

## JUVENTUS MUST ECLIPSE DOMESTIC WOES AGAIN - ALLEGRI

**MILAN:** Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri has demanded his side forget their domestic woes with a Champions League win over Borussia Monchengladbach that would put them within sight of the last 16. An underwhelming start to the Serie A season has left Juventus just four points above the relegation zone and nine points behind leaders Fiorentina after eight games.

But in true Jekyll and Hyde style, Juve-last season's beaten finalists appear to transform when the challenge of Europe's premier club competition looms. They are among only six teams with maximum points from their first two games, following a 2-1 win at Manchester City with a 2-0 defeat of Sevilla that has propelled them to the top of Group D.

Holding a three-point cushion on both City and Sevilla, Juve will take a significant step towards the knockout stages with victory over Andre Schubert's improving Bundesliga side today.

Observers looking at Juve's Serie A performances and position should be wary. On Sunday, the Bianconeri snatched a point from a pulsating scoreless draw away to on-form Inter Milan, but it was a compelling display from the champions and, with the exception of a poor first-half display from Paul Pogba, dispelled any existing doubts about Juve's steadily-improving form. After the game, Allegri alluded to Juve's split personalities in a post on Twitter, writing: "We played a good game, now let us see #euroJuve and get focused on the Champions League."

The statistics back up the 48-year-old coach. Juve stunned City at the Etihad Stadium just after they had suffered defeats to Udinese and Roma, and could only draw with Chievo at home, in their first three games of the season.

Since then, Juve have only slowly improved on the domestic front. But Allegri has welcomed back key players from injury, including midfielders Sami Khedira and

Claudio Marchisio as well as experienced defender Andrea Barzagli.

Although Juve are not quite the side that Argentinian striker Carlos Tevez inspired to a league and Cup double last season, the Bianconeri are finally beginning to play like a team. "Now, I have all of the squad available for selection, even if some of the lads are lacking a little match fitness," Allegri said. Allegri is expected to deploy his preferred 4-3-1-2 formation for Wednesday's clash in Turin, with Alvaro Morata already sure to claim one of the two strikers' spots.

The Spanish international's goal against Sevilla last time out meant he equalled Alessandro Del Piero's club record of scoring in five consecutive Champions League games. Mario Mandzukic and Paulo Dybala are vying to join him up front.

Gladbach have also endured a Jekyll and Hyde season so far, in the Bundesliga at least. The Germans suffered five straight league defeats and lost 3-0 to Sevilla in Europe, leaving them bottom of Germany's top flight and prompting coach Lucien Favre's shock resignation in mid-September after four successful years at the helm.

Schubert was installed only as caretaker coach, but the change was immediate. The Fools went on to win four league games on the trot and although a 2-1 defeat to City has left them bottom of the group without a point, the Germans are defiant.

"There is a jolt going through the team and the way we are playing at the moment is sensational," defender Tony Jantschke said after Gladbach hammered Eintracht Frankfurt 5-1 away on Saturday. "The fact is that we are not exactly playing with our heads down at the moment. "We are going to Turin to win, we want to show that we can compete against the big names." Fleet-footed winger Patrick Herrmann is out with a knee injury while Swiss defensive midfielder Granit Xhaka is doubtful with an ankle knock. — AFP



SPAIN: Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during a Spanish La Liga soccer match. — AP

## SUPREMACY AT STAKE AS PSG HOST INJURY-HIT REAL

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid will test their Champions League credentials when they meet at the Parc des Princes today with supremacy in their group at stake.

The two teams, who harbour ambitions of going all the way in Europe's elite club competition, are locked together at the top of Group A having both beaten Malmo and Shakhtar Donetsk without conceding a goal.

Both sides are therefore well on course to qualify for the last 16, but their double confrontation over the next two weeks they also meet in the Spanish capital on November 3 — will likely determine who wins the section and thereby sets up a more favourable draw in the first knockout round.

Madrid's preparations for the match—which comes ahead of a testing run of games in which they will also meet Celta Vigo, Sevilla and Barcelona in La Liga in the next month—have been overshadowed by injuries. Gareth Bale is set to miss out with a recurrence of a calf injury suffered in the 3-0 win against Levante at the weekend, while James Rodriguez, Pepe and Dani Carvajal are all expected to be sidelined in Paris. Karim Benzema is also a major doubt due to a hamstring strain.

However, Rafael Benitez's men have been boosted by the return of Luka Modric to training after an abductor muscle injury and captain

Sergio Ramos is reportedly set to start against the French champions after overcoming a shoulder injury.

Madrid are joint top of La Liga and are still unbeaten this season under Benitez, but Spain midfielder Isco admits that record will be seriously tested at the Parc des Princes.

"They are one of the most complete sides in the competition and they have great players," Isco told realmadrid.com. "The two matches against them will be very hard and will be defined by the small details. We need to follow the same path as we have up to now, scoring a lot of goals and conceding very few."

Like their opponents, PSG are yet to lose this season and they are top of Ligue 1 after winning 2-0 at Bastia at the weekend.

Indeed, that result left them unbeaten in their last 20 games in all competitions since a 2-0 defeat against Barcelona in the quarter-finals of last season's Champions League in April.

However, Paris coach Laurent Blanc also has injury concerns, with Marco Verratti and Angel Di Maria hoping to feature after missing the Bastia game and David Luiz struggling to overcome a knee injury suffered playing for Brazil.

In addition, first-choice goalkeeper Kevin Trapp faces a fight to recover from a thigh injury in time, so Salvatore Sirigu is standing by to replace him.

"Real can hurt you at any moment. In mid-field and up front all of their players can make the difference," warned PSG striker Edinson Cavani. The all-star cast for the game will be headed by PSG's Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Real's Cristiano Ronaldo, who have both become the all-time leading scorers for their respective clubs since the start of this month.

Meanwhile, Argentina winger Di Maria will be eager to feature for Paris against the side he helped win the Champions League in 2014 with an outstanding performance in the final against Atletico Madrid.

However, he says he will not produce his trademark celebration, his fingers forming the shape of a heart, should he score. "I won't celebrate because in my heart I have not forgotten what I went through with Madrid. It was unforgettable, a magnificent memory that will always stay with me," Di Maria told Canal Plus. While Paris have faced Barcelona six times in the last three seasons, they have not come up against Real for two decades.

Back then, the French side knocked Madrid out of Europe in consecutive seasons, beating them in the UEFA Cup quarter-finals in 1993 when a legendary late goal by Antoine Kombouare secured a 5-4 aggregate triumph, and then coming out on top in the Cup Winners' Cup quarter-finals a year later. — AFP



ITALY: Juventus' Juan Cuadrado kicks the ball in this file photo.

## GULF RIVALS BATTLE TO REACH ACL FINAL

**DUBAI:** Gulf bragging rights are at stake as Dubai's Al Ahli and Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal play the second leg of their Asian Champions League (ACL) semi-final late yesterday.

The likes of World Cup winning captains Fabio Cannavaro and Diego Maradona have been lured to play or coach in the wealthy region in recent years, but sustained continental success has proved elusive with only one Gulf club—Qatar's Al Sadd—crowned Asian champions in the past decade.

Hoping to put that right are hosts Al Ahli, who will be slight favourites after netting a potentially crucial away goal in drawing the first leg 1-1, and Al Hilal, Asia's second-ranked team and 2014 ACL runners-up. Al Ahli coach Cosmin Olariu led Al Hilal to the Saudi title in 2008 and also took charge of the kingdom's national team

at this year's Asia Cup, but he played down any advantage this experience might provide.

"In football everyone has the tendency to believe football is a science, or mathematical," the Romanian told a news conference. "Football is a show, it is made by artists and in any moment they improvise, they can do things that are not expected."

"My knowledge of them helps, but it will not be the deciding factor. Whoever has more psychological power, more strength, they will succeed."

For Al Ahli, much will depend on playmaker Everton Ribeiro. The two-time Brazilian player of the year has dazzled since his surprise move to the United Arab Emirates for a reported fee of 15 million euros last winter. The 26-year-old scored in the final three ACL group games to help Al Ahli scrape into the knock-out phases and has five goals and a clutch of assists in 21 domestic games.

Ribeiro will be ably supported by his compatriot, the striker Rodrigo Lima, 32, who netted home and away against Iran's Naft Tehran in the quarter-finals and bagged the opener in the semi-final first-leg. "We know about Al Ahli, they have good players, not only these two," Al Hilal's Greek coach Giorgos Donis said. "They work as a team, but tomorrow it is more important for us to improve some things from the last game."

Al Hilal will also look to two Brazilians for inspiration. Ailton, a journeyman striker recruited from Europe's minor leagues, and muscular midfielder Carlos Eduardo, 25, have scored nine goals in six ACL and Saudi league matches between them since signing in the summer.

But the Riyadh outfit will be without key defender Digo, who is suspended, plus goalkeeper Khalid Sharhili who was dropped after skipping training.

"If someone continues with amateur behaviour there's no place for him in our club," added Donis. In the other semi-final, Japan's Gamba Osaka will attempt to overturn a 2-1 first-leg deficit at home to China's Guangzhou Evergrande today. — Reuters

## ATLETICO EYE MAXIMUM POINTS

**MADRID:** Atletico Madrid striker Fernando Torres has insisted his side must take maximum points from their two encounters with Champions League debutants Astana in the next fortnight to get their European campaign back on track.

The Spanish side host the Kazakh champions today hoping to make amends for their first home defeat in the Champions League for six years against Benfica last time out.

Diego Simeone's men are still well-placed to qualify from Group C thanks to their 2-0 win at Galatasaray on match day one. However, having made the quarter-finals in each of the last two seasons, Torres is determined to reach the knockout stages as group winners to ensure an easier path to the last eight once more.

"We knew it was very important to win at Galatasaray ahead of the home match against Benfica. We won in Turkey, but it wasn't our plan to lose here at home against Benfica," the former Liverpool and Chelsea striker told Uefa.com.

"We need the points even more in the upcoming matches but we are confident that we will make it into the next round, which is our short-term objective."

"We want to finish first in our group, because you have more advantages, or let's say fewer disadvantages, in the next round. We are at that point now to know that we need six points in our next two matches." Astana made the longest ever trip in Champions League group stage history when they travelled over 6,000 kilometres to play Benfica on matchday one and face another marathon trip as they try to spring a massive upset in the Spanish capital.



SPAIN: Atletico de Madrid's Yannick Carrasco celebrates in this file photo. — AP

"On paper we are the favourites, but not really knowing them can be a real danger," added Torres, who is just one goal away from his 100th for the club.

"In such matches we have to focus on ourselves, play our game, keep the concentration that you need in Champions League matches, and approach it with the determination to win."

Simeone has a fully-fit squad to choose from,

but the Argentine could rotate his squad with a key clash against Valencia in La Liga to come on Sunday.

Astana secured their first ever point in the competition with a 2-2 draw at home to Galatasaray last time out in a crazy game dominated by three own goals. The visitors will be without Ghanaian striker Patrick Twumasi as he serves the third of a four-game ban. — AFP

## STERLING SETS SIGHTS ON SEVILLA

**LONDON:** After a hat-trick against Bournemouth, Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling has set his sights on bigger targets, starting with today's Champions League encounter at home to Europa League holders Sevilla.

Sterling inspired City to a 5-1 demolition of Bournemouth on Saturday in his best performance since joining from Liverpool in a deal that could be worth up to £49 million (\$75.7 million, 66.7 million euros).

With Wilfried Bony also scoring twice, Manuel Pellegrini's side barely missed the injured Sergio Aguero and David Silva, but ahead of successive games against Sevilla and Manchester United, Sterling knows that City's path is about to become a great deal steeper.

"That was my best game so far for City. I had chances and I finished them, so I'm happy," the England forward told the club website.

"The movement up front and the passing from midfield has been really good in the last few games and we've been playing some good, free-flowing stuff. "We have to put this game to

one side now and look towards Sevilla on Wednesday and Man United next weekend. But our focus for now is purely on Wednesday."

Having crushed Newcastle United 6-1 prior to the international break, City have now scored 11 goals in two games, but the transition from domestic to continental competition has been a consistent area of concern in recent seasons. City won their first five Premier League games without conceding a goal, only to crash 2-1 at home to Juventus in their opening Group D assignment last month.

A 90th-minute Aguero penalty saw them win at Borussia Moenchengladbach in their second group game, but with Juventus having beaten Sevilla 2-0 on the same night, a shootout for second place is already on the cards. As well as Aguero and Silva, City are also currently without both left-backs Aleksandar Kolarov and Gael Clichy, meaning right-back Bacary Sagna is expected to fill in on the left side of defence. Skipper Vincent Kompany is in line to return after being rested against Bournemouth, while

Pellegrini has allayed fears about the fitness of Yaya Toure after he was taken off at half-time.

Although fit, Toure is not content, as he disclosed in an interview with L'Equipe on Monday in which he said that he was "not happy" due to a perceived lack of recognition from the English media. While the Ivorian broods, Wednesday's game is likely to be a happier occasion for City winger Jesus Navas, who played 393 games for Sevilla during a 10-year period prior to alighting in northwest England in 2013.

Sevilla's domestic struggles continued on Saturday as they could only manage a 1-1 draw at Eibar, which left them 12th in La Liga with just two wins from their opening eight games.

However, they have shown their ability to rise to the occasion as one of those victories came against European champions Barcelona.

Unai Emery's squad is also beginning to take shape after a spate of injuries, but Gael Kakuta, Sergio Escudero, Nico Pareja, Daniel Carrico and goalkeeper Beto are all expected to miss the trip to Manchester. — AFP



Matches on TV  
(Local Timings)

### UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Juventus v Borussia	21:45
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
Moskva v Man United	21:45
beIN SPORTS 4 HD	
beIN SPORTS 12 HD	
Atletico v Astana	21:45
beIN SPORTS 9 HD	
Wolfsburg v PSV	21:45
beIN SPORTS 7 HD	
Galatasaray v Benfica	21:45
beIN SPORTS 6 HD	
Malmo v Shakhtar	21:45
beIN SPORTS 5 HD	
PSG v Real Madrid	21:45
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	
beIN SPORTS 11 HD	
Man City v Sevilla	21:45
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	