

# *Real Madrid: La Liga winter champion*

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Havana, December 27 (RHC)-- Real Madrid has won the symbolic title of winter champion of La Liga, after finishing 2021 at the top of the standings.

With one game ahead of the rest, the so-called Club Merengue finishes the first half of the tournament with 46 points, eight more than Sevilla, who could only manage a draw in the last match of the year

against Barcelona FC.

Julen Lopetegui's Sevilla signed a remarkable first half and keeps alive their chances of challenging for the league title. In December they got 10 points out of a possible 12 and that endorses their good pace.

The Andalusian team balances its offense (only Madrid and Betis score more goals) with En-Nesyri, the versatile Lucas Ocampo and the newcomer Papu Gómez, with the airtight defense of Diego Carlos and Jules Koundé.

The backline of the Nervionenses is the one that allows the fewest goals among all, with 13 goals. They have in their goalkeeper Yassine Bono the best in saves with 77%, narrowly beating Madrid's Courtois (76%).

## THE SURPRISES

While the absence of Barcelona, mired in a deep crisis and 18 points behind the leader, and Atletico Madrid, who have four defeats in a row in their last matches, is surprising among the advanced quartet that qualifies for the Champions League, neither are Valencia, Villarreal or Real Sociedad the occupants that could be expected.

It is Manuel Pellegrini's Betis, with a squad that justifies its good performance, with Juanmi knocking hard on the doors of the national team and other players who have slowly but surely put together a fearsome machine: Borja Iglesias, Nabil Fekir, Sergio Canales, Guido Rodríguez or William José.

The engineer Pellegrini has managed to make his team the top scorer (32) after Real Madrid (41), and although he has to allow fewer goals, he has made a record start to the season in terms of points for the first 11 matches.

Rayo Vallecano, the sensational Rayo Vallecano, close the honor roll. At this point, few thought that they would be occupying fourth place in La Liga and close to qualifying for the Champions League, but Andoni Iraola's team has a fact that explains their excellent performance.

Those from Vallecas, in Madrid, have the best income of any team in Europe playing at home. The contribution of Colombian Radamel Falcao is unquestionable, but what has been truly decisive so far has been the 12th player (the public) and their stadium.

Of the nine home games played, El Rayo won eight and drew the remaining one. If the balance sheet is already very positive, the forcefulness with which they have achieved it could be even more so: they have scored 19 goals there and allowed three. Absolutely no one on the continent can beat that.

## THE LEADER

In a more competitive league than in previous years, Real Madrid has accumulated a points cushion that, although not decisive, at least means an advantage that worries their main pursuers.

This is not Carlo Ancelotti's best season in charge of Madrid. In his penultimate match of the year, a goalless draw against Cadiz, he missed the opportunity to equal the 48 points obtained in the 2014-2015 season in charge of Los Blancos. On that occasion, a physical setback left Madrid without La Liga.

This year the Merengue fans are hoping for a happy ending, despite the fact that the statistics are favorable if not overwhelming: out of 34 occasions in which the team finished as winter champion it was crowned in 21 finally.

This year, the Vikings have a goal-scoring duo that has scored more goals than 12 of the 20 teams in the championship. Karim Benzema leads the way with 15 after his brace against Athletic Bilbao, while

Vinicius Jr. appears third with 10, one goal behind Juanmi.

The young Brazilian took over the starting lineup and made 22 consecutive appearances in all competitions, after a remarkable improvement in his ability to score.

Despite the losses suffered in the last few matches due to the covid-19 pandemic, Ancelotti managed the pieces surgically and it paid off. One of the Italian's most noteworthy gambles was that of David Alaba as Militao's partner at the back from the start of the season.

With Thibaut Courtois in goal, accumulating 538 consecutive minutes without conceding a goal until Sancet's goal 10 minutes into the last game of 2021, the Merengues boast an excellent defense.

Only 16 goals conceded (0.84 per game) against 41 conceded (2.16 per 90 minutes) explain the overwhelming balance to date. Nothing is definite yet, but the numbers augur a white league.

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