

Chelsea look to rise to the challenge of the FIFA Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi



- The Blues will look to emulate Manchester United and Liverpool by becoming world champions at Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium

ABU DHABI: It is hardly a surprise that the FIFA Club World Cup final is between the European and the South American champions, especially given the European domination of the competition in recent decades.

Chelsea are eyeing their first title against the Brazilian Palmeiras after failing to win the competition in their one previous final against another Brazilian team, Corinthians, in 2012 at Nissan Stadium in Japan.

English clubs have had a complicated history with this competition, and its previous incarnations, with many perhaps not giving it the importance that clubs from other continents — and other European teams — do.

Due to their participation in the Club World Cup, two Premier League matches have been postponed, something that many observers say could affect the club's fading title challenge and other domestic and European challenges this season.

English clubs have started to take this competition more seriously, and Chelsea will want to become only the third English team to win it, after Manchester United and Liverpool.

Those two clubs banished traditional complaints against the competition by winning their matches on their return to the Premier League and going on to win the title.

In 2019, Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool clinched the Club World Cup in Qatar after beating Brazil's Flamengo 1-0. At the time top of the Premier League table at the time, they returned home to stroll to title.

Manchester United were crowned world champions in 2008 after golden boy Wayne Rooney scored the only goal against the Ecuadorean League de Quito; though third in the table at the time, Alex Ferguson's team retained their Premier League title that season. The Club World Cup did not prove the distraction that some feared.

Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel will be hoping the trend continues with his European champions. The German does not want to make any particular competition a priority, as Chelsea compete on five fronts.

On Feb 27, the Blues take on Liverpool in the Carabao Cup final; they are third in the English Premier League, ten points behind leaders Manchester City with 14 games remaining; in the FA Cup they are through to the fifth round; and they face the French club Lille in the round of 16 of the Champions League - at Stamford Bridge on Feb. 22, and away in the return leg on March 16.

One way or the other, Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi will witness the coronation of a new champion on Saturday night. Palmeiras will look to carry on Brazil's fine tradition in the competition. Chelsea, the clear favorites, will hope their time has finally come to be crowned world champions.

The outcome of the semi-finals means that the final will not have an Arab presence. Al-Hilal lost 1-0 to Chelsea, despite a heroic performance, but will have shot at third place on Saturday when they take on Egypt's Al-Ahly, who lost the other semi-final to Palmeiras.
