WE STAND BY UEFA IN REJECTING THE SUPER LEAGUE INFANTINO

TOP CANDIDATES TO REPLACE ZIDANE AT REAL MADRID

KANE SETS FOR SPURS EXIT
Manchester United fans returning to Old Trafford for the first time in 14 months tomorrow will have to abide by a new code of conduct aimed at reducing the risk of COVID-19.

The 10,000 United supporters attending the fixture with Fulham on Tuesday night have also been told punishments will be handed out for any use of flares, pitch invasions or vandalism.

Old Trafford has been the scene of protests against the Glazer family recently, with the fixture with Liverpool on May 2 postponed, while there were more protests for the rearranged game on Thursday.

Both of those protests included some clashes with police and flares and smoke bombs used outside the ground, while the protest ahead of the initial game saw some fans get onto the pitch.

The game against Fulham is the first time supporters have been allowed inside Old Trafford for a match since March 8, 2020, but those attending have been told to expect some changes to the matchday routine.

Collette Roche, United’s chief operating officer, said: “Matchday at Old Trafford will be slightly different for those fans who have been successful in the ballot for the Fulham game.

“We’ve got a new Code of Conduct to help keep people Covid-safe and fans will need to arrive at designated times due to social distancing protocols. We have also introduced digital ticketing which means fans with tickets will need to bring photographic ID. This is all designed to keep people as safe as possible and we are confident fans will understand the need for these procedures as a result.

“While some things will change, it’s important to stress that our usual ground regulations remain in place. We remind everyone that inconsiderate, reckless or anti-social behaviour by anyone visiting Old Trafford will not be tolerated. Club sanctions will apply for the use of flares within the stadium and any pitch incursions or vandalism will result in criminal prosecution.

“Our aim is to ensure that the match passes peacefully and that fans with tickets get to enjoy their return to Old Trafford.”

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer hopes Manchester United fans will ditch their protests against club owners, the Glazer family, and cheer on the team when supporters return to Old Trafford for the first time in more than a year on Tuesday.

United’s last three home games have featured fans protesting against the Glazers after they signed up to the European Super League before the supporters’ furious reaction saw them withdraw hastily.

United’s home game with Liverpool had to be postponed earlier this month when fans broke into the stadium and got onto the pitch.

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The re-scheduled game last Thursday also featured protests outside the ground -- as did last Tuesday’s home defeat to Leicester.

Solskjaer wants to hear more positive sounds when they host relegated Fulham where victory would secure them second place in the table.

Around 10,000 fans are expected to attend as the latest easing of the British government’s coronavirus restrictions comes into force.

“Of course the last couple of home games, especially the Liverpool ones with the protests...”

It’s never nice to see a club that is not united, fans with the team, so we’re hoping that Tuesday is going to be a positive day that we move together, that we play a good game of football,”

Solskjaer, though, blames the protests for their last two home defeats to Leicester and Liverpool.

Even without the protests United’s overall home form this season has been poor -- six defeats in all -- and effectively cost them giving champions Manchester City a run for their money in the title race.

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Toyota (Nigeria) Limited
The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) has sent a message of congratulations to much-respected former Nigeria goalkeeper Emmanuel Okala, who attained the platinum age of 70 on Monday, 17th May 2021.

NFF General Secretary, Dr Mohammed Sanusi praised the towering goaltender for his glorious service to fatherland in the round leather game, delivering his best anytime he turned out for both the Senior Men Team (then known as Green Eagles) and Rangers International FC of Enugu.

"We all remember the heroic feats and unforgettable deeds of the great Emmanuel Okala. He served Nigeria to the best of his ability and we commend him for his patriotism, discipline, dedication and sense of duty. We wish him a happy Platinum anniversary celebration and many more years in good health and in joy," Sanusi said in Abuja.

Okala, an imposing figure between the sticks at 6feet 5inches, emerged during an era in which Nigeria produced a long line of exceptional goalkeepers, including Inua Rigogo, Peter Fregene, Amusa Adisa and Eyo Esien. He earned his first cap in a friendly against Tanzania in Lagos that Nigeria won 3-2, and was in the team that won All-Africa Games football gold in Lagos in 1973, took bronze medals at the Africa Cup of Nations in 1978 and finished as runners-up at the All-Africa Games in Algiers four months later.

Okala was also in the Green Eagles’ squad that won Nigeria’s first Africa Cup of Nations on home soil in 1980. He was named Africa’s best goalkeeper by the Africa Sports Journalists Union in 1975 and was in the Rangers FC squad that won the Africa Cup Winners’ Cup in 1977.

Sanusi also sent messages of congratulation to Super Falcons’ captain Asisat Oshoala whose team; FC Barcelona defeated Chelsea FC of England to lift the UEFA Women’s Champions Cup on Sunday evening. Oshoala is a four-time winner of the Africa Woman Player of the Year award, was Most Valuable Player and Top Scorer of the FIFA U20 World Cup finals in 2014 and has harambeed with the Super Falcons to win successive Women Africa Cup of Nations titles in 2014, 2016 and 2018.

“We felicitate with Asisat (Oshoala) on the victory of Barcelona and wish her many more medals and honours in her career with Club and Country.”

Also celebrated were the duo of Leon Balogun and Joseph Ayo-Aribo, whose club, Glasgow Rangers FC won the Scottish Premier League on Saturday.

“We celebrate with Balogun and Aribo for their success in the Scottish Premiership. They are our worthy ambassadors and we are happy for them as we are happy for Wilfred Ndidi and Kelechi Iheanacho who won the English FA Cup with Leicester City on Saturday.”

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FIFA president Gianni Infantino has offered his thoughts on the suspended European Super League, calling for dialogue with the clubs but also saying he understands the potential need for sanctions. He also spoke about young people's waning interest in football, clubs' multi-million-euro losses and the need to control spending on transfer fees, players' salaries and agents' commissions, something he describes as “exploding to unhealthy levels”.

As the former secretary-general of UEFA, you appear to be the ideal person to mediate in the conflict between European football's governing body and the major clubs involved in the European Super League breakaway attempt. What can you do to help?

I am the president of FIFA and my responsibility is to defend football as a whole and all around the world. This includes small, medium and big clubs, leagues and federations of all over the world with different levels of development, all the players, coaches, officials and each and every stakeholder, always having in mind the fans, which are and should be at the centre of everything we do. I have been very clear in what is mine and FIFA’s position on this matter. We stand by UEFA in rejecting the Super League. We are against it and we will always be against any competition which is not part of the international structures of football and that threatens the unity and solidarity that should always exist in the football pyramid, which links grassroots and amateur level to the top stars. Having said that, it is also my duty to advocate that all the parties should enter into a profound and hopefully constructive dialogue in search of positive solutions. Our duty as the world governing body is to have our doors open to everyone, we need to face the problems in football together.

It’s a conflict that has been bubbling away for years, because each side has its arguments. What solutions would you propose?

Our game is so incredibly successful also because there is a bond, a link between the bottom and the top of the pyramid. Between a girl or a boy playing in school or on the streets and a professional player scoring a goal in the final of a big competition. The clubs are an essential part of that pyramid but there are also other structures to ensure that everyone is united and there are solidarity and control mechanisms put in place in order for the less privileged to benefit, even if just partially, from the success and popularity of the most successful and powerful ones. As in everything in life a fair balance needs to be sought so that everyone’s interests are defended. As I said, in FIFA, our interest is the defence of football as a whole, from grassroots to the big stars, and all around the world, not only Europe but also in the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Oceania. We, for example, proposed and have approved a competition which we think fills a gap in this particular context. With a proper new Club World Cup, which will replace two competitions (the current annual Club World Cup and the Confederations Cup) so it won’t be an extra burden to players, and for which several big clubs will qualify, a new revenue stream will exist with benefits not only for the participating clubs but also to all the entire football pyramid.

In fact, FIFA will not keep one single dollar from this competition and we will make sure that a per-
Arab sheikhs, American billionaires and Russian oligarchs. Does football really belong to the fans?

Fans have to be at the heart of everything we do. Without fans and their passion, football wouldn’t be what it is and we need to keep that in mind all the time. Football is and should be essentially for the fans and we have to find ways to protect their interests. Investments in football should be welcome but, as I said, financial control mechanisms are very important also to ensure a healthy and sustainable industry.

Of the world’s biggest clubs, there are only two that continue to follow the ideal of being exclusively fan-owned: Real Madrid and Barcelona. Do you understand why they feel like that?

There are some other examples like in Germany and other countries, but I understand your question, which should also be put into the context of the legal framework where sport fits. Sports and football have a specificity that everyone needs to understand and respect, including political authorities because we don’t live in a bubble. Football has to respect laws and systems in the different countries and regions where it’s integrated, and those laws should allow that the sports regulations can implement several measures ensuring our industry is solid, transparent and respected.

What can FIFA do to reverse the trend shown in the latest Global Reach of Football report, which found that almost half of young people between 15 and 24 are losing interest in football?

The world is evolving fast and what was always a formula of success for us might not be the right one for the future. There are some things we can’t and shouldn’t compromise. The beauty of football is also its simplicity. On the other hand, maintaining everything exactly as it is might not attract young audiences as much as in the past and that is why I think a large and frank debate must take place on if we can have less but more meaningful games, maybe new formats of competitions, maybe more play-off stages. I think the huge investment we are making in women’s football will be a great way to bring more fans, for example. I am sure there will be plenty of other good ideas and that football will continue to be a universal source of joy and entertainment for billions of people.

Liverpool announced a €30 million loss in the last 12 months. Among the 12 ESL clubs, losses of between €1.5 billion and €2 billion are forecast. Can you understand these clubs’ plight?

As I said, financial control mechanisms are very important also to ensure a balanced and fair competition. I have been saying a few times that we should think if we can introduce some sort of salary caps, transfer fee and squad size limits and other rules that can help to control a spending spiral which is harmful for the game even if we live in an ever more globalised world. Of course the controversy over the Super League took over the debate but this should really be an opportunity to focus on the key issues of football and its future. Concentration of power and money in fewer and fewer. Competitive imbalance getting worse and worse nationally and even much more internationally. Salaries, transfer fees and agent fees exploding to unhealthy levels. Growing imbalance between national teams and clubs due to the inappropriateness of the international match calendar for the new global football landscape.

Women’s football growth.

What would a Champions League be without Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus? How much value would it lose? 50, 60, 80%?

Everyone in football knows how important are those big clubs that make so many millions of fans in their home countries and around the world. We also need to take care of the not so big clubs, leagues and federations which are not at the top of the pyramid but ensure that football is played and promoted all around the world. UEFA will decide what is the most suitable action to take on its competitions. Of course, we need to be strict and ready to take firm actions not losing sight of the possibility to try and find common solutions for common problems.

Any chance of holding the men’s World Cup every two years instead of every four years?

I think you are referring to Arsène Wenger’s idea of having the World Cup and the Euros more frequently. I’ve been reading with interest several opinions about the international match calendar and I think football should reflect on why so many people, namely the fans, consider that in many parts of the world, the qualifying phases are not exciting and interesting. Is it worth interrupting the domestic season so many times? Are we really using national team football the best way we can? Again, I think all the stake-holders, including players, coaches and fans, should come forward and bring their ideas to see if there is a better option for everyone.

This article was originally published in Spanish newspaper Diario AS. The author of that article is Joaquín Maroto (@AS_Maroto) (https://AS.com).
Real Madrid manager, Zinedine Zidane, has reportedly informed Real Madrid board of his intention to leave the club at the end of the season. It is also claimed Zidane told the dressing room that he will not be staying beyond the end of the season following their 2-2 draw against Sevilla recently.

Physical and mental fatigue from managing a club of Real Madrid’s stature has been mentioned as the possible reasons behind Zizou deciding to call it quits.

Meanwhile, Real Madrid still have a chance of winning the LaLiga title as they sit second in the table, two points behind league leaders Atletico Madrid with one match remaining in the season.

Zidane calling it quits leaves Florentino Perez with a huge decision to make over the summer. With several high-profile players available in the market, they will need to make the right choice, keeping the long-term future of the club in mind.

Here, we take a look at five potential replacements for Zinedine Zidane.

Hans Dieter-Flick
Hans Dieter-Flick is set to leave Bayern Munich after two stellar seasons in charge. Bayern Munich have already announced that Julian Nagelsmann will take over as the new manager in the summer, making continental treble winner Flick one of the most sought-after out-of-job managers in the world.

As per reports, Flick is first in line to replace Joachim Low as the manager of the German national team. Diario AS claim that Barcelona have made contact with Flick as they view him as a potential replacement for Ronald Koeman. Juventus have also been linked with the Bayern Munich manager.

Flick has proven to be an excellent coach guiding Bayern Munich to a continental treble in his first season in charge and has improved several players in his short stint as well. He’d be a great replacement for Zidane, but he’s most likely to end up as the coach of the German national team.

Carlo Ancelotti
The Mirror claims that Real Madrid have identified Everton boss Carlo Ancelotti as a potential replacement for Zinedine Zidane. Carlo Ancelotti had already managed Real Madrid between 2013 and 2015 and his ideas were key to bringing out the best in Angel Di Maria in Real Madrid’s UEFA Champions League winning campaign in 2014-15.

Ancelotti is highly regarded in the Spanish capital as he was the manager who guided them to La Decima, Real Madrid’s 10th UEFA Champions League title. He also won the Copa Del Rey, FIFA Club World Cup and UEFA Super Cup with Real Madrid and managed Bayern Munich as well before joining Everton.

However, it remains to be seen if Ancelotti would be willing to drop his Everton project in its nascent stages and make a return to Real Madrid.

Joachim Low
Joachim Low is yet another high-profile candidate who is re-
portedly on Real Madrid’s shortlist. But it comes as a bit of a surprise as even though Joachim Low has proved his mettle on the big stage, his best days seem to be behind him. He has looked a bit bereft of ideas and the German national team has struggled in recent times.

Low is set to resign as the coach of the German international team at the end of the Euros. Low has also hinted that he is interested in the Real Madrid job. He told ZDF TV via ESPN, towards the end of March.

“I’ll hopefully see out my contract, but my race as a national team coach is almost over, and you must start making plans at some point. I’d be interested in coaching at club level. I don’t plan on retiring. It would be abroad. I don’t think it’ll be in Germany. [Real are] a club which is interesting for every coach, right?”

But Low’s last stint in club management was with Rapid Wien in Austria in the 2003-04 season and it would be a bit of a risk from Real Madrid’s side to go for him ahead of the other candidates.

Raul Gonzalez

Raul is a Real Madrid legend and while it would be a risky move to hand the youth team’s coach the role of the main man at the club, it will undoubtedly be welcomed by the Santiago Bernabeu faithful. Just like Zinedine Zidane, Raul learned the ropes of management during his time with the Real Madrid youth system.

He has done an incredible job too, winning the UEFA Youth Cup and almost winning promotion with the Real Madrid Castilla side despite losing key players to the senior squad.

Raul has been crucial to the development and promotion of a lot of young talent in the youth system, with Miguel Gutierrez, Antonio Blanco and Sergio Arribas in particular looking worthy of taking a claim on a spot in the senior side in the near future.

There are no candidates on the list who understand the club and its philosophy better than Raul and given how he has already proven to be a good coach, it might be a risk worth taking.

Massimiliano Allegri

In Massimiliano Allegri, Real Madrid have perhaps their most ideal candidate. Allegri has been on a hiatus ever since pulling the shutters on a successful stint with Juventus in 2019.

Allegri guided Juventus to two UEFA Champions League finals but lost both of them and this led him to believe that he had taken the club as far as he could.

The Italian coach builds his side around a strong defense and his teams have a distinct and cohesive style of play. He was able to bring the best out of all the midfielders he worked with at Juventus and at Real Madrid, he will have some of the best in the world at his disposal.

If the Real Madrid board are willing to back Allegri in the market and trust the process, he might just be the best choice they have got.

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Spanish powerhouse Real Madrid held onto its crown as the most lucrative club in football with a value of 1.27 billion euros ($1.5B) according to consultancy firm Brand Finance's 2021 rankings.

Barcelona took second place, with a value of 1.26 billion euros, and Manchester United followed closely at 1.13 billion.

The document published on Monday confirms all three clubs remain at the top of the list, despite the European Super League fiasco and the resulting 600 million euros setback for the 12 founding clubs' total brand value.

Premier League clubs dominate the higher end of the board with six teams in the top 10, including Manchester City (1.11 billion euros), Liverpool (973 million), Chelsea (769 million), Tottenham Hotspur (723 million), and Arsenal (675 million).

Bayern Munich is number one in brand strength, with a score of 91.9% and AAA+ rating and the only top 10 club to have increased its value (up 1%) despite Covid-19.

Italy's highest ranked club, Serie A's Juventus, dropped by 16% in value, despite maintaining number 11 in the rankings.

According to the report, the Covid-19 pandemic caused an 11.2% devaluation of the top 50 clubs, compared to a 2.2% drop the previous year.

Despite losing 10.1% of its brand value as a result of the pandemic and the ESL fallout, Real Madrid boasts a third consecutive year in first place, and is also Spain's largest football club in net worth at 3.13 billion euros.

Kane first discussed his future with Tottenham last summer, but eventually agreed to try to help the club end their long run without silverware. But, following another trophyless campaign and the sacking of Jose Mourinho, Kane has reiterated his desire to move on in the past month and is unlikely to be dissuaded from his position.

City, United and Chelsea have all made it clear they would be interested in signing Kane this summer and want to be kept in touch with any developments.

It remains to be seen whether or not, in Kane's eyes at least, Levy remains true to his word and listens to offers for the England captain, who he values at £150million.

Kane still has three years remaining on the contract he signed in 2018 which puts Tottenham in a strong negotiating position, and it is hard to see Levy agreeing to sell him to Chelsea in particular.

Kane is enjoying his best personal season for Tottenham, having scored 22 Premier League goals and assisted 13 more to keep the club's hopes of qualifying for Europe alive.

Over the course of 334 games, Kane has netted an incredible 220 times for Tottenham after going out on loan to Leyton Orient, Millwall, Norwich City and Leicester City.
The European Golden Boot is awarded to the player who scores the most number of goals in any of the European top division leagues.

Ciro Immobile won the award in 2020 while Lionel Messi won three Golden Shoes on the trot before that.

This time around, one of the candidates has a clear lead over the rest of the competition. The award is granted based on points earned for goals scored over the course of a season. The weightage of points per goal is in favour of Europe’s top five leagues.

While a player in Europe’s top-five leagues (as per UEFA’s rankings) gets two points per goal, players in leagues ranked between 6 and 22 get 1.5 points per goal. Those playing their trade in any league below the 22nd ranked one, get 1 point per goal.

Here are top five players in the race for the Golden Boot for the 2020-21 season.

Kylian Mbappe (26 goals)

Widely regarded as the heir apparent to the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappe has been living up to that tag. The Paris Saint-Germain forward continues to be prolific in front of goal and is the leading goalscorer in Ligue 1.

Mbappe has scored 26 goals for PSG in 30 appearances this term. He averages a goal every 88 minutes in Ligue 1 and has been PSG’s best player this season. Mbappe’s current contract with PSG expires next summer and he is yet to sign an extension.

There are rumours linking him with an exit, but with Neymar putting pen to paper on a new deal, PSG are expected to prioritize extending Mbappe’s contract as well.

Andre Silva (27 goals)

Andre Silva has been the surprise package of the 2020-21 Bundesliga season. After failing to impress at Sevilla and AC Milan, Silva showed a lot of promise during his loan spell at Eintracht Frankfurt in the 2019-20 season, scoring 12 goals and providing three assists from 25 appearances.

Eintracht Frankurt gave him a permanent deal at the start of the 2020-21 season and Andre Silva has been banging in goals for fun. The Portuguese striker, who is now being courted by several European giants, including Manchester City, has scored 27 goals in 31 appearances in the Bundesliga this term.

The 25-year-old averages a goal every 99 minutes and is in stellar form ahead of the Euros.

Cristiano Ronaldo (29 goals)

Cristiano Ronaldo is 36-years-old. Juventus have had a poor season by their standards but if they didn’t have a prolific Cristiano Ronaldo in their ranks, it could have been even worse. Ronaldo is the leading scorer in Serie A, but Juventus sit fifth in the table with just one game remaining in the season.

Cristiano Ronaldo has scored 29 goals from 33 appearances in Serie A this term. The Portuguese legend averages 93 minutes per goal this season. Ronaldo’s numbers are a testament to how he has been able to evolve his game in his 30s as his body starts to tire out.

It remains to be seen if Ronaldo will kick on at Juventus beyond the end of the season as the Bianconeri, given their present situation, are a fair bit away from mounting a challenge on all fronts. Ronaldo cannot be around forever either and it may be best for both parties to part ways despite the man’s generous contributions over the last three years.

Lionel Messi (30 goals)

Lionel Messi has been clocking incredible numbers since the turn of the year. After the implosion at Barcelona last summer, which was followed by Josep Maria Bartomeu and his board of directors deciding to resign, the club took a while to settle down in the new season.

Lionel Messi has scored 30 goals in LaLiga in 35 appearances. He averages a goal every 100 minutes. The Argentine will be devastated with how Barcelona couldn’t make the most of their chances at the home straight after doing all the hard work in the build up to it.

It remains to be seen whether or not Lionel Messi will stay at the club. One thing is for certain and it is that the Argentine is simply irreplaceable.

Inarguably the best striker in the world right now, Robert Lewandowski has been clocking unbelievable numbers for Bayern Munich over the last two seasons. The Polish international had an excellent season in terms of productivity in 2019-20 scoring 34 goals in the league, but he missed out on the European Golden Shoe to Ciro Immobile.

Robert Lewandowski (40 goals)

This time, however, he has made doubly sure that he won’t miss out on the honour. Lewandowski holds a 10 goals lead over Lionel Messi. He has scored 40 goals in just 28 appearances in the Bundesliga. He averages a goal every 59 minutes. That is just unreal, isn’t it?

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