Mbappe leading Real Madrid comeback charge against Arsenal

AFP- Kylian Mbappe joined Real Madrid in search of Champions League glory, hoping to be on the right side of exactly the kind of magical night they need against Arsenal on Wednesday if they are to progress to the semi-finals.

The Gunners lead 3-0 after dismantling the holders in London last week in the quarter-final first leg, leaving Madrid craving the sort of dramatic comeback the 15-time winners are renowned for.

Returning from a three-goal defeat would be step further than anything Los Blancos have managed so far, but that is precisely why they tried to lure Mbappe to the club for years.

The French superstar's explosive edge gives Madrid hope of achieving what appears to be borderline impossible.

"Of course we can," said Mbappe on his way out of the Emirates last Tuesday, heading to the team bus after Arsenal's stunning victory.

Declan Rice struck two sublime free-kicks and Mikel Merino's third helped Mikel Arteta's side put one foot in the final four.

Arsenal will be fully aware the job is not yet complete, having seen Mbappe's devastating impact against Premier League champions Manchester City earlier this season.

Mbappe netted a hat-trick against Pep Guardiola's side in February at the Santiago Bernabeu in the play-off round, helping Madrid eliminate City 6-3 on aggregate.

The striker was sent off for a wild challenge against Alaves in La Liga on Sunday, putting his team-mates under pressure, but can make it up to them with a special performance at the Santiago Bernabeu against Arsenal.

Madrid scraped a 1-0 win and Mbappe only played 38 minutes before his dismissal, so he should be fresh for Wednesday.

Mbappe has 33 goals in 49 games across all competitions this season, matching Madrid's all-time top goalscorer Cristiano Ronaldo's tally in his first season at the club.

– 'Big night' –

Mbappe failed to lift the Champions League trophy with Paris Saint-Germain during his seven seasons at the club and in 2022, was on the sharp end of a spectacular Real Madrid comeback.

PSG led 1-0 from the last 16 first leg, with Mbappe on target, and he netted his second goal of the tie to give the French side the lead at the Bernabeu.

It sparked Real Madrid into life and a remarkable 17-minute Karim Benzema hat-trick turned the tie around and powered Los Blancos into the quarter-finals, on the way to lifting the trophy.

Mbappe said his treble against Man City was exactly the kind of night he was craving.

"I've been dreaming of moments like this since I was a kid, to play for this club and to feel what it's like on a big night at the Bernabeu," said the Frenchman.

"A lot of people have told me about it, but now I've seen it with my own eyes, and I hope we'll have many more."

In 2022 Madrid made a stunning comeback to beat Man City despite trailing 5-3 on aggregate in the final minutes of the

semi-final second leg, progressing 6-5 in the end.

Perhaps their most important comeback came in the 2014 final against rivals Atletico, trailing 1-0 until Sergio Ramos headed home in the 93rd minute to force extra-time, with Los Blancos winning 4-1 to claim ‘La Decima’, their 10th Champions League trophy.

They also overcame a 2-0 quarter-final first leg deficit against Wolfsburg in 2016, winning the second leg 3-0 with a Ronaldo hat-trick.

Mbappe would dearly love to emulate the Portuguese forward’s feat against Arsenal.

“At the Santiago Bernabeu, comebacks are always on everyone’s lips,” said Ronaldo.

Madrid and comebacks have been synonomous since the 1980s when winger Juanito was involved in several, including the UEFA Cup semi-finals in 1985.

“90 minutes at the Bernabeu is a long time,” he warned Inter Milan after the hosts won the first leg 2-0 in Italy, with Madrid going on to triumph 3-0 on their way to glory.

Mbappe came to Madrid to add to their rich history and Arsenal’s visit presents the ideal opportunity.

“We have to believe, we have to have confidence,” said coach Carlo Ancelotti last week. “Because sometimes, quite often at the Bernabeu, it happens.”

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