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Leroy Sane: Where did it go wrong at Man City?

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Leroy Sane tore his cruciate knee ligament just 13 minutes into the Community Shield win over Liverpool in August 2019

By Simon Stone

BBC Sport

It says a lot about the cooling of relations between Manchester City and Leroy Sane that the winger has been allowed to join Bayern Munich now, even though Pep Guardiola's side still have at least 10 matches to play - and the prospect of winning the Champions League for the first time remains in sight.

A move to Bayern was on the cards last summer, only for Sane to suffer a serious knee injury during the Community Shield which ruled him out for 10 months and scuppered hopes of a transfer.

But Sane's desire to return to Germany didn't diminish. Faced with the prospect of a player it was suggested they wanted £140m for 12 months ago leaving for nothing when his contract expired in a year's time, City have negotiated what they believe is a good £54.8m deal, given the 24-year-old's recovery is yet to be properly tested.

Nevertheless, it is a disappointing end to a City career that appeared to be on the verge of great things as Sane was crowned PFA Young Player of the Year in 2018.

It would be easy to conclude his Etihad Stadium career hit the buffers in the summer of 2018.

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Sane's goal beat Liverpool in January 2019 - the Reds' only Premier League defeat of the season which would be pivotal in the title race

Sane was shocked to be left out of Joachim Low's Germany World Cup squad - a move that baffled those who had seen him contribute 10 goals and 15

assists to a record-breaking season, in which Guardiola's side became the first to reach 100 points in an English top-flight season.

But given the chance to offer his public support for the player in the USA at the start of a pre-season tour, Guardiola chose a different approach.

"Jogi decided what was best and I respect the decisions of the manager," he said. "For Leroy, this decision may make him stronger. He has to improve his game and keep to the levels he showed last season."

To mark that moment as the beginning of the end, though, would be wrong. The City boss carried on picking Sane for most of the 2018-19 campaign - on 3 January, Sane scored the winner against Liverpool.

Guardiola's assessment in Chicago was only in keeping with the tough-love approach he employed with the laid-back Sane almost from the moment the pair came together in 2016, following his £37m move from Schalke when he was just 20.

In January 2017, Guardiola delivered what was described as a "brutal" dressing down to Sane after he had attended a New Year's Eve party and turned up late for training the following day.

At the start of the 2018-19 season, Guardiola spoke to the German privately about his behaviour at training. In an interview for the book *Pep's City*, for which he provides a credit, Guardiola said of Sane: "It's about his mental attitude. If he wants to keep improving, if he wants everyone to see how much he has progressed, then first he has to accept there is room for improvement and apply himself. Then he will be a better player. He has got the talent."

Multiple sources at City have stressed there was no big issue with Sane; that there is no technical problem that needed to be addressed, nor a problem with the player's attitude. Neither, it is being stressed, was anyone forcing him out of the club.

LEROY SANE

GAMES	90
GOALS	25
ASSISTS	28
WINS	68
DEFEATS	9



| All stats PL games only

However, the statistics around Sane tell an interesting story.

Of the wide players put forward as alternatives to the German - Bernardo Silva, Raheem Sterling, Riyad Mahrez and Phil Foden - all like to start wide and cut in.

Sane is left-footed and more direct on the left wing. He has only started in the same team as left-back Benjamin Mendy five times in three seasons. On three of those occasions, Sterling, who tends to start on the left, was also picked.

So Mendy, who has suffered so much with injury, and Sane have only been paired together on the left twice. Does that suggest there is something about the partnership Guardiola didn't quite trust?

Whatever the reason, after the March 2019 international break, Sane's game time was reduced. In 12 matches to the end of the season, he started just three and played no part at all in three.

It is against that backdrop that Bayern were circling as Sane stalled on a new contract City felt confident at one stage the player would sign.

Last week, Guardiola confirmed the player wanted to leave, a point he reiterated on Wednesday, saying: "Everyone has his own life. I would love him to stay here but he believes he will be happier.

"I wish him all the best. I give him a big thanks for our years together."

And now Bayern have come forward with a package that over the five years of his contract will net Sane £100m.

The Bundesliga champions are pushing the boat out for a German player who will instantly become one of the key components of their squad.

At City, that status was simply not on offer.

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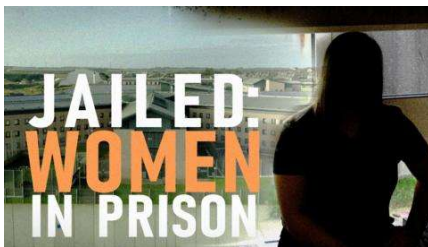
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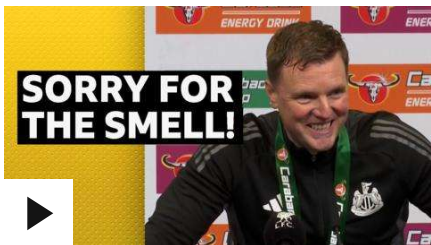
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