

Shane Stay



**EUROPEAN
SOCCER LEAGUES
2019**

**Everything You Need to Know
About the 2019/20 Season**

MEYER & MEYER SPORT

European Soccer Leagues 2019

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INTRODUCTION

With few exceptions, every top player from around the world winds up in Europe. And eventually Asia. And eventually the Middle East. And eventually the United States. But in their prime, every player worth a grain of salt wants a shot at Europe. This has been the way for many generations. It really started to escalate in the 1980s when South American players such as Maradona, Junior, and Careca found their way to the continent. As a result, it started to feel like this was the thing to do. Before them, a few like Pelé held back. Yet others made a leap for European greatness, but it hadn't quite opened up as much. There were plenty of players making the trip to Europe, but not in the great numbers that we see today. In fact, right now, it might be difficult for a TMZ-esque reporter to walk into a popular Brazilian airport and not see a player—wearing headphones and sports gear—either departing for Europe or returning from it. The 80s and 90s were gateway decades for South Americans, along with other players representing North America, Africa, and Asia; the floodgates were definitely open. By this time, globalization of soccer was really in full swing, and Europe was the elite place to be—a trend that has continued to this day.

The enthusiasm of the fans, the money, and the quality of play in countries like England, Germany, Spain, and Italy are second to none. These countries are the main destinations for elite talent. Reaching back in time, there are legendary players who defined the game, such as Bobby Charlton, Alfredo Di Stefano, Ferenc Puskas, George Best, Eusebio, Johan Cruyff, Paul Breitner, Michel Platini, Bryan Robson, Ruud Gullit, Roberto Baggio, and

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Zinedine Zidane. The history of club soccer within these nations is vast, historic, and, at times, overwhelming, which is what distinguishes these places. Today, the talent flourishes as players continue to compete at the highest level, leaving a legacy that provides a playground for the best soccer in world; players like Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylian Mbappé, Luka Modric, Lionel Messi, Neymar, Dele Alli, Mohamed Salah, Thomas Muller, and many more. Because of past players' greatness, this new generation of talent has something special to strive for.

This book reviews the top European leagues, with some additional information on other teams and leagues. Sit back and enjoy the journey—the 2019-20 European Club season will be a good one.



ENGLAND—PREMIER
LEAGUE

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A Look Back: 2018-19

Top Players: Danny Welbeck, Mesut Özil, Mohamed Salah, Firmino, Fabinho, Marcus Rashford, Jesse Lingard, Paul Pogba, Kevin De Bruyne, Fernandinho, Raheem Sterling, David Silva, Sergio Aguero, Eden Hazard, Willian, Olivier Giroud, Pedro, Harry Kane, Jan Vertonghen, and Dele Alli.

MVP: Mohamed Salah.

The Teams

Manchester City

Liverpool

Arsenal

Tottenham Hotspur

Chelsea

AFC Bournemouth

Wolverhampton Wanderers

Manchester United

Watford

Leicester City

Everton

Burnley

Brighton & Hove Albion

Crystal Palace

West Ham United

Southampton

Fulham

Huddersfield Town

Newcastle United

Cardiff City

These were the teams from 2018-19 season. Going into 2019-20, there will likely be a rumbling in the standings. When teams want to win, and when teams strive to win, anything can happen... that's the beauty of each new season.

Top 5 Teams

Arsenal

Liverpool

Manchester United

Manchester City

Chelsea



Twitter: @Arsenal

Founded in 1886

FA Cup: 13

FA Community Shield: 15

League Champions: 13

European Cup and UEFA Champions League: 0

UEFA Super Cup: 0

Known For

Strong attendance

Very passionate fans

Exciting games

Elite talent

Thierry Henry

Danny Welbeck

Mesut Özil

Aaron Ramsey

A BRIEF TEAM HISTORY

Legendary coach: Herbert Chapman, from 1925-34.

Stan Kroenke—the current owner—is reportedly not a fan favorite; oddly enough, this is the same Stan Kroenke who is unpopular with St. Louis fans for moving the NFL franchise, the St. Louis Rams, to Los Angeles. Kroenke is majority owner; also in the ownership mix is Alisher Usmanov, a billionaire from Uzbekistan. The arrangement between the two has an interesting backstory. From 2018, Tariq Panja of *The New York Times* wrote: “LONDON—The Russian tycoon Alisher Usmanov agreed on Tuesday to sell his 30 percent stake in Arsenal to the club’s majority owner, the American billionaire E. Stanley Kroenke, an agreement that would end years of acrimony and values the English Premier League team at \$2.3 billion.

“Mr. Kroenke and Mr. Usmanov spent years fighting for supremacy at Arsenal, buying up shares whenever they became available, and the deal clears the way for Mr. Kroenke to take the club private, an action that Mr. Usmanov had long blocked by refusing to sell his shares.

“Mr. Kroenke, whose family also owns several American sports franchises, including the Los Angeles Rams and the Denver Nuggets, gained the upper hand in July 2011, leaving Mr. Usmanov to do little more than complain from the sidelines or seethe privately in the luxury skybox he maintains at Arsenal’s stadium.

“Mr. Usmanov accepted an offer of 550 million pounds in cash, or about \$712 million, giving Mr. Kroenke more than the 90 percent

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stake required to purchase the remaining shares in the club, said Mr. Kroenke's investment company, KSE.”¹

In the coaching department, Arsenal is a team that is rebuilding from previous years. Though successful by comparison with lesser clubs around the continent, fans were looking for higher, loftier accomplishments and it was thought that maybe Arsene Wenger needed to be replaced. Wenger coached Arsenal for an amazingly long time: 1996 to 2018! With his departure, the team is rallying behind coach Unai Emery and a not-so-popular American owner, Stan Kroenke. (Kroenke can't catch a break.)

FACTS ABOUT THEIR CITY

London—one the world's most vibrant cities—hosts a number of pro soccer teams, including the elite Arsenal, the renowned Tottenham, the powerful Chelsea, the every-ready West Ham, and the club with maybe the coolest name in world soccer, Crystal Palace. Supporters of the Gunners are known as the Gooners, a group that strongly supports its team with a loudness rarely found elsewhere.

WHERE THE TEAM IS TODAY— TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

A lot is expected of Arsenal, and each year it seems to be a team in the mix, on the verge of something great.

Tactics and strategies: keep things upbeat and continue pushing the pace.

The Gunners play a skillful, upbeat, and determined style of game. It's a team that pushes the pace, using possession with a purpose to keep opponents off-balance and fans happy. Likely operating out of a 4-2-3-1, the Gunners have midfield contributions from the likes of Lucas Torreira, Granit Xhaka, and Mesut Özil to keep things dynamic and moving forward. In the high pace arena of the Premier League, Arsenal is ready for any challenge. A team that is solid in its approach, its one that will continue to thrive from the legacy Arsene Wenger left behind.

UNAI EMERY—A BRIEF COACHING PORTRAIT

Unai Emery—who was born in Spain—began coaching Arsenal in 2018. As a former midfielder who played for a handful of teams, he racked up the most games with Toledo in Spain. As a coach, he recently finished up with Paris Saint-Germain before taking the Arsenal job. Will Emery be able to sustain the different style of play in the Premier League? This is a question posed by many as he takes on the new season.

KEY PLAYERS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Danny Welbeck, Mesut Özil, and Aaron Ramsey

Danny Welbeck—born in 1990 in England—is a talented forward who's been racking up playing time with England's national side since 2011. Prior to joining Arsenal, Welbeck spent time with Sunderland, Preston North End, and Manchester

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United. He’s got speed and good ability on the ball. Keep an eye out for Welbeck creating shots for Arsenal up front.

Mesut Özil—a talented midfielder from Germany—has great touch on the ball, coupled with intuitive vision, whose passes tend to keep the flow going in a positive forward direction. Equipped with the World Cup title from 2014, Özil adds much-needed experience to Arsenal’s quest for the FA Cup.

Aaron Ramsey—a versatile midfielder from Wales—has played a ton of games with the Gunners while also tallying up some playing time with Cardiff City and Nottingham Forest. The almost 30-year-old still has some good years left for Arsenal.

Overall Player Rating:

Danny Welbeck: 9.1

Mesut Özil: 9.4-9.6

Aaron Ramsey: 9

KEY PLAYER STATS

(Total career goals with this club)

	Games Played	Goals
Danny Welbeck	88	16
Mesut Özil	164	32
Aaron Ramsey	260	40

WHAT TO WATCH FOR ON TV—HOW MESSI, NEYMAR, RONALDO, AND OTHERS PLAY

Arsenal is a club with strong talent coming from practically every angle. Plenty of soccer fans know that Arsenal can bewilder opponents and stop them in their tracks. In fact, most fans would agree with this. By recruiting from abroad and developing players within its training academy, the club is able to attain this level of supremacy.

From the 2018-19 campaign, Arsenal had a number of players at its disposal, including the goalkeeping talent of Petr Cech, Bernd Leno, and David Ospina; the forward play of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Joel Campbell, Alexandre Lacazette, Eddie Nketiah, Lucas Perez, Danny Welbeck; with the versatile midfield play of Mohamed Elneny, Matteo Guendouzi, Alex Iwobi, Ainsley Maitland-Niles, Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Mesut Özil, Aaron Ramsey, Lucas Torreira, and Granit Xhaka; with the defensive options of Hector Bellerin, Calum Chambers, Rob Holding, Carl Jenkinson, Sead Kolasinac, Laurent Koscielny, Stephan Lichtsteiner, Konstantinos Mavropanos, Nacho Monreal, Shkodran Mustafi, and Lokratis Papastathopoulos.

There is a high level of production value from Mesut Özil and Aaron Ramsey in midfield. These two will be called upon to guide the team forward with skillful interplay, smart passing choices, and instrumental organization throughout the attack.

Emile Smith-Rowe is a young midfielder to keep an eye on. He is likely to make a splash with the first team.

As for veteran regulars, Arsenal is equipped and ready to go. Stephan Lichtsteiner—a defender from Switzerland—adds

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experience and steadiness on the outside of defense. You can't go wrong with contributions from the Costa Rican star, Joel Campbell, a crafty dribbler and creator, easily one of CONCACAF's best. With Danny Welbeck up top, making runs, creating space for teammates, Arsenal is a contender for the FA Cup, along with being one of the best on the continent.

WHAT ARE THEIR CHANCES OF WINNING THE FA CUP THIS YEAR?

It's a team that will definitely be in the mix.

Overall Team Ranking: 9.1



LIVERPOOL

Twitter: @LFC

Founded in 1892

FA Cup: 7

FA Community Shield: 15

League Champions: 18

European Cup and UEFA Champions League: 6

UEFA Super Cup: 3

Known For

Strong attendance

Very passionate fans

Exciting games

Long history of high-quality soccer

Elite talent

Bill Shankly

John Aldridge

Ray Houghton

Alan Hansen

Ian Rush

John Barnes

Steve Nicol

Robbie Fowler

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Michael Owen
Jamie Carragher
Steven Gerrard
Fernando Torres
Luis Suarez
Philippe Coutinho
Mohamed Salah

A BRIEF TEAM HISTORY

From 1892 to present, with so many championships and accomplishments, it's hard to categorize Liverpool without dedicating a complete book, the size of an encyclopedia, to one of the giants of European soccer, with Bill Shankly—the great coach—front and center. Just a few stellar names from Liverpool's storied history include: John Aldridge, Ray Houghton, Alan Hansen, Ian Rush, John Harkes, Steve Nicol, Robbie Fowler, Michael Owen, Jamie Carragher, Steven Gerrard, Fernando Torres, Luis Suarez, Philippe Coutinho, Mohamed Salah.

FACTS ABOUT THEIR CITY

Liverpool—home of The Beatles—is situated in western England, not far from Manchester and Sheffield, with easy access to Northern Ireland and Ireland by way of the Irish Sea. Traditionally, Liverpool has been an industrial city—one that, over time, has adored its soccer team. Anfield—which holds a little over 54,000—has become one of the best known, and revered, stadiums in the world.

WHERE THE TEAM IS TODAY— TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

German coach Jürgen Klopp—often seen wearing stylish glasses—has been implementing his idea of how Liverpool should play. Kevin Draper of *The New York Times* elaborated on some of Klopp’s approach: “The birth of the new Liverpool may have been Oct. 8, 2015, the day F.S.G. announced the hiring of Klopp, the former Borussia Dortmund manager. In less than three years, Klopp has become the exuberant, backslapping and hugging face of the club. His aggressive gegenpressing, or counterpressing, system is the key to Liverpool’s ruthless attack, and it can be a pleasure to watch—provided you’re not supporting the team being subjected to it.

“But Klopp also has brought a focus to Liverpool’s transfer targets. With the help of Michael Edwards, the former head of analytics who has risen to become Liverpool’s sporting director, he has built a team capable of playing the way he wants it to play, and of challenging its more moneyed rivals.”² With that, Liverpool is certainly a team to reckon with in the Premeire League and throughout Europe.

Tactics and strategies: If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.

Keep the squad in place and keep the momentum going in a positive direction. Liverpool is at the top of its game. Is there room for improvement? Sure, but things are going well, so why make any big changes to playing strategy at this point?

JÜRGEN KLOPP—A BRIEF COACHING PORTRAIT

Jürgen Klopp—born in 1967 in Stuttgart, West Germany—began coaching at Liverpool in 2015. He has plenty of experience under his belt having played with Mainz 05, amassing a little over 300 games from 1990 to 2001. Following his playing career, he ended up coaching Mainz 05, then Borussia Dortmund, followed by Liverpool.

KEY PLAYERS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Mohamed Salah, James Milner, Firmino, and Fabinho

Mohamed Salah—a star attacker from Egypt—has catapulted onto the international scene with explosive runs down the wing, a knack for dribbling around the box, and an eye for goals. Some players are game-changers, and Salah is one of them. Like Shevchenko, Denilson, and Robben, get the ball to Mo's feet, and something interesting is bound to happen.

James Milner provides steadiness and experience. As a longtime veteran game-manager, Milner is a timely asset for the club.

Firmino—the Brazilian attacker—will provide good skill up top, setting up teammates, creating opportunities for himself, while drawing defenders his way, which, in turn, should open things up for his teammates. He's a valuable asset in terms of bringing everything together. A good threat up top, Firmino, who has over 100 appearances with Liverpool, is a player who will be orchestrating the attack this season, and certainly one to watch.

Fabinho—a Brazilian with a handful of caps for his country and relatively new to Liverpool—should have an active year helping with defense and providing structure for the squad.

Overall Player Rating:

Mohamed Salah: 9.9

James Milner: 8.9

Firmino: 9.5

Fabinho: 9.4

KEY PLAYER STATS

(Total career goals with this club)

	Games Played	Goals
Mohamed Salah	71	51
James Milner	125	17
Firmino	135	48
Fabinho	25	1

WHAT TO WATCH FOR ON TV—HOW MESSI, NEYMAR, RONALDO, AND OTHERS PLAY

Probably operating out of a 4-2-3-1, Liverpool employs smart attacking soccer, crisp passing, high tempo on both sides of the ball, and a strong work rate from players.

You can't go wrong with Salah creating danger in the opposition's end. Georginio Wijnaldum and Virgil van Dijk add a solid presence, leaving Liverpool in a strong position to consistently win games over the long stretch of a season.

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Some of the forwards from the 2018-19 season included Roberto Firmino, Danny Ings, Sadio Mane, Divock Origi, Mohamed Salah, Xherdan Shaqiri, Dominic Solanke, Daniel Sturridge, and Ben Woodburn; a few defenders available included Nathaniel Clyne, Virgil van Dijk, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Joe Gomez, Ragnar Klavan, Dejan Lovren, Joel Matip, Alberto Moreno, Connor Randall, and Andrew Robertson; the midfield options included Allan, Pedro Chirivella, Marko Grujic, Jordan Henderson, Naby Keita, Ryan Kent, Adam Lallana, Lazar Markovic, James Milner, Sheyi Ojo, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Harry Wilson, Fabinho, and Georginio Wijnaldum. The goalies available were Loris Karius, Simon Mignolet, and Danny Ward.

Will Daniel Sturridge be around? That's a good question, and something to watch as the season progresses.

Should this group stay intact, it's a good pool for Klopp to work with. He's a coach with passion, one who can bring players together. As Lothar Matthaus pointed out in *FourFourTwo* (Issue 292, October 2018): "It's not just Pep Guardiola who makes players better; Klopp does, too. He's also a motivator, and not just with his words. When Liverpool score and he jumps around or runs to the players, that's not acting—it's how he feels inside. Players feel he's one of them. He's like a second father for the young players, talking with them and helping them."

Strong as usual, Liverpool is a definite contender for league supremacy and a team to watch for quality play up and down the field. Anfield will be rockin' each and every game.

WHAT ARE THEIR CHANCES OF WINNING THE FA CUP THIS YEAR?

Very good—top of the list.

Overall Team Ranking: 9.8



MANCHESTER UNITED

Twitter: @ManUtd

Founded in 1878

FA Cup: 12

FA Community Shield: 21

League Champions: 20

European Cup and UEFA Champions League: 3

UEFA Super Cup: 1

Known For

Strong attendance

Very passionate fans

Exciting games

A legendary program

Elite talent

George Best

Ryan Giggs

Eric Cantona

David Beckham

Wayne Rooney

Cristiano Ronaldo

Paul Scholes

Patrice Evra

Antonio Valencia
Marcus Rashford
Jesse Lingard

A BRIEF TEAM HISTORY

A legendary coach: Alex Ferguson

The Busby “babes” and George Best and Ryan Giggs and where to start? Manchester United, like Liverpool, are so completely overwhelmingly successful, with generation after generation of top-level talent and players from the UK and around the world, that it’s hard to quantify them without a book that’s potentially 5,036 pages long. Who can forget Bobby Charlton, Nobby Stiles, Bryan Robson, Mark Hughes, Jesper Olsen, David Beckham, Eric Cantona, Ruud van Nistelrooy, Cristiano Ronaldo, Wayne Rooney, and Edwin van der Sar? These are just a handful of great players who have represented United over the years, and there are plenty more to come.

FACTS ABOUT THEIR CITY

Manchester—which sits close to Liverpool on the west side of England—is traditionally an industrial city, known for producing cotton and various war-time supplies during WWII.

It notoriously sports two of the world’s most famous clubs: Manchester United and Manchester City. Of course.

A little music: The Smiths came formed in Manchester back in the early 1980s.

Food: Good luck! It is England after all!

As for beer, that's another story. Locals have many interesting options, some of which include Marble Brewery, BlackJack Brewery, and Six O'Clock Beer Company.

WHERE THE TEAM IS TODAY— TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

This is not your Manchester United squad of 2007, however it's a good one. Likely operating out of a 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1, José Mourinho has turned some drama into a show of sustainability from a group of players eager to keep United in top contention.

Tactics and strategies: build on last season and find harmony.

Some forwards at Mourinho's disposal during the 2018-19 season were Romelu Lukaku, Anthony Martial, Marcus Rashford, Alexis Sanchez; midfielders included Marouane Fellaini, Fred, Ander Herrera, Jesse Lingard, Juan Mata, Nemanja Matic, Scott McTominay, Andreas Pereira, Paul Pogba, and Ashley Young; defenders consisted of Eric Bailly, Cameron Borthwick-Jackson, Diogo Dalot, Matteo Darmian, Timothy Fosu-Mensah, Phil Jones, Victor Lindelof, Marcos Rojo, Luke Shaw, Chris Smalling, Axel Tuanzebe, Antonio Valencia; and the goalies included David de Gea, Lee Grant, Joel Pereira, and Sergio Romero.

Should this group stay together, it's a club that has a great deal of proving to do. It has to prove that it's the best in England.

On the plus side, United has the skillful play of Marcus Rashford, Fred, Jesse Lingard, and Paul Pogba, which should help galvanize productive scoring chances.

When it comes to United, there's always going to be high-level passing. The passes are smart, well-placed, and full of energy. Finding on-field harmony through team chemistry is a key goal for United this season. It will depend on the capability and talent of the players, certainly, and with a little time, Manchester United can get back to dominating the Premier League.

JOSÉ MOURINHO—A BRIEF COACHING PORTRAIT

José Mourinho—a talented coach originally from Portugal—took over the Manchester United gig in 2016. Prior to stepping into one of the greatest clubs in soccer world history, he had the privilege of leading a handful of other sides, including Real Madrid, Inter Milan, and Chelsea. Known for interesting news conferences, Mourinho, like it or not, has been part of some building drama around Manchester which may prove even more exciting down the road. Manchester United has been striving to be great again. Essentially, as long as United finds itself out of first place, drama will be around the corner. Fans are up in arms, the media jumps all over it, and the coach is left with an overwhelming challenge. Mourinho is definitely ready for it.