EURO 2020 FANTEAM MD3 DRAFT USING DATA MODEL

Euro 2020 has begun at a break-neck pace, with 2 Match Days (MD) in the bag. Due to the shorter time duration of the tournament compared to FPL, it is even more important to be involved throughout the process. Due to certain teams having qualified and fitness issues, we might see a lot of rotation for MD3, and that bench is about to come in handy for just this reason. Whether you have entered a team in MD1 or MD2, and have 1 or 2 fee transfers as a result, considering a one-week punt for MD3 is worthwhile since the Round of 16 will have a Wildcard to be used.

Due to lack of reliable resources such as FPL Review, and a lack of expected data for international events such as World Cup 22 Qualifiers, Euro 20 Qualifiers, Nations League, etc. from the normally reliable FBREF, I decided to build my ow data model for the Euro Fantasy game. There are individuals with tremendous knowledge of the analytical aspect in the FPL community, so if someone wants to build their own data model, I would highly recommend Corridor of Uncertainty FPL podcast as the starting point.

While it is impossible to look underneath the hood of a data model in the length of an article, it is possible to explain the tenets. The data model used for computing expected points (xPts) comprises primarily of the following:

1. Expected Minutes (xMin.)/Squad information: xMin is king when it comes to fantasy football. Based on predicted lineups by reputed media sources, with weightage assigned to each source, each player's expected minutes are determined. Apart from this, set-piece taker probability was also determined which increases the expected points significantly for penalty takers and also boosts the expected value for freekick and corner specialists.

2. Attacking data: Underlying stats for the past 3 seasons in the domestic league (with each season being wieghted according to their recency) formed a part of the metric. Along with that, data from the past 7 international events, i.e., Euro 2016, World Cup 2018, Nations League 2018-19, Euro 2020 Qualifiers, Nations League 2020-21, World Cup 2022 Qualifiers and 2021 International Friendlies have also been used with different weightage assigned according to their importance and recency. Out of all the international events, expected data was available only for World Cup 2018. FBref is also maintaining expected data for Euro 2020, which is being considered as well, with an increasing weightage as we progress through the tournament.

3. Offensive data adjustment: Robert Lewandowski is arguably the best player on the planet in a Bayern Munich shirt, but how does that translate to the national team ? Using FiveThirtyEight's offensive ratings and a number of attacking and defensive stats for all countries since Euro 2016, each player's underlying club stats have been adjusted to fit his national squad. This includes relative attackign and defensive ratings of all national teams relative to domestic club teams.

4. Odds/Probability: In order to understand the likelihood of a cleansheet, defensive ratings from FiveThirtyEight were combined with the Cleansheet odds available on various reputable websites. This was used to determine the expected value of a cleansheet for each player. Similarly, anytime goalscorer and assist odds were used to supplement the data available for each player in order to predict attacking returns. In order to assess the value of impact for each player, odds from Drafthound and Oddschecker for Win and Loss were considered.

5. Home/Away factor: Looking at the expected goals data of the Big 5 leagues (Premier League, Serie A, Ligue 1, La Liga and Bundesliga) from 2017-19 (precovid seasons), there is a distinct home advantage which is quantified by the ratio of xG accumulated by the home team to the xG accumulated by the away side. This has been used to adjust the expected returns for players playing in front of a home crowd, or on the road with a gruelling travel schedule.

My current draft is the result of running optimisation algorithm on points predicted by my data model:

The team has been assembled assuming a budget of 105.0m, and costs 104m (which can be used to make bench upgrades if needed). Captaining Depay and vice-captaining Lukaku leads to an Expected Value (EV) of 84.7 xPts.

In order to take advantage of some tasyt MD3 match-ups, it is important to have a good captaincy option. Considering that Italy, Netherlands, Belgium and a few others might rotate players in order to maintain overall fitness of the squad, xMins have been adjusted. The stand-out fixtures for MD3 involve Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Germany. Frank de Boer (Dutch manager) has already hinted at minimal rotation due to the need to keep practicing their 3-at-the-back formation, while Roberto Martinex has been clear about handing starts to Eden Hazard, Kevin de Bruyne, and the involvement of Romelu Lukaku against Finland. Roberto Mancini, the Italian manager, has already hinted at starts to Federico Chiesa and Andrea Belotti in place of Insigne and Immobile respectively as well. A short summary of the rationale behind the model for the MD3 draft team:

1. GOALKEEPERS

Although Spain have been disappointing for the first 2 MDs, they are the overwhelming bookies favourite for keeping a cleansheet against Slovakia (roughly 58%). They are also clear favourites for registering a win in MD3, with an 81.4% probability. This should ensure the 0.3 impact points and 4 points for a cleansheet as well. Since there are no manual substitutions, Unai Simon can be paired with any 4.0m starting GK, be it Hradecky or Bachman (Austria, 4.1 xPts).

2. DEFENDERS

Ricardo Rodriguez and Denzel Dumfries are the odd-on favourites for scoring a goal in MD3 (~19%). Rodriguez is also on penalties, which with variance, can lead to a megahaul, and Dumfries is just a winger with cleansheet points who is also the odds-on favourite for providing an assist (~20%)! Meunier is also a very attacking wingback who has already registered a goal and an assist, and with injury doubts for Nacer Chadli and Thorgan Hazard, he looks set to get at least 60 minutes. Pau Torres is in using the same rationale used for Unai Simon, and Robin Gosens is another extremely attacking wingback with whom the manager is also very happy (which would increase the xMin) and the fixture against Hungary is just the perfect storm! For all the defenders under consideration except for Pau Torres, shots on target is yet another potential avenue for points since all four of them are very attacking.

3. MIDFIELDERS

Kai Havertz and Serge Gnabry enhanced their reputation with a spectacular attacking display against Portugal. You just can't write off Germany in any international tournament, can you?! Due to their fixture and fairly reasonable pricing, both or at least one of them is near essential for MD3. Wijnaldum plays in a far more attacking role for Netherlands as opposed to Liverpool, which shows with him racking up an impressive 0.6 npxG+A p90(non-penalty eexpected goals and assists per 90 minutes). Memphis Depay is the cheat code in Fanteam, with him being classified as a midfielder and having access to cleansheet points, extra point for a goal while playing up top. Christoph Baumgartner is the budget choice that enables strengthening in rest of the areas of this draft.

4. FORWARDS

Luis Enrique, the Spanish manager, finally showed faith in Gerard Moreno by handing him a start vs Poland and it paid off, with Moreno being one of the best players on the pitch. His 0.9 npxG p90 is only bettered by Andriy Yarmolenko and Cristiano Ronaldo, which shows the potential for a haul against the weakest team in the group. Since Lukaku will not be completely rested, even a 60-inute spell is enough to do damage against Finland, while Robert Lewandowski's inclusion in the team is based on his price point, decent enough fixture and him being Robert Lewandowski!

According to the model projections, the top players for MD3 are*:

Player	Country	Price	Pos	MD3 xPts
Memphis Depay	Netherlands	€ 8.5	MID	9.8
Romelu Lukaku	Belgium	€ 11.5	FWD	7.4
Gerard Moreno	Spain	€ 8.0	FWD	7.2
Georginio Wijnaldum	Netherlands	€ 7.1	MID	7.2
Pau Torres	Spain	€ 6.0	DEF	6.5
Kai Havertz	Germany	€ 8.0	MID	6.5
Serge Gnabry	Germany	€ 8.8	MID	6.4
Dani Olmo	Spain	€ 8.0	MID	6.3
Álvaro Morata	Spain	€ 9.9	FWD	6.3
Ricardo Rodríguez	Switzerland	€ 4.9	DEF	6.1

*Assuming the player starts

If your expectation of home team advantage is higher than the assumed value, there are 8 players out of those 10 that play in front of a home crowd (Netherlands, Spain and Germany).

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