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Real Madrid v Barcelona: The key questions in Sunday's pivotal El Clasico

With 13 games remaining and Barcelona leading Real Madrid by two points, El Clasico at the Bernabeu on Sunday could be pivotal in deciding the most compelling La Liga title race for years.

Neither team has looked particularly convincing this season, both have been hit by significant injury blows, and Real now have a Champions League home defeat to bounce back from, so there are plenty of uncertainties heading into a game that is likely to be tense and closely contested.

Here are some of the key storylines to look out for on Sunday.

Can Benzema carry the load for shot-shy Real?

A notable aspect of Real›s season has been their struggle in front of goal, which came to light once again during last weekend›s shock 1-0 loss at mid-table Levante - the eighth time this season they have failed to score.

During the early phases of the campaign, Karim Benzema carried the load almost single-handedly. The Frenchman netted 13 goals in the first 16 league games, masking the team›s overall deficiencies inside the penalty area.

But Benzema has mustered only one league goal since Christmas - an important one, winning last month›s local derby against Atletico Madrid - and none of the team›s other forwards have stepped up to play their part.

A remarkable stat this late into the season is that excluding penalties no other Real player has scored more than three league goals. Sergio Ramos is the team›s second-highest scorer with five, but three of those came from the spot.

The team›s forwards are, to be blunt, having very bad seasons in front of goal: Gareth Bale (two league goals), Eden Hazard (1), Luka Jovic (2), Rodrygo (2) and Vinicius Junior (1) have all massively underperformed, making the ability of midfielders like Toni Kroos and Fede Valverde (and, of course, Ramos) to chip in with their fair share of strikes extremely important.

To an extent, injuries can be blamed for the forwards› lack of goals, and last weekend›s loss at Levante provided another major setback as Hazard - in just his second game since returning from a three-month absence - limped off with a fractured ankle that is likely to keep him out for the rest of the season.

In stark contrast to the Real team of Zidane›s previous managerial stint, which often struggled to play cohesive football but never lacked goalscoring prowess - largely thanks to Cristiano Ronaldo - the current side are more than capable of knitting together pretty passing patterns but regularly fail to be effective where it matters the most.

Football is more than the fans

Richard Hall - Football will always have a raw intensity and a unique ability to make anyone that steps over that white line feel the need to win. We see this is in the parks, recreational grounds and in any amateur version of the game. Inter's Europa League fixture took place at an eerily empty San Siro due to the Coronavirus outbreak, a situation that engulfs Italy and may soon do the same to the rest of Europe. It only served to prove that this sport is still beautiful, even without the fans.

There are two obvious issues that need to be clarified. The Coronavirus needs more discussion and football without fans is much, much worse. Personally, as I write, my trips to Venice (then Hellas Verona), Genoa and Milan look to be cancelled. The frustration is felt, just as the huge effects of a virus that is beyond control is also felt. Medical personnel will be better placed to talk about this, after all, one is only missing football. When all is said and done, public safety is as important as fear-mongering.

As the creator of the niche website 'The Gentleman Ultra' I spend time on the Curva, especially with Inter. The reason I went to Italy in the first place, back in 2006, was to satisfy a craving I'd felt since 1990.

So how do we view the game behind closed doors? After all, this will also be case for the Derby D'Italia on Sunday, along with another four Serie A fixtures this weekend.

Inter played Ludogorets at San Siro with only the shouts of their teammates to be heard. It felt at first like a house party without music, yet the participants were dancing anyway. So, what did we learn?

What we learned in this game is that players care. They want to win, they still put in 100%. The Bulgarians were not over-awed and the Italians played with intensity. What was different about this to the first leg? Inter won the game, the players celebrated and it mattered. Was it as intense as with the crowd? No, but it was not far off. The issues with Daniele Padelli remained, Romelu Lukaku still performed, would this be that much different with the Curva in view? In fairness, the players who didn't perform under less pressure have to answer.

Inter versus Ludogorets was raw, it was certainly with pressure, but it was not gladiatorial. What it showed was the basics of football, the beautiful game just played between two teams without the baying crowds, just like in any park this weekend. Maybe you expected a tactical analysis. I think this is more important. Do not ask if the players care anymore.

Europa League last16- draw: Man Utd face LASK as Inter tackle Getafe

Goal - Manchester United will face LASK in the last 16 of the Europa League, while Inter take on Getafe and Wolves will look to succeed where Arsenal failed against Olympiacos.

Elsewhere, Steven Gerrard's Rangers face a tough test against Bayer Leverkusen and five-time winners Sevilla lock horns with Roma.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is looking to emulate his predecessor Jose Mourinho by savouring success in Europe's second-tier competition.

The Portuguese guided Manchester United to glory back in 2017, with the Red Devils having endured a barren run on the trophy front since then.

They will, however, be confident of prolonging their continental campaign three years on after being paired with the lowest-ranked side left in the competition, Austrian hopefuls LASK.

Inter are another of those setting their sights on the ultimate prize, with the Serie A heavyweights hoping to see their star-studded squad deliver tangible reward in 2019-20. It remains to be seen whether the turnstiles will be in operation again by the time the Nerazzurri take in a meeting with Getafe.

A lively atmosphere can be expected in Greece when Wolves take in a trip to face Olympiacos. The Athens-based outfit stunned Arsenal in the first knockout round and are now chasing down a second Premier League scalp.

Nuno Espirito Santo has, however, seen Wolves win many admirers during their return to European competition and Molineux will be bouncing for the second leg of an eagerly-anticipated tie.

Fireworks can also be expected at Ibrox when Rangers play host to Bayer Leverkusen.

The Glasgow giants have already progressed further than Old Firm rivals Celtic, who came unstuck against FC Copenhagen in the last 32.

The reward for the Danish outfit is a date with Istanbul Basaksehir, who are gracing this stage of the competition for the first time following a thrilling extra-time victory over Sporting C.P.

Spanish side Sevilla know what it takes to progress through the business end of the Europa League and will want to put down another marker to their rivals when tackling Roma.

Wolfsburg will be doing likewise when facing Shakhtar Donetsk, while FC Basel are still waiting to discover who they will face after a storm warning in Austria delayed the second leg of Eintracht Frankfurt's meeting with Red Bull Salzburg.

All of those left in the competition will be desperate to book a spot in the quarter-finals, while also dreaming of making it all the way to the final in Gdansk on May 27.