PREMIER LEAGUE 2021/22 FANTEAM DRAFT USING DATA MODEL

The new season is almost here! With less than 24 hours to go, it's time to delve into my proprietary data model to try and help readers gain just that little added edge of Expected Value (EV). The data model was developed before the Euro2020 tournament and it helped earn a tidy bit of sum on FanTeam as well as finish with an OR of 302 in the Official Euro Fantasy game. All the previous articles pertaining to the data model can be found on the FanTeam Focus site, especially the debut article in which the nuances of my data model have been discussed. While we have resources like FPL Review for FPL, there is a distinct lack of resources for FanTeam when it comes to EV modelling. If you are interested in building your own data model, I would highly recommend Corridor of Uncertainty FPL podcast as the starting point.

Since the Premier League game runs for a long duration and we only get 35 Free Transfers effectively (i.e., if you use both your wildcards), it is very important that you finalise a strategy regarding your chips and assemble a squad accordingly. One thing that might help is using points projections across multiple GWs to set your team up nicely that can be managed via Free Transfers without the need for taking a hit (or two). Another strategy is to have a balanced squad with one eye on an international break in which you can then wildcard and catch those fixture swings. In this article, I will delve into more than one draft as it is the start of a new season! There will be 2 different drafts that will be analysed from an optimisation, planning and EV point of view. The best thing about using a data model is that it washes away your cognitive biases, the untrained "eye-test" takes and leaves facts behind. Pairing an EV model with optimisation/planning and team news is another way of playing any fantasy football game.

DRAFT-I (GW1 EV = 66.39 xPts; 0.0M £ ITB)

In order to take advantage of some tasty GW1 match-ups, it is important to have a good captaincy option. Considering all press conferences that have taken place for GW1, expected minutes (xMin) have been adjusted. The stand-out fixtures for GW1 involve Liverpool, West Ham United, Manchester United and Brighton. While the signing of Lukaku does not throw any spanner into the works as of now, he is "one-to-watch" for sure! There is a dearth of Chelsea assets in both drafts due to the sharp turn that their fixtures take post-GW1. Draft-I involves playing a 3-5-2 formation with the luxury of 2 rotating 4.5m defenders on the bench. This can be managed according to the fixtures, and expected points (xPts) of course! A short summary of the rationale behind Draft I for GW1:

1. **GOALKEEPERS**

Impact points have been reduced from +1(or -1) to +0.3(or -0.3), which reduces the appeal of elite GKs like Ederson (6.0m) and Alisson (6.0m). Brighton have excellent underlying stats from last season and the selection of Sanchez + Gunn enables strengthening of the team in other areas, while not compromising much on GK EV. Brighton have the 6th best odds for keeping a cleansheet in GW1, with around 38% as well. Their fixture run till GW8 involves tough games against Leicester and Arsenal, but beyond that they are favourites to keep a decent amount of cleansheets. Other GKs with high EV for GW1 include E. Mendy (6.0m) – 4.5 xPts, Alisson – 4.3 xPts, Ederson – 4.2 xPts, and Schmeichel (5.0m) – 4.1 xPts.

2. **DEFENDERS**

Sometimes, players just pick themselves (cliché). Trent Alexander-Arnold (7.5m) has had a full pre-season, no Euro2020 hassle and is playing Norwich, with Liverpool the clear favourites for winning (76%) and second-most favourites of all teams to keep a cleansheet (45%). Alongside him, Luke Shaw (40%) was an injury doubt coming back from Euro2020. However, he has played the final pre-season game against Everton (in which he assisted a goal), and with Alex Telles out for a while, he is nailed in that Manchester United backline. United have great odds for winning (64%) and for keeping a cleansheet as well (40%). In between the two sits Caglar Soyuncu (5.0m), who is absolutely nailed to start for Leicester City due to Fofana's unfortunate long-term injury and Jonny Evan's continued absence due to plantar fasciitis. Leicester have been heavily backed by the bookies to keep a cleansheet as well (45%), and Soyuncu has somewhat of a goal threat as well. Vestergaard's arrival should help shore up the defence as well. Joel Veltman (4.5m) and Ben White (4.5m) complete the quintet, with Brighton and Arsenal ranking high on defence ratings, and keeping in mind Arsenal's fixture turn after GW3. Other defenders with high EV for GW1 include van Dijk (6.5m) – 3.9 xPts, Tsimikas (4.0m) – 3.8 xPts, Maguire (5.5m) – 3.8 xPts and Digne (5.5m) – 3.7 xPts.
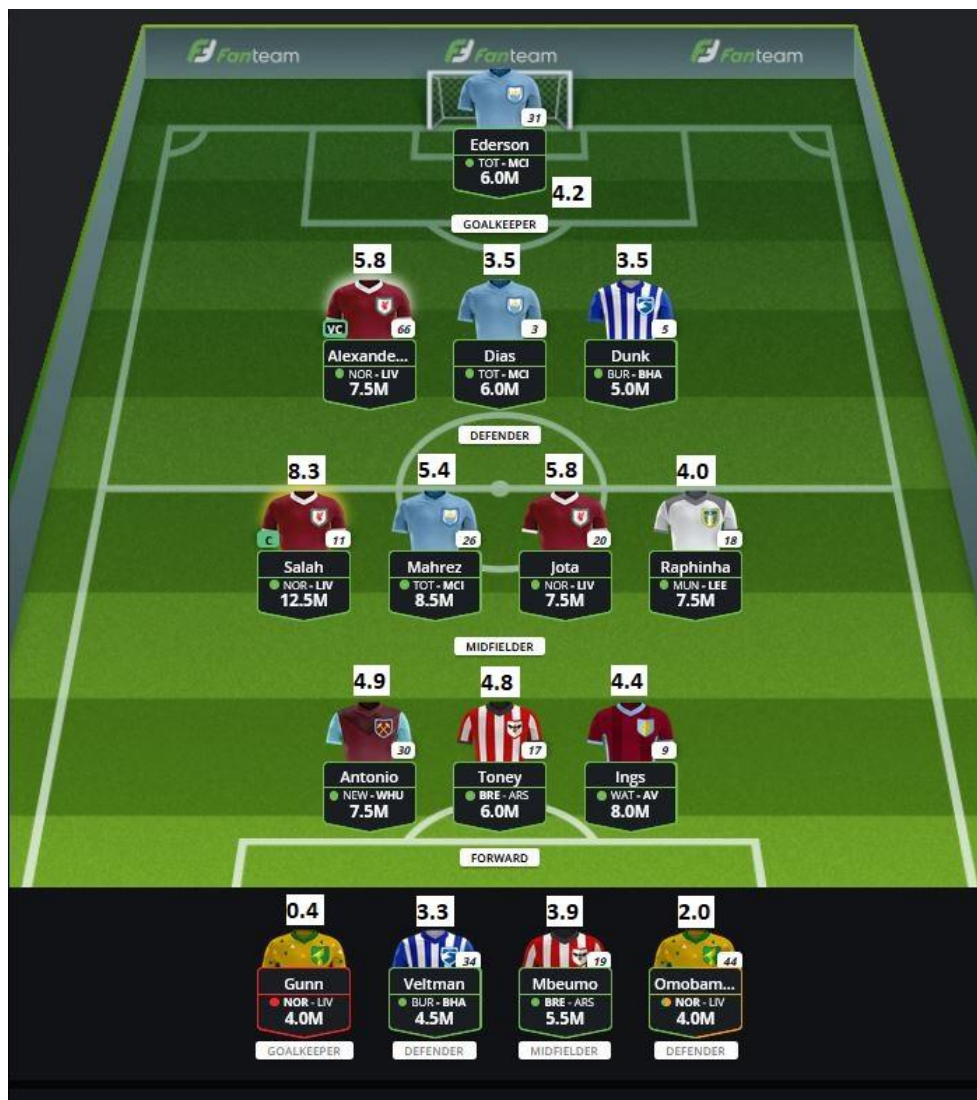
3. **MIDFIELDERS**

Let's be honest, no-one wants to play fantasy football in fear and in anticipation of agony. Just get Salah (12.5m) and Bruno Fernandes (12.0m) in your team! Mo Salah is the odds-on favourite to score a goal at 61%, with Bruno not far behind at 43%. With the additional points for cleansheet, 90 minutes completed, impact and Shots on Target, they are FanTeam gold. Accompanying them are Jota (7.5m) and Mahrez (8.5m), who are also heavy favourites to score with 48% and 31% respectively. No-one likes Pep roulette, but if ever Mahrez can be predicted to have a decent run-in, it would be now, with Foden injured, Bernardo wanting to leave and Grealish still settling in after his move to City. Also, he is most likely on penalties. Said Benrahma has been on fire in pre-season and he looks set to start against a dodgy Newcastle defence (20%

goalscoring probability). Other midfielders with high EV include Sadio Mane (10.0m) – 6.3 xPts, Mason Greenwood (7.5m) – 4.7 xPts, Bukayo Saka (6.5m) – 4.6 xPts, and Harvey Barnes (7.0m) – 4.5 xPts.

4. FORWARDS

There is a wealth of options in the mid-priced strikers market this season. Michail Antonio (7.5m) is a well-known xG beast with glass hamstrings, who has 38% odds for scoring a goal. Alongside him is the championship version of an xG monster in Ivan Toney (6.0m), who has been priced very kindly, is on penalties, and has a 35% goalscoring probability despite a tough opening fixture against Arsenal. Supporting them (ably) is the 4.0m striker Hirst, who provides the perfect bench fodder. Other forwards with high EV include Timo Werner (8.5m) – 5.0 xPts, Jamie Vardy (9.5m) – 4.8 xPts, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (9.5m) – 4.7 xPts and Callum Wilson (4.5 xPts).

DRAFT-II (GW1 EV = 64.4 xPts; 0.0M £ ITB)

Draft-II involves playing a 3-4-3 formation with the luxury of 2 rotating playing options on the bench. This draft has been built considering the best squad to last for a 5 GW horizon! Barring injuries, the only moves in this team could be to keep switching the big hitters for captaincy. A short summary of the rationale behind Draft II for GW1, discussing the key differences:

1. **GOALKEEPERS:** Manchester City are the best team in the league (as of now), with the best defence in the league (again, as of now!). Getting their "most-nailed" defensive asset in the team from the get-go is a viable strategy, albeit with some caveats as discussed in Draft-I.

2. **DEFENDERS:** Same rationale as that for Ederson, with Dias (6.0m) being the second-most nailed asset in the Manchester City squad. Starting with him might save an FT further down the road. Getting Ederson meant that sacrifices had to be made in defence, with Dunk now becoming a part of the starting XI. His shot volume, xG and "nailed-ness" in that Brighton defence makes him a pretty good FanTeam asset. Out of all the 4.0m defenders, Omobamidele might have the best chance of breaking into the Norwich starting XI, hence his inclusion on the bench.

3. **MIDFIELDERS:** As already proclaimed in Draft-I, BruNO is terrifying! However, due to the ability to enter multiple teams, one of those could be where you get someone with similar underlying stats as Bruno, who is not on penalties, and is an absolute baller, in the shape of Raphinha (7.5m). Again, this is long-term planning for a Leeds attacker which will save you an FT down the road. Mbeumo (5.5m) is Toney's partner-in-crime and shares set piece duties with decent underlying stats. His goalscoring probability is at 19% for GW1.

4. **FORWARDS:** Danny Ings' (8.0m) move to Aston Villa was an absolute shocker, with rumours appearing after his move was confirmed by the club! With Buendia, Bailey, and Watkins surrounding him in attack, Ings should get great service and prove to be a great asset for those first 3 GWs. Due to long term planning in all other areas, this short-term punt is viable and could pay off big time! The price point is also decent, and he can be moved to someone like Callum Wilson or Edinson Cavani.

According to the model projections, the top players for GW1 are*:

Player	Pos.	Price	Club	GW1 xPts
Mohamed Salah	MID	12.5	Liverpool	8.33
Kai Havertz	MID	8	Chelsea	6.46
Bruno Fernandes	MID	12	Manchester United	6.37
Sadio Mané	MID	10	Liverpool	6.28
Diogo Jota	MID	7.5	Liverpool	5.85
Trent Alexander-Arnold	DEF	7.5	Liverpool	5.80
Riyad Mahrez	MID	8.5	Manchester City	5.45
Timo Werner	FWD	8.5	Chelsea	5.03
Michail Antonio	FWD	7.5	West Ham United	4.87
Jamie Vardy	FWD	9.5	Leicester City	4.84

*Assuming the player starts

Another valuable metric might be understanding the top value picks, which according to the model projections, are as follows for GW1:

Player	Pos.	Price	Club	GW1 xPts	Value (xPts per million)
Konstantinos Tsimikas	DEF	4	Liverpool	3.88	0.97
Kasper Schmeichel	GK	5	Leicester City	4.18	0.84
Antonio Rüdiger	DEF	5.5	Chelsea	4.58	0.83
Kai Havertz	MID	8	Chelsea	6.46	0.81
Emile Smith Rowe	MID	5.5	Arsenal	4.44	0.81
Declan Rice	MID	5	West Ham United	4.03	0.81
Ivan Toney	FWD	6	Brentford	4.79	0.80
Daniel Bachmann	GK	4.5	Watford	3.58	0.80
Diogo Jota	MID	7.5	Liverpool	5.85	0.78
David Raya	GK	4.5	Brentford	3.51	0.78

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