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SPORTS

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Best way for Liverpool is to go on the attack and they should stick to it against Barcelona, says Ashley Westwood

Former Bengaluru FC and ATK manager Ashley Westwood talks about the Barcelona vs Liverpool semi-final in the UEFA Champions League.

Written by [Tanuj Lakhina](#) |

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Liverpool will head to the Nou Camp for the first leg on May 2. (File Photo)

In the second of the UEFA Champions League semi-finals, to be played between Liverpool and Barcelona, the English Premier League club will head to the Nou Camp for the first leg on May 2.

The second leg will be played a week later at Anfield. Former Bengaluru FC and ATK coach Ashley Westwood spoke to [IndianExpress.com](https://indianexpress.com) on the mouthwatering clash. He reveals how the extremely potent attacks of Barcelona and Liverpool can be stopped from scoring.

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Should Liverpool play their typical attacking style when they face Barcelona or be conservative in their approach?

Westwood: I think Liverpool have one way of playing and the front three have been very important: Sadio Mane, Mo Salah and Roberto Firmino. Add to that, if they play with two defensive midfielders in Jordan Henderson and James Milner, they can be a little more disciplined. In the previous matches in the Champions League, away from home, they've been more defensive but having said that, their away form isn't that great in the Champions League. The best way for them to play, for me, is to go attacking. It is a difficult place to go, and I'm sure Jurgen Klopp has got a plan for it.



Manchester United did well at home to nullify Barcelona but didn't have enough to do well at the Nou Camp. (Reuters)

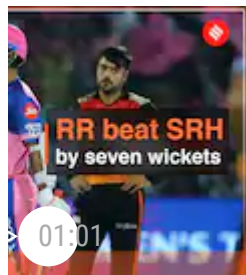
If they do stick to the attacking approach, do you think they risk exposing themselves? So it might be game over by the first leg itself?

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Westwood: That's the danger of going to Barcelona. They in 10-15 minutes. We've seen that in the past with their at Messi, Ousmane Dembele, and the likes. So Liverpool ha Barcelona if you are on the attack.

It's a very good side but it is not the best Barcelona side v United did well at home to nullify Barcelona but didn't hav maybe Klopp has looked at the Manchester United game conservative approach in the first leg.

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Barcelona celebrate winning La Liga with the trophy (REUTERS)

Barcelona had all but wrapped up the Spanish league a few weeks back while Liverpool are still fighting. How much of a role does that play in the preparation?

Westwood: All these players have been competing at the very top for years. They know how to handle the mental pressure as top professionals in top leagues in the world. I don't think they'd be thinking about anything other than the next game. You just play the next game and take the next one as it comes along. You don't look too far ahead and I don't think it'd play too much of a role.

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Luis Suarez and Coutinho will be in action against Liverpool. (Reuters)

Luis Suarez and Coutinho will be in action against Liverpool. Will that be an added advantage for Barcelona?

Westwood: I don't think so. So Suarez has been away for quite a few years. Liverpool have a lot of new players now that weren't there when Suarez was there. Everybody knows what Liverpool are

going to do, it's just whether you can stop individuals like Mane and Salah, who can hurt anybody – even if you know what they're going to do.

How do you stop a Barcelona attack?

Westwood: Obviously to stop Barcelona, you have to stop Messi. You need to be very compact when you haven't got the ball. Messi likes to operate in between the lines, in between the defence and midfield in little spaces, so you need to make sure that space is minimum. Otherwise, if you become expansive and Messi gets the ball and runs at your defence, there will be big problems.



Jordi Alba loves to attack down the left. (Reuters)

Jordi Alba plays a key role in working in tandem with Messi and Coutinho could play on the same wing. So it could be a two-on-one with Trent Alexander-Arnold. How would one counter that threat?

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Westwood: Normally Salah plays on the right. So he will be required to do more defensive work because we do know Alba loves to attack down the left. But if your holding midfielder, whether that's Henderson, Naby Keita or Milner, that defensive midfielder will have to come out and help Alexander-Arnold. That's why teams sometimes play a 4-2-3-1 so they have two defensive midfielders to share the workload of covering in areas when Salah or Mane gets caught higher up the field. The defensive midfielder can then just shuffle across and help out the full back.

Is there a probability that we could see a three-prong defensive midfield – maybe a Georginio Wijnaldum?

Westwood: Wijnaldum is a little more attacking in nature. So when you play three midfielders, normally two sit back and one goes forward. Very rarely do you see all three sitting back. What Liverpool may do is sit high and wide at the same time. Maybe when one full back goes forward, the other one tucks in to provide extra cover and they work in pendulum mode rather than both the full backs being high and wide at the same time. But let's see. There are many ways of playing the same kind of system. Surely Klopp would have done his homework and would know which way to go.

How can Liverpool be stopped?

Westwood: To stop Liverpool, it is more of an individual responsibility. People need to be able to defend in 1-vs-1 situation. So whether it is Alba vs Salah, or Gerard Pique vs Firmino, or the right back to look after Mane. It is important to not be beaten in the 1-vs-1 situation and both Salah, Mane like to dribble so you have to match their speed, physicality and dribbling ability to defend.

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Watch: UEFA Champions League Semi-Finals will be live May 1, 2 at 12.30 AM IST onwards on [Sony](#) Ten 2 channels.

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