

Salah 'deserves **big** send-off', says Liverpool boss Slot

Minor injury ensures star forward can feature again before Liverpool departure

● Salah expected to return soon

● Emotional exit planned at Anfield

● Slot praises Salah's legacy

AFP | London

Arne Slot said Mohamed Salah "deserves a big send-off", confirming he expected the departing superstar to return from injury before the season is over.

The Egypt forward, who will leave Anfield at the end of the campaign, was forced off in last weekend's 3-1 win at home to Crystal Palace, prompting fears he may have played his final game for the Reds.

An emotional Salah applauded the fans and was given a standing ovation as he made his way off the pitch.

But Liverpool confirmed earlier this week that the 33-year-old had only suffered a "minor muscle injury" and was expected to return to action.

Slot's men travel to face bitter rivals Manchester United on Sunday after three straight wins

257
goals in 440 appearances underline Mohamed Salah's Liverpool legacy

virtually sealed a place in next season's Champions League.

"We expect him to be back in the final part of the season, but not for Sunday," Liverpool boss Slot said at his pre-match press conference yesterday, describing the winger as a quick healer.

"In all ways it's a big relief that his injury is minor, so that he's able to play for us, that he's able to play at the World Cup.

"And if there's ever a player who deserves to get a big send-off, it's definitely Mo."

Salah has scored 257 goals in 440 appearances since his arrival at Anfield in 2017, behind only Ian Rush and Roger Hunt in Liverpool's list of leading goalscorers.

He had a public spat with Slot in December, declaring he had "no relationship" with the Dutchman after being dropped for three consecutive games, but quickly returned to the fold.



Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah celebrates on the pitch after a match (file photo)

Liverpool, whose Premier League title defence collapsed dramatically from late September, have four games remaining, starting with their trip to face United.

The Reds are fourth in the table, three points behind third-placed Manchester United but eight points clear of sixth-placed

Brighton.

The top five automatically qualify for next season's Champions League.

'Right step'

Slot said qualifying for Europe's top club competition was vital after a turbulent season.

"I wouldn't say a step forward,

but it's the right step to make," he said. "We know how important it is to qualify for the Champions League, for any club, but definitely for our club."

The manager was asked whether he had been judged harshly in the light of Liverpool's success last season, when they won the Premier League



Despite a public fall-out earlier this season, Salah and Slot quickly reconciled, with the forward returning to form before his emotional farewell run-in

in his first campaign in charge.

"That's for you guys to judge, if I've been too harshly judged by many people," he said.

"That's not up to me. I'm judging my football players, if they play well, if they work hard enough, if they execute tactics well enough, and I'm not in this job to judge if I'm criticised too harshly or too much or too less."

Slot said first-choice goalkeeper Alisson Becker, who has not played since March, was nearing a return to training.

"He is very close but of course, also we don't want to take any risks, because that's never what you do with a player and that's also not what we do now," he said.

Bahrain Victorious Take Fourth in Frankfurt

TDI | Manama

Pello Bilbao produced a strong ride for Bahrain Victorious, finishing fourth at Eschborn-Frankfurt after a fast and selective edition of the German WorldTour one-day race on Thursday.

An early breakaway went clear in the opening phase and was kept under control by the peloton as the race reached the climbs of the Taunus. The pace steadily increased on the ascents, gradually reducing the bunch before the decisive selection.

The key move came on the final climb, where a reduced lead group went clear and forged a decisive gap. The riders in front worked well together on the run-in to Frankfurt, holding off a determined chase from the peloton.

In the closing kilometres, the bunch closed in rapidly, but the leaders managed to stay away to contest the sprint for victory. Bilbao positioned himself well in the final and crossed the line in fourth, narrowly missing out on a podium finish in a tightly contested finale.

The race was won by Georg



Pello Bilbao of Bahrain Victorious

Zimmermann, ahead of Tom Pidcock and Ben Tulett.

Despite just missing the podium, Bahrain Victorious were encouraged by an aggressive and well-executed team performance throughout the day.

Bilbao said the finale left

mixed emotions after a strong collective effort. "We played our cards in the best way, made the race harder and the boys were excellent, very aggressive," he said. "In the end, it's a bit of a strange feeling because when you see the line while sprinting

and you are so close to victory, then losing the podium in the last moment is a pity. But I know we did our best."

Sports director Aart Vierhouten praised the team's approach and execution. "First of all, we are happy with Pello's result, which was really great again after all the Classics. He deserved the podium. He was really close, but that's cycling," he said.

"We knew what to do from the start and wanted a harder race. Afonso did a great job on the climbs to increase the pace. In the final, Pello did everything right. In the end, we go home confident with a good result."

Flick happy Raphinha back for Barca with title in sight

AFP | Barcelona

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick celebrated the return of winger Raphinha from injury yesterday as the Catalans close in on the Spanish title.

Flick's team are 11 points clear of second-place Real Madrid and can win a second successive La Liga title this weekend if they beat Osasuna on Saturday and Los Blancos drop points at out of form Espanyol the following day.

Raphinha suffered a hamstring injury while playing

for Brazil in March, which left him sidelined as Barcelona were knocked out of the Champions League by Atletico Madrid in the quarter-finals.

Barca face Real Madrid on May 10 in a Clasico which could seal their title defence if they do not clinch it this weekend, and are still in with a chance of matching the all-time record of 100 points in a Spanish league campaign.

"Rapha is a player who always gives us 100 percent, when he's on the pitch or in training," Flick told reporters.



Bilbao rode strongly but finished just off the podium as the front group held their gap to the finish line

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