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Introduction

Talking tactics

This review of the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League season offers a record of a campaign that spanned 205 matches from the start of the group stage in September to the final at Juventus Stadium on 14 May. It provides useful factual and statistical information on the fifth season of the UEFA Europa League and seeks to gain real understanding of the action on the field through the analysis and interpretations of UEFA technical observers.

This group of coaches gave their input on every match played from the round of 16 onwards, providing a platform on which UEFA’s technical team could build their discussions when they met together in Turin in May, the day after the final between Sevilla FC and SL Benfica, to reflect on the tactical approaches and trends witnessed.

Led by Ioan Lupescu, UEFA’s chief technical officer, this “think tank” featured some vastly experienced coaches, who contributed enthusiastically to an engrossing debate. Sir Alex Ferguson’s presence alone guaranteed some fascinating insights and he was joined by Antonio Conte and Vincenzo Montella — who shared their respective experiences of coaching in the 2013/14 competition with Juventus and ACF Fiorentina — and Thomas Schaaf, who led Werder Bremen to the UEFA Cup final in 2009.

Other valuable contributions came from Ginés Mélendez, Willi Ruttensteiner and László Szalai — a trio of coaches working in important technical positions in the Spanish, Austrian and Hungarian national associations respectively. The end product is a technical report which will hopefully provide coaches around Europe with food for thought and fuel further debate. It will be made available to members of the coaching family across the continent and if it can also help development coaches stay aware of the evolving styles and approaches at the elite end of the club game, then all the better.
Competition overview

Road to Turin

More nations were represented in the group stage than ever before, but once again Iberian sides proved dominant.

The 2013/14 UEFA Europa League season ended with the familiar sight of two finalists from the Iberian peninsula – Sevilla FC and SL Benfica – yet much of what went before was a celebration of the breadth, diversity and colour of European club football. This was a competition in which the group stage featured teams from 27 different countries – a record number for the UEFA Europa League – and which gave some of Europe’s not-so-familiar names the opportunity to pit their wits against celebrated clubs from the continent’s big leagues. Its sheer scale was underlined by the 4,600km journey made by Kazakhstan’s FC Shakhter Karagandy for a group fixture against AZ Alkmaar in the Netherlands.

Shakhter were the first side from Kazakhstan to participate at this level; indeed, half of the 48 sides involved in the group stage were making their UEFA Europa League debuts. The brightest newcomers were PFC Ludogorets Razgrad, the rising force of Bulgarian football, who won a group featuring PSV Eindhoven – former European Champion Clubs’ Cup winners and ever-presents in the UEFA Europa League group stage – and beat the Dutch side home and away. Ludogorets were one of 12 sides that survived the group stage unbeaten. FC Salzburg and Tottenham Hotspur led the way with six straight wins – and an unsurpassed 15 goals each. Salzburg could call on the finishing prowess of Jonathan Soriano, the tournament’s eventual eight-goal top scorer, while five goals from Tottenham’s Jermain Defoe meant he became the London club’s record European scorer with 23 overall.

AZ Alkmaar, ACF Fiorentina, KRC Genk, SS Lazio, Olympique Lyonnais, PAOK FC, FC Rubin Kazan and Trabzonspor AS also avoided defeat, along with Sevilla, whose campaign had begun back on 1 August in the third qualifying round against FK Mladost Podgorica. Sevilla were not the only group winners to travel far in the competition: under the experienced Dick Advocaat, AZ went on to reach the quarter-finals for the second time in three seasons, as did Rémi Garde’s Lyon.
Round of 32

The round of 32 featured clubs from 19 member associations – a record for the revamped competition – and produced an intriguing run of away victories. The week of the first-leg ties included just two home victories amid six for the visiting teams. This was not a one-off either: there were more wins away than at home both on the first two matchdays of the group stage and in the round of 16 too. During the UEFA Elite Club Coaches Forum at the start of the season, several leading coaching figures had suggested it was easier to post away victories in Europe today than in previous decades – partly owing to the increased emphasis on counterattacking football, with teams breaking forward in numbers and on better playing surfaces. These statistics thus provide further food for thought. True to form, one of the most impressive results of the round of 32 was Salzburg’s 3-0 triumph away at AFC Ajax, featuring a brilliant 50m strike by Soriano, and Roger Schmidt’s men followed it up with a 3-1 home success the following week. Ajax were among a quartet of former European Cup winners to enter the competition at this stage, having finished third in their UEFA Champions League groups. Another of this number, FC Porto, nearly suffered the same fate against Eintracht Frankfurt after surrendering a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw. The tournament evidently meant a lot to the Eintracht fans – 12,000 had travelled to FC Girondins de Bordeaux to see the team qualify for the last 32 – but now they were to be disappointed. Over in Frankfurt, Porto fought back from 2-0 down and again when 3-2 behind, as Nabil Ghilas equalised with four minutes left to squeeze his side through on away goals.

While SL Benfica and FC Basel 1893 shrugged aside PAOK and Maccabi Tel-Aviv FC respectively, Antonio Conte’s Juventus began their pursuit of a final appearance in their home stadium with an equally comfortable win against Trabzonspor. With SSC Napoli surviving a scare against Swansea City AFC and Fiorentina progressing too, Italy now had three teams in the round of 16 but not Lazio, who lost a thrilling tie against Ludogorets. After Stoicho Stoev’s side had won the first leg 1-0 in Rome, Ludogorets showed impressive resolve back in Sofia where they trailed 2-0 and then 3-2, before Juninho Quixadá’s 88th-minute strike ensured parity on the night and victory on aggregate. Like Italy, Ukraine had begun the knockout stage with four clubs, but none survived this first hurdle. FC Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk came closest, leading Tottenham 2-0 on aggregate midway through the second leg before eventually succumbing to coach Juande Ramos’s former employers. It was Ramos who famously led Sevilla to their first two UEFA Cups, and the Andalusian side continued their progress by beating NK Maribor. Two other Spanish sides, Real Betis Balompié and Valencia CF, along with FC Anji Makhachkala and AZ also made it through – all four thanks to wins on the road.

Knockout blows

For Betis, the prize was a city derby against Sevilla in the round of 16. It was the first meeting of these old rivals on the European stage and it proved rich in drama. Betis – under Gabriel Calderón, their third coach of a difficult season that would end in relegation – gained the upper hand with a 2-0 success at the Estadio Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán. Yet Sevilla showed impressive resolve in the return at the Benito Villamarín. José Antonio Reyes and Carlos Bacca scored to force extra time and Nono’s penalty miss sent woe for Betis, Sevilla going through as 4-3 shoot-out winners. It was not the only contest between compatriot clubs. In Italy, Juventus and Fiorentina staged a reprise of the 1990 UEFA Cup final, with the same outcome as all those years ago. Although Fiorentina earned a draw in Turin through Mario Gomez’s equaliser, back in Florence they were felled by a piece of magic from Andrea Pirlo, whose second-half free-kick proved a fatal blow for an attractive Viola side hitherto unbeaten in the competition.
Competition overview

There were other goals to savour at the Stadio San Paolo, where Porto built on a 1-0 first-leg win with a 2-2 draw with Napoli; indeed, three of the strikes were candidates for the competition’s goal of the season. After Goran Pandev’s fine opener, Nabil Ghilas equalised before Ricardo Quaresma’s solo effort – his stunningly quick feet leaving three defenders in his wake – proved decisive, despite a late Napoli equaliser on the night.

Benfica marched on too, winning a first meeting with Tottenham since the 1962 European Champion Clubs’ Cup semi-final. They prevailed 3-1 in a first leg in London dominated by set pieces. Luisão struck from two dead-ball situations for the visitors, while Christian Eriksen converted a fine free-kick for Spurs, who led 2-1 to the return only to end up with a 2-2 draw. While the Eagles of Lisbon soared, Ludogorets – who have the same nickname – crashed to earth. Although playing 400km from their Razgrad home in Sofia’s Nationalen Stadion Vasil Levski, Ludogorets enjoyed the support of a capacity crowd. But it was not enough; Valencia shrugged off the dismissal of Seydou Keita and let their greater European experience tell in a 3-0 victory. They administered another lesson with a 1-0 home success back in Spain. Basel ended Salzburg’s run in similar fashion as they overcame an early red card for Masso Sochy and Sosan’s final goal of the competition to win 2-1 in Austria and advance by the same score. The quarter-final lineup was completed by AZ, 5-0 aggregate victors against Anji, and Olympique Lyonnais, who ousted FC Viktoria Plzeň with the help of Steed Malbranque’s playmaking skills; he set up three goals in their 4-1 first-leg win against the Czech side, whose 2-1 second-leg victory was not enough.

Benfica midfielder Miralem Sulejmani (right) takes on AZ’s Mattias Johansson

Quarter-finals

For all the fine away displays seen earlier in the competition, the quarter-finals offered a reminder of the power big teams draw from their home support – and nowhere was this more evident than at Mestalla. One of Spanish football’s most atmospheric arenas was at its electric best as the Valencia crowd roared Juan Antonio Pizzi’s men on to a remarkable comeback against Basel. Beaten 3-0 in Switzerland, Valencia staged a revival hitherto unseen in the UEFA Europa League. A Paco Alcácer double and Eduardo Vargas’ strike forced extra time, and with Basel losing Marcelo Díaz and Gastón Sauro to red cards, Valencia duly finished the job, Alcácer completing his hat-trick in an eventual 5-0 rout.

Sevilla joined them in the semi-finals, meanwhile, by overcoming a 1-0 first-leg deficit as they swept Porto aside in the Andalucian capital, three goals inside the opening half hour the platform for a 4-1 triumph. For Juventus and Benfica, progress was more straightforward. The Bianconeri earned a 1-0 victory across the Alps in Lyon and then prevailed 2-1 back at home with the help of another Pirlo free-kick. Benfica ended AZ’s challenge with wins in Alkmaar and Lisbon, 1-0 then 2-0.

Pirlo’s free-kick proved a fatal blow for Fiorentina

Juventus see off Fiorentina in the all-Italian tie

Andrea Pirlo scored Juve’s winner
Competition overview

Semi-finals

It was now only the Portuguese who stood between Conte’s Italian champions and a showpiece occasion on home turf in Turin. Juve’s hopes rose in the first leg at Estádio do Sport Lisboa e Benfica with Carlos Tévez’s first goal in UEFA competition in over five years, but Lima’s spectacular late strike – selected as the goal of the competition, no less – gave Benfica a 2-1 advantage. The second leg in Turin proved a night of frustration for Juventus who, despite a flurry of near misses, could not find a way through. Benfica, hanging on after Enzo Pérez’s red card, were in the final. Their opponents there would be Sevilla, who rode their luck in the all-Spanish semi-final with Valencia. Although Unai Emery’s men prevailed 2-0 in Seville, it was merely the cue for another Valencia fightback as the tournament’s top scorers hit three unanswered second-leg goals… unanswered, that is, until the fourth minute of added time, when Stéphane Mbia’s header silenced a stunned Mestalla. Iberia had now provided eight of the ten finalists of the UEFA Europa League era, and a reprieved Sevilla could be forgiven for starting to believe this might well be their year.

Stéphane Mbia’s header silenced a stunned Mestalla
The final

Sevilla strike again

A defiant defensive performance coupled with a cool nerve kept Benfica at bay and earned the Spanish side the title for a third time

It may have been a Juventus icon, Ciro Ferrara, who carried the trophy on to the pitch before kick-off, but this was a night when the home of the Bianconeri found itself submerged under a sea of red and white. Sevilla FC and SL Benfica were in town and the cartoon image on the huge banner in the end filled by Spanish supporters showed a grandfather, or abuelito, with a big white beard holding on to the handlebars of a Vespa. The accompanying banner above read Hemos vuelto – We’re back. Sevilla were indeed back – back in the final seven years after winning successive UEFA Cups – but the biggest pre-match question concerned Benfica’s rather longer wait. The Lisbon giants had not held a European trophy since 1962. Seven finals lost since had even revived talk of a curse, but Jorge Jesus’s team had already survived one trip to Juventus Stadium – stifling Bianconeri hopes in a goalless semi-final second leg – and they arrived in Turin on the brink of a domestic treble.

In a sense, the unfolding 120 minutes would prove, for Benfica, a reversal of that night spent frustrating Juventus. In a match that became a test of nerve and endurance, they became the team struggling to put away a Sevilla side whose defiance was writ large in the performances of men like the Lisbon-born goalkeeper Beto and centre-back Nicolás Pareja. The end result would be the first penalty shoot-out in the UEFA Europa League final’s five-year history.

Sevilla FC 0-0 SL Benfica
(aet; Sevilla win 4-2 on penalties)
Wednesday 14 May 2014
Juventus Stadium
Penalty shoot-out
0-1 Lima, 1-1 Bacca, 1-1 Cardozo (saved), 2-1 Mbia, 2-1 Rodrigo (saved), 3-1 Coke, 3-2 Luisão, 4-2 Gameiro

Lineups
Sevilla
Beto; Coke, Pareja, Fazio, Moreno; Daniel Carriço, Mbia; Vitolo (Figueiras 110), Rakitić (C), Reyes (Marin 78 (Gameiro 104)); Bacca

Benfica
Oblak; Maxi Pereira, Luisão (C), Garay, Siqueira (Cardozo 99); Gaitán (Ivan Cavaleiro 119), Rúben Amorim, André Gomes, Sulejmani (André Almeida 25); Rodrigo, Lima

Cards
Yellow
Fazio 11, Moreno 13, Coke 98 (Sevilla); Siqueira 30, Almeida 100 (Benfica)

Referee Felix Brych (Germany)
Attendance 33,120
The final

Pařízek set the tone by denying Ezequiel Garay from the game’s first real opening, when Beto pushed Nicolás Gaitán’s free-kick only as far as Garay who turned it back to goal but found the Sevilla No21 in the way. Rather than a breakthrough, this slice of action gave Benfica coach Jorge Jesus an early headache. Mirel Rădoi, the right winger in his 4-4-2 formation, had injured his shoulder in the challenge that prompted the free-kick and soon departed the action. Jesus was already missing the suspended Lazar Marković and Eduardo Salvio, and with right-back Maxi Pereira further upfield, the Uruguayan, originally a winger in his home country, would rise to the challenge.

There were plenty of good intentions, but also plenty of passes going astray. Yet for Sevilla one player made his influence felt: Ivan Rakitić, the eventual man of the match. Roaming in front of two screening midfielders, Stéphane Mbia and Daniel Carrico, the Croatian added sparks of creativity to his side’s speed and intensity. His skill and athleticism were evident in several purposeful forward runs, the first after just nine minutes when he broke 30m and combined with José Antonio Reyes to play in Carlos Bacca, who was offside. Rakitić would end the night having attempted 89 passes and completed 62 of them — more than any other player in a white shirt.

Eventually, as half-time approached, the game opened up. Moreno — a left-back attacking down the right — found himself promisingly placed after a quick Reyes counter but curled his shot straight at Jan Oblak, the Benfica goalkeeper. Instead it was Benfica who should really have gained the half-time advantage. As a swell of noise rose up from the Benfica end, spreading around the ground to scattered pockets of Portuguese supporters, their team so nearly gave them something to celebrate in first-half stoppage time. Maxi timed perfectly his run between two defenders to get on the end of Rubén Amorim’s ball over Sevilla’s back line; he connected as it dropped but his volleyed flick was beaten away by Beto. That was not the end of it. Moments later Rodrigo ghosted past Federico Fazio on a run into the penalty box, but again Beto was there at the near post to save. Benfica then looked to the German referee Felix Brych as Gaitán went to ground under Fazio’s challenge but he ruled no penalty.

Prior to this explosion of action, Benfica had showed only flashes of their high-speed attacking threat, yet they came again on the resumption. Maxi was the catalyst as he beat Moreno in a 50-50 inside his own half, and then outsprinted him to the loose ball on the halfway line. Suddenly the Portuguese team had a three on two and Maxi’s diagonal ball to Lima sent the forward breaking into the box. Lima took one touch on his chest and thrashed a low shot beyond Beto but not Parajá, who was covering behind. The centre-back came to the rescue again as Benfica recycled the danger. André Almeida and Gaitán worked the ball into Maxi and he squared for Rodrigo who unleashed an angled strike from over 25m that Beto clawed away from beneath the crossbar. Moments later Beto made a rare misjudgement from a set piece, which could be seen as testament to the fine defensive organisation of both sides. At the other end Sevilla got little out of Luisão and other end Sevilla got little out of Luisão and

When Sevilla did threaten at the other end, Rakitić was invariably at the heart of it. In the 53rd minute, the Spanish club’s captain got among the red shirts to make a telling interception and release Reyes but Luisão at full stretch did enough to put him off. Just after the hour another Rakitić ball, lifted into the space behind Benfica left-back Guilherme Siqueira, afforded Coke the opportunity to tee up Reyes for a shot he flashed at Oblak at the near post. A similar ploy almost undid Sevilla at the other end. When the influential Gaitán played a crossfield ball to Maxi, there was only Rakitić covering his team’s left side; Maxi got behind him and squared for Lima to make another block. Even then the rebound fell to Lima, but Reyes of all people was in the way this time.

One of Sevilla’s strengths in their run to the final had been their compactness in defence. Now, as spaces appeared in the midfield area, their resilience and last-ditch defending stood out. As Thomas Schaaf, a UEFA technical observer at the final, noted afterwards: “Many things are decided by willpower.”

From left: Sevilla’s Kevin Gameiro; Carlos Bacca shoots wide in extra time; Nicolás Gaitán on the ball

Rakitić added sparks of creativity to his side’s speed and intensity
So to extra time. Before it, the teams resembled two prizefighters slumped in their corners summoning some last reserves of energy for the final round. Luísão sat on a cool box holding ice to his hamstring as a masseur worked on his calves. As Sevilla’s players and staff emerged from their huddle, they urged their fans to make some more noise. There was a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides to reach penalties, yet they actually came within a feeling that they might be the happier of the sides.

Unai Emery

A figure in seemingly perpetual motion on the touch line, the Sevilla coach propelled his side to the title

Shortly after his arrival at Sevilla FC in summer 2013, Unai Emery cited one particular quality he hoped to see from his new squad. “The tactical side of things won’t be as important as the attitude of the players,” he declared, and the manner of their dramatic, occasionally bumpy, journey to UEFA Europa League glory underlined the wisdom of those words.

In the space of a season, Emery succeeded in building a team who simply did not know when they were beaten. Sevilla came through a penalty shootout against Real Betis Balompié, they scraped past Valencia CF, his old club, with a goal deep in stoppage time, they rode their luck in the final before prevailing once more on spot kicks. As Emery put it at the end of that long, draining night in Turin: “We’ve had to really suffer to get through some ties and in the end this is the prize. My team have been really united in the difficult moments.”

Given that it is the coach who sets the tone, it was not hard to draw a thread between Sevilla’s refusal to yield during their 19-match run in the competition and the figure in perpetual motion down on the touch line. Emery in the technical area does not stop for a second. Inside Juventus Stadium he was animated from the first moment onwards, pointing a finger here, waving an arm there, punching the air in a last-ditch tackle, stamping a foot as a pass went astray.

Yet it was not just energy and passion that he transmitted to his players. The 42-year-old is renowned in Spain as a master of dead-ball strategies. If it was a long throw in that led to Sevilla’s late, late reprise in Valencia in the quarter-final, via Stéphane Mbia’s headed goal, in the final against Benfica it was his defensive work that stood out as they resisted their rivals’ set-piece threat. Ginés Meléndez, a UEFA technical observer in Turin, praised Emery when he said: “Benfica are very dangerous at dead balls and this just confirmed that he is an extraordinary coach in this area.” Emery’s father Juan and grandfather Antonio were goalkeepers, so it is tempting to imagine that Emery – a midfielder in his own playing days – picked up tips about penalty box organisation in conversations at the family dinner table.

And his influence did not end there, of course. Emery took over a team freshly shorn of key players such as Álvaro Negredo and Jesús Navas. He had to integrate over a dozen new faces, yet still ended the season with his first major trophy along with a fifth-placed finish in the Spanish Liga. Along the way he found the perfect position for the inspirational Ivan Rakitić, ahead of defensive midfield duo Daniel Carrico and Mbia. He also successfully rotated his main strikers, Carlos Bacca and Kevin Gameiro, who started just one European match together yet each scored important goals.

Emery had previously come close in this competition with Valencia, losing quarter-final and semi-final ties, and on the eve of the final, he underlined just what it meant to be in Turin. Recalling the impact of watching Sevilla’s 2007 UEFA Cup final victory during his final days as a young coach with their fellow Andaluzanos UD Almería, he said: “I remember watching and wondering what it would be like to be in that situation one day. And now I am here and eager to make the most of it.” He certainly did just that – and made sure his team did the same.
**Analysis**

**Technical topics**

From increased tactical flexibility to the growing role of the full-back and the merits of the high pressing game, the 2013/14 season produced plenty to ponder.

Lyon keep a close eye on Betis forward Chuli during their Group I opener.

**Fluid shapes**

The Gazzetta dello Sport had a nice phrase for it when describing the tactical approach of the Italy national team under coach Cesare Prandelli: “la forma dell’acqua” – the form of water. In other words, it is all about fluidity. This was certainly the case in the latter stages of the UEFA Europa League. It was interesting to note that half of the sides involved in the last 16 employed a 4-4-2 at some point or another, with clubs such as Olympique Lyonnais and ACF Fiorentina operating with a midfield diamond. This compared with just five using the more modish 4-2-3-1, yet of arguably greater significance was the fact that so few stuck to one rigid system. AZ Alkmaar, for instance, played in the classic Dutch 4-3-3 with two wide men with notable dribbling ability; when defending, though, this pair dropped back to form a five-man midfield line. FC Basel 1893 showed great variety with regular changes of shape during games. Willi Rüttensteiner, one of UEFA’s technical observers, said: “We cannot speak any more about one shape – we must speak about defence and offence as there is so much tactical flexibility from the coaches.”

Antonio Conte, the Juventus coach, backed this up, speaking of “flexible systems” and “looking beyond numbers”. A glance at the UEFA technical observer’s report for the Bianconeri’s round of 16 home tie against Fiorentina helps illustrate the point: Juventus may have started out in a 3-5-2 but this became 5-3-1-1 in defence and 3-3-4 in attack. Conte also suggested that it is impossible for a coach to be wedded to one particular system as he must adapt to the players at his disposal. By way of example, he reflected that he had used different formations in the past but changed his approach at Juventus as Andrea Pirlo benefits from the support of two midfield players alongside him.
Full-backs here, there and everywhere

The attacking, overlapping full-back is now a prominent feature on the tactical landscape. The list of players ticking that box among the last 16 teams in the UEFA Europa League was lengthy, and SL Benfica, one of the quickest attacking teams in the competition, provided a case in point in their semi-final second leg at Juventus. Although defending a 2-1 advantage in a tight goalless game, it was notable that the two Benfica full-backs, Maxi Pereira and Guilherme Siqueira, still looked to push on whenever Jorge Jesus’s men broke forward. With the wingers moving infield, it was often these fast, hard-running full-backs who provided the width on the overlap.

With their impressive wing-backs, Juventus provided perhaps the most compelling example of the vital function played by the modern wide man. For their match against Fiorentina, the UEFA technical observer noted that when the team were under pressure, Kwadwo Asamoah and Mauricio Isla worked as defenders; when they attacked, these were the two players who provided the essential width. It is a big job and it helps to have a player like Pirlo – or also, for that matter, a centre-back like Leonardo Bonucci – with the ability to find the man on the move with his pass. Sir Alex Ferguson said that for teams to flood forward successfully, there had to be a trust that the pass would come. “That is where good teams work – they have confidence in the player on the ball and will gamble and overload, like Juventus with the two wide full-backs.”

Another point about wide players that was raised at the UEFA technical study group meeting in Turin, was that full-backs are moving into the midfield to provide a numerical superiority there when needed. Of course, the defensive role remains vital, yet with a multitasking full-back, it is not always possible to get the balance right according to another of UEFA’s match observers during the competition, László Salai. “I saw that sometimes you have problems in defence,” he said. “The wide defenders are working forwards instead of defending and this creates spaces for fast attackers to come in down the sides.”

In the UEFA technical study group meeting, Sir Alex Ferguson offered his own fascinating take on the trend. He recalled playing a pressing game in a 1981/82 UEFA Cup tie against Hamburger SV during his days as Aberdeen FC manager in an attempt to stop Franz Beckenbauer controlling the match. Yet he questioned how much energy should be expended pressing the ball when it is in the opponents’ half of the field. “If it is two yards away I want to go and win it, but if it is ten yards why should I spend the energy and he just passes the ball by me? Pressing happens with teams who are organised and believe in it. I would rather be organised and back in shape and have more space for my team when we have the ball.”

Press, press, press

A high pressing game was a feature of both UEFA Europa League finalists, Sevilla FC and SL Benfica, and this pair were not alone in deploying the tactic to good effect. One particularly striking example came when FC Salzburg travelled to AFC Ajax for the first leg of their round of 32 tie and seized control with three goals inside 35 minutes. By pressing Ajax high up the pitch, inside the hosts’ own half, they had the advantage of winning the ball in areas where they could pose an immediate threat on the counterattack.

Niklas Moisander, the Ajax defender, spoke afterwards of the difficulty of coping with Salzburg’s tactics: “It was very difficult for us, especially when we had the ball. We are used to building up the play from the back, but they made it almost impossible. They did really well with the amount of pressure they put us under. That made us lose the ball in our own half, which was very dangerous.” It was not just that game either: at home to Basel in the next round, it was noted that Salzburg, out of possession, still had six players applying pressure inside the opposition half. One common tactic is for teams to press immediately after losing possession, in a bid to recover the ball as quickly as possible. If not successful within a period of five or 10 seconds, they will then drop back. Willy Ruttersteiner, the UEFA match observer, noted that “almost every team wants to win it immediately back and the pressure is very high.”
The quarter-back role

Remember the Makélélé role? That was the name inspired by Claude Makélélé, the former France midfielder, who played a pivotal defensive midfield role for both Les Bleus and the Real Madrid CF side that won the 2002 UEFA Champions League. That role has now evolved and in the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League campaign one striking feature of teams’ build-up play was the involvement of the defensive midfielder as a creative force, dropping between the centre-backs to pick up the ball and open the game up, constructing attacks from the back. As Thomas Schaaf said: “The defensive midfielder is no longer just a destroyer, somebody there to break up play. Instead he is often the source of attacks, dropping deep between the centre-backs, picking up the ball and passing it forward.”

Sevilla had Stéphane Mbia fulfilling this role while Ivan Rakitić, though operating slightly higher up the pitch, would drop deep too to get the ball moving. They would look for long balls either hit diagonally to the winger or full-back, or played up to the centre-forward. “Quarter-back style” is how Schaaf described it, evoking a mental image of the American football linchpin collecting the ball and launching it out to the wings.

Sevilla's semi-final victims, Valencia CF, also used the long ball to spark quick counterattacks. In their 5-0 quarter-final victory over Basel, the UEFA technical observer noted how they used “a lot of penetrating passes to take out three or four opponents” in the middle of the pitch. One particularly spectacular goal that night came when full-back João Pereira hit a diagonal ball into the Basel penalty box that Eduardo Vargas flicked back for Paco Alcácer to smash into the net. Other teams, Basel included, used long balls and went direct, but given the recent tiki-taka phenomenon it is these Spanish examples which stand out – especially when you consider that Sevilla had less possession than their opponents in all four of their quarter-final and semi-final matches.

The season witnessed some excitingly open contests

One regular observer of UEFA Europa League matches in 2013/14 summed up the nature of the games thus: “Pressure, no space, and fast, fast transition.” It was a view shared by Vincenzo Montella, who guided Fiorentina to the last 16 of the competition and saw a definite difference between the approach in Serie A and the challenge posed in Europe where his team noted the quicker transitions. “You will find more direct attacks and less space in midfield compared with Serie A,” he said, speaking the day after the final. These general observations always come with caveats – especially when you consider that Sevilla had less possession than their opponents in all four of their quarter-final and semi-final matches.
The top ten teams
Team | Average possession (%)
--- | ---
Tottenham | 65
AZ | 58
Fiorentina | 57
Sevilla | 55
Betis | 55
Juventus | 54
Salzburg | 53
Lyon | 52
Benfica | 50
Ludogorets | 47

Juventus were among the most accurate passers; Michu – one of Swansea’s pass masters; AZ coach Dick Advocaat.

The observation in the previous section about changing philosophies in English club football applies once again when you consider the passing statistics for the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League campaign. As with possession statistics, there is a Premier League one-two here too, albeit this time Swansea City AFC ranked first. The Welsh club were competing in Europe for the first time for over 20 years, yet did not hesitate to show off the impressive passing game that has become their trademark. Although they exited the competition in the round of 32, they averaged 646.39 passes per game, with an unmatched accuracy ratio of 87.47%

It was no surprise, meanwhile, to see a team like Juventus feature in the top five when they had a passer of the quality of Andrea Pirlo. And so while they recorded fewer passes (527.38) than third-ranked AFC Ajax (540.5); their accuracy (84.24%) was better than that of the Dutch champions (76.41%) who had nobody of comparable calibre to make their traditional passing game function as efficiently as desired.

Overall, eight teams managed to average more than 500 passes per match, and all but one of them, Belgium’s SV Zulte Waregem, featured in the knockout round. At the other end of the scale, the tough baptism of fire for Kazakh newcomers FC Shakhtar Karagandy was highlighted by the fact that they were the lone team that managed fewer than 300 passes per match.
Goalscoring analysis

The net result

Crosses proved to be the most productive way of getting on the scoresheet in a season when goals were harder to come by than usual. A total of 475 goals were scored in the UEFA Europa League at an average of 2.32 per game, the lowest total in the competition’s five-year history. Overall, the second half was clearly more fertile than the opening 45 minutes. It produced 276 goals to 197 – 40% more, with the quarter-hour between the 61st and 75th minutes the most prolific, when 99 (or 21%) of the season’s goals were scored. There were two extra-time strikes, which secured Valencia CF their quarter-final victory against FC Basel 1893. Among the 29 goals in excess of 60% scored during additional time at the end of the 90 minutes was the header which earned Sevilla their place in the Turin final. It was one of the 22 headers to hit the net during the knockout rounds, representing 15.7% and tallying with the percentage of headed goals registered in the 2013/14 UEFA Champions League. The goalscoring analysis in this review and the chart opposite are based on the 140 goals scored during the knockout rounds.

Set plays

Dead-ball situations led to 26% of the goals scored during the knockout rounds – a figure which tallies exactly with the UEFA Champions League. However, whereas penalties accounted for 32% of the set-play goals in the latter, spot kicks provided only 22% in the UEFA Europa League. Corners were the source of 41% of the set-play goals, with Basel, for example, inflicting the only defeat of the campaign on FC Salzburg thanks to a corner from each flank, while SL Benfica broke the deadlock in the semi-final against Juventus thanks to a corner from the left.

Seven goals were scored from direct free-kicks during the knockout rounds – as many as in the entire UEFA Champions League campaign. Superb conversions by Andrea Pirlo were crucial to Juventus’s win against ACF Fiorentina and Olympique Lyonnais, while Tottenham Hotspur’s Christian Eriksen produced master-of-the-art strikes in the home legs against FC Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk and Benfica.

Open play

As in the UEFA Champions League, crosses were the main source of goals in the knock-out rounds of the UEFA Europa League, accounting for over one-quarter of the open-play goals, with both finalists exploiting this route on the way to Turin. Benfica converted two crosses from the right to beat AZ Alkmaar in the quarter-finals; Sevilla earned their penalty shoot-out against local rivals Real Betis Balompié thanks to a brace of crosses from the left.

Through passes achieved a greater success rate in the UEFA Europa League than in the UEFA Champions League, while long-range shooting yielded a similar percentage of goals and solo efforts considerably less – though it was a solo run which provided the penalty that allowed Dnipro to beat Tottenham at home. Basel rounded off their 3-0 home victory over Valencia with a solo run on the counter – and this was one of 15 goals which could be directly attributable to counterattacks. Betis produced a classic example to clinch their 2-0 win at FC Rubin Kazan, with Léo Baptistão breaking free to allow Rubén Castro to score with a superb lob, while Lyon demonstrated the counterattacking potential of dead-ball situations in favour of the opposition when they broke fast after an FC Viktoria Plzeň free-kick to claim their third goal of a 4-1 home success against the Czech champions.
Best goals from open play

Lima’s stunning winner for Benfica against Juventus was the pick of the season, while Ricardo Quaresma caught the eye with three goals in the top ten.

There were some outstanding goals among the 475 registered in the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League and UEFA’s technical study group could easily have highlighted more than the ten eventually chosen.

Those that did make the top ten stood out for different reasons. In the case of Lima’s winning effort for SL Benfica against Juventus, it was memorable both in its creation and execution. Enzo Pérez played the ball in from the flank, Ivan Cavaleiro provided a dummy and on it ran for Lima to deliver an emphatic first-time drive into the roof of the net. Its significance as Benfica’s late first-leg winner – which eventually took them to the final – only enhanced its value.

With three efforts in the top ten, FC Porto’s Ricardo Quaresma staged his own mini goal-of-the-tournament competition, showcasing his wonderfully nimble footwork and spectacular shooting. The pick came in the round of 16 against SSC Napoli: after exchanging passes with his full-back, he was in the box when the ball came back to him from Josué’s backheel – his cue to ghost past three blue shirts on a weaving run before firing into the top corner. Goals by Porto’s Nabil Ghilas and Napoli’s Goran Pandev in the same match were more about the fine teamwork that preceded them. The same went for Rodrigo’s far-post tap-in for Benfica against AZ Alkmaar, which was the reward for an eye-catching run and cross by Salvio. Elsewhere, ACF Fiorentina’s Alessandro Matri was lauded for his brilliant control in scoring against round of 32 opponents Esbjerg fB, as he plucked a high ball out of the sky with a lovely first touch with his right foot before being left to score, despite pressure from a defender. Paco Alcácer’s rising drive in off the crossbar for Valencia CF against FC Basel 1893 featured a superb volleyed lay-off from Eduardo Vargas, while Jonatan Soriano’s goal from near the halfway line for FC Salzburg against AFC Ajax was all about the vision, awareness and accuracy of a striker at the top of his game.

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<td>4 Jonatan Soriano</td>
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<td>7 Nabil Ghilas</td>
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<td>8 Rodrigo</td>
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<td>9 Ricardo Quaresma</td>
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<td>10 Goran Pandev</td>
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Goalscoring analysis
Goalscoring analysis

Best goals from set plays

Juventus midfielder Andrea Pirlo once again took the plaudits for a trademark free-kick. It was no surprise to see Andrea Pirlo at the top of the list of set-play goals. The Juventus maestro’s exquisite free-kick against Fiorentina was perfectly angled and powerfully struck; indeed it was still rising as it hit the back of the net. It was a brilliant strike, not just for its beauty but also its timing as the only goal with 19 minutes remaining of a closely fought round of 16 second leg in Florence. Where Pirlo went for power, SL Benfica’s Nicolás Gaitán’s dinked free-kick over the PAOK FC wall in the round of 32 stood out for its cuteness and finesse. Two other dead-ball efforts cited by UEFA’s technical jury were of the more conventional up-and-over variety – Josip Iličić with his left foot for Fiorentina against Esbjerg and Christian Eriksen with his right for Tottenham Hotspur FC against Benfica. The odd man out among the top five is Valencia’s Eduardo Vargas, who struck with his head to divert Fede Cartabia’s flag-kick into the far corner of the Basel goal.

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<td>5</td>
<td>Christian Eriksen</td>
<td>Tottenham v Benfica</td>
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Scoring first remains, for obvious reasons, the best play for any team wanting to win a football game but in the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League, it proved less of a guarantee of ultimate victory than in previous campaigns. The overall success rate for sides registering the breakthrough goal was 63.74% – or 116 wins from the 182 matches in which goals were scored. They would lose 29 of the matches, with 37 drawn. This compared unfavourably with each of the previous UEFA Europa League seasons, when teams finding the four previous seasons’ goal in their 2012/13 matches would lose 29 of the matches, with 37 drawn.

The importance of scoring first

Yet despite the slight downward trend, when it came to the knockout rounds, teams scoring first still held a massive advantage. Of 52 games involving goals, there were only four in which the team who conceded first actually battled back to win. In the round of 32, Tottenham Hotspur FC came back to beat FC Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk 3-1 at home, while in the round of 16 tie between Olympique Lyonnais and FC Viktoria Plzeň, each side prevailed at home despite conceding the first goal.

The eight clubs that reached the quarter-finals lost just one of 54 matches after scoring first

In the group stage, teams would appear to have more of an opportunity to come back and get something out of a game – or at least this is what the example of Greece’s PAOK FC would suggest. They fell behind in four of their six group fixtures – and came back to win two and draw two, including a 3-2 home victory over Maccabi Haifa FC in which they had trailed by two goals.

The 26-goal tournament top scorers, Valencia recorded a total of 175 goal attempts at an average of 12.5 over their 14 games played. According to these figures, they found the net with every 6.7 attempts. On the night of their memorable comeback against FC Basel 1893, they recorded 33 goal attempts and scored five times. The same fortune favours the brave logic applies to FC Salzburg, the team with the highest shots-per-game average (14.6) who were the competition’s second-highest scorers with 22 alongside Sevilla FC.

Only Salzburg and FC Porto (13.83) managed more attempts per game than semi-finalists Juventus, although the Bianconeri also showed that sometimes there is no substitute for plain old efficiency. They had two shots on target in their quarter-final return leg against Olympique Lyonnais and scored with both of them. Unfortunately for Antonio Conte’s men, they had a taste of that same medicine in the semi-finals against SL Benfica, when they outscored their opponents 12-3 for shots on target, but lost the tie 2-1.

An honorary mention for efficiency should also go to Eintracht Frankfurt, who finished as fifth-highest scorers with 18 goals, despite exiting the competition in the round of 32. They were joint 13th in the goal attempts category, yet found the net with every 4.9 shots.

Statistics

Attempts on goal

If you don’t buy a ticket, you won’t win the lottery. It is tempting to think that this old cliché – or at least the Spanish version – was on a motivational poster somewhere in the Valencia CF dressing room in 2013/14. The Liga side ran up the most attempts on goal over the course of the UEFA Europa League campaign and, not coincidentally, also scored the most goals.

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to a feature about a 52-year-old curse? Should have dedicated almost a full page final, Italy’s Gazzetta dello Sport newspaper to explain the fact that two days after the of 14 May seemed a little like that. How else it feels as if fate is taking over. The night seems to fly out of the window; times when
In other words, there are times when logic Sir Alex’s response? “Football, bloody hell.” FC Bayern München with two added-time goals. UEFA Champions League final against his United side ripped up the script of the on a May night in Barcelona in 1999 when his reaction to that crazy turn of events late United FC manager was his briefest. It was quote during his long reign as Manchester Pressure point

Arguably Sir Alex Ferguson’s most famous quote during his long reign as Manchester United FC manager was his briefest. It was his reaction to that crazy turn of events late on a May night in Barcelona in 1999 when his United side ripped up the script of the UEFA Champions League final against FC Bayern München with two added-time goals. Sir Alex’s response? “Football, bloody hell.”

A football match is played with the mind as well as the feet, and Thomas Schaaf, another technical observer in Turin, acknowledged that there were moments in football when “maybe you are afraid it won’t happen for you.” If doubts did enter one or two Benfica minds by the end, for Sevilla it was the opposite story. They had come through several scrapes along the way to the final – overturning a 2-0 home defeat against neighbours Real Betis Balompié before beating them on penalties, then reaching the final with an added-time goal at Valencia CF – and they looked like a team who believed that this was their time. Vincenzo Montella, the ACF Fiorentina coach, suggested that this “winning spirit” was ultimately “decisive” in the Andalusian side’s triumph. “You could see a different attitude in the individual players in these two teams,” he said. “The team won who were convinced they would win.” When you factor in the impression that they seemed the happier of the two sides to get to penalties in the first place – having ridden their luck at times – it is perhaps no surprise they had the greater conviction when it mattered, curse or no curse.

What is clear from Sevilla’s success is that Emery’s approach serves a purpose; if his passion sets the tone, in a noise-filled stadium, his gestures are an effective means of transmitting his message. Ginés Meléndez, who knows Emery well, explained: “Normally a player cannot hear the coach’s instructions but he can see his gestures. He can see the gestures even from a distance – whether the coach is raising a hand, whether he is signalling two or one. Although he doesn’t hear, he usually understands what is being said.”

Emery’s opposite number in the Turin final, Jorge Jesus, is of a different generation, but he did not leave his technical area throughout the contest either. Indeed, the spectacle that pair provided hinted at how the game has evolved for coaches since the days when Bob Paisley, who guided Liverpool FC to three European Champion Clubs’ Cup triumphs, used his bricklaying skills to build a new dugout at Anfield. It is hard to imagine Emery doing the same. That, of course, was long before 1994 when the technical area was introduced into the Laws of the Game, and 20 years on from that milestone, coaches today are increasingly active in their designated part of the touch line. A good number seem to spend at least half of their team’s games on their feet.

Of course, different coaches take different approaches; some will prefer to watch at least part of a match from a higher vantage point in the stand. According to Thomas Schaaf, the most important thing is that a coach is consistent. In the case of Emery, for instance, his players are accustomed to seeing an animated touch line presence so his absence would be felt should he suddenly alter his style. “If you do it again and again, they get used to it and then follow,” Schaaf noted. “It is his personality, his style, and he’s very successful with this. There are different coaches, coaches who are quiet and only talk in a few sentences, giving a little information. It depends on the personality. We are such a big group of people and everyone must know how they want to work.”

TALKING POINTS

Coping with pressure, communicating from the touch line and the pitfalls facing late arrivals

UNAI EMERY AND JORGE JESUS

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No guarantees for late arrivals

In the five-year history of the UEFA Europa League, there have been two winning teams – Club Atlético de Madrid in 2010 and Chelsea FC in 2013 – who began the season playing in the UEFA Champions League. One intriguing plot of the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League was Juventus’s quest to become the third team to triumph in the competition after transferring from the UEFA Champions League – and teams entering the midway stage after all, they arrive nursing the psychological wounds of defeat in another competition and must find fresh focus.

In his case he could motivate his players with the exciting prospect of playing a major European final on home soil.

No guarantees for late arrivals

Sir Alex Ferguson expanded on the pitfalls for sides stepping into the UEFA Europa League with the example of his Manchester United FC team in 2011/12. That season United were taken aback by the quality of the Athletic Club side that eliminated them in the round of 16. “We got surprised by the energy of Bilbao,” Sir Alex said. It is a reminder of the quality in the UEFA Europa League – and teams entering from the UEFA Champions League should be wary. There have now been three winners in five years who kicked off in the competition the previous summer – Porto in 2011, Atlético in 2012 and Sevilla – though it is also worth noting that this means a long campaign for these teams. Whereas Spain’s two 2014 UEFA Champions League finalists played 12 times to get to the Lisbon showpiece, Sevilla (as Atlético had done in 2012) had to play 18 games en route to the final in Turin, starting off in the third qualifying round back on 1 August.

For the coach, a sustained sequence of combining Thursday night UEFA Europa League fixtures and weekend league football poses challenges in terms of planning training sessions and, above all, ensuring the players have adequate rest-and-recovery time. There is another question raising concerns among coaches, too: to what extent can and should squads be rotated in a competition in which the growing quality imposes mental and physical demands on players who sometimes have fewer ‘air miles’ in continental football!

Analysis

No guarantees for late arrivals

Statistics

Fouls and cards

The 205 matches of the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League campaign produced 875 yellow cards at a ratio of 4.27 per game. There were 57 red cards shown at an average of 0.28 although that ratio rose in the case of German Bundesliga club SC Freiburg, who recorded four dismissals in six group fixtures – including two for Karm Guédé, sent off on each of his two appearances.

Of the 16 featured teams, Sevilla FC and Benfica were the team with the lowest card ratio (3.07 and 2.96 respectively) but still had to get to the Lisbon showpiece, Sevilla (as Porto did) taking a player dismissed in each of their six knockout games and finished among the top four in the table for average fouls committed per game, surpassed only by SL Benfica, FC Porto and FC Viktoria Plzeň, who showed the biggest discrepancy between fouls committed (17.75) and suffered (8.93).

Offsides

Looking at the offside statistics, there seems to be a clear link between FC Salzburg’s preference for pressing high inside the opposition half and the fact that they were the team who posted the most offsides per match (4.2 on average) in the entire competition, followed by Juventus (4.13). The team who stayed offside the least were FC Porto (0.67). Of the 16 featured teams, Benfica came out on top for catching opponents offside – their average of 4.56 per match offering another illustration of their superbly defied discipline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Matches</th>
<th>Average fouls committed*</th>
<th>Average fouls suffered*</th>
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<td>11.9</td>
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*Average per match

Offsides (round of 16 teams)

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<th>Caught opponents offside*</th>
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*Per match

Final referee Felix Brych
Finalists Sevilla and Benfica provided half of the players chosen for the 2013/14 UEFA Europa League squad of the season. The dust was still settling on a tense final in Turin when UEFA’s technical observers sat down the morning after to select their UEFA Europa League squad of the season. This was an opportunity to assess which players had made the most noteworthy contributions and, given the wish to recognize those who had enjoyed long and successful campaigns in the competition, it was no surprise that players from the two finalists, Sevilla FC and SL Benfica, should end up featuring heavily.

With Sevilla’s stubborn defensive effort still fresh in the mind, goalkeeper Beto – their penalty shoot-out hero – and defender Nicolás Pareja simply could not be ignored, for example. The sense that Benfica were, to a certain extent, unlucky losers was reflected by the presence of five players from the Eagles’ squad on the list, making them the best represented team. One Benfica player included, Lazar Marković, missed the final through suspension, but his eye-catching speed and technical ability on the flanks in earlier ties ensured his place. One consequence of a campaign featuring semi-finalists from Spain, Portugal and Italy was that just one player featured from a club outside that bloc of Latin nations. This was the tournament’s eight-goal top scorer, Jonatan Soriano of FC Salzburg; ironically, he too is a Spaniard.

Sevilla’s penalty shoot-out hero Beto and defender Nicolás Pareja simply could not be ignored. Ezequiel Garay was part of the meanest defence, with Benfica conceding just four times in nine matches at an average of .44 goals per game.

Ezequiel Garay was part of the meanest defence, with Benfica conceding just four times in nine matches at an average of .44 goals per game.

Goalkeepers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beto</th>
<th>Gianluigi Buffon</th>
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Defenders

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<tr>
<th>Eliaquim Mangala</th>
<th>Ezequiel Garay</th>
<th>Leonardo Bonucci</th>
<th>Nicolás Pareja</th>
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Midfielders

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Andrea Pirlo</th>
<th>Borja Valero</th>
<th>Ivan Rakitić</th>
<th>Stéphane Mbia</th>
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Attackers

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<tr>
<th>Carlos Tévez</th>
<th>Gonzalo Higuaín</th>
<th>Jonatan Soriano</th>
<th>Rodrigo</th>
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Midfielders

70.6 minutes per goal for top scorer Jonatan Soriano, who scored in five of the seven matches he played for Salzburg.
## Group stage

**Tottenham's Brad Friedel became the oldest player to compete in the UEFA Europa League aged 42 years and 173 days.**

### Group A

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<thead>
<tr>
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Tottenham Hotspur FC's lead scorer in the UEFA Europa League was Harry Kane, scoring 12 goals in 15 appearances. He was also named the tournament's Best Player. The Europa League Cup Final was played at the Friends Arena in Stockholm, Sweden. The match took place on 26 May 2017.

PSV, Rubin and Ajax are the only teams to have appeared in all five UEFA Europa League campaigns.
Only four sides have won the UEFA Cup/UEFA Europa League three times: Sevilla, Juventus, FC Internazionale Milano and Liverpool FC.
Team profiles (last 16)

**FC Anji Makhachkala**  
Russia

**AZ Alkmaar**  
Netherlands

---

**FC Anji Makhachkala**

**Head coach:**  
Gadzhid Gadzhiev  
Born: 26/10/1960,  
Wassypur (India)  
Nationality: Russian  
Matches in UEFA Europe League/Uefa Cup: 11  
Matches in European club competition: **11**  
Head coach since: 01/06/2013

**Key features:**
- 4-4-2 but also played 5-3-2  
- Quick defense to attack transition away, more patient build up play  
- Strong dribbling skills from Smolov  
- Incite long-range passing and set-piece goals from Alexey, from both flanks

**Statistics**

**Players used:** 27  
**Goals scored:** 6

**Goal attempts:** 88 (27 on target) — 8.2 (2.7) per game

---

**AZ Alkmaar**

**Head coach:**  
Dick Advocaat  
Born: 27/08/1947,  
The Hague (NED)  
Nationality: Dutch  
Matches in UEFA Europe League/Uefa Cup: 15  
Matches in European club competition: **15**  
Head coach since: 16/10/2013

**Key features:**
- 4-3-3 in classic Dutch formation, switching to A-5-1 when defending  
- Compact defensive structure; nine-man block when defending  
- Support from goalkeeper Esteban, covering space behind  
- Attacking variety, combining build-up through midfield with long passes to front

**Statistics**

**Players used:** 26  
**Goals scored:** 11

**Goal attempts:** 112 (32 on target) — 8.9 (3.4) per game

---

**Team shape**

**FC Anji Makhachkala**

**Goalkeepers**
1. Evgeni Romazanov  
2. Mikhail Karakalin  
27. Mikhail Zhikharev

**Defenders**
2. Andrei Eshchenko  
3. Ali Gadzhiev  
4. Benoit Angbwa  
5. Gasjukov  
6. Aleksandr Esmanov  
7. Karim Abugarev  
13. Idir Togt"oboev  
15. Yudson Derecho  
26. Artyom Akseyev  
37. Evgeny Sosnov

**Midfielders**
8. Yuzhikov  
10. Alin Grez  
16. Karlen Mkrtchyan  
28. Adil Ahmedov  
33. Vardan Derbodon  
36. Maksimov  
88. Oleg Ionov

**Forwards**
14. Pavel Solomin  
19. Lucio Tonzani  
28. Serdar Senerbo  
30. Aleksandr Balashov  
61. Nikita Burenkov  
81. Yggdshald  
89. Fedor Smolov  
99. Islamber Alekboev

**AZ Alkmaar**

**Goalkeepers**
1. Esteban  
16. Thom Merlet

**Defenders**
2. Marin Johansson  
3. Dirk Marcellis  
4. Nick Vlaar  
5. Danny Gorter  
6. Etienne Reijn  
7. Simon Poulsen  
22. Thordur Jonsson  
29. Jan Wouters  
30. Roland Maanen  
34. Wesley Hoedt

**Midfielders**
8. Nemanja Gudelj  
11. Maarten Martens  
12. Viktor Elm  
19. Marco Henriksen  
26. Calvin Ozturk  
31. Jon van Oschem  
33. Thom Huyse  
36. Dalcrey Sousa

**Forwards**
7. Johan Gudmandsen  
10. Willem Daems  
20. Anton Johansson  
22. Steven Berghuis  
23. Roy Beerens  
40. Fernando Lezún  
44. Dennis Aduo

---

**Substitutions**

**FC Anji Makhachkala**

28/30

**AZ Alkmaar**

23/36

---

**Players in the starting XI:**
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 1-2-3-4-5  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 1-2-3-4-5  
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 1-2-3-4-5  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 1-2-3-4-5  
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 1-2-3-4-5  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 1-2-3-4-5

**Minutes:**
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 0:45  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 0:30  
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 0:35  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 0:35  
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 0:35  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 0:35

**Goals:**
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 1  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 2  
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 1  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 1  
- **FC Anji Makhachkala:** 1  
- **AZ Alkmaar:** 1

---

**Passing accuracy**

**FC Anji Makhachkala:** 76%  
**AZ Alkmaar:** 78%
## TEAM SHAPE

### SL Benfica

**Goalkeepers**
- 1 Altair
- 13 Lopes
- 41 Jan Oblak

**Defenders**
- 23 Stephen García
- 14 Maxi Pereira
- 21 Nemanja Matić
- 10 Filip Djurić
- 2 Marek Suchý
- 15 Batchkov
- 29 Nacer Al-Jaziri
- 7 Simon Donké

**Midfielders**
- 5 Ljubomir Fejsa
- 6 Ruben Amorim
- 8 Miralem Sulejmani
- 11 Filip Quaresma
- 12 Eduardo Tavares
- 15 Ola John
- 65 Enzo Pérez

**Forwards**
- 36 Breel Embolo
- 33 Jardel
- 16 Guilherme Siqueira
- 90 Ivan Cavaleiro
- 20 Nicolás Gaitán
- 50 Lazar Marković
- 35 Enzo Pérez

### FC Basel

**Goalkeepers**
- 1 Yann Sommer
- 23 Manuel Neuer
- 41 Jan Oblak

**Defenders**
- 1 Yann Sommer
- 23 Manuel Neuer
- 6 Yann Sommer
- 41 Jan Oblak

**Midfielders**
- 5 Mohamed Elneny
- 25 Marek Suchý
- 15 Kay Voser
- 13 Ivan Ivanov

**Forwards**
- 36 Breel Embolo
- 25 Marek Suchý
- 15 Kay Voser
- 13 Ivan Ivanov

## AVERAGES

### FC Basel

- **Minutes Used**: 1183 (120%)
- **Goals Scored**: 13

### SL Benfica

- **Minutes Used**: 1200 (120%)
- **Goals Scored**: 22

## KEY FEATURES

### FC Basel

- **DefensiveIng**: Quick, clever transitions to attack
- **DefensiveIng**: Combination of man-marking and zonal marking for set pieces
- **DefensiveIng**: Strong in air

### SL Benfica

- **DefensiveIng**: Ruthless in attack
- **DefensiveIng**: Strong in air
- **DefensiveIng**: Strong in air

## COACH

### FC Basel

- **Murat Yakin**
  - **Born**: 15/09/1974
  - **Nationality**: Swiss
  - **Matches in UEFA Europa League/UEFA Cup**: 18
  - **Matches in European club competition**: 29
  - **Head coach since**: 15/10/2012

### SL Benfica

- **Jorge Jesus**
  - **Born**: 24/07/1954
  - **Nationality**: Portuguese
  - **Matches in UEFA Europa League/UEFA Cup**: 64
  - **Matches in European club competition**: 20
  - **Head coach since**: 08/04/2019

## TEAM SHAPE

### SL Benfica

**Goalkeepers**
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- 15 Kay Voser
- 13 Ivan Ivanov

**Forwards**
- 36 Breel Embolo
- 25 Marek Suchý
- 15 Kay Voser
- 13 Ivan Ivanov

## KEY FEATURES

### FC Basel

- **4-4-2 and 4-3-3**, also played
- **Tactical flexibility**, with regular
- **Compact defence in away games**, sitting deep
- **Good support for defenders from goalkeeper Sommer**

### SL Benfica

- **4-4-2 at home**, with variations
- **Tactical flexibility**, with regular
- **Compact defence in away games**, sitting deep
- **Good support for defenders from goalkeeper Sommer**

## STATISTICS

### FC Basel

- **Goal Attempts**: 106 (57 on target) = 8.8 (4.8) per game

### SL Benfica

- **Goal Attempts**: 154 (94 on target) = 10.3 (6.3) per game
Team profiles (last 16)

Real Betis Balompié  Spain

Key Features:

- 4-4-2, attacking to 6-2-4 when attacking
- Compact defence, playing a high line
- Organised organisation helped by influential goalkeeper Adán covering
- N'Doye athletic in midfield, covering ground to support defensive, aerial threat too
- Set piece variation from Reyes (inswinging, diagonal balls into box) and Sevila

Pressing game; seeking to put opposition under immediate pressure
Long-range shooting threat from Llorente
Counterattacking quality a valuable asset in away games
Ball into the end zones, notably with Fullback Viña
Impressive teamwork and commitment in first leg against Sevilla

Coaches:

Pepe Mel
Born: 20/03/1963,
Nationality: Spanish
Matches in UEFA European League/UEFA Cup: 0

Gabriel Calderón
Born: 07/01/1960,
Nationality: Argentine
Matches in UEFA European League/UEFA Cup: 5

Team shape:

**AVERAGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL ATTEMPTS</th>
<th>PLAYS</th>
<th>GOALS SCORED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113 (5 on target) = 11.3 (5) per game</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goalkeepers

1 Neri
25 Antonio Rosati
78 Gustavo Manica

Defenders

2 Gonzalo Rodríguez
24 Rubén Castro
30 Ryder Matos
19 Alessandro Matri
22 Cedrick
17 Juan Carlos
9 Álvaro Vadillo

Midfielders

18 Markus Steinhöfer
37 Axel Gulin
30 Ryder Matos
14 Matías Fernández
13 Paulão
12 Dídac Vilà
92 Léo Baptistão
24 Rubén Castro

Forwards

8 Marko Bakić
7 David Pizarro
23 Manuel Ambrosini
36 Caro
7 Álvaro Vadillo
15 Damien Perquis
78 Gustavo Munúa
20 Nosa

Statistics

**GOAL ATTEMPTS**

- Total: 113
- 5 on target

**GOALS SCORED**

- 8

**AVERAGES**

- Goals per game: 11.3

Real Betis Balompié

Spain

ACF Fiorentina  Italy

Key Features:

- 4-4-2, changed to 4-1-4-1 for second leg against Juventus
- Presso at base of midfield, diamond, collecting and distributing ball
- Talented individuals in defence, Rodriguez and Keita at centre-back
- Constructive use of ball by goalkeeper Neto, long ball only as last resort
- Compact in defence; combine midfield and attack
- Well organised defending set pieces, strong in the air
- Attacking with width, fullbacks (Borja, Tommasi) getting forward
- Mobile front two supported by influential Valero linking midfield and attack

Coaches:

Vincenzo Montella
Born: 10/06/1974,
Nationality: Italian
Matches in UEFA European League/UEFA Cup: 0

Team shape:

**AVERAGES**

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>114 (5 on target) = 11.4 (5) per game</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goalkeepers

1 Neto
25 Andrea Consoli
78 Gianluca Busato

Defenders

2 Gonzalo Rodríguez
24 Rubén Castro
20 Nosa
14 Matías Fernández
17 Joaquín
37 Axel Gulin
37 Albert Aguinaga
12 Dídac Vilà
12 Stephan Andersen

Midfielders

18 Markus Steinhöfer
24 Rubén Castro
19 Jorge Molina
14 Matías Fernández
6 Xavi Torres
3 Marcos Alonso
13 Paulão
12 Dídac Vilà

Forwards

7 Álvaro Vadillo
23 Rubén Castro
19 Alessandro Matri
20 Nosa
14 Matías Fernández
17 Joaquín
37 Axel Gulin
37 Albert Aguinaga
12 Dídac Vilà
12 Stephan Andersen

Statistics

**GOAL ATTEMPTS**

- Total: 114
- 5 on target

**GOALS SCORED**

- 17

**AVERAGES**

- Goals per game: 11.4

ACF Fiorentina

Italy

For further information, visit the official websites of Real Betis Balompié (http://www.realbetisbalompie.com) and ACF Fiorentina (http://www.acfiorentina.it).
**PFC Ludogorets Razgrad**

**Team profiles (last 16)**

**Juventus**

**Italy**

**Team shape**

- Fluctuation 3-5-2, wing-backs make
- Vast experience down spine
- REAL width in attack; right-back
- Strong motivation to do well
- Good ball possession; plenty of
- Excellent passing game
- Key role for wing-backs
- 4-2-3-1, switched to 3-2-3-2 when
- Compact defence; two centre-
- 3G-1, back three
- KEY FEATURES

**COACH**

- Antonio Conte
  - Born: 31/07/1960,
  - Born: 15/08/1962,
  - Match in European
  - 11/16/2013,

**STASTICS**

- Goal attempts: 219 (121 on target) = 15.6 (8.6) per game
- Goalkeepers
  - Goalkeepers
  - Defenders
  - Forwards

**COACH**

- Stoicho Stoev
  - Born: 15/08/1962,
  - Born: 15/08/1962,
**Olympique Lyonnais**

**France**

**TEAM SHAPE**

- **Formation:** 2-4-4-2
- **Key Features:**
  - 4-4-2 with diamond switch to 4-5-1 when defending
  - Influential goalkeeper in Lopes
  - Full-backs pushing high
  - Intelligent Gonzales supporting centre-backs as deep-lying midfielder
  - Pressing game in midfield, swift transitions in attack
  - Players able to run with ball, speed to break behind defences
  - Malbranque influential with passing and ability to find space

**COACH**

- Rémi Garde
- Born: 30/04/1966, Marseille (FRA)
- Nationality: French
- Matches in UEFA Europa League/UEFA Cup: 20
- Matches in European club competition:** 32
- In head coach since: 23/06/2011

**AVERAGES**

- **Goalkeeping:**
  - Passing accuracy: 80%
  - Passes attempted: 435

- **Midfielders:**
  - Possession: 52%
  - Passing accuracy: 80%
  - Passes per game: 47 (11% of total)

- **Forwards:**
  - Goals scored: 13

**STATISTICS**

- **Players Used:** 28
- **Goals Scored:** 13

**GOAL ATTEMPTS**

- 115 (64 on target) = 9.6 (5) per game

**TIME SCORED**

- 1-15: 0-0
- 16-30: 0-0
- 31-45: 0-0
- 45+: 0-0

**SUBSTITUTIONS**

- 33/36

**KEY FEATURES**

- 4-4-2 with diamond switch to 4-5-1 when defending
- Influential goalkeeper in Lopes
- Full-backs pushing high
- Intelligent Gonzales supporting centre-backs as deep-lying midfielder
- Pressing game in midfield, swift transitions in attack
- Players able to run with ball, speed to break behind defences
- Malbranque influential with passing and ability to find space
- Against Javanos, Malbranque at tip of diamond limited Lopes’ space
- Dangerous from set pieces

**COACH**

- Rémi Garde
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- Matches in European club competition:** 32
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**TEAM SHAPE**

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  - 4-4-2 with diamond switch to 4-5-1 when defending
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  - 4-4-2 with diamond switch to 4-5-1 when defending
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  - Dangerous from set pieces

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- Matches in UEFA Europa League/UEFA Cup: 20
- Matches in European club competition:** 32
- In head coach since: 23/06/2011
FC Viktoria Plzeň  Czech Republic

KEY FEATURES
• Attacking threat from players coming from full-backs (Hubník), wide midfielders (Petržela)
• Impressive use of width; full-backs pushing forward in attack, creating threat
• High defensive line with goalkeeper, allowing partners to support attack (Danilo)
• Midfield pressing; apply immediate pressure after losing ball
• Storage and turnover of possession with good movement and support in attack

TEAM SHAPE
Long 34 (10% of total)
Short 309 (90%)

TEAM SHAPE
Long 309 (90%)
Short 7 (2%)}

FC Porto  Portugal

KEY FEATURES
• Influence of deep midfielder; Martinez, variety and timing of passes
• Midfield passing; apply immediate pressure after losing ball
• Impressive use of width; full-backs supporting attack (Danilo)
• Attacking threat from players coming from wide areas
• Queiroz’s source of danger with dribbling, set-piece crossing and shooting

COACHES
Pavel Vrba
Born: 06/13/1963, Prague (CZE)
Nationality: Czech
Matches in UEFA Europe League/UEFA Cup*: 14
Matches in European club competitions* 14
Head coach from: 07/10/2006 to 10/12/2013

Dušan Uhrin Jr.
Born: 11/10/1967, Prešov (SVK)
Nationality: Czech
Matches in UEFA Europe League/UEFA Cup*: 15
Matches in European club competitions* 15
Head coach from: 11/1/2013

Paulo Fonseca
Born: 05/01/1973, Mação (POR)
Nationality: Portuguese
Matches in UEFA Europe League/UEFA Cup*: 14
Matches in European club competitions* 14
Head coach from: 05/06/2013

Luis Castro
Born: 05/07/1961, Vilafranca (POR)
Nationality: Portuguese
Matches in UEFA Europe League/UEFA Cup*: 28
Matches in European club competitions* 28
Head coach from: 05/03/2014
Team profiles (last 16)

**FC Salzburg**

**FC Salzburg**

**Team shape**

- **Team shape**
  - **Goals scored**:
  - **Goals attempted**:
  - **Stats**
  - **Players used**:
  - **Squad list**

**Sevilla FC**

**Sevilla FC**

**Team shape**

- **Team shape**
  - **Goals scored**:
  - **Goals attempted**:
  - **Stats**
  - **Players used**:
  - **Squad list**

**Key features**

- **Key features**
  - **Nationality**: German
  - **Minutes played**: 168 in the group stage
  - **Squad**: 21
  - **Nationality**: Spanish
  - **Minutes played**: 160 in the group stage
  - **Squad**: 25

**Statistics**

- **Statistics**
  - **Shoot out attempts**: 3
  - **Goals scored**: 22
  - **Goals attempted**: 146
  - **Shoot out ratio**: 22

**Coach**

- **Coach**: Roger Schmidt
  - **Born**: 1/01/1967
  - **Nationality**: German

- **Coach**: Unai Emery
  - **Born**: 01/11/1977
  - **Nationality**: Spanish
**Tottenham Hotspur FC**

**England**

### Team Profiles (Last 16)

#### Key Features
- Effective use of full-backs; Naughton
- Back four with good zonal defending
- Constructive build-up play

#### Key Features
- High pressing; immediate pressure on opponent after losing ball
- Aeriel strength of Mathieu
- Midfielders coming from deeper
- Team shape

#### Team Shape

#### Coaches

<table>
<thead>
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**Valencia CF**

**Spain**

### Team Profiles (Last 16)

#### Key Features
- Goals from midfielders such as Chadli;
- Eriksen a key threat from set pieces;
- Lennon, cut infield or go wide

#### Key Features
- 4-4-2, morphing into 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3 away from home;
- Rapid transition from defence to attack;
- Full-backs (Bermúdez) combine well with wingers, creating space to bend for pages;
- Good at set plays in both boxes;
- Aerial strength of Mathieu
- High pressing: immediate pressure on opponent after losing ball

#### Team Shape

#### Coaches

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