

PSG ONCE AGAIN KINGS OF EUROPE

Arsenal remain in pursuit of elusive Champions League glory

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Paris Saint-Germain secured a historic Champions League triumph last night in Budapest, defending their crown with a 4-3 penalty shootout win over Arsenal. The final at the Puskás Aréna finished 1-1 after regular time in an emotionally charged contest.

Arsenal arrived riding a wave of belief after winning their first Premier League title in 22 years, a breakthrough season under Mikel Arteta that had finally ended their domestic wait and restored faith that their European pursuit of a first Champions League title could also be broken. The final represented the last step in completing a historic double, with the club reaching this stage for the first time since their defeat to Barcelona in 2006, carrying genuine optimism that this time would be different.

That belief was briefly strengthened inside a chaotic opening phase. PSG captain Marquinhos saw an attempted clearance deflect off Leandro



PSG captain Marquinhos lifts their second consecutive Champions League title

Trossard, and Kai Havertz reacted quickest, collecting the loose ball and racing clear of the defence before rifling a strike into the roof of the net. It was a finish that carried the weight of the occasion, giving Arsenal an early lead and lifting the sense that their long wait might finally be ending.

PSG, however, steadily took control of possession and dictated the rhythm of the match. Luis Enrique's side came into the final having scored 44 goals in the competition on their road to Budapest — the highest single-season tally in Champions



League history — underlining their attacking power and status as favourites heading into the

contest. Yet for all their control, they were repeatedly frustrated by Arsenal's compact defensive structure, with clear chances at a premium in a tense first half.

From there, the contest tightened into something far more suffocating. Arsenal stayed organised but found themselves starved of momentum, spending long spells without the ball as PSG dictated territory without delivering the final blow. The Gunners were effectively playing for a penalty shootout in the later stages — a gamble that would ultimately come back to haunt them.



Arsenal players left dejected after Gabriel skied his spot-kick

The match went to extra time, which finished goalless, before the contest was ultimately decided by penalties, where the French champions held their nerve. Gonçalo Ramos, Désiré Doué, Achraf Hakimi and Lucas Beraldo all converted, while Nuno Mendes saw his effort saved by David Raya. For Arsenal, three converted penalties were not enough, as misses from Eberechi Eze and Gabriel ultimately condemned them to a 4-3 shootout defeat.

For the Parisians, this defence of the crown proved far less straightforward than their

maiden title win last season, the 5-0 dismantling of Inter Milan. Yet once again they showed their ability to withstand pressure on the biggest stage, adding another Champions League title and joining Real Madrid as the only team to successfully defend the crown.

For Arsenal, it was a night of progress but ultimate heartbreak and another painful reminder that their search for a first Champions League title continues. Their domestic triumph had raised expectations of a historic double, but their European wait goes on.

Najma finish play-offs unbeaten, Budaiya sign off with victory

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Al Najma completed the relegation/promotion play-offs unbeaten after defeating Manama 3-2 in yesterday's concluding round of matches, while Budaiya ended their campaign with a 1-0 victory over Al Ettihad.

The final matchday had no bearing on the outcome of the mini league, with the two Premier League places already decided after the opening two rounds. Al Najma had secured their top-flight status, while Manama had booked a return to the Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier League. Budaiya, meanwhile, were already relegated to the First Division, while Al Ettihad's stay in the second tier had been confirmed.

At Al Ahli Stadium, Manama struck first in the 10th minute through Ali Meftah following a slick passing move down the left flank. Isa Abdulla delivered the final pass into the box and Meftah finished first time to give



Action from Al Najma's win over Manama at Bahrain National Stadium

his side the lead.

Najma levelled in the 56th minute through Adel Al Romaihi, whose superb curling effort from just inside the area fol-

lowing a short corner flew into the top-right corner, leaving the goalkeeper rooted to the spot.

Substitute Zachary Hadji put Najma ahead in the 73rd minute



Action from Budaiya's win over Al Ettihad at Al Ahli Stadium

when he met a short pass from Faisal Bodahoom inside the box and guided a first-time finish into the corner.

Just three minutes later, Al

Romaihi grabbed his second of the evening after capitalising on a defensive error. He dispossessed Sayed Hassan Al Moosawi in the final third, advanced

into the penalty area and calmly slotted home to make it 3-1.

Hussain Akbar pulled one back for Manama seven minutes later, but Najma held on for the win.

Meanwhile, at the Bahrain National Stadium, Budaiya secured their first victory of the play-offs with a 1-0 triumph over Al Ettihad.

Abdullah Al Bahrani scored the game's only goal in the 14th minute after Mohamed Al Shamsi dispossessed an Al Ettihad player and surged down the right wing into the penalty area. He then squared a pass to the back post, where Al Bahrani arrived to tap a first-time finish into the roof of the net.

The second half remained goalless as Budaiya held firm to claim all three points.

Najma finished top of the four-team standings with a perfect nine points from three matches, while Manama ended second on six points. Budaiya finished third with three points, and Al Ettihad were fourth without a point.

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