

Arsenal must 'stick together' in PSG showdown: Odegaard

AFP :: Martin Odegaard has urged Arsenal to "stick together" after their recent failures as they aim to defy the odds in Wednesday's decisive Champions League semi-final showdown with Paris Saint-Germain.

The Gunners head to the Parc des Princes faced with the daunting task of having to beat the French champions to reach the Champions League final for the second time in their history.

Mikel Arteta's side trail 1-0 from the first leg after Ousmane Dembele's winner in north London.

PSG have already eliminated Premier League champions Liverpool in the last 16 and Aston Villa in the quarter-finals, after beating Manchester City in the group phase.

Arsenal, who have never won the Champions League, are on the brink of becoming PSG's latest English scalp this season after a disappointing first leg that could have ended in a heavier defeat.

Their preparations for the second leg in Paris couldn't have gone much worse as they slumped to a 2-1 home defeat against Bournemouth in the Premier League on Saturday.

Arteta said Arsenal were full of "rage and anger" after two painful losses.

But Gunners captain Odegaard said they can use those emotions as fuel to inspire an epic victory over PSG – as long as there are no recriminations over the badly-timed slump.

"We're disappointed now, but we have to move on and be strong and stick together and prepare for a massive game," Odegaard

said.

“It’s a massive game. That’s the good thing. When you’re disappointed now and you’re angry and frustrated, you can use all those emotions into Wednesday.

“We know what we’re playing for. We have to stick together and create energy and be ready.”

Arteta’s decision to make just two changes against Bournemouth raised eyebrows as he risked the fitness of his key players.

Only Jurrien Timber and Mikel Merino did not face the Cherries, with Arteta revealing the Dutch defender faces a fitness test before his availability for the PSG clash is decided.

– ‘A massive performance’ –

Second-placed Arsenal still need two wins from their last three league games to secure qualification for next season’s Champions League.

But it is the current edition of the tournament that has Arsenal’s attention for now.

After finishing as Premier League runners-up to Manchester City for the previous two seasons, Arsenal’s failure to win a first title since 2004 weighs heavily on Arteta and his players.

Injuries and inconsistent form from their forwards stopped Arsenal keeping pace with champions Liverpool.

Without a trophy since winning the 2020 FA Cup, Arteta is desperate to turn Arsenal’s undoubted quality into the tangible reward of silverware.

Arsenal eliminated holders Real Madrid in this season’s Champions League quarter-final with a superb 5-1 aggregate

triumph.

But the north Londoners' European history is littered with disappointment.

Arsenal's last European trophy came when Alan Smith scored the winner against Parma in the 1994 Cup Winners' Cup final.

Arsene Wenger's reign brought countless trophies, but their two European finals under the Frenchman ended in defeat to Galatasaray in the 2000 UEFA Cup and against Barcelona in the 2006 Champions League.

Arsenal also lost the 2019 Europa League final to Chelsea in Unai Emery's brief spell in charge.

It is that 1994 Cup Winners' Cup success for George Graham's men that Arsenal hope will prove a good omen for Wednesday's game.

The Gunners were underdogs in the semi-final 31 years ago against a PSG side featuring George Weah and David Ginola, but emerged with a 2-1 aggregate victory.

If Arsenal can overturn the deficit against the current PSG generation, it will go down as one of the greatest results in the club's history.

Arteta's rallying cry left no doubt about what is at stake.

"What we have created now is a lot of rage, anger, frustration and a bad feeling in the tummy," he said.

"So make sure we use that for Wednesday to have a massive performance in Paris, win the game and be in the final."

AFP