

City must win at Spurs to clinch title: Guardiola

AGENCIES

Manchester City have lost all four Premier League matches they have played at the Tottenham Hotspur stadium but the defending champions must change that when they visit the North London side on Tuesday, manager Pep Guardiola said.

Second with 85 points from 36 matches, City are one point behind Arsenal who have played an extra game.

If City beat Spurs, they will be able to seal the championship with a win at home to West Ham on the final day of the season on Sunday, when Arsenal host Everton, as the Citizens seek a record fourth title in a row.

"If we don't win we aren't going to win the Premier League, so this is what we have to do," Guardiola told reporters on Monday.

"It's always so demanding to play there, especially this season. They are so aggressive."

City got their first win at Spurs' new stadium in an FA Cup tie in January, ending a five-match losing streak at the venue.

Tottenham won their last four home league games against Manchester City and kept a clean sheet in each of those four encounters. But Ange Postecoglou's side lost 1-0 at home in an FA Cup fourth-round fixture in January.

City have not won their final away league game in the past three seasons.

Under Pep Guardiola, City have lost six times to Tottenham six times in all competitions – the most they have lost against a particular opposition with the Spaniard in charge.

The reverse fixture between the two teams at the Etihad Stadium earlier this season ended in an enthralling 3-3 draw.



"We know what we are playing for," Guardiola said. "We know how difficult it is to be in this position again but we have something unique in front of us."

Guardiola's men are charging towards the finishing line, hitting 28 goals in their past seven Premier League matches and conceding just five times.

"Consistency has been there and that's the reality ... I push my players and they push me," the manager said.

"We are trying to do something special so we have to do that this time. This is the time to do it otherwise Arsenal will be champions."

Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou admitted

that such a fixture at the closing stages of the season sees his side up against an intense challenge.

"Any time you're going to play Man City, particularly at the end of a season when they always seem to be at their best, it's a hell of a challenge," Postecoglou told reporters on Monday.

"We've got an opportunity to measure ourselves against the best. A team that has consistently strived for honours. We want to emulate them one day."

"My recent home record against them is one game, one loss. So I'm not going to take any confidence from that," Postecoglou said.

The manager dismissed the idea that most Spurs fans would want their club to lose in order to dent local rival Arsenal's title hopes.

"You think the majority of our fans are not going to want us to win tomorrow night? I don't see it that way," he said.

"I will never understand if somebody wants their own team to lose. That is not what sport is about. What I love more than anything is the competitiveness," he added.

High-flying Atalanta close in on CL

AGENCIES

Atalanta took a big step towards Champions League football on Sunday by beating Serie A top-five rivals Roma 2-1, a win which also guaranteed spots for Bologna and Juventus in Europe's elite club event.

A brilliant brace from Charles De Ketelaere in the first 20 minutes gave Atalanta, still on a high from reaching the Europa League final, a fully deserved win in Bergamo.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side sit in Italy's fifth and final Champions League spot, three points ahead of Roma with a game in hand against Fiorentina which they will play the weekend after the scheduled end of the season.

Atalanta, who also face Juventus in the Italian Cup final on Wednesday, looked set to sweep Roma aside in the same manner in which they dealt with Marseille on Thursday to reach their first-ever European final.

But they had to overcome a tense finale after Lorenzo Pellegrini's 66th-minute penalty gave the away side hope, despite a dominating display from the hosts who also hit the post twice.

"We weren't clinical enough in front of goal, otherwise we would have won it sooner without having to suffer so much at the end," said Gasperini to DAZN.

"I don't know if we've learned a lesson, other than we had so many scoring opportunities and did not aim properly," he added.

Defeat for Roma followed up their heartbreaking last-four elimination from the Europa League at Bayer Leverkusen.

Daniele De Rossi's team, who were missing injured talisman Paulo Dybala, have little chance of finishing fifth but can still reach the continent's top club competition even if they finish sixth, if Atalanta win the Europa League.

Thanks to Atalanta's win Bologna will make their first appearance in the modern Champions League as they and Juve, who could only draw with relegated Salernitana, are seven points ahead of Roma with two rounds of fixtures remaining.

Third-placed Bologna hailed their qualification with a simple "Bologna, we did it" on social media.

Injury in limelight with WC squad imminent

SPORTS REPORTER

Ahead of Bangladesh's T20 World Cup squad announcement, there appeared to be very little doubt regarding the make-up of the side, but Taskin Ahmed's late injury has stirred debates the team management will have to settle. The Bangladesh Cricket Board has officially informed that the squad is set to be announced on Tuesday.

Yesterday, pacerman Hasan Mahmud met with head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and it was learnt that Hasan is set to board the flight to USA to play the three-match T20I series against USA, slated to begin on May 21.

Given Taskin's injury, which he suffered during the fourth T20I against Zimbabwe recently, the pacer will not be playing the three-match series against USA. The Tigers are expected to take a 17-member squad to the USA for the upcoming series and Taskin will accompany the squad. Team management sources are still hopeful that the pacer can recover in time for the World Cup.

"We are still hopeful that we will have some positive news regarding Taskin. If it was too serious, we would have been informed that there is no chance," a member of the selection panel told The Daily Star yesterday.

Taskin had not been allowed NOC to play the Indian Premier

League but the pacer had played Dhaka Premier League matches and four of the five T20I matches against Zimbabwe lately. Concerns regarding his injury had seen him sit out the fifth and final T20I in Dhaka which the Tigers lost by eight wickets.

If Taskin does not make a full recovery, it will open the door for Hasan to be included in the World Cup squad.



Changes can be made to the World Cup squad till May 24 and ICC T20WC technical committee's permission is required if any team wants to make a change to the squad after that date.

There are also suggestions from sources that all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin's inclusion in the World Cup squad is under doubt. Saifuddin picked up eight wickets in the four matches he played in the Zimbabwe series

at an economy rate of 9.31. He, however, conceded 55 runs in four overs in the final T20I and team management is believed to be disappointed by his performance.

The all-rounder also got just one opportunity to bat during the series.

Pacer Tanzim Sakib likely has a good chance of making the cut, given doubts over Saifuddin's inclusion. Bangladesh are also mulling over the inclusion of spinner Tanvir Islam, though it remains to be seen whether he gets into the final 15-member squad.

The rest of the squad looks pretty settled. Shakib Al Hasan has made a strong return with the ball in the Zimbabwe series alongside pacer Mustafizur Rahman. Towhid Hridoy was in fine touch in the recent series and was well supported in the middle-order by Jaker Ali Anik and Mahmudullah Riyad.

Mahmudullah, who did not get a place in the 2022 World Cup, has the highest average among Bangladesh's middle-order batters in the last 12 months and his experience will be banked on heading to the global event.

Meanwhile Rishad Hossain, who has featured the most in the Tigers' T20I line-up in the last 12 months, playing 13 out of 16 T20Is and bagging 10 wickets, is being earmarked as the first specialist leg spinner in a Bangladesh World Cup squad in a while.

Big names miss out in Dutch T20 WC squad

ICC

Veteran all-rounder Roelof van der Merwe and key batter Colin Ackermann missed the cut for the Dutch as the Netherlands named their squad for next month's ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024

Selectors instead opted for the more youthful choices of left-arm spinner Tim Pringle, young seamer Kyle Klein and hard-hitting opener Michael Levitt in their squad. Levitt turned heads with a blistering hundred against Namibia in a T20I tri-series played in Nepal back in February, hitting 11 fours and 10 sixes in a knock of 135 from just 62 balls.

Wicket-keeper-batter Scott Edwards will once again lead the Netherlands in his regular role as skipper, with star all-rounder Bas de Leede among the key players for a Dutch side that will face South Africa, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal during the group stages at the T20 World Cup.

The Netherlands' first match comes on June 4 against Nepal in Dallas, with the European side looking to build on their impressive effort at the last T20 World Cup where they upset South Africa in one of two memorable victories during the Super 12 stage of the event.

Squad: Scott Edwards (c), Aryan Dutt, Bas de Leede, Daniel Doram, Fred Klaassen, Kyle Klein, Logan van Beek, Max O'Dowd, Michael Levitt, Paul van Meekeren, Sybrand Engelbrecht, Teja Nidamanuru, Tim Pringle, Vikram Singh, Viv Kingma, Wesley Barresi

SHORT CORNER

Tchouameni 'not ruled out' for CL final: Ancelotti



Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said Monday injured midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni was 'not ruled out' from competing in the Champions League final. Los Blancos face German side Borussia Dortmund at Wembley on June 1 but Tchouameni is a doubt after suffering a stress fracture in his left foot last week.

Ten Hag laments Man Utd's injuries

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag blamed an injury crisis at the Old Trafford club for a poor campaign after his side fell to a 1-0 loss to Arsenal in the Premier League on Sunday - their ninth home defeat across all competitions this season.

Germany eyes huge party as it hosts Euro 2024

Germany is gearing up to host the Euro 2024 football championship under high security as global threats cast a shadow, but on the field, the home team will be looking to prove they are finally back in form.

Livingstone leaves IPL to get 'knee sorted'

England batsman Liam Livingstone has left the Indian Premier League early to get his knee "sorted" ahead of the T20 World Cup in June, the Punjab Kings player said. Livingstone, 30, played just seven of 12 matches for Punjab, who have been knocked out of the play-off race for this season.

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PHOTO: REUTERS

PSG's Mbappe brothers -- forward Kylian and midfielder Ethan -- pose with their mother Fayza Lamari on Sunday following a price-giving ceremony marking the French club's record-extending 11th Ligue 1 title, confirmed about two weeks ago. It was the last game in Paris for Kylian Mbappe, who confirmed his exit from the club at the end of the season through a social media post on Friday. Mbappe opened the scoring after eight minutes with a fine finish into an open goal in his final appearance at the Parc des Princes but PSG were left stunned as Toulouse spoiled the hosts' title celebration with a 3-1 win to inflict only their second Ligue 1 defeat this season.

'NO RHYTHM, NO TEMPO' Djokovic risks losing top spot

REUTERS

Novak Djokovic's shock exit from the Italian Open on Sunday could prove to be a decisive moment in the race for the world number one spot, as the top-ranked Serb prepares for his French Open title defence with Jannik Sinner poised to leapfrog him.

Two days after accidentally being hit on the head by a water bottle while signing autographs in Rome, an off-colour Djokovic crashed to his earliest defeat in the tournament he has won six times after a 6-2, 6-3, third-round thrashing by Alejandro Tabilo.

Djokovic will remain 1,090 points ahead of Sinner before the year's second Grand Slam begins on May 26, but the 36-year-old is on shaky ground as he will be defending 2,000 points in Paris and winning the title may not be enough to stay on top.

"It was a very unfortunate, unlucky situation ... that guy leaned over the fence, and the bottle dropped from his rucksack and landed on my head," Djokovic said, reflecting on the freak accident that hurt his chances to pull away from Sinner.

"It was unexpected. I wasn't even looking up. Then I felt a very strong hit in the head. That has really

impacted me.

"The way I felt on the court [on Sunday] was just completely like a different player entered into my shoes. No rhythm, no tempo, no balance whatsoever on any shot. It is concerning."

With only six matches on clay, Djokovic will be slightly undercooked as he heads to Paris in search of a record 25th Grand Slam title.

Even if Djokovic goes on to win at Roland Garros, Sinner could rise to world number one for the first time on June 10 by reaching the championship match.

The 22-year-old Sinner, who skipped Rome with a hip injury, will be defending only 45 points in Paris but faces a race against time to be fully fit.

Djokovic had endured a bumpy season even before the bottle incident as the Serb's bid for a record-extending 11th title at the Australian Open was snuffed out by eventual

champion Sinner in the semifinals.

He then fell to lucky loser Luca Nardi in the Indian Wells third round before being outlasted by Casper Ruud in the Monte Carlo semifinals, sparking fear among fans that his aura of invincibility was slowly fading.



Despite winning three out of the four Grand Slams last year, Djokovic split with long-time coach Goran Ivanisevic and fitness coach Marco Panichi in a bid to rediscover his best form ahead of Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the Paris Olympics.

Talk of terminal decline may still be premature as Djokovic could silence critics by winning a fourth title at the claycourt major, but he admitted things must improve fast after reaching May without a trophy for the first time since 2018.

"Everything needs to be better in order for me to have at least a chance to win it," said Djokovic.