

Liverpool flip script on Man City to take commanding Premier League lead

Liverpool (AFP) – Liverpool have been used to second best during Pep Guardiola's era at Manchester City, but a 2-0 victory over the crisis-hit champions left little doubt over who are the team to beat in this season's Premier League title race.

Goals in either half from Cody Gakpo and Mohamed Salah at Anfield on Sunday did not do justice to the scale of the Reds' domination as City succumbed to a sixth defeat in a seven-game winless run.

Arsenal and Chelsea are now Liverpool's closest challengers, nine points behind, with City 11 back and almost certain to finally lose their grip on the English top flight after an unprecedented four consecutive titles and six in the past seven seasons.

Pep Guardiola reminded Liverpool fans of his six Premier League titles © Adrian Dennis / AFP

Guardiola reminded the Anfield crowd of that fact by raising six fingers when taunted with chants of “sacked in the morning”.

The Catalan’s defiance, though, could not mask the fact that City have rested on their laurels, while Liverpool have stepped up a level under Arne Slot.

Slot appeared to have the impossible job of succeeding the much-loved Jurgen Klopp.

The charismatic German brought Liverpool back to the top of English and European football. His title triumph in 2019/2020 was the club's first for 30 years and the only blot on City's dominance in recent times.

In contrast to Alex Ferguson's departure from Manchester United and Arsene Wenger's exit at Arsenal, Liverpool have turned a legendary figure leaving into a positive.

Klopp did much of the groundwork himself, rejuvenating the squad over his final 18 months in charge with the signings of Gakpo, Alexis Mac Allister, Dominik Szoboszlai and Ryan Gravenberch.

Slot's only summer signing, Federico Chiesa, has barely featured due to injury.

But the injection of fresh blood, mixed with the experience of title winners in the prolific Salah, captain Virgil van Dijk, Andy Robertson and Trent Alexander-Arnold has proved a winning combination.

Slot has been keen to give Klopp's legacy credit, but the Dutchman deserves his due for the small details that have produced a run of 18 wins from his first 20 games in all competitions.

'A great day'



Arne Slot has won 18 of his first 20 games as Liverpool manager © Adrian Dennis / AFP

Robertson and Alexander-Arnold's narrower positions have left Liverpool less vulnerable in transition and contributed to them having the best defensive record in the league.

Gravenberch has shone since being transformed into a holding midfielder, while Gakpo is finally delivering on his potential under his compatriot.

Slot has also managed to keep Liverpool's momentum rolling despite constant speculation over the futures of Salah, Van Dijk and Alexander-Arnold, all of whom are out of contract at the end of the season.

"City are a fantastic team, four times champions in a row and they have quality to punish any team," said Van Dijk. "So, overall, it has been a great day.

"It's game-by-game and stay calm. But games like this, when you win it like this, is always a good feeling."

It is not just the Premier League that Slot has so far bent to his will.

Liverpool are also top of the Champions League with a perfect record from five games, including a memorable 2-0 win over Real Madrid on Wednesday.

Victory over City capped a dream week, but the former Feyenoord boss was still keen to use the English and European champions as the benchmark for his side's aspirations.

"Real Madrid and Manchester City have been and are so good, with managers that have won so many trophies, so it is always nice to come out of those situations as a winner," added Slot.

"But they were able to win every single three days. We understand what we want to achieve is more than this winning once or twice, even against these big teams, if you want to win big things."

December may only be a day old, but already it is hard to see beyond Liverpool matching Manchester United's record tally for 20 English top-flight titles come May.

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