

# Win or bust in Europa League for Amorim's Man Utd

AFP- Ruben Amorim has bet the house on the Europa League after Manchester United's disastrous Premier League campaign, knowing this season and next hinge on winning the competition.

The Portuguese manager took over from the sacked Erik ten Hag in November, with United a miserable 13th in the table. Now they are 14th.

That the former Sporting Lisbon boss is not under more intense pressure is largely due to a general appreciation of the scale of the task he faces at Old Trafford.

United, so dominant domestically under former manager Alex Ferguson, will finish the season with their lowest points tally in the Premier League era.

But Amorim's team can still rescue their campaign with victory in the Europa League, which brings with it a place in next season's Champions League.

A return to Europe's top club competition could transform the future of United in the short term, boosting the coffers and making Old Trafford a more attractive destination for much-needed new recruits.

But United face a tough task in the semi-finals against Athletic Bilbao, fourth in La Liga, who have the added incentive of knowing the final will be held at their stadium.

"San Mames will roar. We want to keep this dream alive," Bilbao tweeted this week ahead of Thursday's first leg in the Basque Country.

The winners of the tie will face either troubled Tottenham or Norwegian champions Bodo/Glimt in the final.

– Lyon comeback –

United produced a comeback for the ages to see off Lyon in the quarter-finals, scoring three times in seven minutes in front of a disbelieving Old Trafford crowd.

But they have since returned to type, losing to Wolves and drawing at Bournemouth in the Premier League as Liverpool equalled their record of 20 English top-flight titles.

Amorim, 40, admits winning the Europa League would be a huge shot in the arm for his struggling side.

“In this context, winning something like that is massive for us for our confidence – and then, to the future, to the next season,” he said.

“To play in the Champions League (makes the situation) completely different. The environment, the way we are going to face the summer, the budget for the summer – everything is connected with this competition.”

Bizarrely, despite their appalling Premier League form, United are the only team unbeaten in the Champions League and Europa League this season.

The Red Devils were in complete control of the second leg of their quarter-final against Lyon at Old Trafford before familiar frailties returned to haunt them.

They pulled off a miracle to win the second leg 5-4 to seal the tie 7-6 on aggregate but Amorim will know that lightning is unlikely to strike twice and his side must impose themselves.

One plus for United is that Rasmus Hojlund scored just his second Premier League goal since early December in a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth on Sunday.

Captain Bruno Fernandes, United’s top-scorer with 17 goals in

all competitions this season, said he hoped that the goal would give the Denmark striker confidence.

“Everyone that plays here who has the qualities to get into the box to score goals has to do it,” he told MUTV.

“Everyone is very happy to see a striker scoring and hopefully it’s going to give him a little bit of a push for what’s coming.”

AFP