

Napoli raring to party as Serie A title triumph nears



Napoli players and coaching staff celebrate their side's 1-0 victory over Juventus in Serie A at the Allianz stadium, Turin, Italy, on April 23, 2023. **MARCO ALPOZZI/AP**

Naples is ready to finally celebrate this weekend as Napoli take on regional rivals Salernitana potentially one win away from their first Serie A title since the days of Diego Maradona. Thousands of expectant fans will descend on the stadium

named after their Argentine icon hoping to be able call their team champions of Italy, ending a 33-year wait for Napoli to be crowned the country's top team, AFP reported. With a 17-point lead with seven games remaining Lu-

ciano Spalletti's team have to beat Salernitana on Sunday and hope Lazio don't win at Inter Milan in order to cap a magnificent league season which has stunned fans and defied pre-season expectations. Napoli were a club in turmoil

in the summer whose fans were in open revolt against owner Aurelio De Laurentiis after falling away in last term's title race and selling off beloved players like Kalidou Koulibaly. Skeptical about new arrivals and their team's chances,

only a few thousand fans bought season tickets before the start of the campaign and Spalletti was ordered to "wake up" by one angry supporter at Napoli's pre-season training retreat. Nine months later and summer signings Khvicha Kvar-

atskhelia and Kim Min-jae are lynchpins of a thrilling team who were champions-elect by mid-February and bewitched Europe with a run to the Champions League quarter-finals.

It was Giacomo Raspadori, signed after the season started, who gave Napoli their first match point with his last-gasp winner at Juventus last Sunday night.

That 1-0 win in Turin sparked wild celebrations among supporters, thousands of whom waited for the team at Naples airport.

Afterwards a phalanx of moped-riding fans, some packed three to a scooter and almost none wearing helmets, followed the team bus back into the city to a tune of blaring police sirens and honking horns.

Those supporters will know whether Napoli have a shot at winning the league this year by the time they take to the Stadio Maradona field as the match with Salernitana was pushed back to today, after Lazio's clash at Inter, for public order reasons.

That match at the San Siro is itself a huge fixture in the race for the Champions League, as defeat last Sunday has left Juve vulnerable to a clutch of teams behind them. Inter are sixth, five points behind third-placed Juve who were knocked out of the Italian Cup by the Milan giants on Wednesday and travel to Bologna on a dismal run of three straight league losses.

Qatari banker, British billionaire submit final bids for Man United



CARL RECINE/REUTERS

Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani and British billionaire Sir Jim Ratcliffe's Ineos Group have submitted their final bids for Manchester United, BBC Sport has been told.

They are the two main parties looking to take control of the club.

Club owners, the Glazer family, will now assess their position after the latest bid deadline passed at 22:00 BST on Friday.

Both bidders are eager for a resolution to a process that began in November. BBC Sport has been told the offer from Sheikh Jassim is around £5bn and includes one figure that would go direct to the sellers.

It also includes a plan to make a significant amount of additional capital and infrastructure investment into the club.

It is understood the third bid deadline only applied to potential buyers of the whole club and not investment vehicles such as the US-based Elliott and Carlyle, both of whom are only willing to purchase a minority stake.

Finnish businessman Thomas Zilliacus says he lodged bids previously but would not submit a fresh offer.

The Glazers announced in November the board had "authorised a thorough evaluation of strategic alternatives", including selling the club.

Investment bank the Raine Group was brought in to oversee the process after it handled the sale of Premier League rivals Chelsea.

After a deadline for expressions of interest in February and a second deadline last month, Friday marked a third deadline for bids.

It is understood large amounts of paperwork have had to be completed to get to the latest stage, leading all parties to believe the situation will be resolved before the transfer window opens at the end of the season.

There have also been suggestions this week that Ineos could restructure its offer, which initially was for the Glazer family's combined 69% stake, in a way that could allow co-chairmen Joel and Avram Glazer to retain their personal shareholding.

It has been stressed Ratcliffe has been consistent in his view that he wants a majority stake, giving credence to the reports.

This move has already been attacked by the '1958' fans group, who have demanded 'Full Sale Only'.

NBA Playoffs: Lakers obliterate Grizzlies 125-85 to advance; Kings force Game 7 against Warriors

LeBron James made sure the Lakers had the appropriate urgency for a close-out playoff game. Their raucous fans constantly urged them to end an infuriating decade without a postseason celebration on the Lakers' home court. Anthony Davis had 16 points and 14 rebounds while blocking five shots and dominating the paint, D'Angelo Russell scored a career playoff-high 31 points and Los Angeles completed its first-round upset of the Memphis Grizzlies with a 125-85 victory in Game 6 on Friday night, The Associated Press reported.

James scored 22 points on 9-of-13 shooting for the seventh-seeded Lakers, who emphatically clinched a playoff series in their own arena for the first time since 2012.

"It was definitely a Game 7 mentality for us," James said. "We understood that we had an opportunity to play in front of our fans, and we wanted to try to end it tonight. We came out with a discipline. From the start of the game, we were just locked in on our game

plan all the way until the final seconds."

The Lakers won all three of their home games in the series, and the final victory was a scary demonstration of their capabilities when James and Davis are both healthy alongside their full supporting cast.

Davis' imposing defensive presence largely shut down Memphis' offense in Game 6, while Russell's five 3-pointers highlighted a slick offensive effort from a late-blooming team with championship aspirations. The Lakers took a 20-point lead in the first half and went up by 36 in the third quarter before coasting to victory in front of superfan Jack Nicholson and a sell-out crowd. James and Davis even got to sit out the entire fourth quarter, preserving their legs for the second round.

Los Angeles opens its next series on the road Tuesday against the winner of today's Game 7 between Sacramento and defending champion Golden State.

Ja Morant scored 10 points on 3-of-16 shooting for the Grizzlies, who won 107



Lakers' Anthony Davis dunks during a victory over Grizzlies in Game 6 of a first-round NBA basketball playoff series in Los Angeles, CA, US, on April 28, 2023. **AP**

games and two Southwest Division titles in the past two seasons, but just one playoff series.

Morant's injured right hand appeared to hamper his shot, and he seemed unwilling to drive the paint with his usual fearlessness while Davis loomed in the middle. Morant's teammates couldn't pick him up: Desmond Bane, who guaranteed a Game 7, had 15 points on 5-of-16 shooting, while Jaren Jackson Jr. had 14 on 3-of-12

shooting. Dillon Brooks, the Memphis agitator who dismissed James as "old" after Game 2 and then got ejected from Game 3 for striking James in the groin, finished a dismal series performance with 10 points in Game 6 while Lakers fans booed his every move. Brooks left the Grizzlies' locker room before reporters were allowed in. The Grizzlies had the second-worst road record

among the NBA's 16 playoff teams in the regular season, and they lost all five of their road games against the Lakers this season.

Kings stay alive

Meanwhile, Malik Monk scored 28 points, De'Aaron Fox added 26 points and 11 assists, and the playoff-newcomer Sacramento Kings staved off elimination in their first-round playoff series by

beating Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors 118-99 in Game 6.

Rookie Keegan Murray scored 15 points with four 3-pointers and grabbed 12 rebounds for his first playoff double-double, and the No. 3-seeded Kings withstood every scoring surge the defending champions made on their home court and shined in nearly every facet of this one with their special season on the line.

Kevin Huerter, struggling with his shot all series - 20 of 52 coming into the game - hit a 3 with 6:23 to go and another with 4:58 left as Sacramento gave its fans at least one more chance to cheer these upstart Kings. "This is exactly what I expected and I expect a little bit more from both teams in Golden 1," Monk said. "We're going to be prepared."

Curry scored 29, Klay Thompson 22 and Kevon Looney pulled down 13 more rebounds to give him an NBA-leading 85 this postseason. He was coming off a career-high 22 rebounds in a Game 5 win at Golden 1 Center.