

# A Universal Guide to Fantasy Premier League (FPL)

by FPL Brain (@FPLBrain)

This guide is aimed at both FPL beginners (Part 1) looking to get a better understanding of the game and at intermediate managers (Part 2) looking to improve their skills and Overall Rank (OR) further. I think the basics in Part 1 will act as a useful refresher for managers who have played before, but if you want to skip straight to the more advanced, in-depth FPL discussion in Part 2 then you can jump to page 9.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

# FPL Brain's A Universal Guide to Fantasy Premier League (FPL)



## INTRODUCTION

Firstly – thank you very much for requesting and/or reading my guide!

I am not claiming to be an authority on FPL or even an expert, but for what it's worth here's a quick background on me. I have been watching and playing football for 30 years, including captaining / managing teams at a recreational level. I have a background in finance with lots of emphasis on quantitative methods (stats) along with a good knowledge of behavioural science, and my profession involves some useful overlaps with respect to research, data and portfolio management.

I have long been obsessed with fantasy sports, but FPL only became a serious focus 3 seasons ago - I wish I had made the switch earlier so that I might have one of those long and impressive track records people like to show off on FPL Twitter! Since getting serious about FPL I have had ORs of 224k (a terrible captaincy year!), 28k and 16k since. I hope to notch my first 10k finish in the coming season and my long-term goal is to eventually make the top 1k. Prior to these last few seasons I was focused primarily on Telegraph Fantasy Football (2x top 500 finishes) and then on US fantasy sports. I have always been in competitive mini leagues for cash in whatever my main game was at the time and done very nicely.

I have a young family and free time is a very scarce resource these days, so I won't be supporting every suggestion with the relevant psychological study or stat table etc (I will endeavour to expand the guide in this way over time). However I've obsessively consumed a huge amount of relevant research in various forms over the years, and I wanted to try and distill some of that (in addition to my own experience) into this guide to help others do better at FPL and enjoy it more in the process.

I hope you enjoy the guide and good luck for the 2020/21 season!

### FPL Brain





## PART 1 – BEGINNER'S GUIDE

### THE BASICS

**Squad and budget:** You have a squad of 15 players to select – 2 GKs, 5 defenders, 5 midfielders, 3 forwards. In each of the season's 38 gameweeks (GWs) you will select 11 players to start, with the other 4 remaining on the bench unless starters do not feature (in which case players will be auto-subbed in depending on the order you've selected them in).

**Formation:** Your starting formation must include 1 GK but otherwise is quite flexible (3-5 defs, 2-5 mids, 1-3 fws). 3-4-3 is the most used formation but any formation can potentially be used successfully, including a 'big at the back' approach heavy on strong defensive asset, or by going for a 'power midfield' with a 3-5-2 or 4-5-1 lineup.

**Scoring:** The FPL scoring system is quite nuanced so it's best to carefully review the scoring page of the FPL help, but essentially your outfield players are primarily rewarded for goals, assists and cleansheets (defs and mids only), while your goalkeeper is primarily rewarded for cleansheets, saves and penalty saves. Forwards get 4 pts for a goal, mids get 5, defs get 6, everyone gets 3 for an assist. Players may also receive 1-3 bonus points if they perform very well.

**Captains & VCs:** Each week you will also select your captain and vice-captain (VC). This is very important as your captain scores double points and will usually be a major factor in how your team performs in a given GW. Typically it's best to stick with one of the very expensive, elite players such as Salah, Mane, de Bruyne, Sterling and now Fernandes, but that's your call and sometimes a less elite player can be a good option if the fixture and form are compelling enough.

It is rarely a factor in practice, but you may want to make sure your captain and VC are not playing in the same fixture, just in case of a surprise postponement or similar, especially in the covid-19 era.

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**Transfers:** Each GW you will be given one free transfer (FT) to use in order to make changes to your squad. These accumulate if not used but only up to a maximum of 2 FTs. If you wish to make additional transfers beyond your allotment of FTs then each additional move will cost you a 4 point deduction.

**Chips:** You also have some other weapons at your disposal – 2 Wildcards, a Bench Boost, a Free Hit and a Triple Captain chip. Only one of these can be used in each GW. These chips are very valuable and you should give a lot of consideration as to when is best to use them. Timely and successful use of chips can add substantially to your overall points return and make all the difference to your overall rank.

**Wildcards (WCs):** Wildcards essentially give you the opportunity to completely re-design your squad (subject only to your budget at the time used), and as such are the most valuable chips you have. Your 1<sup>st</sup> WC can be used only in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the season and the 2<sup>nd</sup> WC only in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. A lot of managers use their 1<sup>st</sup> WC in GWs 3-7 once they have seen the lay of the land of the new season. Others whose teams are still in good shape may wait closer to the halfway point to freshen things up.

2nd WCs are typically best used to help capitalize on / navigate smoothly around double GWs (DGWs – 2+ teams play twice in one GW) and blank GWs (BGWs – 2+ teams don't play) late in the season.

**Bench Boost (BB):** When you choose to deploy your Bench Boost, all 15 of your squad will be active and contribute to your points total, so the idea is to use this in a GW where your whole squad is fit, expected to start and ideally has a good fixture (or preferably 2 fixtures). Experienced managers often try to use this in a DGW so that it is possible to get up to 8 games played by bench players.

**Free Hit (FH):** A Free Hit is like a WC that works temporarily for 1 GW before your squad reverts to how it was previously. Again, these are particularly useful when used to help capitalize on / navigate around DGWs and BGWs. For instance, in a GW with only 5 fixtures, 10 teams playing, you can change your team to target the best players from that limited pool.

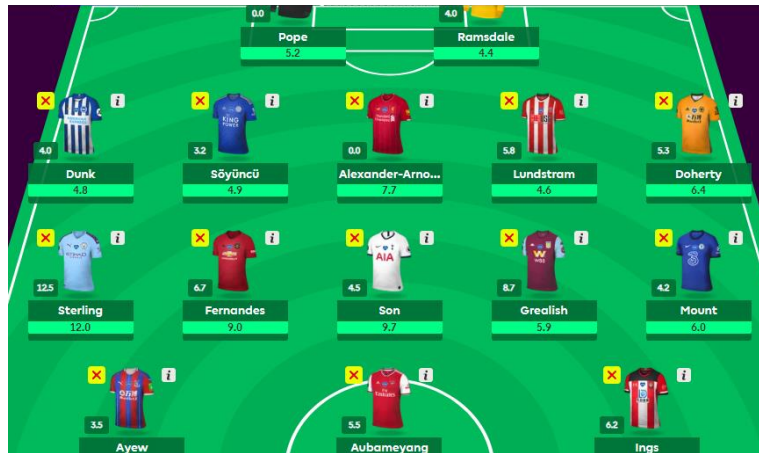
**Triple Captain (TC):** The TC chip gives your captain 3x points for the week instead of 2x. Obviously you want to save this for a particularly enticing fixture or fixtures, with the TC chip often preserved for a DGW. This can obviously still go wrong (see Sane-gate 18/19, Mane-gate 19/20 and the Duffy-dud of 18/19). But as with BB usage, in addition to simply having 'two cracks at the coconut', that's also a slightly larger sample and so should also reduce the variance (luck) factor slightly versus a single GW.

**Overall Rank (OR):** Your team's cumulative score across the season results in your overall rank, your position versus every other team in the game. Last season there were over 7m teams, and estimates vary but of those perhaps 2-3m remain active across the whole season. This shouldn't be applied to managers playing more casually, but for a rough gauge of OR for experienced managers - finishing in the top 250k is considered to be an okay season, top 100k is a good season, top 50k is very good, top 10k is a great season and top 1k is a fantastic achievement.

**Mini Leagues (ML):** While only a select few managers will ever win the overall game, most of us compete in several mini leagues (MLs) against friends, family and wider groups within the FPL community. You can set up your own ML or join existing ones (once the season starts) – you'll need the league name and code for the latter. This is a really fun way to compete in smaller groups for prestige, bragging rights and sometimes cash prizes (this must be set up by the ML organisers outside of the official game).



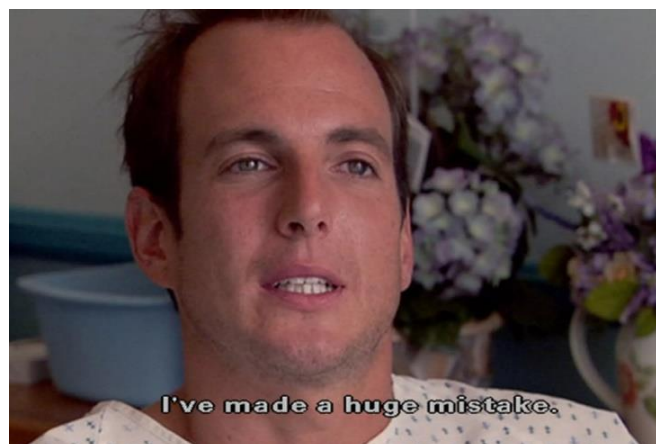
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### YOUR SQUAD

**Squad Selection:** Squad selection, initially and on WCs is probably my favourite part of the game – the feeling of a blank slate, a shiny new team with the potential to be the best possible combination of players. Tinkering away trying to find an optimal setup is pure gold as far as I'm concerned.

Unfortunately, it is not as simple as just identifying and picking all the best players – those are never going to fit within your 100m budget. You'll be able to select maybe 5 or 6 of the best players and then you'll need to combine them with some mid-priced players and cheap 'enablers' to fit the budget. There is no 'one size fits all' approach, but below are some guidelines to putting a robust, competitive squad together so that you're not full of regret after 2 or 3 GWs.



**Value vs Upside:** GKs and defenders consistently offer the strongest value in terms of pts/£, followed by midfielders, followed by forwards. The implications of this are less clear than might be immediately obvious. If you focus only on the best value players then you will not use your whole budget. If you use it all but with an emphasis on defence (perhaps in a 5-4-1) then you'll typically have either a weak or expensive bench and perhaps a lack of strong captaincy options. What you're really looking for is a squad that combines value with upside (players with the highest pts ceiling irrespective of 'value'), and I would include a mixture of premium players and cheaper enablers in defence as well as in mid/fwd. Achieving a powerful balance of value and upside will produce a very competitive squad.

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**Long-term vs Near-term:** I would look to balance your squad circa 70/30 as far as picking reliable players for the long-term (potential 'season keepers') versus players with strong early fixtures. You could go closer to a 50/50 balance - because you'll often end up using a WC in GWs 3-7 anyway - but I think it's better to aim longer-term so that you're giving yourself the chance to hold onto your WC until closer to Christmas. That way you can then go into the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the season with a fresh, revitalized team.

**Captaincy options:** You want multiple compelling captain options (e.g. Salah, KDB, Auba) so that you have a strong captaincy fixture in most gameweeks, and as such you need more than one elite priced player. But on a pts/£ basis, very few of these players are actually good 'value' as such when they're not being captained (and hence their points being doubled), so you don't want too many of them early on when the budget is tight. 2 or at most 3 is usually a good amount to begin the season with.

**Goalkeepers:** Typically, one or more of the top-scoring GKs are cheap 4.5m options from less glamorous teams – it's usually a waste of funds to spend 5.5-6.0m here. This is because the added save points and bonus points the GKs of less strong teams tend to collect, often more than offset the (usually) higher cleansheet points from the premium options. If you find a GK that you're happy to start in any fixture, you can go 'set and forget' and only spend 4.0m on a non-playing backup for the bench. Another popular approach is to have two 4.5m GKs and to then rotate according to the easier fixture. This will obviously go against you sometimes, but plenty of managers have been able to use this approach successfully. I would not spend more than 9m on GKs as you need every possible penny for the outfield.

**'Price points'** – this is a beloved talking point of Fantasy Football Scout's Joe. The idea is that you want players at a good variety of different prices, essentially so that it's easier to switch to other players (in as few moves as possible) if changes are needed. You want most of your players to be at prices where there are multiple viable options in case a player needs replacing, and ideally to have a range of prices within each position category, again for added flexibility.

Taking into account the above advice, something along the lines of the following structure should make for a robust and flexible squad:

GKs	4.5-5.0m potential 'set & forget' e.g. Pope		4.0-4.5m bench / rotation GK		
DEFs	7.0-7.5m elite (e.g. Trent / Robbo)	6m premium (e.g. Doherty)	4.5-5.0m (rotation)	4.5m (rotation)	4.0m bench fodder
MIDs	12.5m elite (e.g. Salah)	9.5-11.0m premium	7.5-8.0m mid-priced	6.0-6.5m 'punt spot'	4.5m bench
FWDs	10.5-11m elite (e.g. Auba / Kane)		7.0-7.5m mid-priced	4.5-5.0m (rotation)	

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From that squad you have some flexibility to play 4-4-2, 3-4-3 or 3-5-2 depending on how your cheaper players begin the season, you have a wide range of price points including 2-3 players of captaincy quality and you're not wasting much money on the bench. You can then begin making upgrades to your squad as the best players and cheap enablers of the new season emerge.



### BANANA SKINS TO AVOID

In addition to the above basic guidelines, there are quite a few classic pitfalls in FPL that can trip up inexperienced managers, and in doing so discourage people from staying the course:

- **Don't miss deadlines!** Make at least a mental deadline of the next GW deadline and set your team and captain as soon as the new GW opens (in case you forget later)
- **Don't waste money on the bench** - it's good to have one capable bench player but you don't need three - in practice you'll rarely use more than your one best bench player
- **Avoid defensive midfielders** like the plague - they're simply not rewarded by FPL's scoring system given they usually lack attacking returns and only get 1 pt for a CS
- **Don't waste transfers on low impact players** – there can be a temptation to use transfers to fix or upgrade all fifteen members of the squad, but it is better to focus your moves on higher price, higher impact players
- **Don't be too biased** to the team you support or against teams / players you dislike in your squad selection - try to be as objective as possible
- **Stick with it!** If you have a few bad GWs early on, don't give up or start making 'fun picks' - it's rarely too late to turn things around and green arrows are more fun than wacky decisions that rarely work out



## PART 2 – WAYS TO IMPROVE

In this section we will look at ways in which managers can take their FPL skills to the next level and improve their ranks and hence mini league fortunes.



### DO YOUR RESEARCH

I know that not everyone is able to spend as many hours watching games, researching underlying stats, listening to podcasts, reading team articles and building spreadsheets as some of us diehard obsessives. But you do need to do a bit of research, otherwise your FPL approach is going to be some degree of 'garbage in, garbage out'. Fortunately, there have never been so many (largely free) excellent resources in this regard. Here are some of the best sources that I recommend you tap into on a regular basis, if you are not already:

- **Listen to FPL podcasts:** I would recommend listening to at least one (preferably several) of the many excellent FPL podcasts such as Fantasy Football Scout, FPL Surgery, Who Got the Assist?, Always Cheating, Planet FPL, The 59<sup>th</sup> Minute, FML FPL. As an FPL nutcase I listen to most of these every week, but there does tend to be quite a bit of overlap after a few, so if you can listen to 2 or 3 you should be well informed. There are lots of other great pods out there (too many to list them all) and new ones springing up all the time, so please give as many a chance as possible!
- **Look over the key stats** of the previous gameweek along with cumulative stats over the whole season and/or the last 6 games. These are readily available and nicely organised in the Fantasy Football Scout Members Area (which I like to use) and in various other places, some of them free to access.
- **Watch as many games as possible** - at least a few of the matches (or highlights of matches) more relevant to FPL / your team. I'm a big believer in the value of stats but 'the eye-test' is also very valuable, especially when used in conjunction with stats.
- **Learn a bit about expected goals (xG)**, assists (xA), goal involvement (xGI, which is xG plus xA) and goals conceded (xGC, more useful as a team stat) figures and keep an eye on these. Personally I believe this is some of the most powerful data you can follow, but it's important to know how to interpret and apply this info (which I think is why there's so much debate as to the merit of this info). You'll find a section on this later in the guide.

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- **Read some of the best weekly threads** and other content created by the FPL Twitter community. The quantity and quality of this content continues to grow month by month and the best pieces are on a par with professional content at this point. If you only have time for one then @BigManBakar's GW review thread is becoming legendary for good reason - it is somehow both concise and comprehensive, summarising so much of the key GW information in a 10 minute read.
- **Keep an eye on upcoming fixtures** for your players. As discussed elsewhere, we don't have enough FTs to have all our players in kind fixtures every GW, but if you have several players and/or expensive players heading into a nasty run coming then you may want to switch one or more of these to players with favourable fixture runs starting.
- **Scan through the press conference highlights** the day before a new GW in case of new injuries, doubts, etc. This won't save you from every nasty surprise, particularly as not every manager is too transparent (hello Eddie Howe), but it will help avoid some.
- **Check the bookies' odds** for goalscorers, cleansheets etc. for the upcoming GW. The bookies' have serious money at stake in getting these things right and hence apply significant resources in that regard, so take note of the odds. I think these are particularly useful when you have some defenders rotating for the 3rd or 4th starting spot and you're trying to decide between them.
- **Check major captaincy polls** which are available on Fantasy Football Scout, on Twitter, on various Slack channels, etc. You don't need to go with the favourite every time - he may not be in your team for one - but it's useful info, particularly if you may be overlooking someone that's going to be an extremely popular captain with effective ownership (more on this later) potentially over 100%

That might already seem like a lot of homework, but excluding watching the games (that's pleasure not work surely!) you can cover a lot of the above in maybe 2-3 hours a week, and you can hopefully fit podcasts into your commute, while walking the dog or somewhere in your life while you're also doing something else.

There is not really a shortcut for this research but if you are a very busy person and you still want to do well in FPL then I'd try to at least hit these marks at a minimum:

- 1 good podcast
- 10 mins on key stats including xG (look for volume more than over/underperformance)
- Read @BigManBakar's GW review thread – seriously it's that good
- Scan the press conference highlights

That is down to an hour or so now – and how can you expect to do anything well if you're not investing at least a little bit of time to keep informed and to learn and improve a little.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - You do need to do some research to be a competitive FPL manager, but if you are pushed for time an efficient hour or two per week can go a long way.



### TAKE A LONG-TERM APPROACH

An FPL season is a marathon not a sprint - 38 gameweeks spread typically across 9 months. We all enjoy immediate rewards and to be doing well at something right from the start, but it's important to take a long-term view with almost every decision in FPL. From building your initial squad, to the transfers you make (and choose not to make), how and when you use your Wildcards, FH and BB, there should always be an keen awareness on how these decisions will impact your squad and your performance over the long-term as well as in the near-term.

We must be especially careful to maintain this longer-term perspective when things go against us in the short term. If you have a bad GW (which may only be due to unfortunate negative variance) and your response is to 'fix' your team with short-sighted moves, you can quickly begin to build a psychological and points hole for yourself. For instance, if you make an impulsive double transfer for a -4, which in reality is a sideways move, you've essentially wasted a precious FT and 4 precious points. If you then have another bad GW (and even worse, if you see that you would have done better without the 'fix'), you're just going to get more tilted and be more likely to take more hits in a vicious spiral of 'rage transfers'.

By contrast, a long-term perspective, patience and a focus on process over (near-term) results will facilitate more effective use of FTs, improve your results over time, make you feel better about the game and can drive a virtuous circle of FPL play. As with so many things in life, this is easier said than done, but I believe this is perhaps the single most important aspect / lesson of FPL, and something we should constantly strive to improve at.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - FPL is a marathon not a sprint, and while there is a great temptation to chase short-term gains, long-term planning and perspective typically result in the best performance and ultimately more enjoyment from the game.



### TRANSFERS ARE A PRECIOUS RESOURCE

Each week we see our players' fixtures and usually we wish they were easier than they are, and we get the urge to improve that situation. However, by the time you take away GW1, the WCs and FH weeks, you have just 34 FTs to use across a whole season of twists and turns. As such, FTs should not be wasted on minor (/sideways) tweaks to the squad, in an attempt to chase 'easy' fixtures every week, to jump on every bandwagon player or to transfer out every player that we think has let us down. There simply aren't enough, and even if you don't have more important fires to put out now, you probably will soon.

Beyond those 34 FTs and 3 chips, every transfer is costing you 4 pts, or the equivalent of a cleansheet, a fwd's goal or an assist plus a bonus point. Returns are not easy to come by and should not be burned away frivolously. So whenever we make a transfer we should consider whether it is worthwhile not just for how it (hopefully) improves our team in the short term, but also how / whether it improves our team over the medium and long-term.

Unless your squad is already close to what you consider to be ideal, then you should largely restrict yourself to moves that bring in a player who you expect to want in your team for the foreseeable future. There will be injuries, suspensions, players that get dropped, and so on, so a decent portion of your FTs will be needed to address these situations (particularly if this happens with your intended starters, it is much less of a priority if this happens with bench players).

Of course, we do obviously want to also maximize our team for each of the 38 GWs where possible, so you want to combine moves that improve your situation for the long term with moves that improve your situation in the near term.

So where should we set the bar for using a transfer, and if necessary, taking a hit? I believe you want to set the bar pretty high – using transfers (and occasionally hits) to do the following:

- Switch between premium assets to target attractive fixture runs
- Replace players with medium to long-term injuries (unless to bench fodder)
- Target excellent single fixtures if there's a standout captain candidate with the potential to haul
- Gradually upgrade your team towards whatever is currently optimal (what you would WC to)

**Wherever possible you want your moves to combine as many of the above benefits as possible.**

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The bar won't be the same for every manager as we all have different personalities, risk appetite and style of play, but this is a rough guide. More aggressive players who find they have regular success in jumping between premium assets according to form and/or fixtures, and in targeting particular fixtures for captaincy etc, may be able to turn 'a profit' in making more moves and hence taking more hits. The most conservative, risk averse managers will typically avoid hits almost entirely and hence are unlikely to be able to do as much of this.

Along similar lines, there's a lot of value in **saving a transfer** when you don't really need to use one. When you have 2 FTs the following week you have gained info from additional games, and there are exponentially more double moves you can make in order to make more meaningful changes to your team / squad. At that point it can also be powerful to take a hit in order to make 3 moves (commonly known as 'the mini wildcard') and giving your squad a more meaningful redesign in the process.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - You have only 34 FTs (+ 2 WCs + FH) to use across a long season - some of which will be needed for 'putting out fires' - so use the rest very selectively, thoughtfully (near-term & long-term) and try to eliminate frivolous 'sideways' moves.



## SEARCH CONTINUALLY FOR UPSIDE

Right from initial squad selection, you should always have upside in mind. But first, what exactly do I mean by upside in this context? What I'm looking for with as many of my players as possible is for a realistic case in which they score meaningfully more points than the common consensus. Ideally this will be combined by a solid floor (a high probability of getting at least a certain number of points which would be acceptable, if the upside case doesn't come through at all). Let's use a couple of examples from the 19/20 season (one more successful than the other) to try and illustrate this:

- **Anthony Martial 19/20** - priced as a 7.5m mid
  - **Floor:** His pts run rate from previous seasons was ~200 pts for a full season (/per 3000 mins). To be comfortably worth the 7.5m he only needed to play his usual allotment of minutes, ~  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the season.



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- **Upside case:** Easy - he was starting the season healthy and apparently in the first team (position was TBC), so he only needed to stay healthy and in favour to make the 7.5m a serious bargain.
- **Blue sky case:** Ole had talked him up as a number nine and he was largely expected to start the season as such. A Man Utd starting striker priced as an oft injured / rotated winger? If this case came through the upside was substantial, and it did – he played up front all season and missed very few games, scoring 200 pts in the process.
- **Ayoze Perez 19/20** - priced as a 6.5m mid
  - **Floor:** Based on Ayoze's history with Newcastle, if he played most of the season as an attacking mid in an attacking (under Rodgers) Leicester side then he should comfortably be worthy of his 6.5m price tag.
  - **Upside case:** Ayoze was still young and improving - he had finished the 18/19 season in strong form - and could perhaps be playing further forward than previously.
  - **Blue sky case:** There was talk that he might play up front behind Jamie Vardy. He'd come in for a large fee and could possibly be a regular OOP starter. If this case came through, he could have outperformed his 6.5m price by a huge margin. Instead he played in various positions and was rotated more than expected on his way to a decent 129 points, but there was still a realistic chance that this *could* have happened.

Now let's look at this another way. To win FPL you typically need ~2500 pts. To do extremely well (to finish in the top 1k) you typically need ~2400 pts. Here's how that could realistically be broken down:

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| • 2 super elite players - 240 pts each   | 480 pts |
| • Captaincy (incl. TC)                   | 280 pts |
| • Keeper                                 | 150 pts |
| • 1 elite defender (e.g. Trent / Robbo)  | 200 pts |
| • Bench Boost and Free Hit               | 40 pts  |
| • 2 cheap but effective outfield players | 250 pts |

At this point we have 6 players and we are at 1400 pts and need another 1000 pts to make our 2400 pts target for a fantastic season. I think all the above figures are realistically achievable. That leaves us needing 5 other players that average 200 pts each! That is where things get tricky as the budget will not stretch to these 5 being all premium expensive assets.

- |                       |          |
|-----------------------|----------|
| • 5 remaining players | 1000 pts |
|-----------------------|----------|

To achieve this then, we need to nail some cheaper upside picks (e.g. Jimenez 18/19, Ings 19/20, Robertson 18/19, Mahrez 15/16 etc). That sounds extremely difficult, but we don't necessarily need to nail them first time, we just need to hit the ground running with our initial picks and then shift to better assets in a timely fashion as and when they emerge.

What I'm circling back around to is that if you pick 5 safe players who should be worth their prices, but don't really have an upside case in which they get close to 180- 200 pts, you are almost locking yourself into a moderate season.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Continually strive to find players who have a material and realistic upside case beyond the common consensus and hence their pricing.



### PLAYER SELECTION

I was about done with version 1 of this guide when I realised I had only addressed player selection indirectly. I'm certainly not going to try and suggest particular players (we don't even have the prices yet, which guide all such decisions), but I will try to offer some guidance as to what you're ideally looking for when the game goes live again and across the whole season. I believe we're essentially looking for the best combination of the following attributes as possible:

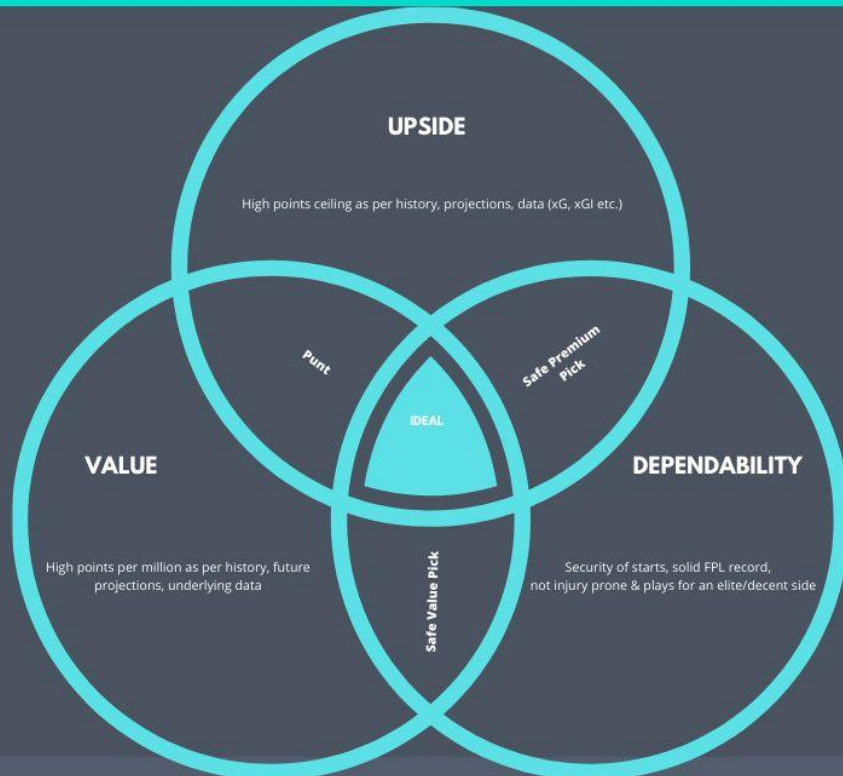
**UPSIDE** - A high points ceiling per the player's history or reasonable forward-looking projection (e.g. at better team, in more attacking position, under a more attacking manager, young player should be improving, and so on). This could be judged on either a season-long basis (I think of this as per 3000 mins) or on a per 90 / per min basis where you believe it's reasonable to extrapolate. It's typically best to enforce a reasonable minutes minimum if you're judging players on a per min basis - I've used 500 minutes before as a minimum cut-off to have a viable sample.

**VALUE** - Player rates well on a pts/£ basis, either based upon historical points and new price, or using a realistic points projection (in your judgement) going forward. Note again that the better GKs and defs tend to score very well for value (but fewer will reach upside thresholds), followed by cheaper mids and fwds, followed by expensive mids and fwds (but typically with stronger upside).

**DEPENDABILITY** - How confident can we be that the player will start and play big minutes in upcoming games? Do they have a solid track record of producing good FPL returns? Are they clear of any significant injury doubts? Do they play for a good team or at least a decent one?

Below I have displayed the player selection process visually:

# PLAYER SELECTION



**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Aim to identify and select players with the strongest combinations of upside, value and dependability. Do not begin the season with too many players that fail the dependability criteria, as they are too often 'a transfer waiting to happen'.



## TARGET OUT-OF-POSITION PLAYERS

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An out-of-position (OOP) player is one who in reality is regularly playing meaningfully further forward on the pitch than their position designation (the inverse situation gets referred to as 'reverse OOP' and is like FPL kryptonite - avoid!). The reason why we like OOP players and try to fill our teams with them is the point scoring advantage of this. If a player is classified as a defender but is actually playing in midfield (e.g. Lord Lundstram) then they have a higher chance than most defs of getting attacking returns (goals, assists) and they're getting more points for the goals (6 for defs, 5 for mids, 4 for fwrds) and they're still getting 4 pts for a CS (vs 1 point for a mid getting a CS), so it puts us at a significant advantage. Always be on the lookout for these and it's not impossible to build a team where most of the defenders are actually playing in midfield and most of your midfielders are more or less playing up front (e.g. in 19/20 examples included Lundstram, Doherty, Aurier, Salah, Martial, Antonio and Ritchie)

You can easily see just how big an advantage you're getting via OOP players by looking at the heatmaps of some of the most prominent examples from the 19/20 season:



**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Seek out OOP players who are playing further forward than their game classification, such that they're being rewarded more generously for goals and cleansheets than they would otherwise.



## EFFECTIVE OWNERSHIP & THE TEMPLATE

For me these are not the most fun aspects of FPL but they can certainly be impactful so you should at least understand them properly. So first - what exactly is 'effective ownership'? Effective ownership % (as opposed to just ownership %) considers not just how many teams a player is on, but factors in how many teams that player has been started in, how many times he's been captained, triple captained and benched. This gives you their live effective ownership (EO).

For example, if 50% of teams own KDB, none bench him, half of those managers captain him (2x points) and none TC him, then his EO will be 75% (50% x 1.5). Let's quickly look at how his returns will impact you in different scenarios, assuming for simplicity that he scores 10 points:

Ownership Scenario	Impact on Rank
Don't own, player you have instead scores 0	75% of 'the pack' get 10 points => -7.5 pts negative impact
Don't own, player you have instead scores 10	10 pts vs. 7.5 for 'the pack' => +2.5 pts positive impact
Own but didn't captain	10 pts vs. 7.5 for 'the pack' => +2.5 pts positive impact
Own and captained	20 pts vs. 7.5 for 'the pack' => +12.5 pts positive impact
Own and triple-captained	30 pts vs. 7.5 for 'the pack' => +22.5 pts positive impact

The second scenario is a little counterintuitive because your alternative player scored the same points as KDB and yet you get a positive impact. That's because you have 100% EO of your player and the pack has only 75% EO of KDB.

**The 'template'** that we refer to so often in FPL is effectively a team built of the highest EO players at a given time. Ownership % and EO% can vary quite widely across different ranks, with top 10k EO often



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used as a proxy for active ownership. LiveFPL.net (which has some excellent tools including live ranks) can quickly show you EO for the top 10k, top 100k, overall ownership and a lot more.

Part of the reason EO can become a bit of a frustration is that when it's high enough (as in the above example), you can own a player but scarcely benefit when they do well, unless you captained them. There will be times during the season when a very popular player has EO > 100% and at that point you're actually negatively impacted (since you have a 100% exposure) if you did not captain them.

While I don't like to advocate blindly following the herd, if a very good player is reaching towards 100% EO then in many cases it will be better to take the "if you can't beat them, join them" approach, and fight your battles elsewhere. I faced this problem with Bruno in the latter stages of the season, and unfortunately as I already had 3x Utd players it was difficult to bring Bruno in. Of course Man Utd kept winning penalties, he kept scoring them and this was a real headwind to me in the run-in.

Even if you have 3-4 players who are more or less owned by everyone, such that their returns are a wash, you still have 7-8 starters plus captaincy with which to still set yourself apart, without the risk of one of those 'essential' players hauling and giving you a big red arrow in the process.

Conversely, if you see players with very high EO which you believe could underperform, this can be a great opportunity to 'chunk rise' in the rankings if the player you select instead outscores them handily. Just be aware that the downside of doing this is as impactful as the upside and be sure it's a bet you want to be taking. Such differential moves become more appealing if it's late season and you are a long way off your rank target or mini league prize places and need to take risks to try and make up ground.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Don't let EO dominate your decisions but be aware of highly owned players and prioritise bringing them in if they're the real deal. If you strongly believe you've found a more compelling alternative to a high EO player then this can be an opportunity to attack and gain ground.



### **DON'T BE TOO HASTY**

With most decisions we make in life it is best to have as much relevant information as possible before acting, and the same applies here. In FPL this largely comes down to waiting until as close to the next

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GW deadline as possible / convenient before making any transfers and our final captaincy decision. With regard to the former however, there can be a trade-off versus building team value (more in the next section).

Team value aside, time and time again when you listen to or read the advice of top FPL managers, they will emphasise the importance of waiting until close to the deadline before finalising moves. Personally, I'm not someone who is strict about doing this every GW (again, see below re. team value), but I try to do this more often than not. The advantages generally outweigh the disadvantages by some margin – you have more team news, more chance of finding out about an injury to one of your players or targets before making moves, you have more time to listen to podcasts, dig into stats, read threads and articles, and more time to then think through all your options. Indeed, by the end of the week there will typically be at least one or two interesting options which you were not even considering to begin with.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - All else being equal, making decisions later in the gameweek gives you more information to make the most advantageous moves and carries less risk.



### **BUILD TEAM VALUE EARLY ON**

The one material advantage to making transfers early in a GW is to grow team value. By looking to move out underperforming players who are due to drop in price, and bringing in players who are due to rise in price because they are performing well, you can grow your TV by a not insignificant amount across the season, and give you a slightly more powerful squad in the second half of the season.

I think the main time to go the early moves and TV route is when you have a squad with no current issues at all and when there are not any / many midweek fixtures involving your players. It is also more useful earlier in the season when there are more active buyers and sellers and hence there are more dramatic price changes. This is also when we begin to see the important changes to team lineups, player positions, player development and so on.

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However, always keep in mind the 'points over pounds' mantra, and make sure that you're not farming TV at the expense of squad quality. You only want to do it when it coincides with moves that also improve the quality of your squad, and ideally when these are the same moves you would want to make irrespective of price changes.

Again, absent price changes or any time when your squad is not close to optimal health, I would suggest you wait until late in the GW to make your moves.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Making transfers early in a GW can help to build your team value – especially earlier in the season - but don't let imminent price changes determine who it is you're moving in and out, and be cautious about doing this if there are midweek games or if your squad isn't in perfect health.



### SAVE AND MAXIMIZE CHIPS

Particularly if you're having a bad run, the temptation can creep in to 'pop your wildcard', use your Free Hit to attack a GW where you have a few bad fixtures or injuries, use your Bench Boost because "fixtures look okay" for your four mediocre subs, or you can start talking yourself into using your Triple Captain in a single gameweek because you've "never had much luck with DGW captains". I strongly suggest you resist such temptations, which are often fleeting. It's not that these choices don't ever work - sometimes they'll work out okay - but there's almost always going to be a more optimal time or time of desperate need to use chips which comes along later.

The FH, BB, TC and 2nd WC chips will usually be saved by top managers until late in the season, and for good reason. Usually we get a tricky section of fixtures with a BGW (or 2), DGW (or 2), and if you've already used some or all of your chips then navigating this section (usually around GWs 30 - 36) gets extremely difficult and will usually coincide with a rank drop. If on the other hand you still have your chips at this point, you can:

- Use your FH to still have 11 good fixtures in a BGW
- Use your BB to have up to 4 doubles (so potentially 8 games) from your bench (the GK doubles tend to be particularly effective) in a DGW

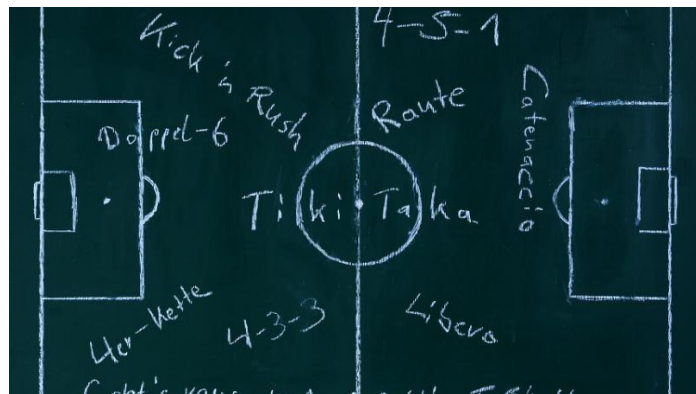
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- Use your TC in a DGW for a strong team where an elite player has 2 attractive fixtures
- Use your 2nd WC to arrange your team for maximum effect ahead of the DGW bench boost deployment, or to fix the squad the GW afterwards

Obviously, this doesn't ensure that everything will go to plan, but in aggregate this chip usage tends to result in a meaningful rank boost. These measures alone could be the difference between going into the final weeks of the season at 20k OR or 200k OR, making all the difference with respect to meeting our rank goals and ML chances. So, before you use your chips, ask yourself the following:

- BB - are these fixtures really so good that I couldn't do better in a DGW?
- FH - is this such an emergency or opportunity that I'll gain as many pts as if I used it in a BGW or DGW later?
- TC - is that game against the whipping boys du jour really as compelling as a potential DGW later? FWIW algos typically project ~8 pts for the absolute best fixtures for elite players, versus 5-6 pts for a tougher fixture for that same player, which gives you a sense of the math you're going against there. Albeit this may be partially offset by greater rotation risk in a DGW.
- WC - is your squad in such a bad state that it couldn't be rectified with 3-4 transfers over the next 2-3 weeks? Is it really that urgent to get to the sexy new template or is your squad that much of a hospital ward that you're likely to tank your rank if you don't fix it now? If you're actually just hankering for that feeling of picking a shiny new team, when your current team is fine, try instead to be patient and just patch it up with a transfer or two.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Try to save your chips (1st WC aside) for the latter part of the season, since they tend to be most effective when used in BGWs and DGWs, often in combination to some degree.



## FORMATION SELECTION

I got some requests to talk about formations, so I've gone through the mains pros and cons of all the main options below. However, as with your player selection, who the best players are and how they're priced should be a major factor in your formation decisions – aim to stay flexible and to take what the game gives you.

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## 'The classic' 3-4-3

- Facilitates the strongest and cheapest bench, since the best options at 4.5 are in def and then mid (in vast majority of seasons) and the only options at 4.0 are in def
- The most attacking formation which means you are largely pulling for attacking returns not cleansheets – it is subjective of course but I think most of us find that a more enjoyable way to watch games
- This is perhaps changing as we see more and more of the best FPL assets in midfield (due to wide fwds being classified as mids), but historically this also afforded managers more captaincy options
- You are taking least possible advantage of the more generous scoring for defs > mids > fwds
- With fewer strong options in the fwd category in recent years (due to the shift away from 4-4-2, towards 4-3-3, 4-5-1, 4-2-3-1 etc.), even if you find 3 strong fwd options to begin with, there may be a lack of adequate replacements if one disappoints or gets injured / suspended

## 'The swiss army knife' 4-4-2

- This is a really flexible formation in FPL because this means you have 1 def, 1 mid, 1 fwd on the bench and it's easy from 4-4-2 to shift to other formations depending on how those subs are performing vs your starters, and as new enablers emerge etc
- As you move away from 3-4-3 and towards more defs and mids vs fwds you're taking advantage of the scoring benefits, particularly with more OOP defs and mids available in recent years
- With 4-4-2 you can be reasonably 'big at the back' without going too extreme and pigeonholing yourself into that approach
- Frankly has little by way of a weakness, although I've never liked the way it looked on the page!

## 'Big at the back' - 5-4-1, 5-3-2

- These formations take the most advantage of the scoring benefits for defenders, with half of your team's outfield potentially earning 4 pts for a cleansheet and 6 points for a goal
- You're putting most of your players and budget in the best pts/£ positions, so you're getting the most possible 'bang for your buck' from as much of your team as possible
- These formations are particularly effective in years when there are a lot of great defenders that are actually playing OOP or otherwise have a lot of attacking threat
- These approaches can leave you with a weak or expensive bench since credible options at 4.5m in mid and especially fwd positions are typically very limited, and there are none at 4.0
- By this point on the spectrum you're pulling primarily for cleansheets which especially if you like to watch and follow a lot of the games in real time, is not the most enjoyable (footie where you're hoping no one scores?)

## 'Power midfield' - 3-5-2, 4-5-1

- I will strongly consider starting the season with 3-5-2 as I like the combination of having 2 viable bench options in defence at just 4.5 or even 4.0, and then 5 of your 7 more attacking players getting 5 pts for a goal plus 1 for a clean. Particularly with so many OOP mid options in recent seasons, at times you can almost have 6 or 7 forwards with most of those getting extra points as midfielders



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- Unlike the 'big at the back' formations, the more popular 'power midfield' lineup of 3-5-2 does not result in a weak bench situation – we can typically find two effective defs at 4.5m or below and a 4.5m forward who will at least get some game time and could be stashed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> bench spot
- 4-5-1 is terrible for bench options as decent 4.5m fwds are few and far between, but it can still work, with perhaps 1 good 4.5m def sub, 1 reasonable 4.5m / 5.0m fwd and a 3<sup>rd</sup> bench fodder who you'll likely never need
- With the tight early season budget it can be difficult to afford the great mids you really want and to still have Trent or your elite def of choice, and any good striker. This becomes more viable as the budget expands across the season and as strong cheap enablers emerge as they almost always do

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Player prices are key to squad selection and should also guide formation, but on balance I would recommend using 3-4-3, 4-4-2 and 3-5-2 in most cases.



### CAPTAINCY DECISIONS

Our captains and their double points make a huge impact on our FPL fortunes. Unfortunately, I don't think there is any special secret that when it comes to regularly nailing big captaincy returns, but the right selection process enhanced by appropriate research can definitely help us make better decisions with the armband. We are looking to identify a player with a good chance of scoring circa 8-10 points or better and who we feel has a decent chance of recording a real haul of 13 points plus.

There are only a few players each season who actually post double-digit FPL point returns with any regularity, so your main captain pool is essentially made up of these. Last season this group would arguably have been just Salah, KDB, Mane, Aguero (while healthy), Sterling, Mahrez (who I would exclude due to excessive rotation risk), Bruno (but only from late-Feb once his credentials were properly established), Aubameyang and TAA. This group will probably be very similar in the 20/21 season, with

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possibly Kane regaining his captain option status (if he carries over his impressive late season form), while Werner and Sancho (assuming that move is concluded) could also prove to be explosive options.

Below I have divided the better FPL assets into 3 quality categories based upon players' combinations of upside potential and dependability (we do not care about value when picking a captain) and I have given some examples for each bracket:

	Characteristics	19/20 Season Examples
<b>ELITE PLAYER</b>	Often >11m and ~220+ pts run rate	Salah, KDB, Mane, Sterling, Aguero, Bruno
<b>PREMIUM PLAYER</b>	Often >9m and ~200+ pts run rate	Auba, TAA, Martial, Kane, Vardy, Son
<b>STRONG PLAYER</b>	Often >7.5m and ~180+ pts run-rate	Jimenez, Pulisic, Mahrez, Ings, Jesus

Using these categories as guidelines for who should be considered an elite, premium or strong player, I've included below a reasonably straight-forward process for making logical captaincy choices and to give a sense of when you might want to use FTs or even a hit to bring in a stronger option:

	ELITE PLAYER	PREMIUM PLAYER	STRONG PLAYER	USE FTs or HIT (-4) ?
<b>CAPTAINCY STRENGTH</b> ↑ IDEAL STRONG OKAY WEAK ↓	Attractive home fixture			N/A
	Attractive away fixture / moderate home fixture	Attractive home fixture		Consider FT if happy to hold new player medium to long-term
	Moderate away fixture / tough home fixture	Attractive away fixture / moderate home fixture	Attractive home fixture	Consider FT even if you only want the new player short-term
	Tough away fixture	Moderate away fixture / tough home fixture	Attractive away fixture / moderate home fixture	Consider -4 if happy to hold new player medium to long-term
↓ AVOID		Tough away fixture	Moderate away fixture / any tough fixture	Consider -4 even if you only want the new player short-term

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If the above process results in multiple appealing captaincy options which are difficult to decide between, I would then recommend taking a close look at each of the following in order to break the tie:

- **Player returns** – this season and prior (track record) and last 6 games (form)
- The bookies' **goalscorer odds** (for the players involved)
- The bookies' **cleansheet odds** (opposition teams)
- **Expected goals** (xG, for both player and team) – season-to-date and last 6 games
- **Expected goals conceded** (xGC, opposition teams) – season-to-date and last 6 games

Essentially what we are looking for from a captain is for a **double return to feel realistic** and for a **single return to feel probable**. If your intended captain does not realistically fit this description, then I would suggest taking another look through your options (both current players and potential transfers targets).

**KEY TAKEAWAY** – In most cases I would stick to elite players – ideally in kind home fixtures - for captaincy. The further you find yourself lowering the bar in terms of player quality and fixture ease, the more you should consider using FTs and if necessary a hit to bring in a more compelling captain.



### LEARN FROM THE BEST

Perhaps it's a coincidence but one of the things I did during the summer ahead of a big improvement into the 18/19 (28k) and 19/20 (16k) seasons, was to listen to every one of Fantasy Football Scout's 'Meet the Manager' series. The elite managers featured in the series vary quite widely in terms of approach (and indeed how well they can describe their approach) but you do pick up on some commonalities in terms of process and philosophy (including some aspects of FPL that I've included in this guide). I believe listening to all of these helped me to tighten up my approach and make it more effective, and I would highly recommend doing the same ahead of the 20/21 season.

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If you're unable to spare that much listening time then FPLSwede (@FPL\_Swe) has been producing some really good threads which summarise the approaches of top managers, and this could be another, less time-consuming way to pick up some important lessons from the legends.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - While elite managers have a range of different approaches, there are plenty of commonalities in terms of approach, philosophy and mistakes they have learned to avoid.



### EXPECTED GOALS

Firstly, a description. From sportperformanceanalysis.com:

*'Expected Goals, or xG, are the number of goals a player or team should have scored when considering the number and type of chances they had in a match. Expected Goals uses various characteristics of the shots being taken together with historical data of such types of shots to predict the likelihood of a specific shot being scored.'*

Similarly, Expected Assists, or xA, are the numbers of assists a player could be expected to have recorded based upon the number and type of chances they created in a match, or across a period of time. Expected Goal Involvement, or xGI, simply combines these figures, and is a useful proxy for FPL attacking return potential. You will then often see xG, xA and xGI quoted on a per 90-minute basis, or xG/90, xA/90, xGI/90, for obvious reasons.

Non-penalty xG excludes penalties from the data, to give a clearer indication of chances coming a player's way in the normal course of a game. This is particularly useful if you're trying to judge players but you know they are now no longer taking penalties, have added that responsibility recently (e.g. KDB after the restart in 19/20), or have benefited disproportionately from a lot of penalties at an unsustainable rate (e.g. Bruno 19/20?).

Now, how do we use this information in a constructive way for FPL? Firstly, **what you want to look for primarily is VOLUME**. You want players who have the highest xG and xA possible, either on a total or per

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90-minute basis. You want the players who are getting and/or creating the most attacking return opportunities, whether or not those have been converted up to this point.

xG aims to represent what the *average* professional player could be expected to produce, but of course all players vary widely in ability. A reasonable rule of thumb is that the near-perfect player could be expected to sustain outperformance of their xG of 30% - this is sometimes referred to as 'the Messi rule' as this is roughly what Lionel Messi has been able to sustain over time. Poor finishers may consistently underperform by a similar degree, and for the most part, most players will be within +/-15% of their xG numbers over the long haul. (xA is a little different as you're relying on teammates to convert, who will vary in quality, and sustained under or over performance of xA is not really expected).

Some common mistakes / misconceptions with xG:

- **"He's just clinical!"** - Player X has scored 10 goals versus 5 xG but this is sustainable because he's "a clinical finisher". See 'the Messi rule' above, this is simply unsustainable for any player over the long-run. So many people said this about Pukki after his incredibly hot start to 19/20 (6 goals from 2.3 xG over the first 5 GWs), despite Pukki not having been a prolific striker historically and almost certainly not having suddenly become the greatest of all time at 29. People *wanted* to believe it because he was very cheap and they did not want to think they were chasing yesterday's points. Pukki scored 5 goals in the remaining 33 GWs from 9.2 xG.
- **"He couldn't finish his dinner!"** - Player Y has just 5 goals versus 10 xG, so he is "a terrible finisher". This can easily happen in a small sample set – indeed it is not particularly improbable at all - and Player Y could actually be a perfectly decent finisher. Typically, even players that we think of as poor finishers will still end up relatively close to their xG over the long run.
- **"He's due a goal!"** - Player Z has 5 goals versus 10 xG, so he's due for a hot run "to catch up" / mean revert. While Player Z would be likely to return more in line with his xG going forward there is no real timeline for when he may mean revert. He may continue to be ice cold all season only to then have a great season next time, he might go on an incredibly clinical run (a la Sterling after the restart in 19/20), the path is impossible to predict. But if player Y has an xG of 50 over the next 5 seasons then he's likely to score somewhere in the region of 50 goals over that time.

Instead of focusing on over or underperformance of xG (and to a lesser extent xA), we always want to find players with the biggest volume of xG (or xG/90) and xA (or xA/90) as possible, such that whether a player over or underperforms these numbers, they can still produce compelling returns for our teams.

- **High xG/90 relative to price is a very good starting point for finding FPL bargains**
- **Very high xG/90 irrespective of price is a marker of the most elite assets and captaincy options**

If you want to get really advanced about it, you can combine a player's recent xG with an adjustment for their career over or underperformance of xG, to get an adjusted figure, thereby potentially getting a more accurate picture of the potential returns you may get for the price you're paying. It depends how far down the rabbit hole you are willing to go here!

**KEY TAKEAWAYS** - Target / scrutinize players who are putting up compelling xG and xA figures (in total or /90) relative to their price, particularly where the eye test supports the player or team's ability to convert these into returns going forward.





### MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS

*'If you can meet with triumph and disaster / And treat those two impostors just the same'*

**Rudyard Kipling, If**

Speaking of the struggle to remain patient - FPL can be a truly infuriating game at times! Even when we hypothetically do everything right, the substantial degree of luck / variance involved in football and hence FPL means we can still be on the end of a 'bad beat' and have a bad gameweek. Whether we think it's been our fault, our players' faults, or just plain old misfortune, staring at the big red arrow from a bad GW – and thinking through all the 'coulda woulda shoulda' regrets is a bitter pill to swallow when you're investing a lot of time in FPL. On the flipside, when we have a big green arrow there's a tendency to believe we're the next Pep Guardiola for a little while, and perhaps get overconfident and overly aggressive until our next red arrow brings us back down to earth.

I believe managing our emotions and maintaining consistency and discipline across the FPL season is a huge part of the game, and something that the top managers are able to control while others let their emotions control them and their fortunes. If you let yourself get into serious 'FPL tilt' mode and make decisions while in that state - rage transferring out players (that in reality are still good assets) early in the GW, to feel like we're taking action and 'fixing' what's wrong - these often turn out to be detrimental.

Conversely, when we're doing well and/or in control of our emotions then it's a lot easier to wait until closer to the deadline when we have more information, to make valuable incremental changes with a longer-term view (without taking hits) and to make the sensible logical transfer instead of taking a wild swing on a maverick pick.

So how can we do this? Well this is where you need to know yourself and come up with your own methods, but here are a few simple strategies:

- Go for a walk – so basic but this can really serve to clear the head, calm the FPL red mist and regain perspective
- Log out and go and do something else you enjoy – a lot of us already spend too much time focusing on FPL!

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- Sleep on it – easier said than done but things usually seem better in the morning and you're much less likely to do something rash. If you avoid impulsive early transfers you'll often end up waiting until close to the deadline
- Focus on process over result - go back and look at why you made prior decisions, take an objective look at whether your team is actually a good one that just had an unfortunate week
- Do something to help your team to do better without making a transfer you can't undo. Plan out captains for the next 5 or 6 GWs, build a spreadsheet mapping out your players' fixtures and some planned transfers, etc.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Come up with methods to cool off after bad GWs, avoid making decisions when 'on tilt' after red arrows and try not to get complacent / overconfident after green arrows.



### TRY TO REMAIN OBJECTIVE

There is some overlap here with the above, but we all have behavioural biases, some more pronounced than others. Try to know yourself, be objective and realistic about what you do well, what you do badly, what kind of mistakes you tend to make, which players and/or teams you're biased for and against, and so on. Some of us tend to be too impulsive, too much of an itchy transfer trigger finger – then come up with some strategies to moderate this. Some people are too old school and don't take into account powerful new tools and data. And so on.

Having tried to take the extremes off of your biases, I also think you need to 'go with the flow' a bit in terms of your personality when it comes to your FPL style. If you are a super conservative, risk averse person then I don't think it's going to work well for you to try and make aggressive, high risk/reward moves a la @lateriser. You should use your steady, disciplined nature to avoid hits and stick to the most

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sensible and popular captaincy choices. This serves a lot of good managers very well, and I'm pretty sure you'll not be bothered that it's perhaps a bit less exciting if the green arrows keep coming, your OR keeps improving and you're dominating your mini leagues.

If you have a higher risk appetite or if you prefer to take action rather than show restraint, then that can work too. Just make sure that those extra transfers and hits are being used effectively to target major captaincy hauls, exceptional fixture runs, keeping your squad close to optimal, and so on. You may also want to use some slightly riskier, lower-ownership captains, particularly when there's the opportunity to do so on a powerful FPL asset who just happens to be temporarily out of vogue (e.g. some of us were able to do this with Aguero around gameweeks 20-25 after he'd had some injuries and was down to circa 10% ownership).

The Who Got the Assist? podcast has produced some superb content with regards to the psychological aspects of FPL over the years, while FPL Raptor (@FPL\_Raptor) has been producing some excellent threads on this area in recent months. These are two good places to start looking if you're interested in digging deeper into this crucial and fascinating aspect of FPL, as I have barely scratched the surface here.

**KEY TAKEAWAY - Try to settle into a playing style that fits quite naturally with your personality and risk appetite and try to be aware of and moderate negative behavioural biases.**



## FIND GOOD SOUNDING BOARDS

Another balance that needs to be struck is in how much and what types of information you're taking in, and from where. Most notably, FPL Twitter will besiege you with an almost infinite amount of information if you're following a lot of accounts and hooked on gathering every new piece of news or data as it hits the wires. While it's obviously important and beneficial to be well-informed, sometimes we can lose the signal in all that noise, and it can become counterproductive. Too much FPL Twitter or equivalent can make it difficult to make our own decisions (even to know what our own opinions and decisions really are!), which can then add resentment if decisions go poorly.

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Try to focus primarily on the very best advice from accounts, sites, data sources etc that you trust and believe to be truly value-adding expert info / opinions, and to filter out some of the noise. Just because 25 different FPL\_Animal accounts are going to bring in or captain player X, it doesn't mean you have to! The player you already have or were planning on bringing in instead could just as well score more points, and no amount of effective ownership (discussed further in due course) will make 8 points worth more than 9.

If you have a really important decision to make and you want some final input on it, I would suggest you narrow it down to your top 2 or 3 options and then discuss these with a trusted FPL ally or two, rather than taking opinions from all over the place or running a twitter poll. Wide polling is largely just going to lead you towards the template / safest decision / most popular player(s) du jour, which isn't always the right decision for you.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Find trusted, smart, experienced allies to discuss key decisions with - try to take in a lot of high-quality information while filtering out excessive noise from the FPL crowd.



### CONTRARIANISM

I think to really raise your game you need to find the right balance of 'dullard' play (safe, low risk, stay close to the template) and contrarianism (more aggressive, more differentials). If you play extremely safely, follow the template very closely and rarely make any aggressive transfers or captaincy choices then you can certainly do nicely, but you're unlikely to have a standout season (or much fun!). You'll simply be too close to the pack in too many regards to be able to separate yourself.

At the other end of the spectrum, if you try too hard to be a 'maverick' (always trying to go against the grain) you're essentially taking a lot of low probability bets and it is difficult to successfully bet against the template for a sustained period of time (the template does typically include a lot of great picks even though the term can be used negatively). Unless you're @lateriser12 of course, but I'm not entirely convinced he doesn't have a fully operational time machine.

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But there is a middle ground. The right differential players and captains can lead to chunk rises in rank and are extremely satisfying when they work for you. You just need to pick your spots. I think it's good to have 1, 2 or 3 slightly more differential players at a given time, but that's enough. The crowd might be missing several excellent options at any given time (and several of the template players may be overrated in some way), but they're not missing a whole team of them and most of the template will be the template for good reason. Every few weeks there might be a standout captaincy option that people are overlooking for some reason, but that is not the case most weeks. Don't try to force a differential pick or captain, wait until those times when everything lines up in favour of a player (form, fixtures, underlying stats, return from injury, whatever it may be) but the pack have not caught on to the opportunity yet.

A good range of price points in your squad will help facilitate differential picks in a few places and allow you to switch them if they are not working out. The mid-priced midfielder price range (6-7m) can be a fertile soil for finding a great differential who is perhaps going from good to great or from rotation player to starter and is underpriced as a result. Perhaps at the premium striker spot everyone is currently focused on Vardy but Aguero is just coming back from one of his regular injuries and has a great run of fixtures. You get the idea.

**KEY TAKEAWAY** - Don't be afraid to stray from the template and go against the crowd when your research and gut instinct strongly suggest you should, but don't try so hard to be a maverick that you make too many low probability bets to be successful.



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- In you do find this guide valuable and would like to make a small contribution then that would be very much appreciated and you can do so quickly and securely at <https://ko-fi.com/fplbrain> - maybe I can take the family out for dinner to make up for spending too much time on FPL!
- Otherwise please follow, retweet and share so I can get this guide to as many people as possible

