

# Mbappe's rejection of Real Madrid gives Spanish football inferiority complex



- Days before Champions League final against Liverpool, new La Liga champs left reeling when French international opted to stay at Paris Saint-Germain
- Spanish game has lost some star attractions since departures of Cristiano Ronaldo from real Madrid, Lionel Messi from Barcelona

RIYADH: Real Madrid may be days away from another Champions League final, but it seems the biggest talking point at the club at the weekend was Kylian Mbappé's decision to stay at Paris Saint-Germain.

The Spanish giants, and their President Florentino Perez, simply do not take kindly to being rejected, and certainly not twice as the French World Cup winner has just done.

On Saturday, Mbappe confirmed he would stay on at Paris Saint-Germain instead of making a move that had been all but set in stone earlier in the week. His new contract will keep him in the French capital until 2025 and allegedly give him benefits and powers never before afforded to a professional footballer.

And it was not only in Madrid where the decision did not go down well.

In recent days, even Barcelona President Joan Laporte has criticized Mbappe's decision, calling players who signed long-term contracts for PSG "slaves to money."

But perhaps the most outraged reaction came from the president of La Liga, Javier Tebas, who questioned the French club's ability to pull off such a lucrative deal having incurred losses of \$750 million in recent seasons and with a salary bill of more than \$640 million. It was, he said, an "insult to football."

In short, the move has been seen as a slap in the face for La Liga and Spanish football.

La Liga, astonishingly, even filed complaints to UEFA and the EU against Paris Saint-Germain "in defense of the integrity of the economic system of European football."

In its statement, La Liga considered the actions of Nasser Al-Khelaifi, president of the Parisian club, "a danger to European football," and stressed that such deals threatened the economic sustainability of the game in Europe, putting hundreds of thousands of jobs and sporting integrity at risk in the medium term. The deal, it said, was a "complete scandal."

It is not hard to see where all the anger stems from. Since the departure of Cristiano Ronaldo from Real Madrid and, later, Lionel Messi from Barcelona, La Liga has lost some of its luster.

Mbappe's rejection of Real Madrid comes only weeks after Erling Haaland, also a target at the Bernabeu, signed for English Premier League champions Manchester City.

This has not been helped by Barcelona's marked decline and economic troubles, despite Xavi Hernandez bringing about a relative mood of positivity around his young team. And though Real Madrid have fared better, winning the league title this season, and reaching the Champions League final, at times they have seemed a shadow of the team that won three continental titles under Zinedine Zidane.

Signing Mbappe would have been Tebas' way of redressing the balance, Madrid once again becoming home to the world's best player.

That will not happen now.

Even should Real Madrid win the Champions League final in what is sure to be a heated confrontation with a wounded Liverpool, few can deny that in recent years the war quality of the squad at the club has waned, something that Perez was keen to address with other new signings.

There is a danger, however, that the world's best players are looking elsewhere. Spain, for so many years the ultimate destination, no longer has the same pull.

Never was this clearer than on Sunday night, when the whole world seemingly tuned in enthralled to the finale of the Premier League season.

They were not disappointed either, as the Etihad Stadium witnessed Pep Guardiola's Manchester City win the title after a remarkable five-minute spell saw them overrun a two-goal deficit against Aston Villa, while Liverpool kept the pressure on to the last with a 3-1 win against Wolves at Anfield.

The Premier League may be overhyped at times, but days like that make it hard to deny that it remains the strongest, most exciting, and most popular league in the world. In marketing speak, its product is unmatched.

That is what Tebas is up against.

The two Spanish giants will no doubt strengthen their squads in anticipation of another battle for supremacy next season, but El Classico may not be the draw it once was if players continue to head to the Premier League or Paris Saint-Germain.

For Perez, the announcement of Mbappe was a major step to establishing Real Madrid as Europe's prominent destination, regardless of the outcome of Saturday's final against Liverpool.

Now he has to start all over again.

Already there are reports of a deal with Aurelien Tchouameni of Monaco. Will Real Madrid compensate for the Mbappe deal by attempting to sign Mohamed Salah or Sadio Mane from their Champions League final opponents, or even Richarlison from Everton? And will Perez and the fans even be satisfied with any of these after having their heart set on Mbappe?

That such questions have preoccupied Spanish fans and officials ahead of European football's biggest game shows the extent to which they have been rattled.

A defeat for Real Madrid on Saturday, and Spanish football's recent sense of an inferiority complex might just grow even more.

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