

## International Champions Cup Singapore



Bayern's new man James Rodriguez displaying his skills in front of fans, as team-mate David Alaba (right) looks on at Clifford Square during the adidas Football Freestyle Battle last night. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

## RODRIGUEZ CAN'T WAIT TO START

## Bayern loanee wants to forget his unhappy time at Real as he is reunited with Ancelotti

Nicholas De Silva and Lester Wong

New Bayern Munich loan signing James Rodriguez has declared his intention to play a major role in continuing the club's longstanding tradition of success.

"I'm here to win titles. I came to Bayern because they are always one of the best in the world," said

the forward, who recently signed on a two-year loan deal from Real Madrid, at yesterday's press conference for today's International Champions Cup (ICC) match.

The 26-year-old Colombian also appeared to take a jibe at his former boss Zinedine Zidane.

"I am really happy to come to a place where the coach really trusts me," he remarked, glancing at his current manager Carlo Ancelotti.

And in a later event yesterday evening for Bayern's apparel sponsor adidas, James reiterated his desire to play for the Italian tactician.

He said: "I am open to the directions of Carlo, I can play in the middle or in the sides. The two-year loan is an arrangement between the clubs but I want to win titles for Bayern, especially the Champions League."

The move reunites the pair, as it was former Real boss Ancelotti who brought Rodriguez over to the Spanish giants after an impressive 2014 World Cup Finals outing, which saw him win the Golden Boot with

some dazzling goals.

Ancelotti is a keen admirer of Rodriguez and is confident that the move will be a boost to the Bundesliga champions going into next season.

"James has a fantastic quality and with this quality we can improve our play between lines. We can reach within and have the possibility to do final passes to our strikers," raved the 58-year-old.

While the German giants have been busy during this summer's transfer window with highly rated youngsters Corentin Tolisso, Kingsley Coman and Niklas Sule joining

Rodriguez, Ancelotti is determined to keep his best players.

He quashed rumours of Arturo Vidal's departure amid speculation linking the Chilean international with Manchester United.

"There is no way. He is our player and I have a lot of confidence in him. I know there are rumours but Vidal will stay with us 100 per cent," insisted Ancelotti.

Young Portuguese midfielder Renato Sanchez's future at the club, however, hangs in the balance. Ancelotti would only say: "At this moment he's working with us and training with us. It could be a possibility

that he leaves but also possibility that he stays with us."

For now, Ancelotti is focused on improving Bayern's dismal pre-season performance in the 4-0 drubbing by AC Milan last Saturday.

Bayern face English champions Chelsea tonight at the National Stadium in the opening fixture of the inaugural ICC Singapore.

"We want to do well (against Chelsea). But the result is our last focus now. We want to have a good attack, a good balance," he said.

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## The 'space investigator' looks for a renaissance

Wang Meng Meng

It can be hard to pigeonhole Thomas Muller – a supremely effective footballer despite his spindly frame, ungainly stride and unwieldy skills.

Even his playing position is hard to determine: Raumdeuter, as the Germans call their World Cup-winning hero, or "space investigator", for the way he drifts wide before swooping in for the kill.

Yet, an unproductive 2016-17 season that yielded just five Bundesliga goals saw question marks raised over the Bayern Munich star. But for the man himself, it simply gives him the opportunity to re-invent himself, just like how he shaped his first innovative tactical role.

Said the 27-year-old yesterday evening at an event for the club's apparel sponsor adidas: "Last season we had quite a few changes, but now the coach and I know each

other quite well so I think next season will be very good for Bayern Munich as well as for me.

"I took a break and then on July 1, came back and trained very hard to be good in shape.

"I missed a few chances (last season), but I think I made a lot of assists so maybe I have to change my tactics and shoot a little bit more often than in the past year. Of course scoring goals makes you happy, but what is important is that the team win the games."

Muller, along with team-mates David Alaba and James Rodriguez, ran the last leg of a 12km dribbling relay from Jalan Besar Stadium to Clifford Square. The relay also saw national players Izwan Mahbud, Khairul Nizam and Nazrul Nazari, as well as ex-Lions captain Fandi Ahmad and his two youngest sons, Ilhan and Iryan, take part.

While there are murmurs that Rodriguez was signed as his replacement, the German international insists that he can play along-



side the Colombian.

"He's a great player, and we will try to learn to play together and have some great games and win many titles," he said.

No doubt, this space investigator can also evolve and prosper.

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• Additional reporting by Jean Lau

Bayern Munich star Thomas Muller signing autographs for fans at Clifford Square yesterday. The German international had an underwhelming season by his own high standards last term and will want to bounce back ahead of the World Cup. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

## Muller remembers his mentor from Malaysia

Thomas Muller is an established international football star, but the Germany and Bayern Munich forward owes a debt of gratitude to a man from South-east Asia.

From 2001 to 2013, former Malaysian international defender Lim Teong Kim, who is also the uncle of ex-Singapore defender Lim Tong Hai, was a coach at Bayern's youth academy.

Famous players like Philipp Lahm, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Toni Kroos and Muller himself graduated to the first team under his tutelage.

The 2014 World Cup winner broke into a wide smile and spoke effusively when The Straits Times asked him about his former coach Lim.

Muller said: "I learnt very much from him. He has a great eye for tactics and to take the right positions on the pitch.

"He was one of the first coaches I learnt football from, so I enjoyed it

very much."

Approaching his peak at 27, Muller's 37 goals in 85 international games ranks him ninth in Germany's all-time list while his 10 strikes in two World Cup Finals gives him a shot at breaking compatriot Miroslav Klose's record of 16.

Lim could not be reached for comment, but in an interview with The Sunday Times three years ago, he complimented Muller for his "huge work ethic".

"He had a huge desire to succeed, which is as important as individual skills if you want to make it far in football," he said then.

"In training, we constantly drilled into him to always follow a shot into the penalty box and anticipate the rebound, which is one of the key aspects of his play now.

"The drills may seem minute and mundane, but Muller practised them fastidiously nonetheless."

Wang Meng Meng

## Bayern aim to be Europe's best again

Ian Kiew

They are one of only five teams to have won the European Cup at least five times, yet Bayern Munich have now gone four years without lifting the prestigious trophy.

The German giants won the Cup from 1974 to 1976, in 2002 and most recently in 2013. Since their last triumph, they have reached the Champions League semi-finals thrice, but could not make the last steps to the ultimate victory.

And centre-back Mats Hummels

believes his club have to "do a little better" to be kings of Europe again.

"It's not like we've played a bad Champions League season last year," he said. "It was unlucky for us in the game in Munich against Real (Madrid) that we had three important players out, and you just need

this kind of luck sometimes.

"We have a good team, but in a competition where there are six or seven world-class teams, there's no guarantee for any side to make it to the final. You need to beat at least two world-class teams to make it there, so it's pretty tough."

The 28-year-old German World Cup winner is in town with his club for the International Champions Cup (ICC) Singapore, and was at a meet-and-greet session at The Arena hosted by T-Systems, a subsidiary of Deutsche Telekom – Bayern's primary sponsor.

Re-signed from Bundesliga rivals Dortmund in 2016 for €35 million (\$55.5 million), the former Bayern youth product also said that, with new additions, it is possible that Bayern can finally end their Euro-

pean drought and win the title.

Hummels has not tasted Champions League glory yet. Ironically, he was on the opposite side in Bayern's 2013 triumph, marshalling the defence for Dortmund as they lost 1-2 in the final, courtesy of an 89th-minute Arjen Robben strike.

He said: "So many things can happen and I always think winning the Champions League is possible, but it's very tough to do."

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