrate.

Rajasthan go back dejected after their first final appearance since they won the inaugural edition in 2008 under late Australian hero Shane Warne.



Gujarat Titans opener Shubman Gill embraces hard-hitting batter David Miller after scoring the winning runs against Rajasthan Royals in the final of the IPL at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

PHOTO: BCCI