

Sports

Guardiola's City a painful reminder of Arsenal's past

Wenger faces the might of City for second time in five days

LONDON: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger faces the might of Manchester City for the second time in five days today as the Gunners seek salvation after an abject display in losing the League Cup final 3-0.

City's victory on Sunday delivered the first trophy of the Pep Guardiola era and underlined the sense that the two clubs are on radically different trajectories. Guardiola's men also enjoy a 13-point lead at the top of the Premier League and are virtually assured of their place in the Champions League quarter-finals, thanks to a 4-0 last-16, first-leg win in Basel.

Arsenal, by contrast, face a huge challenge just to make it back into the Champions League next season. Sixth in the league, they trail north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur, in fourth place, by 10 points.

Even the emergency route of a Champions League return via winning the Europa League looks a big task after Arsenal were paired with Italian giants AC Milan in the last 16. What is galling for Wenger and Arsenal is that in many ways Guardiola is the modern-day incarnation of what the Frenchman used to be in his first decade at the club.

Wenger's early years married attractive, aggressive football with a winning culture. While some of the frills to Arsenal's football have remained in the second half of his 22-year reign, the club have failed consistently to challenge for the biggest prizes.

"This development of mediocrity has to be arrested," Arsenal's second-highest goalscorer of all time, Ian Wright, who played under Wenger, told BBC radio.

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Guardiola shares Wenger's ideals of how the game should be played and has spoken glowingly of his admiration for his counterpart's longevity.

"I would have liked to have played for him," said Guardiola ahead of Sunday's final. "He likes one type of player, with quality and respect for the ball. They are things I like a lot, so if people say we play a little bit like Arsenal of the last 20 years then it's good for us."

SERIAL WINNER

The difference is that Guardiola is a serial winner, lifting 21 trophies in his first seven years of senior management with Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

He has shone after the first season of his career without silverware in his debut campaign at City in 2016-17. Rather than abandon his principles, the Catalan has doubled down on the passing and pressing game he made famous at Barcelona to create the spectacle and success for which he was lured to Manchester by the club's cash-rich Abu-Dhabi owners in the first place.

Wenger, by contrast, despite an enviable record of success in the FA Cup in recent years, has failed to arrest his side's general slide from the pinnacle of the English game.

Guardiola has also demonstrated a far shrewder sense of timing than Wenger in knowing when to walk away. He left his boyhood club in Barca as their most successful coach because the intense demands of four seasons in the job had taken their toll.

Likewise, his time at Bayern never seemed likely to



Pep Guardiola

extend beyond the initial three-year contract he signed despite winning three straight Bundesliga titles. "No chance," Guardiola responded at the thought of matching Wenger's two-decade long stay at City. "That is not going to happen because I am not going to train in 20 years more."

Wenger's desperation to hold on to recreate his glory days means it is increasingly likely he will be edged towards the exit door before he walks come the end of

the season. City will fall short of one of Wenger's greatest achievements. Defeat at Liverpool last month means they cannot go a full Premier League season unbeaten as Arsenal did in their last title-winning campaign of 2003-04. "Arsene's record belongs to him, we are not going to break it - he has to be calm," said Guardiola earlier in the campaign. It may be the only thing remaining that Wenger holds over English football's new dominant power. — AFP

Real's Ronaldo gamble backfires as Espanyol snatch late victory

MADRID: Real Madrid rested Cristiano Ronaldo and suffered a fifth Liga defeat of the season as Espanyol's Gerard Moreno struck late for a 1-0 win over the Spanish and European champions on Tuesday.

Catalan forward Moreno wasted a number of chances but his last-minute volley took a wicked deflection off defender Raphael Varane to secure Espanyol's first victory over Real in 11 years. Real stay third on 51 points from 26 games, seven behind second-placed Atletico Madrid, who host Leganes later, and 14 adrift of pacesetters Barcelona who play today.

Real coach Zinedine Zidane rested Ronaldo ahead of next week's visit to Paris St-Germain in the Champions League last 16, which his side lead 3-1 from the first leg, and selected Gareth Bale at centre forward in a much-changed team.

However, despite a promising start, an insipid Madrid were second-best all night at Cornellana not that Zidane thought so. "We really didn't deserve to ship that goal," said the Frenchman. "We played really well in the first half but couldn't score. The second-half wasn't good but nevertheless we didn't deserve to concede in the final minute."

"Espanyol had few chances and we deserved more. That's football and we now have to look forward." Bale, having struggled to get back into the side following injury, saw a header parried by Espanyol's former Real keeper Diego Lopez, who then scrambled away a deflected Marco Asensio cross, but that was as good as it got for the visitors.



CORNELLA DE LLOBREGAT: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (C) vies with Espanyol's Spanish defender Marc Navarro (L) and Espanyol's Spanish midfielder Granero (R) during the Spanish league football match between RCD Espanyol and Real Madrid CF at the RCDE Stadium in Cornellana de Llobregat. — AFP

Espanyol should have led only for Moreno to spurn a gilt-edged chance after pouncing on a wayward Varane clearance. The forward's misery was compounded when he saw a successful effort incorrectly ruled out by the linesman's flag before halftime.

After the break Espanyol defender Oscar Duarte clipped the bar before Real keeper Keylor Navas acrobatically denied Moreno. It appeared the forward was going to endure a torrid night when his left-foot effort

curled past the far post with a minute left but Moreno was not to be denied at the death.

His goal securing a deserved three points that took Espanyol up to 13th with 31 points after their first win in eight games. "We need to go game-by-game," Moreno said. "This victory will help us and calm things down a bit. We should be doing this more regularly and it'll give us the confidence that we needed. Hopefully it will push us forwards to better things." — Reuters

Neymar faces 'at least six weeks out', to miss Real clash

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's hopes of getting Neymar back for their crunch Champions League clash against Real Madrid next week look to be over after the Brazilian's father claimed the player would be out for "at least six weeks".

Speaking to ESPN in Brazil on Tuesday, Neymar Senior said: "PSG know that they will not be able to count on Neymar for the upcoming matches: his treatment will last six to eight weeks, whether there is an operation or not." That was after PSG coach Unai Emery claimed earlier that "no decision" had been taken on whether Neymar would require surgery and that there remained a "small chance" of getting the world's most expensive player back in time to face Real next Tuesday, March 6.

Tests confirmed that Neymar suffered a hairline fracture of the fifth metatarsal in his right foot as well as a twisted ankle late in PSG's 3-0 win over Marseille in Ligue 1 on Sunday.

He appeared to be in tears as he was stretchered off the field at the Parc des Princes, immediately raising fears that the 26-year-old could miss the Champions League last 16, second leg against Madrid. PSG lost 3-1 in the first leg in Spain two weeks ago and are in danger of being knocked out of the competition in the last 16 for the second season running.

Brazilian newspaper Globo Esporte had claimed Neymar would undergo surgery, and that the former Barcelona player would be sidelined until May. If his father's estimate is correct, Neymar would not return before the semi-final stage of the Champions League in late April. On the possibility of rushing Neymar back for the Real second leg, experts say that PSG would be taking a huge risk, possibly even jeopardising Neymar's participation at the World Cup in Russia in June and July. "It would be very risky as it's a fragile bone in the foot which is difficult to protect," Jean-Marcel Ferret, a former doctor with the French national team, told AFP.

"(Playing against Real) could compromise the rest of his season." In the meantime, PSG are preparing to do without Neymar for yesterday's French Cup quarter-final at home to Marseille, the second meeting of the clubs in four days. — AFP

Swansea past Wednesday into FA Cup quarters

LONDON: Swansea City reached the FA Cup quarter-finals for the first time in 54 years with a 2-0 win over second-tier Sheffield Wednesday on Tuesday as goals from Jordan Ayew and Nathan Dyer settled an attritional fifth round replay.

Swansea, who face a last-eight home tie against Tottenham Hotspur or Rochdale, who play their replay on Wednesday, was lifeless in front of a sparse crowd at the Liberty Stadium until Ayew tapped home a rebound from close range in the 55th minute.

Dyer then settled the contest against his manager Carlos Carvalhal's former club with 10 minutes remaining, slipping the ball through goalkeeper Cameron Dawson's legs after being played in by Tammy Abraham. Swansea last reached the sixth round of the competition in 1964, when they were known as Swansea Town. That year, they went one stage further before losing to Preston North End in the semi-finals.

"1964 is a long time ago, I know because I was born in '65," Swansea's Portuguese manager Carvalhal told the BBC. "Swansea have now made the best path in the Cup since then so it's a little part of history and we are happy about that. I'm very proud of my players." Carvalhal would have seen little to be proud of in the first half, however, as Swansea struggled to create chances against their Championship opponents.



SWANSEA: Swansea City's English striker Tammy Abraham (L) takes a shot at goal past Sheffield Wednesday's Portuguese defender Frederico Venancio during the English FA Cup 5th round replay football match between Swansea City and Sheffield Wednesday. — AFP

Swansea, battling to avoid relegation from the Premier League, dominated the ball but would have fallen behind but for two smart saves in quick succession by Kristoffer Nordfeldt from Wednesday striker Jordan Rhodes. Their breakthrough arrived when midfielder Tom Carroll let fly with an unstoppable drive that ricocheted off both posts before halftime substitute Ayew slotted in the rebound. As Wednesday pushed

forward, space opened up for Swansea and Dyer made the game safe.

"At the break we weren't happy with the score," added Carvalhal. "We needed more energy and intensity, so we brought on Martin Olsson and Jordan Ayew and they had a big impact..."

"I think we deserved the win, but Sheffield Wednesday did well in the two games." — Reuters



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Arsenal v Manchester City	22:45
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Real Betis v Real Sociedad	21:30
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
Las Palmas v Barcelona	23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
Deportivo Alaves v Levante	23:30
beIN SPORTS HD 4	