

UEFA bans Ajax fans for Champions League trip to Chelsea

Reuters | London

Ajax Amsterdam have been banned from selling tickets to their fans for next month's Champions League game at Chelsea following crowd trouble in their match at Valencia, European soccer's governing body UEFA has said.

UEFA fined Ajax 50,000 euros (\$55,615) due to the behaviour of their fans during a 3-0 win at Valencia earlier this month and an additional 18,000 euros for "improper conduct of the team".

"The Control, Ethics and Disciplinary Body has decided ... to ban AFC Ajax from selling tickets to its away supporters for its next (1) UEFA competition match," UEFA said in a statement on Thursday.

The Dutch champions, who were given 30 days to contact Valencia and settle damages caused by their supporters at the Mestalla Stadium, said in a statement that they would ask UEFA for more information.

Group H leaders Ajax travel to Stamford Bridge on Nov. 5. UEFA have also banned Eintracht Frankfurt from selling tickets to their fans for their Europa League trips to Standard Liege on Nov. 7 and Arsenal on Nov. 28.

City fume over festive fixtures

Manchester City lead criticism of Premier League Christmas schedule as club face prospect of playing twice in less than 48 hours

● The club have criticised the scheduling and called for a rethink over the fixtures

AFP | London

Manchester City believe the sporting integrity of the Premier League has been compromised by the scheduling of a hectic festive period that will see the English champions play twice in less than 48 hours.

City's game at Wolves has been pushed back from Boxing Day to December 27, kicking off at 7.45pm (18.45 GMT).

That gives them less than two days to prepare for their game at home to Sheffield United, now set for 6pm on December 29.

The change to the Wolves fixture also means Nuno Espirito Santo's men will have 24 hours less to rest ahead of their trip to City's title rivals Liverpool on December 29.

Liverpool already hold an eight-point lead over City at the top of the table.

"Premier League games are a huge physical demand, and it's not ideal to be made to play



Manchester City's Fernandinho (L) clears the ball as Wolverhampton Wanderers' Raul Jimenez lands on the back of Manchester City's goalkeeper Ederson after he made a run at goal

twice in less than 48 hours because it doesn't give the players time to properly recover," City's chief operating officer Omar Berrada told the Manchester Evening News.

"We also need to make sure that we protect the players' wellbeing, the sporting integrity of the league, and the quality of the product.

"We've had an open dialogue with the league to consider other options, but ultimately, we will have to comply with the kick off times and dates as they have been presented to us."

Liverpool fans are also unhappy at the fixture announcement made on Thursday as they face the trip to Leicester for an 8pm kick-off on Boxing Day, a nation-

al holiday with limited public transport available.

"The latest round of televised Premier League games has been announced and once again there is scant, if any, consideration given to match-going supporters and those employed at the stadiums," Liverpool fans group the Spirit of Shankly said in a statement.

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Premier League games are a huge physical demand, and it's not ideal to be made to play twice in less than 48 hours because it doesn't give the players time to properly recover

OMAR BERRADA

CITY'S CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

"The Premier League and TV companies repeatedly ignore the welfare of supporters. But they do have a chance to redeem themselves.

"Spirit of Shankly call on the authorities to do the right thing and revert all Boxing Day fixtures to a sensible kick-off time."

Supporters groups had already been angered by the delay in releasing the fixtures, which were originally scheduled to be announced on October 11.

"These fixtures are five days late. This impacts on family arrangements, the price of train tickets, the ability to book leave and much more," said the Chelsea Supporters' Trust.

Lampard joins calls to abandon UCL reforms

AFP | London

Chelsea manager Frank Lampard believes the Champions League format should not be changed if the quality of the competition is to be maintained.

Proposals that could have seen promotion and relegation from the Champions League and the group stage of the 32-team competition extended to guarantee more games for those involved have been scrapped due to a lack of support from

clubs across the continent.

Lampard, who won the Champions League with Chelsea in 2011/12 and is managing the Blues in this season's competition, thinks putting extra demands on players will water down the quality of the tournament.

"If you ask me can you play more European games, I personally don't know where you fit them in amongst our busy schedule," said the former England international.

"I would find it hard with

the players to keep the quality level and the freshness within them.

"I liked the format, personally, as a player and as a manager now."

In response to the rejection of promotion and relegation, where most Champions League clubs would no longer have to qualify each year via their domestic leagues, Giorgio Marchetti, director of competitions for UEFA, said the Champions League must remain an "open competition".

Liverpool have nothing to lose in title race, says Van Dijk

AFP | London

Liverpool have nothing to lose in the Premier League title race despite amassing an eight-point lead after just eight games, according to defender Virgil van Dijk.

The European champions are in pole position to end a 30-year wait to win a league title, but Van Dijk believes the pressure is still on Manchester City to win the league for a third straight year.

"I don't think we have anything to lose," Van Dijk told Sky Sports ahead of Sunday's trip to Manchester United.

"Man City are the champions, they're defending their title and we want to get it. In my point of

view, we just have to go for it.

"We definitely need to enjoy it and be full of confidence, especially with the way we've got these points, having not had the best games but still getting the wins."

City's shock defeats to Norwich and Wolves have allowed Liverpool to surge ahead thanks to their perfect start to the season.

However, Van Dijk remains wary of Pep Guardiola's men, who overturned a seven-point deficit to pip Liverpool to the title by a point last season.

"There are so many games left, you can't really think about it (winning the title) -- it's not realistic," added the Dutch captain.

"I don't watch Man City's games but I have family and friends who text me or say something, especially after the Wolves game.

"That's just part of life but we've learnt from last year that we don't have to look to the others until the end of the campaign. So far, we have been doing well but Man City are definitely not going away."



Virgil van Dijk

Pakistan sack Sarfaraz as Twenty20, Test skipper

AFP | Lahore, Pakistan

Pakistan sacked Sarfaraz Ahmed from his post as Twenty20 and Test skipper yesterday, a week after he led the side to a shocking 3-0 home defeat against an inexperienced Sri Lanka.

The showdown in Lahore gave the visitors their first Twenty20 series win against Pakistan in seven attempts while missing 10 of their top players -- including regular T20 skipper Lasith Malinga, who refused to tour Pakistan over security fears.

Senior batsman Azhar Ali will replace Sarfaraz as Test skipper, while Babar Azam will lead the Twenty20 side, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said.

"Sarfaraz has been replaced... on poor performance," said a board press release.

Azam has been appointed skipper until next year's Twenty20 World Cup in Australia, while Azhar will remain in charge for the 2019-2020 season.

Squads for the tour will be announced on October 21.

The change is seen as surprising despite the Sri Lanka whitewash. Pakistan had reached number one in the Twenty20 rankings under Sarfaraz,



Pakistan's Sarfaraz Ahmed looks on during a match



Pakistan had reached number one in the Twenty20 rankings under Sarfaraz, winning 11 series along the way

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Sarfaraz also topped the batting chart with 67 runs across the series.

Sarfaraz congratulated both new captains on the honour.

"I wish Azhar and Azam the best of luck and thank all the coaches, selectors and officials for helping me in the journey," he is quoted as saying in the release.

Azhar previously skippered Pakistan in one Test and 31 one-day internationals between 2015 and 2017, losing 18 and winning 21 with one no result.

"It's an honour to lead my country," said Azhar, who was himself sacked after losing 4-1 against Australia in a one-day series in 2017.

Pakistan will next play three Twenty20 internationals in Australia in November ahead of two Test matches.