Whether the likes of Barcelona, PSG, Juventus and Real Madrid can pose a threat to the EPL heavyweights in Champions League should be a lot clearer after this week’s group matches.

By Mark Gleeson

Tonight and tomorrow’s Uefa Champions League matches could offer an early and fascinating glimpse into clubs who might be able to break down English hegemony in the competition.

English clubs were in supreme command last season and holders Liverpool, runners-up Tottenham Hotspur, Chelsea and Manchester City are all expected to go deep into the competition again as the group campaign gets underway.

Their opposition will come from the usual Spanish threat of Barcelona, Atletico and Real Madrid, Italian champions Juventus and their German counterparts Bayern Munich, plus Paris St Germain, where Neymar remains for another season despite his best efforts to get away.

The fixture list has thrown up some juicy contests between many of those contenders over the next days, which will allow a peek into their potential.

Paris St Germain, for all their spending, were bundled out in the last-16 of the competition last season, having got to the last eight in each of the four seasons before that.

Despite being arguably Europe’s wealthiest club and having unprecedented dominance in the French Ligue 1, they have failed to make any real impact in Europe’s premier club competition.

Real Madrid are in Paris tomorrow night with Eden Hazard likely to start for the first time along with Gareth Bale, who was supposed to be leaving in the off-season but refused.

Madrid manager Zinedine Zidane was looking for more of an overhaul of his squad, but did not get Paul Pogba or Neymar, who had his first run of the season for PSG on Saturday and scored the stoppage-time winner against Strasbourg despite taking much stick from his own fans.

Barcelona remain without an injured Lionel Messi in an away game at Borussia Dortmund tonight. But goals for 16-year-old Ansu Fati in a 5-2 win over Valencia in La Liga at the weekend has taken Messi’s absence off the back pages.

Dortmund are among the Bundesliga front-runners after scoring four at home to Bayer Leverkusen in their last outing.

Juventus’ trip to Atletico Madrid tomorrow is probably the most interesting game involving the top non-English contenders.

The Spanish club remain a study in defensive rigidity, but are up against long-time nemesis Cristiano Ronaldo, who has a rich history of picking Atletico apart.

To take a bet, go to www.soccer6.co.za

Ansu Fati, Picture BackpagePix

PRO’S TOP SHOTS

City spends record 1.1-billion Euros

For the first time in history, a football club has invested more than one-billion Euros in transfers to assemble its squad.

That is Manchester City, which is closely followed by Paris St-Germain (953-million Euros) and Real Madrid (902-million Euros).

A new survey finds significant gaps between the costliest and cheapest squads per league, starting in the Premier League in which Real Madrid has spent 1,481 times more than Malorca.

(Other notes are in France’s Ligue 1, in which Paris St-Germain have spent 114 times more than Nimes, x63 in the Bundesliga (Bayern Munich versus Paderborn), x86 in Serie A (Juventus versus Lecce) and in the English Premier League in which Manchester City has spent 32 times more than Norwich.

Soccer6’s Pool opens: 17 Sep - Closes: 18:55 18 Sep

PSG v Dynamo Kiev

M1 2 14 14-2 Club Brugge v Galatasaray 5-5 7 5 5
M2 4 10 7-5 Fuenlabrada v Zaragoza 10-12 13 2
M3 5 9 5-3 Huesca v Albacete 2-9 6 15
M4 14 6 6-6 Lugo v Fuenlabrada 8-10 8 12
M5 5 6 6-3 Sundowns v SuperSport Utd 9-6 8 4
M6 1 9 7-0 Olympiacos v Torment 11-6 8 3
M7 11 12 1-4 PSG v Real Madrid 9-6 8 3
M8 2 16 13-3 Din Zagreb v Atalanta 7-6 6 6
M9 2 9 5-4 Alt Madrid v Juventus 5-3 7 3
M10 6 8 25-5 Fylke FC v Vip Reykjavik 29-28 25 8

In the last three results, most recent on right. LP: League Position or International Ranking, GS-GC: Goals Scored - Goals Conceded

DISCLAIMER

With regard to the results table, whilst Soccer6 believes the data to be correct, Soccer6 makes no representations or warranties of any kind, expressed or implied as to the completeness, accuracy or reliability of any of the data. Soccer6 shall not be liable for any loss, damage or expense caused by any inaccuracy, inaccuracy, or omission in any of the data.

PRO’S TOP SHOTS

Olympiacos have lost seven of their last eight Champions League group games. Spurs reached last season’s final, losing to Liverpool.

Olympiacos v Vitoria SC

M10 Fylkir Reykjavik v Vikingur: Newly-promoted Fuenlabrada are in their first season in Spain’s second division and this is the first time they play against Zaragoza.

M3 Huesca v Albacete: Three of the last four meetings between these Spanish clubs ended in draws with Huesca winning the other.

M4 Lugo v Ponferradina: Lugo are unbeaten in their last four home games against Ponfer- radina, but have won only twice.

M5 Mamelodi Sundowns v SuperSport United: This is the third time these clubs meet in the history of six weeks. So- downs won 2-0 on the opening day of the league season and then drew 1-1 in the first leg of this MTN8 semi-final clash some 10 days ago.

M6 Olympiacos v Torment Hotspur: Olympiacos have lost seven or their last eight Champions League group games. Spurs reached last season’s final, losing to Liverpool.

M7 Paris St Germain v Real Madrid: PSG’s record against Real Madrid is two wins, two draws and four losses. PSG didn’t get past the round of 16 last season.

M8 Dinamo Zagreb v Atlante: The Italians from Bergamo are making their Champions League group stage debut, while Dinamo have lost their last 11 group matches, one off the record.

M9 Atletico Madrid v Juventus: Atletico have won both previous home games against Juventus in European club competition without conceding. Juventus’ Cristiano Ronaldo has scored seven goals in eight Champions League games against Atletico.

M10 Fylkir Reykjavik v Vikingur: Fylkir have lost four of their past six matches. Vikingur are unbeaten in their last five clashes against Fylkir, winning three of them.

Europe’s big guns roll out

Wednesday 18 September

M1 Club Brugge v Galatasaray: These two clubs met in 2002-03 Champions League group stages where they drew 0-0 in Istanbul and Bruges won 3-1 at home.

M2 Fuenlabrada v Real Zaragoza: Newly-promoted Fuenlabrada are in their first season in Spain’s second divi- sion and this is the first time they play against Zaragoza.

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**SOCCER 6 POOLS Tuesday 17 September**

- **Mark S6 V2 P2 - BET from Thu 19 Sep** - Closes 16:55 Tue 24 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S6 V2 P1 - BET from Fri 20 Sep** - Closes 10:45 Tue 24 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S6 V2 P1 - BET from Sat 21 Sep** - Closes 15:00 Sat 21 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S6 V2 P1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 20:45 Tue 24 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S6 V1 P1 - BET from Thu 19 Sep** - Closes 18:55 Thu 19 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

**SOCCER 10 POOLS Monday 16 September**

- **Mark S10 V1 P1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S10 V2 P1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

**SOCCER 10 POOLS Saturday 21 September**

- **Mark S10 V1 P1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

**SOCCER 10 POOLS Saturday 19 September**

- **Mark S10 V1 P1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

**SOCCER 10 POOLS Thursday 19 September**

- **Mark S10 V1 P1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

**SOCCER 10 POOLS Tuesday 17 September**

- **Mark S10 V1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S10 V2 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S10 V3 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

- **Mark S10 V4 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B

**SOCCER ANY 15 POOL Saturday 21 September**

- **Mark S10 V4 P1 - BET from Mon 16 Sep** - Closes 16:00 Mon 23 Sep
  - Team A versus Team B