

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS

European club competitions date back to 1927, when the Mitropa Cup was first contested by the leading clubs of central Europe. Sparta Prague were its first winners. The last Mitropa Cup was won by Yugoslav side Borac Banja Luka in 1992, but by then the glamour of the Mitropa had long been eclipsed by the mighty European Cup, a competition that is now known as the European Champions League.



◀ Real Madrid keeper Rogelio Dominguez claims the ball during the 1959 European Cup final against French club Stade de Reims. The game ended 2-0 to Real, who lifted their fourth European Cup in a row.

from 1977, but were banned from European competition for five years after the 1985 Heysel Stadium disaster (see page 105). There have been 13 Spanish winners, and 12 English and 12 Italian champions.

As the European Cup grew in intensity, it became harder to successfully defend the title. The last back-to-back winners of the trophy were AC Milan in 1989 and 1990. The first year that the final went into extra time was 1958, while the first penalty shootout in the final was in 1984. The two finals won by Eastern European sides, Steaua Bucharest (1986) and Red Star Belgrade (1991), both went to nail-biting penalty shootouts.

EARLY DAYS

The European Champion Clubs' Cup, usually known as the European Cup, developed out of a meeting set up by Frenchman Gabriel Hanot. Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese club sides were keen to take part, as were teams from many other nations. The first European Cup, held in 1955–56, featured major names such as Real Madrid, Sporting Lisbon, Anderlecht and AC Milan. Clubs that are less well known today also entered – Århus GF and FC Saarbrücken, for example. English league champions Chelsea, however, were forbidden from entering, but Scottish club Hibernian reached the semi-final. The first winners of the trophy were Real Madrid.

CHANGING CHAMPIONS

Real won the first five European Cups, before the tournament hit a golden age of competition in the 1960s, with Benfica, Internazionale and AC Milan all winning the trophy. The 1970s saw both Ajax and Bayern Munich crowned champions three years in a row. English clubs won six European Cups in succession



▲ Nottingham Forest celebrate winning their second European Cup title in a row after winger John Robertson's single goal was enough to defeat German side Hamburg in the 1980 final.



▶ Julius Aghahowa of Shakhtar Donetsk is challenged by Barcelona's Fernando Navarro in a 2004–05 Champions League game. Aghahowa's two goals gave the Ukrainian side a surprise victory.

EXPANSION AND DOMINATION

The format of the European Cup remained almost unchanged for its first 35 years. Teams competed in knockout rounds, playing one match at home and one away. If the scores were tied after the two games, the team with more away goals would go through. For many years, the competition was open only to the league champions of each country. Today, as many as four sides from each top league take part.



EUROPEAN CUP / CHAMPIONS LEAGUE WINNERS

1956	Real Madrid	1976	Bayern Munich	1996	Juventus
1957	Real Madrid	1977	Liverpool	1997	Borussia Dortmund
1958	Real Madrid	1978	Liverpool	1998	Real Madrid
1959	Real Madrid	1979	Nottingham Forest	1999	Manchester United
1960	Real Madrid	1980	Nottingham Forest	2000	Real Madrid
1961	Benfica	1981	Liverpool	2001	Bayern Munich
1962	Benfica	1982	Aston Villa	2002	Real Madrid
1963	AC Milan	1983	Hamburg	2003	AC Milan
1964	Internazionale	1984	Liverpool	2004	Porto
1965	Internazionale	1985	Juventus	2005	Liverpool
1966	Real Madrid	1986	Steaua Bucharest	2006	Barcelona
1967	Celtic	1987	Porto	2007	AC Milan
1968	Manchester United	1988	PSV Eindhoven	2008	Manchester United
1969	AC Milan	1989	AC Milan	2009	Barcelona
1970	Feyenoord	1990	AC Milan	2010	Internazionale
1971	Ajax	1991	Red Star Belgrade	2011	Barcelona
1972	Ajax	1992	Barcelona	2012	Chelsea
1973	Ajax	1993	Marseille (see p83)	2013	Bayern Munich
1974	Bayern Munich	1994	AC Milan		
1975	Bayern Munich	1995	Ajax		

▼ Robert Lewandowski scores Borussia Dortmund's first goal in their Champions League semi-final first leg game against Real Madrid. In an extraordinary match, Lewandowski became the first player ever to score four goals in a semi-final. Dortmund won 4-1 in that game, and went on to reach an all-German Champions League final versus Bayern Munich.

FACTFILE

Spanish striker Raúl has scored more Champions League goals than any other player – an incredible 71, all for Real Madrid and Schalke 04.



▲ Manchester United's Wayne Rooney in action during the 2009 Champions League final.

The competition was revamped as the Champions League in 1992. Group stages were introduced, guaranteeing more games and vast sums of television money for the competing clubs. Champions League success is now essential for the financial health of Europe's top teams. A report in 2005 showed that taking part in the tournament can add 10–20 per cent to a club's total income in a season. For a big side, failure to qualify can be a financial disaster.

The number of games in the Champions League soared from 25 in 1992–93 to 157 in 2002–03. From the 2003–04 season, the number of group stages was reduced from two to one, partly due to criticism that the competition was overblown. Yet, for every one of its critics, there are a thousand fans of the Champions League, as it pits more of the world's elite players against each other than any other club competition.

FACTFILE Up to 2004, only Dutchman Clarence Seedorf has won the European Cup with three different clubs – Ajax (1995), Real Madrid (1998) and AC Milan (2003).

