

## Sports

# Giroud and Morata battle for Chelsea starting spot

## Hazard has been the star man for Chelsea so far this season

**LONDON:** Chelsea boss Maurizio Sarri has a tough decision to make over whether to pick Alvaro Morata or Olivier Giroud for a testing encounter with West Ham today. The Stamford Bridge club are top of the Premier League table after five wins out of five but the fixture list has been relatively kind to them so far.

West Ham had a miserable start to their campaign but victory against Everton has lifted the mood and they will be further buoyed by last season's results against Chelsea-when they took four points off their London rivals.

Belgian playmaker Eden Hazard has been the star man for Chelsea so far this season, scoring a hat-trick in their 4-1 demolition of Cardiff last week to lead the race for the Premier League Golden Boot. But who will Sarri pick to lead the line at the London Stadium?

Up until last weekend Morata, 25, was getting the nod, with French World Cup winner Giroud-a stronger physical presence-consigned to the bench. But Giroud got his chance against Cardiff and Hazard made no secret of his admiration for his teammate, hailing him as the world's best target man after the Frenchman laid on two goals for Hazard.

"Olivier's a target man, maybe the best in the world-I think so," said Hazard, appearing to make it clear who he would prefer to see in the line-up. "When he gets the ball he can hold the ball and we can go in deep with

him, so for us it's a pleasure to play with him.

"When Alvaro (Morata) was playing it's completely different, he's a different player than Olivier, but they both have great qualities, so I'm happy to have good strikers in the team."

Spanish striker Morata was criticised last season over his lack of a killer touch after a bright start to his career at Chelsea and has only found the net once so far this season. Sarri said he needs goals to boost his fragile confidence following Chelsea's 1-0 win against PAOK of Greece in their Europa League opener on Thursday, for which he was back in the starting line-up.

"Alvaro has to gain confidence with one, two, three goals," Sarri said after the victory, during which Morata missed a number of chances. Giroud, 31, limited to substitute appearances before last week, is yet to score for Chelsea this season but already has three assists in the Premier League. The former Arsenal player, who moved to Chelsea in January, believes the battle with Morata is positive for the team. "It has always been a fair competition between us and we will both try to step up to help the team reach our target," he told London's Evening Standard.

"I'm happy to have a teammate like that, who pushes me to do better," he added. "It's positive for both of us. I want to play as many games as I can and try to be as efficient as I can for the team." — AFP



**THESSALONIKI:** File photo shows Chelsea's French midfielder N'Golo Kante (C) vies for the ball with PAOK's Egyptian midfielder Amr Warda (L) and PAOK's Swedish midfielder Pontus Wernbloom (R) during the UEFA Europa League Group L first-leg football match between PAOK Thessaloniki and Chelsea at the Toumba stadium in Thessaloniki on September 20, 2018. — AFP

## Tighten up, Emery warns leaky Arsenal

**LONDON:** Unai Emery has warned his Arsenal stars to fix their leaky defence in time for today's Premier League clash against Everton. Emery's side extended their winning run to four matches in all competitions with a 4-2 victory over Vorskla Poltava in the Europa League on Thursday.

The Gunners raced into a four-goal lead through Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's double and strikes from Danny Welbeck and Mesut Ozil. But Emery was furious that Arsenal switched off in the closing stages to allow minnows Vorskla to score twice.

It was the latest in a long line of defensive disappointments for Arsenal, who have failed to keep a clean-sheet in any of Emery's six matches in charge. Arsenal have endured difficulties at the back for years as Emery's predecessor Arsene Wenger struggled to

find the right players to man his defence.

Emery has made changes of his own, giving a debut to goalkeeper Bernd Leno in midweek in place of Petr Cech, while central defender Sokratis Papastathopoulos arrived in pre-season from Borussia Dortmund.

So far that quick-fix plan hasn't worked, so Emery has called on his team to show some steel and learn from their mistakes. "It's our disappointment. Little by little, we are conceding a few chances to the opposition, the same like in Newcastle," Emery said.

"But we need to continue to improve on this because in the last minute in Newcastle and again today in the last 20 minutes, we conceded two goals. "Our challenge is to be competitive for 90 minutes of each match and this is one thing to improve."

Emery made eight changes for the Europa League clash as he rested his key players for Everton's visit to the Emirates Stadium. But the Spaniard doesn't believe that should be used as an excuse for Arsenal's fragile defence.

"We are speaking before each match to take a mentality of 'don't concede chances easily'," he added.

"I think today is a good opportunity for not accepting goals, but the last 30 minutes, we needed to be better on this competitive aspect." Leno, a close-season signing from Bayer Leverkusen, could be key to

Emery's defensive rebuild.

The German experienced a tricky start to life at Arsenal as he waited for a chance to replace Cech, who has struggled to adapt to Emery's desire for a goalkeeper who can pass out from the back.

Asked if he had been frustrated at being made to wait to make his debut, Leno replied: "Of course, because I came to the club to play every game. "But I think to move to a bigger club, another country, it needs maybe a little bit of time. It is a little bit frustrating but I keep calm and work very hard to improve."

"I think my performances in training are good. I train very hard and maybe it needs a little bit of time. I keep calm. My chance will come." Everton manager Marco Silva could give a debut to Yerry Mina after the former Barcelona defender began training with the rest of the squad last week following a foot injury.

Emery has yet to keep a clean sheet this season and suffered a wretched 3-1 home defeat against West Ham in their previous match. "It's something we analysed during the week. They already know what we did in the wrong way and what I expect in the next game that we don't do the same," Silva said. Everton will be boosted by the return of Brazil forward Richarlison after he completed a three-game ban. — AFP

## World Cup success has given Pogba a boost: Mourinho

**MANCHESTER:** Paul Pogba's fine form for Manchester United this season is evidence that post-World Cup hangovers are as much mental as physical, according to the club's manager Jose Mourinho.

Pogba played a crucial role in France's path to being crowned world champions-scoring a sublime goal in the final against Croatia-in Russia in July. Yet despite a short close-season break, he has been given the captaincy by Mourinho and performed impressively.

The issue of post-World Cup fatigue has been debated extensively by club managers, with Tottenham striker Harry Kane the most high-profile example of those struggling to replicate their best form. Mourinho, though, thinks that Pogba's success with France has given the midfielder an extra surge of energy.

"I think good results, and good performances, they make miracles," said Mourinho at his press conference on Friday. "And bad results and bad performances, they make you look more tired, more upset, more ugly, more everything."

Mourinho's remarks are likely to be welcomed by Pogba especially as the Portuguese had reportedly angered the 25-year-old last month when he implied Pogba played much better for France at the World Cup than he did for United last season as he was not surrounded by his entourage.

"Paul came back from the World Cup, and he was the last one to come because he played the final," said Mourinho. "But I think the happiness, the confidence, the self-esteem was what pushed him to play in our first match against Leicester almost without training and he played a very good match."

"It's more about the moment and the momentum is very important-in both the positive and negative way."

Mourinho has indicated Pogba's compatriot Anthony Martial, despite scoring against Young Boys in the Champions League this week, will drop to the bench against Wolves in the Premier League on Saturday to make way for Alexis Sanchez, who was an unused substitute on Wednesday.

Asked why he was dropping him to bring back the Chilean, the United manager replied Martial had played the whole game and Sanchez not taken part at all. Mourinho's side go into the weekend six points behind leaders Chelsea, having lost two of their opening five matches, at Brighton and at home to Tottenham.

However, with his side having won their past three matches in all competitions, Mourinho believes his team are showing they are better than they were last season, when they finished runners-up to Manchester City in the Premier League. "I am optimistic, but it will be a difficult season, yes," he said.

"I don't change that because we won two matches in the Premier League. "You see the level of the teams-you see Liverpool's squad, Manchester City's squad, Chelsea's squad, Tottenham's squad, and Arsenal are improving. "I am not saying we are going to have more points than last season because last season we collected a very acceptable level of points. But I think we are going to be a better team." —AFP



### Matches on TV (Local Timings)

#### ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

West Ham United v Chelsea 15:30

beIN SPORTS HD 2

Arsenal v Everton 18:00

beIN SPORTS HD 2

#### SPANISH LEAGUE

Levante v Sevilla 13:00

beIN SPORTS HD 3

Villarreal v Valencia 17:15

beIN SPORTS HD 3

Real Betis v Athletic de Bilbao 19:30

beIN SPORTS HD 3

Barcelona v Girona 21:45

beIN SPORTS HD 3

#### ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Torino v SSC Napoli 13:30

beIN SPORTS HD 4

Bologna v Roma 16:00

beIN SPORTS HD 4

Lazio v Genoa 16:00

beIN SPORTS HD 7

Chievo Verona v Udinese Calcio 16:00

beIN SPORTS HD 9

Milan v Atalanta 19:00

beIN SPORTS HD 4

Frosinone Calcio v Juventus 21:30

beIN SPORTS HD 4

#### GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Bayer 04 Leverkusen v FSV Mainz 16:30

beIN SPORTS HD 5

Eintracht Frankfurt v Leipzig 19:00

beIN SPORTS HD 5

#### FRENCH LEAGUE

Stade Rennais v Paris Saint-Germain 16:00

beIN SPORTS HD 6

Guingamp v Girondins de Bordeaux 18:00

beIN SPORTS HD 7

Olympique Lyonnais v Olympique Marseille 22:00

beIN SPORTS HD 6



**TOKYO:** Naomi Osaka of Japan serves during their women's singles semi-final tennis match against Camila Giorgi of Italy at the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament in Tokyo yesterday.—AFP

## Red-hot Osaka powers past Giorgi into Tokyo final

**TOKYO:** US Open champion Naomi Osaka stormed past Italy's Camila Giorgi 6-2 6-3 yesterday to reach the final of the Pan Pacific Open, where she will face Karolina Pliskova. Osaka's victory in front of an expectant home crowd was her 10th in a row and did not look in doubt from the moment the world number seven pounded down a huge ace with her first serve of the match. The 20-year-old, who became Japan's first Grand Slam singles champion in New York two weeks ago, hit a further eight aces to overwhelm world number 37 Giorgi. Osaka has carried the poise and power that saw her overcome Serena Williams in the Flushing Meadows final across the Pacific with her and, helped by eight double-faults from Giorgi, wrapped up the victory in just 72 minutes.

A runner up at this event two years ago, Osaka has not dropped a set so far this week and has had her service broken just once. "It's a bit surprising but I felt kind of calm going into the first round match and a lot of people were surprised because they thought I would be very nervous," Osaka told reporters of her stunning run of form.

"Today was the first match that I felt nervous. But other than that I feel like I've been playing well and I've been trying to set little goals for myself."

"Because if you set a really high goal, than normally, for me at least, I tend to overwhelm myself. I'm trying to stay at a consistent level so hopefully I can keep doing that."

#### PLISKOVA BATTLES ON

Osaka advanced to face world number eight Pliskova in the final after the big-serving Czech outlasted Croatia's Donna Vekic 6-2 4-6 6-3 in a topsy-turvy match that lasted more than two hours.

Pliskova has spent more time on court than any other player at this tournament despite a first round bye and was once again dragged into a long contest by a dogged Vekic.

The former world number one started as if intent on finishing the contest as quickly as possible, storming to a 4-0 lead before wrapping up the first set in less than half an hour.

Vekic, though, had defeated top 10 players Sloane Stephens and Caroline Garcia en route to the last four and recovered from an early break in the second set to secure two of her own.

A weary-looking Pliskova dug deep in the decider and the quality of her superior hitting eventually told as she broke Vekic's resolve with a strong start to the third set. "I think tomorrow is a completely different day," said Pliskova, who admitted to feeling tired during the second set. "It's the final, so you just forget about all those minutes that you spent on the court. It's the last match also, so I just want to put in everything, what I have left in body."

Currently just outside the eight qualifying spots for next month's WTA Finals in Singapore, Pliskova has now spent 420 minutes on court in Tokyo compared to 222 minutes for Osaka.

Both players are in the top 10 in terms of number of aces served on the tour this year. "I have played Pliskova twice already and so I know she is a great player," said Osaka, who won their last meeting at Indian Wells. "She has basically every shot and she has a really good serve, so I know it will be a very difficult match." Pliskova added: "I know her game. I have my weapons, she also has hers. It's going to be a lot about serves." — Reuters