

# Will Manchester United tolerate another week of underachievement?



- Coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer seems to have weathered the storm after the disastrous 5-0 loss to Liverpool last weekend. But for how long?

As Manchester United prepare to take on Tottenham on Saturday evening, it's no exaggeration to say this has been the worst week of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's managerial and playing career.

Club officials say there is a lack of belief in Solskjaer at the moment. Players don't recognize the manager's tactical acumen, and while he remains popular as a person, opinions about him as a coach have hardened.

While many fans expected him to be sacked after Liverpool humiliated their team 5-0 at Old Trafford last weekend, the board has continued to show faith in him. But for how long?

Manchester United have gone four league games without a win, leaving them seventh position, eight points behind leaders Chelsea, and seven behind Liverpool.

The Red Devils have already been eliminated from the Carabao Cup and needed late comebacks to win their last two home games in the Champions League after opening the group stage with a shock defeat to the Swiss club Young Boys.

The team is in turmoil at the moment, having conceded nine goals in their last two Premier League games — a 4-2 loss at Leicester City on October 16, followed by Liverpool's five the following weekend.

Solskjaer can't even say he hasn't been supported. Despite a string of big signings this season, including Raphael Varane (\$44 million from Real Madrid), Jadon Sancho (\$93 million from Borussia Dortmund) and Cristiano Ronaldo (\$16 million from Juventus), United have not noticeably improved this season, with even the victories being unconvincing.

Undoubtedly, United suffer from a lack of organization, especially in defence, and there are no clear patterns of play that show up in their attack sequences. In the absence of a clear and defined game plan, they attempt to solve problems during games through individual plays.

Beside the tactical problems, the relationship between players doesn't seem very good. Ronaldo appears to be getting frustrated with the decision of some teammates — particularly Mason Greenwood — for not providing goalscoring opportunities.

Defender Eric Bailly is said to have raised concerns about why Harry Maguire played against Leicester City, after just one practice session following three weeks out through injury — a game in which the returning captain performed poorly.

Donny van de Beek, Jesse Lingard and Nemanja Matic have been frozen out in favour of underperforming colleagues in their positions.

The lack of tactical coherence, clear game plans and rapport between last season's players and newcomers seems to be a problem for Solskjaer.

After finishing second in the Premier League last season (12 points behind Manchester City) and reaching the Europa League final, which was lost on penalties to Villarreal, the club surprised many by giving Solskjaer a new three-year contract that runs until 2024 with an extra season option.

Recent days have brought mostly silence from Old Trafford which usually means there's something going on behind the scenes, but unless there's a repeat of the debacle against Liverpool in the game against Tottenham, no immediate change is expected.

After Saturday's trip to Spurs, United travel to Bergamo on Tuesday for a vital Champions League match against Atalanta and then host Manchester City in the derby at Old Trafford four days later.

The game against City may be the key to any changes.

One of the leading candidates to replace Solskjaer is Antonio Conte. He has indicated a willingness to take over the role, but there are reservations on both sides of the negotiating table. The club insists no contact has yet been made, despite reports from Italy to the contrary.

The Italian, who won the Premier League with Chelsea in 2016-17 and led Internazionale to the Serie A title last season, would want total control at Old Trafford if he agreed to replace Solskjaer.

Conte usually refuses to take a job mid-season as it's harder to convey his tactics to what would typically be a struggling squad, but it is believed that for Manchester United he would make an exception.

Most likely, Solskjaer looks to be safe for another week at least, barring any disasters, with Conte's appointment likely at some point. We just don't know when.