

History beckons Messi yet again

AGENCIES

On Saturday, World Cup winner Lionel Messi could become the most decorated footballer alongside former Barcelona teammate Dani Alves.

With two games left, Messi's Paris Saint-Germain sit on top of the Ligue 1 table with 84 points from 36 games and have a six-point cushion over the second-placed RC Lens, who are virtually out of the title race courtesy of PSG's superior goal difference.

Messi has won 41 major trophies for his clubs and country, and can match Alves' tally of 42 if PSG beat Strasbourg tonight and win a record 11th Ligue 1 title, surpassing Saint-Etienne, who won 10 Ligue 1 titles.

Former Barcelona stars Andres Iniesta and Maxwell have won 39 and 37 trophies respectively, leaving them in third and fourth position.

Among the trophies in Messi's cabinet includes the World Cup and Copa America which he won in the past year, four Champions League titles, 10 La Liga trophies, one Copa America and many more.

The 35-year-old in particular has scored 20 goals and provided 20 assists in 39 matches across competitions this season.

Messi won the Ligue 1 during his first season in France. He looks set to do so again in what could be his last season in the country.



Bashundhara Kings continued their domestic dominance, making history by completing a four-peat of the Bangladesh Premier League on Friday. [Bottom] Kings beat Sheikh Russel KC 6-4 with four goals coming from Brazilian forward Dorielton Gomes, who marked the occasion by donning a traditional Lucha Libre mask. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Imperious Kings clinch unprecedented four-peat

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings made history by lifting the Bangladesh Premier League title for the fourth successive time after Brazilian forward Dorielton Gomes' poker helped them register a thrilling 6-4 win over Sheikh Russel at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

Kings ensured a fourth straight title with three matches in hand, taking an unassailable lead. They have 46 points from 17 matches, 12 more than nearest rivals Abahani, who yesterday played out a 1-1 draw against archrivals Mohammedan to raise their tally to 34 points from 17 matches.

No team prior to Bashundhara Kings, before or after independence, had won four league titles in a row in domestic top-flight football. The country's two traditional powerhouses, Abahani and Mohammedan, have only managed three in a row, with the Sky Blues completing that feat twice.

Since entering the professional football league in the 2017-18 season, Bashundhara Kings have become a formidable side as they consistently form strong teams, including many national players as well as high-quality foreign recruits.

This season, Kings have suffered only two defeats in 28 matches.

Dorielton opened the scoring in the sixth minute but Suján Bishwas

and Dipak Roy each struck once to hand the initiative back to Sheikh Russel before Brazilian Robson Da Silva and Sheikh Morsalin restored Kings' lead with two goals in the dying embers of the first half. Former Abahani forward Dorielton then took over the show in the second half, in which he scored three goals.

seasons after joining from Abahani, told reporters.

Goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico said: "I have been with Kings for four successive seasons and won the league title four times in a row. I feel really proud to be part of all four titles. This season has been a long one, I suffered injuries and recovered again and played matches."



After securing their four straight title, Bashundhara Kings' players and head coach were ecstatic and celebrated with the few hundred in the stands.

"Lifting the league title four times in a row is a great achievement. I will be a part of this achievement even after quitting football. I really feel good to be part of this achievement," midfielder Sohel Rana, who won the league title with Kings in two successive

Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon said: "Winning the league title is not an easy task. There is a lot of hard work behind this success. It is common for me personally but I am really happy to have helped Kings win four titles in a row."

Meanwhile, in another league match, Chittagong Abahani beat Azampur FC 1-0 to jump to eighth position with 16 points from 16 matches. Azampur FC are bottom with four points from 17 matches.

Klopp still finds 'reasons for optimism'

REUTERS

Liverpool boss Juergen Klopp struck a sombre note on Friday after it was confirmed that the club could not finish in the Premier League's top four but he said he was optimistic as they rebuild for next season.

Liverpool's hopes of qualifying for the Champions League ended when Manchester United thrashed Chelsea 4-1 on Thursday to guarantee a top-four finish and ensure Klopp's side would end the campaign in fifth.

After narrowly missing out on an unprecedented quadruple last season, winning two domestic cups, Liverpool will not feature in the Champions League for the first time under Klopp since his first full season in 2016-17.

The German manager said he was "very self-critical" after they struggled to match the standards they set last season despite a late resurgence that earned them a spot in the second-tier Europa League.

"This has not been a historically good season. We're absolutely not happy with it, we made mistakes and were not consistent enough," Klopp told reporters ahead of their final game of the season, away at Southampton.

"After Dubai since we were in training camp after the World Cup, not everything was great but the amount of points we collected since then is pretty good. If we could have done that all season, we'd be in a different place.

"So of course there are reasons for optimism... The atmosphere our people created in the last home game, the way the club said farewell to the players who are leaving... all of these things are the basis for a fantastic future."

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah said he was devastated after the club failed to qualify for the Champions League and although Klopp agreed with his Egyptian forward, he said the squad was still united.

Dortmund's moment of truth

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The stage is set in Dortmund for the most dramatic Bundesliga finale in more than a decade with Borussia fans desperate to see the team win their first league title in 11 years on Saturday against visitors Mainz 05.

The Ruhr valley club, who last won the Bundesliga under then coach Juergen Klopp in 2012, are one win away from making sure they end Bayern Munich's decade-long stranglehold on the German championship in front of a sold-out 81,000 home crowd on the last matchday of the season.

Star-studded Bayern have had the title in their bag well before the end of previous seasons, but this time, their slip-ups and Dortmund's persistence are keeping the suspense going to the final whistle.

Dortmund are two points clear of Bayern Munich going into the last game and know that a draw or even defeat might still be enough to secure the title depending on Bayern's result in Cologne.

But in Dortmund there is no goal other than to win. A win over mid-table Mainz will certainly secure their first



Bundesliga title since 2012, while Bayern can claim their 11th straight Bundesliga title with a win at Cologne -- but only if the leaders slip up.

Dortmund coach Edin Terzic called on his side not to lose focus, with one game to play.

"We're not done yet, but we're ready to take the final step," Terzic said, "As a team, as a club, as a city."

Terzic was called "the best Dortmund coach since Jurgen Klopp" on Thursday by Germany's Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper, putting the 40-year-old ahead of Bayern boss Thomas Tuchel.



Meanwhile, Dortmund could miss Jude Bellingham for the title decider as the midfielder is in a race against time to be fit for Saturday's match. This fit will be the last game in a Dortmund shirt for Bellingham, who missed Dortmund's 3-0 win away at Augsburg on Sunday with a knee issue.

A win for Dortmund would also mark the biggest success of captain Marco Reus' long and injury-plagued career, with the 33-year-old being one of the most gifted players of his generation but having so far failed to win a league title. "What he has always been

accused of is that he has never won the championship," said Dortmund sports director Sebastian Kehl, captain of the 2012 title winning team. "He feels sorry for that and he will do everything that we are champions on Saturday, but also for him."

The atmosphere could not be more different in Munich, where Tuchel, whose team suffered a shock 3-1 home loss to RB Leipzig last week to surrender the lead in the title race, is trying to convince his players that all is not lost.

"I have no message for Dortmund. We have our own work cut out. We have slipped up too many times," Tuchel told a press conference.

"We will now try to finish the race and give it all but it is not a season anymore that is satisfactory. We don't have to look over to the other game because for us it is clear that first we have to win our game."

Writing on Instagram, Mueller -- who has been a key part of the Bayern team that has won the last ten Bundesliga titles -- told his 12.8 million Instagram followers "everything is still possible".

Afif's performance still not red-ball ready?

SPORTS REPORTER

It was right after the Dhaka Premier League triumph for Abahani that Afif Hossain was asked whether he was interested in longer-version cricket given his sudden inclusion as captain of the A team for West Indies A's tour of Bangladesh. "Of course, why wouldn't I be?" came Afif's straightforward reply.

However, when his name was omitted from the third four-day match, speculation grew about why the captain, was dropped.

As it turns out, Afif was not dropped but had instead asked to skip the third and final four-day game due to exhaustion. "He wasn't dropped. Afif asked to be rested due to exhaustion," a member of the team management told The Daily Star on conditions of anonymity.

Afif's decision certainly raises questions about his Test aspirations given that he has continuously made a place in the national team on the basis of his exploits with the bat in white-ball cricket.

While his first-class performance -- punctuated by five tons, three fifties and 1,361 runs -- does not portray an aversion to the red-ball format, his decision to skip the match brings into question his inclusion given his current frame of mind.

Afif scored 95 runs in four innings during the first two four-day games. But at an

average strike-rate of over 100, he did not show the required patience. Coach Jamie Siddons had even spoken against batters playing 'too many shots' and 'not leaving enough deliveries' before the second four-day game.

Meanwhile a whole host of changes came in for the third four-day game with Mominul Haque, Yasir Ali, Nurul Hasan, Nasum Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Mirritunjoy Chowdhury coming in to get some much-needed red-ball cricket exposure ahead of Bangladesh's lone Test against Afghanistan next month.

The A team fought tooth and nail to get a result against West Indies A yesterday in the second four-day game at Sylhet, but Joshua De Silva stood firm and secured a three-wicket win for the visitors.

Bangladesh did not add much to their overnight score, skittled out for 297, having added just 23 runs with Irfan Shukkur scoring 72.

Spinner Tanvir Islam and Saif Hassan created an opportunity, bagging four and two wickets respectively in defence of a 189-run lead and had West Indies in trouble at 150 for seven before Joshua's knock saw the visitors over the line.

The third four-day game will begin at Sylhet on May 30 but no captain has been named to lead the side.



Iga Swiatek will have to lead a defence of not only her French Open title, but also the World No. 1 ranking as she gears up ahead of the start of her journey at Roland Garros. In order to retain the top ranking, Swiatek will need to reach at least the quarterfinals and hope that World No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka does not go further in the competition. PHOTO: TWITTER

Fahad finishes fourth in Hanoi

SPORTS REPORTER

IM Fahad Rahman ultimately finished fourth in the Hanoi Grandmaster Chess Tournament 2 despite playing out a draw against eventual champion GM Tran Tuan Minh of Vietnam in the ninth and final round in Hanoi yesterday.

The draw helped Fahad secure six points from nine matches, tied with Indian GM Swayams Mishra and Singapore IM Siddharth Jagadeh. Fahad secured fourth place following a tiebreaker.

Fahad needed seven points to secure a GM norm, but he let the opportunity slip despite going very close. He defeated two GMs and one WGM and had a solo lead at the end of the sixth round, but failed to carry his momentum into the seventh and eighth rounds, where he recorded one defeat and one draw against International Masters. He squared off against another GM yesterday and had to be content with a draw.

