

## Sports

# Kepa the hero as Chelsea edge out Villarreal to win Super Cup

**BELFAST:** Kepa Arrizabalaga was the unlikely hero as Chelsea started the new season as they ended the last with a European trophy by beating Villarreal 6-5 on penalties after a 1-1 draw to win the UEFA Super Cup in Belfast. The Spaniard, who has lost his place as number one since joining the club for a world record fee for a goalkeeper in 2018, was introduced late in extra-time as a substitute for the shootout by Thomas Tuchel.

Kepa famously refused to be replaced by former Chelsea boss Maurizio Sarri in a League Cup final defeat to Manchester City two years ago. But this time he rewarded his manager's faith with saves from Aissa Mandi and Raul Albiol. "It was not spontaneous," said Tuchel who explained the plan had been hatched in the FA Cup last season.

"We talked about it with the goalkeepers after the first cup game against Barnsley. Kepa has the best percentage at saving penalties, the analysing guys and goalkeeping coaches showed me the data. We spoke to the players that this could happen when we play in knockout games. It's fantastic how Edouard (Mendy) accepted it. There is proof that Kepa is better in this discipline. They're team players. Edouard does not show the pride to not step off the field. He was happy to do it for the team and take this for the team."

Chelsea's win over Manchester City in Porto to lift the Champions League for a second time in May was the culmination of a meteoric rise in Tuchel's first five months in charge. The German has bemoaned having to manage a 42-man squad during pre-season and could soon have even

more firepower to call on with Romelu Lukaku expected to complete a return to Stamford Bridge later this week for a club record £97 million (\$135 million).

But the depth of resources available to Tuchel was on show early on. Euro 2020 finalists Mason Mount, Ben Chilwell, Reece James and Jorginho all had to settle for a place on the bench after their late return to pre-season training, but Chelsea still had far too much for the Europa League winners in the opening half hour.

## Bittersweet for Ziyech

Hakim Ziyech had a bittersweet evening as he continued his fine pre-season form into competitive action with the opening goal. Marcos Alonso fed Kai Havertz down the right and from the German's low cross, Ziyech swept home. However, the Moroccan was forced off before half-time in a sling by a shoulder injury. In stark contrast to Chelsea's haul of now 20 trophies in the nearly 20 years since Roman Abramovich's takeover transformed the club, Villarreal's Europa League final victory over Manchester United in May secured their first ever silverware.

After an overly cautious start from Unai Emery's men, going behind forced the Yellow Submarine out of their shell and they were unfortunate not to be level by half-time. "I am proud to represent Villarreal, our project and the Spanish league," said Emery. "We knew how to compete." Mendy scampered from his line to deny Boulaye Dia a debut goal before Villarreal twice hit the woodwork either side of the break



**BELFAST:** Chelsea's Spanish defender Cesar Azpilicueta raises the trophy during the presentation ceremony after Chelsea won the UEFA Super Cup football match between Chelsea and Villarreal at Windsor Park on Wednesday. — AFP

through Alberto Moreno and Gerard Moreno.

Villarreal were the dominant force in the second-half as Chelsea physically faded after their flying start. Tuchel turned to his bench to stem the tide as Mount, Jorginho and Andreas Christensen were introduced. But the Spaniards finally got their deserved equaliser when Moreno played a clever one-two with Dia before firing high past Mendy.

Neither manager would have welcomed an extra 30 minutes just days before their respective league campaigns kick-off. Chelsea had the better of extra-time as Christian Pulisic fired inches wide before Sergio Asenjo produced a fine save to deny Mount. Asenjo also gave Villarreal a dream start to the shootout by saving from Havertz. But Chelsea were flawless with their next six spot-kicks to allow Kepa to take center stage. — AFP

## No backdown on 4-week quarantine for Aussie athletes

**SYDNEY:** Australian state officials defended their decision yesterday to force some Olympic athletes to quarantine for four weeks, as one high-profile sports star branded the move "disgusting" and another "embarrassing". All overseas travelers, including the nearly 500-strong Australian team, must spend 14 days in isolation at a designated hotel or special outback camp on arrival in the country, under strict coronavirus rules. The South Australian government is also insisting that those heading back to the state from Sydney must repeat the two-week quarantine.

The Australian Olympic Committee slammed the move as "cruel", but South Australia Premier Steven Marshall said it was necessary. "It is tough, we feel for these athletes, but every person coming in from Sydney is required to do 14 days," he told reporters. "We've got to be prudent in South Australia. It's tough but the Delta variant is a killer."

He pointed out that the state's most recent seven-day lockdown - which ended on July 27 - was prompted by a resident returning from New South Wales. There are 56 athletes ex-



**TOKYO:** Australia's athletes celebrate during the closing ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium on Aug 8, 2021. — AFP

pected back in South Australia with 16 already undergoing quarantine in Sydney, which is currently in a lockdown to try and stem a Delta variant outbreak. The entire Australian team,

who won 17 gold medals and 46 in total, are fully vaccinated and were tested for COVID-19 almost daily in Japan.

Adelaide's Belinda White, a member of Aus-

tralia's Olympic softball team, will be one of the first impacted after completing her Sydney stint this week. Softball Australia chief David Pryles said he was worried about her mental health, noting that she had already been away from friends and family since June 1. "To force Belinda to undergo an extra 14 days by herself upon returning to her hometown of Adelaide frankly gives us concern for the mental well-being of our returning Olympian," he said.

## 'Embarrassed'

Several notable Australian sportspeople weighed in on the controversy with cricket star Glenn Maxwell tweeting: "This is actually disgusting," while tennis' Luke Saville, who played singles and doubles in Tokyo, said he was "embarrassed to be a South Aussie". Adelaide rower Molly Goodman claimed she was only informed about the extra quarantine requirement "probably two days ago at the most". "I'm not sure I've actually come to terms with it, to be honest," she told broadcaster ABC from her Sydney hotel room. "It's quite a lot to ask of the athletes."

Australia dodged the worst ravages of the pandemic through a strategy of closed borders, lockdowns, travel quarantine, and aggressive testing and tracing. But those tools now appear blunted in the face of the highly transmissible Delta variant, with several regions struggling to control case numbers. — AFP