

## Bringing Gundogan back was a no-brainer

### Guardiola

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said the decision to re-sign former captain Ilkay Gundogan was an easy one, considering the season the German international enjoyed at Barcelona.

Midfielder Gundogan, who played seven seasons for Guardiola's men before departing for Spain, could feature in Saturday's home Premier League match against Ipswich Town.

"(Gundogan) called me and asked me the situation, the chance to come back and we said yes immediately," Guardiola told reporters on Friday.

"He played really well last season and I know how competitive it is. I love his qualities and he will give us an incredible alternative.

"If he has to play (Saturday) then he knows everything."

Gundogan left City for Barcelona in 2023 on a free transfer after leading Guardiola's side to the treble, among 14 major trophies he won with the English champions including five Premier League titles.

Gundogan made 51 appearances last season, helping Barca to a second-place finish in La Liga.

He described City's offer as the "perfect package" and Guardiola agreed.

"It is a privilege for all of us (to be at the club). It is an honour," the manager said. "The club is being ran for everyone amazingly. (The players) have everything they need to perform at the highest level possible."

Manchester City will hope that Erling Haaland's flying vigour continues against newly-promoted Ipswich Town at home on Saturday in the Premier League and also throughout the season after the forward got things going in the right direction with his opening goal of the season in City's 2-0 win against Chelsea in the last game week.



PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY

## Bangladesh contingent for Paris Paralympics reduced after criticism

SPORTS REPORTER

The Youth and Sports Ministry of Bangladesh yesterday revised a government order (GO) that cut the list of members set to go to the Paris Paralympics, running from August 28 to September 8, following criticism.

It cancelled GOs of six members, revising the Bangladesh contingent from 13 to seven members. They will accompany the two athletes – archers Joma Akhter and Al Amin Hossain – who will participate in the tournament.

The National Paralympic Committee (NPC) on July 18 secured the approval for a 13-member contingent from the ministry which saw the NPC come under immense scrutiny.

Now, the new government order approved five officials – NPC acting president Dr Sheikh Abdus Salam, chef de mission Fakhruddin Haider, physician Monirul Islam, team official Ashif Sobhan, and coach Nisith Das – to accompany the athletes.

International Paralympic Committee guests Rebeca Sultana and Maksudur Rahman, chef de mission's support Nigar Haider, team official Mohammad Faisal Ahsan Ullah, and two government officials – Aminul Islam and Mohammad Sanaul Haque – were excluded from the contingent.

## Sri Lanka to host NZ Test during presidential vote

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will host New Zealand for a two-match Test series during next month's presidential election, Sri Lanka Cricket board said Friday.

The first Test will begin on September 18 at Galle, but there will be a rest day on September 21 when the voting is set to take place, the board said.

The final match will also be played at Galle from September 26.

New Zealand's last tour of Sri Lanka was in August 2019, when they drew a two-match Test series with the hosts.

Next month's presidential election is the country's first poll since it declared a sovereign default in 2022 during an unprecedented economic crisis.

Months of protests over shortages of food, fuel and medicines forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down after an immense crowd of angry Sri Lankans stormed his compound.

His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe introduced tough austerity measures in line with an IMF rescue package negotiated last year.



# Arsenal seek Villa REVENGE

### United travel to Brighton

AFP, Manchester

Arsenal's Premier League title aspirations face an early test away at bogey team Aston Villa on Saturday, while Manchester United's defence are set for a stiff examination at Brighton.

Arsenal's two defeats to Villa last season cost them the chance of a first league title in 20 years.

"They scored and we didn't, it's very simple," Arteta told reporters of the two defeats by Villa last season.

"In two games, even though we had an enormous amount of chances to do that, and that was one of the big differences, one of the details we have analysed. We have to do better tomorrow [Saturday]."

The Gunners are gearing up to again try to dethrone Manchester City but a trip to Villa Park begins a tough run of fixtures so early in the season.

Arsenal will also travel to north London rivals Tottenham and City in their opening five games.

Mikel Arteta's men got off to a winning start at home to Wolves as Bukayo Saka and Kai Havertz showed no sign of fatigue from their exertions at Euro 2024.

Arsenal need more of the same against a Villa side that also got off to an encouraging start by winning 2-1 away at West Ham.

Villa have strengthened their squad in preparation for their first Champions

League campaign since the competition was the European Cup back in 1982/83.

Doubts remain over Villa's ability to maintain a fight for the Premier League top four alongside their European commitments, but with just one game a week early in the season they are well capable of dealing an early blow to Arsenal in the title race.



**Two sides to Man Utd start**

Manchester United's 1-0 win over Fulham on the opening night of the season could be read one of two ways.

After finishing eighth in a torrid campaign last season, Erik ten Hag's men badly needed a winning start as a sign that a new era off the field at Old Trafford will be accompanied by an improvement on the pitch.

The fact new signing Joshua Zirkzee

came off the bench to score the winner helped raise belief United have sufficiently strengthened to at least threaten the top four with defenders Leny Yoro, Noussair Mazraoui and Matthijs de Ligt also arriving in the transfer window.

Yet, the ease with which Fulham created chances was eerily reminiscent of how United were consistently cut open



last season.

A truer test of United's credentials come at the Amex on Saturday against a Brighton side themselves flying high after a 3-0 win at Everton.

The youngest ever manager in the Premier League Fabian Hurler, 31, takes charge of his first home match for the Seagulls, who have Kaoru Mitoma back fit and could hand a debut to new £40 million (\$52 million) signing Georginio Rutter.

## Slot 'trusts' Liverpool squad without signings

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Arne Slot said on Friday he was relaxed about his new club's lack of transfer activity after inheriting a "very good team" at Anfield.

Slot has the unenviable task of succeeding Jurgen Klopp but got off to a winning start by beating newly promoted Ipswich 2-0 on the opening weekend of the Premier League season.

Liverpool are the only side in the English top flight yet to make a single signing in the window.

Spain international Martin Zubimendi rejected the opportunity to leave Real Sociedad, while a deal for Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili is reportedly close that would see the Georgian stay at the Mestalla this season on loan.

"I trust the team," said Slot on why he is not stressing about the lack of new signings.

"I've said before, I have inherited a very good team, with young players. We trust them a lot. They proved that they have earned our trust."

Slot takes charge of his first competitive game at Anfield on Sunday when Brentford are the visitors.

The Dutchman, though, said he was too focused on getting the three points to feel the nerves of having to impress the home fans.

"I am not nervous at all. Certainly not at this moment because I'm in the middle of preparation, prepare the team for Sunday," he added.

"It wouldn't be a good thing if you have nerves. I trust what me and my staff do to prepare the team in the best possible way. I trust the team a lot."

Liverpool's window has been more dominated by sales.

Sepp van den Berg and Fabio Carvalho have joined Brentford for combined fees of close to £50 million, while Bobby Clark has joined Red Bull Salzburg.

# Mbappe set for 'beautiful' Bernabeu debut

AGENCIES

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said striker Kylian Mbappe will enjoy a "beautiful day" when he makes his home debut for the Spanish giants on Sunday in La Liga.

Los Blancos face Real Valladolid in their first match at the Santiago Bernabeu this season with supporters clamouring to see the French superstar in action.

Mbappe scored on his debut for Madrid in Warsaw against Atalanta in the UEFA Super Cup win but could not find the net in a 1-1 league draw at Mallorca.

"I think it will be a beautiful day for Mbappe, to play at the Bernabeu for the first time in a Real Madrid shirt," Ancelotti told reporters Friday.

"The fans are very excited about him, and he will have a great game, because of the quality he has – the fans will enjoy themselves."

Mbappe was linked with Real Madrid for several years while at Paris Saint-Germain and was finally able to make his dream move this summer at the end of his contract in France.

Even with Mbappe joining Vinicius Junior, Rodrygo Goes and Jude Bellingham in attack, Ancelotti has complained his team have lacked balance



in their first two matches.

"We have prepared well for the game on Sunday... we know very well what happened against Mallorca and we have tried to fix it for this weekend," said Ancelotti.

"I think facing Valladolid will be a good test... we lacked balance at times and we have to work on that.

"It's not so hard to look for a solution when the problem is clear, there is also a clear solution."

**Bellingham could be sidelined for a month**

However, as things stand, Ancelotti will have to find balance without Bellingham

for a number of upcoming matches as, according to Spanish reports, midfielder Bellingham is set to be sidelined for around a month after suffering a calf injury in training on Friday.

Bellingham will miss La Liga games against Real Valladolid, Las Palmas and Real Betis, as well as England's Nations League matches against the Republic of Ireland and Finland in September.

"(Bellingham) took a knock, we're evaluating it," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told a press conference earlier Friday.

**Training behind closed doors**

Meanwhile, Ancelotti, who usually talks to the media one day before each Real game, decided to change the schedule so he could hold his final training session before the Valladolid game behind closed doors at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium today.

Ancelotti said his unusual move had nothing to do with Real's drab performance at Mallorca last weekend which left the usually calm and collected Ancelotti fuming at his players' effort.

"It's nothing special, I'm doing it just to test the pitch, because it has changed compared to last year. I want the players to try the new pitch to see how they feel there. There is nothing superstitious or anything else behind it," Ancelotti said.

# Barca hope to register Olmo for Bilbao clash

REUTERS

Barcelona hope to have new signing Dani Olmo available against Athletic Bilbao amid the midfielder's LaLiga registration issues due to Barca's breach of Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules, manager Hansi Flick said on Friday.

Barcelona host Bilbao on Saturday after winning 2-1 at Valencia in their LaLiga opener.

Former Germany midfielder Ilkay Gundogan, one of the top earners at the club, re-signed for Manchester City on Friday, clearing the way for Olmo's arrival.

"(The registration) is not my job, we have worked well this week, (Olmo) is ready to play and I hope he will be in the team, that will be very positive for us," Flick told reporters.

"In training he is amazing and it is important to have him as soon as possible."

Flick's side will be missing Pedri, Gavi, Ronald Araujo and Frenkie De Jong due to

injuries but will welcome back midfielder Fermin Lopez, who rejoins the squad after winning the European Championship and Olympic title with Spain.

"From what I see, he will be ready to play. It was important for him to rest after two tournaments," Flick said.

Flick said former Barcelona midfielder Gundogan had told him he wanted to help the LaLiga side but changed his mind.

"It happens. At the end, I know him as a person and as a player. He has been a fantastic player for Barcelona and the German national team," Flick said.

Flick was asked about the threat of Bilbao forward Nico Williams, who was superb during Spain's Euro 2024 run alongside Barca's Lamine Yamal.

"It's not my job to talk about a player from the opposing team," he said. "Bilbao are physically very strong and they have a great coach. It will be a tough game."

