

SEVILLA STEAMROLLER HIGHLIGHTS SPAIN'S WEIGHT IN EUROPE

MADRID: Sevilla's rout of Liverpool in the Europa League final is a new sign of which country rules the continent's football and a powerful warning to Barcelona ahead of their kings of Spain clash. Coke's double in the 3-1 win in Basel highlighted the value of the Spanish system of turning home talent into title winners. And Sevilla's record five titles in the UEFA Cup and Europa League have shown them to be masters of the art. Real and Atletico Madrid will dispute the Champions League next week in a showdown that highlights how Spanish clubs can also buy world class talent successfully to dominate European football. The Europa League "belongs" to Sevilla, AS sports daily wrote Thursday after the stunning second half comeback spurred the triumph.

Losing 1-0 at half-time, Coke's double and a third from Kevin Gameiro saw Sevilla to a win that left Liverpool on their knees. "The Andalusian team steamrolled the English in an unforgettable second half," said Mundo Deportivo. The win again left English Premier League clubs wondering how to turn their wealth into European success. AS editor Alfredo Relano said that Sevilla have a "magnificent structure with a model sporting system and an extraordinary business plan, buying well and selling even better". Spanish clubs have bought and nurtured outstanding talent from Portugal, South America and other smaller football nations. But they have a core of players that have come through their own academies.

Sevilla bought their match-winner Coke for a reported 2.5 million euros from Rayo Vallecano in 2011. They developed Brazilian right back Dani Alves from the youth ranks and sold him to Barcelona for more than 28 million euros. Alves left in tears saying he would like to play with Sevilla again some day. Ivan Rakitic, Aleix Vidal and Seydou Keita have also been sold on by Sevilla to Barcelona at a big premium. With Barcelona and Real Madrid leading the Spanish pack on the international stage, clubs like Atletico, Sevilla and Villarreal have a huge incentive to up their game to survive.

Coaches also have a far wider variety of styles that goes far past the 'tiki-taka' short passing style that has brought Barcelona success. Diego Simeone's Atletico Madrid have a rock-solid defensive structure that has stifled Europe's best. Real Madrid, Sevilla and Villarreal are all deadly on the counter-attack. "Football in Spain is a very technical game. The best football is here," said Manchester City manager Manuel Pellegrini, whose side was dumped out of the Champions League semi-finals by Real Madrid. "Spanish teams work very well at the academy level," Spain coach Vicente del Bosque told AFP in a recent interview. "From there, with the improvement of coaching too, it has improved the standard at club and international level."

Now Sevilla are a Europa legend and their win means that Spain has secured the Europa League-Champions League double two years in a row. Atletico play Real in Milan on May 28 for the Champions League title—their second clash in the final in three years. Sevilla can add to their history if they overcome Barcelona in the Kings Cup final on Sunday. The Sport newspaper said yesterday that Sevilla's comeback from a "torrid" first half meant that "Barcelona have been warned." But win or lose, Spanish clubs have scored another key win over their English rivals. "Liverpool may be legendary, but Sevilla are eternal," declared Sport. — AFP



BASEL: Liverpool's English midfielder and Captain James Milner (left) falls next to Sevilla's Argentinean midfielder Ever Banega during the UEFA Europa League final football match between Liverpool FC and Sevilla FC on May 18, 2016. — AFP

MORE FINAL MISERY FOR KLOPP

FINAL DEFEAT CAN BE CATALYST FOR BRIGHT FUTURE

BASEL: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said he will give it "everything I have" to reach another final after collecting his fifth successive losers medal following a 3-1 defeat to Sevilla in the Europa League final on Wednesday.

Liverpool had been hoping to end their 15-year wait for Europa League glory having last won the competition, as the UEFA Cup, in a nine-goal thriller against Deportivo Alaves in 2001. But a second-half fightback on Wednesday saw Spanish midfielder Coke hit a brace in the space of six minutes to help Sevilla to their third consecutive and fifth trophy overall from Europe's second-tier competition.

It means five-time European champions Liverpool have not won a European trophy since their stunning comeback victory over AC Milan in the final of the Champions League in 2005. Klopp, meanwhile, now has a fifth successive losers medal from his past five finals. But the German took a decidedly positive approach to his poor record. "I'm not sure I have a good answer but I will try with all I have to reach the next final, and to win the next final," Klopp said. He added: "There are more important things in life than football. I have a lot of luck in my life. I'm sitting here as manager of Liverpool FC so I think I'm a lucky person."

The last of Klopp's silver medals came as recently as February when Liverpool lost the League Cup final on penalties to Manchester City. In Klopp's last match as manager of Borussia Dortmund, the Bundesliga side suffered a 3-1 defeat to Wolfsburg in the German Cup final—the second successive setback in the competition after an extra-time defeat to Bayern

Munich in the 2014 final. But the defeat that arguably hurt the Liverpool manager most came against Bayern in the all-German final of the Champions League in 2013 when Arjen Robben hit a late winner for the Bavarian giants. "I promise everybody we will use it (Wednesday's loss) and come back stronger. It was 50-60% of our usual quality and we have to accept that. We will come back," said Klopp after the game.

Catalyst for bright future

A spirit-crushing defeat in a major final can often signal the end for a manager, yet Liverpool boss believes their Europa League final heartache could prove to be a bright new beginning for his club. A self-confessed fan of "heavy metal football", Klopp would have loved nothing more than to get his hands on a weighty piece of silverware in Basel, but his hopes of glory were dashed by a 3-1 loss to the competition's masters Sevilla. As Sevilla captain Coke held aloft the trophy at St Jakob-Park, Liverpool's German coach had already disappeared down the tunnel, not waiting to applaud opponents who had dashed his hopes of ending his first season at Anfield with a trophy.

"We will use this experience—that is what we have to do," German Klopp told reporters. "The players are still young. Some day everyone will say Basel was a decisive moment for Liverpool FC." Klopp arrived at Anfield in October to take charge of a team low on confidence who had developed a reputation for lacking the steel to get over the line on big occasions. While the latter accusation could still be leveled at Klopp's squad, confidence abounds that the

German is steering the Liverpool ship to new horizons and a second cup final defeat in three months will not have swayed fans who have been captivated by the German.

After going three seasons under Klopp's predecessor Brendan Rodgers without making a major final, to reach two in such a short space of time is perhaps a glaring signal that Klopp means business. Liverpool also lost to Manchester City in this season's League Cup final. He has been far from a panacea to cure all Liverpool's ills, however, and their erratic league form attests to the fact that there is still so much work ahead for the Liverpool boss. Yet there is no mistaking a change in atmosphere at Anfield and a sense that people around the club has changed, in Klopp's words, from doubters to believers. It was perhaps a shame, therefore, that belief was the one thing Liverpool seemed to lack when Sevilla clawed their way back into the match on Wednesday.

Daniel Sturridge's opener was wiped out 17 seconds into the second half by Kevin Gameiro's close-range effort and Coke's two goals finished the job. "It was obviously the first (Sevilla) goal (that changed the game). In this moment we lost faith in our style of play," Klopp said. "We changed from passing simply and quick, to slow and complicated." While next season will not see Liverpool return to the European stage after their eighth-place Premier League finish, Klopp believes this could give his side an edge on the domestic front. "We will have no international tournament next year, we will have time to train. We will use it and come back stronger," he said. — Agencies

SUNDOWNS LOSE KEEPER, GAME AND CAF CUP TIE

JOHANNESBURG: New South African champions Mamelodi Sundowns had goalkeeper Denis Onyango sent off as they fell 2-0 to Medeama in Ghana Wednesday and were eliminated from the CAF Confederation Cup. The second leg result in a play-off left the clubs tied at 3-3 on aggregate and the home team advanced on away goals after trailing 3-1 from the first meeting in Pretoria 11 days ago. Ugandan Onyango was red carded midway through the second half in western city Sekondi for kicking Abbas Mohammed after Bernard Ofori had put the Ghanaians two goals ahead. Medeama took the lead during the first half when Thabo Nthethe conceded a penalty which Malik Akowuah converted.

Success for the West Africans came after a dramatic two-leg tie in the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League. Medeama took a 38-second first-leg lead only to concede three goals in seven minutes during the closing stages. Swedish coach Tom Strand then secretly abandoned the Ghanaian club in Pretoria and returned to Europe before announcing he was quitting. Evans Adortey, coach of the Ghana women's national team, was hastily promoted to replace Strand for the return match against Sundowns. — AFP