



'DIE GELBE WAND...'

...or 'The Yellow Wall', in Dortmund's imposing south stand, is lurking to test Paris Saint-Germain stars like Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in the Champions League on Tuesday. AP

# Up against the wall

From Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten to former boss Klopp, everyone knows about the 'gigantic monster' in Dortmund stands

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PACKED WITH passionate home fans, Borussia Dortmund's imposing south stand - dubbed 'The Yellow Wall' - is the 'gigantic monster' lurking to test Paris Saint-Germain stars like Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in the Champions League on Tuesday.

"It's just a fantastic feeling that I haven't had before," is how Dortmund's star striker Erling Braut Haaland described scoring in front of 'Die Gelbe Wand' (The Yellow Wall) at Signal Iduna Park. The 19-year-old has bagged nine goals since Dortmund snapped him up for 20 million euros (\$22 million) from Salzburg. Five of them have come in his three home appearances games, including one in the 4-0 thrashing of Frankfurt on Friday.

"If you are the opposition, it crushes you - but if you have her at your back as a goalkeeper, it's a fantastic feeling," is how ex-Dortmund shot-stopper Roman Weidenfeller describes the experience of the imposing terrace.

For Bundesliga games, the south stand, which is 100 metres (328 feet) wide and 40 metres high, is packed with 25,000 fans, but capacity is reduced to 16,000 to meet UEFA regulations for Champions League games.

**'Huge, roaring monster'**

Nevertheless, the noise will be deafening when the Dortmund team walk out for Tuesday's last 16, first leg tie. "Just look at the south stand in Dortmund," Johnny Rotten, lead singer of British punk band The Sex Pistols and a passionate Arsenal fan has said on the matter. "They all stand, chant and make such a noise that the stand seems like the pharynx of some huge, roaring monster. It's fantastic."

Dortmund fan Max Kiwitt, 27, has been coming to the stadium with his family since he was four and told AFP why he is a regular on 'The Yellow Wall'. "Because here, everyone can let go of their emotions. No one will complain if they get elated in the head" or if they get showered by beer when Dortmund score to send thousands of plastic cups flying, he said with a smile. Season tickets for the south stand start at 219 euros (\$237), but are often passed down from generation to generation.

The waiting list is often counted in years, as Max's girlfriend Sabrina Rupp discovered to



Liverpool, coasting towards a first English League title in 30 years, have qualified for the Champions League next season. Reuters

her cost. "Until I was 13, I had a season ticket," she admits regretfully. "I gave it back, and that's the worst mistake you can make, because after that it's almost impossible to get it back."

The 'Yellow Wall' is often described as the beating heart of Signal Iduna Park. It's from there that designated fans lead the chants, yelling into megaphones while drummers beat out the rhythm. The fans in the south stand see themselves as the 12th man of the Dortmund team.

**Malaga mayhem**

On the run to the 2013 Champions League final, where Dortmund lost 2-1 to Bayern Munich at Wembley, the wall played a key role in the quarter-final at home to Malaga, when the hosts found themselves 2-1 down with 90 minutes on the clock.

With Dortmund seconds from elimination, the fans erupted, inspiring tired legs to one last push. Pandemonium broke out when forward Marco Reus, then defender Felipe Santana grabbed goals in added time to seal a fairy tale 3-2 win after a goalless first leg in Spain.

The delicious scenes at the final whistle are part of club folklore. "I don't think it's something you can really grasp unless you're exper-

rienced it yourself. It was unbelievable," said defender Mats Hummels. Former Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp explained what the PSG team can expect on Tuesday. "You come out and the stadium explodes... you look to your left and it looks like 150,000 people are standing there going crazy," said Klopp, who led Dortmund to back-to-back Bundesliga titles in 2011 and 2012. As the Malaga game demonstrated, PSG need to play until the final whistle as Dortmund can never be written off with their backs to 'The Yellow Wall'.

**Liverpool the team to beat**

LIVERPOOL RETURN to the scene of their Champions League triumph when they visit Atletico Madrid's Wanda Metropolitan on Tuesday very much the team to beat for those hoping to succeed Jurgen Klopp's men as European champions. Liverpool are coasting towards a first English League title in 30 years having dropped just two points all season and are likely to be crowned English champions before the Champions League quarter-finals commence in early April. Liverpool remain on course for a potential five-trophy haul this season. They have already lifted the UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup and are used to reach-

ing European finals under Klopp.

The German has overseen three in four seasons at Anfield, losing the Europa League final to Sevilla in 2016 and Champions League to Real Madrid two years later before getting over the line against Tottenham in the Spanish capital last year. "I have no clue if we can win the Champions League again but we should be ready to go for it," said Klopp. "What I know and what we showed last year is that we can beat the best." On current form Atletico are little match for the holders. For the first time in over eight years in charge, the future of Diego Simeone has been questioned with Los Rojiblancos languishing well off the pace in La Liga and battling just to qualify for next season's Champions League.

A chronic struggle to score goals has hampered Simeone's side all season. Joao Felix has failed to deliver on his 126 million euro (USD 138 million) price tag and the Portuguese wonder kid is a doubt for Tuesday's first leg. By contrast, Liverpool have hit the money with almost every major signing in recent years. With Alisson Becker, Virgil van Dijk, Fabinho, Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah they have built a side capable of not just winning, but retaining the Champions League.

## Manchester City's family silver may be up for sale

Manchester City's two-year Champions League ban for flouting financial fair play rules has proverbially put the cat among the pigeons. Even though the club has recourse to an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, there will be several European heavyweights prowling around like vultures to poach on the prized assets of the four-time Premier League champions. Also, it would make attracting the best players to the Etihad Stadium a difficult proposition if the club can't offer them a chance to play in the best club competition in the world.

**NO SHORTAGE OF SUITORS FOR GUARDIOLA**



THE SPANIARD has not won the Champions League since leaving Barcelona. The ongoing season provides him another opportunity to fill that void in his CV (City face Real Madrid in a blockbuster Round of 16 clash), but whatever happens, Guardiola is unlikely to stay at Man City for two seasons without the lure of the Champions League.

According to The Sunday Times, Juventus has coveted him for long and the Serie A is one of the top leagues in Europe where Guardiola has not managed. With Cristiano Ronaldo already in Turin, getting the Spanish master tactician could be the final piece of the zigsaw in their quest for European glory. Guardiola managed to get

the best out of Lionel Messi during his time at Barcelona, and it would be fascinating to see how he deals with the other preeminent player of the generation.

Maurizio Sarri is facing a tough domestic battle and his position could be under scrutiny if the Old Lady doesn't manage to hold on to the title.

Paris Saint-Germain also has the financial muscle to get Guardiola, but the French Ligue 1 is still not at a competitive level of other top European leagues. Also, the tense geo-political relations between the UAE and Qatar can make the move difficult.

As an aside, can a move back to Camp Nou be ruled out completely?

**AGUERO'S CONTRACT NEARS END**



The deadly goal poacher has just one year left in his City contract, and would not be their biggest concern. He and fellow Argentine Nicolas Otamendi have made their preference to end their careers in their home country. The ban may hasten their departure.

**REAL TO GO AFTER STERLING**



According to Daily Mail, Real will also go all out to sign Raheem Sterling'. The 25-year-old is under contract at City for another three years and talks started in November to increase his salary from £300,000-a-week to £450,000-a-week. But the heavyweights from Madrid are already planning a £180 million swoop, the paper claimed.

**SILVA ALSO GETTING ON**

David Silva is arguably the club's greatest ever player, but at 34, he is out of contract and prime to make a move. Could he be persuaded to stay on for some time if other big guns around him leave? According to media reports, David Beckham's Inter Miami is one suitor.

**DE BRUYNE - THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN**

Any club will welcome such a top player - arguably one of the top ten in the world. It's no surprise that Real Madrid would like to have the 28-year-old on their roster.

## Rules at risk of being 'scuppered' if City overturn European ban

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
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EUROPEAN FOOTBALL'S financial fair play rules risk being "scuppered" if Manchester City overturn their two-season ban from continental competition, according to a soccer analyst.

UEFA announced the punishment on Friday and also imposed a fine of 30 million euros on the English champions for what it said were City's serious breaches of its FFP regime. City, however, wasted little time in responding by saying they would appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in the hope of securing an "impartial judgment".

Since the Sheikh Mansour takeover in 2008, which put the financial might of Abu Dhabi behind them, City have won 10 major trophies - including four Premier League titles. Yet the prize that has eluded them is the one the Abu Dhabi project most desires - the UEFA Champions League.

The Chinese government have provided City with additional backing, as has US private equity firm Silver Lake. They are all set to ensure City has a no expense spared legal team that will challenge the validity of UEFA's ruling.

Should City succeed, the entire FFP system could collapse, according to Professor Simon Chadwick, director at the Centre for the Eurasian Sport Industry.

**'Transnational power'**

"In essence UEFA has to try to win this because, if it doesn't win or is undermined in any way, then its position on Financial Fair Play begins to unravel... FFP is scuppered," Chadwick told Britain's Press Association news agency.

"However, they are not taking on Wigan, they are taking on Asian governments, US tech investors and some of the smartest, most-talented people in football. It is transnational power versus localised governance." Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp was just one of several leading football figures stunned by the sever-

PREMIER LEAGUE STANDINGS						
	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Liverpool	26	25	1	0	46	76
Man City	25	16	3	6	36	51
Leicester	26	15	5	6	28	50
Chelsea	25	12	5	8	9	41
Spurs	26	11	7	8	9	40
Sheffield	26	10	9	7	4	39

ity of the UEFA punishment. "It was a shock," said Klopp, whose Champions League title holders are on well on course to succeed City as champions of England. "What they have done on the football pitch is exceptional. The rest, I don't know," added Klopp, speaking after a 1-0 win at bottom-of-the-table Norwich on Saturday saw leaders Liverpool extend their advantage over second-placed City at the top of the Premier League to 25 points.

**Son's strike edges Spurs past Villa**

Son Heung-min struck deep into stoppage time as Tottenham's chances of Champions League football next season were boosted by a 3-2 win at Aston Villa on Sunday.

A third consecutive Premier League victory lifts Spurs up to fifth - which could be enough to secure Champions League qualification with Manchester City facing a two-season ban from the competition - and within one point of fourth-placed Chelsea. Jose Mourinho's men were worthy of their victory after bouncing back from a nightmare start when Toby Alderweireld sliced into his own goal.

The Belgian quickly made amends at the other end with a thundering finish before Son followed up after Pepe Reina had saved his penalty to put the visitors in front. Slack defending threatened to cost Tottenham all three points when they allowed Bjorn Engels to equalise early in the second half.

## Putting woes wipe out Woods' hopes at Riviera

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LOS ANGELES, FEBRUARY 16

ABOUT THE best thing Tiger Woods could say about his day at Riviera Country Club was that it was over. "That was a lot of shots," the 15-time major champion said of his five-over-par 76 in the third round of the US PGA Tour's Genesis Invitational. "I hit the ball quite a few times, especially on the greens and it was a long day."

Woods' tough day with the putter included a four-putt from 18 feet for double-bogey at the 13th - his fourth hole of the day, and a three-putt bogey at his final hole, the ninth.

Nine adrift to start the day, he knew he needed something special to move into contention for a record 83rd tour title - but he was going the wrong way from a bogey at the par-five 11th - where he was in the fairway off the tee but missed a par putt from within six feet.

"I didn't putt well today at all," said Woods, who took 33 putts. "I didn't have a feel for it, I didn't see my lines, I couldn't feel my pace and I was just off. "Well, I'm done," Woods said when asked if he took any positives from the round. "A new day tomorrow, that's the way golf is." Woods will try again to get it right on

Riviera's bumpy Poa annua greens on Sunday, and then he'll take a week off. Under the circumstances, he was feeling good about his decision to skip next week's WGC Mexico Championship, despite the fact that the elite event promises world ranking points key to the race to qualify for the US team for the Tokyo Olympics. Woods said there are other priorities in managing his schedule, especially now that physical concerns limit the number of events he can play. "The idea is to peak around Augusta time, yes," said Woods, who captured his 15th major at the Masters last year to end a Grand Slam drought of more than a decade. "I just felt I wasn't going to be ready for next week, a little rundown and playing at altitude as well isn't going to help that, so take the week off."

**McIlroy, Kuchar, Scott in lead**

Rory McIlroy, looking to cement his return to number one in the world, fired a three-under par 68 on Saturday to join Matt Kuchar and Adam Scott in a three-way tie for the third-round lead. Kuchar was atop the leaderboard for a third straight day after a one-under par 70 at Riviera Country Club.

Playing partner McIlroy carded a three-under 68 while Australia's Scott grabbed his share

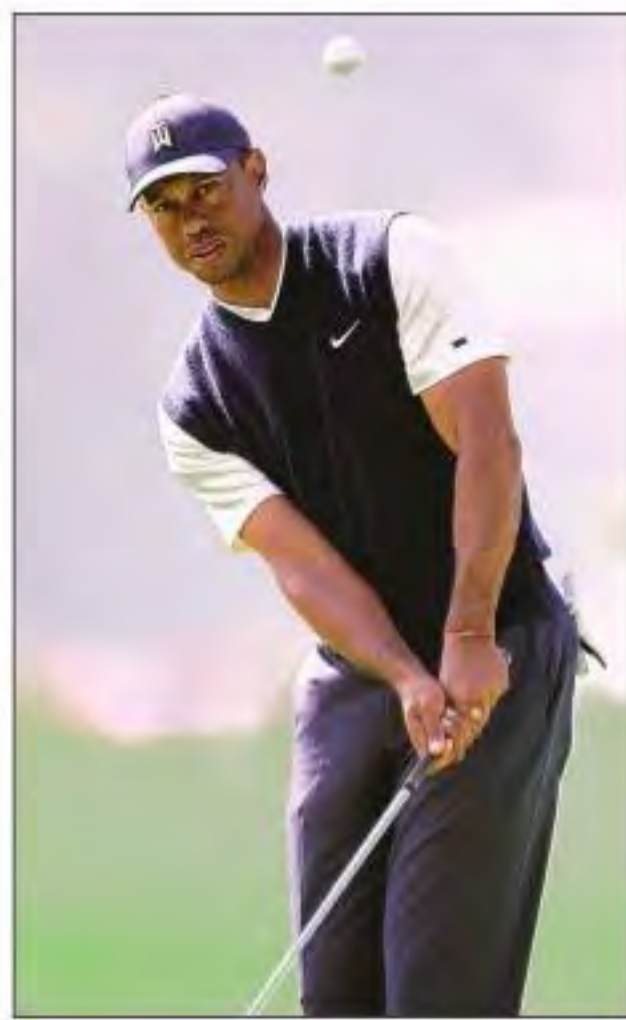
of the lead with a birdie at 18 to cap a four-under 67. They were all tied on 10-under par 203 - one shot ahead of Russell Henley and Harold Varner on a jam-packed leaderboard.

Tiger Woods, who came into the week gunning for a record-setting 83rd US PGA Tour title, was nowhere near the top, however, after a five-over par 76 that left him languishing 15 off the pace. Kuchar started the day with a two-shot lead and maintained his cushion with three birdies through 11 holes.

But three bogeys in four holes from the 13th through the 16th opened the door for McIlroy, who tied the lead with his fourth birdie of the day at 13 and despite a bogey at 14 was one shot ahead until Kuchar got up and down for birdie from a greenside bunker on the 17th.

Scott, first in the clubhouse on 10-under, was looking forward to challenging for a victory on the same Riviera course where he hoisted a trophy in 2005 but couldn't claim an official win because the rain-soaked event was shortened to 36 holes.

He also has two runner-up finishes. "I think all of that is just a bit of motivation for me to win here and have an official victory at Riviera," Scott said. "I think that would be extremely satisfying for me."



Tiger Woods shot a five-over-par 76. AP