

Champions League ready to resume, at long last

The Champions League resumes on Friday with the remaining last 16 second legs

● **Pep Guardiola's Manchester City face Real Madrid on Friday looking to clinch a place in the quarter-finals, fresh from having their two-year ban from the Champions League overturned**

● **The final will be in Lisbon on August 23**

AFP | Paris

After an enforced hiatus of almost five months, the UEFA Champions League and Europa League resume this week in order to clear up the last remaining business in a troubled season.

Both competitions were frozen in March as the coronavirus pandemic took hold across the continent, and while European football's governing body acted swiftly to move Euro 2020 back a year, for a long time it was unclear how it would manage to complete its two landmark club competitions.

In the end the solution was to set up two mini tournaments bringing all teams together in one place from the quarter-finals onwards, with all ties being decided in one-off matches behind closed doors.

And so the Champions League will move to Lisbon for the 'Final Eight' starting on August 12 and ending with the final at Benfica's Estadio da Luz on August 23.



A man looks on as the UEFA Champions League trophy is displayed at the UEFA headquarters

The Europa League, meanwhile, will be played to a conclusion at a series of venues in western Germany, with the last eight beginning on August 10 and the final in Cologne on August 21.

"I believed it from the first moment," said the UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin recently when asked if he ever doubted it would be possible to play the tournaments to a conclusion.

"You should always be optimistic, and if something like this crisis happens, you must have a plan ready.

"At the present time, we will be playing matches without spectators until further notice. We will not take any risks."

UEFA not worried

There is, though, no question

of further changes being made to the formats despite concerns about an increase in Covid-19 cases in and around Lisbon, and more recent worries in Germany about a rise in cases there.

UEFA also recently insisted it was "confident" there would be no more delays despite cases of coronavirus emerging among players at Real Madrid and Sevilla.

It is, in any case, now or never. Indeed, the preliminary round of next season's Champions League begins next Saturday, the same day Bayern Munich entertain Chelsea and Napoli visit Barcelona in their outstanding last 16 second legs.

Before that, Manchester City defend a 2-1 first-leg lead at home against Real on Friday as Pep Guardiola's side target Champions League glory on the back of the club's success at getting a two-year ban from the competition overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

The winner of that tie will face Juventus or Lyon in the quarter-finals in Lisbon.

Wolves' longest year

It is the Europa League which is first up, though, with the last 16 being completed on Wednesday and Thursday.

Two ties -- Inter Milan against Getafe and Sevilla against Roma -- will go ahead as one-off ties in Germany as the first legs were never played.

Six second legs will also be played with the winners heading to Germany for the last eight.

Among the ties to be completed is Manchester United's against Austrian side LASK, which will be a formality for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team after they won 5-0 in the first leg in March. Their form since the Premier League resumed in mid-June has been excellent and they have already sealed a place in the 2020-21 Champions League, but now they want to finish this never-ending season with a trophy.

"Now our focus is on the Europa League because this is a really good trophy and we want to win," Bruno Fernandes told MUTV.

"I came to Manchester to win trophies. We need to play every game to win. If we go into the Europa League and win every game, we know we'll win the trophy."

United, Europa League winners in 2017, could yet find themselves facing Premier League rivals Wolverhampton Wanderers in the semi-finals in Cologne on August 16 should both teams get there.

Wolves entertain Greek champions Olympiakos on Thursday having drawn 1-1 in the first leg of their last-16 tie.

After going six games without a win after the coronavirus hiatus, Villa have given themselves hope with four points from their last two matches, although conceding a late equaliser at Everton on Thursday was a major blow.

Bournemouth's win against Leicester on July 12 was their first in 10 games, but a defeat at City kept them in the mire.

Watford had won their previous games before a 3-1 loss at West Ham on Friday dented their survival bid.

Marquez out of Czech MotoGP after second operation on arm



Honda's world champion Marc Marquez

AFP | Paris

Reigning MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez will miss his second straight race after he was ruled out of Sunday's Czech Grand Prix following another operation on his fractured right arm, his team said yesterday.

"After undergoing a second operation on his injured right arm, Marc Marquez and HRC have decided that the world champion will not ride in the Czech Republic in order for him to recover more," Repsol Honda said in a statement.

The Spaniard underwent further surgery Monday in Barcelona on the arm he broke in the season opener in Spain on July 19. He missed the following race in Jerez despite initially being declared fit to take part, just 48 hours after having a titanium plate inserted.

Marquez will be replaced this weekend by German test rider Stefan Bradl, who has made 95 career starts in the premier class.

"The first operation was successful, what was not expected was that the plate was insufficient," doctor Xavier Mir said

Monday. "An accumulation of stress in the operated area has caused the plate to suffer some damage, so the titanium plate has been removed and replaced by a new fixation.

"The rider has not felt pain during this period. He has always followed the medical advice given and the feeling from his body. Unfortunately, an over-stress has caused this issue. Now we have to wait 48 hours to understand the recovery time," the doctor added.

Six-time world champion Marquez made a remarkable return in practice ahead of last month's Andalucia MotoGP, four days after surgery, but later dropped out of qualifying having struggled to keep pace.

The 27-year-old Marquez has yet to register a point this season and already trails championship leader Fabio Quartararo by 50 points after the young French rider secured back-to-back victories at the Jerez circuit.

Next on the calendar, which has only 13 confirmed races, is the Czech race at Brno before a double-header at the Red Bull Ring in Spielberg, Austria, on August 16 and 23.

Chelsea's Pedro undergoes surgery for shoulder injury

Reuters | London

Chelsea's Spanish winger Pedro has had surgery after sustaining a shoulder injury in Saturday's FA Cup final defeat by Arsenal, the 33-year-old said.

Pedro had replaced forward Christian Pulisic in the game which Chelsea lost 2-1, after the American, who scored in

the first half, pulled up with a hamstring problem.

"The surgery went well, I will be back soon. It was a pity not to win the FA Cup. Thank you all for your support," Pedro said on Instagram.

Pedro, whose Chelsea deal expires at the end of the month, has reportedly agreed a move to Italian Serie A side AS Roma on a free transfer.



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Madrid Masters tennis cancelled due to COVID

AFP | Madrid

The Madrid Open tennis tournament has been cancelled due to fresh outbreaks of coronavirus in the region, organisers confirmed yesterday, raising doubts around the upcoming US and French Opens.

Originally scheduled for May, the postponed Madrid tournament was scheduled to take place on the clay courts at Caja Magica between September 12 and 20.

"We share in the disappointment that the Mutua Madrid Open will not be able to take place this year," said Andrea Gaudenzi, the ATP Chairman.

The tournament was expected to boast a stellar field, including world number two



and five-time champion Rafael Nadal, and would have been a key warm-up event two weeks before the start of the French Open.

The Italian Open is due to go ahead in Rome in the week leading up to the grand slam at Roland Garros but it remains to be seen how other competitions react.

Before then, hard-court events are planned later this month in Lexington and New York ahead of the US Open at Flushing Meadows, which is due to start on August 31.

Federer pays surprise visit to rooftop tennis girls

AFP | Milan

Two Italian girls whose rooftop tennis video went viral have received a surprise visit from Roger Federer.

The video of Vittoria Oliveri and Carola Pessina playing on the rooftops of neighbouring buildings in Finale Ligure during the COVID-19 lockdown garnered over 10 million views.

The girls thought they were preparing for another media interview when they were asked about their favourite players.

"Roger Federer. If I were to meet him, I would jump on him, or I would be starstruck," Vittoria, 13, said.

"I would like to have Federer's elegance while playing and (Rafa) Nadal's power," 11-year-old Carola added.

The girls were then left wide-eyed and speechless when



Roger Federer with Vittoria Oliveri and Carola Pessini

Federer came out from behind a curtain. The 20-times Grand Slam champion later played some rooftop tennis with the girls before inviting them for lunch.

"I nearly fainted when he showed up," Vittoria was quoted as saying by The Times. "He figured out the distances pretty

fast and started playing shots between his legs from one roof to another, which was amazing.

"I didn't think he was real. I thought it was a mannequin."

Federer also told the girls he had arranged for them to go to a summer camp at the Rafa Nadal Academy.

"Personally, for me, that was

"I have played in many cool places around the world, but this one is definitely up there for me as a special experience. We showed that we can play anywhere and have fun with it

ROGER FEDERER

a very special moment in my career as a tennis player to surprise a fan, or children, like I was able to with Carola and Vittoria today," Federer said.

"I have played in many cool places around the world, but this one is definitely up there for me as a special experience. We showed that we can play anywhere and have fun with it."