



# TOTAL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS

#112 // AUGUST 2024

WHY ARE THE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES OF GIOVANNI ROSSI AND LARNE FC WORTH CASE STUDIES? CAN CHRISTIAN LATTANZIO SUCCEED AT SINT-TRUIDEN? WHY ARE YOUNG PLAYERS LIKE MORGAN ROGERS, GIOVANNI FABBIAN AND NESTORY IRANKUNDA CATCHING THE ATTENTION OF BIGGER CLUBS? IS MAN-MARKING ON PREMIER LEAGUE CORNERS A THING OF THE PAST, AND WHO ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE SET-PIECE TAKERS IN THE ALLSVENSKAN? HOW HAS CHRIS ARMAS REVIVED THE COLORADO RAPID, AND WILL MARIA MIKOLAJOVA GET HER WELL-EARNED BIG MOVE? ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS, PLUS MORE, WILL BE ANSWERED IN THIS ISSUE!!!

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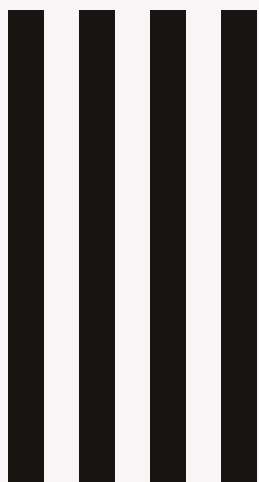
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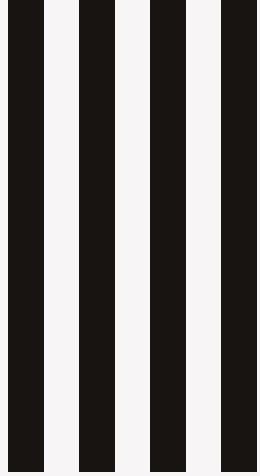
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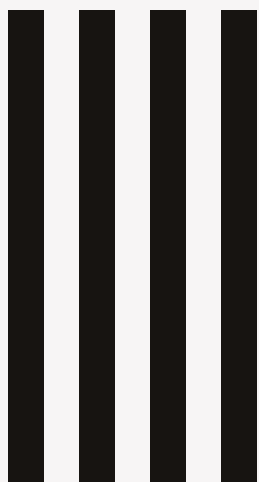
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## PREMIER LEAGUE 2024/25

### THE NUMBERS BEHIND SOUTHAMPTON'S NEW CENTER-BACK SIGNING RONNIE EDWARDS

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

All three teams promoted to the Premier League for the upcoming season are eye-catching in various aspects — recruitment, style of play, and age group among those. That has not been the case for a long time.

Southampton's transfer window has been near perfect so far, with the Saints signing exciting talent in the game, including making some loan moves from last season permanent. One of those signings is Ronnie Edwards from Peterborough United. The 21-year-old England youth international was instrumental in helping his team secure a playoff spot.

The below visualisation shows where Edwards ranks for some of the key metrics when compared with the other left-sided centre-backs from League One and similar leagues in terms of difficulty level. Edwards is not afraid to play an active role in possession. Ranking above average for a number of possession metrics, Edwards is press-resistant, shows quite often the ability to find the feet of his teammates between the lines and is intelligent enough to move the ball in tight spaces — ranking in the top 1% for accurate passes and top 20% for progressive passes per 90 minutes. His ability to dribble the ball is quite a positive for someone who plays in his position, 67th percentile for dribbles per 90 minutes.

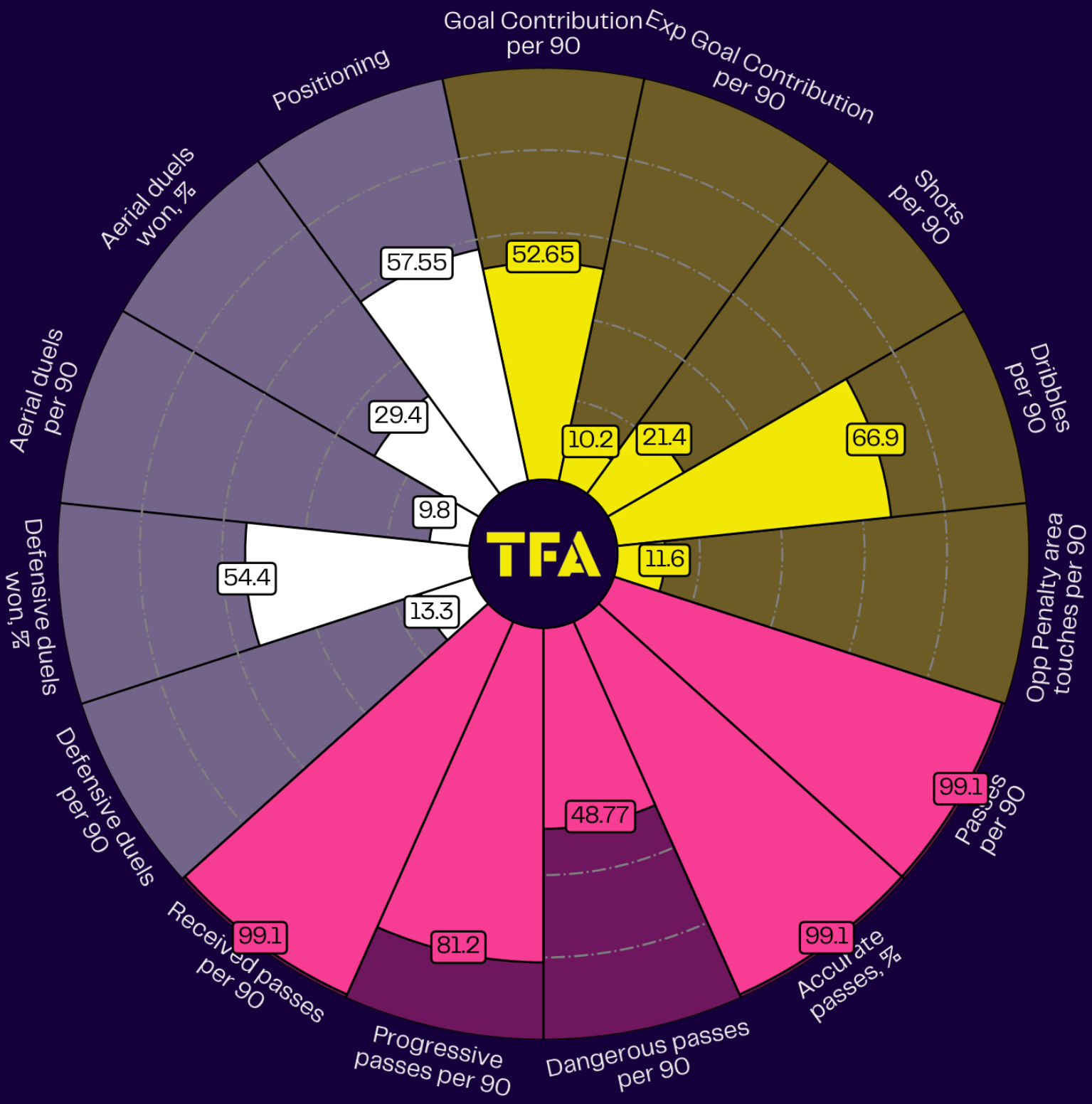
Defensively, he possesses the physical strength to be proactive in defending 1v1 duels—ranking 54th percentile for duels won—but he is too proactive sometimes and ends up in a no-man's land, leaving the backline in trouble—reflected in his defensive positioning percentile (58th percentile). His aerial ability is also lacking for someone of his height and is an aspect of his game that can be improved.

Ronnie Edwards played the most minutes for the Posh last season and was, rightly, one of the highly-rated defenders not just in League One but in the entirety of EFL. After spending four seasons at the Posh, the move to Southampton is at the right time for him, and if he continues to shine for the club in the Premier League, no one would be surprised if one of the top six teams came for his signature next summer given his versatility to play on either side of the central defence, and his flexibility to play in different systems.



# R. Edwards | LCB | 4695 minutes played

## Peterborough United | 21-years-old | TFA Score: 46



■ Attacking 
 ■ Possession 
 ■ Defending

Percentile Rank vs LCBs in Tier 5,6,7 | Data from Season 2023-24

\*TFA score: Custom metric evaluating player performance, factoring in position-specific metrics

# MORGAN ROGERS

MORGAN ROGERS



ASTON VILLA

**A MODERN EXAMPLE OF  
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT**

ALEXANDRA HUNT

Back in April 2023, Millwall's Zian Flemming dispatched a penalty condemning Blackpool to relegation to England's third tier. In the Tangerine's starting XI that day was then-Manchester City loanee and attacking midfielder, Morgan Rogers.

Fast forward to the present day; Rogers is a recently established regular in Unai Emery's Aston Villa side, who are ready to embark on Champions League football this campaign. It is an outstanding rise up the football pyramid for the 21-year-old in such a short period of time.

Rogers' time at Blackpool had shown signs of promise, but overall, it was somewhat underwhelming. The former West Brom academy graduate scored only once in 20 appearances for the then-championship club. Rogers' raw talent, though, was enough to persuade Middlesbrough to acquire his services from City for a fee believed to be in the region of £1 million.

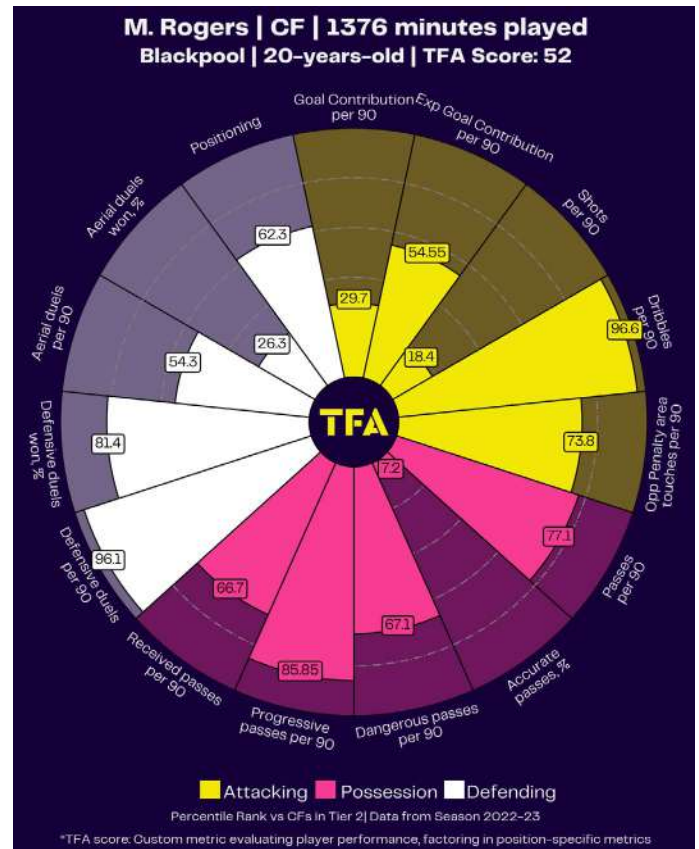
Billed as one for the future on Teesside, it was a surprise to many that Rogers departed for high-flying Aston Villa in January 2024, only six months into his Boro deal. While some believed that Rogers was not ready to step up to the rigours of Premier League football, the midfielder is currently proving any doubters wrong as he became a regular in the Midlands at the tail end of last season.

In this tactical analysis and scout report, we will highlight Rogers's development over the last year and further delve into how Rogers has slotted into different tactics, enabling the midfielder to progress his game.

## TOUGH START ON TEESSIDE

Middlesbrough's recent transfer policy has been to invest in young potential, developing such players in the hope of generating a profit

later on. Boro identified Rogers as a player who fit this remit following his loan spell at Blackpool.



The pizza plot shows that despite featuring for a struggling side in the Championship prior to his Boro move, Rogers ranked highly compared to his peers for his positive play when in possession. Moreover, Rogers ranked highly for his dribbling ability and would not shirk his defensive work, as he ranked in the top 20% for percentage of defensive duels won.

However, the midfielder's game had flaws. As shown in the previous graphic, Rogers had much to improve on in terms of keeping possession for his side and producing end product in front of goal.

Rogers arrived on Teesside just as Middlesbrough was nursing a hangover following defeat in the playoffs. Michael Carrick's side had also just lost loanees Cameron Archer and Aaron Ramsey as well as top goalscorer Chuba Akpom, who had departed for Ajax.

Therefore, the attacking midfielder had big shoes to fill, and it was a lot of pressure to put on the then-20-year-old. Rogers typically played on



the left or centrally of the advanced midfielders in Boro's 4-2-3-1 system. However, due to slow progress in the transfer market coupled with injuries, it was not uncommon for Rogers to lead the line.

This role was unfamiliar for Rogers, though, as he lacked the strength to hold up play. Although he has pace, he wasn't quick enough to make runs in behind defenders. Rogers prefers to be involved in the play and use his neat footwork to create openings, as he is comfortable with either his left or right foot.

In theory, Rogers was ideal for Carrick's preferred attacking principles—patient build-up play looking to make intelligent passes in tight areas in the final third. It was evident from the outset that Rogers was keen to make an impression in his new side, but the former Manchester City player often wanted too much time on the ball.



This was exactly the case in the above example, where Rogers had the intelligence to turn away from the opposition and drive forward. However, upon creating the space, Rogers should have opted for a through pass toward the forward Emmanuel Latte Lath but instead kept possession, only to be dispossessed.

It proved to be a common theme in his early Middlesbrough career as the young midfielder was dispossessed 2.48 times per 90 and recorded 3.45 miscontrols per 90 throughout his time at the Riverside.

Middlesbrough started last season in poor form, with their only two victories in their opening eight fixtures in all competitions coming in the League Cup. During this time, Rogers had an expected goals tally of just 1.22, exemplifying the little impact he made on the Teessiders' goal threat.

Carrick's side only averaged 1.25 goals per game in these opening eight fixtures despite often dominating possession. Whilst it would be unfair to shoulder the disappointing attacking statistics during this time solely down to Rogers, the former Manchester City man was unable to make a significant impact at his new club. He soon found himself resigned to the bench thereafter.

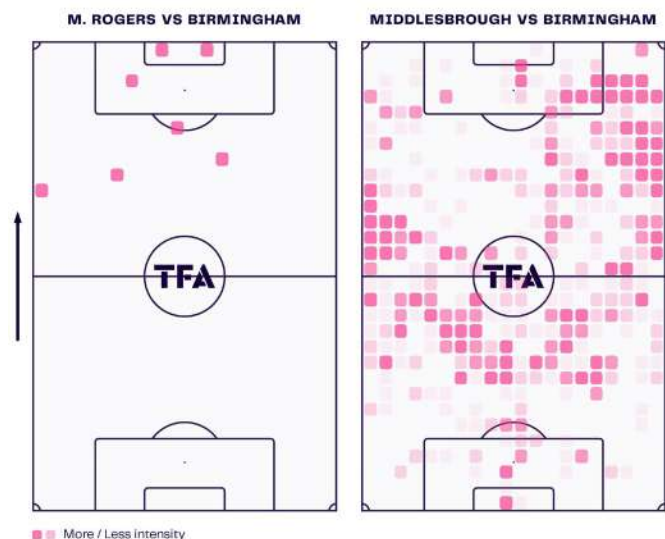
## PROGRESSING IN THE NORTH-EAST

Rogers had shown flashes of potential upon his move to the North East, but honing that talent on the training ground was required, and work was done to help the midfielder improve his decision-making. Rogers has been vocal in the past about his eagerness to learn the tactical and analytical side of the game. He was able to develop an understanding of Middlesbrough's style of play when amongst the substitutes.

It is no easy feat to make an impact from the bench, as players need to adjust to the pace of the match, but Rogers was able to make an impression in games in such scenarios in early October last season. He notably contributed an assist in victory at Sunderland and scored a late winner against Birmingham City following introductions from the bench.

The graphic below highlights how Rogers made an impact against the Blues. He found space and influenced the match in positions that Boro had occupied less frequently prior to Rogers' introduction.

### HEATMAP



Although Boro dominated possession against the Blues, the heatmap shows that they had much more play in the attacking third down the right flank. However, upon his introduction to the match, Rogers was able to provide a threat both centrally and on the left side in the final third and, hence, provide Middlesbrough with a different attacking outlet.



As Middlesbrough piled forward on the counter against Birmingham, Rogers was free on the left side to pick up the loose ball and drive forward. He then played a pass out to Matt Crooks on the right. Although the pass itself was not the most accurate, Crooks was able to supply a cross, which Rogers met just before the goalkeeper to give his side the lead.

Another takeaway from this example, as well as Rogers' positioning, is his unselfish play. In the early days of his Middlesbrough career, Rogers would likely have opted for an attempt at goal on the edge of the penalty area. However, he was showing signs of growing into his role in playing with his unmarked teammate. The evidence pointed to a player who was starting to value the team rather than go for individual brilliance.

As last season progressed, Rogers found himself back in the starting XI and found a rich vein of form around the festive period, with two goals and three assists in five matches. The attacking midfielder started to link up play with his Boro counterparts with intelligent passing.



Prior to the incoming pass by Hayden Hackney, Rogers scanned the penalty area and was aware of the space in the opposition's defensive line.



Once the pass had been made towards Rogers and with the opposition opting to close him down, his awareness of the space enabled him to play a clever flick towards the advancing Marcus Forss, who dispatched his effort on goal.

As the matches went by, Rogers was growing into his role on Teesside and finished as the top scorer in the League Cup as Boro made the semi-finals. It was noticeable how the young midfielder was able to find pockets of space in and around the area and link up with others in the Boro forward line.

He was much less lightweight upfront and helped to advance play as Middlesbrough got their season back on track. Rogers ranked in the top 8% compared to other attacking midfielders in England's second tier for dangerous passes per 90, and this style of play caught the attention of Aston Villa, which paid an initial £8 million for his services.

## EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS AT VILLA

Emery's Villa side were the surprise package last campaign, with not many tipping them for a top-four finish, and it seemed a somewhat unusual choice for the Midlands side to opt to bolster their squad midway through the season with a Championship player.

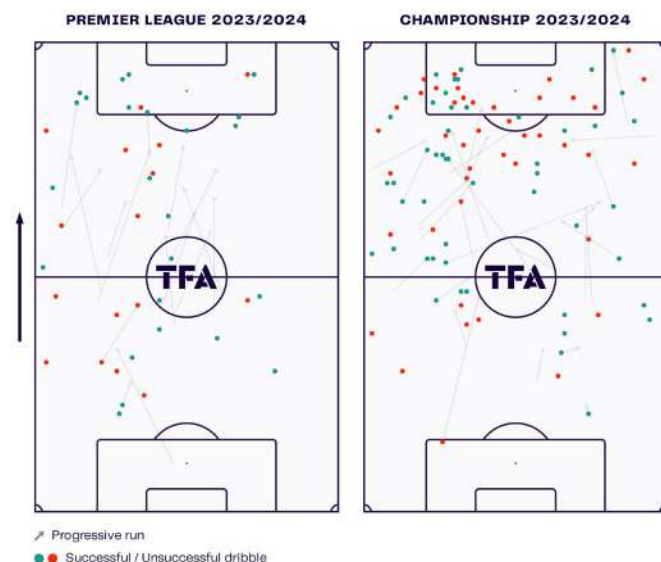
Many will have anticipated that Rogers was outlined for a player to develop, but he soon found himself in the starting set-up. Unlike his role at Boro, Rogers operates on the left side of Emery's preferred 4-4-2 formation.

Under the Spaniard, Villa adopt a direct style of play in attack, and Rogers thrives in this system. We have already demonstrated that Rogers has neat footwork, and these attributes have served him well at Villa Park. His current side often works

possession in tight areas, looking to combine with Ollie Watkins as the focal point upfront.

In Villa's attacking principles, it is commonplace for the wider midfield to drive forward into the more central areas.

### M. ROGERS BALL PROGRESSION



The above graphic shows that since his move to the Premier League, Rogers has been more positive in progressing the play, as he would often make more lateral runs in the Championship to find space in tight areas. It is more the case now that upon receipt of possession, Rogers' instinct is to accelerate forward.

The direct style suits Rogers, who is strong at receiving possession and advancing play on the turn. Since his arrival at Villa Park, the midfielder has also been less wasteful in possession, as his miscontrols per 90 have decreased by 31%, and his dispossession rates per 90 have decreased by 38% compared to his time at Middlesbrough.

As Villa like to progress play quickly, their passing style can be to release Watkins down the channels or half-spaces, and a range of passing is required. This is exemplified below, where Rogers has received possession and turned, before playing in the advancing Watkins.





As a consequence of Villa's variation in carrying the ball into the final third and quickly playing in the likes of Watkins, Rogers' possessional play has improved.

Morgan Rogers passing statistics (2022/23 – 2023/24)

Club	Season	Medium pass completion (%)	Long pass completion (%)
Blackpool	2022/23	52.1	50.0
Middlesbrough	2023/24	74.6	64.1
Aston Villa	2023/24	83.3	85.7

The table shows a marked improvement in Rogers's passing range, particularly compared to his loan spell at Blackpool. The statistics, therefore, showcase a player who is growing in confidence as he successfully completes more difficult passes.

As well as the improvements that Rogers has made on a personal level, he has also improved the balance of Emery's side, who previously had been weaker in defence on the left side due to a lack of pace. Rogers, though, has added such pace and has slotted into Villa's system, with the Villans playing a high, aggressive defensive line, forcing the opposition out wide in a compact 4-4-2 shape out of possession.



As Lucas Digne has closed down the opposition out wide, Rogers has checked the options Chelsea have in the forward line and ensured to provide cover for the more advanced Digne. There are signs that Rogers is improving the tactical side of his game, as he is much more disciplined than in his earlier days at Boro.

That being said, there are certainly areas that Rogers could improve on. Upon his transfer to Villa, he had only won 50% of defensive duels. Moreover, he will be looking to improve his goal tally. Rogers' goals last season were often of high calibre, but it will be a case of whether he can improve this element of his game to find an end product on a more regular basis.

It will be encouraging to the Villa faithful, though, that Rogers has been much more clinical of late, with a goal-per-shot ratio of 0.27 compared to just 0.06 while on Teesside. As Emery has often been dubbed a perfectionist in the past, he could well be the perfect manager to further develop Rogers' promising talent.

## CONCLUSION

The 2023/24 season has been potentially career-changing for Rogers, who, as this analysis has shown, improved tactically. The greater understanding that Rogers has developed with teammates on the pitch has ensured his natural ability has not gone to waste.

While Rogers has developed physically, he has also become much more instinctive in driving

play forward for his side. Playing with a stronger crop of players will no doubt have aided his development, but this analysis has shown that for any young footballer, it is important to trust the process.

By no means is Rogers the finished article, but he is an example to young footballers that with the right attitude, there is always scope for development.



# SET-PIECE ROUNDTABLE

ANDERS TORSTENSSON



MJÄLLBY AIF

**DISSECTING THE  
MOST EFFECTIVE  
SET-PLAYS IN THE  
ALLSVENSKAN**

MARCEL SEIFEDDINE // @\_MARCEL\_23



Welcome to the set-piece roundtable! Each month, we will travel to new leagues and nations across the world to bring to the limelight the most interesting and innovative tactical set-piece tweaks/ideas or any routines which stand out. These ideas will range from extremely effective to ineffective, but we will make sure to inform you of the thought processes behind these routines to determine if there is room for these set plays to be repeated in the future.

In August, we turn to the Swedish top-flight, Allsvenskan, to discover what these teams have been up to while most of Europe has been on a break following the end of the season, with some player's seasons only finishing a few weeks ago after the conclusion of EURO 2024. As usual, the goal is to dissect the routines and teams that have gone under the radar to emphasise how important set pieces can be and bring to the surface some new and exciting set plays that can be emulated all over the world.

In this tactical analysis, we will look into the tactics behind the Allsvenskan's most interesting set pieces, with an in-depth analysis of why each routine is used. This set-piece analysis will examine why each routine has been innovative, with details on how and when the different routines are most efficient.

## **8) DECOY RUNS TO STRETCH MAN MARKING DEFENCES, GÖTEBORG VS DJURGÅRDEN**

Djurgården open the discussion with a fairly simple yet effective routine. As we have mentioned in previous roundtable discussions, attacks facing a man-marking defensive structure have the most potential for destabilising the defensive unit due to how susceptible each member of the defensive side is to being moved around while they attempt to remain tight to their

marker. Attackers can make decoy runs away from the target areas to maximise the amount of space the intended receiver of the ball has to compete for the aerial duel and leave him isolated rather than battling numerous opponents in that duel.

As we see in the image below, two attackers located at the middle of the six-yard line make decoy runs towards the near edge of the six-yard box, which lures those defenders away from the target area highlighted below. While those defenders are dragged away from the six-yard box, the two attackers located on the edge of the penalty area make runs into the target area, which is now left completely unopposed.



All that's left is for the attackers to reach that open space before their marker can, which is possible through sharp movement to dismark and then attack the ball unopposed. This routine is ranked lower because, in the second stage of dismarking, Djurgården fail to create any advantages for its attackers, as each has to attempt to outmanoeuvre a defender in order to access the free space unopposed or battle in an opposed aerial duel while attempting a header on goal. In this particular instance, Lucas Bergvall, who has recently picked Spurs over Barcelona to have a taste of the Premier League, manages to win his duel and direct the ball in the back of the net, but unless a mismatch is created on purpose, these aerial duels are a flip of the coin, a big gamble for such an important outcome.

## 7) ENGAGING & DISTRACTING ZONAL DEFENDERS, DJURGÅRDEN VS MALMÖ

Next up, Malmö's last gasp, stoppage time winner against Djurgården in a top-of-the-table six-pointer. Zonal defending is a prevalent method, but each defender is responsible for different zones in the system. If one zone becomes left open for whatever reason, no one is left to cover, and it becomes extremely vulnerable. One way in which it is possible to unsettle a zone is through setting a screen to prevent a defender from being able to attack the ball. Once this happens, that zone is unguarded, free to attack unless the defender can 'break' the screen.



A defender can 'break' a screen by either changing their own position to gain a clear path towards the ball or by changing the position of the player, setting the screen to again gain a clear path to attack the ball.

This is hard to capture with images, but the defender moves towards the screen setter, shifts him a couple of steps to the side and attempts to move back to his original starting position. While the screen is broken, Malmö are happy with the outcome, as the defender has been distracted enough for his positioning to be suboptimal when battling for the aerial duel and protecting his zone. The zone has been unsettled and is vulnerable to the incoming Malmö attacker.

The image below shows how, by the time the cross is delivered, the defender is still moving backwards as he attempts to jump for the ball. Due to this, he cannot reach the same height the attacker can, giving the attacker the advantage in the aerial duel. This is only possible through good timing, as the screen could have been set earlier, and the defender would've had enough time to break it and return to position. However, through the last-second timing, the defender has no time to react adequately to the screen that is set.



This highlights the value of set pieces, with one successful corner kick routine being enough to convert a draw into a victory within seconds. At the same time, it is also important to add that this is only possible through precise and consistent corner kick deliveries to land exactly where the screen is performed.

## 6) FINDING SPACE ON THE OUTSKIRTS, GÖTEBORG VS ELFSBORG

When teams cannot guarantee consistent deliveries into a specific zone, it can be more beneficial to target spaces on the outside of defensive blocks rather than trying to be incisive and finding/creating gaps in the middle of them.

As seen in the image below, Elfsborg's heavy zonal presence leaves no space to attack the six-yard box unless a late run arrives at the near side. The space is on either side of the defensive unit. In this particular example, the cross is

floated to the far side, where there is a higher margin for error, as the receiver has more time to react to the ball should it deviate from the target location. The defenders on the far side of the box are shifted towards the goal to increase the receiver's space as well.



As the ball arrives at the far side, we can see the other attackers find spaces around the six-yard line, where they can potentially redirect the ball, which will be volleyed across the six-yard box.



## 5) CREATING SPACE IN ZONAL BLOCKS, GAIS VS GÖTEBORG – ATTACKING FREE KICK

In fifth, GAIS are the only side with a free kick set play being discussed. The nearest zonal defender from the free kick below is in line with the penalty spot, and his role is to protect his side from any balls being delivered across the front of the block. GAIS use a decoy run as shown in the image below, to drag the defender away from his teammates, stretching the gap in the defensive unit.



Once this is accomplished and the space in front of the defensive unit (along the red dashed line) increases, an in-swinging delivery can be made towards the back post, with attackers being given enough space to attack the ball without disruption. Redirecting a goalward cross in the last moments gives goalkeepers little time to react, and this becomes an effective goal-scoring method.



## 4) ARRIVING IN DANGEROUS AREAS FROM OUTSIDE THE BOX, VÄRNAMO VS MALMÖ

As the title suggests, arrivals from outside the box are yet another effective method of giving players the opportunity to attack the ball without disruption. The players on the edge of the box are usually there to collect loose balls and are unmarked, giving them a clear path to attack the ball without a defender disrupting their movement.

In this particular routine, Malmö use an in-swinging delivery to force the opposition to sit



deeper and protect the spaces in the six-yard box. Furthermore, all attackers purposefully form a pack surrounding the goalkeeper. Combining both elements allows Malmö to trap the defence inside the six-yard box, which means any delivery to the outskirts of the six-yard box is free to attack. In the image, we can see the player arriving from deep, with no one around him, to volley the ball into the back of the net from a close distance.



### **3) SHORT CORNER ROUTINE; UPGRADING THE CROSS, VÄRNAMO VS HÄCKEN**

In third place, the short corner performed by Häcken is fairly simple yet effective and has similarly been used by Eddie Howe at both Newcastle and Bournemouth. Short corners are effective due to the ease provided for attackers to lose their markers to attack the ball unopposed. As the ball is moved into open play, defenders have to adjust their positions in relation to the ball, and so they are too distracted to be in the optimal position to protect both space and the player, who has so little time to make their decisions.



The image above shows the ball being played into the penalty area, from where the cross can be 'upgraded', with the distance being closer to the goal. From this distance, once an attacker manages to gain a yard of space from their marker, the defender has no time to recover his position to deal with the cross.

When the player inside the box receives the pass, he has his back to goal and is not in a position to deliver the ball into the box. He must set the ball back to the corner taker, but in order to allow them to get as close to the goal as possible, his first touch must go away from goal to attract pressure from the defender and guide him away from the byline.



After that first touch takes the defender away from the byline, the player rolls the ball behind him into the space highlighted below. From there, the corner taker can approach the ball and deliver into the box from an 'upgraded' position.



## 2) USING CLUSTERS TO PIN THE GOALKEEPER, SIRIUS VS HÄCKEN

Häcken take up two of the top three spots in the most interesting set plays of the Swedish top-flight. Earlier, we discussed the benefits of crowding the goalkeeper, to trap opponents and the goalkeeper in tight spaces, preventing them from being able to step up and intercept crosses. The image below displays the white shirts surrounding the blue, suffocating them in a small space. This makes the near post zone, which is highlighted, easily accessible. Through good timing, the attacker on the far side of the six-yard box is able to arrive in the space as the ball does and flick the ball into the near post without having to gain separation.



The use of an out-swinging delivery further encourages the goalkeeper to step further up from the goal line, as the ball is likely to curve away from the six-yard box, which he wants to claim. As a result, the near post is left unguarded, and the attacker can sneak in and finish the chance from a tight angle, with the goalkeeper unable to cover the space in time.

## 1) DECOY RUNS, NEAR POST FLICK AND A BACK POST FINISH, VÄSTERÅS VS MJÄLLBY

Mjällby tops the ranking through a well-worked, two-part routine. Their coach, Anders Torstensson, has them battling near the

top of the table, with hopes of European football after they earned promotion back in 2020. When facing a hybrid defensive system, Mjällby must defeat zonal and man-marking defences to create an excellent goal-scoring opportunity.

The first stage in this routine involves the need to perform a flick-on from the near side of the six-yard box, which is only possible by destabilising the zonal defenders. Mjällby achieve this through decoy runs, where we can see in the image a run is made in front of the zone they want to target, to lure the zonal defender away from the black area. The defender protecting the zone steps up to track the initial run in case he attempts to flick it on, but in doing so, he vacates the target zone, which the Mjällby player attacks from his starting position by the near post.



Once the player makes the first contact at the near side of the six-yard box, the other attackers can arrive in the six-yard box to make the second contact, redirecting the ball into the back of the net. As mentioned earlier in the article, losing the man-markers is easier after the first contact. The defenders turn their attention to the ball, allowing the attackers to make darting movements to the goal unopposed.



## CONCLUSION

This detailed analysis explores the ideas and benefits behind some of the most innovative set-piece tactics used in recent months in the Allsvenskan. This article presents effective set-piece routines that clubs globally could implement. Observing the various strategies teams employ to gain advantages is intriguing, emphasising the potential to secure essential points through set plays.





## LA LIGA 2024/25

### WAS MARC ROCA RIGHT TO MAKE HIS SWITCH FROM LEEDS UNITED PERMANENT?

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

Leeds United made some jaw-dropping signings in the summer of 2022, one of which was Marc Roca from Bayern Munich. The Spanish youth international spent only one season at Leeds United after a slow start and a disappointing season for the team, eventually getting relegated.

However, he moved on to Real Betis on loan last summer and put up quite an audition only for the Spanish club to sign him permanently this summer. Roca, after spending a significant part of his career so far in his native Spain, is back there and looks set to become an integral part of Betis this upcoming season if they are to punch above their weight.

The visualisation below shows Marc Roca's ranking for some key metrics compared to the players who play in a position similar to his in Europe's top five leagues. Over the years, Roca has gone on to become a very well-rounded midfielder. Playing regularly as a deep central midfielder and then continuing that way at Bayern. Roca has now become a deep-lying playmaker with a major focus on progressing the ball between the lines and stopping counterattacks.

His impact in the final third has gone down over the last couple of seasons, which shows that he is mostly involved in receiving the pass in the first phase of build-up and progressing between the lines. Only Isco attempted more progressive passes than Roca for Betis last season.

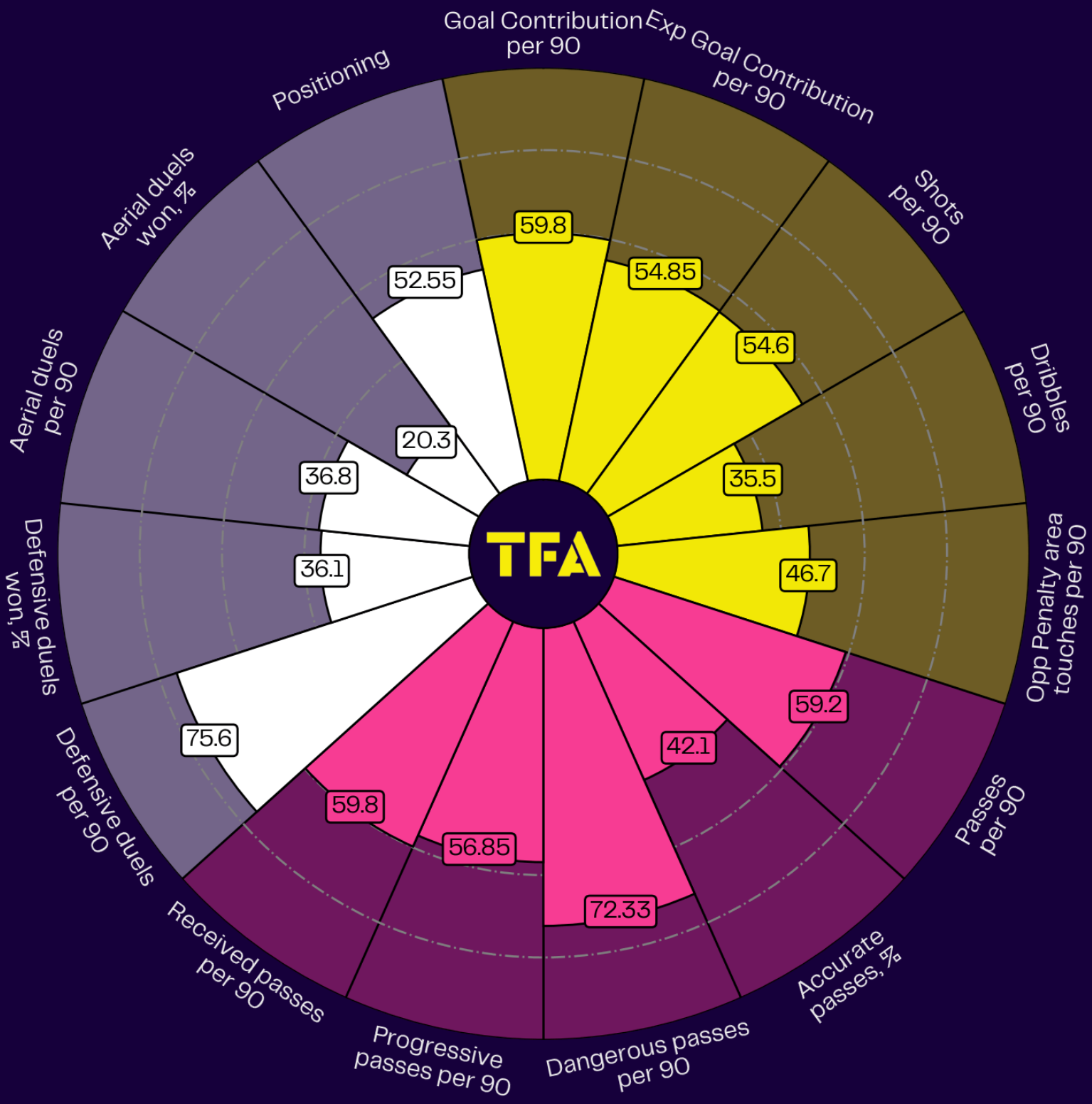
Roca is involved in a large number of defensive actions per 90 minutes. He played 22 90s last season, and that number is expected to go up this term. Carrying an aggressive attitude combined with good physical strength in tackles, Roca is good at stopping counterattacks.

His involvement in the attacking third at Betis has drastically reduced compared to his time at Leeds United—he was in the top 40% for touches in the opp. penalty area at Leeds but only in the top 60% for touches in the opp. penalty area at Betis. His ability to find his teammates with dangerous passes has improved—he was in the top 30% last season compared to being in the top 40% in 2022/23.

These numbers show that Roca's role at Betis has changed, and he, too, has excelled in it. That is one of the reasons why he has been signed permanently. At his peak, Roca is back in an environment that is comfortable for him, and there is no doubt he will shine.

# Marc Roca | LDM | 2008 minutes played

## Real Betis | 27-years-old | TFA Score: 60



■ Attacking 
 ■ Possession 
 ■ Defending

Percentile Rank vs LDMs in Tier 1 | Data from Season 2023-24

\*TFA score: Custom metric evaluating player performance, factoring in position-specific metrics

# ROGÉRIO CENI

ROGÉRIO CENI



BAHIA

## DECODING THE BRAZILIAN GIANTS BAHIA

JACK CHIPPENDALE // @JACKCHIPPY6



Over in the Série A, one of the most prolific goalscoring goalkeepers in football history is spearheading the latest adaptation in Brazilian football tactics. Having avoided relegation by the skin of their teeth in the previous campaign, Rogério Ceni and Bahia have emerged as Brazil's surprise package this season, with supporters lauding their ball dominance and willingness to be progressive against the historic greats.

The future of Bahia was transformed in 2023, having been financially supported by the City Football Group. A \$200 million purchase excited supporters in their search for a more competitive squad. Despite their new-found wealth, Bahia maintains the 13th largest squad market value in the Série A, highlighting the importance of their experienced tactician, who has introduced an unfamiliar system to fans in Brazil.

Despite Bahia's incredible start to the season waning slightly in recent weeks, they still hold a comfortable position at the right end of the table, firmly in contention for qualification to the Copa Libertadores.

This tactical analysis will begin to highlight some of the reasons why Rogério Ceni's team have taken the division by storm, reaping the rewards for their excellent squad development and collective passion for progressive football. Their tactics at both ends of the pitch have been imperative to their success, with our analysis aiming to portray their dynamic player profiles and ability to flow between different tactical systems depending on the game state.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Before taking a deeper dive into some of the key specifics regarding Bahia's style of play, it is important to understand how their underlying statistics are portrayed on the pitch. In line with the footballing philosophies surrounding the City

Football Group, Rogério Ceni has emphasised the need to enjoy possession of the football, with his side welcoming extended periods of ball dominance with an average possession of 52.7% this season.

This is further strengthened by their ability to maintain said possession when bypassing any opposition press, with Bahia enjoying the least amount of ball losses per 90 across the whole of Brazil's top flight (82.03).

When using this prolonged possession, Bahia's offensive numbers have been much more promising regarding expected goals and their ability to put away key opportunities. Especially when looking at their positive spell towards the end of the previous campaign, Bahia consistently enjoyed spells of possession in and around the opposition penalty area.

However, a goals-expected goals variance of -2.6 would suggest that they were just about failing to reach their optimal level regarding attacking conversion. This figure is much more favourable for Bahia in 2024, with a score of +2.7, allowing them to overcome close matches with greater levels of composure.

## ATTACKING PHASE

Perhaps the most captivating element of Bahia's play this season would be their high-functioning midfield unit, which exudes incredible levels of effort and dynamism.

In anticipation of this season, Bahia recruited the 35-year-old Éverton Ribiero to bolster their unit and provide the much-needed maturity and leadership, with players emulating his willingness to do the dirty work.

Despite being in the twilight years of his footballing career, Éverton leads a midfield quarter full of mobility and is integral to Bahia's commitment to

frustrating their opposition due to their passing sequences.

Within the framework of Brazilian football, Rogério Ceni's commitment to a 4-4-2 diamond or 4312 was viewed as fairly unique, resembling something much more familiar to fans of Argentinian football. But it has, in fact, been the cornerstone to their success within the middle third, allowing short, incisive passing strings, which can cause chaos for opposing markers.

When looking at their setup in the offensive phase, one of the Bahia midfielders will drop deeper into the holding role to offer the outlet ball to either the goalkeeper or two central defenders – Ceni's trusted players to initiate build-up play.

The two central midfielders at the sides of the diamond are responsible for picking up pockets within the two half-spaces and remaining compact to build Bahia's numerical superiority through the middle third. Their attacking width is usually created by Bahia's marauding full-backs, along with the two strikers who can split out wide to avoid being doubled up on through the centre.

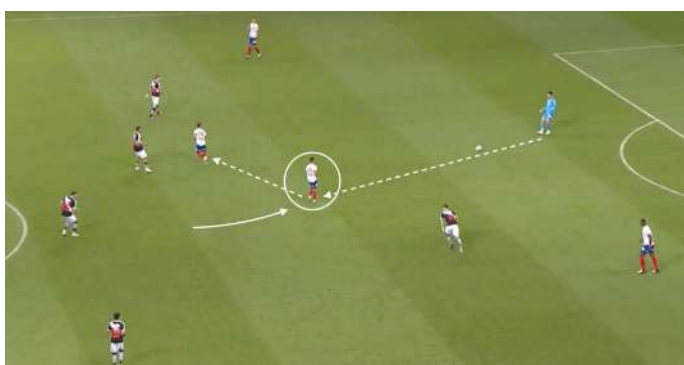
Even though Caio Alexandre is usually the initial option to receive from the keeper, this example highlights Éverton adopting this role, with Alexandre in close proximity to provide a rapid outlet pass to break the Vasco de Gama pressing efforts. Such combinations are one of the many reasons why Bahia lead the Série A in key passes, with 3.46 key passes highlighting their attacking intent when working the ball out from the back.

We can observe how these attacking sequences progress into the final third. Bahia is highly confident in its ability to break the lines, especially with strikers such as Everaldo and Thaciano able to manipulate the defensive positioning of the central defenders, creating space for Bahia's midfield quartet to run into.



One of the most pleasing things about the Bahia offensive game plan is the fact that they can show variation to stray away from their energy-zapping and controlling passing style, especially when facing some of the toughest opposition in the division.

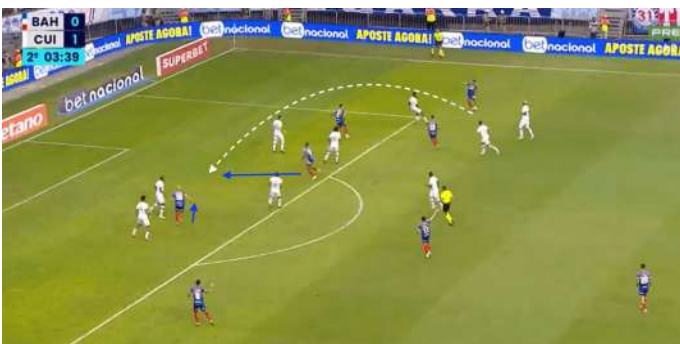
This example from their match against Flamengo encapsulates how Rogério Ceni's squad can rise to the occasion and cut through the defence at a faster rate. Unfazed by the occasion of playing at the Maracanã, Bahia were able to level proceedings with a swift two-pass sequence, with Kanu displaying excellent technical ability to bypass the Flamengo midfield. A Jean Lucas through ball allowed Everaldo to take advantage of the disjointed backline and slot past the goalkeeper, consequently allowing Bahia to display a greater level of fight when it matters most.



# BOX CRASHING BRILLIANCE

Having mentioned their ability to create space for players to attack the box, it would be wrong not to discuss one of the key ways Bahia have found success in front of goal this season. Whilst all of the Bahia squad can be praised for their efforts in the final third, Jean Lucas stands out as one of the key beneficiaries when crashing into the opponent's penalty area.

In our first example, we can see how Jean Lucas is able to spin off his marker and attack the lofted cross into the penalty area, aided by Thaciano's ability to invite defensive pressure and Cuiabá's other central defender being drawn out on the opposite side of the line.



Against Athletico Paranaense, Jean Lucas' dart towards the penalty attracts significant attention from the central defender. It forces him to overcommit and track the midfielder out of the two passing options. His indirect ability to affect play allowed Everaldo to find the pass through the central channel with little to no pressure from covering defenders, giving him the time to open the scoring from the edge of the box.



## DEFENSIVE PHASE

When it comes to their out-of-possession play, a lot of Bahia's defensive improvements can be attributed to their collective shape and willingness to be resilient. We often see Bahia regress into variations of the 4-5-1 or 4-1-4-1, depending on the depth of their holding midfielder and whether there is an opposition threat between the lines.



Due to the fact that Bahia lack natural offensive width, both strikers work hard to cover space in the wide areas, acting as defensive wingers who can then threaten in transition should they recover possession. This leaves Bahia's true attacking midfielder adopting the role of a false nine, with Cauly usually acting as the lone striker to offer Bahia's first point of resistance.

When taking a look at league statistics, Rogério Ceni's squad is not the most effective team when pressing high up the pitch, holding the 3rd lowest PPDA at 14.91. This is supported by the fact that their challenge intensity is only the 16th highest in the Série A at 4.6, with evidence to suggest that they are much more combative when the opposition enters the middle third.



The presence of a true defensive midfielder has been a notable talking point so far this season, highlighting some of Bahia's defensive frailties when allowing the opposition too much space in the middle to attacking thirds. In their match with Flamengo, Bahia were too slow to react to Flamengo's runners through the middle, offering multiple passing outlets inside the pitch for the right winger to utilise.



## CONCLUSION

This season has certainly been a step in the right direction for Bahia, allowing them to put the relegation battle behind them and push on towards the right end of the table. Rogério Ceni's ability to transform the Tricolor into a real contender has done wonders for his managerial reputation in Brazil, having been damaged after a few unsuccessful spells. It would appear as though some exciting South American prospects share these sentiments, and they are now becoming incredibly intrigued by Ceni's project and impressive style of football.



However, against Atlético Mineiro, this issue was resolved thanks to one of Bahia's deeper midfielders remaining tight to the passing option through the centre, forcing the winger into an audacious shot and subsequently recovering possession.

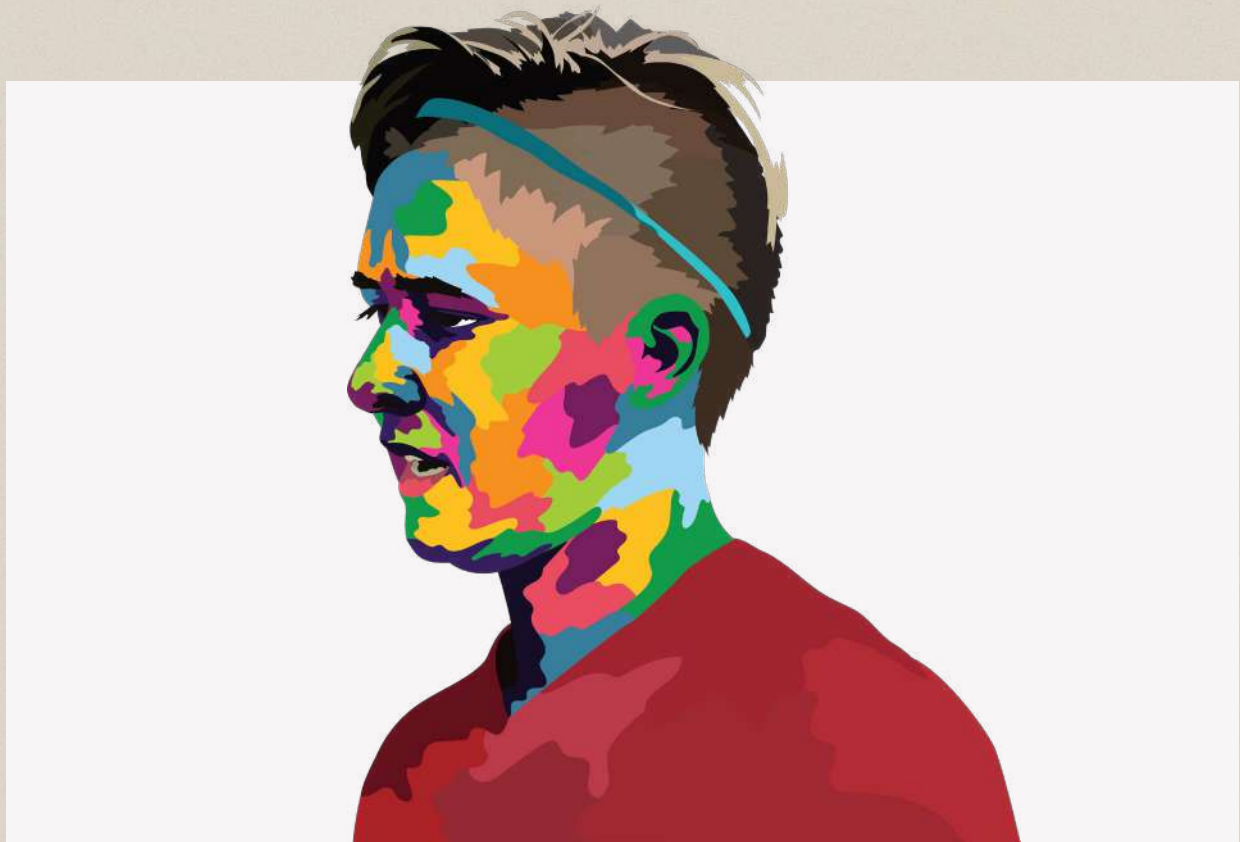


Even though Bahia's forwards are not the most aggressive pressers when their opposition begins to build an attack, a useful feature of their defensive work would be their ability to compress space when incoming from the flanks.

One of the ways in which they look to recover possession is by pressing the blind side of the ball carrier, with Everaldo shown to be forcing the opposition into a narrow channel where Bahia maintain numerical superiority in their typical diamond. Once again, this forces the opposition to rush their attacking sequence, creating the chance for more high turnovers whilst minimising any threat to their own goal.

# MARIA MIKOLAJOVA

MARIA MIKOLAJOVA



ST. PÖLTEN

**THE SLOVAKIAN  
SUPERSTAR LINKED  
WITH A MAJOR MOVE**

DAVID ASTILL // @DAVIDPASTILL21

## ATTACKING THREAT

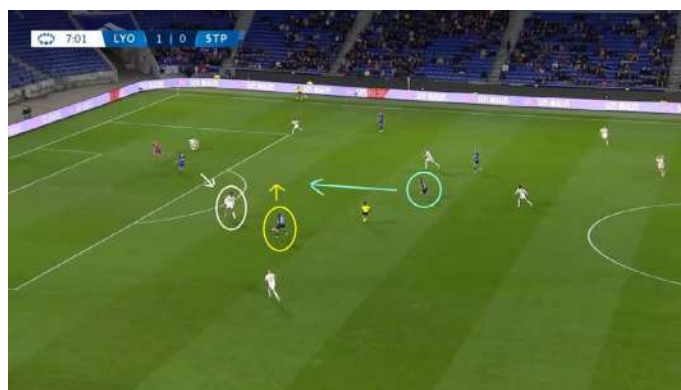
With the summer transfer season now well underway, there has been plenty of activity taking place as clubs compete to attract new names and bolster their ranks ahead of the upcoming campaign. In the women's game, one side who have been especially busy is Juventus Femminile, who will be seeking to ensure that they have a strong chance of lifting silverware in 2024/25 and of making new head coach Massimiliano Canzi's first season at the helm a fruitful one.

What has really stood out about their business is that they have been dipping into a rich variety of markets, with versatile Italy wide player Valentina Bergamaschi signing from AC Milan Femminile but Switzerland forward Alisha Lehmann, Denmark attacker Amalie Vangsgaard and Sweden midfielder Hanna Bennison among those moving from abroad, having left Aston Villa Women, PSG Femminine and Everton Women respectively to link up with Canzi's Serie A Femminile outfit.

If rumours are to be believed, the Italian side is not finished yet and does still have some names remaining on their summer shopping list. Another who is rumoured to have sparked their interest is Slovakian midfielder Mária Mikolajová. Currently plying her trade for St. Pölten Frauen in the Austrian Frauen Bundesliga, she is someone that many feel has the potential to be a future star, and adding her to their ranks would certainly represent another signal of intent from the Italian team.

With that in mind, this tactical analysis will take a closer look at what they could gain by bringing her to Turin this summer and why doing so would be another really positive step forward as they continue to assemble a squad capable of challenging for honours.

Whilst Mária Mikolajová is a midfielder by trade, it is not uncommon to see her drifting into more advanced spaces and operating as an additional attacking threat whenever her team have possession. The fact that both her club and her national side have given her licence to operate higher up the field has led to it being incorporated into their overall game plans as time has gone by, and it could be expected that she would bring the same offensive presence to Juventus if they were to move for her this summer.



What has allowed the St. Pölten player to thrive when in forward areas is her exceptional spatial awareness and understanding of how she can have an impact on the play, and her ability to operate in almost a hybrid midfield/forward role proved to be especially vital against Lyon Féminin during last season's Champions League group stage.

St. Pölten's tactics on the day were to get on the front foot and take the game to their opponents whenever there was an opportunity (which is not something that they always do), and this was one situation when it almost paid off, allowing them to put the ball beyond former Chile goalkeeper Christiane Endler.

What really stood out was the way that every player involved worked in a coordinated and unified manner. Mikolajová was essential to that being the case as she initially held her position



whilst the Lyon goalkeeper was pressed. The ball fell to teammate Mateja Sver before running forward to exploit the gap left open by France captain Wendie Renard, giving the Slovenia international a passing option and a chance to relieve the pressure she had come under.

The chance might not have led to anything on this occasion, with Lyon able to react in time and block Mikolajová's effort. Still, there is no doubt that they were tested here and that the Slovakia international played a crucial role in ensuring they had to work hard to keep the Austrian champions at bay.



It is not only in central spaces where Mikolajová has had an effect with the ball at her feet, though, with her also seen drifting into wider areas at times as she looks to stretch the play and to allow her team to operate in the expansive manner that they prefer to. When in these positions, her attention is once again firmly on assessing her surroundings and working hard for the good of her team, and that comes through her desire to create gaps in the middle and to then send the ball into areas from which those inside her can get a shot away at goal.

What allows her to pose a threat in these areas is her clever manipulation of the ball and her ability to remove individual opponents from the game. Here, she receives the ball and instantly dries it back inside the pitch, which opens up an angle from which she can then direct the ball back into the central channel and prevents Brann Kvinner's Sara Ritter from closing her down and winning it before she has had a chance to do so.

However, whilst this aspect of her play is positive and generally has the desired effect, it tends to fall down when the actual cross is made, which is not one of Mikolajová's strengths. In this case, she had time to give either forward Valentina Mädl or Croatia defender Leonarda Balog a chance to run in behind the Brann back line but ended up sending the ball too far in front of them and giving Norway goalkeeper Aurora Mikalsen an easy gather.

With just one of her five attempted deliveries in the Champions League finding their intended target, it is clear that this is one area of her game that does need improving as she continues to develop. It is something that Juventus or any other interested party will need to bear in mind when they inquire about her availability.



Whilst this section of the scout report has largely revolved around how Mikolajová can support teammates in advanced positions, she is just as capable of taking matters into her own hands, too, and this has been one of the defining characteristics of her play.

The telltale sign that she is shaping up to try her luck is when she starts to position herself on the edge of the goal area, just as she has here against Israel, and it is from this position that most of her efforts have come from. In this case, she was slightly fortunate that the ball came to her, with Diana Bartovičová's shot being blocked and Shahar Nakav making a poor attempt to clear the ball, but the fact that she showed no signs of hesitation when the chance did present itself highlights how she always backs herself when in these areas to find the back of the net.

On this occasion, her effort missed the target because Israel reacted to the danger, and Elianna Beard moved to close her down, but the threat was once again there, and it highlights how there are different layers to Mikolajová's attacking play that make her a constant risk to opposing back lines.

## ROLE IN TRANSITIONS

Nevertheless, while it is clear that Mária Mikolajová is highly effective in forward areas, it was mentioned earlier in the analysis that she is a midfielder first and foremost. So it does seem likely that, whilst Juventus could use her in different areas as they experimented with her role in the team, this is where she would be most commonly seen.

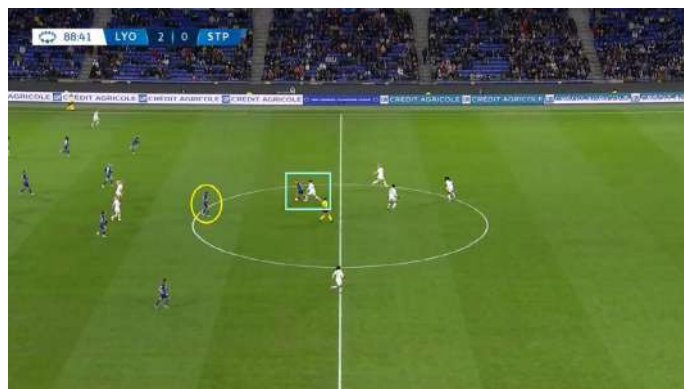


However, this doesn't limit her abilities in any way and instead allows her to demonstrate other aspects of her play, with her looking to use her strong passing ability to allow both St. Pölten and Slovakia to play in the transitional manner that both favour.

The key thing to note, though, is that neither is a one-dimensional side. Instead, they like to leave their options open and ensure that they can keep their opponents guessing, and that is where Mikolajová becomes really critical. In this case, she has received the ball and has been closed down from behind by Latvia midfielder Viktorija Zaičikova, but what the latter player doesn't know is where Mikolajová will go and in which direction she will try to send the ball.

This unpredictability comes through the Slovakian's ability to move off in either direction with equal ease and to make sharp changes of direction on the spot to create gaps in her vicinity. That once again came into play here as she hinted at going one way before then moving off in the other direction and taking the ball beyond her opponent.

At that stage, it comes down to her ability to find teammates around the field, and that, too, is not an issue for her, with her registering a 75.8% passing accuracy in the Nations League and seeing 71.6% of her passes find their intended target in the Euro 2025 qualifying matches. Therefore, this is why both her club team and her national side rely so heavily on her when they are constructing sequences of play, and it was vital that she was able to offer these qualities during the two-legged Nations League tie against Latvia as they are a team with weapons and who will capitalise on indecision and inaccuracy.



That is not to say that Mikolajová is only useful when her team is looking to move the ball around the field, though. She is just as capable of holding onto it and slowing the tempo down when necessary. This mainly happens when she is the most advanced player on the pitch for her side and doesn't have any options ahead of her to look for, as is the case here against Lyon as St. Pölten have tried to launch a counterattack.

In these moments, it is her individual strength that really comes to the fore, with her fighting hard to stay between the ball and those looking to win it off her. On this occasion, she manages

to keep former Germany midfielder Dzsenifer Marozsán from regaining the ball and allows her teammates time to get up the field and to offer the necessary supporting options, and it is at that point that she then releases the ball, as she does to Zver here, and allows them to once again settle into their transitional mindset.

Therefore, she is capable of affecting the game in central areas both when her team is playing at a fast and a more measured tempo. Her ability to adapt between the two is another reason that she has been linked with a big move this summer.



However, there are other ways in which she can affect the game, such as when her team is out of possession and is looking to stifle the opposing side's attempts to build their own attacks. Here, Brann are in the process of building an attack and are looking to transfer the ball into space, with the horizontal pass that now-Wolfsburg Frauen midfielder Justine Kiehlund makes towards Ritter designed to do just that.

Initially, it appears to be quite a conservative and risk-free pass, but what Brann haven't recognised here is that Mikolajová is waiting and watching, positioned slightly ahead of midfield teammates Anna Johanning and Claudia Wenger and is looking for an opportunity to cancel the attack in its infancy. This aerial ball presents the perfect chance for her to do just that, with her intercepting it and reacting at the right moment to regain possession for her side.

Given that this is one of four interceptions that she made during the Champions League group

stage and that she averaged 3.7 and 4.03 per game in the Nations League and Euro 2025 qualifying matches, respectively, it is clear that her ability to be disruptive and to break up play is another positive aspect of her game. Many prospective future employers will certainly be interested in this.

## DEFENSIVE QUALITIES

That is not the only thing that Mária Mikolajová offers defensively, though, and she is instead just as effective in deeper areas as she is when nearer the top of the field, and it has been just as common to see her dropping back to aid her team's defensive presence as it has been to see her supporting the attack. This again highlights how she is a team player and is always happy to fill in where needed, giving her side the best possible chance of succeeding on the field.



It was mentioned earlier in the scout report that St. Pölten have different ways of defending and can move between them depending on what is happening in front of them, with the Austrian team capable of playing in a proactive manner as they did against Lyon but also having the ability to sit back and to be more passive if they are under sustained pressure.

However, regardless of which of the two styles they do opt for, what is always apparent is their inherent desire to win the ball, and that means that they always look to close opponents down in one way or another and to ensure that the other team doesn't have things entirely their own way. That is where Mikolajová has been able to utilise



her attacking instincts inside her own third, with her here tracking Ritter and looking to prevent her from creating anything that would give Brann a chance to shoot at goal.

What is critical to note, though, is that the St. Pölten player doesn't simply dive in and is instead more subtle about how she manages the threat from the German defender. She initially watches and waits and then reacts as soon as Ritter makes her move. In this case, that saw her force the ball out of play and prevent Ritter from finding a teammate, with them losing the momentum that they had built up until this point as a result.

It is not difficult to see why Mikolajová succeeded in 61.7% of her defensive duels in the Champions League and has won 69.2% and 62.2% of them in the Nations League and the Euro 2025 qualifying matches, respectively. This is, therefore, another tactical feature that she will bring to Juventus if they follow up on their reported interest in adding her to their ranks.



However, being adaptable is critical, and there are times when marshalling a threat in that way is not the appropriate method. Mikolajová has demonstrated during her short career so far that she can switch between different styles of defending. In this case, Slavia Praha Ženy's Martina Šurnovská is looking to move the ball into a position from which she can send it forward and into the path of Czech Republic forward Karolína Křivská, who is making a run and who is looking to offer a forward passing option that would take the ball inside the St. Pölten goal area, and it

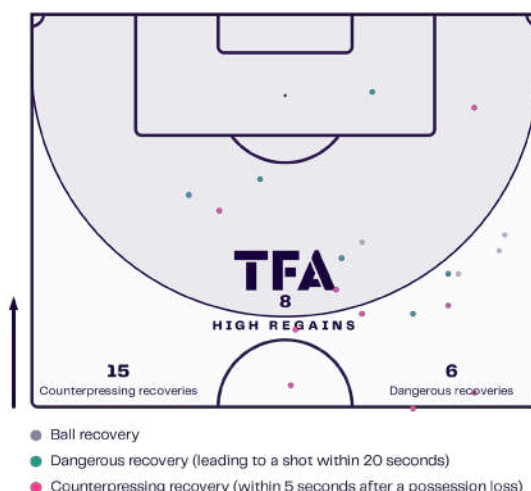
appears on initial glances as though the Czech side have the time and space needed to create a shot on goal.

However, to think that way would be to discount the quality of Mikolajová in these moments, with her consistently demonstrating that she can deal with tricky situations like this and can ensure that her side are as robust as possible whenever they are under siege. Here, she once again tracks her Slovakia teammate but doesn't look to make a tackle at any point, with her instead focusing on limiting the angle that she has available to find Křivská, leading to the pass arriving at the feet of Jennifer Klein instead. As a result, what looked like a dangerous situation ended up with the ball being safely cleared from danger, and that would not have happened without Mikolajová working hard and once again helping to bring the attack to a controlled end.

Therefore, the reported Juventus target is just as effective at defending in more open spaces as she is in close-quarter battles, and that once again reflects show she is a versatile player who can bring different things to the table and who will be the perfect fit for a number of shapes and systems wherever she ends up.

## M. MIKOLAJOVÁ HIGH REGAINS

All games from UEFA Women's Nations League - League B 2023/2024



Given the running theme throughout the analysis about Mikolajová being able to play on the front

foot and further back, it perhaps goes without saying that she can also be just as dominant when defending higher up the pitch too. This has been hinted at previously when she broke up Brann's attempt to build from the back, but it is illustrated more clearly here through the high regains that she has made for her nation, with Slovakia more inclined to play this way than St. Pölten.

As can be seen, she made 15 counterpressing recoveries and six dangerous recoveries throughout Slovakia's six matches in the Nations League and in many different areas of the pitch, and the fact that she has also contributed nine counterpressing recoveries and two dangerous recoveries during their Nations League play-off matches against Latvia and the same numbers for each statistic in the Euro 2025 qualifying campaign shows that any side interested in signing her would be getting a player who can defend on the front foot too, which makes her a very attractive prospect in the modern game.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this tactical analysis has looked in detail at the impact that Mária Mikolajová has had on both St. Pölten Frauen's and Slovakia's play. It is clear that she has been a key part of both teams' recent form and has helped them to gain some favourable results of late.

With the midfielder linked with a move to Juventus this summer, the ultimate question that needs to be asked is whether she would be a good addition for the Turin side to make as they try to take on reigning champions Roma Femminile and regain their position at the summit of the Italian women's game. On paper, it does appear as though she would be, with her ability to contribute in multiple ways and adapt to any systems and shapes that new head coach Canzi might utilise.

However, there is some doubt as to whether she will make a move. The interest has not been reported too heavily, and Juventus have made other signings in the areas that she might be used in, suggesting that she may not be a priority target for them this summer.

Nevertheless, there are ways that she could fit into the team. They may be looking for another transitional midfielder following the loss of Canada international Julia Grosso to the Chicago Red Stars. Their ambition in the market already means a move would not be out of the question. It will undoubtedly be something to keep an eye on between now and the commencement of the new campaign.

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**TOTAL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS**



# DATA VIZ

## SERIE A 2024/25

### IS ALVARO MORATA MILAN'S IDEAL REPLACEMENT FOR GIROUD

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

It's summer transfer window time, and Álvaro Morata is on the move once again, as is Olivier Giroud. Yeah, you guessed it right: Morata is signing for AC Milan, replacing the departed Olivier Giroud.

The Spanish Euro-winning captain is returning to Italy where he spent a couple of seasons with Juventus from 2014-2016 and two more seasons from 2020-2022. Milan, after failed attempts to sign different profiles, are willing to sign Morata, who on paper looks like an ideal replacement for the Frenchman Giroud, but what do the numbers say?

The below visualisation shows Morata's numbers for different metrics from last season at Atlético Madrid.

Morata, who is seen as someone who is at the right time at the right place inside the penalty area, is similar to the Frenchman in many ways. Giroud's shot volume dropped last season, but both Morata and Giroud have ranked above average for shot volume quite often in their careers — Morata ranking in the top 20% for shots per 90 minutes among centre-forwards in Europe's top five leagues last term.

Not very good at dribbling and, in fact, quite hesitant at dribbling the ball forward, Morata, like Giroud, ranked below the median for dribbles attempted per 90 minutes.

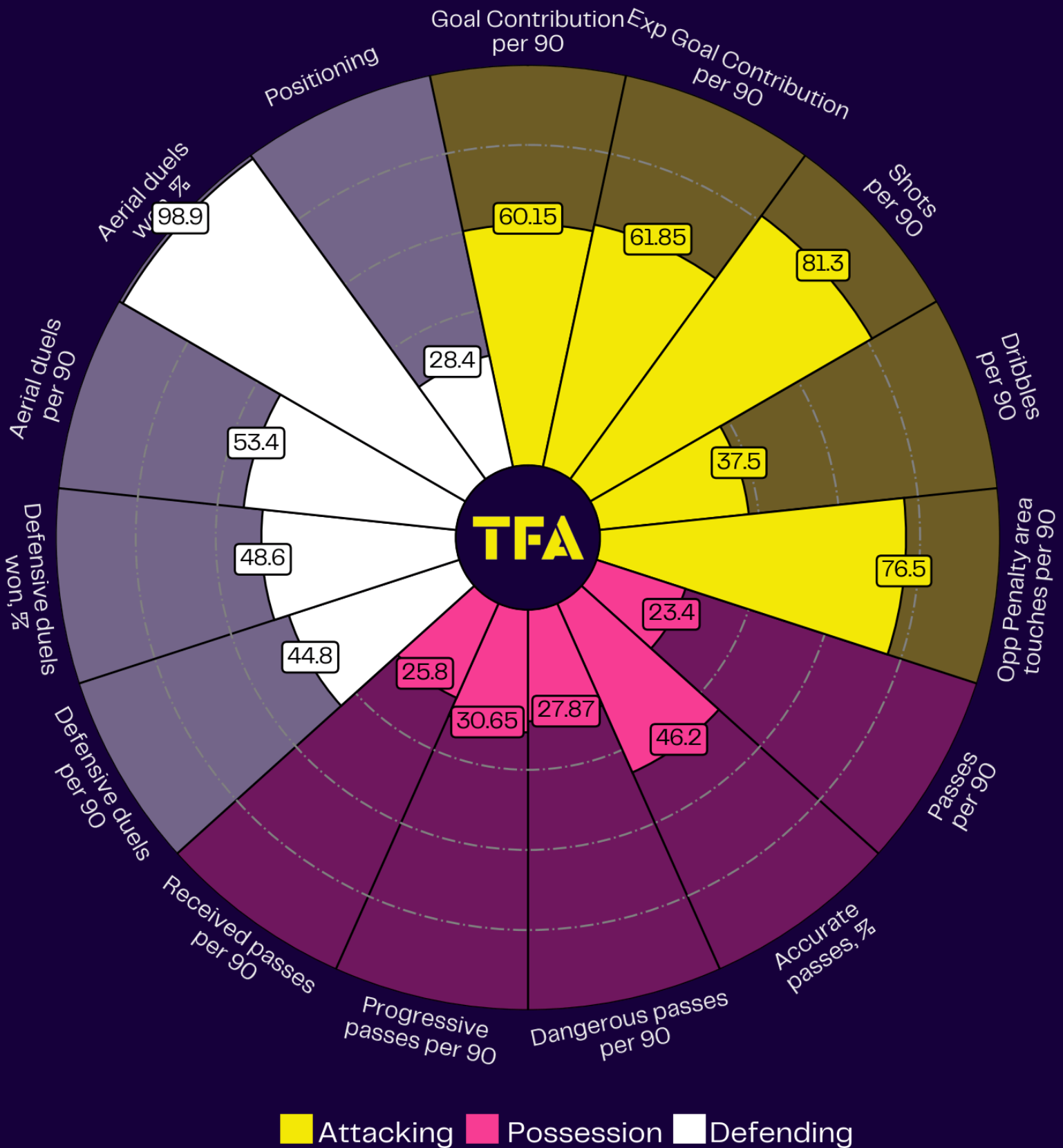
With 15 goals to his name, Morata even had the same number of goals as Giroud last season.

That being said, ranking in the 62nd percentile for xG Contributions per 90, Morata finished lower in that metric compared to Giroud, who was in the top 25% of the same metric. Good at holding up play and linking with wingers who run in behind the lines, Morata is good with his back to the goal. Possessing an aerial threat very similar to the Frenchman, Morata ranked in the top 2% for aerial duels won.

At the start of the window, Morata was not on Milan's list — nor were Milan on Morata's — but here we are. As the season goes by, it will be interesting to see how frequently Morata is used and what impact he can make.

# Álvaro Morata | CF | 2015 minutes played

## Atlético Madrid | 31-years-old | TFA Score: 59



Percentile Rank vs CFs in Tier 1 | Data from Season 2023-24

\*TFA score: Custom metric evaluating player performance, factoring in position-specific metrics

# **GIOVANNI** **FABBIAN**

GIOVANNI FABBIAN



BOLOGNA

## **BOLOGNA'S MIDFIELD GEM ON ITALY'S RADAR**

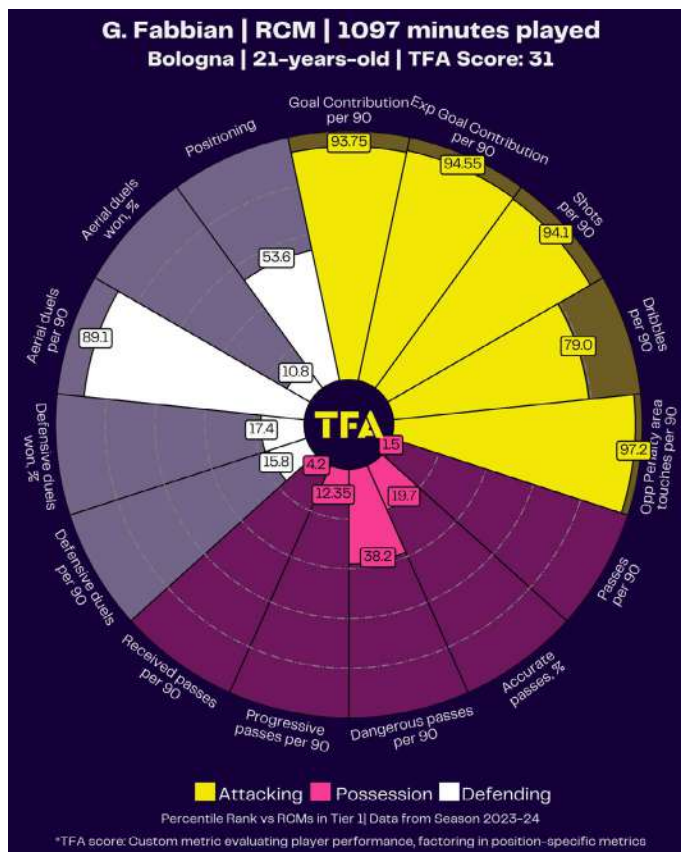


So far in this transfer window, Bologna have been at the centre of two of the biggest transfer stories of the summer, having sold forward Joshua Zirkzee to Manchester United, while defender Riccardo Calafiori is reportedly close to joining Arsenal following an impressive EURO 2024 outing. Bologna have enjoyed a meteoric rise in Serie A recently, finishing fifth last season — their best season in the top flight since 1970/71. This followed several years of sitting around mid-table, so it was only really a matter of time before clubs came knocking for their best players.

One important player who could define their 2024/25 campaign is 21-year-old midfielder Giovanni Fabbian. A product of the Inter Milan academy, Fabbian is not yet confirmed to be playing for Vincenzo Italiano’s side for the upcoming season, but his former club, Inter, is reportedly interested in bringing him back to the capital.

Regardless of which shirt Fabbian is donning in the 2024/25 season, he will be determined to build on his first two seriously impressive seasons in senior football. This scout report will provide a tactical analysis of the midfielder, with the analysis highlighting the key elements of his game and how they benefitted Bologna’s tactics last season.

## PLAYER OVERVIEW

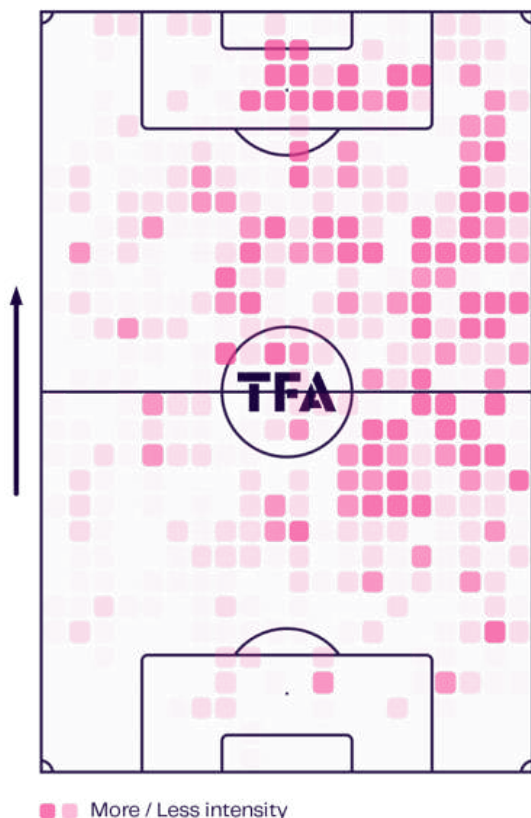


As you can see from the visual above, Fabbian is a highly attacking midfielder, so if you haven’t watched him play before, you’d probably assume he plays as a number 10. While he can and has played in that role, he has spent the most time playing in the number 8 role. Bologna often deploy a 4-1-4-1, and Fabbian operates as the RCM in that system.

In the 2023/24 season, Fabbian was one of the most attack-minded RCMs in Serie A — high percentiles for several key attacking areas, such as touches in the box, shots, and goal contributions, all act as evidence for this. The winner of the 2022/23 Serie B Young Player of the Season award, Fabbian was also one of the brightest U21 stars in Serie A last season.

## G. FABBIAN HEATMAP

All games from Serie A 2023/2024



As we will discuss further, Fabbian's role in Bologna's tactics means he doesn't have a huge role defensively in terms of direct engagement. The heatmap from last season shows us that he is a bigger presence in the final third and the penalty box, making runs and off-the-ball movements into dangerous areas. He also has a tendency to drift out to the right flank during build-up play phases in the final third, where he is able to showcase his strong crossing ability.



Bologna were one of Serie A's most aggressive teams out of possession in the 2023/24 season. They recorded a PPDA of 10.05 (third-lowest in the division) along with a challenge intensity

of 6.1 — the joint highest register in Serie A. And, while Fabbian does like to engage in terms of instigating the press, as you can see in the analysis image above, the data tells us that he doesn't engage much directly — low numbers of defensive duels, interceptions, and high regains/recoveries in the final third all tell us that he isn't tasked with a whole lot of defensive responsibility.

## BUILD-UP PLAY AND CHANCE CREATION

Fabbian has displayed a versatility in his skillset in terms of what he can offer in various attacking/build-up scenarios. From making runs in behind the opposition defence to dropping in deeper to play a half-back-type role, Fabbian's ability to adapt has served him well so far in his short career.



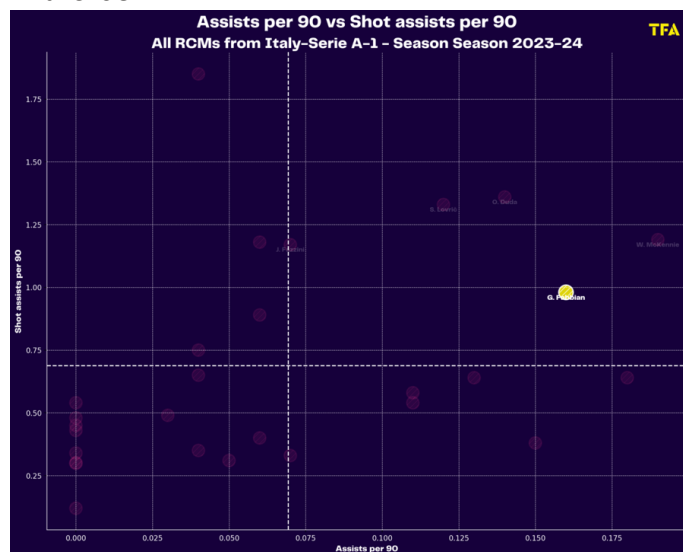
As mentioned, Fabbian likes to break free of the typical midfield shackles we see in possession-based sides by making runs in behind the defence, as shown above. Interestingly, his partnership with Zirkzee was an important part of Bologna's tactics—the now-Manchester United player could often be seen dropping in deeper while Fabbian made the darting run in behind.

Bologna averaged 57.7% possession last season (third highest in Serie A), but their style shifts away from your typical possession-based approach—they like to incorporate fluidity and positional freedom. This becomes hard to defend against and also allows for Bologna's quick pace of possession, as evidenced by their passing rate of 15.7 (third highest in Serie A). Fabbian's attacking qualities from midfield can be a massive benefit for those tactics when executed correctly.

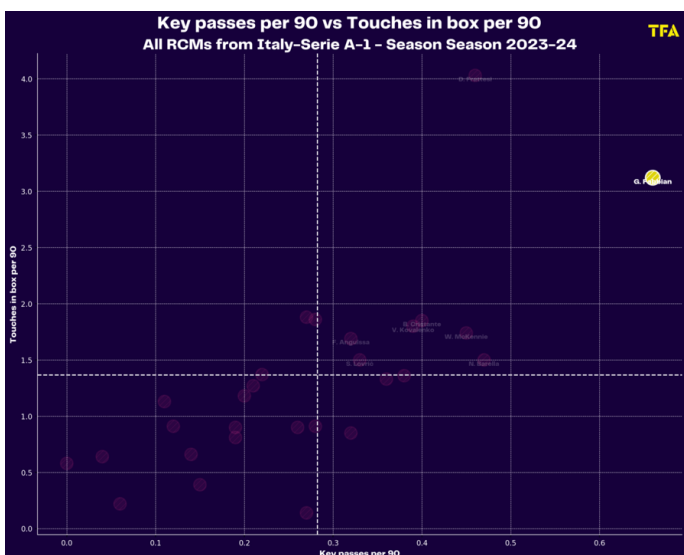


high engagement inside the box (2.97 touches in box per 90 — highest of U21 Serie A players of any position). This showcases his ability to move the ball into dangerous positions, as well as showing us that he is a consistent presence in the box.

We mentioned his versatility in style when it comes to what he offers during build-up phases, and above is another example. While he sometimes offers a high-intensity, energetic presence in the engine room, he does have the ability to switch things up, be more reserved in possession, and even drop in deeper to be an important cog in early build-up stages.



His work in attacking transitions is another strength he possesses and perhaps something he could look to utilise more often at club level. The example above may show what looks to be a simple pass in a moment of transition. Still, Fabbian showed composure and quick thinking when playing a forward pass into an area full of teammates — this gave his side the chance to launch a counterattack quickly.



## GOAL THREAT



As we've touched on a couple of times already, Fabbian is a rarity in terms of modern central midfielders, especially with how much he gets involved in an attacking sense. We've seen his overall role and position in Bologna's tactics and discussed his build-up play abilities. But now, it is time to fully understand just how much of an attacking CM he really is. From CF-like runs to being a vital cog within the final stages of a build-up, Fabbian is truly at his most effective in the final third. We've spoken of his in-possession abilities in important build-up phases, but now, we're looking to get the bread and butter of an attacking midfielder — goals and assists.

Creativity from midfield is simply a must-have for the majority of midfield roles in the modern game, and Fabbian brings that in healthy amounts. The data visual above shows us exactly that, as well as demonstrating his attacking presence. Compared to other RCMs in Serie A last season, nobody recorded more key passes per 90 than Fabbian (0.61). At the same time, he also had a

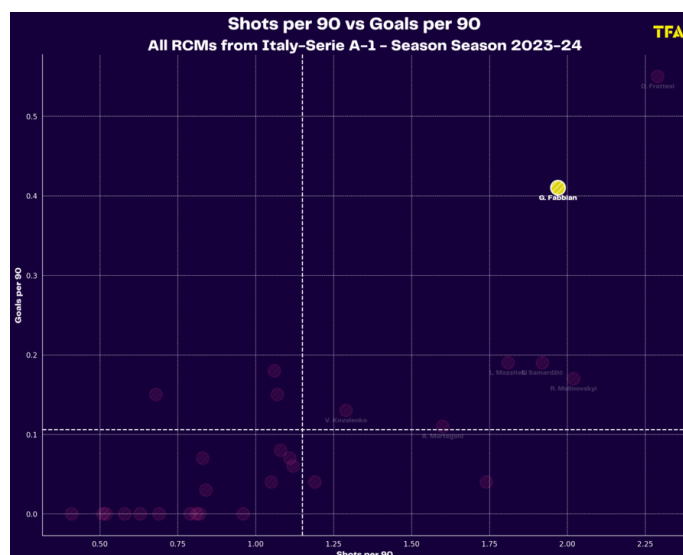




This analysis image shows us a lot of what we've discussed so far. It starts with Fabbian being positioned like a CF in a front-two system, with him making a run into the space on the outside of the defender marking him. That positioning alone is important in terms of his play style and how it complements Bologna's tactics.

While this move did have an element of good fortune to it in terms of how the ball reached Fabbian (second image), the continuation of his positioning and movement are what we are trying to get at here. After he receives the ball well, he displays his excellent vision by floating a delicate cross into the gap behind the last opposition defender for his teammate to run onto and finish.

At such a young age, in his debut Serie A season, Fabbian looked at home in 2023/24. While his attacking style may have been a reason for his slight drop in game time when it came to certain fixtures, when he was present, he provided an undoubted threat when it came to creating chances for his teammates. We touched on this earlier with his use of key passes, but we're looking deeper here as many of his best moments of chance creation come inside the box.



As the data above tells us, not many RCMs in Serie A averaged more assists than Bologna's talisman in midfield. He also ranked (relatively) high when it came to shot assists, proving that he is consistent in his game when it comes to providing chances for teammates.

Chance creation isn't the only way Fabbian inserts himself into attacking play. In comparison to U21 players in Serie A, he ranks second when it comes to shots per 90 (2.05 per 90), and as we can see from the graph above, he ranks second compared to all RCMs in the league for goals per 90, showing a real knack for hurting the opposition when it counts. His total of seven G/A in 2023/24 is the second-highest of any U21 player in Italy's top division.

## CONCLUSION

At 21, Fabbian still has some years before he reaches the prime of his career. Yes, there are areas to improve — we've mentioned a couple, namely his consistency in transitions and his defensive output, but his attacking contribution is a joy to watch. Goalscoring midfielders seem to be a dying breed in the modern game. While Fabbian has yet to post numbers similar to the likes of goalscoring midfield legend Frank Lampard, for example, his skill set already has many desirable qualities that suggest he will become more and more important as each year passes. The question remains: who will he be scoring those goals for?



A lot of his big chances and goals come as a result of high positioning in important attacking moments, like the one you see above. Earlier, we saw how Fabbian utilises the box to get into positions to create chances for teammates, but this example showcases his talent for moving off of defenders to get into goalscoring scenarios.

As you can see, Fabbian is looking to get into the box early in the build-up, positioned alongside the opposition defence, similar to how a CF would. He continues this movement, and as he anticipates the cross, he peels away from his defender slightly to grant him an all-important bit of space that sets him up to meet the cross first and head the ball into the goal. His movement, anticipation, and aggression made this possible, while his timing and execution allowed him to finish the move off with a well-timed header.

# SCANDINAVIAN PLAYMAKERS

LUCAS BERGVALL



TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

## WHO CREATES THE MOST THREAT?



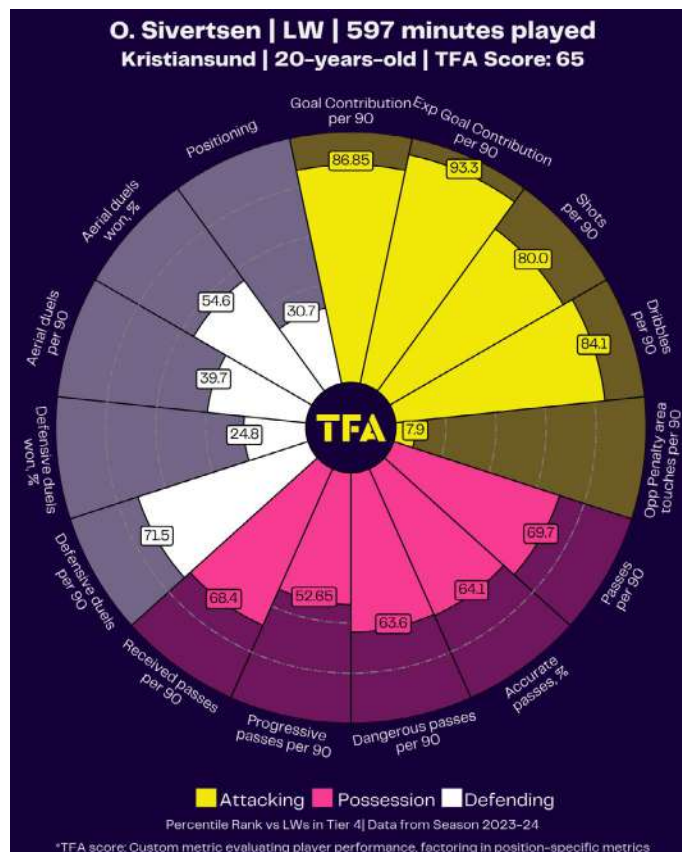
With the majority of European leagues ramping up their preparations for the start of the 2024/25 season over the coming weeks, you might be forgiven for thinking that there was no quality football available to follow. While the European Championships, and now the Olympics, may have offered some distractions from the long summer break, top-level leagues are still ongoing as most Scandinavia, Denmark excepted, play through the summer months.

The likes of the Swedish Allsvenskan and the Norwegian Eliteserien, in particular, are leagues of significant quality. From a recruitment perspective, these leagues are extremely interesting, given the amount of young talent that tends to come through and make their breakthrough in these leagues. We are increasingly seeing top teams with strong recruitment departments covering these leagues and looking to shop directly in these markets instead of allowing top Scandinavian talents to move to the likes of the Netherlands or Belgium before they look to pick them up.

Both the Allsvenskan and the Eliteserien are also first contact points in Europe for talented young African players making their way across to play in European football.

In this article we have identified four players split between the Allsvenskan and the Eliteserien who have impressed so far this season in terms of their creative ability for their team. For the most part these are wide attackers or players who are at their best when they are positioned in the half-spaces and we will concentrate on those who create threat from their ability to play in possession when driving into the opposition area.

## OSKAR SIVERTSEN 20-YEARS-OLD WINGER KRISTIANSUND AND NORWAY



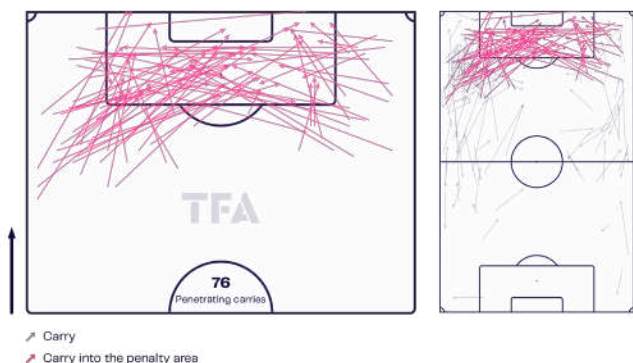
The first player on our list is the 20-year-old Norwegian U20 international winger Oskar Sivertsen of Kristiansund. He is a product of the club youth academy, having spent his entire career there, other than a loan spell at Hodd. Sivertsen is a player who is comfortable playing on either wing, and he is naturally right-footed. As you can see from his pizza chart, he is in the 86th percentile for goal contributions per 90 and the 93rd percentile for expected goal contributions. He is effective in the final third both in terms of working shooting opportunities for himself and creating chances for teammates. It does not matter whether he plays on the left or the right of the pitch. He is at his most effective when playing in the half-spaces

Interestingly, he is also in the 80th percentile for shots per 90 amongst wingers and the 84th

percentile for dribbles per 90. These outputs are impressive for a young attacking wide player who is enjoying his true breakthrough season in the first-team.

### O. SIVERTSEN PENETRATING CARRIES

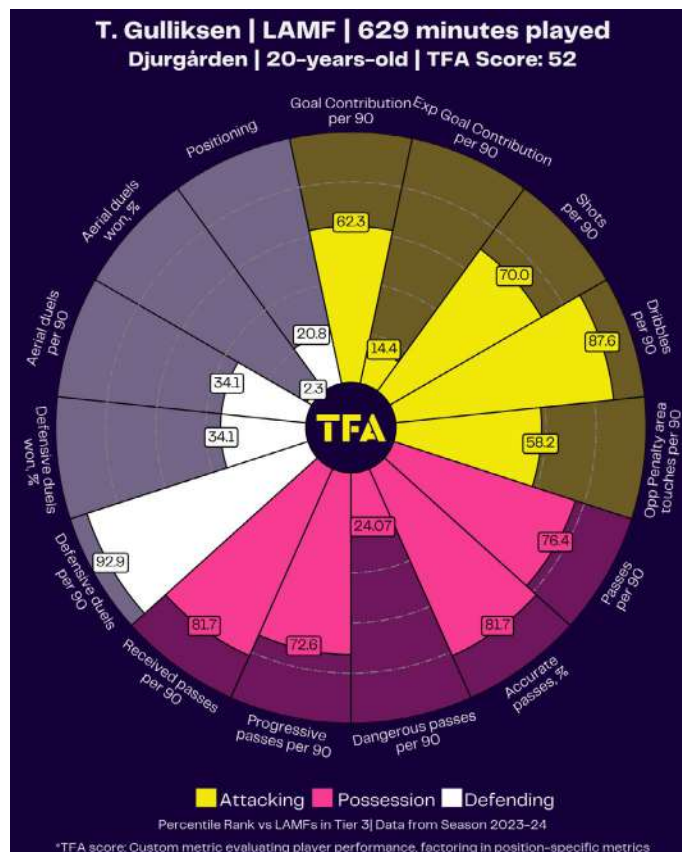
All games from Eliteserien 2024, NM Cupen 2024



As you can see from his progressive carry map, which shows all of his progressive carries from the start of this season in the Norwegian top-flight, he provides a significant threat with his ability to run with the ball and break into the opposition area from the left or the right half-spaces. When he takes possession of the ball in these areas, he can either link with teammates and then make off-the-ball runs to access space or take possession himself and drive into dangerous positions.

If Sivertsen continues to develop in this manner and keeps playing so effectively, then there is little doubt that he will get a move from the Norwegian top flight sooner rather than later. As things stand, a player with this kind of specific profile would be best suited to a move to either Serie A or the Bundesliga.

## TOBIAS GULLIKSEN 21-YEAR-OLD WINGER DJURGARDEN AND NORWAY



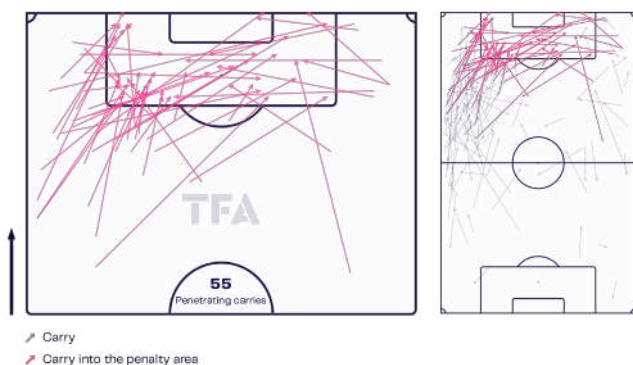
Our next player is another Norwegian winger, although one that has actually moved to play in the Swedish Allsvenskan with Djurgårdens. Tobias Gulliksen is a 21-year-old Norwegian U21 winger with 11 caps and 1 goal to his name at that level of international football. He has already had two relatively big moves in his career to date, having originally developed through the academy at Stromsgodset before moving in 2023 to join Bodø/Glimt for £2.3M and then again in February of this year as he crossed the border into Sweden for £1.8M to join Djurgårdens. At the time of writing, he has four goals and four assists in the Allsvenskan for his new team.

As you can see from his pizza chart, Gulliksen is actually overperforming his expected outputs, as he is in the 62nd percentile for goal contributions

but only the 14th percentile for expected goal contributions. His underlying outputs are strong. However, he is in the 87th percentile for dribbles per 90 and the 70th percentile for shots per 90. He is also a dangerous passer on the ball, and he is in the 73rd percentile for progressive passes per 90.

### T. GULLIKSEN PENETRATING CARRIES

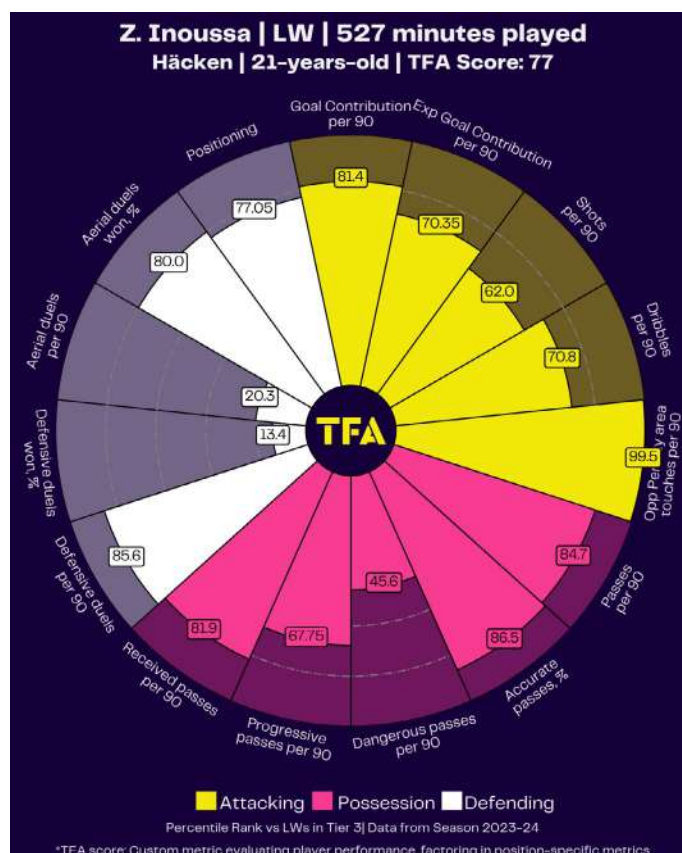
All games from Allsvenskan 2024



As a creative attacking player, Gulliksen provides most of his threat with his ability on the ball in the half-spaces on the left side of the pitch. From these positions, he progresses the ball into the penalty area through his ability to drive and carry the ball or through his passing and line-breaking ability.

Gulliksen is likely going to see out the entire season at Djurgårdens. Still, if he continues to develop in the way that he is and if his outputs start to reflect his underlying data, then he will likely be a candidate for a move to a top-five league by the winter transfer window.

## ZEIDANE INOUSSA 22-YEARS-OLD WINGER SWEDEN AND HACKEN



Next up, we have the 21-year-old Swedish winger Zeidane Inoussa of Häcken. He is a Swedish U21 international with two caps for Sweden at that international level. So far this season, he has five goals and one assist in 13 matches in the Allsvenskan. Inoussa has had a curious route to this point in his career, having played originally at Brommapojkarna in Sweden. At an early age, he moved to France to join Caen, and in that period, he also had a loan spell in Spain with Valencia. In the end, in 2023, he moved back to Brommapojkarna on a permanent transfer but stayed for only one season before moving to Häcken for a fee reported to be in the region of £1.65M.

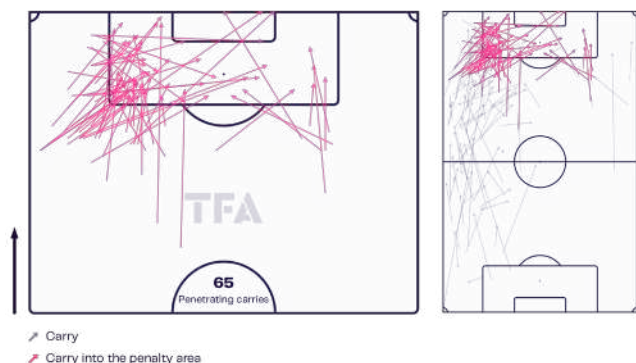
It is fair to say that the signing of Inoussa has looked like something of a masterstroke to this point in his career, and his pizza chart is very instructive. He is in the 81st percentile for goal



contributions and the 70th percentile for expected goal contributions. Interestingly, he is also in the 99th percentile for touches in the opposition area per 90.

### Z. INOUSSA PENETRATING CARRIES

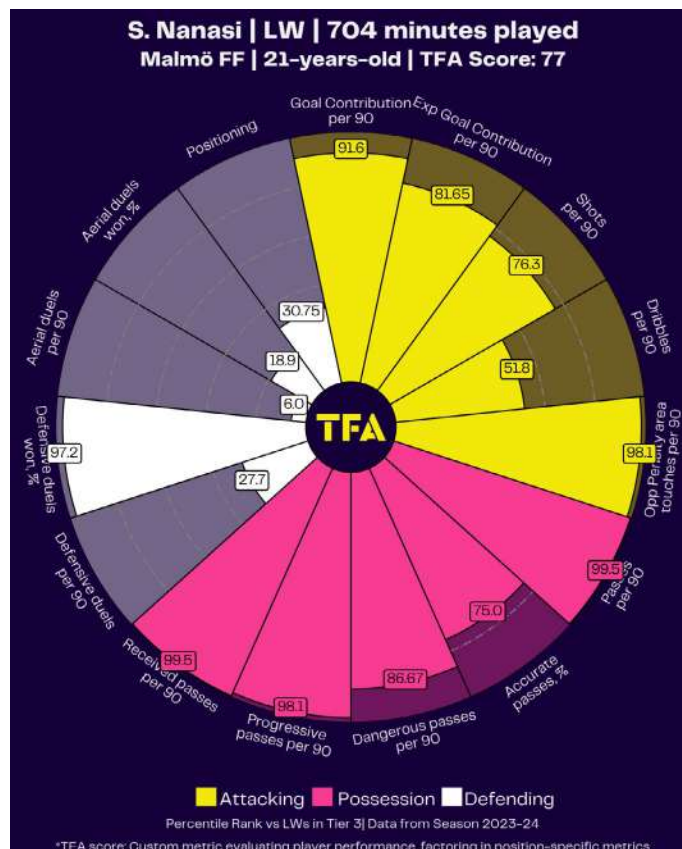
All games from Allsvenskan 2024



As you can see, Inoussa is a player who is at his best when he is in possession in the final third on the left-hand side. From this position, he can outplay defenders and break into the penalty area; from these positions, he can create for teammates effectively.

Having already moved to clubs in France and Spain earlier in his career, it is unlikely, in our opinion, that he will repeat these moves. Instead, he has the ability to play in the Premier League as his next move.

## SEBASTIAN NANASI 22-YEARS-OLD ATTACKING MIDFIELDER MALMO AND SWEDEN



The fourth player we will discuss is the 22-year-old Swedish international attacker Sebastian Nanasi of Malmö. At the time of writing, he has three caps and one goal at full international level. So far this season, Nanasi has scored six goals and nine assists in 16 Allsvenskan matches. He joined Malmö from a lower league side at youth level and has played his way into becoming one of the most important attacking players in the team.

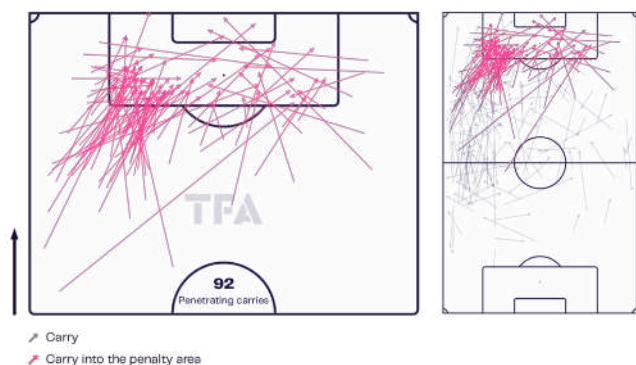
As you can clearly see from his pizza chart, he is a player who excels in both the attacking and ball progression sections of his game. In terms of his pure attacking outputs, he is in the 91st percentile for goal contributions and the 82nd percentile for expected goal contributions. He is also in the 76th percentile for shots per 90 and the 98th percentile for touches in the opposition

area. In short, he is a very versatile and effective attacking threat.

In the ball progression phase he is in the 87th percentile for dangerous passes (passes to the final third and penalty area) and the 98th percentile for progressive passes.

### S. NANASI PENETRATING CARRIES

All games from Allsvenskan 2024



Again, Nanasi is a player who thrives in possession of the ball in the half-spaces on the left side of the pitch. From this position, he provides a genuine threat, whether he is passing through lines and into the opposition area or whether he takes the ball himself and looks to open angles for shooting opportunities. In our opinion, it is clear that Nanasi's next move will be to a top-five league. Still, he will do so for a team that is regularly and consistently challenging for European qualification.

## CONCLUSION

The Scandinavian leagues remain one of the most interesting and talent-rich markets for big teams to recruit from, and their tendency to trust and play young players means that there are always new names emerging.



# DATA VIZ

## BUNDESLIGA 2024/25

### ANALYZING JONATHAN TAH BAYERN'S PRIME DEFENSIVE TARGET

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

**B**ayern Munich are making a host of changes before the next season begins. They have a new manager in Vincent Kompany — a surprise appointment given they are looking to dominate the league once again, which has been the case for at least the last couple of seasons, even if they won the league in 2022/23.

Wanting to be a part of this new project under Kompany is Bayer Leverkusen center-back Jonathan Tah. After finishing third last season, Bayern want to shuffle their central defensive partnership, and at the time of writing, Jonathan Tah is their primary target.

The below visualisation shows where Tah ranked for some key metrics when compared with other centre-backs during the 2023/24 season, providing a picture of what kind of profile he is.

Looking at the visual above, one can confidently tell that the 28-year-old was one of the best defenders in the league last season.

Playing as a right-sided centre-back, Tah suited the possession style of Alonso, which has some similarities to Kompany's style. Tah is touted as a natural replacement for Matthijs de Ligt in Bayern's squad, and the German international ranked better for progressive passing last season — 45th percentile for progressive passes per 90 minutes, which is higher than De Ligt with the Dutchman playing fewer minutes.

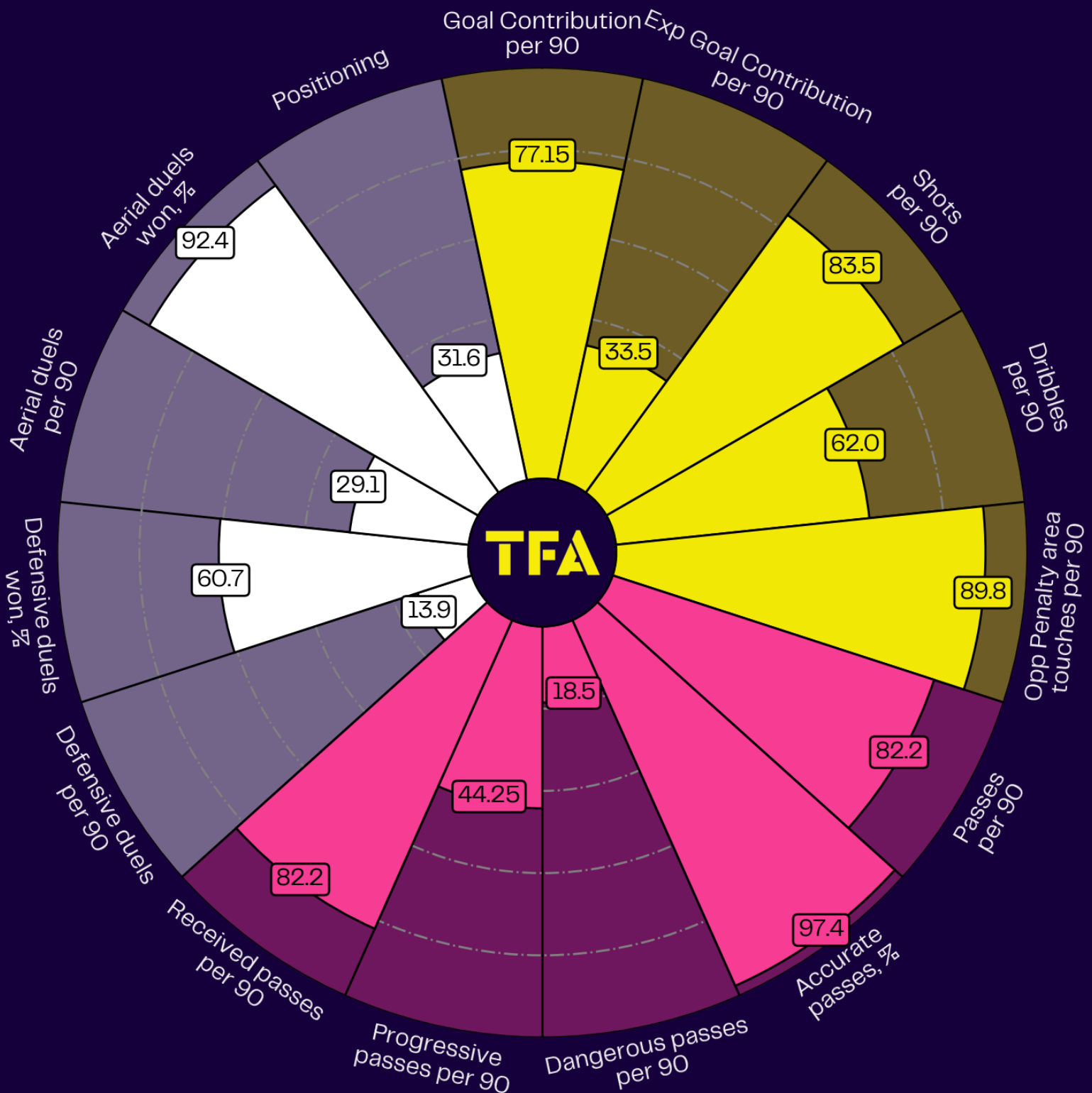
Tah performed better than any other defender in aerial duels and ranked in the top 10% for success in aerial duels. He also adds pace and aggressive tackling during transitions, which Bayern struggled a lot to defend against last season.

Jonathan Tah is in his prime and, on paper, looks to be making the right decision if he moves to Bayern. He played more minutes than any Bayern defender and has been consistently available for the last few seasons. If signed, Tah is expected to be up and running right away, given the familiarity of the league, and it will be interesting to see who partners him.



# J. Tah | CB | 2767 minutes played

## Bayer Leverkusen | 28-years-old | TFA Score: 46



■ Attacking 
 ■ Possession 
 ■ Defending

Percentile Rank vs CBs in Tier 1,2 | Data from Season 2023-24

\*TFA score: Custom metric evaluating player performance, factoring in position-specific metrics

# CHRIS ARMAS

CHRIS ARMAS



COLORADO RAPIDS

## THE REMARKABLE TURNAROUND OF THE COLORADO RAPIDS

DOMAGOJ KOSTANJŠAK // @DKOSTANJSK

The 2024 MLS season has been a whirlwind for Chris Armas and his Colorado Rapids. At the moment of writing, the team currently sits in the fifth spot in the Western Conference, having tallied 11 victories, five draws and nine losses. However, Armas has done a great job of turning the ship around this season, overperforming with one of the youngest squads in the American top flight, all while topping some interesting underlying metrics in the process.

In this tactical analysis, we'll take a look at Armas' philosophy and how it moulded Colorado Rapids' tactics to propel them upwards on the table. The analysis will delve deeper into all of their phases of play, carefully dissecting patterns and statistics to give you all the information about the MLS side.

## MANAGER PROFILE

Chris Armas is a 51-year-old head coach of Colorado Rapids with this team being his first big standalone appointment after a couple of supporting roles. Before the MLS job, the New York-born gaffer had worked as a scout for the Championship side Leeds United and even in the Premier League as Manchester United's assistant manager. If we go even further back than that, we can see he had jobs both at Toronto and New York, as well as working in women's football too.

Currently, he's leading the fourth youngest squad in the MLS with an average age of just 25.5. Interestingly, even though the team is currently fifth on the Western Conference table, Wyscout data analysis tells us that they should be first according to the expected points (xP) metric, which calculates the likelihood of winning games based on the expected values system. Armas has led the team in a total of 25 games so far in 2024, registering 11 wins, five draws and nine losses, seven of which have sadly come in the away stadiums, signalling a clear struggle away from home.

Still, Colorado Rapids have seen a huge swing in their favour this season, and the 51-year-old tactics and setups have certainly played a key part in that. So, let's dive straight into the analysis.

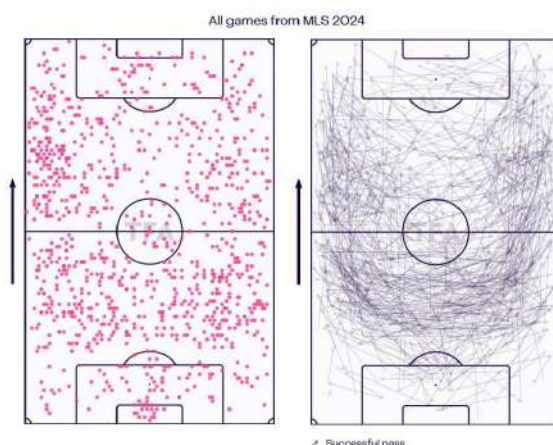
## IN-POSSESSION TACTICAL ANALYSIS

### BUILD-UP PHASE TACTICS

So far in the 2024 MLS season, Colorado Rapids have strongly favoured the versatility of the 4-2-3-1 approach, using it in an overwhelming 81% of games, with the 4-4-2 being the distant second favourite. In their setup, Armas generally opts for a standard back four, a double pivot, a number 10, two wingers and a striker down the middle. This structure, however, undertakes some changes while in possession, and we'll dissect them further down the line of this tactical analysis.

As a whole, Armas is also a coach who doesn't insist on prolonged spells of possession; Colorado Rapids have so far tallied a below-average number of passes per 90 and a below-average passing rate (14.3) with a below-average accuracy and an overall 49.5% ball possession. All of this signals a team that doesn't smother the opposition on the ball, nor does it insist on pinning them down with sustained pressure in possession.

#### COLORADO RAPIDS TOUCH MAP & PASS MAP

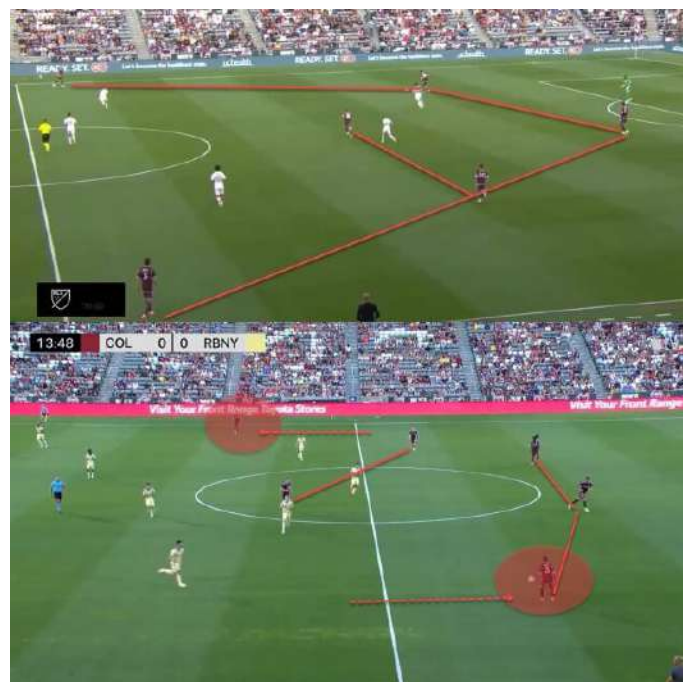




Looking at the touch and pass maps here, we can see some clusters forming, particularly in the wide areas of the pitch, while the centre remains generally empty. Colorado Rapids are a team that doesn't recycle or retain possession that well but will instead opt to verticalise from the first phase as soon as possible. While there are certain mechanisms for a more systematical progression path, which we will discuss later on in the tactical analysis, they prefer simpler and more direct routes towards the final third.

According to our data analysis, Armas' team ranks second in the most passes to the final third and fourth in passes to the final third per 90 (51.6 with 74.3% accuracy). Considering they are not volume passers, this suggests a quicker and more direct pathway to the opposition's danger areas. That can be done via a single longer pass or several shorter but similarly vertical passes instead, as can be seen in the following progression graphs.

A potential alternative is to carry the ball out of pressure, and this is usually done by either accessing the full-backs, who aim to beat their markers and progress or creating superiorities and turning the centre-backs into free men who can carry into open space before connecting with their teammates higher up the pitch. Generally, however, there are two setups they use in their first-phase tactics, and we'll see them in the following image.

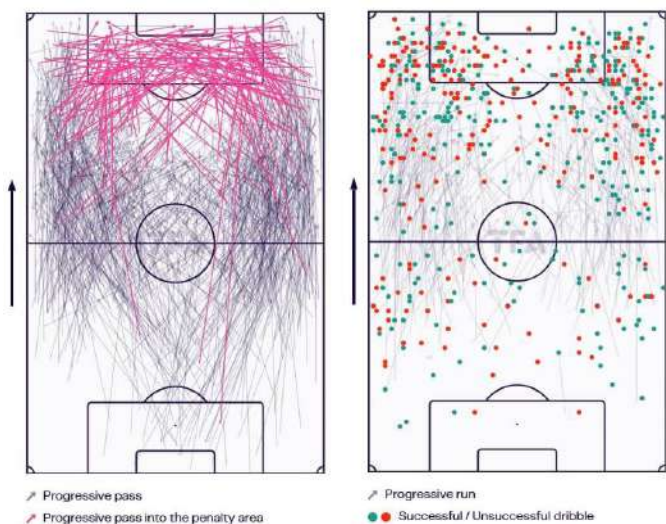


The first option is the standard 4-2 base, with two centre-backs, two full-backs, and two pivots participating in the first phase of play ahead of the goalkeeper. When facing a one-man pressing scheme, the two centre-backs are generally enough to achieve progression, but even in such situations, Armas likes creating a back three by either dropping a pivot in the backline or instructing one of the full-backs to stay deep.

This is why we often see them use deep carries to escape pressure. With Colorado Rapids, it's all about creating and then accessing the free man, and depending on how difficult that is, they will use more complex mechanisms to achieve their goal. If having a back three is enough to free up one of the centre-backs, progression will be as easy as letting that player run with the ball once numerical superiority has been achieved.

### COLORADO RAPIDS BALL PROGRESSION

All games from MLS 2024



Colorado Rapids don't spend much time in the first phase of possession and will, instead, have the goalkeeper quickly release the ball either directly into the higher targets or to his immediate first option, usually one of the centre-backs. Zack Steffen, their first-choice goalkeeper, is the player with the most long passes in the team and seventh most in the league, signalling his preference to go long when starting the attacks.

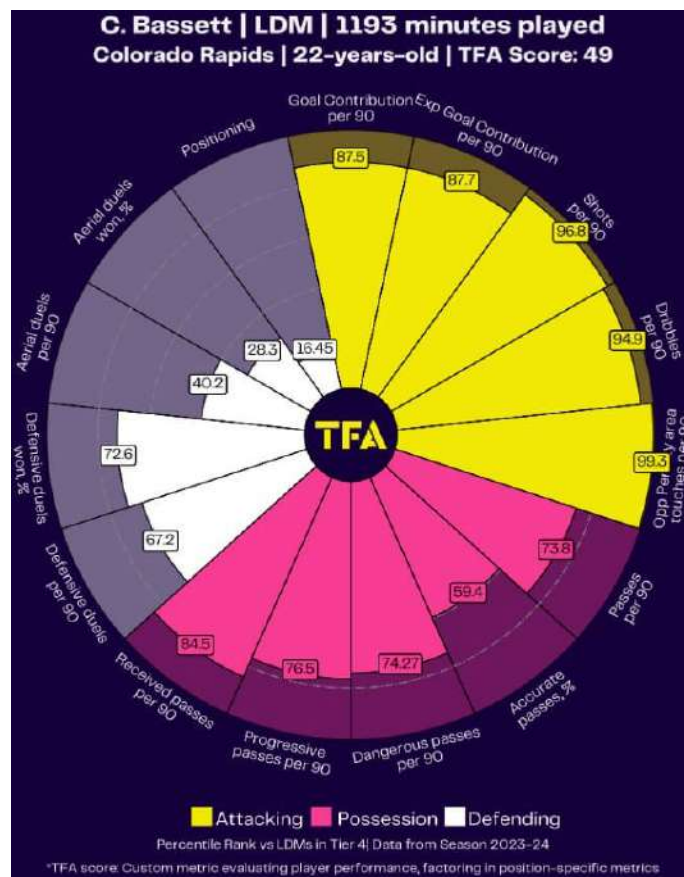
If, however, the opposition commits more people in the press, Colorado Rapids will either play directly over the press, often via the goalkeeper or use a principle of playing into the pressure, something Roberto De Zerbi's Brighton & Hove Albion were famous for. This principle is based on sequential dismarking as the opposition players are baited one by one, each freeing their markers in a sequence and thus allowing the players on the ball to access them. Both that and the direct progression route can be seen next.



Interestingly, Colorado Rapids don't have elite ball-playing defenders even though the centre-backs can be vertical in their passing. Their tasks are primarily to access the main progressors and creators further up the pitch, while the full-backs are more attacking in nature, focusing on crosses and deep completions in the final third. When it comes to the most influential figures in possession, Connor Ronan and Cole Bassett are the two main pieces, the former from a deeper position and the latter from a more advanced one with the licence to roam.

Ronan generally partners another player in a double pivot but has been known to drop deeper and aid progression. His volume and progression rates at Colorado Rapids are only

topped by Bassett himself, who is a true box-to-box presence. He registers the most passes and passes to the final third in the team, the most progressive runs in the team, and has so far been ranked among the best defensive midfielders in the league by Wyscout's index.



And while he may be a defensive midfielder on paper, in reality, he is much more than that. At the moment of writing, Bassett has scored three goals outside of the penalty area from 22 shots (most in the team) and has three third assists (second-most in the league), second-most shots in the team (49) and second-most from open play. Similarly, he is the player with the second-most headers in the team (nine), the most crosses in the team (58) and also the second-most defensive duels in the league with 177.

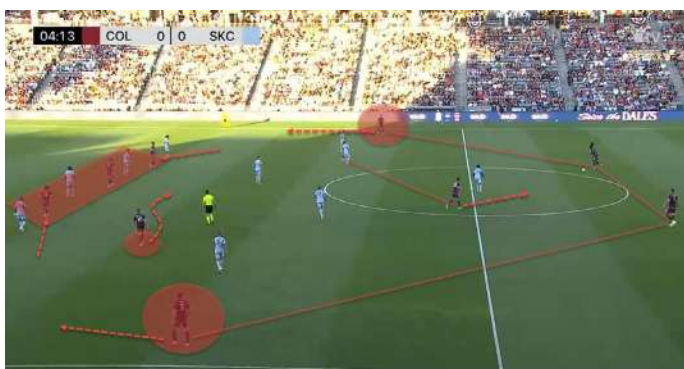
Quite clearly, apart from often being the hub in possession, Bassett dictates a lot of what happens further up the pitch as well. And that is an excellent segue into the next section of our tactical analysis.



# FINAL THIRD TACTICS

Colorado Rapids are not among the most efficient or complex teams in possession, but their final product has been good enough to put them in the upper echelon of MLS teams in 2024. So far, having played 25 games, Armas' team has scored 56 goals and is tied for fourth in that category. However, the overperformance is glaring as they've only accumulated 42.83 expected goals, good enough for the third spot in the league. So far, this has been working for them but such overperformances are often difficult to sustain, even more so when we factor in that they only have two reliable goalscorers in the team.

That said, their structures in the final third are sensible and balanced, as Armas likes to have five zones occupied when arriving into the final third. And arriving is the right word here; Colorado Rapids are not a team that will sustain pressure over a longer spell of possession but will rather attack in quick and consecutive waves. The following image will give us a glimpse of their final third shape in a relatively settled possession phase.



The initial back four is present once again as both full-backs like to push forward to accommodate the inverting wingers. Seeing how the front three are usually quite narrow, the width comes either from the overlapping full-backs or drifting midfielders. In such a setup, they will have a 2-2 base with the centre-backs and two pivots, while the third midfielder gets more freedom to roam the final third. The pivots are tasked with aiding

the centre-backs in linking the lines, but one will generally be positioned somewhat higher with more offensive tasks.

The wingers can start quite wide but will often tuck in right next to the striker and attack the space behind the opposition's backline, often through their respective half-spaces. The main creative threat is often on the flanks, as Colorado Rapids excels in deploying deep completions from those wide areas following an overlapping run. At the moment of writing, they are the team with the third-most deep completions and fifth-most if using the per 90 metric (8.69).



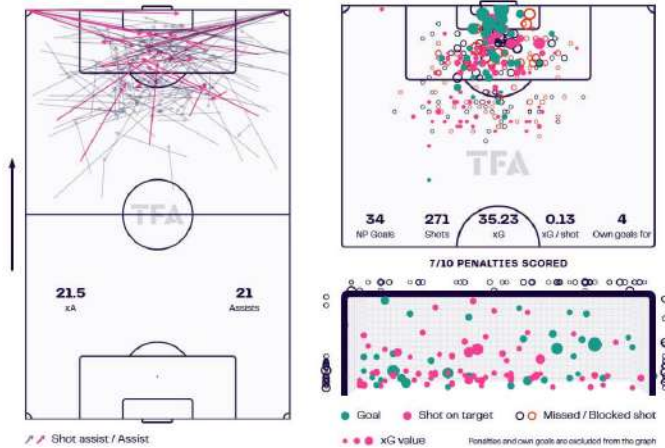
This latest example showcases some of those mechanisms we talked about in this tactical analysis. One of the midfielders drops deeper to assist the progression, as centre-backs are not always the most reliable tool to get the ball through congested spaces. Once the midfielder drops, however, his movement attracts the attention of his markers, who have to either leave him with enough space and time on the ball or try to collapse, triggering the De Zerbian sequential dismarking we discussed earlier.

The other midfielder then sees the space open up behind their backs and runs into it, quickly getting the ball from his teammate. From there, the quick sequence continues as the pass goes towards the overlapping full-back, who finishes the action with a cutback into the box. Even though the sequence does not end with a goal, it does a good job showcasing some of the chance-creation mechanisms Colorado Rapids have up their sleeves.



## COLORADO RAPIDS SHOT ASSISTS & SHOTS

All games from MLS 2024

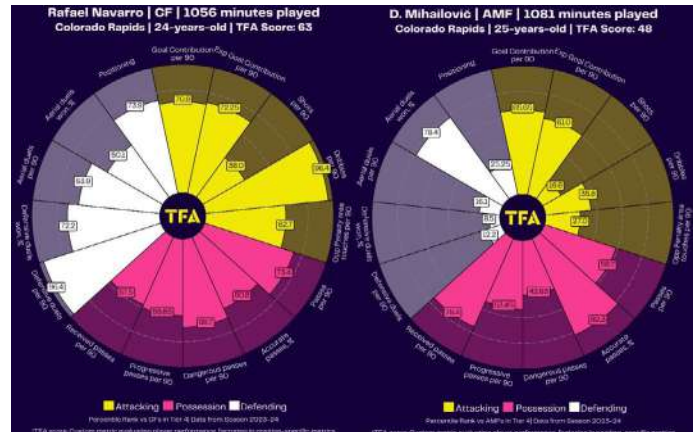


Generally, however, Chris Armas has created a good environment for his team as they are currently the squad with the highest expected goal-per-shot value in the league. At the moment of writing, they are averaging 0.152 xG per shot, outperforming the competition. Their average has fallen off slightly since their last game, and the data for that has yet to be quantified in our chart engines. Hence, there is a slight discrepancy between the numbers you see in the image and the statistics we have on hand.

Currently, Colorado Rapids average 10.48 shots per 90, which is still below the average in the current MLS season. However, 40.9% of those shots are on target, good enough for fifth-best in the league. Interestingly, with 49 headers, they rank third in that category and have also tallied 11 shots on posts so far. When it comes to shots from open play and shots from outside the box, Colorado Rapids are still below the MLS average.

However, most of their shot locations are of high overall value. The huge xG overperformance we mentioned at the start of this tactical analysis comes from goals scored outside the box. We can see in the previous chart that there are a lot of shots on target and low-xG goals in their catalogue, which creates the difference between expected goals and actual goals. Interestingly, they are also the team with the most penalties won so far (10), and they have converted seven

of them. And their main penalty takers? Rafael Navarro and Đorđe Mihailović.



These two are the main goalscorers of the team, with the latter also being the main creator. Mihailović has 16 G/A, the most in the team, and 14.22 expected G/A, again, the most in the team. He has scored 10 goals from 8.6 xG and assisted six from 5.62 xA. Apart from that, he is the most fouled player in the team and has the most smart passes and deep completions in the team (ninth in the league, 2.04 per 90). Navarro, on the other hand, is second with 12 G/A and 13.07 xGA. He has scored 11 goals from 11.56 xG - fourth highest in the league - but also has four second assists (second-most in the league) and the most shots in the team (53).

When it comes to the pure output, he is the main man: most shots from open play and second-highest accuracy in the league (52.83%), most headers in the team with 10, most dribblings in the team, second-most offsides in the league and most touches in the penalty area in the team.

These two are undoubtedly the bread and butter of Colorado Rapids' output and overall attacking tactics.

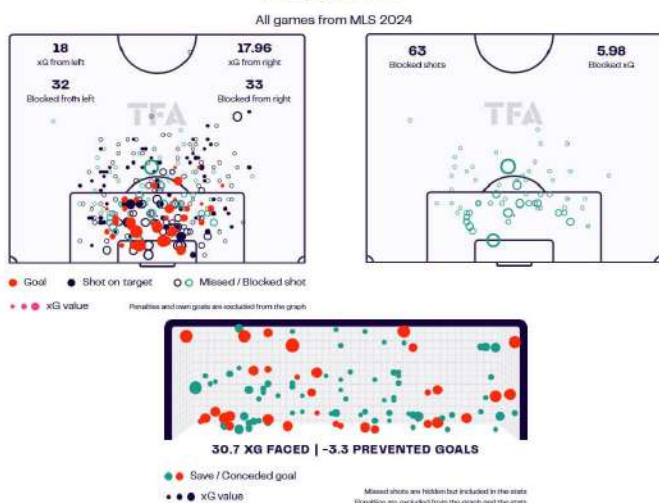
## OUT-OF-POSSESSION TACTICAL ANALYSIS

The final section of our tactical analysis will focus on the out-of-possession mechanisms and statistics to see how Chris Armas has coached the defensive aspects of Colorado

Rapids. At the moment of writing, the team has conceded 38 goals in 25 games and has done so with a total of 32.39 expected goals against, suggesting they have conceded more goals than they should have.

Statistically speaking, Colorado Rapids are far from a defensive juggernaut; so far, they concede 10.55 shots against on average, which is just below the league average of 10.82. Similarly, they block 2.42 shots per 90 and have managed to block 24.9% of total shots conceded, which, while not a bad return, is still below the MLS average for the 2024 season.

### COLORADO RAPIDS SHOTS FACED & BLOCKED

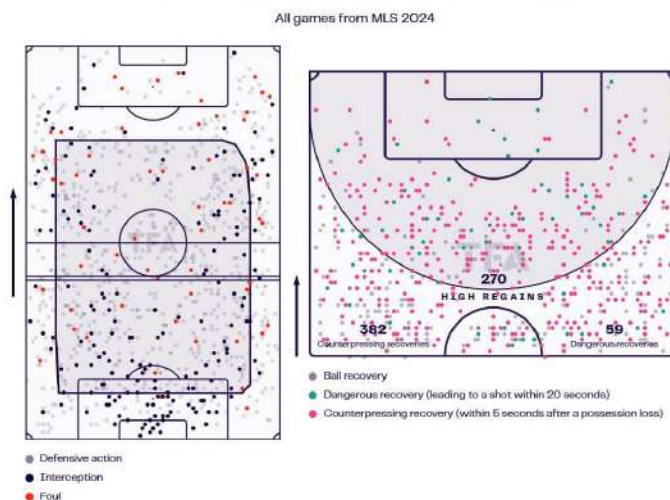


And while Colorado Rapids are not among the teams that face the most shots in the league, their goalkeeper, Steffen, has the sixth-highest shots saved in the league. Unfortunately, his involvement is statistically still a net negative for the team; he has the third-fewest reflex saves in the league and doesn't even crack the top 30 in prevented goals with -0.27 prevented goals per 90. Considering he is a goalkeeper who rarely leaves his line and is also limited on the ball, handball-like reflex saves are crucial for his overall contribution.

When it comes to tactics, Colorado Rapids are not a high-pressing team. So far in the 2024 MLS season, they have recorded 11.76 PPDA, which is below the league average of 12.8 but still

high, and when we pair it up with 4.7 challenge intensity (below the league average of 4.82), we get a team that's happier and more comfortable sitting in a deep block than they are pushing up high and pressing aggressively.

### COLORADO RAPIDS DEFENSIVE TERRITORY & HIGH REGAINS



This can also be seen in the latest visual, which shows us their defensive territory and high regains. Colorado Rapids tally more defensive duels and interceptions in deeper areas, and this is where they also start their transitions. Of course, that is not to say that they never press high, but more often than not, they will drop slightly deeper and defend just ahead of their penalty area.

Statistically speaking, they average 53.31 defensive duels per 90, which is still below the league average but with a 61.7% success rate, a figure that exceeds the league average. Still, with the fifth-most interceptions in the league and sixth-most when it comes to the per 90 metrics (37.32), we can see that the tactics, while not bulletproof, are doing something right. That said, Colorado Rapids are quite vulnerable in the air, and despite registering a high number of aerial duels, they have the third-lowest success rate in the league with 42.4%.



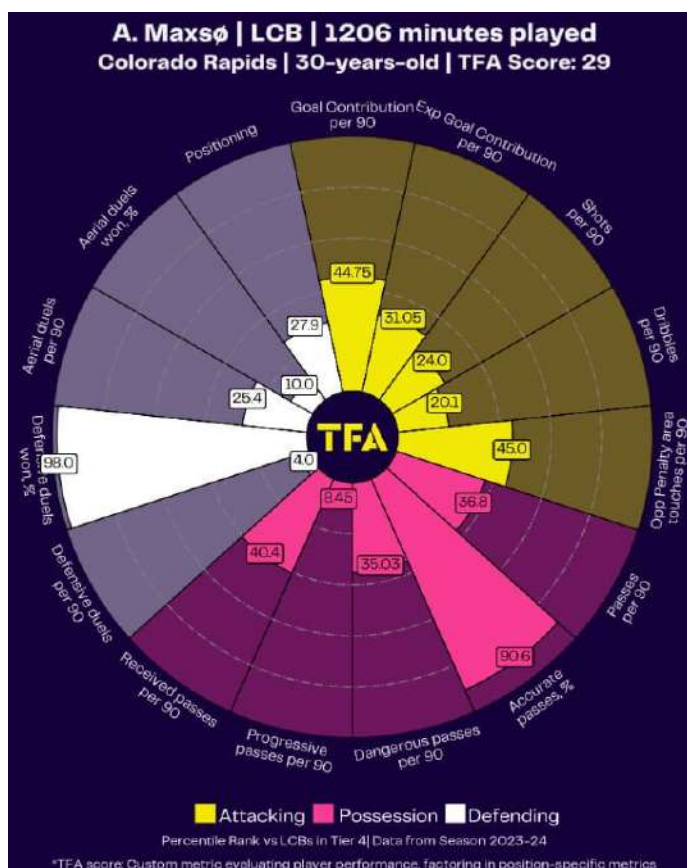
While there are others, it does seem Colorado Rapids' defence is still something Chris Armas should work on; they are leaking more goals than they should according to the expected values and are not getting the most out of their goalkeeper, both in and out of possession.

## CONCLUSION

Colorado Rapids are an exciting young team that has caught the eye of many in the 2024 MLS season. Chris Armas, similarly, is someone who is still building his coaching catalogue, and this year's work is definitely a step forward, both for him and the squad he's currently managing. Colorado Rapids are not perfect, but they are proving to be a collective with a high ceiling, which has yet to show their full capabilities.

Structurally, Armas usually opts for a 4-4-2 mid-block that then transitions to a variation of a 4-3-3 once the wide players push up to pressure their markers. The same happens when Colorado Rapids are higher up the pitch, and they will often do so in that same 4-3-3 shape. Again, high pressing isn't their preference, but they will occasionally try to force dangerous turnovers and exploit mistakes in the opposition's build-up phase.

When it comes to individuals who carry the backline in defensive actions, the experienced Andreas Maxsø stands out in some of the data categories; he is the player with the most successful defensive duels, with a 76.25% success rate, the third-most interceptions in the league, and the most shots blocked on the team (20, third-most in the league, too).





# PREMIER LEAGUE CORNERS

PEP GUARDIOLA



MANCHESTER CITY

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE DECLINE OF MAN-MARKING

KARIM EL-SHESHEINY // @ELSHESHEINY

The Premier League has become a major reference in football due to its abundance of high-level coaches and players, making it a hub for those seeking to learn from coaches worldwide. One of the areas where the Premier League currently leads globally is set-pieces, where it has made significant strides in all types of set plays in recent years.

It is known that there are three methods of defending corner kicks:

1. Man-marking system: This method relies on marking players individually, with only one or more players designated as zonal defenders.
2. Zonal-marking system: This method relies entirely on defending specific zones. Each player stands in a designated area, awaiting the ball to strike if it enters his zone.
3. Hybrid system: Currently predominant, this method involves a combination of zonal defenders and man markers to effectively cover different areas and players.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable scarcity in the Premier League's use of a man-marking system, contrasting sharply with most, if not all, other leagues. In the previous season, only three teams out of the total 20 in the competition adopted a man-marking system: Sheffield United, Nottingham Forest, and Crystal Palace. It is also noteworthy that these teams altered their defensive approach during the season, transitioning to more zonal defenders by its conclusion, except for Sheffield United, who finished last.

**Note:** *The number of zonal defenders in the man-marking system may vary, but in this study, we refer to teams employing only two zonal defenders or fewer, indicating a predominant reliance on man-marking. Additionally, some teams initially used three zonal defenders, but many of them also increased their numbers by the end of the season, such as Newcastle United and Aston Villa.*

As an indicator, Man City and Fulham, who do not employ man-marking, are the teams that conceded the fewest goals from corners, with a total of three goals each. In contrast, Nottingham Forest, who still follow the traditional man-marking, conceded the highest number of goals from corners in the previous Premier League season, totalling 15. You may say well, but Man City and Fulham likely faced significantly fewer corner kicks than Nottingham Forest, so I bring you the percentages of goals conceded from corner kicks relative to the total number of corners faced for each of them:

- Fulham conceded three goals from 188 corners, a percentage of approximately 1.6%.
- Man City conceded three goals from 129 corners, a percentage of around 2.3%.
- Nottingham Forest conceded 15 goals from 245 corners, resulting in a percentage of 6.1%.

We do not argue that simply choosing a defensive system is everything. What matters most are the clear roles of players and their understanding of how to react effectively to different scenarios. It's possible to find a team defending poorly with a hybrid approach or one using zone defence but failing to instruct players how to deal with diverse offensive actions. However, we emphasise that several ideas have emerged that have effectively countered the man-marking system, leading many teams to change their systems and making us wonder whether it is on the path to extinction. This is what we will further discuss in this tactical analysis.

## ORIENTATION PROBLEMS

As we know, this system doesn't have enough zonal defenders to defend important areas. Each marker has his opponent as a reference, so attacking teams can manipulate them easily, dragging most of them wherever they want, far

away from the targeted area. Making the targeted player escape or overcome his marker is crucial, and this is what we will mainly talk about.

We will discuss the main ideas that cause issues for the man markers, which can be designed by hundreds of routines. The first issue is causing orientation problems to the targeted player's man marker, meaning that doing some actions and movements makes him unable to keep tracking the ball and the targeted player at the same time. Moreover, the targeted player can just drag his marker into a difficult position, making it difficult for him to track him and the ball at the same time. Let's explain with examples!

Starting with Arsenal's last game against Crystal Palace, in which the Gunners could score twice from corners, you can see below the man-marking system using only two zonal defenders on the near post and the middle, so Arsenal decides to target this large area behind the second one, so they simply use two attackers to make them out of the game. In yellow, one of them moves in front of the two zonal defenders, taking their attention, stopping in front of the first one while the one in orange blocks the second zonal defender from his back, preventing him from stepping back to the targeted area.

Ben White does his usual job by standing close to the goalkeeper to block him, preventing him from claiming the ball. We should mention that he does that excellently with different strategies during the season. The player in white just drags his marker away, also to take the zonal defenders' attention and help frame the goal to be ready for any second ball.

Easily and finally, the rest is the targeted player's job. Gabriel Magalhães, in baby blue, starts in the middle and steps one step toward the near post and then moves toward the far post in a critical feint. It's worth mentioning that Arsenal left two players for the rebound and a player to cover them.



This feint toward the far post means that the marker can't face the ball to track it and Gabriel at the same time, meaning that he should choose either to keep facing the ball, letting Gabriel escape, or turn around, giving his back to the ball, to track Gabriel. This is what will happen.



The marker chooses the second choice, losing contact with the ball, but there is another strange thing in the photo below! Kai Havertz comes from outside the shot to be the second targeted player in case the ball passes Gabriel, and we will discuss that later in detail.



Below, Gabriel's marker decides to take a look at the ball, and here he loses Gabriel, allowing him to win only a moment before him because of the orientation problem we discussed.





The plan works, and the result is a goal.



Coming back to Havertz's weird starting position, he stands in the position below, which forces his marker to be at a difficult angle, giving his back to the ball. He can also use the same principle to overcome him or win a moment before him with this curved run, as shown in the two photos below.



This position puts the marker against a difficult question to face: Havertz giving his back to the ball, making his priority only to slow him down, but this isn't enough because there isn't a zonal defender to cover him at the end, as in the previous case, or stand in the usual optimum zonal position trying to track the attacker and the ball at the same time, as in the case below.

This option opens the goalmouth for the attacker, like he says, welcome to the goal, while a mate in yellow can block him from his back when he turns around, as shown in the two photos below.



A mate blocks the targeted player's marker, which is called a screen, as in basketball, and this makes us move to the next idea.

## SCREENS

The second issue is using screens to make the targeted player escape from his marker, exploiting some movements and starting positions. For example, you can see below three of Man City's players standing in a pack while Rodri is the targeted player. He will move around his mates in a curved path with the help of his yellow mate, who goes to block Rodri's targeted player.



# ORIENTATION PROBLEMS & SCREENS

The third idea combines the two previous ideas, meaning that we will make the marker turn around and suddenly find himself against a screen, too. Let's clarify that!

In the first photo below, the change is evident by putting the pack more toward the near post, making the target player, Nathan Aké, the first one from the near side and will move to the far post, not the opposite as in the previous case.

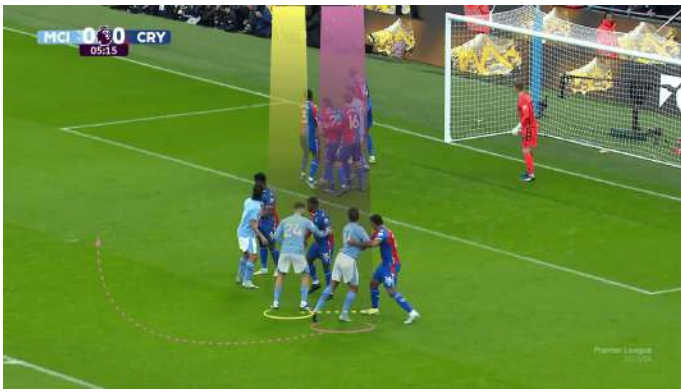
Rodri, in this case, is the one who does the screen for his mate, so when Aké makes his curved run, his marker will turn around, giving his back to the goal, losing contact with it, and also finding Rodri against him as he turns around, as in the second photo below.

In the third photo, the third advantage is clear: the green man marker who cut the ball in the previous case needs to turn around to track the ball. However, he will find the attacker in his back, preventing him, and if the targeted player's marker can escape from Rodri, as happened, he will face orientation problems in his way to track the targeted player back.

In the end, Aké gets the ball while his mates frame the goal, waiting for the headed pass.



The ball reaches one of them and ends with a dangerous shot.



As in the two photos below, the screen is done perfectly while their third mate, in green, blocks his marker, making sure that he won't leave him to go to Rodri when he realises the trick.



But he could push him to chase the targeted player because he saw the ball and all the movements necessary to perform the trick, so Man City turned to the third idea.



## SHORT CORNERS

It becomes more difficult for teams who defend the short and rebound areas with the same man-marking reference, as in the case below.

In the first photo below, Sheffield United doesn't leave a zonal rebound defender, which makes Brentford ask the player who stands on the rebound initially to drag the defender with him toward the second zonal defender to slow down him from going forward to free the rebound area from a player coming from the back suddenly, but the shot goes above the crossbar.



The second issue is that having not enough zonal defenders makes defending teams can't be organised in a line to cover the goalmouth while trying to push up after the short pass, which leads to chaos, leaving gaps, especially on the far post, as in the case below.

In the photo below, Aston Villa try to exploit this by asking a player to come to the taker, pretending that he will be the new taker only, but he passes the ball to the old taker, and he does that trying not to attract an additional defender with him. This makes the rebound green defender dragged with the green attacker standing on the edge of the box.

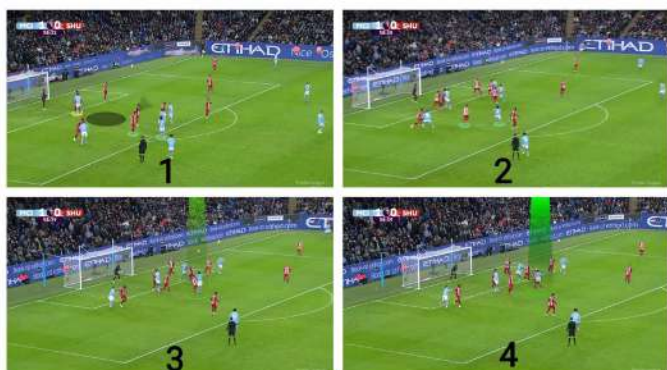
In contrast, the pink attacker drags his marker on the edge of the box to motivate that green rebound defender to leave the central area feeling safe because a defender stands in it, but he is a marker and can easily be dragged after that.



Many strategies depend on one of these strategies. One of them is making the targeted player start in a far position, as in the first photo below, in which the targeted area is shown, and an attacker is ready to block the second zonal defender.

This puts the marker in a difficult question: going forward and sticking to the targeted player, which makes the ball behind him, facing orientation problems, or leaving a distance between him and the targeted player to make him stand in a good body shape to track the ball and the target player at the same time. Here, the marker chooses the second choice, which leaves enough distance between him and the targeted player to exploit this separation without body contact at the taking-off, which makes him jump with his momentum, as in the second and third photos.

In the end, the targeted player hits the ball into the defender's back.







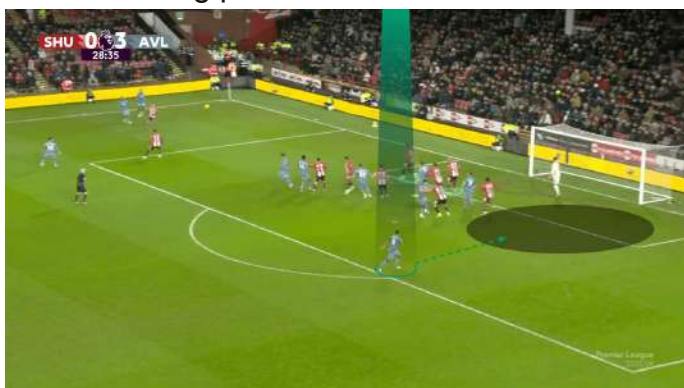
The targeted player is the second player on the edge of the box who pretends that he is waiting for the rebound and is free now.



The second thing is asking the attacker to move toward the near post surrounding the two zonal defenders, preventing them from getting back to the far post. Some movements even make the two zonal defenders shift more toward the near post



In the end, the plan works, but a defender saves the ball intelligently at the last moment, as in the three following photos.



You can notice the difference in the case of having more zonal defenders like Liverpool in the case below.



## CONCLUSION

In this analysis, we have discussed the reasons behind the scarcity of using the ‘man-marking’ defending style during corners in the Premier League and whether it is on the path to extinction.

In this set-piece analysis, we have also shown the different strategies that the Premier League elite teams used against teams that still follow the traditional man-marking system.

# DATA VIZ

## LIGUE 1 2024/25

### GABRIEL OSHO'S JOURNEY FROM LUTON TO AJ AUXERRE

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

From National League, the fifth tier of English football, to Ligue 1, France's top tier. It's not very often we get to see this story arc, but it is a reality for Gabriel Osho, the 25-year-old centre-back who played for Luton Town in the Premier League last season.

Osho has secured a move to play for AJ Auxerre, promoted to Ligue 1 for 2024/25. So how did this all happen? Well, the simple answer could be that Osho's consistent performances over the last couple of seasons for Luton in the Championship and Premier League have earned him a move where, if all goes to plan, he can be a regular starter.

The visualisation below shows Gabriel Osho's ranking for some key metrics compared with Europe's top leagues.

Playing as a centre-back, Osho's performances did take some hit after Luton were promoted to the Premier League last season, but during Luton's promotion campaign, he was one of the most consistent performers for Luton during before his injury towards the end of the season; since then, he has missed a lot of games.

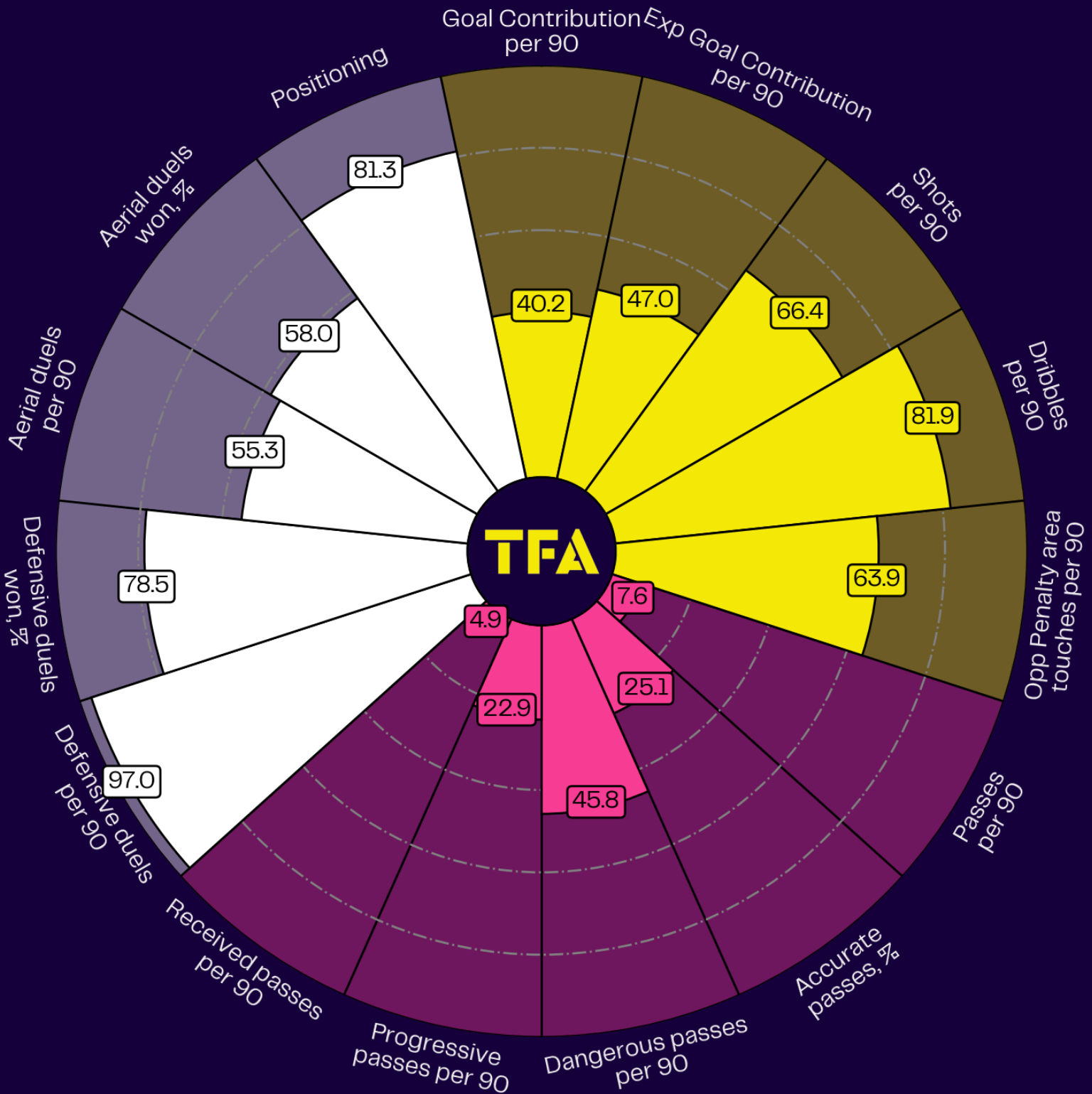
While on the pitch, Osho is very brave and comfortable on the ball, even if the numbers above might suggest otherwise. He has shown versatility in the past, playing as a defensive midfielder, too. This once again highlights his ability on the ball, and his strong defensive acumen — 81st percentile for defensive positioning, top 25% for defensive duels won, and top 3% for defensive duels competed. Over 6'0 tall, Osho is also strong aerially and has the physique to go toe-to-toe with most attackers on aerial duels.

His aggressive nature means he is quite often prone to getting a card, but the positive side is that he stops a number of opposition attacks for his team. Osho is also one of the least error-prone defenders.

Gabriel Osho's move to AJ Auxerre went under the radar, but looking at his performances over the last few seasons, it is deserving and not surprising. There could be other reasons for such an out-of-the-box transfer move, but it will be interesting to see where this move takes Osho in his career.

# G. Osho | CB | 1981 minutes played

## Luton Town | 25-years-old | TFA Score: 51



■ Attacking 
 ■ Possession 
 ■ Defending

Percentile Rank vs CBs in Tier 1 | Data from Season 2023-24

\*TFA score: Custom metric evaluating player performance, factoring in position-specific metrics



# NESTORY IRANKUNDA

NESTORY IRANKUNDA



BAYERN MUNICH II

## THE RISING STAR PROFILED

JONAS BARTSCH

Some people seem to be destined for greatness, but Nestory Irankunda definitely was not one of them. Born in a refugee camp in Tanzania after his parents had to flee Burundi due to civil war, the young boy's future was in doubt from the start. His parents then moved to Australia, where he grew up along with his seven siblings in Adelaide.

Irankunda's career started to take off in 2021 when he was brought in for a trial by Adelaide United. From then on, he took off, signing a professional contract in September of 2021 and making his A-League debut in January of 2022 at just 15 years of age, scoring his first goal just a couple of weeks after his debut. Overall, Irankunda managed to make 60 appearances for Adelaide United, scoring 16 goals in that span. After good performances in the A-League, Irankunda was invited to the U-17 national team and even made his senior international debut in June of 2024.

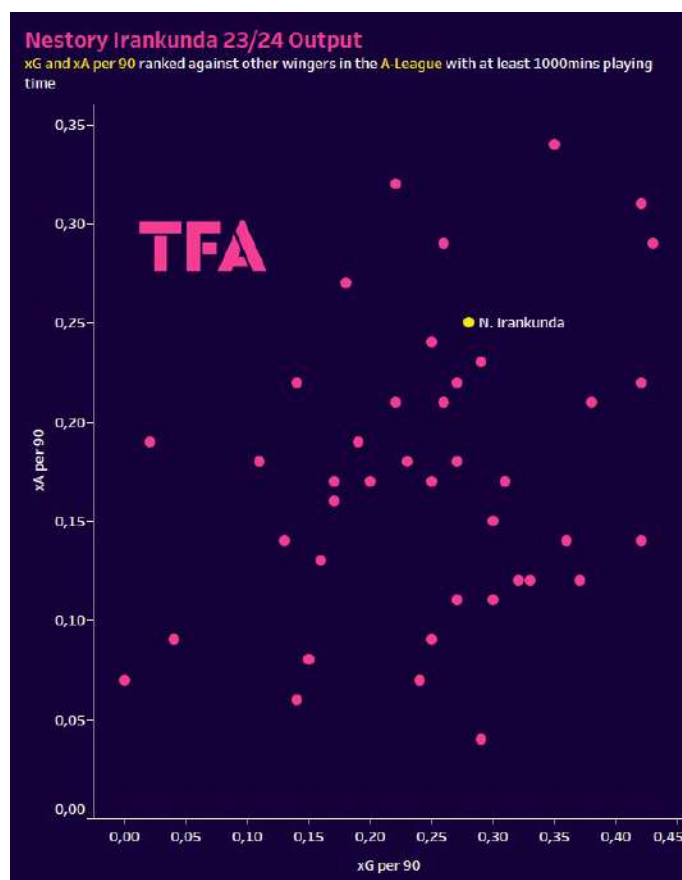
After being such an accomplished player at the age of just 18 years, many teams tried to get their hands on Irankunda. Ultimately, he decided to join FC Bayern München in the German Bundesliga. The decision was heavily influenced by his father's sympathy for the club; many Premier League teams were also interested.

In this scout report, we will examine Nestory Irankunda's approach to the game, his playing style in and out of possession, his strengths, and where he still needs to improve to take the next step in European football over the coming years.

## DATA PROFILE

Nestory Irankunda has a very interesting data profile for multiple reasons. His offensive Output is highly respectable for a winger, especially for a player his age. With 0.28 xG/90 and 0.25 xA/90, Irankunda created a good amount of chances and goal-scoring opportunities for his team during the season.

Suppose we are looking at the xG-side of things. In that case, Irankunda is not generating this much-expected goals by bringing himself in amazing scoring positions, but rather by the volume of his finishing. His 3.68 shots per 90 minutes rank fifth compared to other wingers in the A-League. This means his average xG per shot stands at 0.076, which is not bad but not great either. This just shows that Irankunda is not shying away from pulling the trigger and has been letting it fly throughout the last season, but that is not a bad thing per se.



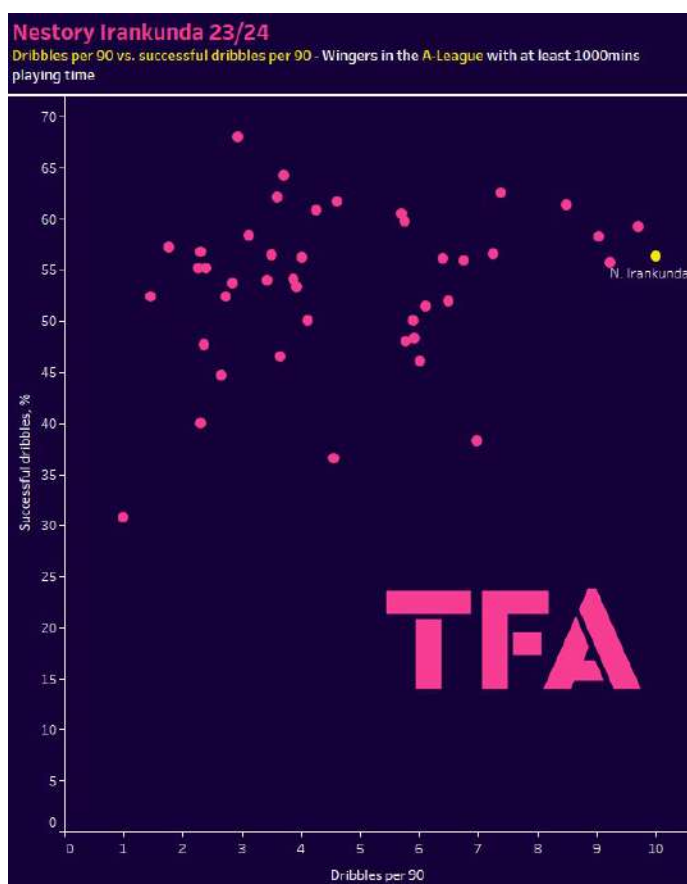
Irankunda's ability to finish off attacks for Adelaide United has been crucial for them to create scoring chances and not lose balls in the attacking phase most of the time.

His xA/90 Output is also decent, ranking 9th in the league. It's rather interesting that Irankunda's xA/90 is also that high for two reasons. Firstly, usually, players like Irankunda, who are focusing a lot on their shot creation, are not creating a ton of chances for their teammates, but Irankunda does. Secondly, the majority of wingers with a high xA-value are really reliant on crossing.

Irankunda's 3.14 crosses per 90 are rather average, and his success rate on crosses, with 20.31%, is in the bottom three of A-League wingers.

Overall, another positive thing is his overperformance in those metrics. Irankunda managed eight goals and 6 assists out of 5.61 xG and 5.15 xA. That just shows his above-average ability in the final third and in creating opportunities for himself and his teammates.

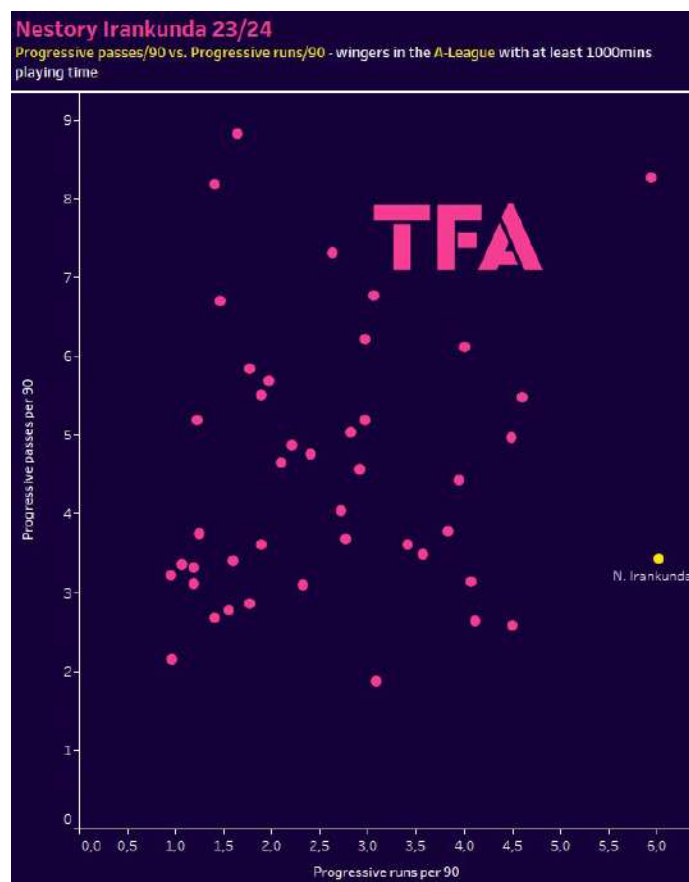
Another very noticeable thing when looking at Irankunda's stats are his dribbling stats.



Among the qualifying wingers in the A-League, Irankunda attempts the most dribbles per 90 minutes with 10. Irankunda obviously is very keen on taking on his defenders and trying to get past them quickly. Another factor in his dribbling is his pace. Irankunda has reached speeds of over 37km/h during his time in Australia, so using his natural athletic ability by trying to dribble past opponents just makes a lot of sense.

Still, he needs to be more efficient with his dribbles. His percentage of % successful dribblings with 56.37%, ranks only 17th amongst qualifying players. While it is still above average, and it's impressive that he can sustain a positive percentage of successful dribblings while having this high of a volume of dribblings, Irankunda still loses a lot of balls this way and needs to improve his decision making there a bit.

If we dig deeper into the data to learn more about Nestory Irankunda's playing style, something immediately catches our eye.



Looking at the ways that qualifying wingers are progressing the ball in the A-League, Irankunda is a standout—his 6.03 progressive runs per 90 minutes rank him number 1 of qualifying players. Irankunda is elite at carrying the ball forward and finding space to dribble into after receiving the ball. This makes Adelaide United's attacking game very dynamic and forces a lot of action all around the pitch. Irankunda is great at pushing the ball upfield and abusing the high defensive line of opponents.



On the other hand, Irankunda's 3.43 progressive passes only rank 30th amongst the qualifying players. Most of these progressive passes are in the final third, which is obviously great for goal and shot creation but shows one significant weakness of Irankunda: His passing ability is lacking in the build-up and transitional play. He is over-reliant on his dribbling to advance the ball into the opposing half and the final third. Especially under pressure, Irankunda struggles to find solutions to pass the ball. Especially at FC Bayern, he needs to improve if he wants to have a shot on the first team.

Overall, Irankunda has a very intriguing scouting profile for a young winger in a relatively weak competition, but there have been multiple areas for improvement shown in the data.

## IN POSSESSION WIDE POSITIONING

In possession, Irankunda is a rather traditional winger. He usually plays on the right, and he interprets his position very well and provides a lot of width for his team in the attacking phase of the game.

Irankunda tries to receive the ball in a half-open stance near the sideline. From there on, he moves inwards rather quickly. Irankunda isn't integrated a lot in his team's passing or build-up; he rather tries to pull defenders outwards so his side's effective playing space is big enough to progress the ball into the final third.



Irankunda likes to pick up the pace after receiving the ball, carrying it towards the goal most of the time. He does not receive many balls behind the defensive line and is more active in deeper zones. He also likes playing with a third man to get a deep run behind the defence.



## DRIFTING INWARDS

After receiving the ball, Irankunda is rarely wasting time. Most of the time, he turns toward the goal with his first touch and dribbles the ball toward the opposing defensive line. With his nice acceleration as well as his fearless style of play, he is a handful to defend for most defences in the A-League.



With his pace, he is a constant threat in transitional play and is helping his team advance from build-up play to attacking play most of the time. Irankunda is not dribbling out wide; however, he drifts inwards most of the time. This leads to reactions of the opposing defence because he is a huge threat out of more central positions because of his excellent shooting technique. Irankunda is dribbling onto a defender, pulling him out of position a lot.

## ANDRIBBELN UND STECKPÄSSE

After pulling the defender out of position, Irankunda is a big fan of attacking the space behind the defensive line. He plays a lot of passes into the spaces he opened up with his dribbling and is confident in his ability to complete these passes as well.

Irankunda uses his dribbling and agility very well, not just forcing his assigned defenders to gravitate towards him but also opening up passing windows and passing angles to progress the ball out of his low stance in an instant.

While Irankunda is great at attacking the holes in an opposing defence and carrying the ball into the final third, he lacks quality in his passing ability. His passes are not placed the right way most of the time and are hard to control for his teammates. Another problem is the pressure on his passes. He just puts too much power onto them a lot of the time, which makes his through balls hard to reach for his teammates.

His range in passing the ball is also somewhat limited. Irankunda rarely plays switches, and if he does, the balls are underhit most of the time. While he has an impressive vision even when dribbling and realises the option of switching pretty often, the execution mostly lacks finesse.

As already pointed out in the data profile, Irankunda is not someone who can progress in play through his passing ability. He is an elite ball carrier, but he will definitely need to improve to be a bigger part of his team's combinations if we want to succeed at FC Bayern München.

## AGAINST THE BALL

### PAST AS A CENTRE-BACK

In a recent interview with FC Bayern, Irankunda told a story about how he always wanted to play as a centre-back when he was younger. With his height and skill set, he had no future in the position, but some of the traits he developed there are still visible in his game today.

Irankunda shows a lot of motor in tracking back against the ball.



Here you can see the opposing team trying to advance the ball after playing through the pressing of Adelaide. Irankunda uses his pace to track back and put some pressure on the ball. Irankunda ends up fouling in this situation, but he still manages to interrupt the counterattack.



Here, Irankunda scans the field after his team loses the ball and realises that the opponent only has one chance, dribbling the ball towards the centre.



Irankunda uses his pace to recover after losing the ball and forces a tackle in the middle of the field. He doesn't just show a great understanding of the defensive side of the game here; he also timed his tackling absolutely perfectly, something he learned in the past as a centre back.

While his past as a defender in these situations is visible most of the time, there still are some issues. While he plays with a high intensity and uses his body well, this ends up in a lot of unnecessary fouls as well, as shown in the first example.

Irankunda holds his wide position when pressing and scans the field very well. However, he is not overly man-oriented in the press; Adelaide United uses more zone coverage while pressing upfront. Irankunda shows great patience in these situations. He doesn't press forward a lot and prioritises a compact defensive formation.



Here, Irankunda is in a pretty bad situation, being caught in a diamond shape the opponent uses in the build-up. He does not press forward here but stays patient and cuts off passing options for the centre-back.



Irankunda baits the centre-back into playing the high-risk pass upfield and then gambles on the interception. In this case, it worked out very well for him, forcing a high recovery for his team. This is a boom-or-bust playstyle, however, because if he misses out on the interception there, Adelaide's press is broken up, and his defenders are left exposed.

While Nestory Irankunda has shown flashes of potential on the defensive side, especially because of his past as a defender, he still needs to work out the details on this side of the ball.

## TRANSITIONAL PLAY

After losing the ball, Irankunda is a menace in the counterpress. He is consistently ready to engage in pressure and is always oriented forward after losing the ball. He is always on the tip of his feet, always ready to sprint and chase the ball. He is not afraid to take risks and shows great trust in his teammates defending the space he leaves open behind him.



In this example, Adelaide United loses the ball quickly after winning it. Irankunda instantly orients forward, only having eyes for the ball and



looking forward the entire time. He is in a sprinter stance instantly and engages in the counterpress within an instant.



Irankunda realises he can't just reach the ball in this situation and cuts off the only possible passing option for the opposing player. He sprints into the passing lane and manages to block the pass, winning the ball back for Adelaide United and preventing the counterattack. This shows Irankunda's proficiency in counterpressing.

After winning the ball, Irankunda is a threat as well. As previously stated in this scout report, Irankunda is always trying to progress the ball through the means of carries and dribblings. In transition, this is just another huge strength that he possesses. The moment he receives the ball on the counter, he presses down the gas pedal and picks up the pace. However, he is not the target player Adelaide United is looking for with the first pass on the counter.

Usually, Irankunda is on the far side of the pitch and holds a very wide position in transition. His teammates overload the left side and play some quick combinations, and then they try to release Irankunda in space on the right side with a switch.



Here, the principle of overload to isolate is used to perfection. Irankunda is completely isolated on the right side and can receive the ball into his front foot. His teammates are playing themselves out of the counterpress and scan the field for Irankunda, playing the switch towards him.



After receiving the ball, Irankunda isn't wasting time and moves forward instantly, taking on the left back of the opposing team and breaking into the box quickly. His cross in this situation was rather bad, but it was still a great counterattack by Adelaide United.



Here, Irankunda receives the ball of a switch on the counter once again. He was again holding a very wide position to get isolated on the right flank. He uses his good first touch again to take on the left back instantly.



Once again, Adelaide was able to release Irankunda in a take-on on the right side of the field, where he could use his pace and dribbling to create a chance for United.

To sum things up, Irankunda is a great player in transition, being able to counterpress effectively and being a threat on the counter at all times.

## STRENGTHS

After assessing the playing style of Nestory Irankunda throughout this scout report so far, it is now time to showcase the abilities that make him such an interesting prospect that a top club like FC Bayern was impressed enough to sign him to a long-term contract.

One of Irankunda's biggest strengths is his drive towards goal and his shooting technique. We already talked about how Irankunda forces take-ons after receiving the ball, but he is not just able to take on; his follow-up action is pretty much always a shot.

Usually, Irankunda threatens the defensive line with his brute pace. He is an incredibly fast player and, as stated before, can reach top speeds of over 37km/h.

After receiving the ball, Irankunda uses only two touches. With his first touch, he prepares the ball for the shot, and then he clinically finishes off the chance with a powerful shot into the top-right corner. His shot power overall is really good, and it allows him to finish chances that are rather hard for other players to finish.

He is also threatening from outside the box. Irankunda's shooting technique allows him to shoot from a distance as well, and he shoots very precisely and powerfully in these situations. He also knows about this strength and always tries to put his defender in a position where he can easily get a shot off.



Here, Irankunda wins the second ball and is picked up by a defender quickly. He uses his agility and pace to move onto his right foot and pulls the trigger as soon as the window opens up.



He opens up the window with his movement and is scoring a goal here. In this situation, the keeper really helps out Irankunda and lets a saveable ball into his net.

His shooting technique is helpful in these situations, and Irankunda is also a threat at set



pieces. He is a good corner-taker, delivering balls into the box at a good height and speed. Also, Irankunda can take direct free-kicks, scoring these at a decent rate with his nice shooting technique.

Overall, his biggest strength is his pace. Combined with his great shooting technique, Irankunda is always a threat to score a goal from anywhere on the pitch and is a hard matchup for almost every defender he has faced.

## WEAKNESSES

Obviously, Nestory Irankunda has areas to improve in as well. In the end, he is just an 18-year-old player, even if he has made a lot of appearances in the A-League.

One of those areas is his crossing ability. As stated in the data profile, his success rate with his crosses is one of the worst in the league. He still attempts a decent number of crosses but can not find his teammates to save his life.



In this example, Irankunda crosses the ball in right away. Usually, he would use his pace and dribbling to get past the last defender in his way and attack the marked space, but he refuses to do so here because the moment he decides to cross it, he is locked in on that option every single time. Still, he does not put his head up and look towards the centre; he just puts the ball into the box, missing his teammate and allowing an easy claim for the opposing goalkeeper.

This just shows the problem with Irankunda's crosses. He rarely picks out a teammate to cross the ball to and just hits it as hard as he can towards the centre of the box. This makes it really hard for his teammates to actually do something with the ball, and most of the time, he just overhits the crosses, and no one is able to claim it.

Irankunda prefers low crosses to high crosses simply because he lacks the technique to put some effect on the ball. That means his high crosses are really predictable and easy for the defenders to clear away or even claim for the goalkeeper.

Irankunda usually has decent vision, so he should be able to improve his ability to find his teammates in the box. However, his decision-making in these situations needs to improve significantly if he wants to succeed at FC Bayern.

Another problematic aspect of Irankunda is his left foot. While his right foot is great, and he uses it to a good extent, his left foot leaves a lot to be desired. He rarely uses his left foot, not just in terms of shooting and passing but also in terms of dribbling. The vast majority of his touches are done by his right foot, making him predictable for the opposing defences and giving them a point of attack.

Irankunda gets by at the level of play he is facing right now, but against Bundesliga defenders, especially those of the top teams. Irankunda will need to be multifaceted if he wants to succeed at the next level, and he definitely needs to be able to do basic things like passing with his left foot; otherwise, he won't make the cut.



## CONCLUSION

**A**t just 18 years of age, Nestory Irankunda is an absolute standout in Australia and has shown flashes of great potential. However, it needs to be addressed that the level of competition he has faced so far has been pretty low. The jump from playing against A-League defenders to playing against Bundesliga defenders will not be easy for him.

Irankunda's pace and athletic ability are great overall, and his demeanour on the pitch definitely shows that he can make another huge step in terms of development. He will need to take that step in Germany if he wants to play for the first team at FC Bayern.

Overall, Irankunda is a pretty raw type of player with great instincts and a couple of very distinctive strengths ('island talents', as they're called in Germany) — but he also lacks a lot of abilities a Bundesliga-level player needs to have. His passing and crossing need to get better relatively quickly, especially. Otherwise, he will be too easy to defend for more experienced players. His left foot also needs a lot of work. Obviously, some players have worked around that in the past, but Irankunda would still be smart to address it.

FC Bayern made an exciting signing in Irankunda, and now it will also be their responsibility to help the young Australian become the best version of himself. For the first time in his career, Irankunda has access to elite training facilities and coaches, and they need to make use of them. If they stay patient and help him through his first couple of months, we could see a future Alphonso Davies-like success story shaping up for FC Bayern and Nestory Irankunda.



# GIOVANNI ROSSI

GIOVANNI ROSSI



MARSEILLE

## HIS TRANSFER STRATEGY EXPLAINED

FINTAN O'REILLY // @FINTANFOOTBALL

For the majority of their 104-year history, Sassuolo were relative minnows of Italian football. They earned their first-ever promotion to Serie B in 2007/08, when one Massimiliano Allegri — who'd, of course, go on to reach great heights with both AC Milan (winning Serie A in 2010/11) and Juventus (winning Serie A in 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 as well as twice finishing as runner-up in the UEFA Champions League — doing so in 2014/15 and 2016/17) at the helm.

Sassuolo went on to achieve a historic promotion to the top flight for the first time in their history in 2012/13 when they won the Serie B title under the management of Eusebio Di Francesco; they'd go on to remain in Serie A from 2013/14 until 2023/24 — this past campaign, when they finally dropped out of Italy's elite and leaves them where we find them today, preparing for another season in Italy's second-tier, hoping to bounce straight back to the big time.

One figure who played a key role in much of the last two decades for Sassuolo — by far the two most successful decades of the club's history — is Giovanni Rossi.

A journeyman attacker who primarily spent his playing career in Italy's third and fourth tiers, Rossi took up his first post-playing role as a member of Sassuolo's supervisory board in 2006 — a role which he'd occupy until 2010 when he departed for Juventus to become La Vecchia Signora's 'Director of Youth Development' for three years. Following that spell in Turin, Rossi returned to Sassuolo, where he occupied the role of 'Sporting Director from 2013 until just last month, barring a one-year break for the 2017/18 season when Rossi left for the same role at Cagliari.

Reports emerged from Italy earlier this summer that Rossi's former colleague, Allegri, now in his second spell as Juve boss, "felt betrayed" when

his club opted not to appoint Rossi as their new Sporting Director, with the 56-year-old seemingly keen on linking back up with the man with whom he shared excellent memories of Sassuolo's first Serie B promotion.

Instead, Rossi has opted for a change of scenery, leaving Italy for the first time in his football career — playing or post-playing — taking on a new position as 'Team Organiser' with Ligue 1 giants Marseille, where the 58-year-old will collaborate once more alongside a manager he'd previously worked with during his time with Neroverdi — Roberto De Zerbi.

Per reports, it appears that Rossi's 'Team Organiser' role will see him act as a middle-man between De Zerbi, with whom he clearly shares a positive working relationship from their time together at Sassuolo, just as Rossi seemingly does with Allegri, and the club president Pablo Longoria, as well as the other members of Marseille's upper management team.

But apart from a friendly relationship with Roberto De Zerbi, what else can Rossi offer Marseille? And could he end up proving a vital addition for Les Phocéens in their bid to firmly re-establish themselves as a formidable force in French football?

This analysis piece will be part recruitment analysis and part data analysis as we provide some insight into Rossi's time as Sassuolo's sporting director via data and statistics.

This analysis piece will shed light on why Rossi's name is one that now holds immense levels of respect within the Italian game thanks to what he played a crucial part in achieving with Sassuolo over the past two decades or so.



# SUSTAINED GROWTH AND SUCCESS

Firstly, it's clear from what we've outlined above that during Rossi's time with the club, Sassuolo provide a prime example of sustained growth and success. Rossi first took up an advisory position with the club when they were in the third tier — then the highest peak they'd managed to reach. He witnessed the club climb the Italian football ladder, break through glass ceilings and, for the most recent decade, establish themselves as top-flight regulars — remaining in Serie A from 2013/14 all the way to 2023/24.

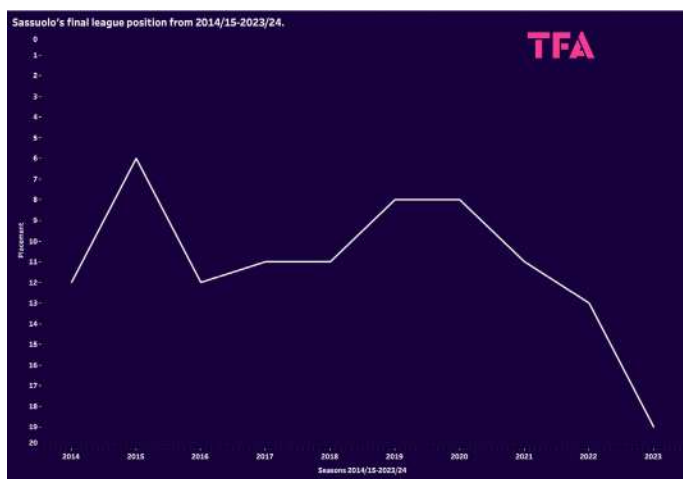
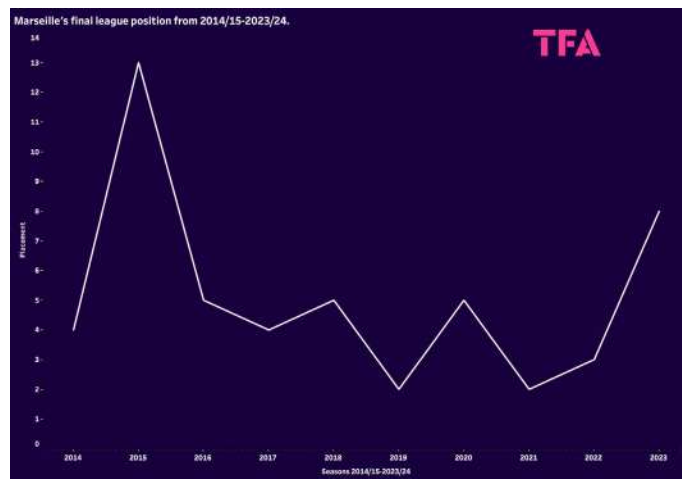


Figure 1 shows us Sassuolo's final league position from 2014/15 to 2023/24 — the last 10 seasons.

As already mentioned, Rossi was not part of Sassuolo's setup for 2017/18, but the Sporting Director position tends to be one which is best evaluated by long-term results, as opposed to a short-term view.

After their first Serie A season (2013/14 — not on this graph), when they finished 17th, narrowly avoiding relegation, Sassuolo placed themselves in a comfortable position in Serie A's mid-table, hovering between a low of 12th and a high of sixth from 2014/15 until 2021/22 — a position that's not to be scoffed at for a club who'd never competed in the top-flight before this impressive decade-long run.

A 13th-place finish in 2022/23 was followed by their eventual relegation this past term when they ended the campaign in 19th place. However, for much of the last 10 years, it's clear that not only did Sassuolo manage to stay in the top flight, but they did so comfortably without a real threat of being relegated — a credit to all involved in the management structure of the club as well as the first team, including Rossi who was one of the central figures in orchestrating this immense success relative to the size and history of the club.



Marseille are a side who will have very different demands to those Rossi will have experienced at Sassuolo; they'll want to be getting regular UEFA Champions League football — European football in general, at a minimum. Over the last 10 years, they've typically managed to achieve the latter bar, the odd outlier, but managing the former consistently has eluded them, as figure 2 indicates.

During the timeframe shown above, Marseille qualified for the UEFA Champions League in just two seasons — 2019/20 and 2021/22, the two campaigns of the past 10 years in which they finished second in France's top-flight.

Realistically, competing on merit with the might of PSG in their current form would be quite a tall task, but establishing themselves as 'the best of the rest' in France is definitely doable, even in a highly competitive league which features several well-run teams on the same level and with the same goal as Marseille at this moment.

Albeit not an easy task, this is undoubtedly what Les Phocéens have to be striving for and what they're hoping for with their restructuring on the management side of things, bringing in Rossi and De Zerbi.

## **MANAGER ID, DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS**

**A**n essential skill of Sassuolo's over the past 10 years has been their ability to effectively identify managers to take the club forward while maintaining the first team's playing style and tactical identity.

After Roberto De Zerbi came Alessio Dionisi, and while things ultimately took a turn for the worst towards the end of his reign, things remained fairly stylistically consistent, which one could argue is a positive for the club in terms of building a culture that everyone involved with the team can clearly identify, understand and buy into.

A team characteristic of both De Zerbi and Dionisi thrives in possession, with quite a structured system on the ball, while requiring a lot of rotation and movement from individuals within that structure to aid ball progression and chance creation.

We analysed both iterations of Sassuolo — De Zerbi's and Dionisi's — in detail at certain points during their respective tenures in charge of the club in previous tactical analysis articles and noted in those analyses a degree of consistency between the respective visions of the two coaches.

Now, Fabio Grosso will take on the task of achieving a second promotion from Serie B to Serie A in his management career as he assumes the Sassuolo hot seat from this coming season.

Grosso is another coach who we've analysed in detail before at Total Football Analysis. In

that piece, we described his team as playing with elements of the positional play philosophy, though with individuals afforded greater levels of freedom than they'd be granted within the traditional positional play philosophy.

Verticality, width and depth are all emphasised within Grosso's ideal game model, in addition to positional flexibility and off-the-ball movement from players as his side attacks — while not a carbon copy of the coaches who came into Sassuolo before him (nor should he be expected to), he does present the profile of coach who can offer an element of stylistic consistency for the Sassuolo faithful and what they've come to expect from their side over the last decade or so.

This stylistic consistency is something that only those above the manager involved in organising the coaching staff and all aspects of the club as a whole can ensure — this is something Rossi would've been central to throughout his time with Neroverdi.

His ability to achieve this successfully with a club like Sassuolo where all the options in the world won't be readily presenting themselves, along with maintain a good working relationship with the coaches who've passed through the club — as his relationship with Allegri and link-up with De Zerbi once more would attest to — is vital when it comes to understanding the respect he commands thanks to his time with Neroverdi.

## **TRANSFER APPROACH**

**F**or our final section of this analysis, we're going to provide some analysis of Sassuolo's transfers from the past decade to give some insight into Rossi's transfer dealing trends.



For starters, figure 3 shares Sassuolo’s transfer activity from the 2014/15 season to the 2023/24 campaign, illustrated through transfer fees spent (pink) and received (yellow).

Overall, we can clearly see that both figures have risen significantly over the last decade, with money on transfer expenditure rising slightly less than money received through player sales by the end of this graph.

For most of the years on display, both figures are in or around the same spot, with a slight variation from year to year, and both figures alternate between the largest and lowest of the two.

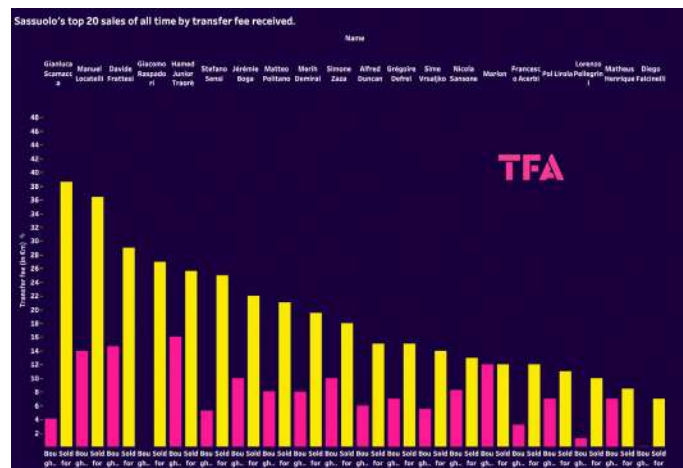
However, Sassuolo did spend more money than they received in the majority of years on display here — illustrating that the club was not afraid to invest in their playing squad and saw this as a necessity when it came to achieving their goal of sustaining top-flight status. This is, perhaps, one key reason why the likes of Allegri and De Zerbi would be pleased to work with Rossi again, knowing he’s a sporting director who prioritises investment in the first-team squad.

Still, towards the end of this graph, we see player sales figures rocketing to new heights while expenditure experienced a slower, steadier rise. It’s primarily due to these last two years that Neroverdi ended up with a €33.7m transfer profit for this period despite investing heavily in the playing squad and making a loss

most of the time, taking things on a year-to-year basis.

The discrepancy between the two figures in favour of ‘money in’ over the last couple of years may be one key reason why they ultimately went through their relegation last season, with Sassuolo arguably failing to adequately replace Davide Frattesi, who departed on loan to Inter last July — meaning a significant chunk of their midfield had been taken out, in addition to the departures of the likes of Gianluca Scamacca, Manuel Locatelli and Giacomo Raspadori which came in the preceding years and perhaps finally caught up to them.

It’d be unfair to criticise Sassuolo’s recruitment, given they signed so many players who went on to deliver big-time for the club on the pitch before leaving and generating a big transfer profit. However, over the last couple of seasons, they failed to sign players who delivered an instant hit of quality to make up for the on-field losses experienced through the aforementioned departures — this makes their increased transfer profits over the last couple of years particularly notable.



Still, over the last decade, during the vast majority of which time Rossi was a central figure in the club’s transfer activity, Sassuolo made heavy profits on a lot of players, with Scamacca to West Ham United being the club’s all-time record sale (€38.6m) after having been signed for €4.1m from PSV’s youth academy five years prior.



Figure 4 shows Sassuolo's top-20 sales ranked in order of transfer fee received (yellow) with the transfer fee they'd initially paid to bring that player in displayed by the pink bar directly to the left of each yellow one.

Of those listed in their top-20 sales, 19 were profitable, with the club breaking even on just one player — Marlon.

One of these 20 is a Sassuolo academy product. At the same time, six — including Scamacca — were signed from other clubs' youth academies rather than first teams, primarily Italian academies. 11 of these players came to Sassuolo from other Italian sides' first-teams, highlighting Rossi's desire to ensure his team has an excellent knowledge of and ability to make use of what's on their doorstep.

From those who came to Sassuolo from foreign countries, a notable trend seems to be a desire to sign players who either didn't make a strong enough impact at a big club abroad but still had the potential to make it at the level of a top-five league (Marlon, signed from Barcelona) or players from some of Europe's top youth academies, which Rossi also seemed to place a strong emphasis on being knowledgeable about (see: Jérémie Boga, signed from Chelsea's youth team and Scamacca, signed from PSV's youth team).

Between their arrival at Mapei Stadium — Città del Tricolore for Neroverdi and their ultimate departures, some of these players went out on several loan spells, including Diego Falcinelli, Fratessi and Scamacca.

This is not just talking about a loan before the buying club made a purchase. Still, rather loan spells to gain experience and improve before featuring for Sassuolo's first team and/or being sold on for a larger fee. However, 'loan with buy option' deals were also quite common for both

Sassuolo's incomings and outgoings during this period.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude our analysis, Rossi could end up being a key player when it comes to managing De Zerbi at Marseille, thanks to his existing relationship with the coach and knowledge of how he likes to operate, potentially providing the 45-year-old manager with the environment he needs to deliver the on-field success Marseille will hope to see during his tenure.

Should Rossi get involved in transfers with Les Phocéens as well, he'll offer a lot of connections, especially to the Italian market but also to top clubs and their youth academies around Europe with whom he's done plenty of deals in the past, leading to successful returns for his club.

During his time at Sassuolo, Rossi exhibited a tendency to place a lot of trust in the manager through investment in the first team in terms of signings — this was largely repaid through positive performances on the pitch, good management of the players and, ultimately, a return for the club. All this led to a healthy 10-year period of top-flight football for Sassuolo — not a bad first crack at Serie A for the century-old club.

Rossi played a pivotal role in a club elevating itself to new heights and Marseille will hope he can repeat that success in a different way while at Stade Vélodrome.

## EFL CHAMPIONSHIP 2024/25

### CAN MIDDLESBROUGH ACHIEVE THEIR PLAYOFF AMBITIONS?

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

Middlesbrough's recent history in the playoffs has been a mixed bag, with the team failing to qualify in five of their last six attempts. However, they have come close in two of their last three, indicating a potential for improvement in the future.

Middlesbrough are currently undergoing a significant transition, both in terms of their on-field football style and off-field events. After a series of managerial changes, the team has found stability under Micheal Carrick's leadership. Carrick, who has been at the helm for nearly two years, has introduced a distinct style of play and is placing a strong emphasis on young talent.

The below visualisation shows where the club finished in its last ten seasons and its points tally in each of these seasons.

Their highest points tally during this period was in 2015/16, when they finished second and earned promotion to the Premier League.

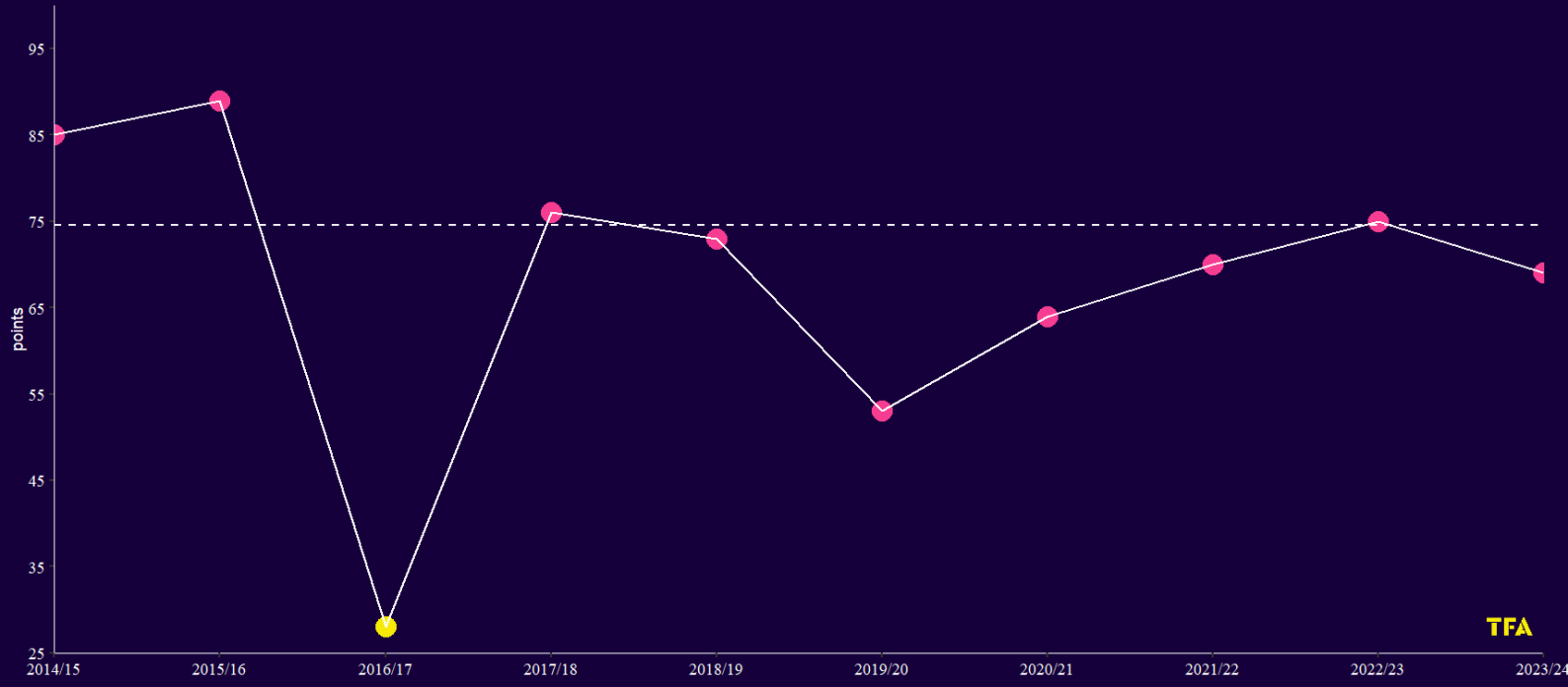
Last season, they finished with 69 points — five fewer than the 64 they secured in 2020/21 when Chris Wilder was in charge. The 2019/20 campaign was their worst in terms of points tally when they finished with 53 points and just above the relegation zone in 17th.

This 10-year period has seen them lose out on plenty of talent, including Chuba Akpom, who was pivotal in helping the club qualify for the playoffs in 2022/23. The club has also moved towards signing relatively younger players who suit the style.

A common pattern that seems to have occurred over the last few seasons is how relatively lesser the managers have been and the players signed seem to be contrasting to the style of play. But this has changed over the last 18 months with a set style of play and relevant players coming in. In addition to this, Middlesbrough are one of the best teams on paper this season, and with the right signings, they should definitely be finishing in the playoff places or above.

## Middlesbrough FC | Points tally over the years

They were relegated from the Premier League in the first attempt and have been so close to the Championship in recent years. The dashed line represents the average points tally (74.5) required to qualify for playoffs over the last 10 seasons





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# YOUNG WING WIZARDS

ESTÊVÃO WILLIAN



PALMEIRAS

## PHILOGENE, FERNANDES AND WILLIAN'S UNIQUE TALENTS ANALYSED

KUROSH MOGHTADER // @MEDIANOWATCHER

This scout report delves into the unique characteristics of Jaden Philogene, Roger Fernandes, and Estêvão Willian. They each stand out due to their distinctive characteristics and potential to reach the pinnacle of the sport. Each of these players brings a unique blend of skills and attributes to the pitch, making them exciting prospects for the future. Through tactical analysis, we can better understand how these young talents might shape the future of football. By examining their skills, playing styles, and potential, we gain insight into the next generation of wingers who are poised to make a significant impact on the global stage.

Before diving into our analysis of each player, we want to highlight a few key points. In the following section, we've separated the 'winger' role into three distinct types, and the two distinct dribbling archetypes to provide clarity and enhance the readability of this report.

## **TYPES OF WINGERS**

The three different types of winger profiles we've decided to focus on are: the "take-on" type, the "runner" type and the "creator" type. When we perform analysis on wingers, it's important to note that players can overlap in two different profiles or even all three of these.

### **TAKE-ON WINGERS**

Take-on wingers are those who are 1v1 specialists. They love to take either man on 1v1 and get past them in a duel. They occasionally like to invite a second opponent to come in and try to double-team them. The goal is to beat their man and progress the ball into the penalty box as quickly as possible. These are wingers like Jérémy Doku, Rafael Leão, Sadio Mané, or Adama Traoré.

## **RUNNER WINGERS**

Runner wingers love to enjoy and manipulate the space in front of them. They can easily make runs behind defences and are great at being ball carriers in transition. These types of forwards can put in shifts as CFs if push comes to shove or play as inside forwards. These are wingers like Raheem Sterling, Heung-min Son, Rodrygo, or Marcus Rashford.

## **CREATOR WINGERS**

These types of wingers usually possess more intelligence. They are the wingers that can dictate matches on their own. Whether they are in wide zones or inverting into central spaces, they have good final ball delivery and intelligence to push their team forward. These are your Lionel Messis, Neymars, Eden Hazards, and Mohamed Salahs. Some smaller names for this profile can be Bukayo Saka, Leroy Sané, or Lamine Yamal. Of course, there can be overlap in these profiles. For example, players like Lionel Messi, Neymar, Mohamed Salah, and Eden Hazard are creator wingers but also take-on wingers and possibly runner wingers, depending on the scenario. The creator wingers are those that have elite attributes in many characteristics compared to the rest of the wingers in the football world.

## **2 TYPES OF WINGER DRIBBLE ARCHETYPES**

### **STOP-MOTION DRIBBLING**

Unlike traditional dribbling, stop-motion engages the duel by waiting for the opponent, turning it into a battle of timing, posturing, and ingenuity. This requires precise thinking and preparation, allowing the winger to act decisively when the opportunity arises. The critical difference lies in his patience, as he waits for the



environment to react to him before making his move. Stop-motion dribbling involves waiting for the ball and the opponent to make the first move; it allows the player to manipulate defenders and exploit openings.

It's like a calculator; you can't get to the answer you're looking for with just one motion, just by typing one button. You have to type each button, and based on what you type, the following arithmetic symbol of what you want to do with that number until you reach your final answer. Calculated moves are based on your environment.

## DYNAMIC MOTION DRIBBLING

**D**ynamic motion is a battle of instincts and speed, requiring a subconscious response and agile movements. It involves feeling your way through situations and reacting instantly to changes, making it ideal for carrying the ball quickly and efficiently, usually through the middle of the field or sometimes in the wide zones. Unlike other dribbling styles, dynamic motion avoids duels by moving faster than the opposition because it moves faster than the opponent's challenge. The key difference lies in forcing the environment to react to the player's movements, allowing for swift and fluid progression.

Dynamic motion is like driving a race car. You rely on intuition and quick reflexes to make split-second decisions, manoeuvring with precision and speed. Just as a driver reacts to the changing conditions of the race, dynamic motion involves feeling your way through the field and staying ahead by moving faster and more efficiently.

## ESTÊVÃO WILLIAN

**E**stêvão Willian is your creator winger. He is a player who can receive the ball anywhere on the pitch, take on players 1v1, run in behind

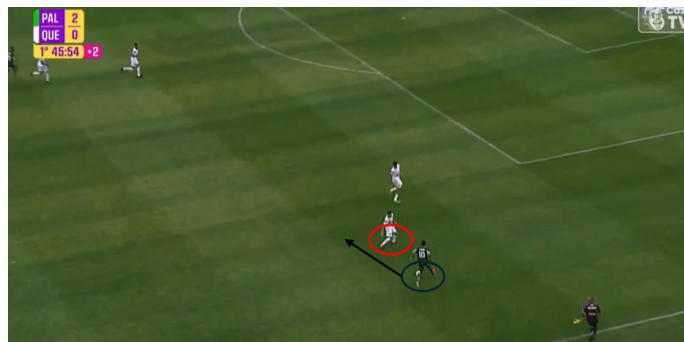
the defence, and break defensive structures or be a creative outlet—a generational talent with elite ball-striking abilities. When carrying the ball, Estêvão demonstrates vast stride variance. He is able to change his direction of run and use his body to manipulate defenders into taking wrong steps in 1v1 duels with shoulder drops, ultimately beating them as a 1v1 specialist as well (take-on winger). He has the potential to run games on his own in the future.

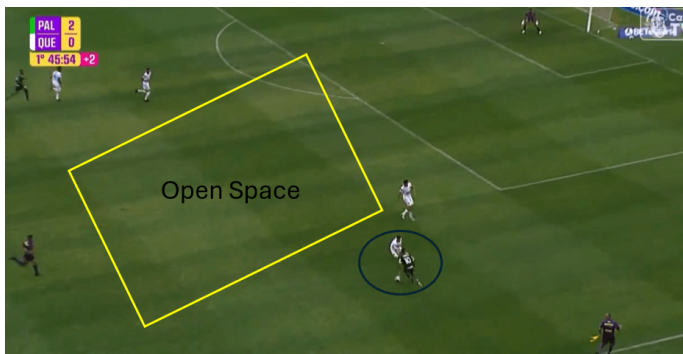
## STOP-MOTION DRIBBLING

**E**stêvão Willian excels at taking players on 1v1 due to his unique stop-motion dribbling. Below is a perfect example of his take-on ability and sense of intelligence. In the first image, he patiently waits for the opponent to make the first step.

They are both in a neutral 1v1; nobody has the advantage in this situation. In the second image, Estêvão takes his dribble to his left and his opponent's right. This is because once the opponent planted his feet flat on the floor and pointed his knees away from his body, Estêvão took the opportunity to go in the other direction with his dribble.

He creates an isolation 1v1 scenario with the defender and then uses stop-motion dribbling.





## TOUCH MAP

Estêvão's touch map is extraordinary. He loves to engage with the opponent in the right central zones of the pitch. Once that opponent is beaten, there is more space until the second or third line of defence has to step up. He loves to take players down the right flank rather than dribbling into central zones. Estêvão can take an inverted role, but he thrives the most in the wide areas of the pitch.

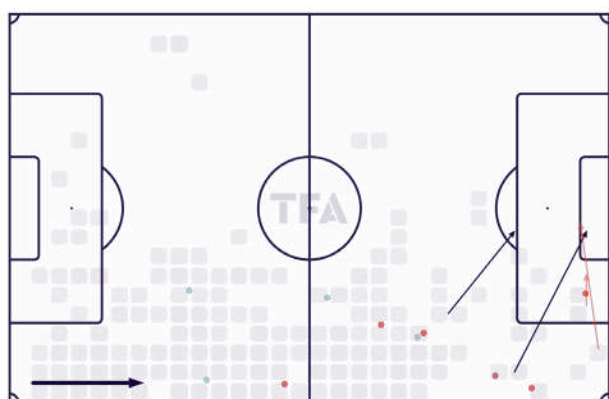
## WINGER ACTIONS

Below, we can see his winger actions during 2022. Notice the intensity part of the graphic first. There is intensity even at the right wing-back position and often centrally, where he can play as a creative outlet as well. However, the majority of his intensity and winger actions are from the right winger side of the pitch, where he thrives the most.

Estêvão averages 3.04 successful take-ons per 90, which ranks him in the top 94th percentile and 5.46 touches in the opponent's penalty box, putting him in the top 88th percentile. This tells us how direct he is, with the goal of getting in the opponent's box to get a shot off, where he ranks in the 96th percentile for total shots per 90 with 3.58.

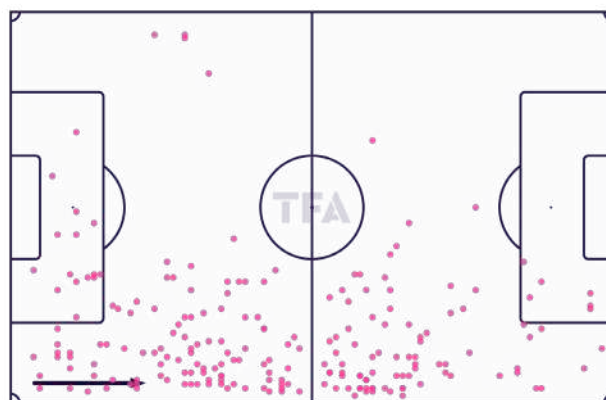
## ESTEVÃO WINGER ACTIONS

All games from Campeonato Brasileiro de Aspirantes U23 2022



## ESTEVÃO TOUCH MAP

All games from Campeonato Brasileiro de Aspirantes U23 2022



## BODY MANIPULATION

Another impressive trait is his ability to change his body direction in just milliseconds, which is a reason why he has such impressive ball-striking abilities. He can shift his body perfectly to strike the ball cleanly. Notice in the first image below if he were to take this strike in this position, the shot outcome would likely be poor. We've seen it many times in football with wingers or strikers taking awful shots due to their body positioning.

However, notice in the second image just how well his body is facing the net to let off a perfect top corner goal strike, all while the defender is unable to track him down. Usually, in the time it takes a player to shift their body correctly to let off the perfect strike, the opponent can clear the

ball, intercept it, put in a tackle, or some sort of defensive action to disrupt the attacker's shot.

In this example, Estêvão shifts his body so quickly that the opponent still could not close him down in time.



## CREATIVITY

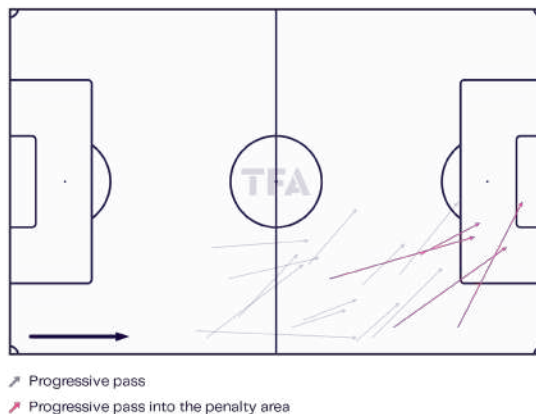
When looking at the final aspect of his creativity package, there's more to it than just the final pass product; we don't want to look at just how much he passes into the penalty box, cross rate, or other types of passes. Being a part of the creator winger profile is more than that; it's where you can receive the ball and progress the team forward.

## PROGRESSIVE PASS MAP

It's easy to analyse his progressive pass map. It's impressive to see a player so young always looking to move forward intelligently. Football isn't just about moving forward; it also involves side-to-side progression. However, Estêvão has both.

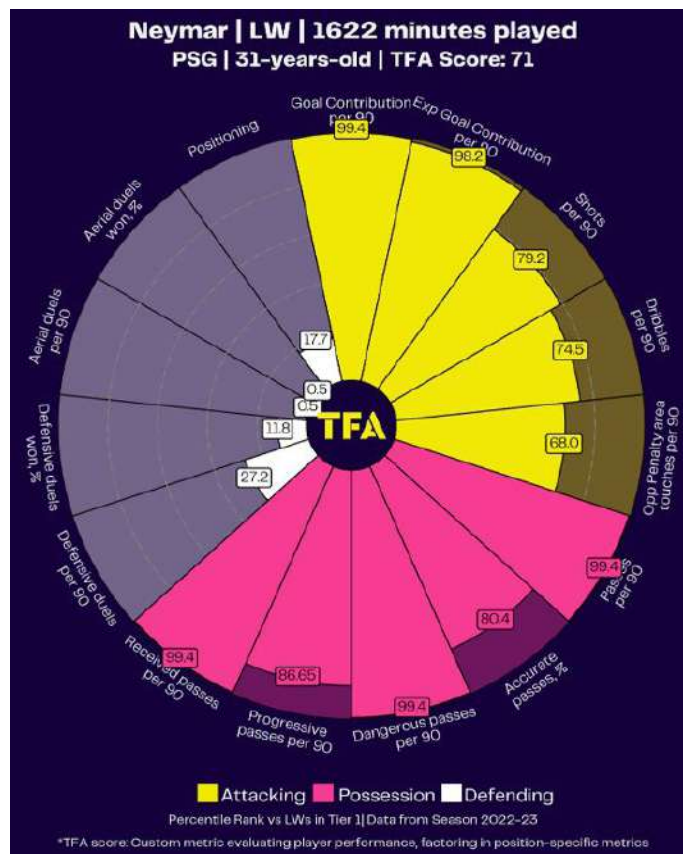
## ESTEVÃO PROGRESSIVE PASSES

All games from Campeonato Brasileiro de Aspirantes U23 2022



## PLAYER COMPARISON

A player comparison would be to someone like Neymar—a creative outlet with flair, 1v1 duelling skills, great ball striking, and micro-body movements to manipulate opponents and take space. Although Estêvão isn't as creative as Neymar in his prime, he is still young and able to develop into any type of player.





# JADEN PHILOGENE

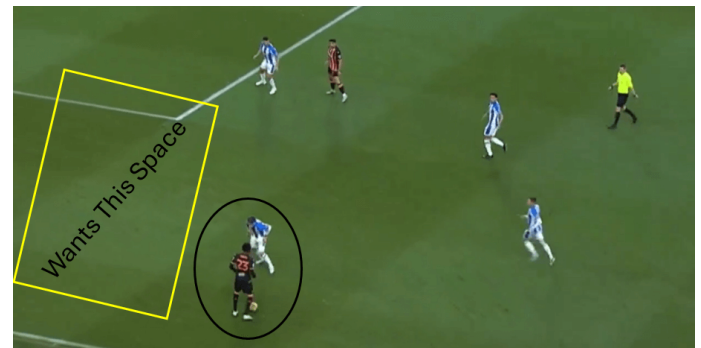
# STOP-MOTION DRIBBLING

His winger profile makes Jaden Philogene unique; he overlaps between the take-on winger and the runner winger. A 2 footed winger that loves to play with his opponent, a 1v1 duelist and chaos causer.

Below is the player radar chart, showing he ranks very highly in key winger attributes: 96th percentile for shots per 90, 93rd percentile for dribbles per 90, and 84th percentile for touches in the opponent's penalty box. He ranks lower in the passing categories, such as the 65th percentile for progressive passes, 44th percentile for dangerous passes, 60th percentile for accurate pass rate, and 53rd percentile for overall passes per 90.

Why is that? Because he's not part of the creative winger profile. His goal and idea are to beat his man 1v1, and sometimes invite the 1v2 duel, beat the player, and get into the box where chaos erupts. His physical build and profile also allow him to be a runner profile. That's what makes him unique—the overlap.

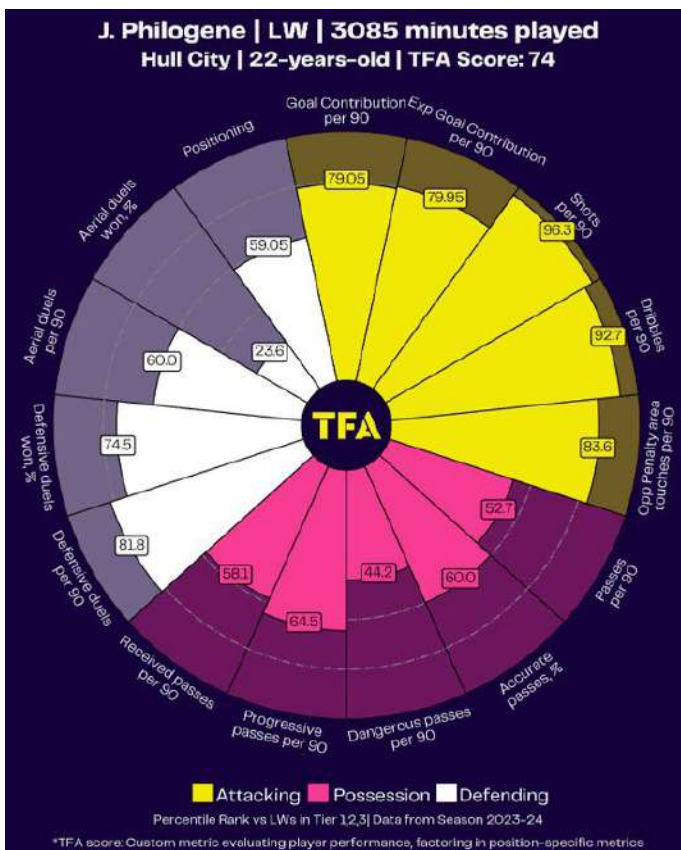
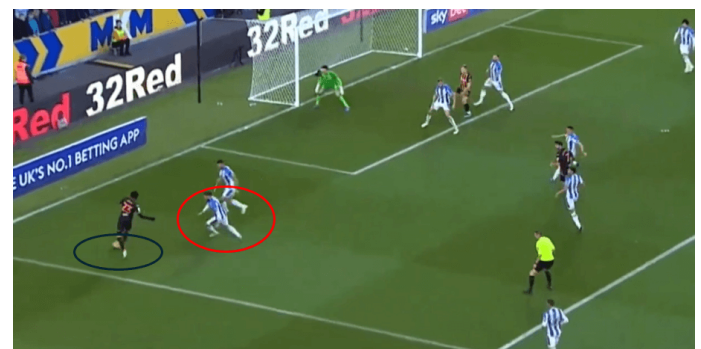
Look at the three images below, a perfect representation of his 1v1 take-on profile. The play settles, and the ball is stopped, but his goal is to reach the penalty box or put in a cross if possible. With his sheer speed and quick use of acceleration, he simply puts the ball past his opponent and goes for a run. These types of wingers create chaos on the wing and bring excitement as well, with the confidence and ability to put on a show and take their opponents for a run.



The play is settled, and he looks at his environment to determine his next move. The opponent's body positioning is unfavourable. Philogene sees this and takes his chance.



With his use of acceleration and physical profile, the opponent can't catch him.



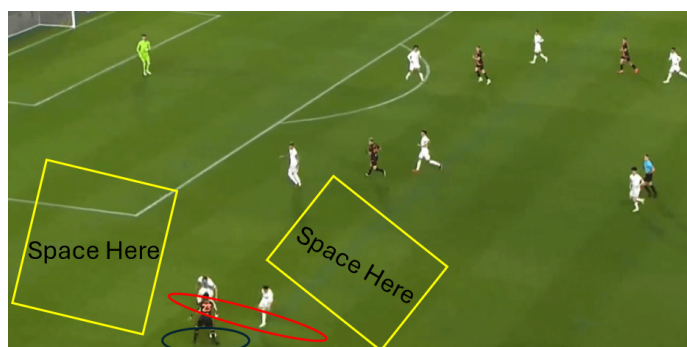
He ends up in the penalty box from that action, where he was hoping to end up. From here, it is completely up to the winger to make the following decisions in the penalty box.

Philogene is also a stop-motion dribbler. He calculates his next move based on the environment and the opponent's actions. Once the opponent plants his feet fully on the floor, he takes off. He waits for this opportunity to arise. Notice in the first image that his right heel is not on the floor; he's ready for take-off.

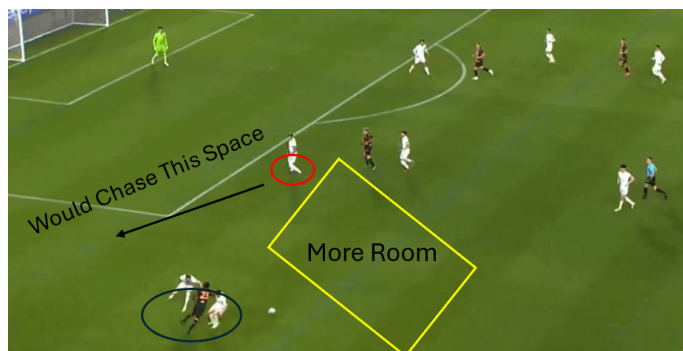
## TAKE-ON PROFILE

Remember what I said about igniting the 1v2 duel for these take-on winger profiles? A perfect example is in the image below. If this situation were a 1v1 duel, Philogene would take on the opponent, head wide, and then try to enter the penalty box.

Since the opponent's midfielder came to support the full-back, Philogene takes this chance to show his flair and use of acceleration. Using stop-motion dribbling, he reacts to his environment and beats both players into a central zone since there is more space available due to the overload that was caused.



He notices the 1v2 duel, with space behind and to the left; his goal is to reach the penalty box.



Beats both players' space to dribble into the box from the central zone.

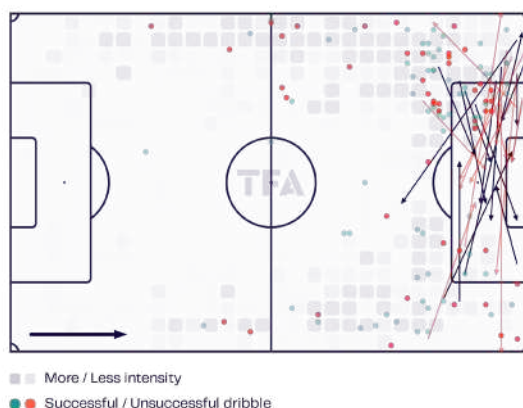
## WINGER ACTIONS

Below is the graphic of the winger actions for Jaden Philogene. He is primarily a left winger but can also put in shifts on the right, as evidenced by his dribbles, intensity, and crosses from the right. However, his best output is from the left.

What else can we see from this graphic? His ability to cut inside and take a central zone once around the penalty box. This is a strength of his game; many wingers are great on the wings but freeze when it comes to the box and entering the pitch centrally. The cluster of players puts too much pressure on them but not on Philogene.

### J. PHILOGENE WINGER ACTIONS

All games from Championship 2023/2024

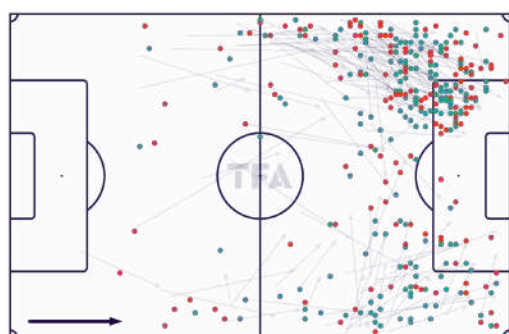


# BALL PROGRESSION

The ball progression graphic below shows this runner profile. He can make progressive runs in behind with the ball at his feet and without possession. He can carry the ball from more midfield zones and progress it forward with a 1v1 take-on mindset. This is where we see the overlap of his two winger-type profiles.

## J. PHILOGENE BALL PROGRESSION

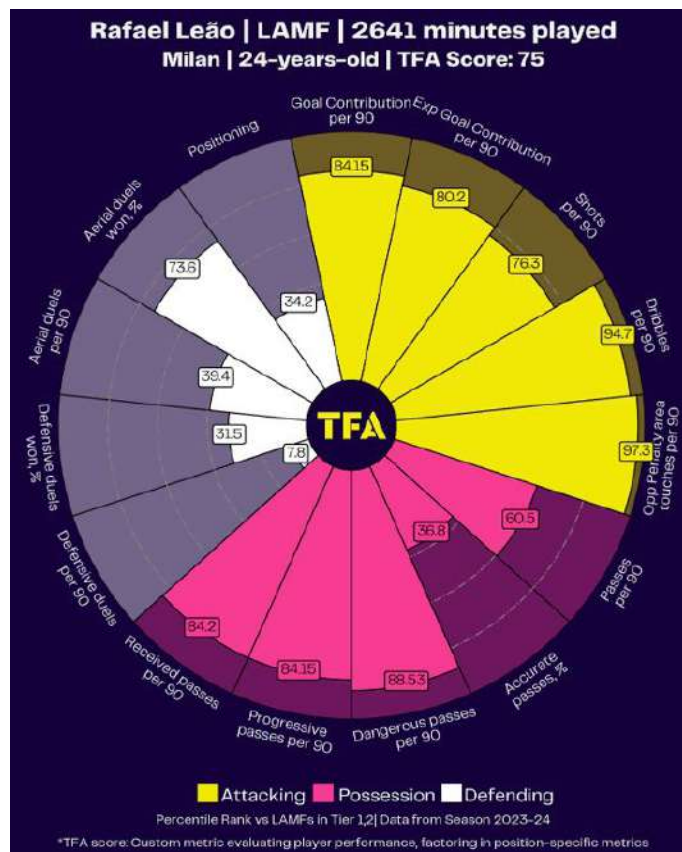
All games from Championship 2023/2024



# PLAYER COMPARISON

Jaden Philogene comes from the same archetype of wingers as Rafa Leão, characterised by their physical frames built for attacking space and technical traits that allow them to excel in tight areas. Philogene can create his own magic moments, working off the touchline and in half-spaces. He is instinctive close to goal and a valuable asset away from it, embodying the qualities of a versatile two-way winger. These types of wingers are very dangerous off the counterattack.

From the radar chart, we see that they both excel in similar goal contribution and dribbling aspects, but Philogene, with more defensive duties, ranks higher in those aspects. Given Rafael Leão's experience in the top flight, it makes sense for his passing aspects to be ranked higher. Overall, Leão is, without a doubt, currently better than Philogene, but there are many similarities in the way they play and think about the game.



Overall, Jaden Philogene is a 1v1 take-on specialist who aims to enter the box. He plays with a stop-motion idea, calculating every move. He is an elite ball carrier and can cause chaos when entering the penalty box. What else makes him unique is his physical profile, similar to Rafael Leão's, and his ability to navigate on the pitch. A recent signing to Aston Villa can surely take his game to the next level.

Jaden Philogene was a standout performer for Hull City during the 2023/24 Championship season. He led the team in several key areas, including the most touches in the opponent's box, the most shots, and the most take-ons completed. His defensive contributions were also significant, with the most tackles and fouls won. Offensively, Philogene created the most chances, had the most shots on target, scored the most goals, and provided the most assists, making him an invaluable asset to the team.



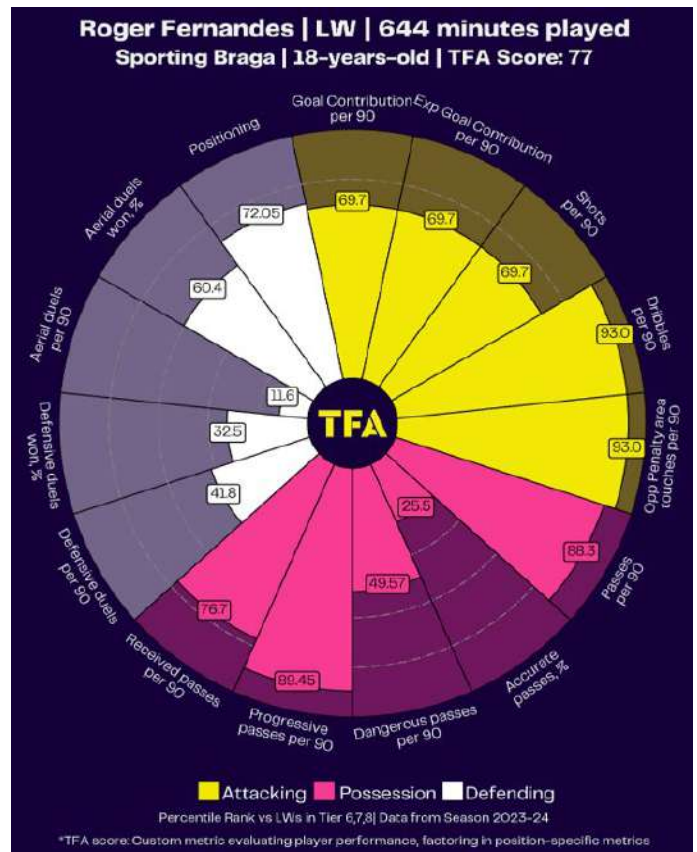
# ROGER FERNANDES

Roger Fernandes is an electric, pacy winger known for his fearless and confident play. As an explosive 1v1 specialist, he can excel on both flanks, showcasing top-tier pace and agility. Fernandes loves looking for spaces behind to play passes or cause chaos with crosses, which he executes exceptionally well with both feet. His vision is outstanding for his age, allowing him to set the ball up smoothly and look for options before delivering a precise cross.

Fernandes overlaps the runner and take-on profiles but also has some sparks in the creative profile. He loves to try and set up assists and put himself in positions to whip in crosses but doesn't fully match the creative winger profile compared to those we mentioned earlier.

Although primarily a winger, he's a player who can excel in the role of a second striker or a number 10 in certain instances. It wouldn't be a surprise if he took on the role of a midfielder one day. He is a player with great positioning, dribbling ability, and can play progressive passes.

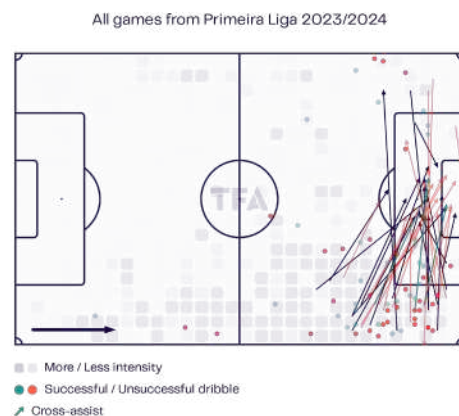
Since he is so young and hasn't played an extraordinary amount of minutes, it's perfectly reasonable to see his goal contribution aspects in the radar not ranked that high in percentiles when compared to other wingers.



## WINGER ACTIONS

Even with limited playtime, he has great numbers when it comes to winger actions. We can see high intensity on the right wing, with lots of crosses and dribble attempts. His love for whipping crosses makes Fernandes unique as a passing outlet. He averages six crosses per 90 in the 23/24 season and 5.20 shot-creating actions per 90.

### ROGER FERNANDES WINGER ACTIONS



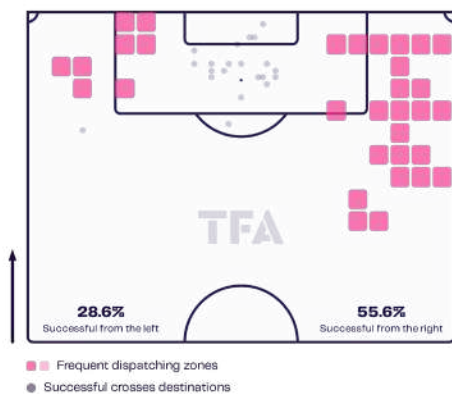
# CROSSING ZONES

Looking at his creative outlet style, a roughly 56% completion rate in crosses is not bad at all. Of course, the majority of the crosses will come from the right, given he is primarily on that side. It's interesting to note where these crosses come from.

There is high intensity in a right centre midfield position, which means he attempts long crosses from afar, but also some intensity further down the right, where he will occasionally send a cross after beating his man or choosing to send a cross instead of taking on his man. His off-the-ball movement puts him in settings where he can successfully take his time to whip in a cross.

## ROGER FERNANDES CROSSING ZONES

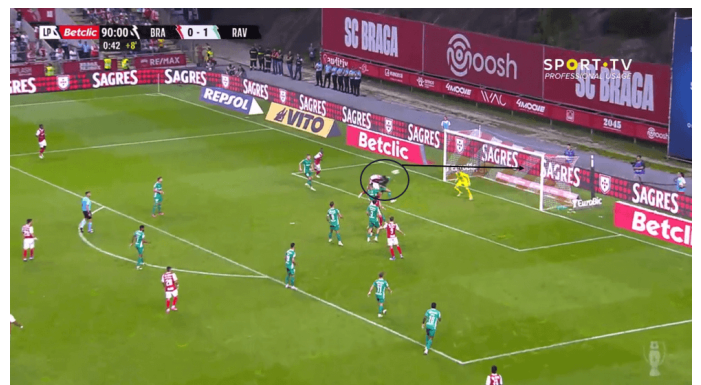
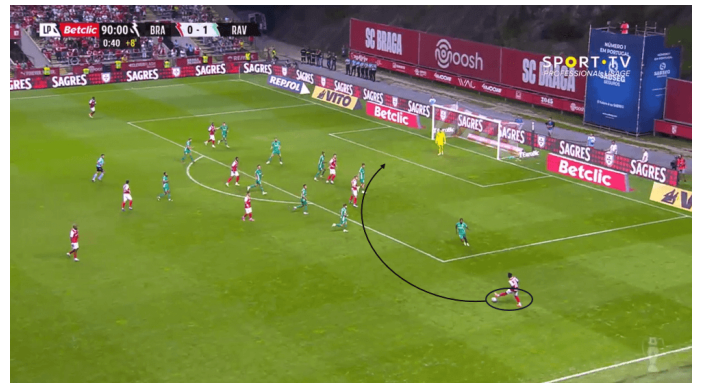
All games from Primeira Liga 2023/2024



In the images below, we can see instances of how his mind thinks for these crosses. He thinks to cross the ball before it even reaches his feet. We know this because his first touch is a roll forward to set himself up, which first shows his read of the game, knowing a cross is a great option here, given the number of teammates attacking the penalty box. The second image shows where the cross landed, right in the middle of the box.

Often, we see terrible crosses, which every player makes, but this one was inch-perfect. The majority of the time in football, crosses aren't touched by a teammate on the other end. Still, Fernandes' crosses are evident in the graphic

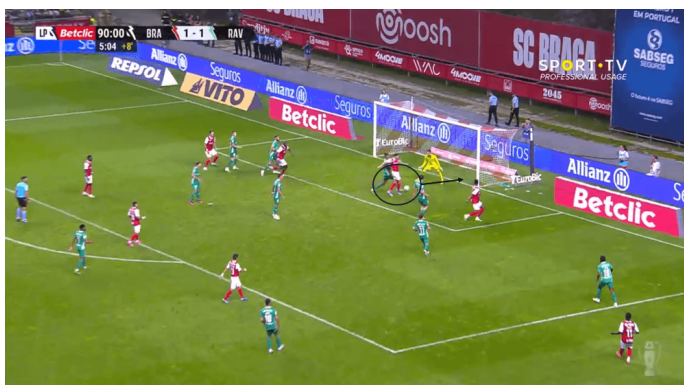
above and in his composure and calmness when getting ready to deliver these. Part of this can be due to his team's tactics. SC Braga is a club that plays a style of football that welcomes crosses, a perfect fit for Fernandes.



What's even more mind-blowingly impressive is that he sent another cross just minutes later into the same area of the penalty box, where his teammate got on the end of it. Roger Fernandes was behind a 90th-minute comeback, turning a 1-0 deficit into a 2-1 victory with him providing both assists. Below is a step-by-step breakdown of the second assist, showcasing the great strength in his crosses.





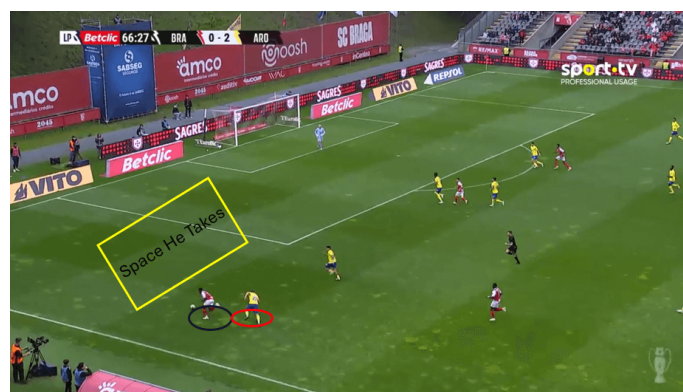
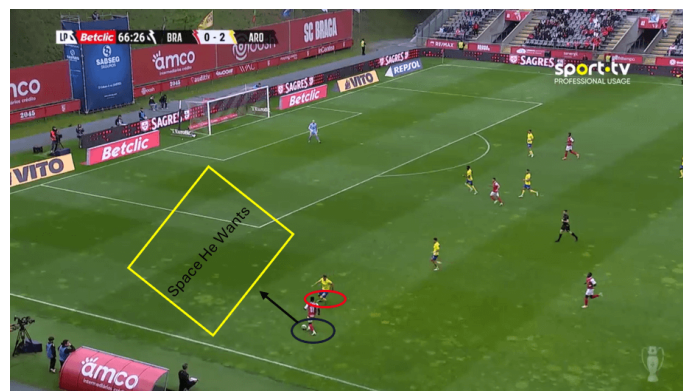


The first image shows exactly what's going through Roger Fernandes' head—a game of instinct. His gut tells him to take the stride forward to his left.

The opponent lunges at him with a standing tackle, but Fernandes' instinct and dynamic motion beat him. Before the opponent's leg is even placed down, Fernandes has run by him and continues his movement.

## DYNAMIC DRIBBLING

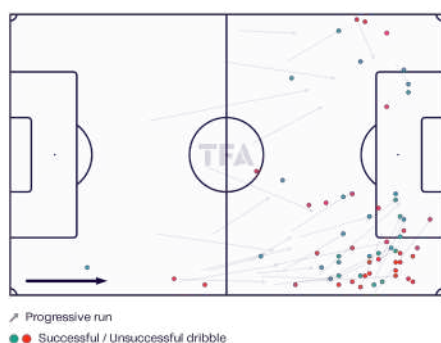
What else makes Roger Fernandes so unique? His dribbling style. We went over stop-motion dribbling before, but Fernandes is a dynamic motion dribbler, or in other words, a fluid dribbler. A player who moves on instinct and makes decisions without a second thought moves with the groove and stays ahead of his opponent. His opponent stands there and tries to guess what Fernandes is thinking, but in Fernandes' head, he's already at the end destination of his vision.



Below is his ball progression map. Before I show match footage scenarios, you can see his many attempts to create and make progressive runs with the ball into wide spaces.

### ROGER FERNANDES BALL PROGRESSION

All games from Primeira Liga 2023/2024



Below is a perfect example of this dynamic dribbling. He doesn't look to engage in the 1v1 duel; his body is positioned to put the ball wide and run to it. The opponent tries to create a 1v1 scenario.

Roger Fernandes is a very interesting player. He has the characteristics to play in midfield positions, as a second striker, centre forward, or naturally as a winger. His mind is very creative, and it would come as no surprise if he took on a midfielder role in the future. He's unique for his creative thinking, quick pace, and dribbling in tight spaces.

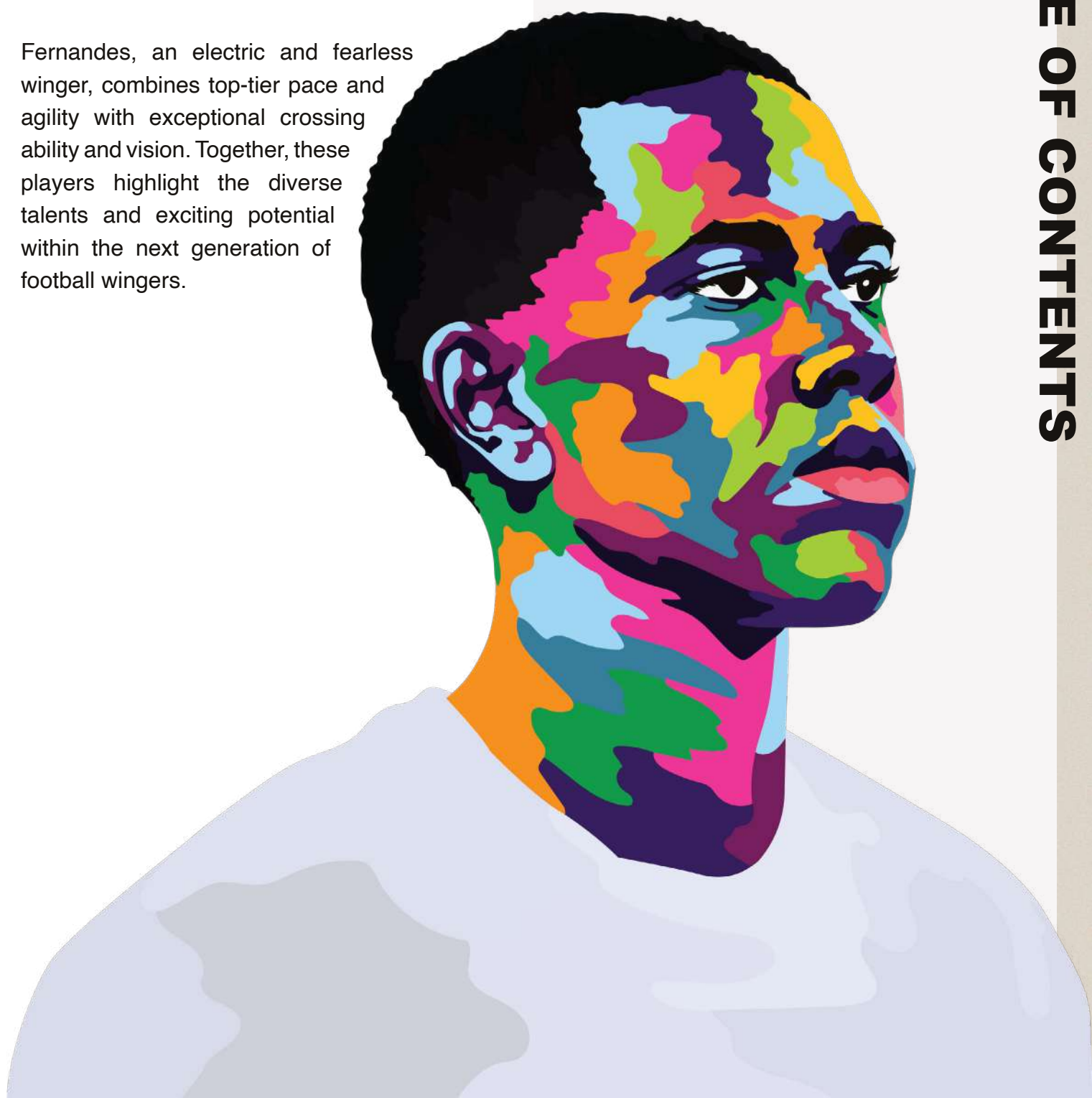


## CONCLUSION

Overall, Estêvão Willian, Jaden Philogene, and Roger Fernandes each bring a unique set of skills and attributes that make them stand out as rising football stars. Estêvão stop motion dribbling showcases his strategic patience and ability to outwit opponents.

With his physical profile and technical skills, Philogene exemplifies the archetype of a 1v1 take-on winger, capable of creating magic near the goal and in wide areas.

Fernandes, an electric and fearless winger, combines top-tier pace and agility with exceptional crossing ability and vision. Together, these players highlight the diverse talents and exciting potential within the next generation of football wingers.



# CHRISTIAN LATTANZIO

CHRISTIAN LATTANZIO



SINT-TRUIDEN

## THE HUGE TASK AT SINT-TRUIDEN EXPLAINED

BRANDON LISS // @BRANDTHEBEAST

After a season in which Sint-Truiden finished ninth in the Belgian Pro League regular season after many predicted them to go down, head coach Thorsten Fink was poached away from the club by KRC Genk this summer. His replacement has since been confirmed as Christian Lattanzio, with the 52-year-old Italian joining the club after a stint in MLS as the head coach of Charlotte FC. The Italian also has experience working in the City Football Group, with stops as a coach in Manchester City's academy and an assistant to Arsenal legend Patrick Vieira at NYCFC and OGC Nice.

Lattanzio joins the club in what some may describe as turmoil, with an exodus of talented young players, including the likes of Zion Suzuki, Aboubakary Koita, Matte Smets, Eric-Junior Bocat, and Jarne Steuckers, all key players from last season who departed the club in this summer transfer window. However, this article will be in the form of a tactical analysis, looking more at the tactics of Lattanzio and what Sint-Truiden fans can expect in the 2024/25 season, one that looks like it may be tough for the Belgian side.

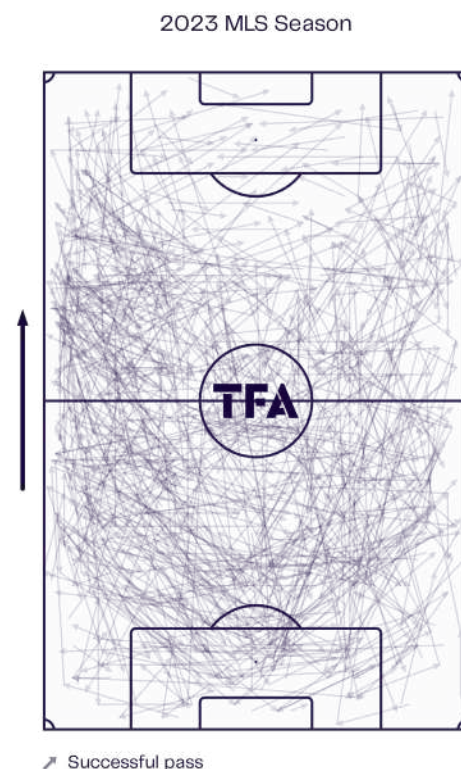
## PREFERRED FORMATION

When it comes to a preferred formation from the 52-year-old Italian, during his time in MLS with Charlotte, Lattanzio tended to prefer setting his side up in some variation of a 4-4-2 setup, with this sometimes looking like a flat 4-4-2, a 4-4-1-1 or sometimes more of a 4-1-4-1. However, during a recent 4-0 friendly defeat to Ajax, Lattanzio opted to deploy a 3-5-2 formation, the system used frequently during Fink's time in charge last season. It will be interesting to see how Lattanzio looks to set the side up once the season gets underway, but it seems like he may have a few options going into the start of the 2024/25 campaign.

## ATTACKING PRINCIPLES

One of the first things to look at when analysing Lattanzio's time in Charlotte is how the club looked to play in possession. During the 2023 MLS season with Charlotte, the Italian's only full season in charge, the MLS side averaged 52.4% possession over the course of the season, with Charlotte looking to dominate the ball against most opposition.

### CHARLOTTE FC PASS MAP



The data viz graphic above shows the pass map of Charlotte from the 2023 MLS season. We can corroborate this tendency to dominate possession with this graphic, as we can see the number of short passes across the back line that Charlotte looked to play, starting with the goalkeeper. Another thing to point out is that Charlotte looked to build the majority of their possession phases out into the wide channels, with a heavy emphasis from Lattanzio's side on looking to overload and attack the left side.

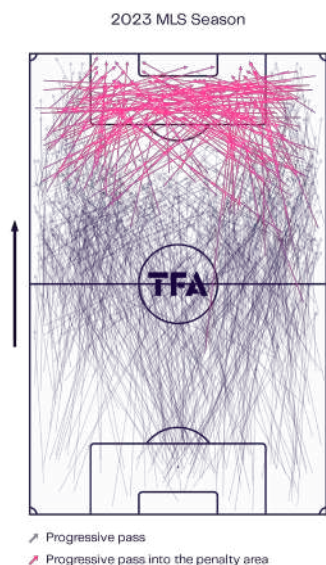




The image above shows an example of the build-up shape that Christian Lattanzio looked to deploy during his time with Charlotte. As we can see, the Italian manager opted for a 4-1 shape, with one of the two central midfielders looking to drop close to the backline to help facilitate ball progression for the goalkeeper, with this player looking to act like a safety valve at times during the initial build-up phase.

We can see that in this specific match against the New York Red Bulls, the home side does well to prevent the ball from being played into the #6 with their pressing shape. However, Lattanzio did not shy away in this match from building out from the back, with Charlotte still sticking to this strategy, even in a rather heavy defeat. This says a lot about how Lattanzio wants his side to play, especially with his education at Manchester City.

### CHARLOTTE FC PROGRESSIVE PASSES



Now, let us take a look at Lattanzio's attacking tactics in the advanced areas of the pitch. When

looking at the data viz graphic above, we can see how the majority of Charlotte's progressive passes into the penalty area from the 2023 MLS season came from the wide areas, showing the Italian's tendency to look to attack from these channels. When progressing the ball into the penalty area from the final third, chance creation from the half-spaces and wide areas are essential for Christian Lattanzio.



The image above shows an excellent example of how Charlotte attacked in the final third under Christian Lattanzio. In this phase of play, from a match against Inter Miami, the ball is in possession of the Charlotte midfielder in the centre of the pitch. As we can see, the Charlotte attack begins to look more like a front three, with the ball being rotated out to the winger in the wide channel.

What we do not see in this image is how, preceding this ball into the wide channel, the ball was on the near side, with the winger electing to stay wide as opposed to tucking inside, allowing him the space to receive once the play was switched to this far side. After receiving possession, the initial cross is blocked by the Inter Miami defender, who does well in recovering. Still, the ball falls back to the winger, eventually ending up in the back of the net for Charlotte.

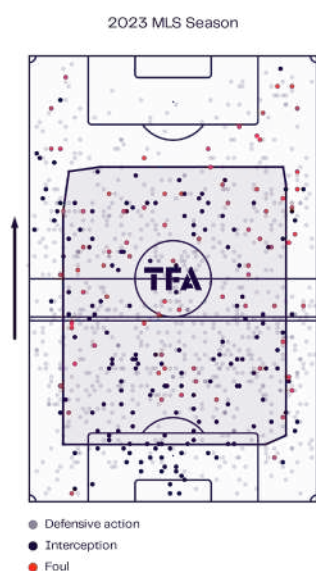
From an attacking perspective, Sint-Truiden fans can expect plenty of attacking impetus from Christian Lattanzio, with the Italian manager likely looking to implement a possession-based system with the Belgian side. We may also see a departure from the back three that worked to

great success for Thorsten Fink last season, with Lattanzio favouring a back four during his time in MLS, though he did use a back three in Sint-Truiden's last pre-season match.

## DEFENSIVE PRINCIPLES

Next, we will look at some defensive principles from Christian Lattanzio and what Sint-Truiden fans can expect from a defensive perspective during this upcoming campaign. During his only previous full season in charge, Charlotte were not the greatest side defensively during that 2023 MLS season. Lattanzio's side averaged 1.56 conceded goals per match, with their opponents averaging slightly less, at 1.4 conceded goals per match.

### CHARLOTTE FC DEFENSIVE TERRITORY



The data viz graphic above shows the defensive territory of Charlotte from the 2023 MLS season. We can see from the graphic how most defensive actions from Charlotte under Lattanzio occurred in the central areas, with the defensive shape tending to look like a flat 4-4-2. The Italian manager will look for his side to keep a relatively balanced defensive shape, with the defensive line looking to advance up the pitch and hold, at times, a relatively high line.



The figure above shows a good example of the typical defensive shape Charlotte set up when they were out of possession under Christian Lattanzio. We can see the pretty defined flat 4-4-2 shape, with the midfield and forward lines staying relatively close together and compact. It was not uncommon to see Lattanzio's Charlotte side look to defend 4v4 at the back, with the first two lines of pressure looking to press opposition sides when they looked to build out from the back.

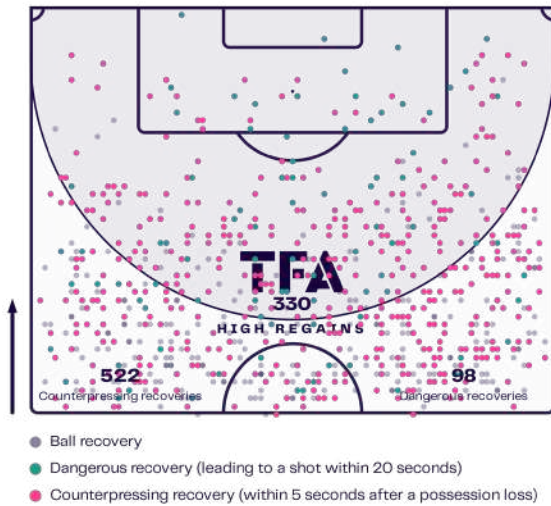
If we refer back to the graphic shown above in this section, we can recall that most of Charlotte's defensive actions under Lattanzio occurred in the central areas. Most times, Lattanzio looked for his side to force the ball into central areas, where they would then collapse on and suffocate opposition midfielders when they gathered possession, looking to win possession back and counterattack.

## LOOKING FOR HIS SIDES TO PRESS

When continuing to analyse Christian Lattanzio's out-of-possession principles, one of the first things you will notice is how he wants his side to press the ball, especially in advanced areas of the pitch. When looking at deeper underlying metrics from the 2023 MLS season, Charlotte had the third lowest PPDA in MLS, with their 9.7 PPDA ranking behind only St. Louis City and the New York Red Bulls.

# CHARLOTTE FC HIGH REGAINS

2023 MLS Season



The data viz graphic above shows Charlotte’s high regains during Christian Lattanzio’s lone full season in charge. As we can see, most of these pressing moments from Charlotte occurred just on the edge of the opposition’s defensive third. Lattanzio wanted his side to mainly press based on pressing cues rather than have a high-octane, no-holds-barred style of pressing opposition defences as they look to build out from the back.



The figure above again is able to show the press from Charlotte and how they are able to force Inter Miami into a turnover. In this phase of play above, Miami are looking to build from the back using their centre-backs, with the ball played from the goalkeeper to the centre-back in this wide area. The Charlotte forward puts the defender under immediate pressure, with the rest of the Charlotte advanced players noticing this pressing cue and looking to close down potential passing options or the space around those players, as in the case of the second Charlotte attacker.



The figure above shows an example of this pressing from Lattanzio’s side and shows how he tends to rely on pressing cues for when his first lines of pressure should be looking to press. In this phase of play above against the Chicago Fire, the ball is in possession of the Fire full-back when he decides to turn and face his own goal while in possession. This activates the press of the Charlotte front six, with the wide midfielder looking to engage and put pressure on the full-back.

As a result, the Inter Miami centre-back is forced to play the ball long, with his attempted pass going out of play for a throw-in for Lattanzio’s side near midfield. This is something that Sint-Truiden fans should look to expect from their side’s new head coach: a pressing system that is intense but one that relies more on certain pressing cues than looking to just press at all times when the ball is in possession of the opposition goalkeeper and defenders.



## CONCLUSION

As this tactical analysis has illustrated, Christian Lattanzio represents an interesting hire for a Sint-Truiden team that many consider to be in transition. After a very good season under Thorsten Fink, there has been plenty of turnover within the playing squad this summer, with many key players departing in this transfer window. It will be interesting to see how the team plays this season, and they have an experienced head coach leading the way for the 2024/25 campaign.



# DATA VIZ

## EFL LEAGUE ONE 2024/25

### WILL LINCOLN CITY'S ASCENDANCY CONTINUE?

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

Lincoln City's journey from the Football Conference in 2014/15, where they finished 15th, to their current position in EFL League One is a testament to their growth and determination.

Last season, they finished seventh in EFL League One, two points off the playoff places.

As Lincoln City gear up for the next season, they are poised to continue their upward trajectory and are considered strong contenders for promotion. Their story so far is nothing short of a fairy tale, with the club consistently punching above their weight.

The below visualisation shows the points tally of Lincoln City over the last 10 seasons.

From their last five League One seasons, 2023/24 was their second-best in the division in terms of the final points tally, after 2020/21, when they were the losing playoff finalists after finishing with 77 points.

Solid at the back and fearless going forward was the motto for Lincoln City during both these seasons. In between these two seasons, Lincoln had a period of transition when Micheal Appleton, who is one of the club's most successful managers, left.

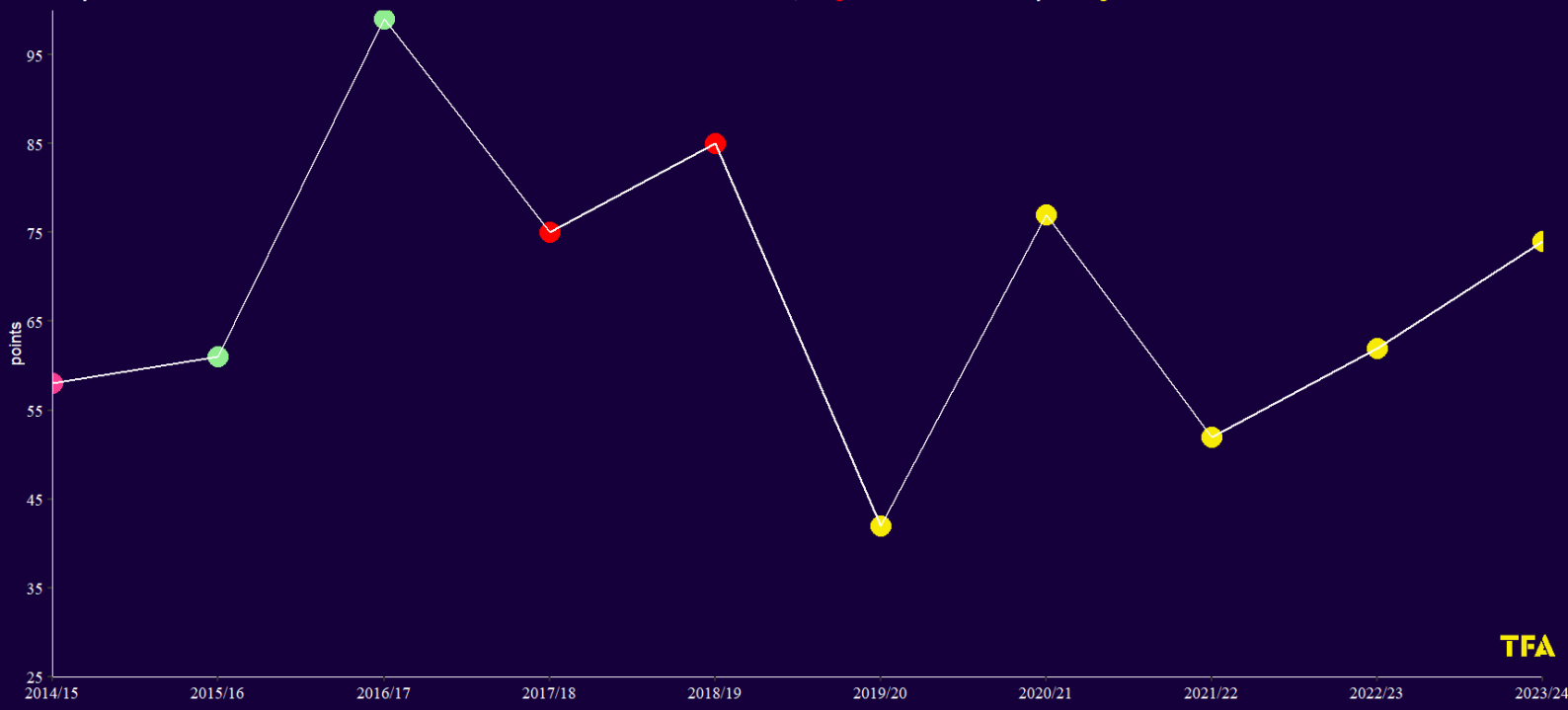
During this period, they finished 17th in 2021/22 (52 points) and 11th in 2022/23 (62 points). They quickly climbed from National League to League Two and then from League Two to League One.

With a number of right decisions on and off the pitch, including the strategy to sign young players, having a clear style of play has seen Lincoln City rise through the ladders of English football.

One of the oldest teams in the English Football Pyramid, Lincoln are rising through the ranks and are setting a great example for the model of surviving the ever-competitive English football ladder. Will next season finally be the season when they get promoted to the Championship? If it does happen, it will be a story for years to come.

# Lincoln City FC | Points tally over the years

They were in the Football Conference in the 2014/15 and have climbed the ladder to National, League Two and are currently in League One



Visual by @VenkyReddevil

TFA

# TFA



# EINTRACHT FRANKFURT'S YOUTH REVOLUTION

CAN UZUN



EINTRACHT FRANKFURT

## THEIR EXCITING FUTURE DETAILED

LUIS KIRCHER // @LUISKIRCHER

**A**s Eintracht Frankfurt prepares for the 2024/2025 season, the club finds itself in a state of renewal and transformation. The summer has been particularly eventful, featuring significant changes both on and off the pitch. A new assistant coaching staff has been brought in to steer the team, and the playing squad has undergone a considerable overhaul, with around a dozen players either joining or leaving the club.

Eintracht Frankfurt's previous season was characterised by a mixture of promising starts and challenging phases. The team kicked off the campaign with a solid performance, securing a 1-0 home victory against Darmstadt and a 1-1 draw away to Mainz. Their prowess was further showcased in a remarkable 7-0 thrashing of Lokomotiv Leipzig in the first round of the DFB Cup. Additionally, the Eagles successfully navigated through the play-offs for the UEFA Europa Conference League by overcoming PFC Levski Sofia with aggregate scores of 1-1 and 2-0.

However, the autumn months brought a series of challenges. Following an unbeaten streak in their first four matches, Eintracht experienced their first defeat of the season with a 2-0 loss away to Wolfsburg at the end of September. This was swiftly followed by a heart-wrenching 2-1 defeat to PAOK in the Europa Conference League group stage, courtesy of a last-minute goal.

Despite these setbacks, Eintracht Frankfurt concluded the 2023/24 season with a respectable tally of 47 points, finishing sixth both at the mid-point and at the end of the season. This ensured their qualification for the UEFA Europa League, although their performance in the second half of the season only ranked as the 11th-best. The season's finale was marked by emotional farewells to club stalwarts Sebastian Rode and Makoto Hasebe, who both announced their retirement.

The upcoming data analysis will delve into the composition and depth of Eintracht Frankfurt's squad for the 2024/2025 season. This analysis aims to provide insights into the current roster, examining the mix of youth and experience, the integration of new signings, and the overall strategic direction under the new coaching staff. By evaluating key metrics and player profiles, we aim to shed light on how well-equipped the team is to tackle the challenges of the new season and achieve success both domestically and in European competitions.

## **TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY**

**M**arkus Krösche's tenure as sporting director at Eintracht Frankfurt has been marked by a clear and strategic transfer and recruitment philosophy. Over the past two seasons, Krösche has focused on assembling a youthful and dynamic squad, leveraging the club's resources to build a team with a bright future while maintaining competitiveness in the present.

In the 2023/24 season, Krösche's approach became evident as he assembled a squad of 46 players, using 34 in Bundesliga matches. This extensive utilisation highlights his belief in squad rotation and depth, giving numerous players opportunities to prove themselves. Notably, the squad had an average age of 25, making it the second youngest in the league after VfB Stuttgart. This emphasis on youth is a cornerstone of Krösche's philosophy, aiming to develop young talents into critical contributors.

The 2023 summer transfer window saw Krösche spend 83.45 million euros on new signings while generating 149 million euros from player sales. This substantial profit reflects his shrewdness in the transfer market, balancing significant investments with lucrative sales. This financial prudence ensures the club remains stable and competitive, avoiding the pitfalls of overspending.

The 2024/25 season has continued this trend, with Krösche reducing the squad size to 34 players while further lowering the average age to 23.3 years. This younger squad is designed to be dynamic and adaptable, aligning with Krösche’s long-term vision. The presence of 22 legionnaires (64.7% of the squad) and eight national team players underscores the international flavour and quality within the team.

In the summer transfer window of 2024, Krösche has spent 32 million euros on new signings, focusing exclusively on players under the age of 23, with the exception of Robin Koch, who, at 27, brings experience and stability to the defence.

Krösche’s strategy is not just about immediate success but also long-term growth. The squad’s current market value of 257.35 million euros reflects the potential and quality of the players assembled. By focusing on young talents, Krösche aims to increase this value over time as players develop and mature, potentially yielding significant returns on investment in the future. While youth is a primary focus, Krösche understands the importance of balancing it with experience. The signing of Robin Koch, who has already been on loan and integrated into the squad, exemplifies this approach. Koch’s presence ensures that while the team is youthful, it also has the necessary experience to navigate challenging situations and mentor younger players.

Eintracht Frankfurt enters the 2024/2025 season with a well-balanced and robust squad. The team is poised to make a significant impact in both domestic and European competitions, thanks to its strategic acquisitions and the depth of talent across all positions.

## GOALKEEPERS

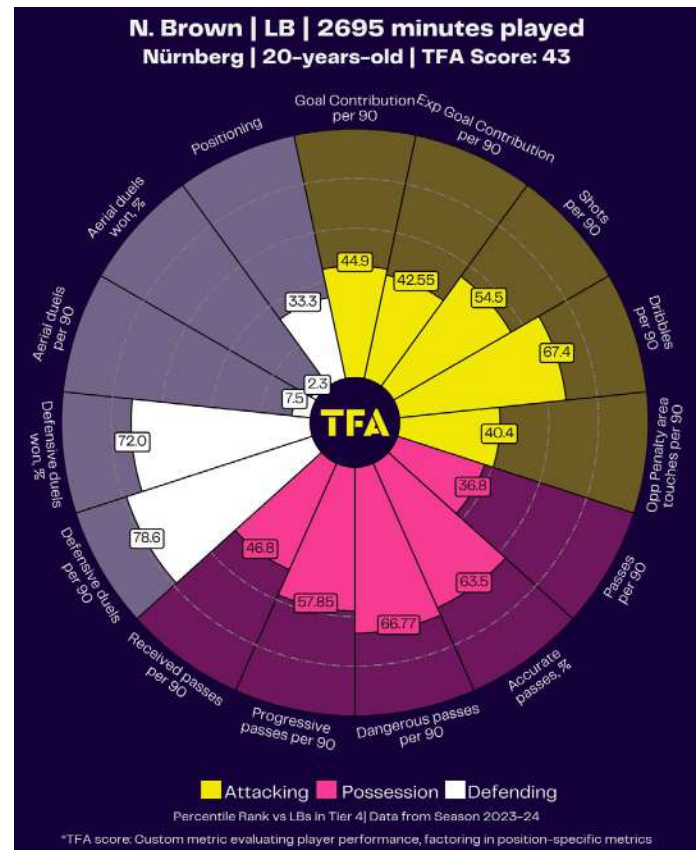
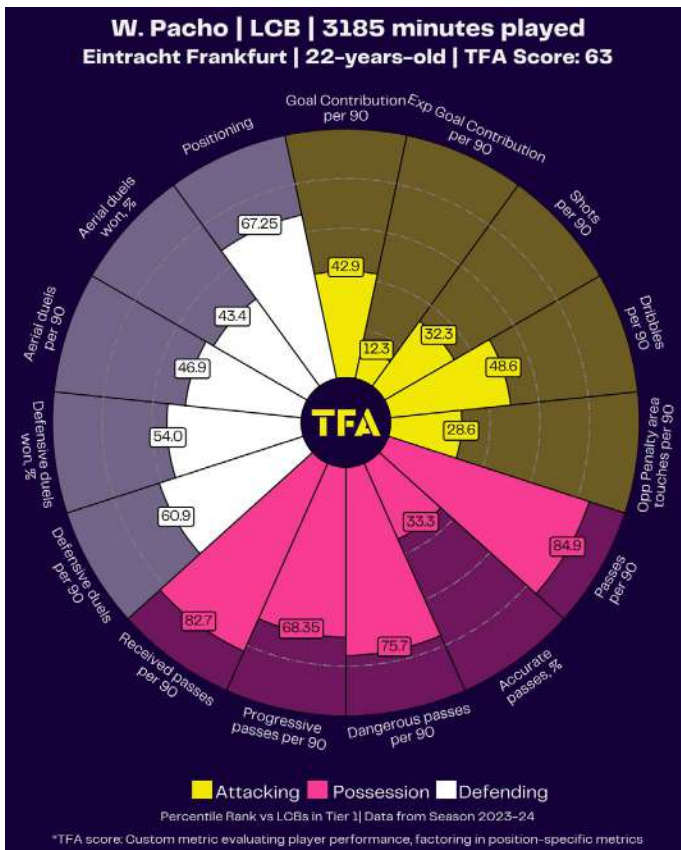
Eintracht Frankfurt’s goalkeeping department is anchored by the experienced Kevin Trapp, a reliable shot-stopper who brings stability and leadership to the backline. Trapp, now 34, joined from Paris Saint-Germain in 2019 and remains a key figure for the team. Complementing him are Jens Grahl, a seasoned backup with solid Bundesliga experience, and Kauã Santos, a young Brazilian prospect signed last season from CR Flamengo U20, who stands at an imposing 1.96 meters. This blend of experience and youth provides depth and security in the goalkeeping position.

## DEFENDERS

The defensive lineup boasts a formidable array of talent and versatility. Willian Pacho, a 22-year-old Ecuadorian centre-back, brings a physical presence and a commanding aerial ability. Alongside him, Robin Koch, recently acquired from Leeds United after his loan spell, adds both strength and tactical awareness at 27 years of age. Tuta, another key player, offers reliability and consistency in central defence.







The squad's depth is further enhanced by emerging talents like new signing Aurèle Amenda and Nnamdi Collins, who represent the future of Eintracht's defence. Jérôme Onguéné, with his dual Cameroon-France nationality, adds depth and experience. Additionally, Davis Bautista and new signing Nathaniel Brown bring youthful exuberance and potential to the defensive ranks.

On the flanks, Niels Nkounkou and Nathaniel Brown cover the left-back position, while Philipp Max offers experience and attacking prowess. At right-back, Aurélio Buta and Timothy Chandler provide reliability and depth, with Chandler's extensive Bundesliga experience being particularly valuable.

## MIDFIELDERS

The midfield is a blend of dynamism and creativity, anchored by Ellyes Skhiri, a defensive midfielder known for his tactical intelligence and ball-winning abilities. Young talents like Hugo Larsson and Junior Ebimbe add energy and potential, while Marcel Wenig and Mehdi Loune provide depth and versatility. Oscar Hojlund is also a new signing known for good defensive positioning, ball-carrying abilities and acceleration.

Attacking midfield is bolstered by Farès Chaïbi, a creative force capable of unlocking defences, and Mario Götze, whose experience and vision remain invaluable. The addition of the signings Can Uzun and Krisztián Lisztes brings further depth and future potential, making the midfield both versatile and competitive.

Paris Saint-Germain, adds youthful exuberance and a keen eye for goal. Igor Matanovic, back from his loan at Karlsruher SC and a towering centre-forward, offers a physical presence and aerial threat.

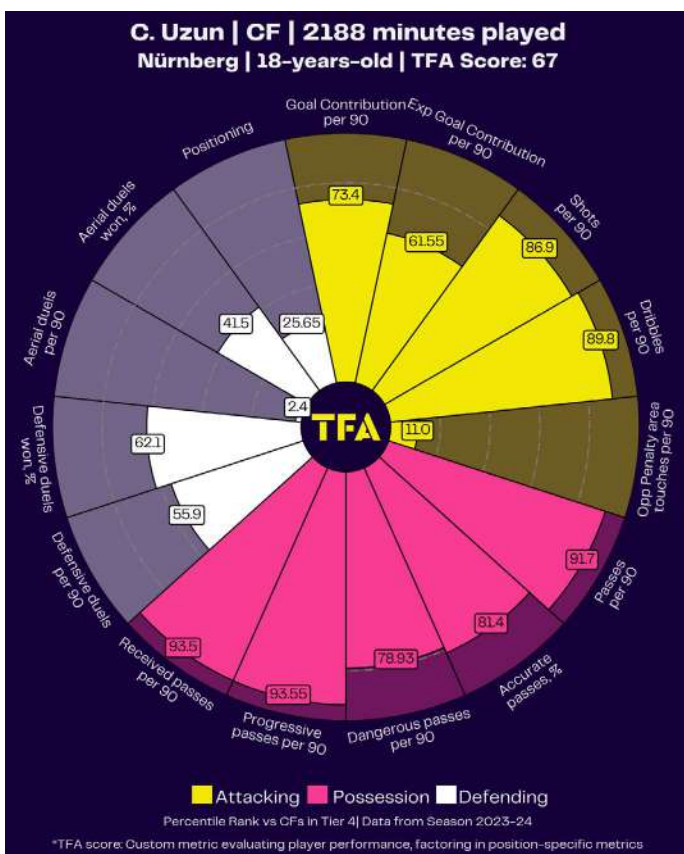
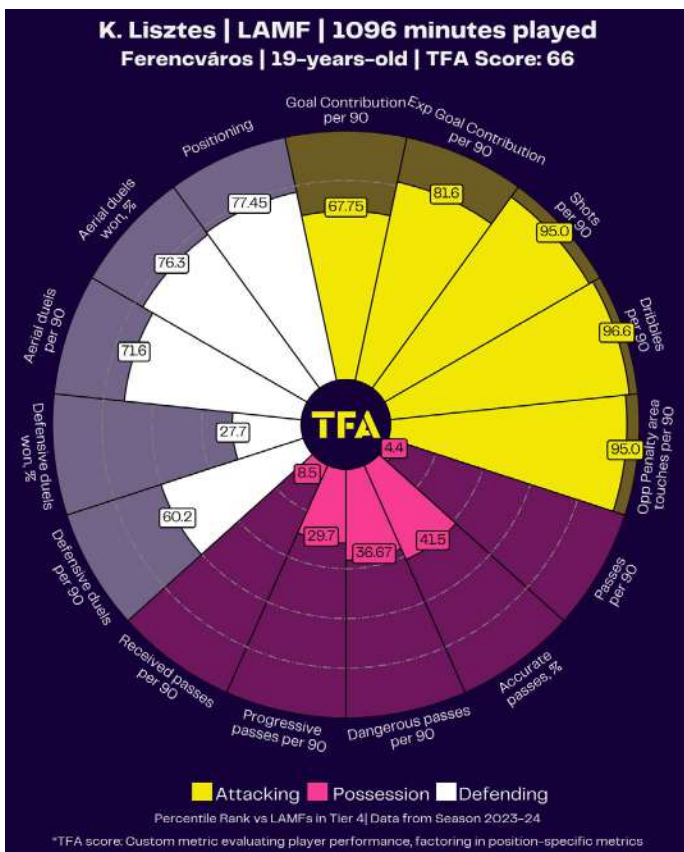
Ansgar Knauff provides pace and creativity on the wings, while Faride Alidou and Jean-Mattéo Bahoya add depth and flair. Junior Awusi, a promising youngster from the U19 squad, also looks set to make his mark in the senior team.

## CONCLUSION

Markus Krösche's transfer and recruitment philosophy at Eintracht Frankfurt is characterised by a keen focus on youth, financial prudence, and strategic long-term planning. By investing in young talents and balancing the squad with experienced players, Krösche is building a team capable of immediate competitiveness and sustained success. His approach ensures that Eintracht Frankfurt remains a formidable force in German football while positioning the club for a prosperous future.

Eintracht Frankfurt's squad for the 2024/2025 season is characterised by its depth and versatility. The club has strategically strengthened each department, ensuring a blend of experienced players and promising young talents. This depth will be crucial as they navigate the rigors of both the Bundesliga and European competitions.

With a mix of seasoned professionals like Kevin Trapp, Robin Koch, and Mario Götze, along with emerging stars like Nathaniel Brown, Aurèle Amenda, and Can Uzun, Eintracht Frankfurt is well-equipped to compete on multiple fronts. The team's tactical flexibility, underpinned by a deep and diverse squad, positions them as strong contenders for success in the upcoming season.

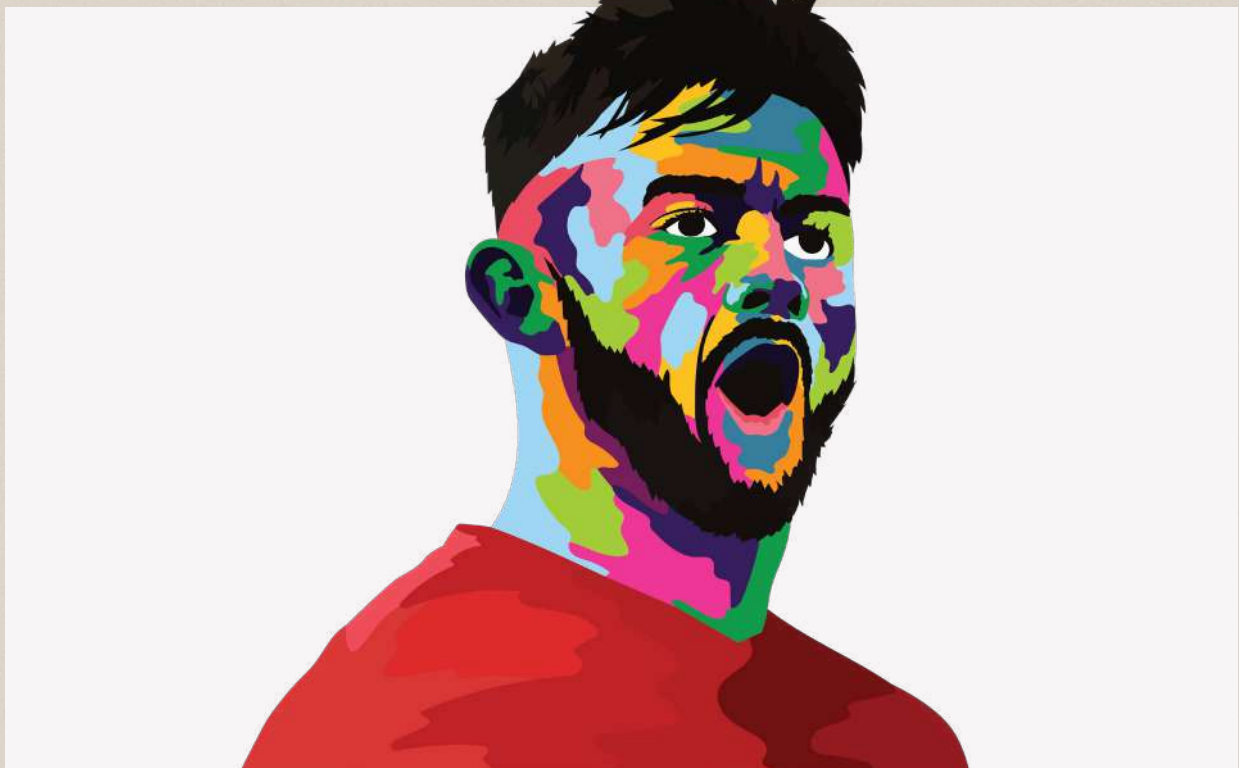


## FORWARDS

Eintracht Frankfurt's attacking options are diverse. Omar Marmoush, a versatile forward capable of playing across the front line, leads the attack. Hugo Ekitiké, signed after his loan from

# LARNE FC

LEE BONIS



LARNE FC

## **ANALYZING THE RECRUITMENT STRATEGY OF THE NORTHERN IRISH CHAMPIONS**

SAM HUTCHINSON // @SAM51867823



Many people dream of owning their local football club. They fantasise about the big-name players who would sign up to wear their club's shirt. They imagine transforming the once-empty trophy cabinet into one overflowing with silverware. They picture the pride that the town would have for their club, basking in the on-field success that has come from their ownership. For many, this is purely a dream. For Kenny Bruce, this is the reality that he has created.

In 2018, Larne FC had all the components of a free-falling club into extinction. The club had been outside of the top flight of Northern Irish football for 10 seasons and were dangerously flirting with relegation into the predominantly amateur third division. Off the pitch, it was a sorry state of affairs with the club in great financial difficulties and its stadium in urgent need of refurbishment. A considerable change was needed for Larne to maintain its existence, let alone progress.

Kenny Bruce was born in Larne but had spent most of his life in England. The business tycoon was responsible for co-founding online property company Purple Bricks, which was worth over a billion dollars at its peak. Bruce had been made aware of the difficult circumstances that his hometown club had found themselves in and saw an opportunity to have an incredible impact that would shape the future of Larne and Northern Irish Football.

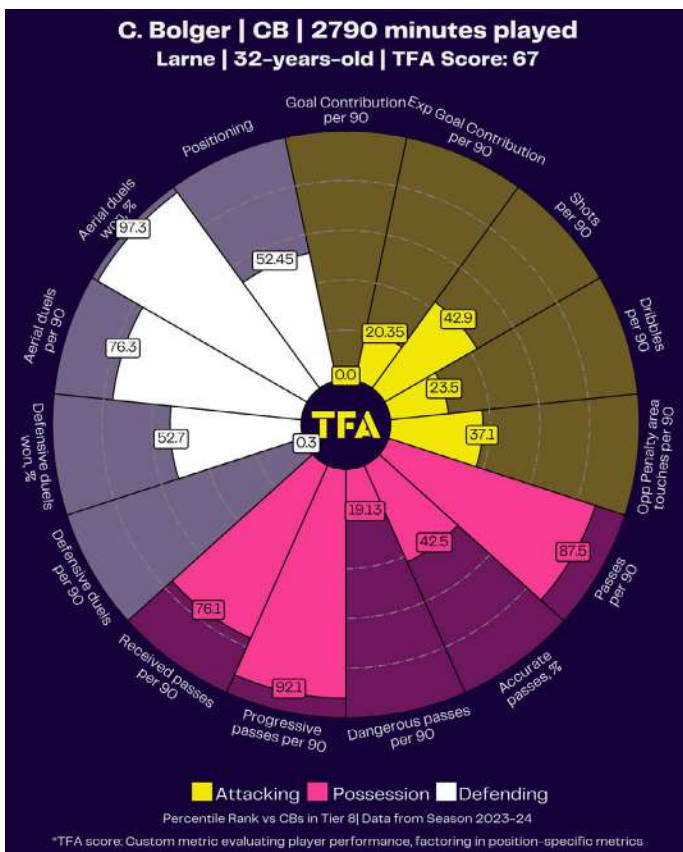
Over the past six years, under Bruce's ownership, Larne have enjoyed a meteoric rise. From dwindling at the bottom of the second division to claiming back-to-back NIFL Premiership titles. Bruce has claimed to have invested £5m into the club, a level of finance that had never been seen before in the Irish League. Bruce has used his business acumen to build a club that is becoming self-sustainable with state-of-the-art facilities and an abundance of riches on the pitch. In this analysis, I will look at how Larne have used their financial power

wisely in the transfer market to bring them their unprecedented success.

## EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE SPINE

A common tactic of clubs with financial power is to bring in experienced big-name signings to bolster a club's reputation. Often, signings of this nature can have catastrophic implications if the club has been blinded by the desire to acquire the services of a household name. A journeyman player whose powers on the pitch have diminished yet still demands a substantial wage can financially ruin a team. However, Larne have done exceptionally well at signing players who bring both experience and quality.

The backbone of Larne's title wins over the past two seasons has come from having a rock-solid defence. Last season, they only conceded 17 goals in 33 leagues, an improvement from their previous title-winning campaign a year prior, where they conceded 18 goals in as many games. Cian Bolger has been central to that. The Irish Centre back has brought a vast level of experience to Larne, playing over 300 games in the football league. Since joining Larne in 2021, the 32-year-old has been appointed club captain and cemented himself as one of the league's best defenders.



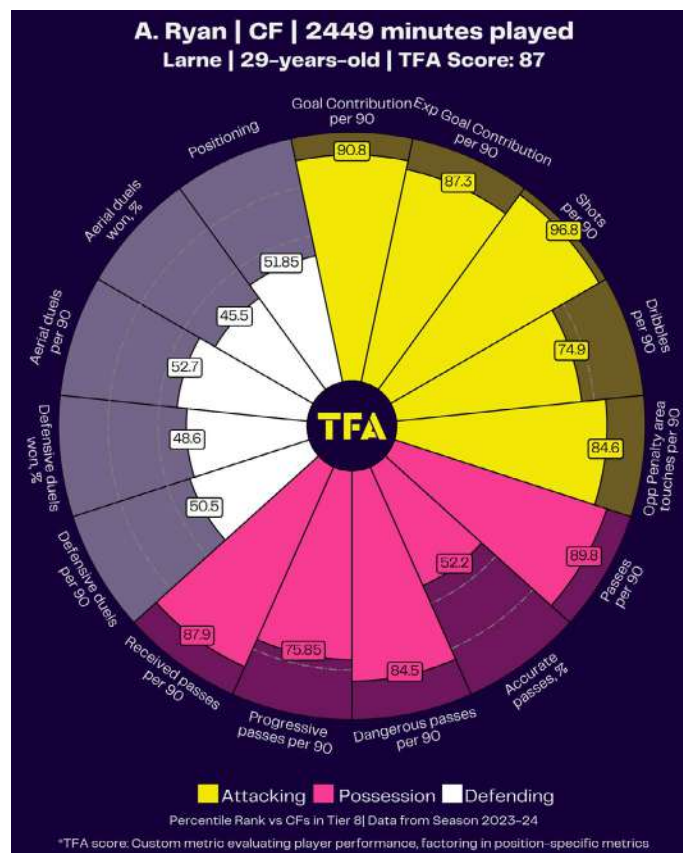
His pizza chart shows that he's one of the most aerially dominant centre-backs in the league, with a percentile rank of 97.3 for aerial duel win percentage. He also proves his ability on the ball, with a percentile rank of 92.1 for progressive passes per 90.

Larne have proved their ability to bolster key positions with experience. The January signing of Manchester United academy product Ro-Shaun Williams, who brought more Football League experience to the side, was a shrewd signing, adding depth in quality to the backline.

In midfield, one of Larne's first eye-catching purchases was the signing of Mark Randall in 2019. The former Arsenal player had made over 200 appearances in the football league before making the move to Northern Ireland. Having played well over 100 times for Larne, the 34-year-old has been instrumental in their success, playing a pivotal role in big games.

Yet no player has made a bigger contribution over the past two seasons than 29-year-old Scottish striker Andy Ryan. Signing in January 2023

from Hamilton Academical, the forward brought vast experience with him, having played in all of Scotland's top four divisions and scoring over 100 career goals. Over the past season, Ryan has become the league's most potent striker.



Ryan finished the season as the League's top goal scorer, finishing the season with 24 goals. Yet, he isn't just a goal scorer. His pizza chart shows that he ranks highly amongst the league's centre forwards for dangerous passes, with a percentile rank of 84.5%.

Ryan contributed six assists in the League last year, displaying why he has such a high goal-contribution rank amongst forwards.

Ryan has been one of the best imports to have graced the Irish League in recent years. However, Larne's search to build their winning team hasn't always required them to look outside Northern Ireland.

# ACQUIRING THE LEAGUE'S BEST TALENT

10 years ago, the Irish League was completely semi-professional. This resulted in the league's best talent having to go to England or Scotland to fulfil their ambitions of playing professionally. Larne became one of the very first sides to turn professional. This has allowed them to attract some of the top performers in the Irish League, who otherwise would have sought moves away from Northern Ireland.

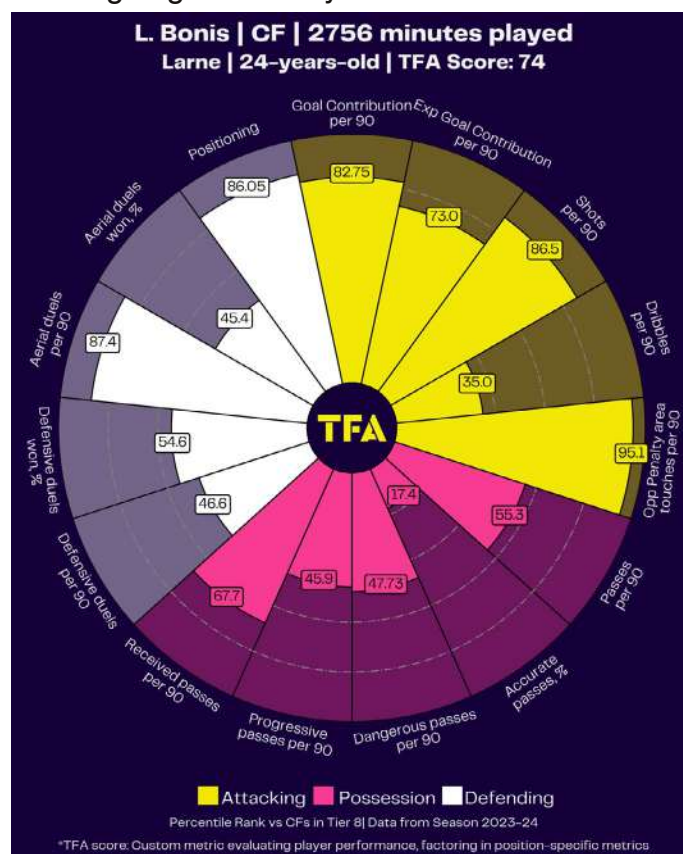
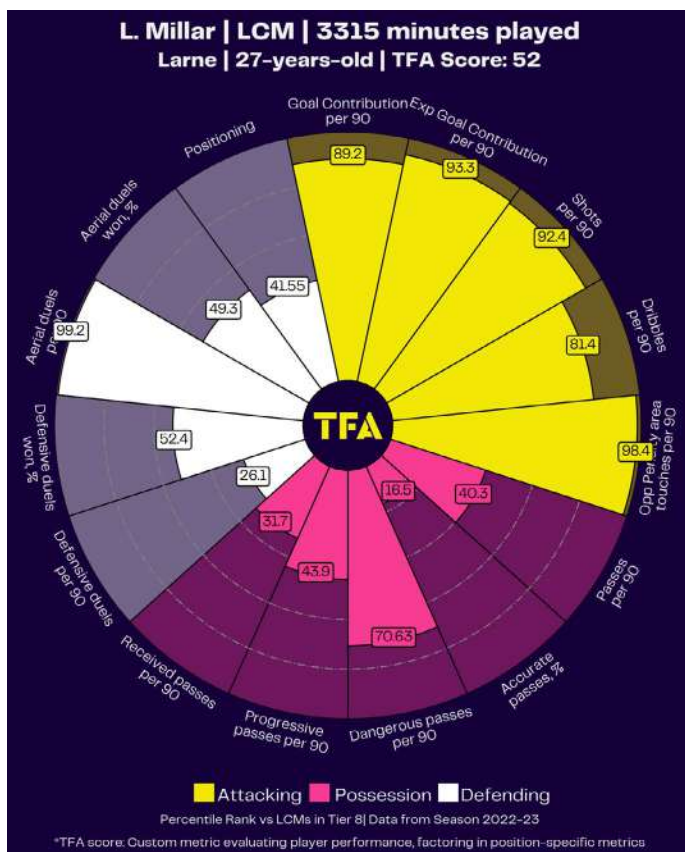
One of the primary examples of this is Larne's dynamic midfielder, Leroy Millar, who moved from his hometown club, Ballymena United, in 2022. Millar was an established Irish League player before his arrival at Inver Park and was well sought after in the summer of 2022 when his contract finally expired. Millar's impact was immediate.

since joining Larne. In his first season, he had a combined total of 20 goals and assists in the league.

He had another solid season in 2023/24, contributing a total of 14 goals and assists. This is a dramatic improvement, with Millar never reaching double figures in combined goals and assists until his move to Larne.

Larne's growing reputation, unparalleled professionalism and financial power have enabled them to fight off competition from League rivals such as Linfield and Glentoran. This was seen evidently with the acquisition of Portadown striker Lee Bonis.

Five seasons ago, Bonis was playing amateur football; now, he's become one of the most sought-after strikers in Ireland. Bonis had many suitors before moving to Larne, having impressed over the previous couple of seasons with Portadown in the top two divisions. Yet he chose to become a key part of Larne's project after signing in January 2022 for a record £119k.



Everyone has noticed Millar's improvement since turning professional. His goal contributions have been the area of most notable progress



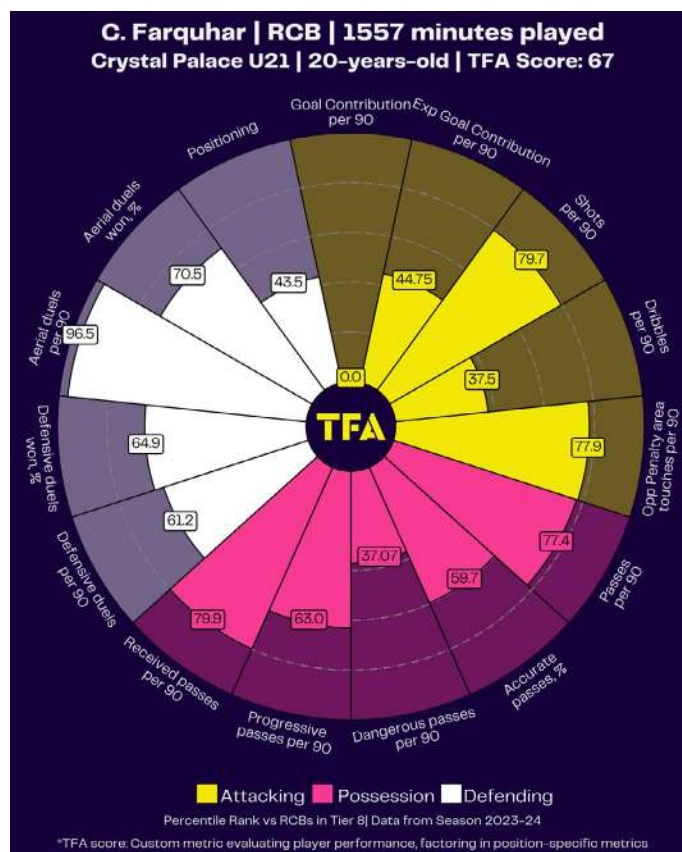
Bonis concluded last season with 28 goals and seven assists in all competitions. His performances over the past two seasons have even seen him receive an International call-up, a feat that is rarely achieved by Irish League players.

Many clubs in England are monitoring his progress, and rumours suggest their great interest. Bonis having several seasons of full-time football under the belt will help the transition if he does make the move to England. Being contracted to June 2026, it's expected that Larne will get a satisfying fee if he does make the move over the summer.

## MAKING PROFIT

There was a stigma attached to Northern Irish players. Often, many of the country's best prospects would seal moves to England and Scotland yet would struggle to adapt to their new environment. Increased training and homesickness were often touted as reasons why so many failed and would return shortly after their initial arrival. However, Larne have provided a pathway for young players to make the transition to the next level.

Kofi Balmer was the primary example of this. Signed for free after the expiry of his contract at Ballymena United, the central defender quickly established himself in Larne's first team during the 2021/22 season. His performances earned him a move to Crystal Palace, with Larne selling him for a reported £300k. Larne repeated this in an almost identical manner to Craig Farquar. The 20-year-old had only played a handful of games for Ballymena United when Larne swooped in after spying his potential.



As seen in Farquar's pizza chart, the 20-year-old ranked highly in both aerial and defensive duels. Farquar impressed in Larne's European qualifiers and made a strong start to the season before being sold to Crystal Palace in January for an unreported fee.

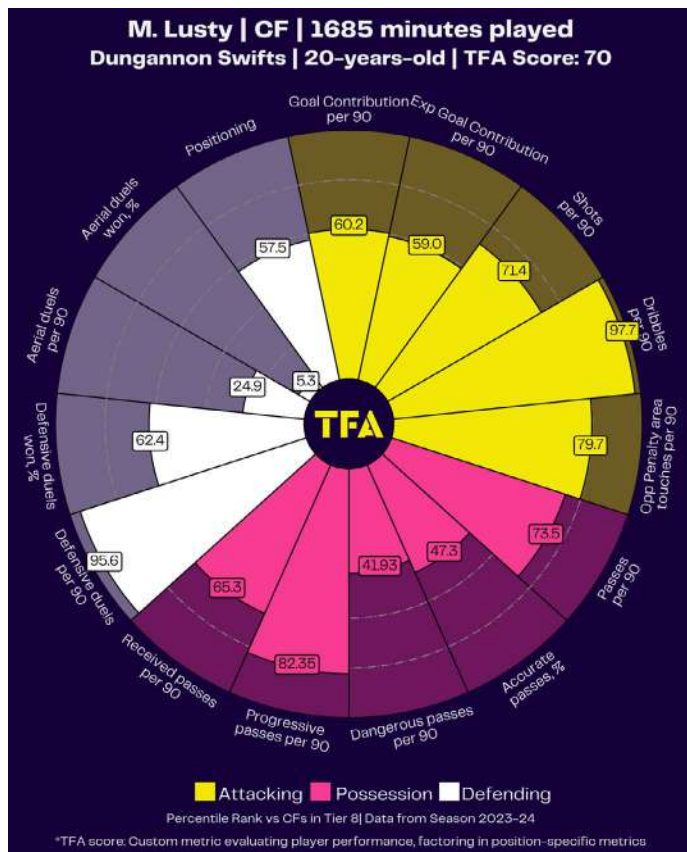
Despite Larne's financial ability to bring in experienced pros with years of experience, they currently have the third youngest squad in the division with an average age of 24. Larne's ability to recoup transfer fees in the manner they have allows them to be self-sustainable. They will be hoping to see further profit made with the arrival of Northern Ireland Schoolboys u18 Captain Oisín Devlin, who at just 17 has over 50 first-team appearances for second-division side Institute.

Larne's are also intent on developing their own players, who will later establish themselves in the first team with a view of being sold later down the line. Larne have utilised the loan market effectively to aid the development of their young talent. Dylan Sloan, who was recruited at u18s level, became a crucial part of Larne's squad

this season after successful loans across the top two divisions in recent seasons. Right-back Sean Brown caught the eye of many while on loan at Bangor and then later at Ballymena this season. However, forward Matthew Lusty was undoubtedly the standout performer while out on Loan this season.

## CONCLUSION

Under Bruce’s ownership, Larne have gone from strength to strength. On too many occasions, new owners overspend, overpromise and underachieve. Larne have a clear process when recruiting, understanding what profile of player they need to recruit to have success. Bruce sets his eyes on Larne becoming the first ever Northern Irish side to qualify for the group stages of a European Club competition. Larne have continuously silenced many of their doubters. It will be no surprise if Larne achieve this new height for club football in Northern Ireland.



Lusty scored nine goals in 20 games for Dungannon this year. His pizza chart also demonstrates many of his standout attributes. His defensive capabilities, progressive passes, and dribbling are all clearly seen in his high percentile rank for each of these game characteristics.

## EFL LEAGUE TWO 2024/25

### **JACK NOLAN GILLINGHAM'S RISING STAR?**

VENKATANARAYANAN VENKATESAN // @VENKYREDDEVIL

**A**fter finishing last season top of the charts for goals and assists for Accrington Stanley last season, Jack Nolan has signed for Gillingham in what is touted as one of the best moves of the summer in the division so far. The England U21 international had a breakout season in 2023/24 when he became a regular and was scoring and assisting for fun.

The below visualisation shows where Nolan ranks for some key metrics compared with other players in a similar position to his in leagues on the same level as League Two.

Playing as a right-sided attacking midfielder, Nolan can play on the left as well and even higher up the pitch as a wide forward. With 17 goals and nine assists to his name, Nolan ranked in the top 15% for expected goal contributions last term.

A good finisher as well as a good dribbler — ranking in the top 5% for dribbles per 90 — Nolan was among the best U23 players in League Two last season. More direct in his style, Nolan has pace and is not afraid to carry the ball forward. With agility and strength, Nolan plays in the half-spaces to receive and take on the opposition defender.

Defensively, he has to improve his game as he will be climbing up the ladder of English football divisions with Gillingham or otherwise.

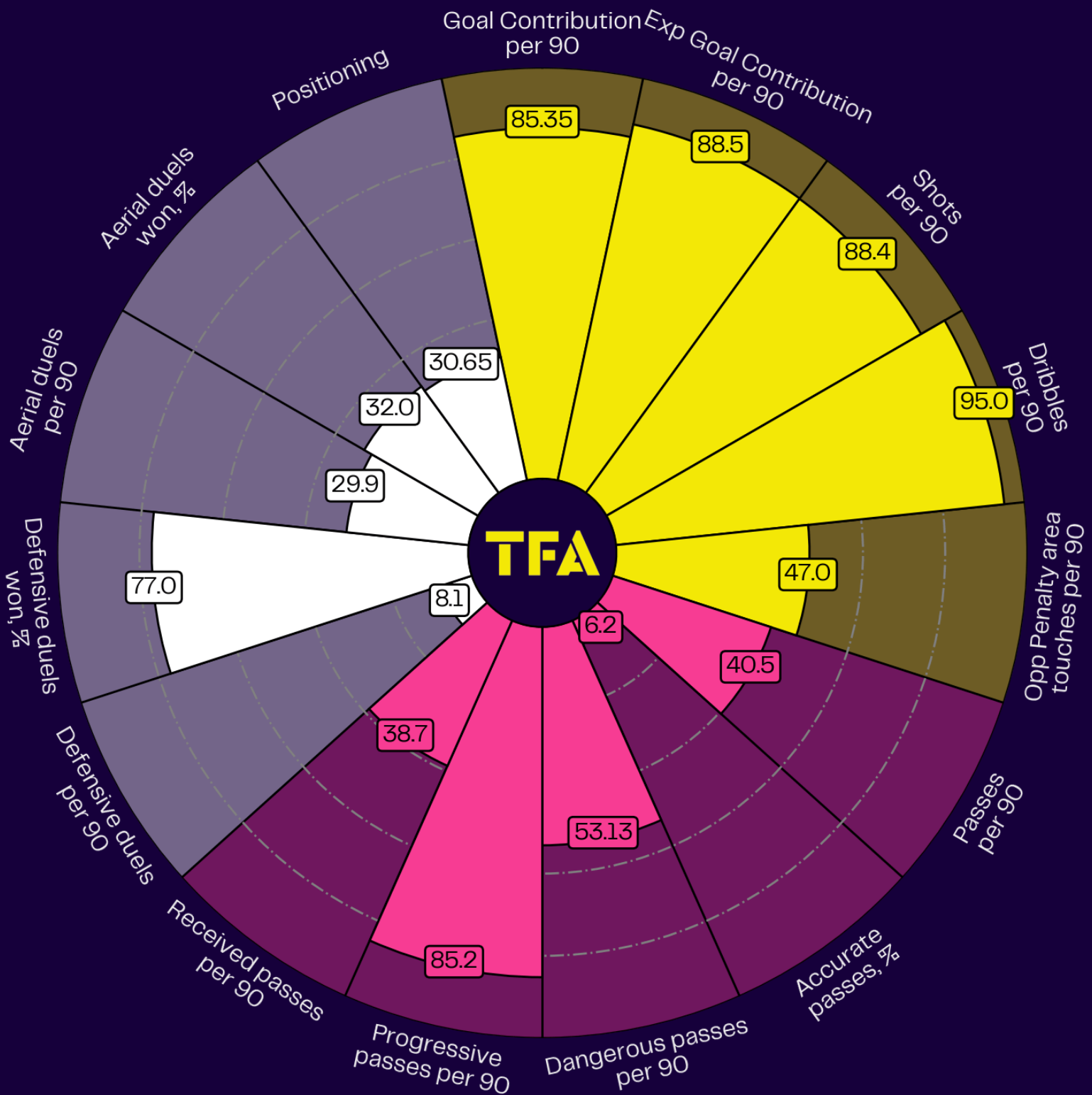
Having played fewer than 500 minutes in the previous season for Accrington, who were relegated then, Jack Nolan was quick to settle into League Two and played the second-most minutes for his club last season. This caught the eye of Gillingham and the wider audience, and the Gills were quick to secure his signature.

One will be surprised if Jack Nolan isn't on the move again next summer, but for the upcoming season, he will be Gillingham's player to watch out for.



# J. Nolan | RAMF | 3737 minutes played

## Accrington Stanley | 22-years-old | TFA Score: 73



■ Attacking 
 ■ Possession 
 ■ Defending

Percentile Rank vs RAMFs in Tier 7 | Data from Season 2023-24

\*TFA score: Custom metric evaluating player performance, factoring in position-specific metrics

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# 24/7

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