

UEFA Champions League 2022-23

MATCHDAY 6: NOV 1

Head-to-head

W D L

GROUP A

Liverpool ENG

Napoli ITA

Rangers SCO

Ajax NED

2 2 3

0 0 5

Napoli

Liverpool

Ajax

Rangers

16 15

9 12

-7 3

-18 0

GD Pts

GROUP B

Porto POR

Atlético ESP

Leverkusen GER

Club Brugge BEL

2 4 5

0 1 1

Brugge

Porto

Atlético

Leverkusen

3 10

4 9

-3 5

-4 4

GD Pts

GROUP C

Bayern GER

Internazionale ITA

Viktoria Plzeň CZE

Barcelona ESP

4 1 3

0 0 3

Bayern

Inter

Barcelona

Plzeň

14 15

5 10

-2 4

-17 0

GD Pts

GROUP D

Marseille FRA

Tottenham ENG

Sporting CP POR

Frankfurt GER

0 0 1

1 0 0

Tottenham

Sporting

Frankfurt

Marseille

1 8

0 7

-2 7

1 6

GD Pts

Daichi Kamada

Frankfurt forward

TENSE BATTLE: With just two points separating top from bottom in Group D, final matchday promises high drama as all four teams vie for only two places in knock-out stage

Champions League: Most balls recovered\*

Frankfurt

Tackles won: 20

253

Chelsea

23

233

Salzburg

36

225

Leverkusen

24

219

Dortmund

26

217

Napoli

19

212

Sources: UEFA, Gracenote

\*Team gains possession after control has been lost by opposition

Picture: Getty © GRAPHIC NEWS

QUALIFIED TEAMS

12 teams already through to Last 16

Last 16 places since 2003/04

66

England

21.7% of all places

61

Spain

20.0%

46

Italy

15.1%

44

Germany

14.5%

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Injury-hit Reds face touch Napoli challenge

LIVERPOOL manager Jurgen Klopp played down suggestions that his team are in decline, saying it is "not 100% fair" to judge the squad because they have had a number of injury problems this season.

Liverpool were expected to be Manchester City's closest challengers for the Premier League title, but Klopp's side are ninth in the standings after 12 games.

Liverpool have lost players including Diogo Jota, Naby Keita, Luis Diaz and Joel Matip to injury while Darwin Nunez has struggled to justify his price tag after being signed as a replacement for Sadio Mane. Saturday's 2-1 defeat by Leeds United, their first home league loss since March 2021, was another blow.

"We do this job in public and the judgement for this will be later on in the season, or even at the end," Klopp said yesterday when asked if his team are in decline. "At the moment it's not 100% fair to judge the team because we haven't had them (players) availa-

ble, missing up front top quality. We'd usually make changes. "Even if it's unfair, it's fine. It's normal to ask these questions. Arsenal and Man City will have to answer those questions later on. We are all out there to be judged, manager, players, that's how it is."

Klopp said there was no quick fix. "Consistency and stability is our issue," the German said. "There are highs and there are obviously too many lows, that is clear."

Liverpool have qualified for the Champions League knockout stages and are due to host Napoli in their final group game today. They are second in Group A and can secure top spot by beating the Italian side by four goals or more. But they face a tough challenge against Napoli, who are top of Serie A and unbeaten in the league this season. "I am not afraid or scared. It is a tough challenge but I really respect what they are doing," Klopp said.

"Now our situation is slightly more difficult than Napoli's. When you are

on a winning streak you have to do a lot to stay on track."

Centre-back Ibrahima Konate is available to face Napoli but the game comes too soon for Matip who has a calf problem. The other massive tussle tonight is between Olympique de Marseille and Tottenham at the Stade Velodrome. Group D remains tightly contested going into the final match-day of the group stages, with all four teams - Tottenham, Sporting Lisbon, Eintracht Frankfurt and Marseille - able to progress to the last-16.

A draw should suffice for Tottenham, but a loss to the Phocceans, plus victory for either Sporting of Eintracht, could see them dumped out of the tournament. In the other matches today, Porto and Atletico Madrid meet to decide the fate of top spot in Group B, while Leverkusen and Club Brugge complete the group in a dead rubber.

Meanwhile, Bayern Munich face Inter Milan, Rangers will be tested by Ajax, and Barcelona travel to the Czech Republic to face Victoria Plzen. | Reuters



T20 WORLD CUP

## Injury concerns take gloss off Australia win

AARON Finch returned to form with a timely half-century, but finished under an injury cloud as Australia eased to a 42-run win over Ireland at the T20 World Cup yesterday to keep their semi-final hopes alive.

Captain Finch's 63 off 44 balls helped the champions post an imposing total of 179/5 at the Gabba in Brisbane before Australia's bowlers led by Mitchell Starc terrorised Ireland's top order on Halloween.

Australia move to second in Group 1 behind leading New Zealand, who have a game in hand, but the hosts missed a golden opportunity to lift their net run-rate above third-placed England after reducing Ireland to 25/5 early on.

A brave, unbeaten 71 by Lorcan Tucker rallied Ireland to 137 before they were bowled out after 18.1 overs.

Tucker was dropped on 35 by Pat Cummins, leaving bowler Starc fuming.

"We didn't get it in the right area enough (to Tucker)," Starc said.

"We take that catch and we could be sitting here talking about how we snuck back in the net run-rate or whatever."

Nonetheless, with the top two teams advancing to the semi-finals, the pressure is on Jos Buttler's England to take down unbeaten New Zealand at the same venue today.

Australia have other injury worries apart from Finch, who spent most of Ireland's chase off the field.

No 6 batsman Tim David was also spared fielding duties with hamstring soreness.

All-rounder Marcus Stoinis was on and off the field despite scoring 35 and taking a wicket during his one over of bowling.

Finch said he hoped to be fit for Australia's last Super 12 clash against Afghanistan in Adelaide on Friday, but the skipper has a history of hamstring problems.

"That doesn't feel too bad at the moment, but generally overnight they can stiffen up," said the stocky opener.

The fitness concerns soured victory for the hosts in front of a crowd laden with fans in Halloween costumes.

After a slow and awkward 31 not out in the win over Sri Lanka in Perth, Finch started tensely with the bat but grew in confidence in partnerships with Mitchell Marsh (28) and Stoinis.

He brought up his fifty with a six during a horror over for Ireland all-rounder Mark Adair, who bowled five wides and conceded 26 runs before finishing with ugly figures of 0/59.

Ireland's Barry McCarthy had a better night with 3/29 and leapt over the rope for a spectacular catch which denied Stoinis a six and saved Adair four runs when he threw the ball back in before landing.

Left-arm Starc was not called into action until the fourth over of Ireland's chase but made an immediate impact, bowling Curtis Campher and George Dockrell for ducks in a thrilling burst of pace and swing.

That reduced Ireland to 25/5 but it was to be the apex for Starc and Australia as Tucker dragged them into a grind that could ultimately prove costly if run-rates are decisive. | Reuters



AARON Finch's 63 off 44 balls helped Australia post an imposing total of 179/5 against Ireland at the Gabba yesterday. | AFP

FOR MORE ON THE T20 WORLD CUP, VISIT WWW.IOL.CO.ZA/SPORT

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FIFA WORLD CUP

TO THE NINES

Over the years, the No 9 jersey was often worn by the most valuable player in the team. Time has changed somewhat, with the No 10s now often sharing the limelight. Football has evolved, but the No 9 jersey continues to be worn by some of the world's greatest players. Ahead of Qatar 2022, Herman Gibbs looks at his best players to ever wear the number

Poland

France

Brazil

Serbia

Belgium

Robert Lewandowski

Karim Benzema

Gabriel Jesus

Dusan Vlahovic

Romelu Lukaku

The striker plays for Barcelona and captains the Poland senior national men's team. Before his move to Barca, Lewandowski proved to be one of Europe's most prolific scorers. He has won the European Golden Shoe consecutively. Over the weekend, he scored his 12th goal in 11 La Liga games this season as Barcelona thrashed Athletic Bilbao 4-0. He also provided one assist.

The recent Ballon d'Or winner, who is a creative and prolific scoring forward, ranks among one of the best strikers of all time. Former Real Madrid boss Manuel Pellegrini recently described him as "a complete player, not only a scorer, but he is a creator as well" - high praise indeed. He is hugely industrious, and has a tremendous off-the-ball work rate.

The Arsenal striker is determined to stamp his authority at the 2022 showpiece. He has been working hard at his game - he is an excellent passer of the ball and will exploit any gaps while on attack. He is a strong player and holds his own during robust play in the melee of the opposition goalmouth. Apart from his dribbling skills, he can be relied upon to hold up the ball and draw the opposition before allowing his teammates a free run into the striking zone.

It has been said that the Juventus hitman will be the next big thing. He offers superb link-play and brings his teammates into the frame when setting off attacking sorties. He runs the channels well, and that helps his teammates to read his moves, and lay on passes. He has a knack for getting behind opposition defences after losing his markers.

The well-travelled forward has been one of the reasons why his country has been ranked at the top of world rankings for the past few months. He is blessed with sublime skills, and he has been described as the "perfect" player. He is known to play with his back to the opposition's goal but has a turn of speed which can leave his markers in his slipstream. He drops deep when the need arises and he sets up a valuable link between midfield and attack.

Graphic:Wade Geduld/African News Agency

## Congested calendar raises injury risk for World Cup stars

AS MANCHESTER United defender Raphael Varane left the field in last weekend's 1-1 draw with Chelsea, the Frenchman's face sank into his shirt to hide his tears from the cameras.

Within seconds of pulling up at Stamford Bridge, Varane was aware his appearance at the World Cup was in jeopardy.

The former Real Madrid centre-back may have got lucky, with an initial diagnosis of a small hamstring tear giving him a chance of making it to Qatar.

Many more have not been so fortunate.

N'Golo Kante will not feature in France's defence of the tournament. Uruguay will be without Ronald Araujo and Portugal shorn of Diogo Jota.

Germany have concerns over the fitness of Bayern Munich duo Manuel Neuer and Leroy Sane. Meanwhile, England manager Gareth Southgate's prediction of a catalogue of injuries for the Three Lions is proving prescient with Reece James, Kyle Walker and Kalvin Phillips major doubts.

"What see is a really packed schedule now with a lot of players playing a lot of minutes," said Southgate earlier this month.

"I think realistically we will lose more. It's so intense, and the players are playing so much football."

The uprooting of football's traditional calendar to fit in a first ever mid-season World Cup has resulted in fixture congestion at club level and little time to prepare for international managers.

Europe's major leagues will pause just a week before the World Cup kicks off on 20 November.

To make space in the schedule, the group stages of European club competitions were squeezed into a two-month period. As a result, many clubs will have played 13 times in 42 days before the World Cup break.

"I am pretty sure they have one eye on the World Cup," said Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola.

"Now it is just two or three weeks before the end, so it is the last effort. I always say the best way to not get injured is to be focused and give your maximum in the game. When you lose the attention is when you are at risk."

Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp claimed his players remain "1 000%" committed to the cause at club level.

But Klopp has pointed to injuries and players playing too often in a short timeframe as the major factor behind his team's wretched start to the season.

"With the amount of games we have some players are overplayed,"

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