Slot eyes first Liverpool trophy against Newcastle in League Cup final

AFP- Liverpool can win the first trophy of the Arne Slot era in Sunday's League Cup final against a Newcastle side desperate to end the club's 56-year wait for major silverware.

In the first final of the English domestic season, runaway Premier League leaders Liverpool head to Wembley aiming to erase the bitter taste of their Champions League exit against Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday.

The Reds were beaten 4-1 on penalties by PSG in the last 16 second leg at Anfield.

It was a rare blow in what has been a successful first season in charge for Slot, who arrived from Feyenoord to succeed Jurgen Klopp last year.

Sitting 15 points clear at the top of the Premier League, the Reds are within touching distance of a record-equalling 20th English title and their first since 2020.

That will be the culmination of Slot's seamless transition to life with Liverpool.

But first the Dutchman has his sights set on putting yet another League Cup in the Anfield trophy cabinet.

Liverpool, who beat Chelsea in last season's final, have won the League Cup a record 10 times and are looking to lift the trophy for a third time in four years.

"You play games like this to win it, and that's what we're going to try to do," said Slot, who will be without injured right-back Trent Alexander-Arnold.

“We’re really looking forward to it because you cannot take a final for granted, especially not in this country with so many good teams.”

Slot, who will be making his first ever visit to Wembley, hopes Liverpool can recover quickly from having their treble bid shattered by PSG.

“It’s a great occasion to be in and especially after losing against Paris Saint-Germain. It’s maybe the perfect game,” he said.

– ‘Chance to make history’ –

Aside from a brief period when Kevin Keegan’s team challenged for the title in the 1990s, Newcastle have endured decades of underachievement and self-inflicted wounds that rendered them a laughing stock for long periods.

All that changed in 2021 when a Saudi-backed consortium completed a takeover from unpopular owner Mike Ashley and quickly made the decision to hire Eddie Howe as their manager.

Newcastle have been transformed from relegation candidates to contenders for silverware, with a Champions League appearance in 2023-24 underlining their revival.

However, Newcastle are still waiting to win their first major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup – the predecessor to the Europa League.

The Magpies’ last significant domestic prize was the 1955 FA Cup and they have lost a combined five finals in that competition and the League Cup since then.

They have never won the League Cup, most recently losing the 2023 final against Manchester United.

Since the Magpies lifted the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, 30 different English teams have won silverware, while Liverpool

have clinched 38 major trophies in that time, including an FA Cup final success against Newcastle in the clubs' last showpiece meeting in 1974.

With the weight of history against them, Howe has urged his players to embrace the chance to become Newcastle legends by ending their trophy drought.

"We want to break that wait for a trophy. It's not a negative, he said.

"We're trying to look at it the other way round, it's the chance to make history and be remembered positively."

Liverpool eased to a 2-0 win in their most recent Premier League clash with Newcastle in February.

And the Magpies' task is made even harder by the absence of suspended England forward Anthony Gordon and injured defenders Lewis Hall, Sven Botman and Jamaal Lascelles.

But Howe is confident Newcastle will not freeze in front of a sell-out crowd and a television audience of millions around the world.

"We've stayed competitive, in the main, in big games," he said. "Our style, we have adaptability, but also we have a clear method."

AFP