



NEWSLETTER Week 16

LIGUE 1- Garde: 'I dream of winning title'

Olympique Lyonnais coach Rémi Garde admits he dreams of winning the Ligue 1 title, but says the club's chances are dependent on how Paris Saint-Germain perform.

OL top the table, currently five points clear of fourth-placed PSG who they face at the Parc des Princes on December 16, and have a crunch game this Sunday in the derby du Rhône at third-placed Saint-Etienne. The season has gone brilliantly for Garde after a host of senior players departed in the summer.

Garde said: "Our position is agreeable but precarious. The title makes everybody dream. I dream of winning the title. In this phrase there is the word 'dream'. I dream of the title every night when I'm going to sleep, and I hope it's the same for my players. But dreaming of something doesn't mean we've become big-headed and that it will come easily to us.

"It depends on PSG. In fact, it depends only on PSG! They should be far out in front, and it's not our five-point advantage over them that makes us safe from a comeback from them."

In his second season as OL coach, Garde has already won the Coupe de France and the Trophée des Champions, and now would love to add an eighth Ligue 1 title to the trophy list.

Garde outlined how Lyon have improved this season: "The team is better balanced, especially in midfield. Last season I tried almost everything, but more often than not we were playing 4-2-4 more than anything else. That system allowed us to get some good results, but not to sustain a run of form.

"Also, the dressing room is much better this season. There's a universal team spirit in the squad. The dressing room needed to regenerate after three seasons of failure. It's difficult to be together on a daily basis when you've got the label of 'the squad that won nothing'. Maybe some players took a year to realise we'd reached a turning point."

Inside Rennes' youth academy

Ligue1.com takes a look inside the famed Stade Rennais youth academy, which has produced some of the finest talent in the French game in recent years, from Sylvain Wiltord to Yoann Gourcuff?

The brains behind Rennes' universally-admired academy, which is situated just by the club's Stade de la Route de Lorient home, is Patrick Rampillon, who has been the director since 1987. Voted as France's best academy for six years running before finishing second last year, Rampillon's laboratory has been a conveyor belt of young talent for the past two decades. So what is the secret to Rennes' success?

"There is no secret," replies Rampillon. "We've simply established a clear youth policy at this club. The owners want the academy to provide players for the first team. That's why at Stade Rennais, we always have room for good young players."

So much so, that more than half of the current Rennes squad is made up of homegrown products. Meanwhile, the list of some of the best-known graduates is mightily impressive.





Players to have learned their trade under Rampillon include goalkeeper Simon Pouplin, now of Sochaux after a spell in Germany with Freiburg, and the defensive trio of Stéphane Mbia (Queens Park Rangers), Jacques Faty (Sivasspor) and Mickaël Silvestre (ex-Manchester United, Arsenal). In midfield, there is current first-team star Yann M?Vila and Ousmane Dabo, whose former clubs include Lazio and Manchester City. Then there is the creative trio of Julien Féret, who is back at the club after a spell with Nancy, Yoann Gourcuff of Lyon and Gaël Danic, now of Valenciennes. Strikers to have come out of Rennes include France's Euro 2000 hero Sylvain Wiltord and current Lyon star Jimmy Briand.

When the academy was redeveloped 20 years ago, Rampillon defined a strict list of principles he wanted all youngsters to adhere to, and the 57 year old continues to do his utmost to make sure they are respected.

"When I watch a game, I'm not interested in who wins," he says. "I want to see if the principles we've laid out are being respected. Are the players playing in the right zones, are they playing in a collective way? I want to see if they're reliable because a coach needs to have players who display the right attitude."

Crucially, life at the academy is not just about football. The 23 boys on full board are also taught important life lessons. They must learn to live together, get used to eating healthy, if sometimes bland, meals at the canteen, and continue their school work. There is also time to try and have a bit of fun in the evenings too. The sacrifices can be huge. Many hopefuls have had to move far away from their families, and life as a young footballing protégé is not necessarily as glamorous as it sounds.

"I left home when I was 11 or 12," says Maxime Etuin, one of the current members of the academy. "My parents went along with it, and I'm grateful for that. Sometimes it's been hard for them and for me as well. It's not easy and it's definitely not the amazing childhood people dream of."

The youngsters, all aged between 15 and 18, have to fit their training sessions around school lessons and exams. It is a set-up that current Rennes defender Romain Danzé, who came through the system, admits he found difficult. He says: "It's an important period. You grow up as a footballer and as a man. I remember my final year when I had to pass the Baccalaureate and force my way in to the senior squad. It's a crucial year."

Sébastien Salles-Lamonge, another of the current crop of academy hopefuls, admitted to Ligue1.com that an increasing workload, with exams on the horizon, has left him jaded and looking forward to a holiday. However, there are frequent reminders of the potential rewards for the most dedicated players at the academy, with Rennes' first-team coach Frédéric Antonetti always keeping a close eye on proceedings.

Furthermore, in light of the recent trouble involving one youth-team graduate - Yann M?Vila was banned from international football until June 2014 after his involvement in an impromptu trip to a Paris nightclub with a handful of teammates in between the two legs of France's play-off against Norway for a place in the 2013 European under-21 championship - the current generation knows that bad behaviour will not be accepted.

"I had a kid who arrived three minutes late for a match and I put him on the bench," says Rampillon. "In August I called his national team coach and informed him of this because I didn't think he deserved to wear the France shirt."

Life as a youth-team player at Rennes is far from easy, but with 53 percent of the pupils going on to enjoy professional careers, the kids can afford to dream about one day emulating their heroes.





CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: PSG rise to occasion

Paris Saint-Germain put their domestic woes behind them on Tuesday with a 2-1 victory against FC Porto at the Parc des Princes that takes them through to the Champions League knockout stages as Group A winners.

Both of these clubs had already sealed their passage into the last 16 before the final round of matches in the group stage, but top spot in the section - and, in theory, a more comfortable draw in the first knockout round - was still up for grabs. Trailing the Portuguese title-holders by a point, PSG knew only a win would see them finish above their visitors in the capital, and they did enough to edge out one of the most accomplished sides on the continent just now.

Thiago Silva headed home the opener in the 29th minute, only for Jackson Martínez to equalise at the other end just four minutes later. But PSG were not to be denied, as Ezequiel Lavezzi struck the decisive blow just after the hour mark to give Carlo Ancelotti's men a fifth win in the group and exact revenge for their 1-0 defeat in northern Portugal in early October.

The wounds of Saturday's 2-1 defeat at Nice were still fresh for PSG, but Ancelotti chose to make just three changes to his starting line-up, with Salvatore Sirigu returning in goal after injury, Gregory Van der Wiel replacing Christophe Jallet at right-back, and Javier Pastore earning a recall at the expense of Sylvain Armand. The Argentine started in midfield, and spent much of the game on the left wing, as Maxwell reverted to the left-back role.

The changes, and the change of environment, seemed to do Paris good, and they posed plenty of problems to their visitors, particularly from corners and set-pieces around the box. Jérémy Menez found Lavezzi at the near post, only for the alert Nicolás Otamendi to get there first and turn the ball behind for a corner, before Alex headed straight at his compatriot Helton in the Porto goal from a right-wing delivery.

And it was from one such dead ball that PSG got their noses in front. Otamendi was booked by Scottish referee Craig Thomson for a challenge on Menez just outside the area to the left, and Maxwell's resulting free-kick was headed home by captain Thiago Silva, a former Porto player.

The home side's pressure had not been incessant up to that point, though. Porto gave an early hint of their threat when Martínez saw an effort deflected inches past from the edge of the box, and they never panicked after going behind. Indeed, they didn't need long to pull level, with Martínez, the Colombian striker, heading home a wicked Danilo delivery at the back post.

Porto certainly deserved to go in on level terms at the interval, even if Helton was almost caught out by a Zlatan Ibrahimovic header two minutes before the break. However, PSG came out determined to turn the screw after the restart, with Pastore and Menez both looking especially in the mood.

The latter saw a fierce shot saved by Helton after being picked out by the Argentine, but it was Pastore's countryman Lavezzi who did restore the Ligue 1 club's advantage in the 61st minute. It was not a goal Helton will ever want to see again, though, as he saw Lavezzi's shot from a tight angle squirm under his body at the near post.

Porto pressed after that in search of a second equaliser, but Sirigu produced a crucial save to deny Martínez, before ex-Marseille man Lucho González fired the rebound over. And Paris could have added to their lead on the counterattack, with Pastore seeing an attempt beaten away by Helton before Ibrahimovic failed to convert the follow-up. For once the Swede was not decisive, but PSG still managed to produce a win that will come as a huge boost to their battered confidence.





Ancelotti praises PSG spirit

Paris Saint-Germain coach Carlo Ancelotti was delighted with his side's response to recent criticism as they beat FC Porto, while Montpellier coach René Girard regrets going out of Europe without a win.

Carlo Ancelotti (Paris Saint-Germain coach): "It was a good performance. We found our spirit, and the players showed great pride in the face of severe criticism. It was very important to finish first, and very important to play some good football and show character. On Saturday, climbing back up the league table will be important. There will be plenty of time to focus on the league, with the Champions League not coming back until February. I want to see professional and serious players working for the team. What I read in the papers is not true. It is perfectly that the Brazilian players should speak with each other, it is easier for them. The important thing is the relationship all the players have on the pitch and tonight we saw that it was not bad. To be five points behind Lyon in Ligue 1 is not good. I am sure that things will now improve quickly. The draw will be difficult but we are entitled to think that obtaining the first place and getting 15 points is a really good performance. There is no particular problem in the PSG dressing room. When you have to build a team with lots of new players, you need time."

Thiago Silva (Paris Saint-Germain captain): "Winning against a team like Porto will kickstart things for us. We are much more focused when we play against big teams in the Champions League than when we play in Ligue 1. I will be honest; we concentrate much more on our matches in the Champions League. That is not good but it is the way it is."

Javier Pastore (Paris Saint-Germain): "We are a young team. Of course, the Champions League motivates us much more. Today we played at a very good level and I hope that on Saturday we will manage to do the same thing. My match gives me confidence. I played well. The whole team has been through a rough patch, not just me. We have not been winning games. There have been a few defeats and we are not top (in Ligue 1) anymore."

Vitor Pereira (FC Porto coach): "I am not satisfied. When we played Paris at home, we were more aggressive. We also lacked concentration and didn't have enough of the ball. I take responsibility for rotating my squad against Braga (in the Taça de Portugal last weekend). We need to take the positives out of this match. We need to be fully concentrated and show more aggression. In the reverse fixture we completely dominated them. This will serve as experience for the future."

Montpellier end on positive note

Montpellier Hérault SC bowed out of Europe for this season with a 1-1 draw against Bundesliga giants Schalke 04 on Tuesday.

There was to be no win in an ultimately disappointing debut campaign in the Champions League, but René Girard's side did at least claim a second draw against their opponents from the Bundesliga. After a fighting 2-2 stalemate in Germany in October, here they came from behind as Benedikt Höwedes' headed opener early in the second half was cancelled out by Argentine striker Emanuel Herrera.

After losing to both Arsenal and Olympiacos at the Stade de la Mosson in the competition this season, Montpellier were eager to give their fans something to cheer as well. In truth, they might have won both of their previous home matches, and they will come away from this match with the same feeling of regret.

The hosts were without regular first-choice goalkeeper Geoffrey Jourden and his back-up Laurent Pionnier due to injury, so Jonathan Ligali was handed his debut in Europe's elite club competition. Meanwhile, Schalke coach Huub Stevens opted to give several fringe players their chance despite





his side needing to win the game to be sure of finishing top of Group B ahead of Arsenal.

Keen to bow out on a high, Montpellier were not far away from breaking the deadlock when Souleymane Camara headed a Henri Bédimo cross over. Herrera tested Timo Hildebrand in the visitors' goal while, at the other end, Ligali did not have to face a single shot on target in the first half.

Schalke did pose a threat from time to time, with Finnish striker Teemu Pukki somehow managing to slice well wide after being picked out by a Julian Draxler cross. Ligali also had to save at the feet of Ciprian Marica, but Schalke did get their noses in front 11 minutes into the second period, when a Lewis Holtby free-kick was headed back across goal by Christoph Metzelder for Höwedes, stooping low, to head home.

That was cruel on Montpellier, who had almost taken the lead moments earlier when Atsuto Uchida cleared a Herrera effort from close range off the line. However, the Argentine did find the target in the 59th minute, following up to score after his initial effort from an Anthony Mounier cross had been blocked.

Herrera came close to putting the Ligue 1 champions ahead after that, and Girard sent on John Utaka and Younès Belhanda for the final quarter of the game in a bid to grab that elusive first win of the campaign. It wasn't to be, though, with Hildebrand keeping out yet another Herrera effort late on, and Montpellier leave the Champions League with mixed feelings. At least they took something from the game, but once again they came mighty close to gaining a victory, as the focus turns back towards their faltering domestic campaign. Schalke, meanwhile, still advance as group winners thanks to Arsenal's 2-1 reverse in Greece.

More Euro disappointment for Lille

LOSC Lille's disappointing Champions League campaign ended with a low-key home defeat at the hands of Valencia CF on Wednesday.

Just as against Bayern Munich on Matchday 3, a first-half penalty proved enough to condemn Lille to defeat at the Grand Stade. On this occasion, the Brazilian Jonas converted from the spot as LOSC were beaten for the fifth time in six Group F games, and the third time on the bounce at home in Europe this season.

Rudi Garcia's side stepped up the pressure in the second half, but were unable to find a way through the Spanish defence, although it wasn't for the want of trying, with Dimitri Payet coming desperately close to an equaliser when he crashed an effort off the bar in the closing minutes.

Lille will now revert their full focus to climbing back up the table in Ligue 1, and Garcia will have to decide whether any of the fringe players who were handed their chance here deserve to keep their place when Lille go to Sochaux on Saturday. With their chances of even catching third-placed BATE Borisov having already evaporated, the likes of Steeve Elana, Gianni Bruno and Ronny Rodelin all started for the northerners against a Valencia side featuring five players with Ligue 1 experience, among them former Lille duo Adil Rami and Ricardo Costa.

With so little at stake for the home side, the atmosphere inside the Grand Stade was rather flat despite an impressive attendance. A lack of notable chances in the opening quarter did little to lift the crowd, with Lille's only notable opening in the first half-hour coming when Rodelin dispossessed former Montpellier midfielder Tino Costa on the edge of the area but saw his shot easily saved by Vicente Guaita.

Valencia looked dangerous around the home penalty area but had not made Elana seriously work before they were awarded a spot-kick ten minutes





before the interval. Jonas was held back by Marko Ba?a inside the area, and the Brazilian stepped up to beat Elana from 12 yards to put the Liga club in front.

Valencia had lost 5-2 at home to Real Sociedad in La Liga at the weekend - a result that cost coach Mauricio Pellegrino his job - and they were determined to put in a stronger defensive display here. They managed to hold firm in the second half, but only just, as LOSC applied the pressure.

Rodelin saw a shot from a Marvin Martin corner cleared from practically on the line by Nelson Valdez, while Guaita made a decisive intervention to deny Salomon Kalou before substitute Payet's curling shot rebounded to safety off the bar in the 86th minute.

The win was not enough for Valencia to finish top of the section, however, as Bayern Munich beat BATE 4-1 in the other Group F game in Germany. That means the Spaniards, now coached by Ernesto Valverde, are potential opponents for Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16.

Garcia rues poor Lille luck

Lille coach Rudi Garcia felt his side were unfortunate at home to Valencia in their final Champions League game, while defender Lucas Digne added the players will take on board the lessons learned in the campaign.

Rudi Garcia (Lille coach): "We were very average in the first half, even if we didn't concede chances all game long. That makes it all the more frustrating to have lost the games. I don't think my players deserved that. We put more pressure on Valencia after the break and we're out of luck just now as their keeper made the saves he had to make, and when he wasn't there it was the bar that saved them. We need to rediscover the confidence we lack sometimes in order to get back on the goal trail. Our game at Sochaux on Saturday has become the most important game of the week. We need to do everything we can to win there and improve our position in the table."

Lucas Digne (Lille defender): "We gave it everything until the final whistle, but of course we're disappointed with our Champions League campaign. We'll take lessons out of it because you learn a lot in defeat. We can hold our heads high after our final performance and we just lacked a bit of clinical play going forward. I'm frustrated by this loss."

Salvador Gonzales (Valencia coach): "It was important to win to change the image we showed in our last two Liga games. I'd like to congratulate my side for this success and for what they showed. Lille were enterprising and had chances, especially in the second half. The three points we took finished off a good group from our point of view with a second-placed finish on 13 points."

EUROPA LEAGUE: Bordeaux and Lyon impress

Bordeaux sealed first place in Group D with a 2-0 home win over Newcastle, while Olympique Lyonnais qualified with the best record of any Europa League club after the OL youngsters beat Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shimona 2-0 in Group I.

Group D

Girondins de Bordeaux 2-0 Newcastle United FC





A point would have been enough for Bordeaux to clinch first place in the section and coach Francis Gillot will have been delighted with the display produced by his experimental side as they gained revenge for their 3-0 loss at St. James' Park earlier in the season.

Bordeaux were rewarded for a positive approach to the game when Fahid Ben Khalfallah's cross from the left was headed in by big Malian forward Cheick Diabaté in the 29th minute. Diabaté had earlier been denied from pointblank range by Newcastle goalkeeper Rob Elliot, who had pushed out a David Bellion effort to him.

Kévin Olimpa saved excellently from Shola Ameobi early in the second half before home captain for the night Grégory Sertic whistled one past the post at the other end. Diabaté scored his second career Europa League goal in the 73rd minute, sliding the ball home left-footed through Eliot's legs after getting in behind the visitors' failed offside trap. Ben Khalfallah had played the perceptive ball over the top for his second assist of the encounter.

Group C

AEL Limassol FC 3-0 Olympique de Marseille

OM were assured of a third-placed finish and no better whatever the result in Cyprus and, with no European future to play for, coach Elie Baup elected to travel without a phalanx of established names. The OM youngsters made a bright enough start against a side the club had beaten 5-1 in the competition earlier this season.

But four minutes before the interval Orlando Sá's header from an Edmar corner put the home side in front. The Cypriot club had not scored in the competition since the first OM game. Playing with renewed confidence, Limassol got on top in the second half and Edmar scored the second goal, turning the ball past goalkeeper Gennaro Bracigliano. The Brazilian then added a second assist of the night as Ghanaian Chris Dickson headed in at the front post.

Group I

Olympique Lyonnais 2-0 Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shimona

With first place secured in Group I, Lyon coach Rémi Garde made his team selection with Sunday's Rhône derby at Saint-Etienne in mind. 19-year-old competition debutant Mahamadou-Naby Sarr got the ball rolling in the 15th minute with a header from a Michel Bastos cross from the left. Brazilian international Bastos was making his first start since returning from more than two months out with a back problem.

Anthony Lopes, back-up keeper to regular number one Rémy Vercoutre, made a number of good saves to preserve OL's advantage before Yassine Benzia, 18, struck his second Europa League goal in as many games, tucking the ball away at the near post in the 58th minute after fine service from Mehdi Zeffane.

20-year-old midfielder Jordan Ferri flashed one wide inside the final five minutes as OL completed their fifth win of the section, going through unbeaten with an impressive 16 points., the best total of any Europa League qualifier for the Round of 32.

Europa League reactions

Girondins de Bordeaux coach Francis Gillot was a happy man after his side finished as Europa League Group D winners; Elie Baup was left





to draw the few positives from Marseille's final-game defeat; and Rémi Garde praised a young OL's home display.

Girondins de Bordeaux 2 - 0 Newcastle United FC

Francis Gillot (Bordeaux coach): "It's a great source of satisfaction to have won, and done so in style. We played well for the whole 90 minutes, and deservedly won 2-0. We could even have scored one or two more. We always play to win, and I couldn't see myself telling the players to play badly and finish second. If we'd have finished second, it would have been the same as there are some big fish out there. The advantage that we have is that everyone knows our principles, and each time they play, they know what to do. The danger would have been for individuals to do their own thing, not work for the team. Tonight you saw that the team came first."

Mathieu Chalmé (Bordeaux defender): "We really wanted to win this match. We were all really motivated, and those who don't play too often wanted to show what they can do. We did that. We defended well, had a lot of chances, and were rewarded for our efforts. Newcastle had a makeshift line-up, so did we, and everyone wanted to prove that they're important in the squad. We did that."

Cheick Tidiane Diabaté (Bordeaux forward): "Everything went well. We were solid out on the pitch. We'd already shown our desire in training on Wednesday, and we were able to reproduce that during the match. We wanted to stay top of the group, and as it hadn't gone well for us in Newcastle, we didn't want to lose a second time. We wanted to show them that we're also good at home. I'm not afraid of what we might get in the draw. It doesn't matter who we play. There are some big teams, but we're confident."

AEL Limassol 3 - 0 Olympique de Marseille

Elie Baup (Marseille coach): "We had already been knocked out of the competition, but we wanted to finish with a good quality match. I don't like losing. It's always worrying to concede goals from set-pieces. The scoreline is harsh, though, when you look at our performance. A lot of young players have had a taste of European football during the competition. With this trip, they have been able to get a feel for the preparation, the discipline, and the focus required at the highest level."

Olympique Lyonnais 2 - 0 Hapoel Kiryat Shmona

Rémi Garde (Lyon coach): "We won without conceding, despite them creating chances and Anthony Lopes making some saves. It's a positive evening for the youngsters in particular. We drifted out of it a little in the latter part of the first half, we had to tweak the tactics. We started to play less simply, and certain people wanted to shine individually. Things had to be put back in place, and in the second half, things were back to normal. This evening was special. We've got a big match coming up on Sunday."

Yassine Benzia (Lyon forward): "I hope I can continue like this, scoring tonight is not the end of it. I'm happy to have scored my first goal at Gerland. We youngsters are trying to show our qualities. When I scored, I can't describe what I felt. Ever since I was really small, I've dreamed of being a professional, and scoring here, in front of our fans, is exceptional."