

# LEICESTER v ROMA

EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE SEMI-FINAL, FIRST LEG, 8PM, VIRGIN/BTS 3

# THIS CUP'S THE SPECIAL ONE\*



SILVER FOX... Mourinho in Leicester

**\*Er, you sure, Jose? You've won the Champs League twice!**



By GRAEME BRYCE

**CHAMPIONS LEAGUE and Europa League winner Jose Mourinho says the Europa Conference League is now his 'Special One'.**

And the Roma chief confessed he would be proud to become the first boss to lift Uefa's much-maligned third trophy.

Mourinho is one of the most decorated managers in the history of the game with 25 major trophy successes to his credit — including **TWO** Champions Leagues, one each with Porto and Inter Milan.

But he swept into Leicester desperate to create history by becoming the first man to win the new competition, dubbed a consolation cup.

Mourinho, 59, insists Uefa's third trophy is not beneath him and declared: "I see this as my competition now."

"I'm not in the Champions League or the Europa League. I'm in this and I'm in it to win it. It's MY competition!"

"We need to fight to the bitter end because we have suffered for this competition and dropped points chasing it."

Roma have not won a European trophy for 50 years — and that was the 1972 Anglo-Italian Cup.

Mourinho, who also led Manchester United to Europa League glory in 2017, said: "Roma as a city, Roma as a club, my players, the people who work at the club, for the work we've done this season improving at every level — we deserve to be in the final."

"Unfortunately, football sometimes doesn't give you what you deserve."

"We have to beat a very good team with a very good coach and very

good players... We have to be at a high level in two games to reach that dream of taking Roma to a final."

Former Chelsea misfit Tammy Abraham will lead Roma's attack in tonight's semi-final first leg and carries the biggest threat to Leicester's hopes of reaching their first-ever European final.

The 24-year-old Londoner has smashed in 24 goals in 46 Roma appearances since his £34million move from the Blues — sparking rumours of a return to the Premier League with Arsenal this summer.

Abraham said: "I was born and raised in England so,

of course, there's many rumours about clubs being interested. I just have to stay focused on this competition and the league and we'll see what happens in the future."

Abraham credits Mourinho — who was Chelsea boss when the hitman came through the Blues academy — with his stunning turnaround in fortunes.

He said: "Jose is one of the best coaches on the planet. He knows how to drive you."

"After Chelsea I needed someone who could push me. I'm learning more about myself every day — now I want to go all the way and win this trophy."

Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers studied under Mourinho at Chelsea in his formative years as a coach.

And Rodgers said: "Jose has nothing to prove to anyone. He is a winner and will always be a winner."

"When I joined Chelsea in 2004, everything back then was all about the players — but Jose came to the UK as a European champion and everyone wanted to be like Jose Mourinho."

"He just had the X-factor and I have nothing but admiration for him."



CHASE ME... Soyuncu and Vardy



## LIKELY LINE-UPS



**VOTE FOUR ME**... Rogic is one of four PFA Scotland POTY nominees

# Rogic in it for the long haul

**TOM ROGIC** last night hinted he is ready to extend his nine-year Celtic stay.

The Australian midfielder, named on the four-man PFA Scotland Player of the Year shortlist, is about to enter the final year of his deal.

Rogic, 29, almost quit Celtic for Qatar in 2020 — but he has now made it clear he is in no rush to leave after a revival under Ange Postecoglou.

He said: "Right now I am enjoying myself and I'm feeling good and I'm happy. There's not too much more to say."

By COLIN DUNCAN

"Is there more in my locker? Potentially. Football these days, you see players maybe peaking later and playing longer so who knows."

"Did I feel that my best years were behind me? Not really."

"I can't control what people are thinking on the outside. I'm a pretty relaxed guy and that wasn't on my mind at all to be honest."

"Football works in funny ways and I think sometimes people get too high when things are going well and then get a little carried away when it's not going so good."

"I have enjoyed the season thoroughly. In spells I've probably played some of my best football and physically it's probably the best I have felt for a long time."

Rogic has already won five Premiership titles during a decade in Glasgow and is closing in on a sixth. He was named

on the PFA shortlist alongside team-mate Calum McGregor, Hearts keeper Craig Gordon and Ross County midfielder Regan Charles-Cook.

The Aussie is adamant Celtic still have plenty of work to do to finish off Rangers despite holding a six-point lead with four games left.

But if they are able to get over the finishing line then he believes this would be the sweetest championship triumph of the lot given the size of the summer rebuild.

He added: "Potentially. Any trophy you win is extremely satisfying and rewarding and you have to work very hard for it."

"Nothing gets handed to you. It will be potentially rewarding but we've got a lot of work to do. We certainly don't take anything for granted."

"We have four games left and they are all going to be important."



TEDESCO... bedtime

# I'm a Leipzig sleeper

By WILL PUGH

**RB LEIPZIG** manager Domenico Tedesco is sleeping at the club's training ground — because his hotel is full of Rangers fans!

Around 4,000 Gers supporters will be at tonight's Europa League semi-final first leg in the Red Bull Arena, with another 3,000 expected in the German city.

And Tedesco, who has been staying in a city centre hotel since landing the job last December, is taking desperate measures to escape them.

The Italian-born gaffer said: "We are happy a lot of fans have come. They pay hotels, restaurants and buy beer, so that's good for the economy."

"But they told me that 200 are coming to the hotel, so I will sleep in our academy for the next two days!"

Gers boss Giovanni van Bronckhorst said: "The fanbase who travel with us are amazing. It feels a little bit like playing at home when you are away."



ERIKSEN... wanted

# Erik's hot property

By ISABELLE BARKER

**THOMAS FRANK** says Christian Eriksen will have to weigh up the pros and cons of staying at Brentford — just like when you buy a new house.

The Bees boss would "love" the midfielder to settle in West London beyond the summer when his short-term deal is up.

But the former Spurs schemer, 30, is being targeted by his old club.

Brentford are unbeaten in the six games Eriksen has started, having lost eight of their nine matches before then.

Frank said: "I'd love to say I'm confident Christian will stay with us."

"I'm very positive and very hopeful that he will but it's a decision for the end of the season."

"Like with everything where you need to decide if you go to one club or another, buy that house or another house or you take this or that job, there must be pros and cons."

"So I hope Christian does what's right for him and his family — and I really hope it will be us."

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