

Mapping the origin of English Premier League players (2009-2019)

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1. Introduction

This Monthly Report focuses on the top English football division: the Premier League. It analyses the evolution of the origin of players fielded over the past ten years. It shows that the percentage of players having grown up in England, the “nationals”, has progressively fallen to reach a new negative record level over the current season. The proportion of goals scored by Englishmen shows a similar trend.

Given the Brexit context, a possible limit on the scope of international recruitment may oblige the majority of Premier League teams to modify their transfer strategies. The rise of a new generation of very promising English players suggests however, on strictly sporting terms, that such a change may not negatively affect the competitiveness of Premier League teams. It could even strengthen the national team.

2. Nationals

Between 2009/10 and 2011/12, players having grown up in England have always accounted for at least 40% of minutes played in the Premier League. Over the seven last seasons studied, this threshold was only breached in 2014/15. Up until the 15th February 2019 of the current season, the percentage of playing time of nationals was 35.2%. This is the lowest value ever recorded during the period covered by the Report.

In parallel to the drop in playing time, the percentage of goals scored by Englishmen has decreased. In this case also, the lowest value was observed during the current season. Over the whole of the period analysed, the percentage of goals scored was always lower than that for minutes played. This result reflects the over-representation of national players in defensive positions.

Figure 1: % of minutes and goals of English players in the EPL (2009-2019)

	% minutes	% goals
2009/10	40.0%	38.8%
2010/11	41.4%	37.8%
2011/12	45.1%	39.1%
2012/13	39.3%	35.2%
2013/14	37.9%	36.4%
2014/15	42.5%	37.9%
2015/16	36.7%	35.6%
2016/17	38.6%	36.2%
2017/18	38.9%	32.8%
2018/19	35.2%	30.7%

3. Other UK players

In ten years, the Premier League playing time of footballers having grown up in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales has fallen by over half. During the current season, the amount of minutes played by nationals from these countries reached a lowest level of 3.0%. A strong declining trend was also observed at the level of goals scored: from 4.7% in 2009/10 to 3.2% up until the 15th February of the current season.

During the decade analysed, the percentage of minutes has fallen for all of the three non-English UK nations. Players having grown up in Northern Ireland and Wales have almost disappeared from the Premier League. The Scottish remain present although less so than in the past. Similar to the UK players, the percentage of minutes played by footballers having grown up in Ireland has fallen sharply: from 4.6% in 2009/10 to 1.5% during the current season.

Figure 2: % of minutes and goals for non-English UK players in the EPL (2009-2019)

	% minutes	% goals
2009/10	6.5%	4.7%
2010/11	6.9%	5.0%
2011/12	7.0%	5.9%
2012/13	6.8%	7.6%
2013/14	5.9%	4.6%
2014/15	5.5%	4.0%
2015/16	4.6%	2.9%
2016/17	4.9%	3.6%
2017/18	3.3%	2.8%
2018/19	3.0%	3.2%

Figure 3: % of minutes in the EPL for non-English UK and Irish players, by nationality

	SCO	NIR	WAL	IRL		
2009/10	3.4%	1.6%	1.5%	4.6%		
2010/11	3.6%	1.6%	1.7%	3.1%		
2011/12	3.3%	2.2%	1.5%	4.2%		
2012/13	3.2%	2.6%	1.0%	3.0%		
2013/14	2.9%	1.9%	1.1%	3.0%		
2014/15	3.3%	1.7%	0.5%	3.2%		
2015/16	2.1%	1.9%	0.6%	2.5%		
2016/17	2.7%	1.8%	0.4%	2.7%		
2017/18	1.4%	1.4%	0.4%	1.4%		
2018/19	2.2%	0.6%	0.2%	1.5%		

4. Europeans

The proportion of players having grown up outside of Great Britain in UEFA member countries has steadily increased throughout the decade analysed. New records have been measured during the current season both at the level of the percentage of minutes (45.0%) and at the level of goals scored (43.3%). Henceforth, continental European nationals are more numerous on Premier League pitches than UK players.

The percentage of minutes for footballers having grown up in France has remained stable at around 9% throughout the decade covered by the study. The strongest increase was observed for the second most represented country of origin: Spain (from 2.5% to 7.2%). The presence of Germans in the Premier League has also strongly increased from 1.1% to 4.8%. Although well represented, the Dutch and the Belgians are currently less numerous than in 2015/16 or 2016/17.

Figure 4: % of minutes and goals for continental European players in the EPL (2009-2019)

	% minutes	% goals
2009/10	36.0%	39.2%
2010/11	34.5%	38.1%
2011/12	34.1%	35.8%
2012/13	37.0%	39.8%
2013/14	41.2%	40.6%
2014/15	34.9%	33.5%
2015/16	41.7%	38.7%
2016/17	41.3%	39.4%
2017/18	42.6%	39.7%
2018/19	45.0%	43.3%

Figure 5: % of minutes in the EPL for European players (2009-2019), main origins

	FRA	ESP	NED	BEL	GER	POR
2009/10	10.7%	2.5%	2.6%	1.1%	1.1%	0.8%
2010/11	10.1%	3.1%	2.6%	1.4%	0.9%	1.2%
2011/12	8.5%	3.9%	2.9%	2.1%	0.8%	0.9%
2012/13	8.7%	6.5%	2.7%	3.4%	2.0%	0.9%
2013/14	9.9%	6.4%	4.1%	3.3%	2.1%	0.5%
2014/15	7.8%	5.8%	3.1%	4.6%	1.5%	0.9%
2015/16	10.1%	6.9%	5.0%	4.0%	2.3%	1.3%
2016/17	7.3%	7.5%	4.2%	5.2%	2.8%	1.1%
2017/18	8.7%	6.5%	4.6%	4.2%	4.9%	1.4%
2018/19	10.8%	7.2%	3.4%	3.0%	4.8%	3.8%

5. Non-Europeans

The percentage of minutes played in the Premier League by footballers having grown up outside of UEFA member countries has remained stable during the period analysed. On the other hand, the percentage of goals scored by non-Europeans has strongly increased from 17.3% to 22.8%. Over the whole of the decade, non-Europeans played 16.2% of minutes and scored 20.6% of goals. This result reflects their over-representation in offensive positions. In 2017/18, 27.4% of minutes for forwards were played by nationals from countries outside of UEFA.

The Brazilians and Argentinians are by far the most represented non-Europeans in the Premier League. The proportion of Argentinians reached a peak in 2014/15 (4.7% of minutes), and fell thereafter. The Brazilian presence however, has never been as great as up until the 15th February of the current season: 4.9%.

Figure 6: % of minutes and goals for non-Europeans in the EPL (2009-2019)

	% minutes		% goals	
2009/10	17.5%		17.3%	
2010/11	17.3%		19.2%	
2011/12	13.8%		19.2%	
2012/13	16.9%		17.4%	
2013/14	14.9%		18.4%	
2014/15	17.1%		24.5%	
2015/16	17.0%		22.8%	
2016/17	15.3%		20.9%	
2017/18	15.3%		24.7%	
2018/19	16.8%		22.8%	

Figure 7: % of minutes in the EPL for non-Europeans (2009-2019), main origins

	BRA	ARG	USA	AUS	CIV	SEN
2009/10	2.3%	1.9%	2.1%	1.4%	0.9%	0.8%
2010/11	2.0%	1.9%	2.0%	1.1%	1.4%	0.6%
2011/12	1.4%	2.5%	1.8%	0.9%	1.5%	0.2%
2012/13	2.7%	2.4%	1.9%	1.1%	1.7%	0.4%
2013/14	2.7%	2.4%	1.6%	0.5%	1.6%	0.2%
2014/15	2.6%	4.7%	1.1%	0.4%	1.1%	1.6%
2015/16	3.2%	3.4%	1.2%	0.3%	1.2%	2.2%
2016/17	3.4%	2.9%	0.4%	0.0%	0.6%	1.6%
2017/18	3.0%	2.7%	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%	1.7%
2018/19	4.9%	2.0%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	1.1%

6. Conclusion

The proportion of UK and Irish nationals in the Premier League has strongly declined over the past decade to the advantage of players having grown up in continental Europe (France, Spain, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, etc.). According to its impact on professional football, Brexit may have major consequences for the teams in the top English division.

However, the excellent results obtained over the past few years by youth English selections bears witness to the conscientious efforts regarding training. As to sporting competitiveness, this work will probably cushion an eventual blow linked to the introduction of more strict criteria for the importation of players from abroad.

Independently of the consequences of Brexit, another indicator suggests that English players have positive future ahead of them. Though less present on the pitch than ten years ago, they are nowadays much younger: 27.49 years of age on average in 2009/10 as opposed to 26.95 years in 2018/19. This is the lowest average age among all the zones of origin analysed in this Report.