

SPORT

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 1 and 2
UEFA Champions League
Live from 1:00 am
(Wednesday, Thursday)
TSPORTS

IPL
Live from 8:00 pm
(Tuesday to Monday)
Live from 4:00 pm
(Sunday)



Bellingham could help Real turn tables on City

AFP, Madrid

Jude Bellingham is aiming to give Real Madrid the edge they badly lacked last season in the Champions League quarterfinal first leg against Manchester City on Tuesday, as he continues a remarkable first season in Spain.

England star Bellingham will lead Madrid's attack alongside Vinicius Junior as the reigning European and Premier League champions visit the Santiago Bernabeu.

Battered and bruised in a 5-1 aggregate thumping by Pep Guardiola's City at the semifinal stage last year, Real Madrid stumped up 103 million euros (\$112 million) to sign the England star from Borussia Dortmund.

Madrid's initial expectations for the 20-year-old were quickly smashed, as he surpassed them at lightning pace.

Bellingham began in stunning goalscoring form, with 14 strikes in his first 15

matches for the club, breaking the record of 13 held by Madrid greats Cristiano Ronaldo and Alfredo Di Stefano.

Having arrived at the club as a midfielder but mainly deployed in attack by Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, Bellingham quickly established himself as a leader and a fan favourite – "Hey Jude", they serenade in the capital.

Although inevitably his goal flow has slowed in recent weeks, he remains Madrid's top scorer and in addition to 20 across 32 appearances in all competitions, he also has provided 10 assists.

Madrid hope Bellingham can help them catch up with City.

Guardiola believes Bellingham's presence could be crucial for the record 14-time winners.

"(Bellingham's) impact has been massive," Guardiola told reporters in March.

"It's a different team from last season – his influence is obvious, and we have to try to discover what he does to control it.

"Facing Real Madrid is always a tough challenge, nobody can deny it. They are an exceptional club, and in this

competition they can control many things with the experience they have in the past."

Madrid have a track record of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat in Europe and did just that against Manchester City in 2022 on the way to glory.

Rodrygo struck in the 90th and 91st minutes against City to force the tie to extra time and Karim Benzema netted the winner to secure a remarkable 6-5 aggregate triumph for Los Blancos.

However, the following season Benzema was not fully fit, and a Madrid lacking spine crumpled at the Etihad Stadium in a 4-0 second-leg thrashing.

Despite only being at the club for a few months, Bellingham has already shown a penchant for the big occasion.

The midfielder helped Madrid come from behind to beat Barcelona 2-1, netting a brace in the league match in October including a 92nd-minute winner.

Bellingham's Madrid thrashed Barcelona 4-1 in his second Clasico appearance to claim the Spanish Super Cup in January, his first trophy

with Madrid.

Eight points clear in La Liga, a second beckons domestically, but Bellingham understands how much Champions League victory would mean for his club.

"I'd much rather keep scoring in the 90 plus minutes than in the 15th, even though it might take a bit of strain (on) my heart and the fans' hearts," said Bellingham after a 94th-minute winner against Union Berlin in the group stage.

Bellingham has four Champions League goals in six appearances this season, including netting twice against Serie A champions Napoli.

An ankle sprain and a suspension has disrupted his start to 2024 but the City tie offers Bellingham a chance to get fully back on track, against a club that would have loved to sign him before it became clear he had his heart set on Madrid.

Most would have liked to – even at 20, Bellingham is drawing comparison to some all-time greats.

"There are things about the way he plays that remind me of (Zinedine) Zidane – it's his extraordinary quality on the ball," declared Ancelotti in February.

Same but different as Kane returns to north London

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane returns to north London to face old foes Arsenal in Tuesday's Champions League quarterfinal and finds himself nursing a familiar problem.

Once again, Kane will step onto the Emirates Stadium pitch as a shining light in a struggling team seemingly on course for a disappointing season without silverware.

This time, however, Kane is wearing the red and white of Bayern Munich, a proud club who have collapsed under the weight of Xabi Alonso's incredible Bayer Leverkusen this season.

Famously trophyless despite a stellar career, Kane left Spurs for German behemoths Bayern, a club synonymous with success and silverware.

Kane quickly established himself as Bayern's most important player, with 32 goals in 28 league matches – and six more in the Champions League.

The England captain is however no closer to that elusive first piece of silverware.

Riding high atop the Premier League, Arsenal fans will no doubt delight in telling Kane he has taken his trophyless curse with him to Bavaria.

And while Kane would have envisioned a happier north London homecoming after his 100 million euro (\$108 million) move, Tuesday gives him the perfect chance to sink the knife into an Arsenal side lacking in European football pedigree.

Despite their current predicament, both Bayern and Kane can take solace from their records against Arsenal.

Kane has a habit of exacting sweet revenge on the club who released him as a junior, scoring 14 goals in 19 games. No player has scored more goals in the north London derby.

The England captain's win-loss record against Arsenal is less spectacular but still solid, seven victories, seven defeats and five draws.

Bayern have lost just three of 12 Champions League encounters with the Gunners, winning seven, and have won each of the last three games between the clubs by a 5-1 scoreline.

On course for a first Premier League title since 2004, the Gunners have won all four of their Champions League home games this season.



ARSENAL VS BAYERN

- No team has played as many Champions League knockout fixtures as Arsenal and not lifted the trophy.
- Arsenal have lost six of their last nine home matches against German teams and won just two of their last seven overall.
- Bayern have won seven of the teams' 12 contests, including the last three all with a 5-1 scoreline.
- Bayern are in the Champions League last eight for a record 22nd time.
- Bayern previously eliminated Arsenal from the knockout stages of European club football's elite competition on three occasions: 2004-05, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

REAL MADRID VS MAN CITY

- Real are unbeaten in their last 27 home matches in all competitions (W22 D5), a run stretching back to April last year.
- The game at Santiago Bernabeu will see Real coach Carlo Ancelotti become the first coach to 200 Champions League games.
- Since their defeat to Monaco in 2004, Real have won each of their last 11 Champions League quarterfinal ties.
- Real have won three of the five encounters with Man City at home.
- Man City are unbeaten in their last 25 games across all competitions (W21 D4).
- Pep Guardiola's side have impressively scored three goals in each of their eight Champions League matches so far this season.
- Since a 3-1 loss to Real in 2022, Man City have gone 21 games without a loss in the Champions League.

SHORT CORNER



Messi called 'possessed dwarf', 'devil' by Monterrey coach

Inter Miami's Lionel Messi was called a 'possessed dwarf' and 'devil' by an opposition coach following a confrontation in the tunnel, revealed an audio leaked by Fox Sports MX. The incident took place after the first leg match of the Concacaf Champions Cup between Inter Miami and Mexican club Monterrey on April 4, which the latter won 2-1.

Kamindu named ICC Player of the Month for March

Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis got the reward for his tremendous showing against Bangladesh in the recently concluded tour and was named ICC Player of the Month for March 2024. "I am extremely happy to be named the ICC Men's Player of the Month, which I consider an inspiration for my international career," Mendis was quoted in an ICC press release.

Mbappe issues warning for Barcelona

Paris Saint Germain forward Kylian Mbappe fired a warning for Barcelona ahead of their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal first-leg match, saying he is "ready" for the Catalan giants. PSG will host Barcelona on April 11 in the first-leg and the French forward said he is primed for the challenge.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

Computers say Arsenal won't win title

REUTERS, London

The super computers and number crunchers still don't fancy Arsenal's chances of winning a compelling three-way Premier League title race despite, on current form, the London club being the best team in England.

Arsenal have won 10 of their last 11 Premier League games with the only dropped points coming in a masterful 0-0 draw at champions Manchester City that was concrete proof of how much they improved from last year's model. They have scored 20 times in their last five away league games in which they conceded not a single goal.

They wear the confident look of champions elect but there are caveats, notably a seven-game run in that looks tougher than Liverpool's and Manchester City's with matches against Aston Villa, Tottenham Hotspur, Chelsea and Manchester United.

Premier League data analysts Opta ran the likely scenarios through their computer after Liverpool's 2-2 draw at Manchester United on Sunday and come up with a conclusion that will not be comforting for Arsenal fans.

In fact the weekend's matches appear to have skewed the title race firmly in favour of Pep Guardiola's City.

Before the weekend City were 33.6% likely to

win a fourth successive title, according to Opta. That has now increased to 40.6%. Arsenal's title-winning chance is 30.3% with Liverpool slipping from favourites to third at 29.1% – a 15.9% drop from before the last round of fixtures.

A look at the remaining fixtures explains why City are marginally the more likely to prevail in the tightest three-way title duel since City edged out a stumbling Liverpool and Chelsea by two and four points respectively in 2013-14.

Six of City's last seven games are against Luton Town (h), Brighton and Hove Albion (a), Nottingham Forest (a), Wolverhampton Wanderers (h), Fulham (a) and West Ham United (h) with their biggest test being a trip to Tottenham Hotspur.

Aston Villa on Saturday before Wolves (a), Chelsea (h), Tottenham (a), Bournemouth (h), Manchester United (a) and Everton (h).

Liverpool face Crystal Palace (h), Fulham (a), Everton (a), West Ham (a), Tottenham (h), Aston Villa (a) and Wolves (h).

While the algorithms still favour City, Arsenal's hopes of a first league title in 20 years are boosted by a far superior goal difference compared to their two rivals.

Run drought in DPL and its consequences

SPORTS REPORTER

The Dhaka Premier League (DPL) is going through a run drought this season as most matches have been low-scoring affairs, which inevitably raises questions about whether the country's premier List A competition is preparing the players for the challenges of international cricket.

When faced with good batting wickets in ICC events, like the ones used in last year's ICC ODI World Cup, time and again the Bangladesh batters struggle to get going and the bowlers look like fish out of water.

A big reason behind this failure is that the Bangladesh cricketers play most of their domestic cricket on low and slow wickets and are simply ill-prepared for the challenges of playing on a flat wicket.

On wickets that lack consistent bounce, batters often struggle with timing and bowlers get away with rank bad deliveries, often picking up wickets with such deliveries, which very much has been the case in majority of the matches in the first nine rounds of this year's DPL.

Teams have been bundled out below 100 six times, over 50 percent of the games has seen scores of 100-200, there have been only four 300-plus totals and only one time has a team chased down a 300-plus target. Shinepukur Cricket Club head coach



Talha Jubair acknowledged the lack of runs.

"Whenever we play the premier league, we adjust to any sort of wicket that we are given. We know that these problems will be present," Talha told members of the media on Monday.

"There isn't much to do since there are quite a few tournaments including the first division, second division and BPL. The wickets don't get rest so there is no point in blaming the wicket or the groundsmen."

"But the previous premier leagues that I have seen were not this low-scoring. This time, teams are winning after scoring 200," added the former national team pacer.

The spinners have been enjoying the playing conditions in particular with many of them having excellent economy rates. Mosaddek Hossain has an economy-

rate of 2.52, having bowled over 29 overs, suggesting the difficulty of run-making in the middle overs.

But such economy rates only create a false sense of confidence which gets shattered on better wickets in international matches, warned Talha.

"The wicket at Mirpur was pretty good, some runs were scored. But I cannot blame the batsmen on the BKSP, Fatullah pitches. The wicket is slow and low, has turn and uneven bounce. That is why I won't give credit to the bowlers, they just had to bowl it in the right areas. They don't have to showcase any skill."

"I think it will create a false self-confidence which will not help in international matches. There [in international cricket] the pitches are batting friendly. So, if the skill isn't there, then to bowl on this sort of a wicket and carry it on into international cricket is not a smart move," he said.

Despite the difficult conditions, Talha also asked the batters to show more fight and bat more responsibly.

"They [batters] also have to adjust. A lot of batters are scoring runs. [Parvez Hossain] Emon is scoring at the top of the order. If he can do it, why can't the middle order batsmen? They are getting out playing bold shots. Batters also need to find safe scoring shots and play calculatedly."