

Alonso demands no excuses at Madrid

New Madrid boss unfazed by short pre-season as Osasuna clash looms today

● Alonso to debut in La Liga

● Club denied request for postponement

● Short pre-season after Club World Cup

AFP | Madrid

Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said the team's shortened pre-season will not be used as an excuse as they prepare to kick off their La Liga campaign at home to Osasuna today.

Alonso will take charge at the Santiago Bernabeu for the first time after beginning his reign at the Club World Cup in the United States, where Madrid reached the semi-finals.

Madrid's request to postpone their league opener to a later date was rejected by Spanish football officials, and the team have played just one friendly since their 4-0 loss to Paris Saint-Germain in New Jersey on July 9.

"Obviously it would have been nice to receive some support with our request, especially for the players' health... after such a long season and to have a little more preparation time," Alonso said yesterday.

"But anyway, in the end it wasn't to be and that's that.



Alonso, who guided Bayer Leverkusen to a Bundesliga and German Cup double in 2023, will take charge of Madrid at the Bernabeu for the first time in his managerial career



Real Madrid's French forward #10 Kylian Mbappe (C) and teammates attend a training session

We've only had two weeks and there's no point looking for excuses now."

Alonso has several new signings, including former Liverpool defender Trent Alexander-Arnold, at his disposal as Madrid look to turn the page on a disappointing end to the Carlo Ancelotti

Xabi Alonso

era. Madrid won the Champions League and La Liga in 2023-24 but finished runners-up domestically to arch-rivals Barcelona last season and suffered a quarter-final exit to Arsenal in Europe.

Alonso, who led Bayer Leverkusen to a remarkable Bundesliga and German Cup double two seasons ago, was coy about his expectations in the Spanish capital.

"I tend to be more of a doer than a talker. So making prom-

ises before taking action in football doesn't usually work," said Alonso.

"We are working hard and people are eager, you can feel that. We are also very eager, we want to start this new project, with new players, a new coach, and bring this energy we have to the stadium, and then earn it, not just talk about it.

"Talking about it won't make it happen, otherwise it would all be very easy. We have to earn it and we have to start tomorrow on that path to get where we



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XABI ALONSO

want to be in May."

Alonso also fully backed Madrid's opposition to plans to stage a La Liga game between Villarreal and Barcelona in Miami in December.

Madrid said last week it would "give an undue sporting advantage" to the teams involved.

"I agree wholeheartedly with the club's statement," added Alonso.

"I believe that at the start of the competition, we all knew what the rules were, and if the rules are to be changed, it must be unanimously agreed upon by all participants.

"Therefore, I believe that this is not appropriate at this time and that all La Liga participants should have been consulted beforehand."

Bahrain Sweep Iraq to Stay Perfect in Arab Juniors

Bahrain's U18 volleyball side beat Iraq 3-0 in straight sets to lead Group B

● Bahrain sweep Iraq in straight sets

● Faidutti-coached side lead Group B

● Palestine clash closes group stage

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's under-18 men's volleyball team made it two wins out of two at the 17th Arab Junior Volleyball Championship in Amman, beating Iraq in straight sets 25-21, 25-20, 25-18. The result followed their 3-1 opening win over Kuwait and moved them to six points from two matches.

Controlled and Composed

Coached by Argentina's Santiago Faidutti, Bahrain looked sharper throughout. Their block proved decisive, while steady serving created separation in each set. Iraq stayed competitive but were never able to push Bahrain out of control.

Top of Group B

With the win, Bahrain lead Group B, which also includes



Bahrain's squad celebrate after the match

Palestine. Kuwait remain in contention after earlier beating Palestine, while Iraq sit winless. In Group A, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, and hosts Jordan are fighting for semifinal places after Saudi Arabia and the UAE withdrew from the competition.

Next: Palestine

This is Bahrain's best start to the Arab Juniors in over a decade

Bahrain rest today before closing their group stage campaign against Palestine on Wednesday at 5pm. A win would confirm their place in the semifinals with a perfect record.

The championship is organised by the Arab Volleyball Association, chaired by Bahrain Volleyball Association president Shaikh Ali bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, in cooperation with the Jordan Volleyball Federation. Bahrain's delegation in Amman is led by BVA vice-president Mohammed Al Thawadi.

Lukaku to miss start of Napoli's title defence with 'serious' thigh injury



Romelu Lukaku
AFP | Milan

Romelu Lukaku will miss Napoli's opening fixture of their Serie A title defence after suffering a thigh injury which could keep the Belgium striker out for months, the Italian champions said yesterday.

Napoli, who travel to promoted Sassuolo on Saturday, said in a statement that Lukaku had suffered a "serious" tear in his left thigh during Thursday's pre-season friendly with Olympiakos.

No indication over how long Lukaku would be sidelined was given by Napoli, but Italian media reported that he could be out of action until November.

Napoli suggested that Lukaku, 32, might have to undergo surgery.