Beat: Sports

Emery set for baptism of fire as Arsenal host Man City

SPORTS NEWS

LONDON, 09.08.2018, 18:35 Time

USPA NEWS - Arsenal fans heading to their clash with Manchester City on Sunday will do so with a sense of excitement and a little trepidation as new manager Unai Emery begins the post-Wenger era with the toughest of all opening matches.

Last season´s runaway champions provide the opposition at the Emirates Stadium as Arsenal begin a season without Frenchman Arsene Wenger in the dugout for the first time since 1996.
With his second league match away to London rivals Chelsea, former Sevilla and Paris St Germain coach Emery could hardly have a tougher start to his first campaign in England.

The Spaniard is not the only new manager hoping to make an instant impact in the capital.

The experienced Maurizio Sarri is the latest incumbent in the Chelsea hot seat having replaced Antonio Conte last month.

The Italian takes his side to Huddersfield Town on Saturday where Kepa Arrizabalaga, the world´s most expensive keeper at 71 million pounds ($91.43 million), is set to make his debut.

Liverpool, buoyant after a close-season spending spree, host equally busy West Ham United on Sunday.

Juergen Klopp´s side, bolstered by the likes of Brazil keeper Alisson from AS Roma, compatriot Fabinho and fellow midfielder Guinean Naby Keita, are the most likely to close the gap on City who won the title by 19 points last season.

DOWNBEAT MOURINHO
While optimism is growing at Anfield, the same cannot be said at last season´s runners-up Manchester United who kick off the new season on Friday at home to Leicester City with a squad that is under-cooked, according to manager Jose Mourinho.

The Portuguese coach has clearly been disappointed by the club´s close-season spending and has rued the fact that, like other top-flight clubs, many of his squad have had minimal preparation having had time off to recover from the World Cup.

“They return on Monday, train Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and today so you can imagine that they are not really fit and ready,“ he said, although he was happy that Chilean Alexis Sanchez was raring to go after a full pre-season.

Tottenham Hotspur, third last term, are heading into the new campaign with a gleaming new 62,000-seat stadium, which will be ready in Septemner, having not added a single player to their roster hours before the transfer window closed on Thursday.

Manager Mauricio Pochettino has remained outwardly calm about the lack of activity in the market despite calling on the club´s owners to take “˜risks´ at the end of last season.

His side will have a familiar look away to Newcastle United in Saturday´s early game.

A fourth successive top-four finish would represent a good outcome for Spurs, but they will be under pressure from Chelsea and Arsenal who finished fifth and sixth last year, while big-spending West Ham could push for a top-six finish.

Arsenal´s Emery will need to reverse a dreadful recent record for the club against City, however, if the new era in north London is not to start in disappointing fashion.

In the three matches between the two clubs last season, City won 9-1 on aggregate.

Arsenal have strengthened at the back though with German keeper Bernd Leno arriving from Bayer Leverkusen while former Juventus defender and Switzerland skipper Stephan Lichtsteiner and Greek Sokratis Papastathopoulos will add guile in defence.

Of the three promoted clubs, Fulham and Wolverhampton Wanderers look capable of flourishing in the top flight after strengthening but it could be a long haul for Cardiff City who mark their return away to Bournemouth on Saturday.

Fulham host Crystal Palace while Wolves face Everton.

($1 = 0.7765 pounds)

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Article online:
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Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Martyn Herman

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