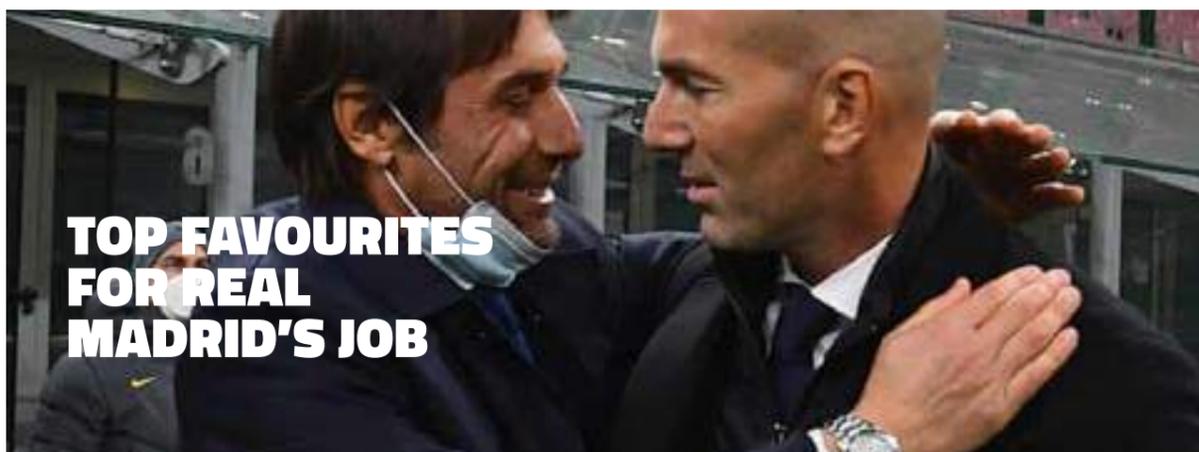




MAN CITY'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE **MISERY** GOES ON



WHAT NEXT AFTER A BOTCHED EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE?



TOP FAVOURITES FOR REAL MADRID'S JOB

News



ZIDANE HITS OUT AT FLORENTINO PEREZ

Club legend, Zinedine Zidane, has hit out at Real Madrid president Florentino Perez in a stunning open letter explaining his decision to leave the club.

Zidane, who returned to Real for a second spell in charge in March 2019, won two LaLiga titles and three Champions League titles during his two stints as coach, but stepped down last week after the club's first trophyless season in 11 years.

In an open letter published in sports daily AS, Zidane has blamed a lack of "trust" in him and "messages leaked to the media" for his decision to quit for a second time. "I'm leaving, but I'm not abandoning ship and I'm not tired of coaching," Zidane said. "In May 2018 I left because after two and a half years, with so many victories and so many trophies, I felt that the team needed something new to stay on top.

"Today things are different. I'm leaving because I feel the club is no longer giving me the trust I need, it isn't offering me the support to build something medium-to-long-term.

"I know the demands at a club like Madrid, I know that when you

don't win you have to go. But a very important thing has been forgotten here... I'm a born winner and I was here to win trophies, but beyond that are human beings, emotions, life, and I have the feeling that these things haven't been valued."

Zidane oversaw three successive Champions League wins during his first spell in charge, before resigning and then returning 10 months later.

However, this season Zidane could only finish second in LaLiga, behind rivals Atletico, was knocked out of the Champions League semi-finals and suffered a humiliating Copa del Rey exit in the round of 32 to third division minnows Alcobano.

"I want what we've done together to be respected," he continued. "I would have liked my relationship with the club and the president in recent months to have been a little different from that of other coaches.

"I wasn't asking for privileges, of course not, but rather a bit more memory. Today the life of a coach on the bench of a great club is two

seasons, not much more. For it to last longer, human relationships are essential.

"That's why it hurt me a lot when I read in the press, after a defeat, that they were going to sack me if I didn't win the next game. It hurt me and the whole team because these messages, intentionally leaked to the media, created negative interference with the staff, they created doubts and misunderstandings."



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ORGANISERS MOVE COPA AMERICA TO BRAZIL



The 2021 Copa America is moving to Brazil just 13 days before the tournament was due to kick off after Argentina were on Sunday dropped as hosts.

Ahead of the scheduled June 13 start date, Argentina were removed as hosts due to what South American football federation Conmebol said was the "present circumstances". Joint-hosts Colombia had previously been stripped of the honour.

Conmebol did not disclose the nature of the circumstances that led to the decision but Argentina is currently experiencing a surge in Covid cases. Officials from the organisation met on Monday to decide on the next steps for the tournament, with 2019 hosts Brazil selected.

"The host cities and the fixtures will be confirmed by Conmebol within hours. The oldest international tournament in the world will make the whole continent cheer!" the South American body said.

"Conmebol thanks President Jair Bolsonaro and his team, and also the Brazilian soccer confederation for opening the doors of this country for the safest sporting event in the world today. South America

will shine in Brazil with all its stars.

Argentina saw Covid cases grow quickly in May and prompted the government to mandate a strict new lockdown. Thursday saw a record one-day number of new cases and the overall death toll had hit 76,693 by the weekend, according to data from the World Health Organisation.

Over 460,000 people have died of Covid-19 in Brazil, with many analysts expecting another wave of the disease to hit the country by late June. Many hospitals have more than 80 per cent of their intensive-care units occupied by victims of the virus.

Even some players who had returned to South America to prepare for the tournament expressed doubts, with Luis Suarez of Uruguay telling reporters on Friday, "€ we have to give priority to the health of human beings".

Organisers are reluctant to call the tournament off because of its importance financially. The last Copa America, held in and won by Brazil, brought in £84million and was the second-biggest annual source of revenue after the Copa Libertadores, the equivalent of Europe's Champions League.

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Analysis



MAN CITY'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ANGUISH GOES ON

Chelsea clinched the Champions League title last Saturday after beating Manchester City 1-0 in the all-English final.

A first-half goal from summer signing Kai Havertz, the most expensive player in Chelsea's history, was enough to earn Thomas Tuchel's side victory in front of thousands of fans at Porto's Estadio Dragao in Portugal.

Meanwhile, Manchester City's wait for European glory continues after making its first final in this season's competition.

Chelsea, which last won the Champions League in 2012, was worthy of the win having executed a perfect game plan masterminded from Tuchel, who took over from club legend Frank Lampard in January.

The former Paris Saint-Germain boss, who lost to Bayern Munich in the final last season, was an animat-

ed figure throughout, conducting the 16,500 fans present and urging his side to a famous win.

"The players were determined to win this. We wanted to be a stone in their (Manchester City's) shoe," an emotional Tuchel told BT Sport after the game.

"We encourage everybody to step up and step out, to be more brave and create dangerous counterattacks."

Both teams had chances throughout but it was Havertz who kept his calm, latching onto a wonderful through ball from Mason Mount to round the goalkeeper and pass into an open net moments before half time.

Both sides lost key players during the final. Chelsea's veteran defender Thiago Silva picked up an injury in the first half and City captain Kevin De Bruyne had to be subbed off in

the second half after colliding with Antonio Rüdiger.

But even before losing its talisman, City looked short of quality and couldn't cope with the constant pressure from Chelsea, led by man of the match N'Golo Kante.

Despite dominating domestically, the Champions League has been the thorn in Manchester City's side in recent years.

City manager Pep Guardiola, widely considered one of the greatest managers of all time, has not won the Champions League title since leaving Barcelona in 2012.

Three seasons came and went at Bayern Munich without European glory and he had failed to get past the quarterfinal stage during his first four years at City.

He has sometimes been accused of overthinking his tactics when it



comes to crunch time in the Champions League, often to the detriment of his own team, and it seems he suffered a similar fate on Saturday.

Guardiola opted for an attacking lineup without a single holding midfielder and his side failed to dominate proceedings as it normally does.

Despite the disappointment, City still finished the season as the Premier League and League Cup champions.

"It has been an exceptional season for us. It was a tight game. We had chances," Guardiola said after the match.

"We were brilliant in the second half, we were brave and we could not convert the chances as they were so strong. The players were exceptional. We will come back maybe one day again!"

In truth, Chelsea could have scored more. Striker Timo Werner missed two glorious opportunities in the

opening stages and Christian Pulisic shot wide in the second half.

The London club may have finished fourth in the Premier League, a huge 19 points behind the champions City, but this, remarkably, was their third win over Guardiola's side in six weeks.

They ended City's hopes of a domestic treble when they triumphed in the FA Cup semi-finals in April and then delayed their title celebrations with victory in Manchester.

Now, in a final watched by a limited crowd of just over 14,000 fans who created a raucous atmosphere, they have denied City the first Champions League crown they and Guardiola so crave for.

City have had to wait 13 years since being taken over by Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour just to get to the Champions League final.

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AGUERO COMPLETES BARCELONA MOVE



Sergio Aguero has completed his free transfer to Barcelona and will be unveiled to fans on Monday evening.

The Argentine has been locked in talks with the Catalan side ever since announcing he would be leaving Manchester City on a free transfer.

Both parties have been eager to keep an official announcement under wraps while City were still competing in the Champions League.

But just 48 hours after their final heartbreak to Chelsea in Porto, Barca have wasted no time in announcing their high-profile arrival.

The club revealed his signing on Twitter with a painting of him wearing a Barcelona shirt.

Aguero has penned a two-year deal to team up with international compatriot Lionel Messi which includes an £86million buy-out clause.

A statement written on the club's website said: "FC Barcelona and Sergio 'Kun' Agüero have reached an agreement for the player to join the Club from 1 July when his contract with Manchester City expires.

"The player will sign a contract until the end of the 2022/23 season and his buy out clause is set at 100 million euros.

"Kun' Agüero's presentation will take place on Monday."

Aguero couldn't produce a fairytale ending to his Man City career as he left the Champions League final

field in tears.

But he leaves a City legend departing as the club's record scorer with 260 goals in all competitions in 389 appearances.

Aguero also won 12 major pieces of silverware including five league titles.

Man City will recognise his achievements by erecting a statue outside the Etihad stadium.

Eagle-eyed Barcelona fans noticed the deal was confirmed before the announcement due to a blunder on the club's website.



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and coached Espanyol, has also been approached by the France player. Another indication that, sooner or later, he will end up playing in Spain's top flight.

Mbappe ready to play for Madrid

Kylian Mbappé remains Real Madrid's number one target. The club believes that Zidane's departure will not delay his arrival, with the recently departed French coach helping to convince him to make the move over the last few months.

The forward has decided that he wants to wear the famous white shirt this season or next. It will depend on PSG, who have two options: sell him now and get something for him or let him leave for free in the summer of 2022. Everything points to the fact that, if he does not renew his current deal, the player will be able to leave this year, although the price the Ligue 1 club set for him will determine the negotiation.

Mbappé asks teammates for LaLiga advice

Many of the Frenchman's gestures over the last few months are clues to his future. And not just the public ones, but also those he has made in private. As this newspaper understands, Mbappé has asked his teammates who have been in LaLiga what the league is like. His intention has been to find out how difficult it is, what the pitches are like, among other things. Sarabia, Navas, Rico, Ander Herrera, Di María and Neymar are some of

City to listen to offers for Sterling

Raheem Sterling leads a shock list of Manchester City stars reportedly up for sale this summer.

The England winger, 26, has won three Premier League titles in six years at the Etihad since arriving from Liverpool but has fallen out of favour in recent months.

Real Madrid, Barcelona and Arsenal are all listed as being interested in Sterling.

Boss Guardiola stated in April that the likes of Sterling must do more to earn game time, particularly with Phil Foden continuing to break out.

He said: "He has to have [confidence], he has it from all of us because the quality is there.

"I cannot give the players confidence, they have to have it for themselves. For me, confidence is to select. This is the opposite.

"Raz has a lot of experience, what we've done these incredible years, with us breaking I don't know many records.

"In the future these will be broken but Raheem was key and was a key player. But at that moment Phil is playing really well and Riyad is playing really well. That is the only reason why and they know it."

Man Utd still in talks over Sancho transfer

Manchester United are still in talks to sign Borussia Dortmund star Jadon Sancho this summer, according to reports.

The Europa League finalists have been linked with the England winger for some time and are the bookies' favourites to sign him.

According to Sky Sports, 'United represents the most realistic destination' for Sancho this summer.

It is believed Dortmund will accept around £80million for the player, significantly less than their previously reported asking price of £108m.

The transfer fee is expected to be the biggest stumbling block, with personal terms between United and Sancho's representatives already rumoured to be agreed.

Dortmund are believed to have identified Lille's Jonathan Ikone and Monaco's Sofiane Diop as potential replacements for the Englishman.

Several top European clubs have been linked with Sancho, including Premier League giants Liverpool and Chelsea.

I can't wait to play my first game for Madrid - Alaba

David Alaba cannot wait to start life as a Real Madrid player after his signing was confirmed.

The Austrian, whose signing had been reported by MARCA back in January, has now officially been announced as a new Los Blancos player after Zinedine Zidane left the club and plenty more changes are expected.

"I leave one special club for another," Alaba said on Twitter after his signing was revealed. "I'm really happy to be part of Real Madrid.

"After so many years in Munich, I'll take on this new challenge and do my best to continue the history of this special club.

"I can't wait to play my first game in this legendary white shirt, in front of all of you, the Real Madrid fans. I'm convinced that this experience will be full of success."

Now, the defender will focus on the summer's European Championship with Austria before returning to the Spanish capital to be presented. Then, he'll have a quick holiday before joining the squad at Valdebebas in July.

Alaba made his debut in a DFB-Pokal meeting with Greuther Furth in February 2010, becoming the club's youngest player in history at the time and setting up a goal for Franck Ribery within a minute of coming on.

The Austrian was 17 years, seven months and 18 days old when he made his debut, but Jamal Musiala is now Bayern's youngest debutant.

Alaba has gone on to make 448 appearances for the Bavarian giants, scoring 35 goals and supplying 47 assists in all competitions.

He has won 27 trophies with Bayern, lifting the Bundesliga title 10 times and winning the Champions League twice – both of those European successes forming part of trebles.



those players that he has spoken with. Also Pochettino, who played

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UEFA TO ABOLISH AWAY GOALS RULE

The away goals rule is likely to become a thing of the past in European football, with UEFA set to abolish the tiebreaker used in the event of a draw in two-legged knockout ties.

UEFA's Club Commission have now passed the issue on to the Executive Committee, who are expected to confirm the removal of

the away goals rule.

A number of years ago, Diego Simeone requested in Nyon that the counting of away goals after extra time would be scrapped, as he felt it was an unfair deciding factor if one team has had 30 more minutes of playing away from home in which they can score.

Now, it seems likely that the away goals rule as a whole will be removed from the game.

The current rule has been in place since 1965, when it was considerably more complicated for teams to travel to away European fixtures and when clubs had more limited scouting networks.



Achraf close to 60 million euro PSG move

Achraf Hakimi's spell at Inter could be a short one, with the ex-Real Madrid star potentially on the move this summer.

Achraf was Inter's first signing last summer and could now be the first out the door following their Scudetto win.

Paris Saint-Germain have identified the 22-year-old as the ideal player to come in and make the right-back position his own at the Parc des Princes for the next decade plus.

Both clubs have been in contact for some time over the move, with PSG originally offering Leandro Paredes in the deal, but the Italian club rejected the idea, preferring to receive more money in an attempt to solve some of their financial issues.

According to Gazzetta dello Sport, PSG are in advanced talks with Inter over the transfer of Achraf, with reports suggesting the deal could cost around 60 million euros, while Corriere dello Sport say that it could be closer to 70 million euros.

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I WILL BE READY FOR EURO 2020- HAZARD



Eden Hazard is still having some thigh problems after missing much of Real Madrid's season, but will be there when the Euros start, he told a video press conference on Monday.

The midfielder said he was

not yet at 100 percent, but added "physically I still have to prepare myself and I obviously hope to be ready for the first game on 12 June."

Belgium, one of the favourites for the title, start Euro 2020 on June 12 against Russia in a

group that also includes Denmark and Finland.

Hazard arrived at the national training centre at Tubize on Monday, at the same time as most of his team-mates and, as captain, was the first to speak at the press conference.

"I missed the last game with Real because of a little discomfort in my thigh. Since then I have been able to rest for a week and mentally I am fine," he said.

"I'm going to be good again when I get my confidence back, and when my thigh and ankle don't hurt," he said. "I've had an unlucky season."

"I've always been a player who liked to play one match after another and that hasn't been the case. I still have many good years

ahead of me."

Injuries have kept him out of recent Belgian squads.

"I missed it," he said. "I am happy when I am on the pitch."

Hazard has struggled to contribute since joining Real for a reported 100 million euros (\$122 million) from Chelsea in 2019.

Since the end of a season in which Real finished second in La Liga and fell against Hazard's former club Chelsea in the Champions League semi-finals, coach Zinedine Zidane has quit.

Hazard said he was "very disappointed that Zidane is leaving."

"I spent two great seasons with him. I'm frustrated that I couldn't give him more," he said.

Hazard said he is not going to leave Real.

"I can't see myself anywhere else but Real Madrid," he said

"I have three years left on my contract at Real, we know that the first two years were complicated, but I want to continue to give the best of myself at Madrid."

Hazard was criticised by Spanish media for laughing and joking with former Chelsea team-mates Kurt Zouma and Edouard Mendy after the full-time whistle at Stamford Bridge where Madrid had just been eliminated from the Champions League.

"I didn't celebrate Chelsea's Champions League title against Manchester City on Saturday," he said. "I am a Real Madrid player."

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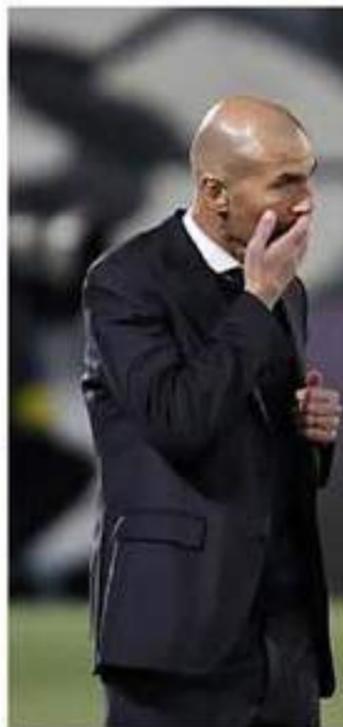
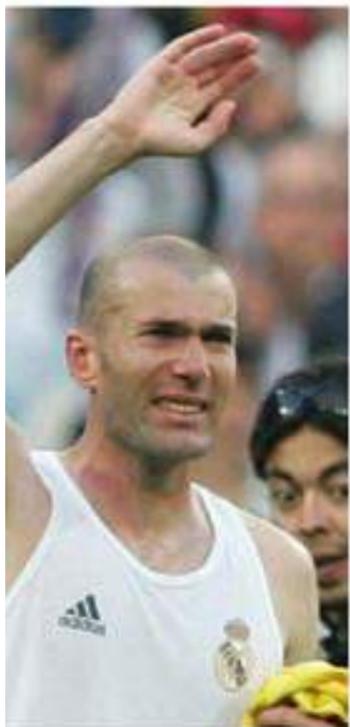


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ANALYSIS

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TOP FAVOURITES FOR REAL MADRID'S JOB



With Zinedine Zidane officially departed Los Blancos, the search for his replacement has begun. But unlike past seasons, this time it's a little complicated.

For the second time in three years, Real Madrid are searching for managerial replacement.

Real Madrid suffered a trophy-less season in 2020/21, watching on as rivals Atletico Madrid and Barcelona lifted the LaLiga and Copa del Rey titles respectively.

Football pundits believe Zidane's second departure is due to a strained relationship with Florentino Perez, with threats of sackings looming behind the scenes at various points last season.

Also, Real Madrid are an aging squad and they may not necessarily be in position to invest heavily given their precarious financial situation made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The club's gross debt is reportedly at \$1 billion and they didn't make any significant player acquisitions during the past season. Outside of Marco Asensio and Ferland Mendy, their most influential players are all in their 30s, and there is talk of a looming outgoing transfer of star French center back Raphael Varane.

Here are few candidates likely to

take Zidane's job.

Raul Gonzalez



Raul is certainly the most popular candidate for the Real Madrid job. The former striker scored 323 goals and played over 700 games for Los Blancos between 1994 and 2010 and is currently in charge of Real's second team, Castilla.

Raul has a decent record at that level, too, losing just 14 of his 53 games in charge.

But the 43-year-old is incredibly wet behind the ears when it comes to elite level management and that is likely to count against him this time around with Real Madrid needing to make up ground on their rivals both domestically and on the continent.



Mauricio Pochettino

Real Madrid's president reportedly made a move to lure the Argentine away from Tottenham Hotspur back in 2018, but the English club didn't play ball. And Paris Saint-Germain probably won't this time.

In the past, Pochettino has talked about managing Real Madrid being



a dream of his, but he's under contract with PSG for one more season until June of 2022.

Despite reports of a strained relationship with PSG sporting director Leonardo, it would not be a good look for the deep-pocketed

ty?

He was linked to Real Madrid in the past and the rumors won't go away as long as he's a free agent. Conte's uncompromising style would potentially be a great fit in a tough job, but given Real Madrid's



Parisian club to see a high-profile manager walk out on them just six months after hiring him.

Pochettino might be another backup option to Raul in 2022 should things not work out.

Pochettino is thought to be unhappy with the politics involved with a club like PSG and already, a departure from Paris looks on the cards.

Antonio Conte

Conte just left Inter Milan after winning the Serie A title because of the impending cost-cutting measures at the club. Why would he take a job at another club that is facing similar financial uncertain-

current predicament, it's unlikely he'd trade one cash-challenged club for another.

And based on the latest rumors, Tottenham Hotspur and the Premier League might be calling any minute.

A title winner in both Italy and England in recent years, it's easy to understand why Conte has quickly become the favourite to take the Real Madrid job. An obvious concern, however, is whether or not his tactical approach will fit the stylistic vision among Los Blancos board members. Even so, there aren't many more proven candidates out there right now, both employed and in the world of free agents

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WHAT NEXT AFTER A BOTCHED EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE?



After a season in which clubs have - like the rest of the world - battled with a pandemic, and 12 of them attempted to form a breakaway league, European football has some major hurdles to overcome.

On 8 June, eyes will turn forward as the preliminary-round draw is made for the 2021-22 Champions League.

Three of the Champions League's most illustrious names - Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus - are facing expulsion from the competition and even those who opposed the Super League concept the trio are clinging to accept that football's future is in peril if the present structure remains.

Here, BBC Sport looks at the differing arguments and why no one can be entirely certain what happens next.

Real, Barcelona and Juventus in cold

Nine of the 12 clubs who signed up to the ill-fated Super League project have

stepped back from the brink and admitted they were wrong. Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus have refused to follow suit.

Senior Uefa executives and other influential figures on the club scene are unsure of their reasons.

The word from those clubs is that they want to talk. A statement released on their behalf last week in response to being charged by Uefa ended with a warning: "Either we reform football or we will have to watch its inevitable downfall."

At present, it does not seem as though Uefa is in the mood for a chat.

European football's governing body says the disciplinary case brought against the three clubs around their Super League involvement is independent - and there is no timescale for a conclusion.

However, as no club from Spain or Italy is due to be involved in European competition until August - in the new European Conference League - it is felt any decision to kick the trio out of the 2021-22 Champions League could be made at quite a late stage of the summer.

More matches involving bigger clubs?

Speaking to a media conference on Friday, new Barcelona president Joan Laporta addressed the issues facing his club, which he admitted was more than 1bn Euros in debt.

"We are not a state," he said.

"We cannot just pick up the phone and say 'send us money'. We did a lot of things wrong. Disastrous decisions were taken. I am not saying big clubs are not partially responsible. But a lot of parties are at fault. Certain people are holding some cards in their hands and have an attitude where they don't think anything will happen.

"We will fight to defend our interests and decisions are made to make football more sustainable."

The general view among all the Super League clubs is that in order to be more sustainable, football needs to generate more revenue - and that can only come through more matches involving the most popular teams.



They never quite say it in these terms but argue Champions League games involving lesser clubs such as Ludogorets, BATE Borisov and Cluj have no appeal beyond their domestic audience and it is only matches featuring the bigger clubs that do.

The idea would be to generate more money and distribute more.

Those who reject this say the biggest clubs have chosen to pay too much to players and their agents and are responsible for their own financial woes. By creating a Super League, the argument goes, all that would happen is the gap between those clubs and the rest would get wider and interest would reduce.

The new Champions League reforms, agreed from 2024, include two 'wild-card' slots for the clubs with the highest co-efficient who qualified for either the Europa League or European Conference League to be moved into Europe's elite competition.

If it had been in operation this season, as would have been the case virtually every season two clubs from the biggest leagues would have benefitted - Roma and Tottenham.

It has been admitted the system was only agreed owing to intense pressure from the clubs likely to benefit, many of whom joined the Super League anyway and are currently outside the European Clubs' Association.

Although the actual process of changing the method of accessing the Champions League is complicated, BBC

Sport has been told there is unlikely to be any opposition to getting rid of the wild-card slots and those places could increase the number of qualifiers from the 'Champions Path' to widen the number of countries involved.

Is a greater spread of clubs the answer?

In the 26-man Belgium squad for Euro 2020, only two play their domestic football in the Belgian league, both for Bruges, champions for the last two seasons and three of the last four.

Poland's squad contained only four Polish-based players. The clubs where the other 22 play include Brighton, Norwich, Derby, Fortuna Dusseldorf, Chicago Fire and Benevento.

There is a fear in countries outside the top-five leagues that without homegrown international stars playing in the country, fans will get bored of watching a lesser standard of football and eventually not bother at all.

What they want is a wider spread of clubs being able to play in the major competitions, which they feel would stimulate domestic and international interest.

The glamour and elation and despair of Chelsea and Manchester City in Porto on Saturday night was a captivating spectacle.

But at the end of a difficult season, it is clear football's problems are far from over.

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