

Sports

Griezmann attempting to find his feet on rocky ground at Barca

Barca looking for lift-off in Champions League after goalless draw against Dortmund

BARCELONA: Antoine Griezmann said he knew it would be tough settling in at Barcelona but it may have proven harder than he thought.

Barca play at home to Inter Milan today looking for lift-off in the Champions League after a goalless draw against Borussia Dortmund made for an underwhelming start to their latest bid for success in Europe.

Griezmann also has something to prove after two steady but unspectacular months, elevated by moments rather than the consistency Ernesto Valverde would have hoped for when the Frenchman's 120-million euro release clause was activated last summer.

"Against Bilbao he was not as involved as we would like," Valverde said at the start of the season. "But it is also up to the team to allow our strikers to participate more." When Griezmann scored twice in the next game, against Real Betis, before tossing glitter above his head at Camp Nou, it felt like he had made his big introduction and not just because of the theatrics.

But five La Liga games have since brought only one more goal and assist while a handful of rather muted displays have left a sense of a player finding his feet, despite excelling in La Liga for the past nine seasons.

After last week's win over Villarreal, Griezmann was asked about his start at Barcelona. "It's different," he said. "It's a different type of football, a different position and I knew it was going to be difficult to adjust."

"But I feel like I'm improving every game and that's it. Three goals, it's not bad right? I can do better but I just arrived. I work for the team and if I can score or assist, even better." Griezmann has reason to defend himself. He joined a team that after five games had posted its lowest points total in 25 years, with last season's collapse against Liverpool still lingering, not least

for Valverde, whose future is never secure.

He also arrived as one of the world's premium strikers but found his new club pursuing Neymar for the duration of the summer, as if the Brazilian might add something he could not. There were relationships to repair too, with Barcelona's fans and players, after Griezmann not only turned them down 12 months before but embarrassed them, by announcing his decision in a documentary.

INCONSISTENCY

"I've spent very little time with him to be honest," Lionel Messi told Diario Sport last month. "Since I returned, I've been injured and training on my own. They went on tour and when they came back we saw each other a little in the dressing room but I've not been there in the training sessions. We'll have the opportunity to share a lot of things."

Once in position, Griezmann has been played in "different positions", three times down the middle as a lone striker and five times on the left of the front three. In his eight games, there have been six different attacking combinations, the revolving pair around him involving all of Luis Suarez, Ousmane Dembele, Rafinha, Carles Perez, Ansu Fati and Messi.

"He is a player who can play in several positions," Valverde said. "We have to see who plays but it's clear the system has to accommodate the players." When he announced he would be leaving Atletico in May, Griezmann said he wanted a fresh challenge and he would have been under no illusions about the inevitable dimming of status alongside the likes of Messi, Suarez and Dembele.

The emergence of the 16-year-old sensation Fati



SANT JOAN DESPI: Barcelona's players attend a training session at the Joan Gamper Sports City training ground in Sant Joan Despi, near Barcelona, yesterday on the eve of the UEFA Champions League Group F football match against Inter Milan. —AFP

and 21-year-old Perez has added two more into an already-crowded attacking roster. But consistency has been hard to come by in a team ridden with

inconsistencies and in that context, Griezmann's start has been encouraging. Against Inter, he will hope for something more. —AFP

Dortmund expect to lose Sancho to premier league club

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund expect to lose England winger Jadon Sancho to a Premier League club with both Manchester United and City reportedly tracking the teenager, director of sport Michael Zorc has admitted.

After turning down a new Manchester City contract to join Dortmund in August 2017, Sancho, still only 19, made his England debut last October on the back of stunning performances for the German club. He has scored 18 goals with 29 assists in 64 games for Dortmund who in the current market can expect around 100 million euros (\$109 million) for Sancho having paid eight million pounds for him after he signed a five-year deal until June 2022.

According to the British media, United and ex-club City are monitoring him. Sancho has made a great start to the season with four goals and six assists in nine games and Dortmund have reportedly doubled his salary to six million euros per year. Many fans, however, do not expect the club to hold onto the fleet-footed winger for much longer and Zorc agrees that "the really top clubs" are "not blind".

"You don't have to be a prophet to say that Jadon will certainly not be playing here for another five years," said the Dortmund boss ahead of Wednesday's Champions League game away to Slavia Prague.

Sancho had yet to turn 18 when he played his first Bundesliga game over 90 minutes in January 2018 — a chance he most likely would not have had so young in England.

"But he knows very well that he took a positive step in his development at Borussia Dortmund," added Zorc.

"I doubt that this would be possible with top English clubs. We trust players from an early age and are not afraid to let them play. He (Sancho) acknowledges that." — AFP



DOHA: Qatar's Mariam Mamdouh Farid competes in the Women's 400m hurdles race heats at the 2019 IAAF Athletics World Championships at the Khalifa International stadium in Doha yesterday. —AFP

Last in heat, Qatari hurdler still breaks down barriers

DOHA: When Qatari hurdler Mariam Mamdouh Farid crossed the finish line more than 15 seconds after the winner in her heat, the sparse crowd at Khalifa International Stadium cheered as if she had put on a podium performance. The 21-year-old finished last in a 400 metres hurdles heat in front of her home crowd with a personal best time of just under one minute 10 seconds, but her race was much more about breaking down barriers than leaping over them.

Competing in a black full-body leotard covering her from head to toe under a national team singlet, Farid is one of two female athletes from Qatar taking part in the

world athletics championships for the first time.

"My goal is inspiring the younger generation, breaking down barriers, making people's perception of how women are in the Middle East," she said. "We are not oppressed. I can still compete with my scarf on. If there is something I want to do, I will do it."

Farid took up athletics as a 15-year-old, having dabbled in a number of sports at her school in Doha. "I used to be the strong girl in school playing football with guys and beating them at the break," she said.

Now on the global stage, Farid, a communications student at the Doha campus of Northwestern University, could not help but be a little starstruck by the hurdlers in other lanes. "I used to see Sydney (McLaughlin) the American champion on Instagram and now she's competing with me," she said. "I felt special."

Making history at the world championships in Doha is not a big enough dream for Farid. She aims to one day win a medal at a major event. "My dreams are very big," she said. "It's not just competing at the world championships but taking medals." — Reuters

Solskjaer demands more clinical Man Utd after Arsenal snatch draw

MACHESTER: Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer jealously lauded the killer touch of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang after the Arsenal striker secured a 1-1 draw for the Gunners at Old Trafford on Monday.

A return of just nine points from their opening seven games is United's worst league start for 30 years and leaves them already 12 points behind leaders Liverpool in 10th. Solskjaer's side have not scored more than one goal since the opening weekend of the season, while Aubameyang took his tally for the season to eight in eight games, seven of which have come in the Premier League.

"It's another game that we are 1-0 up," said Solskjaer. "1-0 at Southampton, 1-0 up at Wolves, we need to learn to win these games. We go 1-0 up and then we don't get the second goal that we want to get. That's the learning now for this time. Be more clinical."

Aubameyang's equaliser just before the hour mark was only awarded after a VAR review with the Gabon international initially wrongly flagged offside. Bukayo Saka pounced on a misplaced pass deep inside the United half and his through ball freed Aubameyang, who was clearly played inside by Harry Maguire.

"Seven now in seven games, so that's clinical," added Solskjaer admiringly of Aubameyang. "VAR is a work in progress, but I'm for right decisions and they definitely deserved their goal today." For many years the clashes between these sides were the Premier League's marquee fixtures. United and Arsenal were the champions of England for nine consecutive seasons between 1996 and 2004. However, the fact they were facing off on a Monday

night because neither are in Champions League action later this week was reflected in a first 45 minutes devoid of inspiration. "I think both Man Utd and us have quality players and we need to improve, to work, to improve physically and tactically to achieve the best performance," said Arsenal boss Unai Emery.

The one moment of quality separated the sides just before the break as Scott McTominay's stunning strike put United in front. Daniel James led a counter-attack from an Arsenal corner and after his cross just evaded Marcus Rashford, the England international cut the ball back to the edge of the box where McTominay smashed into the top corner. That was the first goal United had scored a goal from open play at home in the first-half this season. And they failed to find another goal despite dominating after Arsenal's equaliser.

Paul Pogba fired inches wide from the edge of the area before McTominay somehow didn't score his second of the night with a free header six yards out from a corner. Bernd Leno produced a fine save to turn a piledriver from Maguire over as the world's most expensive defender tried to atone for his earlier error. But the German goalkeeper's best save of the evening came at the death as he flew to his left to turn Rashford's powerful free-kick to safety.

Arsenal remain without a league victory at Old Trafford since 2006, but a point is enough to edge them back into the top four on goal difference. "We wanted to win because we were thinking it was a very good opportunity here to achieve the three points," added Emery. "After 90 minutes I think it was a fair result for both sides." — AFP

Salzburg's youngster Haaland set to shine at Anfield

OSLO: Salzburg's red-hot teenage striker Erling Braut Haaland, will have the chance to measure himself against Liverpool's dazzling collection of attackers today, if he is fit to play.

The Austrian club's sporting director Christoph Freund said on Sunday that the 19-year-old has been ill and may not feature against the European champions at Anfield but there will be many beyond the confines of Merseyside who pray that he is wrong.

After an explosive start to Haaland's Champions League career, fans want to see more of the Norwegian. "He's going to become one of the best strikers in the world," said Salzburg team-mate Maximilian Woeber. "He's just phenomenal."

Haaland set the first round of Champions League games alight when he hit a first-half hat-trick as Salzburg pulverised Genk 6-2 to top Group E ahead of Napoli, who beat Liverpool on the same night.

At 19 years and 58 days, Haaland became the third youngest man to score a hat-trick in the Champions League since its revamp in 1992. Raul was just 18 years and 114 days when he did it in 1995 for Real Madrid against Ferencvaros while Wayne Rooney was 18 years and 340 days when he marked his debut in the competition with a treble for Manchester United against Fenerbahce in September 2004.

Imposing Haaland, who stands 1.94m tall, has been in scintillating form since moving from Molde to Salzburg in January, has scored 17 times in 10 appearances. In May in the under-20 World Cup, he hammered nine goals in one match as Norway humiliated Honduras 12-0.

In spite of his record and his undoubted potential, Haaland is not a regular starter for Salzburg. Five days after his star turn against Genk, he was on the bench at Linz in the Austrian League. He was not even in the squad for the two subsequent wins over Austria Vienna, one in the cup and one in the league.

The young gun is just as confident in his abilities as his teammates are. Asked to name his favourite player by Norwegian TV he answered, with a smile: "I have to say 'it's me'", before adding a slight caveat.

"Zlatan Ibrahimovic is the biggest one. He is Scandinavian, so someone has to take over from him," he said. His profile is inevitably attracting interest from Europe's wealthiest clubs.

"All my life, I have dreamed of playing for one of the best clubs in the world, and I particularly like English football," he said. Yet Haaland has said he is a fan of his father Alf-Inge Haaland's former club Leeds — the city where he was born in July 2000 — and wants to bring glory to a team currently loitering in England's second tier Championship.

"The dream is to win the Premier League with Leeds," he told a Norwegian newspaper in 2017. Juventus and Manchester City have been mentioned as potential suitors but one intriguing link is with Manchester United which has a complex history with the Haaland family. Haaland's dad played for Nottingham Forest, Leeds and then Manchester City, where he was the victim in 2001 of an infamous incident where Manchester United's Roy Keane deliberately stamped on his right knee.

"I really don't like United and I can't stand its players," Alf-Inge has said. Yet Manchester United has a Norwegian manager, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. In the 2017 interview, Erling Braut explained that he had just chosen to join Molde from Bryne, rather than accepting offers from abroad, because he wanted to work with its coach at the time — Solskjaer.

"He had a very big impact on my life," said Haaland said recently of his time at Molde. "He is one of the reasons why I'm here today. He is a good person and a good coach." Solskjaer, who admitted on Monday that he is in the market for strikers, returns the admiration. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV	
		(Local Timings)	
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE			
SK Slavia Prague v Borussia Dortmund	19:55		
beIN SPORTS HD 5			
beIN SPORTS HD 1			
FC Barcelona v Internazionale Milano	22:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 1			
RB Leipzig v Olympique Lyonnais	22:00		
beIN SPORTS			
LOSC Lille v Chelsea FC	22:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 6			
Valencia C.F v Ajax Amsterdam	22:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 3			
Zenit St. Petersburg v SL Benfica	22:00		
beIN SPORTS			
Liverpool v Red Bull Salzburg	22:00		
beIN SPORTS HD			