

Season starts with a cracker

Strengthened City, Liverpool do battle in Community Shield

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THE English football season gets underway with the Community Shield at the King Power Stadium today, pitting Premier League champions Manchester City against FA Cup winners Liverpool.

These are the two best teams in British football, and maybe in the world too. Thus, when they clash in Leicester today, there will be a lot more needle in the fixture, than just another workout in preparation for the start of the league championship next week.

From a neutralist's perspective, there will be even more than that, if only because of the talent laden in both sides.

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They definitely have the star attraction from last season – Kevin De Bruyne, who was recognised for another outstanding campaign with the Premier League's Player of the Year award.

There have been several comings and goings in both camps, but it is those who have been brought in that really excite the clubs' fans, football fans in general and everyone else in between.

Only these two teams have won the league title in the last five years, demonstrating their dominance of the domestic game, and they

look to extend that run – who will it be is another story.

When you consider City's four League Cup wins, besides their four league titles and an FA Cup, over that same period, and Liverpool's League Cup alongside the FA Cup last season, and their triumphs in the Champions League and FIFA Club World Cup, it is no wonder why they have been heavily tipped to do well again this season.

In the key transfers for City, Norwegian centre forward Erling Haaland and Argentine winger-striker Julian Alvarez's arrival at the Etihad looks like business well done.

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New Liverpool signing Darwin Nunez should be one to watch at the King Power Stadium today.
— Reuters

It is quite likely that the departures of Raheem Sterling to Chelsea and Gabriel Jesus to Arsenal will have no ill effects on a squad that is the envy of many.

The Citizens have also brought in Englishman Kalvin Phillips and German goalkeeper Stefan Ortega.

The Anfield club let Sadio Mane go to Bayern Munich in what some thought was a big surprise, and then signed forward Darwin Nunez, along with attacking Portuguese midfielder Fabio Carvalho and teenage Scottish right-back Calvin Ramsay.

These lads, and all those who they will play alongside, should make for some interesting football this season.

We'll get a sample of that from the King Power today, where it is not expected that Guardiola and Jurgen Klopp will start with their strongest first XIs.

Indeed, there should be quite a bit of substituting done over the course of England's curtain-raiser, as the sides put the finishing touches to their off-season preparations.

When the spotlight is turned on, it will be Haaland and Nunez who will come into sharp focus, and why not? They are the biggest stories of the off season.

Lisandro Martinez, who joined Manchester United from Ajax in mid-week, got the Red Devils all excited, but it's not nearly as big a transfer – in terms of quality – as Haaland and Nunez.

Haaland, 22, is not fully fit yet, but he said earlier this week that he was looking forward to the Community Shield clash and link-

ing up with talented England international midfielder Jack Grealish.

Haaland's main assets are his athleticism and speed, and he is as good as any in the world right now with his finishing in the box.

In his first game for City, against Bayern on the trip to the United States, he scored his first goal after just 12 minutes.

In the English champions' other game across the Atlantic, De Bruyne gave notice that he remained a deadly threat and one to watch from the get-go this season.

The Belgian ace scored both goals in a 2-1 win over Club America.

Nunez started life with Liverpool by hammering home four goals in a 5-0 drubbing of RB Leipzig.

Liverpool paid a club record £64mil (RM346mil) for the 23-year-old Uruguayan, and Klopp believes he will deliver if given the service and support upfront.

The Reds' No 27 really looks the part and if he can hit the ground running like Luis Diaz did when the Colombian winger signed in January, then Liverpool might well have a more potent front-three than they did when Mane was in the side.

The other two stalwarts are Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah, the Football Writers Association Player of the Year.

The Reds also saw off Crystal Palace in Singapore after going down to Man United in Thailand in their first game on tour in the off season.

Their fourth and final match before today was a narrow 1-0 defeat they suffered at the hands of Red Bull Salzburg in midweek.

Klopp is expected to field a side stronger than the one he started



City's Erling Haaland will be keen to make a fast start to his career in England. — AFP

with against Salzburg, and if he does, Fabinho should get the nod to run things in the midfield. The likes of Virgil van Dijk should also figure in the side.

The fans will also be keen to see City's Bernardo Silva in action, along with Phil Foden, Riyad Mahrez, Joao Cancelo, Ruben Dias and Ederson.

All in all, it's just good to have the football starting up again, and we could not have asked for two better teams in the Community Shield — there aren't any others. They are the cream of the crop.