

SPORTS

Kylian Mbappe reacts to completing his brilliant hat-trick for Champions League holder Real Madrid in a 3-1 playoff win over Manchester City on Wednesday, helping Los Blancos reach the next round of the competition. AGENCIES



SOCCER

MBAPPE'S TRIPLE TREAT

French star hammers home his third Champions League hat-trick to propel Real past City and into last 16

Kylian Mbappe was celebrating a “perfect night” with Real Madrid — one that included his third Champions League hat-trick and his club securing a spot in the round of 16 to keep alive its hopes of winning a record-extending 16th European title.

With a pair of goals in the first half and another successful strike in the second, Mbappe led Madrid to a comfortable 3-1 win over Manchester City on Wednesday. The Spanish powerhouse advanced 6-3 on aggregate after a dramatic 3-2 first-leg win in England last week.

“This was a perfect night,” Mbappe said. “We wanted to win, and this was how to do it. We gave everything in front of our home fans, and we won because we produced a great performance against City, who are always difficult to play.”

Mbappe joined Lionel Messi, Karim Benzema and Robert Lewandowski on the list of players with two hat-tricks in the knockout stages of the Champions League. Cristiano Ronaldo has four. Mbappe's other hat-tricks came with Paris Saint-Germain against Barcelona in

2021, and in the group stage against Club Brugge in 2019.

“He has the quality to reach his numbers, but he has to work, because Cristiano set the bar very high, but he is so excited to play here, he can reach Cristiano's level,” Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti told a news conference.

“Everyone was waiting for this hat-trick from him, and it has finally arrived. But, Mbappe is not the only one, we have many players who make a difference. And they make a difference with their collective work above their individual quality, which is remarkable.”

Madrid player Jude Bellingham was among those praising Mbappe's performance against City.

“Mbappe is very special — everyone knows that, and he never stops proving it,” he said. “He's a better person than a player, and we're going to benefit from his goals.”

The France star said it was one of his best games since he joined Madrid this season.

“Whether this was my best game for Madrid or not, I'm not the best person to analyze,” Mbappe said.

“This was a perfect night. We wanted to win and this was how to do it. We gave everything in front of our home fans, and we won because we produced a great performance.”

**Kylian Mbappe**, Real Madrid superstar striker

“Better that somebody else decides. I'm here to play and to perform on the pitch. I would categorize this as a great team performance.”

Ancelotti lamented that his side had to go through the pain of the knockout round, but said that it only had itself to blame, after its slow start to the campaign saw it finish outside the top eight in the league standings.

“It's not positive at all having to go

through the playoffs, because we had to play 10 games to get to the last 16,” Ancelotti said.

“We're not coming out of a difficult period, we're entering one, because this is when the real season starts. There is no way to stop, to rest. But, on an emotional level, sure, this tie has been good for us. Let's keep rolling.”

The defending champion will next face either Bayer Leverkusen or crosstown rival Atletico Madrid, depending on Friday's draw.

Mbappe said he would rather see Madrid faces Atletico instead of Bayer Leverkusen in the next round, mostly to avoid a trip to Germany.

“Honestly, I would rather we are drawn against Atletico,” Mbappe said. “They are two great clubs and it would be difficult either way, but, in the next round, it would be much better for us if we don't have to travel.”

**Seven heaven for PSG**

Meanwhile, Mbappe's former outfit PSG demolished Brest 7-0 at the Parc des Princes, as goals from seven different players propelled the

in-form French champion to a 10-0 aggregate win.

Bradley Barcola and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored in the first half to eliminate any lingering doubts over the outcome of the tie, as the host showed no mercy with Vitorino, Desire Doue, Nuno Mendes, Goncalo Ramos and Senny Mayulu also on target.

It was a record winning margin for PSG in a European game. It scored just three goals in its first five Champions League matches this season, but has found the net 21 times in five outings since then.

“I think we are showing that winning everything is possible,” Kvaratskhelia told Canal Plus. “We come into every game to win, and, of course, that is our goal and our dream. We will put everything into that.”

Luis Enrique's men go on to a blockbuster clash with Liverpool or Barcelona, while Brest's first-ever European campaign ended in sorry fashion against a club it has not beaten in 40 years.

“It is pretty shameful to go out this way. To lose 7-0 is too much. Yes Paris are a great team and I hope

they go all the way, but to lose 7-0 is unacceptable,” said Brest midfielder Pierre Lees-Melou.

PSV Eindhoven knocked out Juventus 4-3 on aggregate after extra time, overturning a first-leg deficit with a 3-1 win in the Netherlands.

Timothy Weah canceled out Ivan Perisic's opener for PSV, but the host forced an additional 30 minutes with a goal from Ismael Saibari.

Defender Ryan Flamingo turned in from close range in the 98th minute to send PSV through at the expense of Thiago Motta's Juventus, with Arsenal or Inter Milan awaiting the Dutch side next month.

Borussia Dortmund progressed after a goalless draw at home to Portugal's Sporting Lisbon sealed a 3-0 aggregate victory.

The competition's leading scorer Serhou Guirassy missed a second-half penalty, but it counted for nothing in the end, as last season's runner-up was rarely troubled by Sporting. Dortmund's reward is a last-16 tie against Aston Villa or Lille.

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‘Nothing lasts forever’: Guardiola laments ‘worst’ UCL campaign

Manchester City's manager Pep Guardiola cuts a dejected figure during his side's 3-1 Champions League playoff second-leg defeat to Real Madrid on Wednesday. AP

Pep Guardiola conceded Manchester City needs a rebuild after being swept aside by a Kylian Mbappe hat-trick, as Real Madrid progressed to the last 16 of the Champions League 6-3 on aggregate.

It is the third time in four seasons that City has been knocked out by the Spanish giant, but the first time since Guardiola joined in 2016 that the English champion has failed to reach the competition's last 16.

The sides were drawn to face off much earlier in the competition this time, as City only sneaked through the league phase after finishing 22nd in the 36-team table.

“The better team won,” Guardiola told Spanish TV station Movistar.

“We have had a bad year in the competition. If you finish 22nd, it is because we haven't been right. It has been our worst year.”

Injuries have played a significant part in City's struggles this season.

Erling Haaland did not get off the bench at the Santiago Bernabeu due to a knee injury, while John Stones

had to be replaced inside the first 10 minutes.

Guardiola said his side missed Haaland.

“Erling tried to practice yesterday, but he was really hurting from the challenge against Newcastle. It hurt when he walked, when trying to go up and down stairs,” Guardiola said.

“This morning he told me he wasn't ready, that he wasn't feeling well. The plan was to try to get a better result than in Manchester and, in his condition, it wasn't the best option.”

City's consolation goal came thanks to two of their January signings, as Nico Gonzalez tapped in after Omar Marmoush's free-kick came back off the crossbar.

Guardiola said the rebuild had already begun, as City spent 170 million pounds (\$214 million) on bringing Marmoush, Gonzalez, Abdulkodir Khusanov and Vitor Reis to the club during the mid-season transfer window.

“It is normal. Nothing lasts forev-

er, and in the group there are players that have marked an era,” added Guardiola.

“We cannot deny what this group of players have done, winning six Premier Leagues in seven years given what that competition is.

“In Europe, always getting to the quarterfinals, semifinals, final. It says a lot about what we have done.”

Madrid has gone on to win the competition each time it has beaten City in the past four years, and Guardiola believes this version of Carlo Ancelotti's men is the best he has faced.

“This year we faced the best Madrid. In the previous ones, going through or not, we were very good,” he said.

“They are better because they are able to have the ball for long spells, can run, can defend well with a high line when they want, but also defend well with men behind the ball. You have to congratulate them.”

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Slot unhappy as profligate Liverpool leaves door ajar for title rival Arsenal

BIRMINGHAM — Liverpool manager Arne Slot would have signed up for being eight points clear at the top of the Premier League with 12 games left of his first season in charge, but he could not hide his frustration after a 2-2 draw at Aston Villa on Wednesday.

Victory would have sent his team 10 points clear of Arsenal having played one game more, but his side dropped points for the second time in three games to leave the door slightly ajar.

“Not so happy to be honest. I think if you look back at the game, we created far more chances than them,” Slot told TNT Sports. “I think we did everything we had to do to get a result over here, maybe even a win.”

It was a night of mixed emotions for Liverpool which dominated early on and took the lead in the 28th minute thanks to Mohamed Salah's 24th league goal of the season.

Goals by Yuri Tielemans and Ollie Watkins gave Villa a halftime lead, before Trent Alexander-Arnold's deflected shot just past the hour leveled it up.

Liverpool substitute Darwin Nunez missed a sitter, and Slot's side had its heart in its mouth at the death, as Villa substitute Donyell Malen shaved the post with a shot.

Slot's side had 17 goal attempts to Villa's nine, but was left to rue its lack of precision in front of goal.

“In the final minute (Villa) could have won it,” Slot, whose side has

lost just one league game all season, said.

“But, if you look at all our chances in a row, it's clear that I'm not happy with the 2-2. To come here it's difficult, because of the team they have, because of the support they have from the fans, but I think we were close to playing a very, very, very good game.”

Second-placed Arsenal now has a game in hand and will get the chance to ratchet up the pressure on Liverpool on the weekend. Arsenal hosts West Ham United on Saturday, and a win would cut the gap to five points ahead of Liverpool's trip to champion Manchester City on Sunday.

“There's always pressure if you play for Liverpool, that's the same if you play for Arsenal,” Slot said. “We want to achieve something togeth-

er this season, and we have all the ingredients for it. There are still 12 games to go, and the Champions League, but we're happy where we are.

“I think we've played a few too many games where we deserve more than we got. I don't mean the Everton game when I look at the quality of play, but it was, of course, a big disappointment to concede in the last minute.”

One concern for Slot was an injury to Conor Bradley who had come off the bench to replace Alexander-Arnold.

“It happened in the sprint,” he said. “You never know what it is, but if a player goes out it's never a good sign.”

REUTERS



Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold celebrates scoring the equalizer against Aston Villa on Wednesday. REUTERS