

Sports

Liverpool can exploit Ronaldo's weaknesses: Alexander-Arnold

Ronaldo going for his fifth Champions League winner's medal

LIVERPOOL: At just 19 years of age, Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold faces a daunting task of stopping five-time World Player of the Year Cristiano Ronaldo in tomorrow's Champions League final in Kiev.

But the fresh-faced right-back isn't overawed by the prospect and believes he can even expose Ronaldo's own weaknesses.

A whirlwind season for Alexander-Arnold was capped by a call-up to England's World Cup squad despite not having yet made his debut for the senior national side.

He has been just one of a number of success stories of Jurgen Klopp's management to end an 11-year wait for Liverpool to reach a Champions League final.

The gulf in experience couldn't be greater in the Ukrainian capital, though, as Real aim for a fourth

European Cup in five seasons. Ronaldo is going for his fifth Champions League winner's medal having also lifted the trophy with Manchester United in 2008.

Yet, despite classing the competition's all-time leading scorer as "one of the best players ever", Alexander-Arnold is still confident the Portuguese can be shut down by an improving Liverpool defence.

"Obviously it will be," he said when asked if

facing Ronaldo is the biggest challenge of his young career.

"He's one of the best players ever. He's done unbelievable things in the game, but he's got weaknesses as well, as every player has.

"Tomorrow we'll try to exploit them and stop him from doing what he does best, to stop him from scoring." Alexander-Arnold is likely to have his hands full with Madrid left-back Marcelo also marauding forward down his flank.

The Brazilian scored in Madrid's first leg semi-final win over Bayern Munich and set up Real's opening goal scored by Karim Benzema in the second leg against the Germans.

However, Marcelo is also often exposed defensively with Bayern right-back Joshua Kimmich scoring in both legs of the semi-final and

could leave space to be exploited by Liverpool's own 44-goal marksman Mohamed Salah.

"It is not just a one man team either," added Alexander-Arnold. "They've got other threats too and unbelievable squad depth.

"Even coming off the bench they've got world class players so it will be tough for everyone on the pitch and everyone will have the task of a direct opponent who is world class. It will be tough, but we're excited for it."

“Everyone who has helped me get better”

Ancelotti replaces Sarri with promise to end Napoli's 28-year title wait

MILAN: Carlo Ancelotti promised to end Napoli's 28-year wait for a Serie A title after it was confirmed on Wednesday he would take over from Maurizio Sarri as coach of the Italian club on a three-year deal. Ancelotti, sacked by Bayern Munich last September, steps in after Sarri was pushed out of the San Paolo Stadium after finishing second in Serie A behind Juventus.

Napoli have not won Serie A since the days of Argentina legend Diego Maradona who led them to their only two titles in 1987 and 1990. "I'm very happy to return to my country and to one of the greatest teams in Italy," Ancelotti said in a statement on his personal website. "(The) aim is to conquer the Scudetto after 28 years. We are thrilled by this challenge and ready to open a new chapter in football." It will be Ancelotti's first job in Italian football since leaving AC Milan in 2009 after leading the club to a Scudetto and two Champions League titles. His son Davide and his son-in-law Mino Fulco will also be on the Napoli coaching staff.

Ancelotti hammered out a deal throughout Wednesday with Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis who later confirmed Sarri's departure on Twit-



Carlo Ancelotti

ter. "I'd like to thank Maurizio Sarri for his valuable contribution to the Napoli cause," De Laurentiis said.

"He brought joy and prestige to Naples and Napoli fans all over the world with an entertaining brand of football that drew praise from all quarters. Well done, Maurizio-Aurelio De Laurentiis."

Italian film producer De Laurentiis then announced Ancelotti's arrival with a staged photo of the pair standing back to back holding imaginary guns ready for a shootoff. "I'm really happy and honoured to be the coach of a team from such a unique city with such incredible fans. Forza Napoli always," Ancelotti then said in a message posted in four different languages—Italian, English, French and Spanish. Ancelotti said that he had chosen Napoli despite offers from all over Europe and Asia as well as the Italy national coaching job. His aim was "to return Napoli to the highest position of the Serie A and Champions League". —AFP



KIEV: Liverpool fan reacts as he poses beside the UEFA Champions League Cup on display at the fan zone in Kiev yesterday, ahead of the football match between Real Madrid and Liverpool FC tomorrow at the Olimpiyskiy Stadium. —AFP

Born in West Derby, a stone's throw from Liverpool's Melwood training ground, Alexander-Arnold is living the dream having graduated from the club's academy to break through into the first team.

He also scored the first of Liverpool's 46 goals in the Champions League this season way back in August in a playoff against Hoffenheim just to make the group stages.

Alexander-Arnold hailed the role Klopp has had in his development, and insists he isn't dis-

tracted by the fact he will be headed to Russia with England hot on the heels of tomorrow's final.

"It's down to my team-mates and everyone who has helped me get better, the manager, everyone in the background that's helped me," he added.

"We've all pushed forward as a group and got better over the course of the season. It's exciting times over the next few weeks, but the focus is on Saturday." —AFP

Neuer injury-free at start of pre-World Cup camp: Loew

EPPAN: Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer is on track to regain full fitness in time for next month's World Cup after recovering from a foot injury that has sidelined him for most of the season, national team coach Joachim Loew said yesterday.

Speaking at the start of a training camp in northern Italy ahead of the tournament, Loew sounded confident that the 32-year-old German captain, part of his 2014 World Cup-winning team, would play in Russia.

Bayern Munich keeper Neuer has not played since breaking a bone in his foot back in September that required surgery, putting his chances of making the finals in doubt. "He trained a week at Bayern, here he is training fully and can also deal with the intensity level," Loew told reporters.

"We will see from day-to-day. If he has the feeling that he is at 100 percent then he can be there in Russia. Should there be any problems we would need to discuss it. But as

things stand now he has no problems whatsoever and things look good." Loew is also expecting to have Jerome Boateng back in the squad later this week as the central defender has recovered from a groin injury suffered last month.

"Everything is going according to plan and by next week I expect him to be taking part in training," said the 58-year-old coach, who this month extended his contract to 2022. The Germans are preparing for the fourth time in Eppan, high in the Italian Alps, with Loew praising the conditions for his players as they get ready for their title defence.

"We have the best conditions here, proximity to the pitch, a good hotel, the pitch is in a very good state, short travel times, so everything to have a good preparation." Germany will remain in Italy until June 5, a day after the deadline for the final squad announcement. Loew has taken 27 players to the training camp with four facing the cut.

The Germans, who will travel to play a warm-up match away to Austria in Klagenfurt on June 2 before returning to Italy and then going home to face Saudi Arabia in Leverkusen six days later, are in Group F with Sweden, South Korea and Mexico. —Reuters