

## Sports

# All change as top Bundesliga clubs hunt champions Bayern

**BERLIN:** It's all change for the new Bundesliga campaign - which starts today - with new coaches at each of last season's top six clubs now joining the hunt to deny Bayern Munich a tenth straight league title. In a rare coincidence, all clubs who finished in the top six league places in 2020/21 have a new head coach. The pressure is on incoming Bayern boss Julian Nagelsmann, 34, who is tasked with landing the defending champions' tenth straight league title in his first season.

They reportedly paid league rivals Leipzig a hefty €25 million (\$29 million) to sign Nagelsmann, who has already been warned what to expect. "The hunt is on," warned Bayern's new chief executive officer Oliver Kahn ahead of today's opening game when Borussia Moenchengladbach host the Bavarians. Kahn, a former club captain, expects the competition will "try everything" to knock Bayern off top spot.

Bayern spent €42.5 million on signing France center-back Dayot Upamecano from RB Leipzig. However, no other new recruits are expected this summer with Bayern predicting a shortfall of 150 million euros in lost revenue due to the pandemic.

## Dortmund sign Malen

Leading the charge to stop Bayern are Borussia Dortmund, whose star striker Erling Braut Haaland hit a hat-trick last weekend in the first round of the German Cup. "We have the squad to become German champions, win the cup and progress in the Champions League," insisted Dortmund captain Marco Reus. "Of course, you also need luck. But we can work for that with passion and heart." After two years at league rivals Moenchengladbach, Marco Reus, 44, takes charge of Dortmund with last season's caretaker coach Edin Terzic now helping with player recruitment. Dortmund, who host Eintracht Frankfurt tomorrow, have plenty of fire power up front. Haaland has now scored 60 goals in as many games since joining in Jan 2020.

Dutch star Donyell Malen has been signed from PSV Eindhoven,

## Who can stop Bayern winning a 10th straight Bundesliga title?

**BERLIN:** The new Bundesliga season kicks off today when defending champions Bayern Munich play at Borussia Moenchengladbach. Bayern's new head coach Julian Nagelsmann, 34, is under pressure to deliver a tenth straight German league title at the end of his first season in charge. AFP sports looks at which clubs can prevent Bayern completing a decade of Bundesliga domination:

### Borussia Dortmund

England winger Jadon Sancho may have left to join Manchester United, but Dortmund will be a force to be reckoned with under new head coach Marco Rose. Dutch forward Donyell Malen has been signed from PSV Eindhoven, to play alongside Erling Braut Haaland, Marco Reus and Giovanni Reyna. Haaland claimed a hat-trick last weekend in the German Cup, picking up where he left off after scoring 41 goals in as many games last season.

Dortmund have the forward fire-power to challenge Bayern, but they must tighten their defense. Goalkeeper George Kobel, 23, has joined from Stuttgart, determined to keep out fellow Swiss shot-stoppers Roman Buerki and Marwin Hitz. Dortmund start their season with a bang. They host Eintracht Frankfurt tomorrow in their opening league game of the season, then face Bayern four days later for the German Super Cup.

### RB Leipzig

After struggling for goals last season after Timo Werner left

at a cost of €30 million, to replace Jadon Sancho. Dortmund's challenge to Bayern has support within the Bundesliga. "My money is on Dortmund," Cologne head coach Steffen Baumgart told Kicker. "It's about time someone else won it." Last season's runners-up Leipzig has American Jesse Marsch now in charge after Nagelsmann left for Munich.

Leipzig, founded in 2009 by energy drinks giants Red Bull, struggled last season to find a reliable goal-scorer after Timo Werner left for Chelsea. As a result, Portugal striker Andre Silva has been signed after scoring 32 goals for Eintracht Frankfurt last season in Germany's top flight. Marsch refuses to set a target, but defender Willi Orban says Leipzig are hungry for a first Bundesliga title in the club's fledgling history. "We're hungry and don't want to hide from any big opponents," insisted Orban.

There are also new faces in charge of the other clubs hoping to threaten Bayern. Austrian Adi Huetter quit Eintracht Frankfurt last season to join Moenchengladbach and has a crack at Bayern first up. Bayern lost 3-2 when the sides last met at Borussia Park in January, thanks to two stunning goals by Gladbach midfielder Jonas Hofmann. Wolfsburg, who have qualified for the Champions League after a five-year hiatus, have former Bayern midfield enforcer Mark van Bommel as their new head coach.

### Van Bommel's blunder

The 44-year-old lost five of his six pre-season friendlies and tomorrow, Wolfsburg needed extra time to beat minnows Munster in the cup. The result could still have repercussions for Van Bommel as the German FA is investigating after he used six substitutes, when only five are allowed. The Dutchman replaced Austrian Oliver Glasner, now in charge of Frankfurt, who were knocked out of the cup by third division Waldhof Mannheim on Sunday.

There was no such banana skin for Bayer Leverkusen, whose new head coach Gerardo Seoane led Bern to the Swiss league title for the last three seasons. Leverkusen brushed aside fourth-tier side



**MUNICH:** In this file photo taken on Jan 3, 2021, Bayern Munich's German midfielder Joshua Kimmich runs with the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Bayern Munich v Mainz 05. —AFP

Lokomotive Leipzig 3-0 tomorrow in the cup with Kerem Demirebay netting twice. However, Karim Bellarabi, who also scored, picked up an injury to rule him out of their opening league match at Union Berlin tomorrow. —AFP



**WIESBADEN:** Wiesbaden's German defender Ahmet Guerleyen (right) vies with Dortmund's Norwegian forward Erling Braut Haaland during the German Cup first round match on Aug 7, 2021. — AFP

for Chelsea, Leipzig have boosted their attack by signing Portugal striker Andre Silva under new head coach Jesse Marsch. Alongside Silva, who bagged 32 goals in the Bundesliga for Eintracht Frankfurt last season, Leipzig have also signed center-forward Brian Brobbey, 19, from Ajax. Leipzig are away to COVID-19 hit Mainz on Saturday and have a chance to throw down an early marker in the league when they host Bayern in the league on September 11.

Marsch has identified matches against Bayern and Dortmund as the "peak" games Leipzig must "conquer" in their bid to win the Bundesliga for the first time. After eight months out with in-

juries, Hungarian midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai, 20, capped his club debut off the bench with a goal last weekend. Marsch needs to restructure his defense after losing center-backs Ibrahima Konate, to Liverpool, and Dayot Upamecano to Bayern.

### VfL Wolfsburg

Wolfsburg are back in the Champions League after a five-year hiatus and have appointed ex-Bayern Munich midfielder Mark van Bommel as head coach. The Dutchman has kept most of the squad which finished fourth in the Bundesliga last season. They host newly-promoted Bochum on Saturday but Wolfsburg, who last won the Bundesliga title in 2009, need to gel quickly after losing five pre-season friendlies.

Dutch striker Wout Weghorst leads the attack having scored 20 league goals last season while Germany forward Maximilian Philipp has made his loan move from Dynamo Moscow permanent. One to watch is Germany Under-21 forward Lukas Nmecha, who has joined from Manchester City on a four-year deal. Nmecha was born in Germany, but played for England at youth level after moving there as a child. He later opted for Germany, scoring the winner in the final of June's Under-21 European championship.

### Borussia Moenchengladbach

"The Foals" dropped off badly towards the end of last season as results suffered once it was confirmed Marco Rose was leaving to coach Dortmund. His replacement Adi Huetter inherits an impressive squad, boasting Germany midfielders Lars Stindl and Jonas Hofmann alongside forwards Breel Embolo, Alassane Plea and Marcus Thuram. On their day, Gladbach can beat any German club, but need consistency. Gladbach host Bayern today hoping to repeat January's shock 3-2 victory when Hofmann scored twice before Florian Neuhaus hit the winning goal.—AFP