

1900s Man City

Monaco moment

Manchester

A hotly anticipated staging post in Manchester City's Pep Guardiola era arrives today when Monaco visit the Etihad Stadium in the first leg of the Champions League last 16.

Guardiola was appointed to take City to the next level on the European stage and he has already masterminded a stirring 3-1 win over his former club Barcelona in the group phase.

But Monaco have been rampant this season, powering to the Ligue 1 summit with a tally of 76 goals that is unsurpassed in Europe's five major leagues, and Guardiola is keenly aware of the danger they pose.

"My impression against PSG and from what I've seen is they're a really strong team," he said recently of Leonardo Jardim's side, puffing out his cheeks for effect. "They score a lot of goals, they are physical. We have to go to the gym in the next days!"

Guardiola and his assistant Mikel Arteta watched Monaco's game at Paris Saint-Germain last month, when a 92nd-minute equaliser from Bernardo Silva rescued a 1-1 draw.

Another Silva equaliser secured another 1-1 draw in Monaco's last outing, at Bastia on Friday, but in the main they have encountered scant resistance in the French top flight this season.

Monaco have averaged 2.92 goals per league game, scoring four or more on no fewer than 10 occasions, and have already prevailed on English soil, winning 2-1 at Tottenham Hotspur in the group stage.

Three successive wins have lifted City to second place in the Premier League table, eight points below leaders Chelsea, but they remain a work in progress.

It is just over a month since their scarring 4-0 defeat at Everton -- their fifth defeat of the campaign -- and Guardiola's selection decisions continue to raise eyebrows.

Claudio Bravo, signed amid great fanfare to replace Joe Hart, has been

axed after a string of weak displays, meaning Willy Caballero, City's nominal third-choice goalkeeper in August, is now the number one.

What City's defensive configuration will be against Monaco, meanwhile, is anyone's guess. A rotating cast of full-backs has seen midfielder Fernandinho fill in on both flanks of the defence of late, while Aleksandar Kolarov continues to flit between left-back and centre-back.

Jesus's absence has allowed Sergio Aguero to reclaim his place up front, although he was unable to find a way past the Huddersfield Town defence in Saturday's 0-0 FA Cup fifth-round draw. While uncertainty abounds regarding City's best XI, Jardim's Monaco team largely picks itself.

The trip to Manchester will have special significance for Radamel Falcao, who has rediscovered his shooting boots after two dismal years on loan with Manchester United and Chelsea.

'El Tigre', 31, no longer bites with the force of his Porto and Atletico Madrid days, but, aided by a customised playing schedule, he has scored 22 goals in just 28 games. "I manage him differently to the others," says Jardim. "Because he's a top-level player. I said at the start of the season that I was sure he'd succeed. Quality is permanent."

City are favourites to progress, but as PSG's 4-0 evisceration of Barcelona last week showed, France's top clubs are no longer content to make up the numbers in the League. (AFP)

of truth

US athletes unveil abuse by doctor

New York

Three former US national team gymnasts detailed sexual abuse allegations against former national team doctor Lawrence Nassar in a report Sunday on CBS television's 60 Minutes.

Jamie Dantzscher, a member of the 2000 Sydney Olympic US bronze medal squad, was joined in coming

forward publicly by Jessica Howard, the US national rhythmic gymnastics champion from 1999 through 2001, and Jeanette Antolin, a US team member from 1995 to 2000.

Dantzscher was first seen by Nassar at age 13 after she earned a spot on the US junior national team but complained of back pain.

Barca boos unhelpful: Enrique

Barcelona

Barcelona boss Luis Enrique labelled harsh treatment dished out to his players by Barca fans nonsensical as the Spanish champions squeezed past Leganes 2-1 on Sunday.

Following a 4-0 thrashing at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain in midweek, Barca needed a last minute Lionel Messi penalty to see off a Leganes side without a win since November and on their first ever league visit to the Camp Nou.

Messi had given Barca a fourth minute lead, but jeers rang around the Camp Nou when Unai Lopez levelled 19 minutes from time.

"As a fan, booing a player of your own team for me makes no sense," said Enrique.

Much-criticised midfielder Andre Gomes received the brunt of the boos as he was replaced 10 minutes from the end.

"What can clearly help the team and the players is the support that we saw from the majority of the fans throughout the game and especially in the final minutes," added Enrique.

"That is what makes us stronger. Andre's case annoys me."

However, the Barca boss said he had no such problem with criticism directed his way.

"I am the coach and after the result and performance we saw in Paris it is logical.

"I accept any criticism, but those on the pitch need to be in the best state possible.

"The games are difficult enough as they are. If you add this on top of it, I don't think it helps."

Victory ensured Barca moved back up to second in the table and to within a point of Real Madrid, who still have two games in hand.

Barca face a much stiffer test next weekend when they travel to Atletico Madrid, but Enrique highlighted the psychological importance of getting the three points despite a poor display.



Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi lies on the field

Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola