

Gasperini targets first Atalanta trophy against Juventus as fans return for Coppa Italia final

REGGIO EMILIA: Gian Piero Gasperini can cap his transformation of Atalanta into a team now among the elite of European football with his first coaching trophy in the Italian Cup final against Juventus in Reggio Emilia tonight.

The 63-year-old has revolutionized the Bergamo side since taking over five years ago. Tonight, they bid for just their second ever trophy, after the 1963 Italian Cup, as fans return to football stadiums in Italy for the first time in over a year.

Juve's season is now effectively in the hands of Gasperini's side who have already assured themselves a third consecutive season of Champions League football. But Juve's top-four finish will be dependent on Atalanta beating European rivals AC Milan in Bergamo next Sunday.

It has been a mixed debut season for rival coach Andrea Pirlo who is chasing a second trophy after beating Napoli to win the Italian SuperCup in January. The Turin club's Champions League qualification will go down to the wire in Sunday's final game at Bologna.

"Clearly it is an important final we are playing against Juventus," said Gasperini of a trophy which would cap a stellar season for Atalanta. "For the fans, the cup represents a trophy, and we will do everything to please them."

Atalanta are also in the running for a club high second-placed finish in Serie A behind champions Inter Milan, and can also exceed their best-ever points tally, already equaled with 78. In addition, they could claim a club record number of league games won, now equaled with 23, and already have the top attack in the league with 90 goals scored.

'Growth path'

Gasperini has put the northern Italian club among the elite of European football for the first time. "When I first signed, qualification in the Europa

League was also unimaginable," conceded the former Palermo and Genoa coach.

"It is the result of a growth path during these five years and I must say that this year was more difficult than the others. It is always said that you have to raise a trophy otherwise it seems that nothing has been won. "Instead I am convinced that what we have done at Atalanta is equivalent to many victories on the pitch. We have also scored 78 points this year, equaling the historical record. We have the possibility to improve them, we have set the target around 80 points in the league for three years in a row."

Fans return

As Atalanta, also three-time Cup runners-up in 1987, 1996 and 2019, approach the game serenely, Juventus are under pressure. Pirlo won his first trophy, albeit a minor one, in a season of slip-ups and errors, but chalking up another with a 14th Coppa Italia trophy would be a lift going into a key weekend.

Without the Champions League, the club's already shaky finances would take a big hit. "I made many mistakes, but I'd make them all again," said Pirlo. "This is my first season, I needed those experiences for the present and the future."

"This was a more complicated campaign," added veteran captain Giorgio Chiellini, who in addition to nine league titles has also won four Coppa Italia trophies with the club. "We'll keep trying till the end." The Coppa Italia final will have a limited number of fans present with 20 percent of the Mapei Stadium in Reggio Emilia, home to Serie A side Sassuolo, open to the public.

Fans are returning for the first time in more than a year amid the Covid-19 pandemic, having also been allowed during the Italian Open tennis in Rome last week. Rome's Stadio Olimpico will also be at least 25 percent capacity for Italy's Euro 2020 matches next month. — AFP



GENOA: Atalanta's Italian coach Gian Piero Gasperini looks on during the Italian Serie A football match Genoa vs Atalanta Bergamo on May 15, 2021 at the Luigi-Ferraris stadium in Genoa. — AFP

Guardiola warns Aguero over Champions League final berth

LONDON: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has warned Sergio Aguero there will be no room for sentiment when he picks his team for the Champions League final against Chelsea later this month. Aguero has announced he will leave City at the end of the season after 10 successful years with the Premier League champions.

The Argentina striker is City's all-time record goalscorer, but he may not have a fairytale farewell at the end of an injury-ravaged campaign in which he has been limited to just 18 appearances. Aguero will miss Tuesday's match at Brighton with an adductor problem. He could return for one last

appearance at the Etihad Stadium against Everton on Sunday. But Guardiola refused to give any guarantees the 32-year-old will feature in City's first Champions League final on May 29.

"I would say I would be cold," Guardiola said of his attitude towards selection. "I have to take a decision which is the best to win that game, so I have to be. If Sergio is fit he is going to help us, that is for sure, if he is going to help us score goals he is going to play, but it's the final of the Champions League. I have to take the decision that gives us the best chance of winning that game." — AFP



Kuwait Times
Established 1961

The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

REGISTER TODAY
for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

Free for all residents of Kuwait. To register visit:

www.moh.gov.kw

STEP 1: Click on COVID-19 VACCINE REGISTRATION **STEP 2:** FILL OUT BASIC INFORMATION **STEP 3:** SUBMIT FORM

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and approved by Kuwait's Ministry of Health