

Beware the Ides of March

The month of March has seen the exit of most of the English clubs from the Champions League - what's going wrong?

The month of March is upon us and with it the predictable exit of English clubs from the European Champions League. Granted, we all know Liverpool went the whole way last season but that was an exceptional performance which was out of keeping with recent trends over the last decade.

It is often claimed that the English Premier League is the best league in the world but if that is the case then why are those who represent the top flight here not qualifying for the final phases of Europe's premier competition? As it is there is only one representative from these shores left as compared to two from Spain and three from Italy.

There can be little excuse for the under-achievement of the English sides. Over the past few seasons English clubs have invested heavily in the pursuit of European glory. Most prominent among them are Chelsea.

The three English clubs that competed this week promised much but delivered little. A 2-0 defeat to Benfica at Anfield will be disappointing, in the extreme, for Liverpool's army of loyal supporters.

On paper, the holders should have dispatched the Portuguese representatives with ease. Unfortunately football matches aren't played on paper and sloppy mistakes and a lack of creativity were duly punished with two breathtaking goals from the visitors.

Jose Mourinho talked the talk but his men failed miserably to walk the walk at the Nou Camp stadium in Barcelona. All the hype surrounding the game was instigated and ratcheted up by the "great one" but it didn't disguise the fact that his Chelsea team bowed out without so much as a whimper.

That they were out-played, out-thought and out-fought over the two legs tells the true story, despite what the score-line or indeed Jose might say.

So it has been left to Arsenal to fly the St George Cross in the last eight. They were undoubtedly good value for their win against Real Madrid. That said it was, once again, another pitiful display from the Galacticos.

On the evidence of their first leg performance I think an hour or two attending a schoolboy game would have taught the Madrid team a thing or two about defending.

Arsenal, on the other hand, scored one goal and defended brilliantly during both legs but I wonder just how long they can ride their luck by using that particular tactic. Madrid are a team of fading stars and one goal will not be enough for Arsenal against Barcelona, Juventus and the two Milan sides.

So was this abject failure just a flash in the pan disappointment or part of a continuing trend? I'm inclined to say it was the latter, and it's clear that even more investment is needed if English clubs are to be found, once again, en masse amongst Europe's elite.

About the team

This story was written and edited by John Monaghan, 18. It was published by Reach for the Sky website.

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