

Sports

City's sharpshooter Sterling sets sights on Southampton

Manchester City favourites to win the title

MANCHESTER: Raheem Sterling is looking to add to his best-ever goal-scoring tally as Manchester City attempt to improve on their own record-breaking Premier League start. Pep Guardiola's dazzling side host Southampton today having already accumulated an unprecedented 37 points from their opening 13 games. Sterling was the key man in Sunday's 2-1 comeback win at Huddersfield Town, winning a penalty that was converted by Sergio Agüero and then netting a late winner. That took his goal total to 12 in all competitions, a figure the England winger has never previously managed over an entire campaign. Sterling said calmness under pressure had been a key factor in his improvement in front of goal, but refused to reveal how many goals he had targeted before the season kicked off.

"I just get in the box and try to be as calm as possible," he said. "I set myself targets every season. Sometimes you don't match them, but that's the thing about football—you always have another year to try again. "I can't tell you the target because I don't want to get slated (criticised) for it! I always set myself a realistic target, but high standards as well and hopefully I can match them this year. "I am just really happy to be working in such a fantastic team." City's eight-point lead over second-placed Manchester United has established them as overwhelming favourites to win the title, but skipper Vincent Kompany is not buying into that.

“Calmness under pressure had been a key factor”

they became Champions League regulars, warned there was no room for complacency against Southampton. "After 15 years at this level the one thing you know and learn is you do not crown yourself champions in November," he said. "Let's be steady. "The biggest challenge for us now is to go back home and say, "The next game, let's do it again and do it again".

"I feel the team has got this motivation and I make it more about the next game. We have won nothing and achieved nothing and that's the key message here."

Mauricio Pellegrino's Southampton will arrive in Manchester on the back of Sunday's satisfying 4-1 thrashing of managerless Everton at St Mary's. That was a big improvement on the previous result, a 3-0 loss at Liverpool, although Everton's lack of confidence and organisation were significant factors in the Saints' win.

England defender Ryan Bertrand was convinced the victory, which saw Charlie Austin net two almost identical headers, was ideal preparation for a sterner test. "We'll go there today and give a good account of ourselves," he said. "They're doing well at the moment. "We'll look to build on this and go into the game at the weekend (at Bournemouth on Sunday) hopefully building on what we do today.

"We've got the win and on Everton's form we were expected to win. Let's go and test ourselves and test them in the game and enjoy it." — AFP



Huddersfield: File photo shows Manchester City's Raheem Sterling kicks the ball into the crowd as the final whistle blows in the English Premier League football match between Huddersfield Town and Manchester City. — AFP

Old boys the firm favourites as Premier League clubs play it safe

LONDON: Sam Allardyce and Alan Pardew are favourites to take over the managerial vacancies at Everton and West Bromwich Albion, appointments that would reinforce the cautious culture that exists in the Premier League.

Allardyce, the 63-year-old former England boss, has managed six clubs in the league, gaining a reputation as Fireman Sam who arrives in times of crisis and always keeps his teams up. Pardew also has a fine track record of avoiding the drop and West Brom would be his fifth Premier League club, putting the 56-year-old joint second on the list behind Allardyce.

If confirmed, the appointments mean that eight of the past 15 jobs will have gone to British managers over 50, a surprising statistic given that Allardyce, who will have taken two of these positions, last month bemoaned a tendency for British coaches to be treated as "second class" and get overlooked.

"The Premier League is a foreign league in England," he said. "When you look across the owners,

the managers and players, that is exactly what it is now." Yet the imminent appointments suggest the traditional networks influencing English football's job market remain strong.

Pardew has been recommended by West Bromwich Albion's technical director, Nicky Hammond, with whom he played at Crystal Palace. Allardyce has reportedly been championed by Steve Walsh, Everton's director of football, who worked alongside Craig Shakespeare, Allardyce's assistant at England, at Leicester. Shakespeare is tipped to fill a similar role at Everton.

The recycling of a small number of managers around Premier League jobs is an ongoing trend. Both Allardyce (2016-17) and Pardew (2015-16) formerly managed Palace, as did 59-year-old Tony Pulis who Pardew would succeed at Albion. One of Pulis's predecessors at West Brom was Roy Hodgson, who has completed the circle by taking over at Palace this season aged 70.

EXPERIENCED ELITE

Bournemouth's Eddie Howe is the only one of the seven British managers in the Premier League aged under 40. With only two under 50, the opportunities to dislodge the experienced elite are limited.

The attraction of managers with proven Premier League credentials is clear, particularly given the huge cost of relegation. Sunderland, who received close to 100 million pounds (\$132.9 million) prize money last season despite finishing bottom, are now facing another relegation fight from the Championship alongside

another demoted team, Hull City.

Both Pardew and Allardyce are expert defensive organisers, a quality Everton clearly need given that they have conceded more goals than any other Premier League team this season. Last season Allardyce took Palace from bottom in December to a 14th-place finish while Sunderland, whom he had saved from the drop the previous season, went down under David Moyes, another member of the managerial over-50 club who once oversaw Everton and has just been called on to save West Ham United.

Recognised managers who lose their jobs are given an instant platform to secure further employment by the Premier League's chief broadcaster Sky Sports, for whom Pardew has been working this season.

Yesterday the channel highlighted Pardew's virtues as it discussed who should succeed Pulis at the Hawthorns. "I hope he gets the job," said former Arsenal former Paul Merson. "I can't see what he has done wrong in his managerial career.

"He will have to go in there and make it very tight. As one of the lesser teams you open up nowadays and you get ripped to shreds." That logic probably explained Frank de Boer's sacking by Palace after five games and 77 days in charge this season, even though the Dutchman had presumably been employed to offer a different approach from the Pulis/Pardew/Allardyce brand. And it probably governs Everton's thinking in reactivating contact with Allardyce after five defeats in seven games under caretaker boss David Unsworth. — Reuters

AFC to maintain ACL format despite Gulf crisis

BANGKOK: Matches between clubs from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar will continue to be played on a home-and-away basis in next year's Asian Champions League despite an on-going diplomatic dispute between the Gulf states, the Asian Football Confederation said yesterday.

The AFC's executive committee decided to maintain the current format of its flagship club event in the face of a ban imposed on travel in and out of Qatar by a Saudi Arabia-led coalition that is backed by the United Arab Emirates. Clubs from the three nations regularly play each other in the Asian Champions League, although this year's competition was not affected by the standoff as Qatari teams had been eliminated before the action was taken in early June.

The confederation said in a statement it would send a "high-level delegation to the concerned countries to try and mediate the situation with the concerned (member associations) and governments to find a solution for the matches".

The dispute has already led to complications for Qatar's hosting of the regional Gulf Cup competition, with Saudi, UAE and close ally Bahrain refusing to confirm their participation in next month's tournament. Qatar is also due to host the World Cup in 2022.

The Asian Champions League already sees games featuring clubs from Saudi Arabia and Iran played in neutral venues due to a diplomatic disagreement between those countries, Qatar, along with Oman and the United Arab Emirates, hosted some of those games this season. Meanwhile, the AFC has said it will begin the tender process for the confederation's commercial rights in February of next year, with the aim to finalise the procedure by May or June 2018.

The rights are currently held by Lagardere Sports and Entertainment with the existing contract, which started in 2014 and is worth \$1 billion, due to expire at the end of 2021. "The AFC will ensure that transparent and fair procedures are followed and that the views of the Member Associations are taken into consideration," AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa said. — Reuters

Russia builds inside-out arena for World Cup

MOSCOW: How does it feel to be on the outside looking in? Football fans visiting Yekaterinburg in the Russian Urals for the 2018 World Cup will find out when they get seated in one of two temporary stands that fill empty plots of land next to the arena—originally too small to fit FIFA rules.

Openings at each goal end of the stadium's facade offer a remote view of the pitch but no protection from the sun or rain. And those unlucky enough to only get tickets for the extensions' upper-most rows will stare out directly at the outer edge of the refurbished Yekaterinburg Arena's circular roof.

The UK's perplexed Guardian newspaper suggested the entire ensemble might have come from "outer space" while USA Today screamed that it "couldn't look any scarier".

All of which has left the construction company behind the 42-metre-tall (138-foot-tall) extensions sounding somewhat bemused. "This is a typical solution for sport facilities built for major international competitions," Sinara-Development Director General Timur Ufimtsev told AFP.

"In addition, you can see a beautiful panoramic view of Yekaterinburg itself since the stadium is in a central part of the city." He added that the whole seating section is protected by "tall railings" to make sure no one falls off.

The additions will make Yekaterinburg Arena into a 35,000-seater that will shrink back down in size to 23,000 once the stands are dismantled when all the tourists go home.

CULTURAL HERITAGE SITE

The world media's sceptical gaze fell on the 60-year-old stadium once it was selected as the eastern-most venue of the 12 hosting the marquee June 14-July 15 event. The Kremlin wanted to show off Russia's cultural diversity and settled on Yekaterinburg—the mining capital of the tsars in which the late president Boris Yeltsin built his career.



Yekaterinburg: A photo taken on August 19, 2017 shows the Yekaterinburg Arena football stadium under renovation work in Yekaterinburg. Football fans visiting Yekaterinburg in the Russian Urals for the 2018 World Cup will find out when they get seated in one of two temporary stands that fill empty plots of land next to the arena. — AFP

The unassuming industrial home to almost 1.5 million people has a team that played middling football in the Soviet era and most recently won promotion to the Russian Premier League in 2013.

It is safe to say that its 27,000-seat stadium suited the needs of a club that has gone through many incarnations and is currently called simply Ural. Yet its size fell just short of FIFA's carefully spelled out "minimum capacities of 30,000" requirement for stadiums hosting group stage World Cup matches.

Four were scheduled for Yekaterinburg and Russia had a problem. Sinara-Development said it also could not simply rebuild the entire arena because it was listed as a cultural heritage site that needed to be preserved in its original form.

Football's world governing body not only agreed but

applauded the unique way Yekaterinburg worked its way out of a potential mess. "Temporary seats are being installed in order to ensure that the renovation work would conserve the historical facade of the stadium and that maintenance costs are reduced after the World Cup," a FIFA spokesman told AFP. The old stadium's entrance featured six columns topped by sculptures of communist factory workers and athletes.

These will stay in place for posterity's sake. The FIFA spokesman also brushed aside any safety concerns. "Inspection visits and detailed reports have shown that the temporary seats in the Yekaterinburg Arena fully comply with all safety and security requirements," he said.

Ufimtsev said the stadium was "90 percent ready" and would be completed by the end of the year. — AFP

| Live | | Matches on TV (Local Timings) | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE | | | |
| Chelsea v Swansea City | beIN SPORTS HD 1 | 22:45 | |
| Arsenal v Huddersfield Town | beIN SPORTS HD 7 | 22:45 | |
| Bournemouth v Burnley | beIN SPORTS HD 12 EN | 22:45 | |
| Manchester City v Southampton | beIN SPORTS HD 2 | 23:00 | |
| Stoke City v Liverpool | beIN SPORTS HD 8 | 23:00 | |
| Everton v West Ham United | beIN SPORTS HD 9 | 23:00 | |
| FRENCH LEAGUE | | | |
| Metz v Olympique Marseille | beIN SPORTS | 21:00 | |
| Olympique Lyonnais v LOSC Lille | beIN SPORTS HD 4 | 21:00 | |
| Nantes v Monaco | beIN SPORTS HD 6 | 21:00 | |
| Guingamp v Montpellier | beIN SPORTS HD 9 | 21:00 | |
| Toulouse v OGC Nice | beIN SPORTS HD 8 | 21:00 | |
| Angers v Stade Rennais | beIN SPORTS | 21:00 | |
| Paris Saint-Germain v Troyes | beIN SPORTS HD 6 | 23:00 | |