

# Liverpool seek Anfield miracle

Liverpool seek historic comeback against PSG as Anfield atmosphere becomes crucial

● Liverpool trail PSG 2-0

● Fifth in Premier League currently

● Champions League last hope

AFP | London

Liverpool have a mountain to climb to oust holders Paris Saint-Germain from the Champions League but are hoping the Anfield factor can salvage a bitterly disappointing season.

Crowned champions of England less than a year ago, the Reds sit fifth in the Premier League and fell short in both domestic cup competitions.

The Champions League represents one final chance of silverware but it is a long shot after the team were outclassed 2-0 in the first leg of their quarter-final at the Parc des Princes.

Six-time European champions Liverpool are still alive in the competition thanks to PSG's profligacy and they have overcome greater odds in the past under the lights at Anfield.

"It's down to us to be in the best shape possible to make a special evening on Tuesday," said captain Virgil van Dijk.

## 4-0

was Liverpool's famous Anfield comeback against Barcelona in 2019, overturning a 3-0 deficit — a feat Van Dijk hopes to repeat against PSG on Tuesday

"We are at home and we have to show belief that we can do it. It needs a special performance but I'm lucky I have been part of special performances so I will try and bring that across for the team."

Van Dijk was part of the side that beat Lionel Messi's Barcelona 4-0 in 2019, overturning a 3-0 first-leg deficit in the semi-finals on Liverpool's way to Champions League glory.

That night may have been the high point of Jurgen Klopp's glorious reign, which included three Champions League finals in five seasons.

Barring a miraculous fight-back, Tuesday could be the final Champions League chapter for the key figures in that Klopp side.

### Slot's future in doubt

Mohamed Salah and Andy Robertson have both confirmed they will leave Anfield at the end



(L-R) Liverpool's Scottish defender #26 Andrew Robertson, Liverpool's Dutch defender #30 Jeremie Frimpong, Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah and Liverpool's Hungarian midfielder #08 Dominik Szoboszlai come out to warm up

of the season.

Van Dijk and goalkeeper Alisson Becker remain for now, but there is no guarantee Liverpool will be in the competition next season despite five English sides being assured of qualification.

A 2-0 win over Fulham on Saturday gave Slot's men some breathing space from the chasing pack in the battle for Champions League football and also

snapped a three-game losing streak.

Adding to uncertainty, Slot's position remains in serious doubt towards the end of his second campaign in charge.

Liverpool fans chanted the name of former midfield favourite Xabi Alonso after last weekend's 4-0 demolition by Manchester City in the FA Cup quarter-finals.

Alonso, who left Real Madrid

in January, is the prime candidate to take over should Slot be dismissed at the end of the season.

The Dutchman issued a rallying cry after the Fulham win to try and get the fans back on-side for the visit of the European champions.

"This was a massive win not only for the league but looking forward to Tuesday. Not only for the players but also for the



Liverpool fans chanted Xabi Alonso's name after a 4-0 FA Cup defeat to Manchester City, with the former midfielder now the prime candidate to replace Slot

fans. After a 4-0 loss and a 2-0 loss everybody could do with this win," said Slot.

"One thing is clear is that on Tuesday we need our fans. There were fans in Paris but we had a very hard time.

"Anfield has shown many times that it can lift the team to another level and we need that again. Half an hour before the game the players need that support and need to feel it is going to be another special evening."

At the very least Slot needs his side to salvage some pride.

Another embarrassment like the ones suffered recently in Manchester and Paris, but this time on home soil, could be the final straw for many fans.

# Rashford with point to prove as Barca target Atletico comeback

● Barca lose 2-0 first leg

● Rashford's future depends on performances

AFP | Madrid

Marcus Rashford had his chance against Atletico Madrid, but failed to take it -- or any of the next five that came along on a frustrating European night.

On Tuesday the England international has another opportunity to try and inspire Barcelona to a Champions League comeback in the Spanish capital.

Rashford fired blanks as Barca suffered a 2-0 quarter-final first leg defeat, but the England international was also his team's brightest spark against the Rojiblancos, even though the killer finish eluded him.

The 28-year-old, on loan from Manchester United, has a point to prove in the second leg, particularly with his future at the club on the line -- as well as a potential World Cup spot in Thomas Tuchel's England squad.

Barcelona have not yet made a decision on whether to trigger the 30 million euro (\$35 million) clause in Rashford's loan deal to



Barcelona's English forward #14 Marcus Rashford shoots at goal during a match (file photo)

make his switch to Camp Nou permanent.

With Raphinha out injured, Rashford has been the natural choice on Barca's left flank.

Rashford burst beyond Atletico full-back Nahuel Molina on numerous occasions at Camp Nou but could not capitalise.

"This team is always going to create chances, there's so much quality in possession... today the goal didn't go in, but we can't shy away from the responsibility to take these chances," Rashford told CBS.

"On another day, on another night, they go in."

On Saturday, Flick began with Rashford on the bench for Bar-

celona's 4-1 thrashing of Espanyol in La Liga, likely to save the forward's energy for the visit to Atletico's Metropolitano stadium.

Rashford came on after 65 minutes and netted the fourth in the last minute with a cushioned volley, which Flick hopes will raise his confidence levels.

"I'm happy Marcus scored a goal today, it was very important for us," said Flick.

Rashford also scored against Atletico at the Metropolitano on April 4 in La Liga, with the second leg the third in a trilogy of clashes between the sides in under a fortnight.

The Englishman has six goals

in 26 La Liga appearances, with his finishing an area that could be improved.

In the Champions League, Rashford has netted five times in 10 games and, if the pattern of the first leg is repeated, could be Barca's main attacking threat again.

Talented teenager Lamine Yamal was double and triple marked, in the first leg, creating more room for Rashford to fly into.

### 'Unbelievable' mindset

Rashford believes Barca can mount a comeback to reach the semi-finals for a second season running.

"The mindset and the intent that we had to try to get back into the game is unbelievable, and we're going to have to use this, and we need all of this in the next game in order to come back," said Rashford.

"We know what we are capable of when we're playing at our highest level and we can take the game away from anybody. We have to look to do this in the next game."

Barca left the first leg furious at not being given a penalty when Atletico defender Marc Pubill touched the ball with his hand at a goal kick.

"It's a penalty, it's happened before and it's always given as a penalty," Rashford added. "It's common sense that it's a penalty."

# Nuggets roll into NBA playoffs, Raptors clinch berth

AFP | Los Angeles

The Denver Nuggets, fueled by 23 first-half points from Nikola Jokic, beat the San Antonio Spurs 128-118 on Sunday, notching their 12th straight victory to clinch the Western Conference third seed on the last day of the NBA regular season.

On a day when coaches rested dozens of players in preparation for the looming playoffs, three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic had to play at least 15 minutes to be eligible for end of season awards, including MVP.

The Serbian big man played just over 18, propelling the Nuggets to a 70-56 halftime lead that they wouldn't relinquish against

a Spurs team whose own MVP contender Victor Wembanyama sat out with a rib injury.

The Nuggets clinched the third seed in the West, behind the Oklahoma City Thunder and San Antonio, and will face the sixth-seeded Minnesota Timberwolves in the first round.

The Los Angeles Lakers settled for fourth despite a 131-107 victory and will face the Houston Rockets.

That series will pit Lakers superstar LeBron James against old rival Kevin Durant, but James could well be without the support of NBA leading scorer Luka Doncic, who is battling to recover from a hamstring strain.

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