

# Arsenal aiming to dethrone dynasty-chasing PSG

Luis Enrique targets back-to-back trophies as Mikel Arteta aims to conquer the continent

- Arsenal target their first European crown
- PSG boast tournament's best attack
- Arsenal own strongest defence

AFP | Budapest

Arsenal seek to finally conquer Europe by wresting the Champions League crown from holders Paris Saint-Germain, who are themselves targeting back-to-back titles in Budapest tonight.

Luis Enrique's French champions are favourites to defend the trophy and establish an era of dominance in their post-superstar age, with heavyweight attackers Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe departed.

Homing in on a career third Champions League trophy as a coach, the Asturian cleaned house after arriving in 2023, and created a cohesive, hard-working and brilliant PSG side in his image.

Luis Enrique took them to the semis in his first season, then past Arsenal last year in the final four before crushing Inter Milan to claim the Parisians a first European Cup – 14 years and well beyond 1 billion euros (\$1.2bn) spent since Qatar Sports Investments took over the club.

By contrast Arsenal's team has been slow-cooked over near-



Combination of pictures shows Paris Saint-Germain's Spanish headcoach Luis Enrique (L) giving instructions to his players and Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta reacting from the sideline

ly seven years by Mikel Arteta, without the overwhelming financial muscle of PSG or domestic rivals Manchester City.

Last summer they recognised their developing team was finally ready to triumph and the Gunners reinforced in key areas.

It brought a first Premier League title in 22 years and a return to Europe's grandest stage after two decades away, following their 2006 final defeat by Barcelona in Paris.

Both teams arrive in Hungary with different reputations in the

eyes of the world for the way they play.

PSG are the tournament's top scorers with 44 goals, while Arsenal are the team that has conceded fewest, shipping just six and are unbeaten.

Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, likely to be fit after a calf problem, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Desire Doue lead a thrilling attacking cast for a PSG side that edged Bayern Munich 6-5 in the semi-finals.

Beyond the class of winger Bukayo Saka, Arsenal stand out

more for their grit and defensive discipline, with centre-back pairing Gabriel and William Saliba their regular stand-out performers, as well as midfield powerhouse Declan Rice.

Arteta's team will embrace the underdog role, keeping the champions at bay and leaning on their superior set-piece quality.

## 'Two great teams'

Despite their contrasting styles, both sides have emerged as the competition's outstanding teams this season, shaped by two



PSG reportedly re-arranged domestic fixtures and heavily rotated players to keep their squad fresh for another Champions League title push

of the game's most demanding coaches.

Luis Enrique showed his tactical flexibility in the second leg against Bayern and never likes his team to be predictable.

"I think we're talking about two great teams – along with Bayern Munich, the three best teams in Europe," the Asturian coach told UEFA.

"We'll have to adapt to play and defend in a different way compared to how we usually do if we want to get the better of them."

Along with Dembele the PSG right-back Achraf Hakimi is also expected to win his fitness battle for the game, while Arsenal defender Jurrien Timber is doubtful with a groin problem.

The French side's regular starters have largely played far fewer minutes than their Arsenal counterparts this season.

PSG play fewer matches in general and despite that, Luis

Enrique has rotated and rested players regularly.

Arsenal were pushed to the limit to claim the English title, while PSG were often able to leave their European starters on the bench domestically.

PSG matches against Nantes and Lens were also moved to suit the French club's European campaign.

Former Arsenal great Thierry Henry agrees his team enter the clash at the Puskas Arena as underdogs to a PSG side aiming to become the only side in the modern Champions League era to win the competition back-to-back, besides record 15-time winners Real Madrid.

"We're not at the level of those guys yet so you've got to be humble," Henry told CBS Sports.

"Paris Saint-Germain have the experience of knowing what it is to win it."

The Frenchman finished as a runner-up with Arsenal in 2006, but later won the trophy elsewhere, with Barcelona in 2009.

However Arsenal's eventual Premier League triumph, after three consecutive second-place finishes, might give them the confidence they need to write a new chapter in the club's history.

"They called us bottlers," gloated Arsenal's Myles Lewis-Skelly, brandishing a bottle of champagne during the team's Premier League celebrations.

"And now we're holding the bottle."

The Gunners hope to be uncorking many more on Saturday night.

## Bahrain end contract with basketball coach Vovoras



Georgios Vovoras talks to players (file photo)

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Basketball Federation has announced the termination of its contract with Greek coach Georgios Vovoras and assistant coach Ioannis Tsousis by mutual agreement following their tenure with the national team.

Vovoras most recently guided Bahrain's senior national team at the Arab Basketball Championship, which was hosted in the kingdom. He also oversaw the national youth

team during its participation in the Albert Schweitzer International Tournament in Germany, one of the leading international youth basketball events.

The federation did not provide further details regarding the decision.

The Bahrain Basketball Federation is expected to announce a new coaching staff in the coming period to lead the senior national team in its upcoming qualification campaigns.



Abdullah Al-Hashash reacts during a match (file photo)

## East Riffa sign Bahrain international Al-Hashash

TDT | Manama

East Riffa Club have completed the signing of Bahrain international striker Abdullah Al-Hashash from Al-Ahli Club ahead of the upcoming football season, the newly promoted club announced.

The move is part of East Riffa's recruitment drive as it strengthens its squad for the new campaign.

Al-Hashash was among the standout local forwards in the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League last season, scoring 12

goals for Al-Ahli. He finished second in the scoring charts, one goal behind Al-Khaldiya's Joel Beya, who claimed the league's golden boot award.

The 27-year-old is expected to bolster East Riffa's attacking line with his proven goalscoring record and experience in Bahraini football.

East Riffa will be hoping the addition of Al-Hashash helps the club mount a strong challenge in domestic competitions during the forthcoming season.

## Al-Ahli, Barbar set for Bahrain Handball League final

TDT | Manama

Al-Ahli and Barbar will meet on Tuesday in the final of the Khalid bin Hamad Handball League for the 2025-26 season, with the championship title set to be decided in a highly anticipated showdown.

Al-Ahli booked their place in the final after defeating Al-Shabab 2-0 in their best-of-three semi-final series, continuing the strong form that has characterised their league campaign.

Barbar advanced in similar fashion, overcoming defending champions Al-Najma 2-0

in the semi-finals to secure a place in the title decider. The victory extended Barbar's impressive run this season and set up a meeting with Al-Ahli in the final.

The match is expected to attract significant interest given the stature of the two clubs and

their shared ambition to end lengthy waits for the league crown.

Both sides have produced consistent performances throughout the season, setting the stage for a closely contested final in Bahrain's premier handball competition.