

## Sports

# PSG, Man City to benefit from expected end to financial fair play restrictions

## UEFA mulls salary cap of 70 percent of club's revenue

**LAUSANNE:** Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City go head-to-head in the Champions League tomorrow after a summer which underlined their status as the new superpowers of European football, and any possible restraints on their enormous spending could soon disappear along with UEFA's Financial Fair Play rules.

The story of PSG, City and Financial Fair Play (FFP) is essentially the story of the last decade in European football. Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour bought City in 2008, while in 2010 Qatar Sports Investments purchased PSG. Also in 2010, UEFA introduced FFP in response to a debt crisis that was submerging clubs across the continent.

FFP meant clubs could not lose more than 30 million euros (\$35.2m) over a three-year period if they wanted to play in European competition.

Rivals of PSG and City have consistently asked how the duo can be respecting the rules when they spend as much as they do, most notably when the French side splurged the two biggest transfer fees in history to sign Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in 2017.

PSG were not punished then, while City were handed a two-year Champions League ban by UEFA in February 2020 for FFP breaches when they were found to have overstated revenue from sponsorship between 2012 and 2016. Yet the Court of Arbitration for Sport overturned that ban. Most alleged breaches, the court said, "were either not established or time-barred".

That ruling showed the limits of FFP, and in any case UEFA responded to the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic — with total projected losses of over eight billion euros — by

relaxing the rules. Assessments of the 2020 and 2021 financial years would be done together rather than separately. Clubs are also expected to be able to register losses over the 30 million-euro limit.

Essentially, with cash-strapped clubs desperate, UEFA realized it no longer made sense to prevent investment. "What they're saying is, put in all the money you want," says Raffaele Poli from the Football Observatory at the International Centre for Sports Studies in Neuchatel, Switzerland.

### Salary cap

And it now seems clear this relaxation will not be temporary. UEFA is working on a complete overhaul of its budgetary rules. Details are still being negotiated but it now seems clear the strict limits applied under FFP will be replaced by a salary cap expected to be around 70 percent of a club's revenue.

There will be a transition period in which the limit will gradually drop, for example the cap might start at 80 percent of revenue, then drop to 75 percent. It is a similar system to those used in American sports but the introduction of a Europe-wide salary cap is a delicate issue, given the continent's 55 national federations all follow different accounting and tax rules within their own countries.

In practice, such a cap would do little to restrain wage inflation. In May, UEFA claimed spending on salaries in 2019 represented 64 percent of total revenue for all clubs, "more than in any other industry".

However, the major change in store for the nouveau riches of the European game is not a cap on wage spending, but instead the likely lifting of any



**PARIS:** PSG's players celebrate after winning the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain and Montpellier at The Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Saturday. —AFP

sporting punishment — bans from the Champions League or from signing players — for going over the limit.

### Luxury tax

Instead, UEFA is set to introduce a "luxury tax", as has been mentioned several times in the past by president Aleksander Ceferin. For every euro a club goes over the limit, it will have to pay into a pot and that money will be redistributed to other clubs.

Ceferin has warned that the envisaged new rules are not likely to improve "competitive bal-

ance", an issue close to the Slovenian's heart. It will not stop the biggest trophies being shared only among a very select few elite clubs.

According to Poli, limiting wage spending to a percentage of revenues will simply "entrench the existing hierarchy" as it will still only be the very richest teams who can attract the best players. Indeed, the luxury tax is likely to tip the balance even more in favor of those backed by oil or gas-rich states, or oligarchs, for whom there will no longer be any questions about possible breaches of FFP rules. —AFP

### News in brief

#### PSG win without Messi

**PARIS:** Lionel Messi was again sidelined for Paris Saint-Germain and in the Argentine's absence it was Idrissa Gana Gueye and Julian Draxler who scored as the Ligue 1 leaders beat Montpellier 2-0 on Saturday. Senegal midfielder Gueye crashed a shot into the roof of the net from 20 meters to give PSG an early lead at the Parc des Princes and substitute Draxler added a late second as Mauricio Pochettino's team maintained their perfect start to the French season. They have won eight matches out of eight in Ligue 1 and are already 10 points clear of second-placed Marseille, who do nevertheless have two games in hand. —AFP

#### Real Madrid frustrated

**MADRID:** Real Madrid failed to capitalize on Atletico Madrid's shock defeat by bottom club Alaves on Saturday as they were held to a goalless draw by a determined Villarreal in La Liga. Dropped points for Spain's leading pair allowed Sevilla to make up some ground at the top, with Julen Lopetegui's side beating Espanyol 2-0 to jump above Atletico and into second. Atletico face Barcelona next weekend after travelling to AC Milan in the Champions League on Tuesday, a game made more important after a goalless draw at home to Porto cranked up the pressure in a group that also includes Liverpool. —AFP

#### Inter's dramatic draw

**MILAN:** Inter Milan missed the chance to go top of Serie A on Saturday after a thrilling 2-2 draw with Atalanta which allowed city rivals AC Milan to hold onto first place with their 2-1 win at Spezia. Champions Inter sit third, two points behind leaders Milan, after a breathless match at the San Siro which ended with substitute Federico Dimarco hitting the bar with an 86th minute penalty and Roberto Piccoli then having a last-gasp winner for Atalanta ruled out amid frantic protests from the away side. Atalanta are fifth following the draw which highlighted the attacking threat and the clear intention from Gian Piero Gasperini's side to continue to punch above their weight in Italy's top flight. —AFP

#### Brentford deny Liverpool

**BRENTFORD:** Jurgen Klopp said he was not able to enjoy a "wild ride" as Liverpool twice let the lead slip to draw 3-3 at Brentford on Saturday to edge just one point clear at the top of the Premier League. Defeats for Chelsea and Manchester United earlier in the day propelled Liverpool to the top of the table and gave the Reds a golden chance to open up a three-point lead. However, Brentford showed why they have made such a bright start to their first top-flight season for 74 years in a six-goal thriller that swung from end to end throughout. —AFP

#### Dortmund crash without Haaland

**BERLIN:** Defending champions Bayern Munich finished the weekend three points clear at the top of the Bundesliga table after close rivals Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg both suffered away defeats on Saturday. Without injured star striker Erling Braut Haaland and club captain Marco Reus, Dortmund had midfielder Mahmoud Dahoud sent off for two first-half yellow cards as their 1-0 defeat at Borussia Moenchengladbach left them fourth in the table. Earlier, Wolfsburg lost 3-1 at Hoffenheim, falling to third and losing second place on goal difference to Bayer Leverkusen, whose 18-year-old Germany international Florian Wirtz sealed a 1-0 win over Mainz to become the youngest player to reach the milestone of 10 Bundesliga goals. —AFP

## Pressure mounts on Solskjaer as Man Utd stumble again

**LONDON:** Cristiano Ronaldo's sensational return to Manchester United allowed fans to dream big but three defeats in four games have ramped up the pressure ahead of Villarreal's Champions League trip to Old Trafford on Wednesday.

There is no need for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to hit the panic button yet, with his side just one point behind Premier League leaders Liverpool after six matches.

But there are worrying signs for the Red Devils, who must rediscover their mojo quickly after a shock reverse in their Champions League opener against Young Boys, a League Cup exit to West Ham and Saturday's defeat against Aston Villa.

The one result that breaks up that nasty sequence was a 2-1 victory at West Ham, but that only came courtesy of a late winner and a David de Gea penalty save in stoppage time. In other circumstances the game against Unai Emery's Villarreal might appear routine but United are already on the back foot in Europe after their embarrassing loss in Switzerland.

And they have a recent bad experience against the Spanish side, losing on penalties to them in the final of last season's Europa League, a result that denied them their first silverware since 2017. United boast a squad that on paper can compete with anybody, with an rich array of attacking talent including Ronaldo, Edinson Cavani, Bruno Fernandes, Mason Greenwood and Paul Pogba.

And that's not even including big summer signing Jadon Sancho, Anthony Martial, Jesse Lingard or the injured Marcus Rashford. But Solskjaer's side

## Joshua wants Usyk rematch '110 percent'

**LONDON:** Anthony Joshua said he was "110 percent" likely to activate a rematch clause with Oleksandr Usyk after losing his world heavyweight titles to the Ukrainian in stunning fashion in London on Saturday. Usyk gave a boxing masterclass in recording a unanimous points victory to deprive Joshua of his World Boxing Association, International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Organization belts in front of the dethroned champion's home crowd of more than 66,000 at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

His victory extended Usyk's unbeaten professional record to 19 wins and scuppered the prospects of an all-British world heavyweight title unification bout between Joshua and Tyson Fury. It also meant Usyk became just the third cruiserweight world champion after Evander Holyfield of the United States and Britain's David Haye to also take a heavyweight title, with the 34-year-old achieving the feat in just his third professional contest in the heavyweight ranks.

The contract for this bout, however, contained a rematch clause. And Joshua, who previously lost his belts when beaten by Andy Ruiz in New York in June 2019 before regaining the titles in a rematch in Saudi Arabia six months later, is determined to face Usyk again. "A hundred percent, 110 percent," he told a post-fight press conference. "I'm ready to

still regularly look less than the sum of their parts. United had 28 shots in the match against Villa but just four were on target and the visitors posed a regular threat. They slipped to their first defeat against the Midlands club since 2009 after Kortney Hause's late goal and Fernandes's missed penalty in stoppage time.

Solskjaer felt his team were not clinical enough in the 1-0 defeat. "When we got up there, the final decision, the final execution, the quality in the pass or the shot or decision wasn't good enough to get goals," he said. "The game ebbed and flowed and was probably a good game for the neutrals but unfortunately, we didn't get a goal."

### Must-win?

United must stop the rot on Wednesday and in the context of Europe it could be make or break. "It's a big game, a Champions League night and we know we've started that group badly," said Solskjaer. "We'll be ready."

Despite some eye-catching wins this season, United have often lacked cohesion and relied on moments of individual magic from players such as Fernandes, Pogba and Ronaldo. There is the lingering sense that United are lacking the midfield balance to make a concerted challenge.

After a string of near-misses in the hunt for silverware, Ronaldo's return added to over £100 million of investment in Sancho and Raphael Varane means Solskjaer has to deliver this season. But the Norwegian's record in Europe does not inspire confidence. United have lost seven of his 11 Champions League matches since taking charge in 2018.

The 48-year-old was handed a new three-year deal in July — reward for the progress United have made in the three years since he replaced Jose Mourinho. The club's bosses have remained patient so far with their former star striker but they will be keen to see a return on their considerable investment sooner rather than later.

get back to training. There's an old saying 'If you want to go down as a great fighter, don't fight southpaws', especially good ones. He (Usyk) is a good fighter." Joshua suffered a badly swollen right eye which required medical attention in a fight where only the bell appeared to save him from a last-round knockout. "I couldn't see in the ninth round," explained Joshua. "My eye was shut, but it was a good experience, because in adversity, you've just got to learn to control yourself... it's the first time it's happened in a fight."

Joshua, sounding remarkably upbeat despite a convincing loss, insisted: "I'm a different kind of animal. I'm not a sulker, this is a blessed opportunity to be able to fight for the heavyweight championship of the world. Straight away I've already been watching the fight and figuring out what I could have done better." Joshua's defeat put paid to a fight anytime soon with Fury, who defends his World Boxing Council heavyweight title against Deontay Wilder in Las Vegas next month — the third time the pair have met after a split-decision draw and a win for Fury. Joshua, however, insisted: "I'll fight Tyson Fury, Wilder, without the belts. It's great, it's legacy but with or without the belts I'll fight whoever."

### 'Lucky city'

Usyk, three years older than Joshua, also made light of giving away three inches (7.62 centimeters) in height as well as nearly 20lbs (nine kilograms) in weight during his latest triumph in London following a heavyweight gold medal at the 2012 Olympics — a Games where Joshua took the super-heavyweight title. "London is a really lucky city for me but not a single professional victory



**MANCHESTER:** Manchester United's manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer consoles Bruno Fernandes after he missed a penalty during their team's English Premier League football match against Aston Villa at Old Trafford in Manchester on Saturday. —AFP

### Bruno takes responsibility

Fernandes says he will keep taking penalties "without any fear" despite the spot-kick miss that condemned Manchester United to a 1-0 defeat against Aston Villa. Writing on Instagram, Fernandes said: "Nobody is more frustrated and disappointed than me for missing the penalty and the consequent defeat. I've always assumed my responsibilities and I've always embraced them under pressure in moments like this. Today, I failed. But I took a step forward and faced the challenge with the same ambition and responsibility as when, on the many other occasions, the ball ended up in the net.

"Criticism and contrasting opinions are a big part of football. I've learned to live with it, even using them to drive me on, and I consider it all a very important part of my commitment to never stop trying to improve and to become the best player I can possibly be, for me and the team. Today I once again took the responsibility given to me almost since I joined United and I will take it again without any fear or dread whenever called upon." —AFP



**LONDON:** Ukrainian boxer Oleksandr Usyk (left) fights British heavyweight champion boxer Anthony Joshua at the end of their heavyweight boxing match at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in north London on Saturday. —AFP

can be above an Olympic gold," said Usyk via a translator. "At this point it is the biggest fight in my career but it wasn't the hardest one. I cannot say (who was) but, most likely, it's ahead of us." Most of Usyk's wins have come outside Ukraine, with the new champion — who spent three months in a preparation camp away from his wife and family — adding: "I would love to have the rematch at Olympiyskiy Stadium in Kiev."

But Joshua's promoter, Eddie Hearn, suggested any rematch would be in Britain, in February or March. Hearn said a defeat by the "outstanding" Usyk was easier to accept than the "bolt from the blue" that was the first Ruiz fight. "I think in a strange way he (Joshua) enjoyed the fight because I think he knows he learnt so much and, deep down he knows he was beaten by the better man tonight," he said. —AFP