

# Chelsea’s marathon season ends in glory, but what might be the cost?

Club World Cup win completes 64-game season, but fatigue looms ahead of quick restart

- Five weeks until next season
- FIFPro warns of burnout risks
- Maresca gets three weeks holiday

AFP | New York

For Chelsea, victory in Sunday’s Club World Cup decider completed a fine first season under Enzo Maresca, and also finally brought the curtain down on a marathon campaign that they must hope does not catch up with them down the line.

The Cole Palmer-inspired 3-0 victory over Paris Saint-Germain at the MetLife Stadium outside New York was Chelsea’s 64th game of a season which lasted 11 months.

By any measure it was one of Chelsea’s best ever campaigns, with their Club World Cup triumph – placed on a par by Maresca to winning the Champions League – following victory in the Uefa Conference League and a fourth-placed finish in the Premier League.

Maresca, an ex-assistant to Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, could not have asked for much more after arriving off the back of leading Leicester City to promotion.

“It has been a fantastic season but I am especially happy for the players,” said the Italian, who has succeeded in putting together a coherent team out of the endless line of new signings being brought in by the club’s owners.

“We have said many times that talent alone is not enough. You need to find a way for them to



Enzo Maresca, Head Coach of Chelsea FC, lifts the FIFA Club World Cup trophy after his team's victory

all fit together.”

It all represents considerable progress from just two years ago, when the Stamford Bridge side finished in the bottom half of the Premier League.

Maresca incorporated more new faces during the Club World Cup, with Joao Pedro making a remarkable impact – the Brazilian forward cut short a holiday to complete a £60 million (\$79 million) transfer from Brighton and Hove Albion, and went on to score twice in the semifinal against Fluminense and once in the final.

Liam Delap, Dario Essugo, Mamadou Sarr and Andrey

Santos all joined up ahead of the month in the United States, while Jamie Gittens has since arrived from Borussia Dortmund and fellow winger Estevao Wilian now joins from Palmeiras in Brazil.

Chelsea will hope those signings, added to a squad led by the likes of Palmer, Enzo Fernandez and Moises Caicedo, can make a real push for the Premier League title off the back of their impressive triumph at Fifa’s new tournament.

“It’s a big statement,” captain Reece James told English media shortly after lifting the trophy alongside US President Donald

Trump.

“I’m happy with how much the club has progressed and how next season you know we’ll be competing in the Premier League, to win the title and compete, and to go far in the Champions League as well.”

**Drastically reduced off-season**

Chelsea have also pocketed a stunning \$115 million in prize money from the Club World Cup, but what if there comes a point in 2025/26 when their exploits of this season catch up with them?

While Chelsea have been competing at the Club World Cup

in draining weather conditions, Premier League champions Liverpool and runners-up Arsenal have enjoyed extended off-season breaks.

Manchester City were also at the Club World Cup but they went out over a week earlier.

Global players’ union FIFPro has been the leading voices expressing concerns about the demands on the game’s biggest stars in an ever-expanding calendar.

One of the safeguards it proposed in a study published before the tournament was a mandatory four-week off-season break, along with four-week

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Chelsea’s 64-game season is the equivalent of playing every 5.2 days for 11 straight months without a proper off-season

retraining periods before returning to competition.

Chelsea’s off-season is drastically reduced, with their first match of the next Premier League campaign against Crystal Palace slated for August 17, exactly five weeks after the Club World Cup final. They have a friendly against Bayer Leverkusen on August 8.

“Tomorrow I have three weeks of holiay which is all I want right now because I have not stopped in 15 months,” said Maresca on Sunday.

It remains to be seen if Maresca and his players come back sufficiently refreshed before attacking a season in which they hope to go far in the Champions League, and which will end with the World Cup in North America.

PSG face an even tighter squeeze after a historic campaign for Luis Enrique’s team, capped by their triumph in the Champions League final.

Their first competitive match of next season will be the Uefa Super Cup against Tottenham Hotspur in Italy on August 13, exactly one month after their defeat in New York – a chance to win more silverware, but at what cost?

# Jadeja hailed for taking India close but Gavaskar rues lack of risk

AFP | New Delhi

Ravindra Jadeja was praised Tuesday for almost taking India to an unlikely Test win at Lord’s, but former greats said a little more risk-taking with the bat might have got his side over the line.

Jadeja, batting at number seven, hit a painstaking unbeaten 61 as he shepherded the tail from 112-8 at lunch chasing 193 for victory against England in the third Test.

But he eventually ran out of partners after more than four hours at the crease as India were all out for 170 after tea on a nerve-shredding final day.

Jadeja, who came in at 71-5 and saw India slump to 112-8 at lunch, chose to protect Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj from England’s attack by scoring singles to keep the strike and controlling his attacking instincts.

Former batting great Sunil Gavaskar said on Sony Sports



India's Ravindra Jadeja (R) runs into England's Brydon Carse (L) as he takes a single

that scoring quicker and putting pressure back on England’s bowlers might have resulted in

“a partnership of 60-70 would have made a difference.”

“India never got that (partnership),” he said.

“You could say that Jadeja could have taken the odd chance

ship),” he said.

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India never got that (partnership). You could say that Jadeja could have taken the odd chance and not necessarily the aerial route when Joe Root and Shoaib Bashir were bowling. But full marks to him (Jadeja)

SUNIL GAVASKAR

and not necessarily the aerial route when Joe Root and Shoaib Bashir were bowling. But full marks to him (Jadeja).”

Jadeja hit just four fours and one six in his 181-ball stay before Bashir bowled number 11 Siraj to trigger jubilant England celebrations.

“I’d like to look a little deeper into that whole innings,” former batsman Sanjay Manjrekar said on ESPNcricinfo.

“There was one attempt at playing a shot that went for six.

“But I don’t think there were too many attempted attacking shots.

“For me, one telling moment was when he got to his fifty and India were still a few runs short.

“You saw the reaction of the dressing room there were people applauding but I don’t think there was excitement around and belief that Jadeja would take them through.”

India’s greatest batsman Sachin Tendulkar lamented: “So near, yet so far.”

“Jadeja, Bumrah, & Siraj fought all the way till the end,” he posted on X.

“Well tried, Team India. England played well to keep the pressure on and produced the result they desired. Congratulations on a hard-fought win.”

England lead the series 2-1 with two to play.

The fourth Test starts at Manchester’s Old Trafford on July 23.