

Mbappe 'refuses to talk' to Al Hilal over 300-million-euro move

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Online Desk: Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappe has refused to meet officials from Al Hilal, dealing a potentially fatal blow to the Saudis' ambitious hopes of completing a world record 300-million-euro (\$333 million) swoop. The French star has refused "any discussion with the representatives of the Al-Hilal club, present in Paris this Wednesday," reported L'Equipe sports daily, AFP reports.

According to the report, a delegation from the Saudi club came to Paris to finalise the transfer of Brazilian Malcom from Zenit Saint Petersburg. They also wanted to present their project to Mbappe while in the French capital. "This approach will not succeed," added L'Equipe because the entourage of the 24-year-old player "refused any discussions with the representatives of the Saudi club". "The captain of Les Bleus has never considered this option," the report added.

Riyadh-based Al Hilal had been given permission by PSG to open talks with Mbappe despite him never having expressed an interest in moving to the fast-growing Saudi league. Mbappe has one year left on his contract with PSG, who want him to leave now rather than for nothing next summer. But he is refusing to sign a new contract and the French champions believe he has already struck a deal to move to Real Madrid next year.

It is widely thought that Real hoped to pick up Mbappe for free next year, attracting him with a colossal signing fee because they would not have to pay PSG anything for his services. The standoff between Mbappe and the French club reached a new peak last weekend when they dropped him from their squad to tour Japan and South Korea. There have been suggestions that Mbappe would not be selected for an entire year if he fails to find a solution with PSG.

Mbappe, the club's all-time top scorer with 212 goals in 260 appearances, remains the second most expensive player in history behind his PSG teammate Neymar. He was still a teenager when he joined PSG on a season-long loan from Monaco in August 2017. The move turned into a permanent transfer the following year in a 180-million-euro deal.

That fee is exceeded only by Neymar, the Brazilian who cost PSG 222 million euros in 2017. The third member of PSG's superstar trio, Lionel Messi, left at the end of last season to join MLS franchise Inter Miami.

The trio could not prevent PSG being knocked out of the Champions League by Bayern Munich at the last 16 stage last season although they went on to clinch the French title. Al Hilal are one of the handful of clubs owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF). They have already signed central defender Kalidou Koulibaly from Chelsea and Ruben Neves from Wolves this summer.