

The UEFA Champions League came about as a new version of the European Cup and was played for the first time in the 1992-1993 season. Already established as the most prestigious club tournament in football, Champions League has become even more popular with the introduction of a mini-league group stage system. The new concept had a resemblance to the FIFA World Cup with an early phase of group play followed by a knockout phase. On several occasions has the competition expanded to include more clubs – the initial 8 have become 32 (qualification stage excluded). The Champions League trophy can be kept permanently by a club that win the tournament five times or three times in a row (since the rule changed in 2008 it is only a replica). It is today almost as adored as the FIFA World Cup Trophy

If the precursor, European Cup, is not counted the Champions League started in 1992. Although, when statistics are presented for Champions League it is common that Champions League and European League are accumulated.

What distinguish the Champions League from European Cup is for many the group play instead of the round-robin format. The fact is, however, that a group stage was introduced already in 1991, but the reshaping became formalised by the name shift. In the development of the competition a hybrid-form of group play and round-robin has evolved.

The tournaments have so far been dominated by the top European clubs and few surprise victories have occurred. Perhaps Porto's victory in 2004 should be counted as the biggest surprise. Potential sensations that could have happened was Nantes in 1995-96 that almost managed to go through Juventus in the semi-finals (lost 3-4 on aggregate). If Dynamo Kyiv had won in 1998-99 it would also be seen as a sensation; they were only one goal down on aggregation against Bayern Munich in the semi-finals. Two years later, Leeds reached the semi-finals, but wasn't near to beat Valencia that time. Villa Real is another club that is not familiar to be seen at the final steps in the biggest events; they were only one goal down on aggregation against Arsenal in the semi-finals in 2006.

Most times runners-up are Juventus (3), Milan (3), Bayern Munich (3) and Atlético Madrid (3). Manchester United, Valencia and Liverpool have also lost the final more than once.

If Champions League and European Cup titles are combined, Real Madrid is still the best performing club with 13 titles (6 and 7 in European Cup and Champions League respectively).

Records

The largest victory margin happened between HJK Helsinki and Bangor City in the second qualification round in 2011–12. If the qualification phase is excluded, the biggest goal difference is eight goals in the matches Liverpool-Besiktas (2007-2008) and Real Madrid-Malmö FF (2015-2016). If only finals are considered, the biggest win was in the 1994 final when Milan defeated Barcelona 4 to 0.

Format and participating teams

In the first edition (1992-1993), the tournament consisted of 8 teams after a qualification phase. The eight teams were playing in two groups followed by a final between the group winners. The first season included in total 36 participating clubs in the qualification, since when the numbers have increased.

In the third edition of the Champions League (1994-1995), the tournament expanded to 16 teams (excluding the qualification). The format consisted of a group phase with four groups followed by three knockout stages.

In season 1997-1998 another expansion added more teams to 24 (excluding the qualification). A group phase, including six groups, was followed by a knockout phase in three stages.

In season 1999-2000 the tournament expanded for the third time and would now include 32 teams (excluding the qualification). Now, the teams were divided into eight groups and the first group stage was followed by a second, and finally a knockout stage.

In season 2014-2015, the second group stage was abandoned. Instead, another stage (Round of 16) in the knockout phase was played.