

Judgement Day For Manchester City's Golden Era As Long-Awaited Hearing Begins

Manchester City have been an unstoppable force in English football of late, but now face the challenge of clearing the club's name against accusations their dominance is built on foundations of financial impropriety. Six years after a Premier League investigation began and 19 months on from 115 charges being levelled against the English champions, a hearing that will decide City's fate begins on Monday. An independent panel is expected to hear evidence for at least two months and with a verdict unlikely until well into 2025 for what has been dubbed British sports' "trial of the century."

AFP Sport looks at what City are accused of and the massive stakes at play for English football.

What are City accused of? Since a 2008 takeover from Sheikh Mansour, a member of the United Arab Emirates royal family, City have been transformed from also-rans into the Premier League's dominant force.

Eight of the club's 10 league titles have come in the last 13 seasons, plus a first and only Champions League in 2023.

However, they stand accused of bending financial rules to their will while



on the rise to their current status.

Of the 115 charges, 80 are for breaches of the regulations between 2009 and 2018, while a further 35 relate to failing to cooperate with the Premier League's investigation. The root of suspicion comes from leaked documents published by German outlet Der Spiegel back in 2018.

Emails purportedly sent between top City executives showed the club had inflated

sponsorship revenue from Abu Dhabi state-controlled airline Etihad and telecoms firm Etisalat by disguising direct investment from Mansour's Abu Dhabi United Group as income.

Other documents claimed to show off-the-books payments to then manager Roberto Mancini via consultancy fees from a club in Abu Dhabi.

City responded to the allegations denying any wrongdoing and insisting

there is a "comprehensive body of irrefutable evidence" to prove so.

And they have already defended their position in one case after overturning a two-year ban from the Champions League by UEFA at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in 2020. CAS found most of alleged breaches of overstating sponsorship revenue were either not established or "time-barred" because they fell outside the five-

year statutory limit for prosecution.

But no such time limitation clause exists in the Premier League case.

What are the repercussions?

If found guilty on some or all of the charges, City face a severe points deduction and possibly even expulsion from the Premier League.

Everton and Nottingham Forest were both hit by points deductions last season for single breaches of

profit and sustainability rules.

A guilty verdict could also bring to an end Pep Guardiola's glorious reign at the Etihad.

The City manager, who is into the final year of his contract, has steadfastly backed his superiors but previously said he would walk if they had not been honest with him.

"If you lie to me, the day after I am not here," said Guardiola in 2022.

Severe sanctions would also raise doubts over the future of City's cast of star players, including prolific striker Erling Haaland.

And other clubs could make a claim for titles to be stripped and compensation if City gained an unfair advantage by nefarious means. Yet, there is also plenty at play for the Premier League no matter the outcome.

If City lose their case, an entire era -- at a time when the English top-flight enjoys global prominence over its European rivals -- becomes mired in scandal.

On the other hand, should City prove their innocence, the Premier League stand accused of being a soft touch and outmanoeuvred by the deep pockets of state-backed clubs.

Manu Bhaker sends special message to Neeraj Chopra after javelin thrower reveals he played with hand fracture



Neeraj Chopra brought an end to his 2024 season with a second-place finish at the Brussels Diamond League. The 2020 Olympic gold medalist missed out on the top spot by a mere 1 centimetre, finishing with the highest throw of 87.86m. Despite not reaching his peak performance, Neeraj showed tremendous determination by competing in Brussels with a fractured left hand, an injury that he revealed in a heartfelt social media post.

In his post, Neeraj reflected on the lessons he had learned throughout the year and acknowledged that while the season may not have been as fulfilling as he had hoped, it was full of important takeaways that would aid his growth as an athlete.

Neeraj chose to compete through the pain in the final, showing once again the level of commitment similar to the one during Paris Olympics, where he also battled an injury to win a silver medal.

Neeraj's message didn't go unnoticed. Indian shooter Manu Bhaker, who had won a bronze at the Paris Olympics, penned a supportive note for the javelin thrower. Manu congratulated Neeraj on his perseverance and the season he had in 2024, even if it wasn't his best. She also wished him a speedy recovery.

While Neeraj boasts a stellar CV that includes two Olympic medals, multiple Diamond League titles and the world champion title, one of the key highlights of Neeraj's career so far has been his relentless pursuit of the 90-meter mark in javelin throw. It remains a milestone that has eluded him, and while he had hoped to breach that barrier this year, the season's challenges made it difficult to achieve.

In the Paris Olympics, Neeraj achieved the highest throw of 89.45, which was also his only valid throw. While it was enough to win him a silver medal, Neeraj will be aiming to breach the mark next year.

Argentina legend drops huge 2026 FIFA World Cup prediction for Lionel Messi: 'And I have no doubt...'



Lionel Messi was back in action on Sunday, and scored a brace in Inter Miami's 3-1 win vs Philadelphia Union. Before this match, the attacker was on the sidelines, having sustained an ankle injury during Argentina's win against Colombia in the Copa America final, on July 14.

With Argentina set to defend their FIFA World Cup title in 2026, many fans

have been left wondering about the former Barcelona star's availability, as he is already 37-years-old. Messi's former teammate and Argentina legend Juan Roman Riquelme feels that the Inter Miami star will feature in the tournament in 2026.

Speaking on AZZ channel, he said, "Messi is reinventing himself. You never know what he can do. And I

have no doubt that he will play in the next World Cup, he has to play. We will all be rooting for him to play. I don't tease him too much, but we talk a lot. That's why I think he's going to play. He's very good, it's something that's not normal. And to that, he adds that he really likes to compete. He's won a lot and he still wants to keep winning."

On Sunday, Philadelphia opened the scoring in the second minute via Mikael Uhre. Messi led his side's comeback with a brace. In the 26th-minute, Messi received a pass from Luis Suarez, went past a defender and then drove it inside the left post to make it 1-1.

Then four minutes later, Messi received a cross and scored past the goalkeeper with a shot from 15 yards, to make it 2-1. In stoppage time of the second half, Messi found Suarez, who made it 3-1.

Which Diwali release are you most excited to catch in theatres?

Speaking ahead of the match, Messi said, "A little bit tired because of the heat and humidity of Miami but I wanted to return so much after such a long time away."

"I started training with the group and began to feel better."

Chess Olympiad: Indian men defeat Azerbaijan, women beat Kazakhstan



Arjun Erigaisi showed immense calm and composure as he registered his fifth-straight win, beating world No. 4 Rauf Mamedov. On Sunday, India bagged wins in the fifth round of the Chess Olympiad in Budapest, with the men's team beating Azerbaijan 3-1. Meanwhile, the women's team defeated Kazakhstan 2.5-1.5. R Vaishali registered a key win on the second board, defeating Meruert Kamalidenova. Meanwhile, Divya Deshmukh was held by Xeniya Balabayava on the third board. It was also Divya's first draw after winning four games in a row. Vantika Agarwal beat Alua Nurman on the fourth

board. The men's team kept their unbeaten record intact, with no player losing a match yet. Arjun, India's highest-ranked player, beat Mamedov on the third board.

On the top board, D Gukesh sealed a win vs Aydin Suleymanli. On the second, R Praggnandhaa had to share honours with Nijat Abasov, and even Vidit Gujrathi drew to Shakhriyar Mamedyarov.

The ongoing Chess Olympiad has just not been about India's results, it has also showcased their potential in their round five win against Azerbaijan. Gukesh said, "We have a nice mood in the team, and we're having fun."

Britain fail to reach Davis Cup Finals last eight after losing to Canada

Britain failed to qualify for the last eight of the Davis Cup Finals after losing to Canada 2-1 in its last group-stage tie, while Novak Djokovic helped Serbia secure a place in next year's qualifiers.

The British needed a 3-0 win against the Canadians in Manchester, but Dan Evans lost 6-0, 7-5 to Denis Shapovalov to end Britain's hopes in the opening match in front of a crowd of 15,700 at the AO Arena, the biggest for a Davis Cup tie on British soil, according to organizers.

Felix Auger-Aliassime then defeated Jack Draper 7-6 (8), 7-5 to seal Canada's victory and first place in Group D. England won the final doubles match.

Evans hinted this may have been his last Davis Cup appearance. "I've probably had my fair share now. It could be and probably will be (the end)," he said. "I need to have a think. If I don't feel capable of playing, I won't come back."

Canada and Argentina advanced from Group D. Finland was the other team eliminated.

Four groups have been playing in four cities to qualify for the eight-team Finals in Malaga, Spain, in November. The top two in



each four-team group advance.

In Valencia, Spain defeated Australia 2-1 to win Group B with both having already qualified. France and the Czech Republic were eliminated.

In Bologna, the Netherlands won the closing doubles match to clinch its spot in the Finals despite a 2-1 loss to Italy in Group A. The Dutch needed a single win to advance but had lost the first two matches.

The decisive win came with Wesley Koolhof and Botić van de Zandschulp defeating Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori 7-6 (6), 7-5.

Brazil would have advanced had the Netherlands lost 3-0 to group-winner Italy. Belgium had already been eliminated.

In Group C, Chile beat Slovakia in a match in Zhuhai, China between

already eliminated nations. The United States and Germany had advanced from the group.

Djokovic wins again. Djokovic led Serbia to a 3-1 win over Greece in a World Group I tie in Belgrade. The Olympic champion partnered Hamad Medjedovic to a 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 win over Aristotelis Thanos and Petros Tsitsipas.

Djokovic beat Ioannis Xilas 6-0, 6-1 in the singles on Saturday.

Berdych to captain Czechs. Former world No. 4 and two-time Davis Cup champion Tomas Berdych will take over the captaincy from Jaroslav Navratil for the Czech Republic.

Navratil captained the Czechs for nearly two decades, including when it won the 2012 and 2013 titles with Berdych as a player.

Kylian Mbappe Bolstering Holders Real Madrid's Champions League Ambitions



The format may be new, but few would bet against the winner staying the same. As if record 15-time winners Real Madrid's Champions League prospects were not great enough already, superstar striker Kylian Mbappe's arrival makes Los Blancos the most daunting team in the competition. German side Stuttgart have the honours of facing the reigning kings of Europe in the opening week of the competition, travelling to the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday. Madrid defeated Borussia Dortmund in last season's Wembley final to claim the trophy for the sixth time in the last 11 years.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti, the most decorated manager in the history of the tournament with five triumphs, has not yet found the perfect set-up to get Mbappe firing from open play, but few doubt he will.

The 25-year-old had

arguably his best game for the club in the 2-0 win over Real Sociedad on Saturday in La Liga, threatening the Basque side with his pace and connecting well with Vinićius Junior in attack.

Mbappe scored, albeit from the penalty spot, and he is looking forward to his Champions League debut in Madrid's resplendent white.

"It will be very important for me -- as I said on the first day, I came to Madrid to live these type of nights," explained the striker.

"I am very focused on what we have to do, the Champions League has changed a lot, it's a new competition, and we have to win to start well."

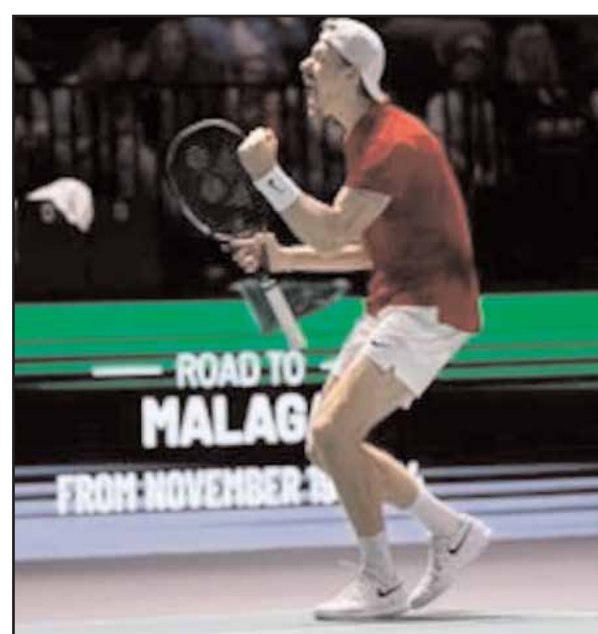
The new-look structure has thrown up ties for Madrid at home against Dortmund, in a rematch of last season's showpiece, and away at Liverpool, whom they defeated in the 2022 final.

Denis Shapovalov Enjoys Davis Cup Redemption, Sends Canada Into Finals

Denis Shapovalov let out a roar of delight as he sealed 2022 champions Canada's place in this year's Davis Cup finals on Sunday beating Britain's Dan Evans 6-0, 7-5 -- redemption for the last time he faced the same opponents. Back in 2017 Shapovalov's wild hitting of a ball in frustration hit the umpire leading to him being defaulted and Britain awarded the tie as a result 3-2. The 25-year-old made no such slip-up on Sunday as he won the opening rubber and ensured the Canadians and not Britain would be joining Argentina as the two countries to progress from the group in Manchester, England.

The Israel-born Shapovalov, who has slipped to 100 in the world having once been as high as 10th, admitted having cruised through the first set it was tough to keep the momentum going.

"Very happy to get the win, he's a tricky opponent and he fights so well," said Shapovalov who managed to silence



the partisan 15,700 crowd.

"He was clawing his way back in the second set. I haven't played a cleaner first set than that in my life so super happy to get the win.

"I could feel Dan getting pumped up and the crowd too so I was definitely starting to turn so I was happy to get it done in straights."

Bologna, a result which would have seen Brazil progress instead.

With US Open champion Jannik Sinner watching from the stands, the Dutch were looking down the barrel when Matteo Berrettini came from behind to beat Botić van de Zandschulp 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 with Flavio Cobolli following up with a 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-3 win over Tallon Griekspoor.

But Van de Zandschulp returned to the court to join Wesley Koolhof in the doubles and they saw Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori 7-6 (8-6), 7-5 to get the result they needed.

In the day's other matches Spain beat Australia 2-1 in Valencia, although both teams have already qualified, while Chile edged Slovakia 2-1 in the Zhuhai group from which Germany and United States had already qualified.

The finals are in Malaga, Spain, from November 19-24 with the draw for the quarter-finals taking place next Thursday.

Arne Slot Gets First Taste Of Liverpool Pressure After Honeymoon Period



Arne Slot had made a serene start to the unenviable task of succeeding Jurgen Klopp at Liverpool, but a 1-0 home defeat to Nottingham Forest has brought the Dutchman's honeymoon period to an abrupt end and exposed cracks in the Reds' facade.

Liverpool have little time to lick their wounds with a trip to AC Milan to come on Tuesday to open their return to the Champions League after a year away from Europe's elite club competition. Under Klopp, Liverpool's prestige at the top of the European game was restored.

The English giants reached three Champions League finals in five seasons between 2018 and 2022 and won the European Cup for the sixth time in the club's history.

That is the legacy Slot inherits and the former Feyenoord boss has not been handed a kind draw by

the new Champions League format.

Liverpool will face the two most successful sides in the competition's history in Milan and Real Madrid.

Xabi Alonso, who had been the favourite to replace Klopp, will return to Anfield with German champions Bayer Leverkusen in November, while Slot goes back to the Netherlands to face Dutch title holders PSV Eindhoven.

They also face more Italian, Spanish, German and French opposition in Bologna, Girona, Leipzig and Lille.

Yet Liverpool may relish that challenge after struggling when Forest put 11 men behind the ball on Saturday and held out for their first win at Anfield in 55 years. The home side enjoyed nearly 70 percent possession but lacked the necessary spark to make it count.