

SPORTS

sports

Injuries put pressure on Liverpool

Huddersfield, United Kingdom

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is entitled to feel frustrated as his fears over the international break were realised with a lengthening injury list that will do little to help his side arrest a recent dip in form.

Without a win in four games, the Reds travel to face Huddersfield on Saturday anxious to rediscover the fluent football that delivered seven successive victories during the opening weeks of the season.

That run appeared to confirm Liverpool's status as the main challengers to reigning champions Manchester City in the Premier League title race.

There was little to separate the sides in a 0-0 draw at Anfield in Liverpool's last outing after defeats by Chelsea in the League Cup and Napoli in the Champions League either side of another Premier League draw at Chelsea.

Klopp could at least point to a hugely demanding set of fixtures before the international break.

But there will be no excuses in a gentler run starting against a Huddersfield

side without a win this season on Saturday, before meetings with Red Star Belgrade in the Champions League and Cardiff next weekend.

However, Klopp has a selection headache this weekend after Sadio Mane, Mohamed Salah, Virgil van Dijk and Naby Keita all returned early from international duty.

Mane underwent surgery on Wednesday on a broken thumb suffered in training with Senegal, while Salah returned to Merseyside after suffering a muscle strain in Egypt's Africa Cup of Nations defeat of eSwatini on Friday.

Keita was forced off with a suspected hamstring strain in Guinea's 1-1 draw with Rwanda.

Van Dijk has been carrying a rib injury for a few weeks and returned home after scoring in the Netherlands' victory over Germany, with national team manager Ronald Koeman suggesting the centre-back has two broken ribs. All four are rated doubtful for the Huddersfield clash, while James Milner is also sidelined with a hamstring problem.

Toulouse appeal Kaino suspension

Paris, France

French Top 14 side Toulouse have appealed the five-week suspension handed to New Zealander Jerome Kaino for a dangerous tackle on Bath player Jamie Roberts, the club said yesterday.

Two-time World Cup winner Kaino was handed the ban after charging Welsh star Roberts' head with his shoulder in last week's 22-20 European Champions Cup win at Bath.

It earned the powerfully-built flanker a yellow card but merited "a red card", the tournament's disciplinary commission said on Wednesday.

Toulouse are appealing the ban, claiming there was "no clear and obvious act of unfair play" and that it was motivated "by feelings and not the facts", the club said in a statement.

Kaino will miss Sunday's European clash at home to defending champions Leinster and will not be eligible to play again until December 3.

Wimbledon to introduce final set tie-breaks

London, United Kingdom

Wimbledon will introduce tie-breaks in the final set of all events for the first time next year, but only once the score in the deciding set reaches 12-12, the All England Lawn Tennis Club announced yesterday.

"Our view was that the time had come to introduce a tie-break method for matches that had not reached their natural conclusion at a reasonable point during the deciding set," said the club's chairman Philip Brook.

A tie-break is normally played to decide the set when the score reaches 6-6. However, until now the US Open

has been the only Grand Slam that uses a tie-break in the fifth set.

In this year's Wimbledon men's final, South African Kevin Anderson lost to Novak Djokovic in straight sets less than two days after beating John Isner 26-24 in the fifth set after more than six-and-a-half hours on court.

Djokovic's own five-set semi-final victory over Rafael Nadal also had to be played over two days due to the delay in a conclusion to the Anderson-Isner match.

The AELTC said it had studied data from the past 20 years at Wimbledon, as well as consulting players and officials before reaching the decision.

As the Clasico looms

Barcelona and Real scrap for revival



Real Madrid's Spanish coach Julen Lopetegui

AFP | Madrid, Spain

Real Madrid and Barcelona cannot avoid heading into next week's Clasico under pressure but each have two games to lift the mood at least, ahead of the pivotal clash at the Camp Nou.

Eight games into La Liga and both Julen Lopetegui and Ernesto Valverde are feeling the heat, forced to defend poor runs that have seen their teams manage a combined total of two wins from their last 10 games.

Madrid's slump feels the more entrenched, given they are without a goal in 360 minutes, discounting injury time, and three of their last four matches have ended in defeat.

While Barca can point to their riveting win at Wembley over Tottenham, and then a point gained in Valencia, Madrid have endured successive setbacks away to CSKA Moscow and Alaves. They have two home games to clear the fog, and winnable ones too, against Levante in La Liga on Saturday before Viktoria Plzen visit on Tuesday in the Champions League.

A pair of victories, and just as importantly, some goals, would earn

Lopetegui much-needed breathing space. He is already being asked about his future in the same job he sacrificed Spain and the World Cup for in June.

"A coach does not think about this, we are in October," Lopetegui said after Alaves' first league win at home to Real Madrid since 1931.

"The only positive is we are close to the top of the league, the most important thing now is to recover the injured players and then calmness will come by winning games and scoring goals."

Injuries have certainly not helped. Marcelo and Isco are both expected back against Levante while Gareth Bale has been training again this week, albeit on his own. All three would provide an attacking boost.

Karim Benzema is struggling with a hamstring strain but the forward might anyway be less missed.

Seven games without a goal have seen calls grow louder for Mariano Diaz to be given a chance and Lopetegui may now be able to oblige, without the unwanted dig at the Frenchman's confidence.

Lopetegui is also right to draw comfort from the table, as Barcelona's

stumbles mean his team are only two points off the top, where Sevilla are the surprise frontrunners.

Barca face table-toppers Sevilla

Barca face Sevilla today night in an unexpected duel of first and second, where the onus will be on Valverde's men to make a statement.

Sevilla have won four league games on the bounce and, in one of those, thumped Real Madrid 3-0.

They also continue a run of blockbuster ties for Barca, which has already included Spurs and Valencia, and will stretch deep into November. After Sevilla, they play at home to Inter Milan on Wednesday and Real Madrid on Sunday. At the start of next month, they face Inter again in Italy, Atletico Madrid and Real Betis.

A win this weekend and Barcelona might feel a corner has been turned.

Atletico visit struggling Villarreal on Saturday, looking to make it eight games unbeaten.

The real surprise leaders of the weekend, however, could be Alaves, who were playing in Spanish football's third tier only five years ago.

Fixtures (all times GMT)

Celta Vigo	v	Alaves (1900)
Today		
Real Madrid	v	Levante (1100)
Valencia	v	Leganes (1415)
Villarreal	v	Atletico Madrid (1630)
Barcelona	v	Sevilla (1845)
Tomorrow		
Rayo Vallecano	v	Getafe (1000)
Eibar	v	Athletic Bilbao (1415)
Huesca	v	Espanyol (1630)
Real Betis	v	Real Valladolid (1845)
Monday		
Real Sociedad	v	Girona (1900)

Hazard can be world's best if he stays at Chelsea, says Sarri

London, United Kingdom

Eden Hazard can still become the best footballer in the world even if he stays at Chelsea, Blues manager Maurizio Sarri said yesterday.

Hazard has made no secret either of his desire to win the Ballon d'Or, the annual prize for the best player in the game, or wanting to play for Real Madrid.

The 27-year-old Belgian playmaker has though insisted it would "not be a problem" for him to finish his career with Chelsea if a move to Real was not forthcoming.

Meanwhile Sarri said Hazard could realise his individual ambitions while remaining at Stamford Bridge.

"He's a fantastic player," Italian boss Sarri said. "And so it will be very important for us if he will remain with us. Very, very important."

"I think also he can win everything, also the Ballon d'Or, here, without playing in Spain."

"Because, for example, if Chelsea



Belgium's footballer Eden Hazard reacts during a press conference

were able to win the Champions League, Belgium won the European Championships, he would be able to win everything, without playing in Spain."

Hazard's current Chelsea contract expires in June 2020 and for all his talk of wanting to play for Spanish

giants Real, there has been no dip in his form for the Blues this season.

"I can finish with Chelsea," Hazard told Sky Sports ahead of Saturday's match with Manchester United. "No problem at all. I am very happy with this club, with the team, my family is happy here."

THE Copper Chimney RESTAURANT

Now Open
at Seef District too

• Um al Hassan +973 17728699 • Seef District +973 17364999