

## Sports

# Kane's future hangs over Tottenham and Man City ahead of season opener

**LONDON:** Manchester City's defense of the Premier League title gets underway today away to Tottenham with both clubs still in limbo over the future of Harry Kane. The England captain returned to training with his Spurs teammates for the first time on Friday after arriving back late from his holidays in the United States and then having to quarantine.

Kane has made no secret of his desire to leave his boyhood club with City the obvious destination as they seek a successor to all-time top scorer Sergio Aguero, who has departed Manchester for Barcelona.

However, Kane's decision to sign a six-year contract in 2018 has backfired with Spurs chairman Daniel Levy set to demand a fee well in excess of the £100 million (\$138 million) Premier League record City spent on Jack Grealish earlier this month.

"Harry is an exceptional, extraordinary striker. There are no doubts about that. Of course we are very interested," City boss Pep Guardiola said last week. "But he is a Tottenham player. If they don't want to negotiate there is nothing more to say. If

they want it, we will try."

Kane claimed his third Premier League Golden Boot last season to go with the same accolade for finishing top scorer at the 2018 World Cup. But England's heartbreaking defeat on penalties to Italy in the final of Euro 2020 means at 28, he is still waiting for the first trophy of his career.

## Big call for Nuno

Tottenham seem further than ever from matching his ambitions. Spurs find themselves out of the Champions League for the second consecutive season, instead facing a qualifier later this week just to reach the group stages of the new Europa Conference League.

A long and unconvincing search for a new manager will also have done little to inspire Kane's confidence. Nuno Espirito Santo was eventually named as Tottenham boss on July 1, nearly three months after Jose Mourinho was sacked.

The former Wolves manager immediately has a big call to make on whether to play Kane at the weekend, against the side he wants to join before the end of the month. "We have to think and we

have tomorrow to make the decision," Nuno said on Friday. "I don't have any concerns about trying to convince players to play for Tottenham. It's such a huge club, it's such a fantastic club. We should be proud of being here."

City's need for Kane may appear immaterial compared to Tottenham, where he has become a living legend. Grealish's arrival has already bolstered Guardiola's attacking options, which already featured Raheem Sterling, Kevin De Bruyne, Riyad Mahrez, Ferran Torres, Phil Foden, Bernardo Silva and Gabriel Jesus.

But City's ambitions are also much greater as they look to not only hold off Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool to defend their Premier League crown, but go one better than last season in Europe after reaching the Champions League final for the first time.

Chelsea have also broken their club record fee to re-sign Romelu Lukaku from Inter Milan for £97 million, while United's squad appears to be in the best shape since their decline began with Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013 after signing Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane.



Harry Kane

Across the English Channel, Paris Saint-Germain have even overshadowed the annual arms race in the Premier League by signing Lionel Messi, Sergio Ramos, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Georginio Wijnaldum and Achraf Hakimi as they too look to end the wait for Champions League glory. That has set the bar for City and Kane is the best guarantee of the goals still on the market. —AFP

## Brentford beat Arsenal to make flying start

**LONDON:** Brentford made a blistering start to their first English top-flight season for 74 years as goals from Sergi Canos and Christian Norgaard earned a 2-0 win over Arsenal in front of a first-ever full house at the Brentford Community Stadium on Friday.

The Bees spent the first season at their new home playing behind closed doors, but rose to the occasion as they were roared on by 17,000 fans in the first Premier League match at full capacity since March 2020. "What an atmosphere," said Brentford manager Thomas Frank. "The first time in the top-flight, we are opening the Premier League season and for our own fans, they can dream. We are top of the league. We are going to celebrate every win, but we want more."

By contrast, Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta is already under pressure. The Gunners have finished eighth in each of his first two seasons in charge and the Spaniard has a daunting task to turn things around before the September international break with title favorites Chelsea and Manchester City to come in Arsenal's next two games. "I don't think we deserved anything different," said Arteta in a damning indictment of his side.

Frank whipped up the crowd into a frenzy before kick-off and Arsenal were soon suffering under the relentless pressing his side became famous for in the Championship. Bryan Mbuemo drilled a shot off the outside of the post in the first warning shot from the home side before they took the lead on 22 minutes.

Ethan Pincock fed Canos on the Brentford left and he cut inside to unleash a powerful shot that beat Bernd Leno at his near post. Mbuemo then dragged another huge chance wide after turning Arsenal's new £50 million signing Ben White with ease.

The Gunners were without both Pierre-



**LONDON:** Brentford's Spanish striker Sergi Canos celebrates scoring the opening goal during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Arsenal at Brentford Community Stadium in London on Friday. —AFP

Emerick Aubameyang and Alexandra Lacazette due to illness, handing Folarin Balogun his Premier League debut. Balogun made little impact, but was also unfortunate not to win a penalty as he was caught on the follow through after slicing wide just before half-time.

"A lot of young boys were doing everything they can. For some of them it was the first experience in the league - that says a lot," added Arteta, as he appeared to make a plea for more funds before the end of the transfer window. "What I can control and help, I'll put all my enthusiasm and work into that."

Arsenal started the second-half with far more purpose as Kieran Tierney and Emile Smith-Rowe finally forced David Raya into action. Bukayo Saka was then given a standing ovation by both sets of fans when he was introduced on the hour mark after

the racial abuse he suffered in the aftermath of missing the decisive penalty in England's Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy.

But Brentford's players were in no mood to show any mercy and substitute Norgaard made sure of a famous night 17 minutes from time. Arsenal somehow let a long throw bounce inside their six-yard box and the Danish international gratefully headed into an unguarded net to double Brentford's advantage.

Smith-Rowe and Tierney were the only sources of comfort for Arsenal as they combined to set up Nicolas Pepe, who was denied by a stunning save by Raya five minutes from time. But a clean sheet rounded off a famous win for Brentford as they ended their first night in the Premier League on top of the table. —AFP

## Real Madrid denies it wants to jump to Premier League

**MADRID:** Real Madrid yesterday denied reports in a Barcelona newspaper that the club had "studied the option" of leaving La Liga to join the English Premier League.

"In view of the information published today by the newspaper Mundo Deportivo, where it is said that our club has studied the option of leaving La Liga for the Premier League, Real Madrid wishes to make it clear that this information is completely false, as well as being absurd and impossible," said a Real Madrid statement. Real said the only purpose of this information "is to disrupt once again the daily life of our club."

Mundo Deportivo claimed on its front page yesterday that "Real Madrid studied the option of joining the Premier League", frustrated by the failure of the Super League project which its president Florentino Perez supports. Real are also upset by an agreement by the Spanish League, led by president Javier Tebas, to sell 10 percent of its rights for 50 years to investment fund CVC.

"Real Madrid's intention has been to find out if it would be possible to abandon the Spanish league to join another big league, because the club's managers are tired of the problems and sticks that Javier Tebas continually pokes in their wheels," Mundo Deportivo wrote.

"In this scenario, the competition preferred by Florentino Perez and his close associates is the English Premier League, although they have also gathered information about the options of joining the Italian Serie A or the German Bundesliga," the Catalan daily said. —AFP

## Ancelotti pins faith on Real Madrid young guard

**MADRID:** Refusing to be drawn on whether the club might yet lure Kylian Mbappe from PSG, Carlo Ancelotti insisted Friday Real Madrid have plenty of young talent coming through. With French World Cup winner Mbappe out of contract next year, Real are widely believed to be ready to pounce should the striker decide partnering both Lionel Messi and Neymar in attack is not sufficient challenge. But Ancelotti preferred to bask in what he says is a hugely exciting crop of up-and-coming players as he embarks on his second spell in charge at the Bernabeu after leaving Everton.

"I'm sorry, I can't speak about this," said Ancelotti, when asked the inevitable questions about the possibility of landing Mbappe. "I don't like talking about players who aren't here" — though he observed the transfer window in any case does not shut until month's end. But I like this squad very much — there's a good mix of veterans and youngsters who are really up for it, very enthusiastic and very interesting. (There's) Miguel Gutierrez, Sergio Arribas, Victor Chust, Marvin."

"They can all be very important in the future but in the present too," said Ancelotti, who won the 2014 Champions League in his first spell in charge at Real which coincided with Wales veteran Gareth Bale's debut season. Bale has returned to Spain after a season loan back at Tottenham but Ancelotti said there was no reason why he could not rediscover his form of their first spell together.

"He is a great player who maybe didn't do so well recently but I rate him very highly and he has been training well. The pitch will be the judge, though, not the coach," said Ancelotti, insisting that the level of competition in the squad would serve to push all his players. Returning to his young emerging stars Ancelotti said he was in regular touch with former striker Raul, now coach of Real's reserve team La Castilla.

### 'Youngsters are ready'

"The youngsters will be ready — they are ready.



Carlo Ancelotti

We shall need them." But he said he was also pleased to see experienced faces raring to go, singling out Croatia veteran playmaker Luka Modric, as well as French striker Karim Benzema.

Coming in after Zinedine Zidane — his former assistant in his first spell — stepped down Ancelotti dwelt briefly on the transfer from Barcelona of Lionel Messi to Paris Saint Germain, where the Italian also spent two years in charge but failed to land the European glory that is now PSG's clearly stated target.

"That surprised me, of course, Messi had played for Barcelona since he was a child. But I have spent 42 years in the world of football," Ancelotti explained, insisting he "respects" the decision. "Barca are still Barca, one of the best teams in the world, with or without Messi. For us it changes nothing — what we have to do is win."

Asked if Real can beat the likes of PSG to European glory he would say only: "It's not impossible — Real have a very good squad, they can go toe to toe with any club in the world. I believe if we give it 100 percent then we can compete against any other team, no doubt about it." —AFP

## Koeman says Barcelona can't live in the past as season starts

**MADRID:** Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman said yesterday that he was "excited about the team" and urged them to avoid "living in the past" ahead of the first Liga match of the post-Lionel Messi era today against Real Sociedad. The departure of Messi "has been painful for all the Blaugrana fans, for everything Leo has done for this club, for the type of player he is," Koeman told a press conference. "We will miss him a lot because he was a very important player in the history of Barca. But you can't live in the past. Things change and I'm very excited about the team we have this year."

"When we get the injured players back, we will have a very strong team to achieve great things. The team is ready, we have a lot of experience and we are ready to play. The team is ready to go, we've had five weeks of preparation when Leo wasn't even present," said Koeman who is entering his second season on the Barcelona bench.

Barcelona said they had no choice but to offload Messi as they battle to slash a 1.2 billion-euro (\$1.4 billion) debt mountain. They also said their wage bill with Messi would have amounted to 110 percent of income, way over La Liga's Financial Fair Play limit.



Ronald Koeman

Barca said yesterday that four of the club's key players — Jordi Alba, Sergi Roberto, Gerard Pique and Sergio Busquets — had agreed to a salary cut. "We know perfectly well the economic situation of the club. It needs help, in every sense. So their gesture is to be commended," Koeman said.

He added that he still hoped to sign players. "We are a bit short on strikers, so we have talked about the possibility of recruiting a striker of a different profile," said Koeman. "But it will depend on whether we can sign anyone. It all depends on Financial Fair Play. If it's possible, it's likely we'll add someone up front." —AFP