

Sports

Dismissed at first, Europa Conference League captures the imagination

PARIS: The subject of some derision when it was introduced at the start of this season, the new Europa Conference League has turned out to be a hit and now has some of the continent's most famous names in the semifinals eyeing a rare piece of European silverware. Leicester City take on Jose Mourinho's Roma and Feyenoord play Marseille in the first legs of their semifinal ties this Thursday, with the winners advancing to the final in Tirana in late May.

Twenty-three years after the abolition of the Cup Winners' Cup, the idea behind UEFA's new third-tier European competition was supposedly to give clubs from smaller countries the chance to play more matches, earn more money and get more exposure. It has seen the unheralded Norwegians of Bodo/Glimt put six past Roma and later knock out Celtic on their way to the quarter-finals, while the Slovenians of Mura claimed a famous win over Tottenham Hotspur as the English giants were knocked out in the group stage.

Both Bodo/Glimt and Mura started the season in the Champions League but defeats in the qualifying rounds saw them effectively relegated. It was the same for Leicester and Marseille, who each ended up in the Conference League after being knocked out of the Europa League group stage. Leicester won last season's FA Cup and just missed out on Champions League qualification, so their manager Brendan Rodgers appeared to turn his nose up at the idea of going into the knockout phase of the new competition.

"I've got to be honest, I don't even know what the competition is," he said in an interview with broadcaster BT Sport. "With all due respect to the competition, I'm

not sure what it is. But I'm sure I will find out soon enough." Leicester have since knocked out Randers of Denmark, French club Rennes and former European Cup winners PSV Eindhoven on their way to the semi-finals.

Their story is hardly the most romantic - after all, the Foxes won the Premier League in 2016 and are the 15th-richest club in the world according to the latest Deloitte Football Money League. Yet, having lost a Champions League quarter-final to Atletico Madrid five years ago, Leicester are now in a European semifinal for the first time in their history.

'I would like to win it'

Roma's European pedigree is on another level, with the Italians having reached the European Cup final in 1984 before later losing a UEFA Cup final. They were Champions League semifinalists only four years ago but this run has certainly captured the imagination. Over 65,000 fans were at the Stadio Olimpico to see them beat Bodo/Glimt in the quarterfinals and there will be another huge crowd at next week's second leg.

Mourinho, meanwhile, could complete the sweep of the main European honors having previously won two Champions Leagues as well as the UEFA Cup at Porto and its successor, the Europa League, at Manchester United. "I don't want to lie to you guys and tell you this competition doesn't interest me. It does interest me. I would like to win it," Mourinho said at the start of the campaign. The other semi-final brings together two former European Cup winners, with Feyenoord having won that prize in 1970 and Marseille doing so in 1993.

Feyenoord also won the UEFA Cup twice while



LEICESTER: Leicester City's Belgian midfielder Youri Tielemans, Leicester City's Nigerian striker Kelechi Iheanacho, Leicester City's English midfielder Harvey Barnes attend a training session at Leicester City's training complex on April 27, 2022 on the eve of their UEFA Conference League semifinal first leg match against Roma. —AFP

Marseille have lost in four European finals, including the 1991 European Cup and in the Europa League in 2018. Both sides have fervent fanbases but, in the age of the super club, Champions League glory is beyond their reach and even success in the Europa League is a big

ask. Far from dismissing the Conference League, both have embraced it, especially Feyenoord, whose adventure began in the second qualifying round last July against Drita of Kosovo and could end 10 months later in Tirana. —AFP

How Tedesco has transformed RB Leipzig's season

BERLIN: When RB Leipzig sacked Jesse Marsch last December, it was inconceivable that the struggling German club would approach the end of the season on the brink of reaching two finals. In the last four months, Marsch's replacement Domenico Tedesco has overhauled RB Leipzig, who are confident of beating Rangers in Thursday's Europa League semi-final, first leg at home.

Since he took charge, Leipzig have shot up the Bundesliga from 11th last December to fourth, punched their ticket for next month's German Cup final and reached the last four of the Europa League. Saturday's 2-1 home Bundesliga defeat to Union Berlin, when they conceded two late goals, was Leipzig's first loss since February and ended a 15-game unbeaten run.

"Nobody would have thought we would make it to the (German) cup final when I think back to last December," admitted club boss Oliver Mintzlaff. The turnaround has been nothing short of miraculous under Tedesco, who coached Schalke to sec-

ond place in Germany's top flight in 2017-18. Since the 36-year-old German-Italian took over, Leipzig have picked up 32 points in the second half of the season - exactly the same as Bayern Munich, who were confirmed Bundesliga champions on Saturday for the 10th straight year.

RB labored badly under Marsch, who won Austrian league and cup titles at sister club Red Bull Salzburg, but lasted just five months after a bad start both at home and in Europe. "In the first half of the season, many players were just unhappy," midfielder Marcel Halstenberg told local newspaper MZ. "We have the quality, we just need the right plan."

After talking to the players, Tedesco put emphasis on again dominating possession, as Leipzig had done under Marsch's predecessor Julian Nagelsmann. Tedesco abandoned a back four for a compact three or five-man defence supported by wing-backs Angelinho and Nordi Mukiele. French winger Christopher Nkunku has thrived on the space created inside for Leipzig's forwards by Tedesco's approach.

The Paris Saint-Germain youth product has been a revelation this season with 30 goals and 20 assists in 46 games. He also struck twice at Atalanta in the quarter-finals to seal a 3-1 aggregate victory. Hungary international Dominik Szoboszlai is a constant menace for defences when



Domenico Tedesco

he cuts in from out wide while Spanish attacking midfielder Dani Olmo can decide games on his own.

Yussuf Poulsen and Emil Forsberg, who headed in the winning goal in last Wednesday's German Cup semi-final, have the experience to turn games off the bench. The recent unbeaten run means confidence is high despite Saturday's home defeat. If Leipzig get through to the Europa final, on May 18 in Seville, they will have the chance to lift two trophies in four days with the German Cup final on May 21 at Berlin's Olympic Stadium. "We have such quality in the team that we have to think it's possible to win both," insisted Forsberg. —AFP

Mourinho rebuilding reputation as Roma eye European glory

MILAN: Jose Mourinho returns to England on Thursday on a wave of enthusiasm as upbeat Roma prepare for their third European semifinal in five seasons with fans firmly behind their charismatic manager. Mourinho's spell at Tottenham, the first since 2002 where he left a club without winning a trophy, left the man formerly known as The Special One's stock at an all-time low.

A crop of attack-minded coaches had left Mourinho behind as he crept towards his 60s, but he is rebuilding his reputation in the country where his star has never waned thanks to the historic treble he won for Inter Milan nearly 12 years ago. Defeat on Saturday at Italian champions Inter ended a 12-match unbeaten run in Serie A and fifth-placed Roma's outside hopes of reaching the Champions League.

They were outclassed at the San Siro by a superior team

who are heavily fancied to retain their league title but the 3-1 loss failed to end the positive vibes in Rome ahead of Thursday's trip to Leicester for the first leg of their European Conference League semi. Fans have been packing the Stadio Olimpico for recent matches with more than 65,000 attending wins over Salernitana and Bodo/Glimt and 1,600 will be in fine voice at the King Power Stadium hoping that their team end an England hoodoo.

Roma have won just one of their 22 matches played in England, at Anfield way back in 2001 with Fabio Cappello at the helm for a 2-1 aggregate UEFA Cup defeat to Liverpool, and have taken some heavy beatings from Premier League sides down the years. Last season's Europa League first-leg 6-2 hammering at Manchester United cost Roma their first continental final since 1984, when they were beaten by Liverpool on penalties at their own ground. Under Mourinho, Roma look more solid than they did under predecessor Paulo Fonseca and he has managed to create a cohesion between the team and a notoriously volatile fan base which last saw their team win a trophy in 2008.

"He's instilled in everyone the idea of never giving up, staying on it and coming together to get results," starlet Nicolò Zaniolo said in an interview with UEFA. "We have a coach who knows what it takes to win, I think we've got a chance." Roma

supporters have continually backed their coach even in the face of some deeply poor performances and at time embarrassing results - not even a 6-1 hammering at the hands of Bodo in the Conference League groups stage led to vociferous training ground protests which have been inflicted on previous coaches.

Considered yesterday's man in England, Mourinho's name still carries immense weight in Italy and fans have been prepared to stick by him in the hope that he weaves the same magic which denied them the Serie A crown in 2010. Back then Mourinho was public enemy number one in the 'Giallorosso' half of the Italian capital as his Inter team pipped Roma to the league on the final day of the season, a triumph that came after Lazio fans had hailed him a "true man in a fake football" in a match against Inter they had demanded their own team lose. —AFP



Jose Mourinho

'Part of our DNA': Eintracht bank on away support at West Ham

BERLIN: Eintracht Frankfurt expect thousands of German fans to travel again in the hope of inspiring another away victory, like the shock win at Barcelona, for Thursday's Europa League semi-final first leg at West Ham. Around 30,000 Eintracht fans managed to get tickets for the second leg of their quarter-final at Camp Nou, roaring the German club to a stunning 3-2 win at Barcelona to seal a 4-3 aggregate victory.

Visiting Frankfurt fans have been allocated 5,000 tickets for the game at West Ham's London Stadium, which has a capacity of 60,000, but the German club expects tens of thousands of fans to make the journey. "I am absolutely sure there will be more than 5,000 in the city," Eintracht CEO Axel Hellmann told AFP. "Our fans like to travel and support their team abroad - that's why we brought 15,000 to Inter Milan" for the last-16 tie in 2019. Frankfurt reached the semi-finals that year before losing to Chelsea on penalties. 30,000 at Barcelona was absolutely the peak of our club history's going abroad. It's part of our DNA."

Frankfurt's Colombia forward Rafael Borré explained why the upset win on a magic night in Barcelona has captured the imagination of Frankfurt fans. "Many people thought it was impossible. So when you achieve it, it's normal for people to feel euphoric," said Borré, who scored away to Barcelona in the quarterfinal.

In a bid to avoid a repeat of the scenes at Camp Nou that prompted Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez to say it felt like they had been "robbed in their own home", West Ham have warned their supporters against selling tickets to Frankfurt fans. Under Austrian coach Oliver Glasner, Frankfurt have struggled at times in the Bundesliga this season, saving their best performances for Europe.

Their fans are desperate to reach the final in Seville on May 18 for the chance of silverware. Before their shock win over Bayern Munich in the 2018 German Cup final, Eintracht's previous title was in 1979-80 when they won the UEFA Cup - the precursor to the Europa League - by beating Borussia Moenchengladbach over two legs in an all-German final. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adalya	22517144

Kuwait Times
The Daily Paper of the State of Kuwait

STAY CONNECTED

- Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**
- Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**
- Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait
Tel: 24833199 - 24833398 - 24839616 / 7 / Fax: 24835620 - 24835621
E: info@kuwaittimes.net

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Ralston Gaynor Mendes, resident of India, have changed my son's name from Michael Mendes to Michael Jay Mendes vide Gazette no. 1561, dated 21/11/2021. **(C 1445) 27-4-2022**

I, Nalakat Anwar, S/o Mohamed Nalakat, Parasseri, P.O. B.P. Angadi, Malappuram District, Kerala. (Indian Passport No. 52388731) have changed my name and address: Nalakat Anwar, S/o Mohammed, Nalakat House, Parasseri, P.O. B.P. Angadi, Talakkad, Malappuram District, Kerala - 676102 **(C 1444)**

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:

Call MSALHOTLINE 128