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# How injured Rodri's absence could hurt Man City's trophy quest

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## Manchester City midfielder Rodri will have further tests on the knee injury that looks set to rule him out for an extended period of time.

The 28-year-old travelled to Spain on Monday for initial tests on the injury sustained in the early stages of City's 2-2 draw with Arsenal on Sunday.

Reports suggest it could be a lengthy absence and there are fears he may not return again this season.

Rodri is one of the favourites to win the Ballon d'Or next month - given to the world's best player - and considered by many to be City's most influential player.

The reigning English champions have not lost in the last 48 Premier League matches in which the Spaniard - also named player of the tournament when his country won Euro 2024 - has started.

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But City did lose four out of the five games he missed last season, with Rodri tasting defeat just once in all competitions - not including penalty shootouts such as the Champions League tie with Real Madrid - the [2-1 FA Cup final](#) upset by Manchester United.

Just how costly could his injury prove to be for their domestic and European hopes?

## Will sidelined Spaniard's loss sway title outcome?

After Rodri made his Manchester City debut in the 2019 Community Shield against Liverpool, team-mate Kevin de Bruyne described him as the "perfect fit" for the team.

He wasn't wrong.

Since arriving from Atletico Madrid, the Spain midfielder's influence has been extraordinary, with City having lost just 11% of their games with him in the side compared to 24% without him.



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# Rodri's importance to Man City

All competitions since 2019-20

Wins%  Draws%  Losses%

Source: Opta

BBC

City's points-per-game average with Rodri in the side - albeit across all competitions - is 2.36. Without him, it is just 2.04.

Therefore, if Rodri was to miss the rest of the Premier League season, using those averages City would finish on 80 points, compared to a projected 91 points with him playing every week.

In three out of the past four seasons, 91 points would have been enough to win the title.

However, the last time a team won the league with as few as 80 points was Manchester United in 2010-11. City, with Roberto Mancini at the helm, finished third that year.



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# What makes midfielder so important to City?

What makes him so effective?

Put simply, he wins the ball back from the opposition and then gives it to another player on his team - and he does so with metronomic accuracy.

Since his debut in a 5-0 win at West Ham, only Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice has won possession more often. Nobody has won the ball back more often in the middle third of the pitch than Rodri has, and only seven players during that time have made more tackles.

His reading of the game and combative nature has helped add a real defensive steel to City, with the club keeping 73 clean sheets in his 260 appearances.

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# Possession Won

(PL Since Aug 10, 2019)



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'Mentally, physically & tactically, Arsenal show why they are a force'

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Source: Opta

BBC

What really sets him apart, however, is how he uses the ball.

Since arriving in the Premier League, Rodri has successfully completed nearly 2,000 more passes than any other player - the City midfielder has made 13,699 in total, with Brighton defender Lewis Dunk next on the list with 11,952.

He has also completed more passes in both the opposition's half and in the final third, while his passing accuracy of 91.9% proves he seldom gives the ball



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away - even though he's often moving it deep in opposition territory.

## Successful Passes in Opp Half

(PL Since Aug 10, 2019)



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'Young pretender Dubois legitimises world title reign'

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Source: Opta

BBC

## Kovacic, Gundogan or Lewis - who could replace him?

BBC Sport's chief football writer Simon Stone:

Pep Guardiola has never made any secret of his belief Rodri is irreplaceable as a single midfield anchor in his Manchester City side.

Kalvin Phillips is the nearest thing to a sitting midfielder in the City squad but Guardiola has long since decided the former Leeds man is not good enough and he is currently on loan at Ipswich and unable to be recalled until January.

That means Guardiola is likely to tinker with his formation and play with two holding midfielders.

Former Chelsea star Mateo Kovacic can fill that role but he is not the only option.

Centre-back John Stones has rarely played as a lone defensive midfielder during his time at Etihad, but has been inverted into the deep-lying role at times from central defence and right-back.

Ilkay Gundogan was used in that position on numerous occasions before he left for Barcelona in 2023. Bernardo Silva has also played there, as has currently sidelined Kevin de Bruyne at times.

And then there is 19-year-old Rico Lewis, who someone Guardiola said only last week could fill a number of positions, such is his flexibility.

Losing Rodri for any length of time would be a hammer blow for City, but if anyone can come up with a plan to deal with it, Guardiola can.

The January transfer window is only a few months away as well.

Former Premier League striker Chris Sutton told Radio 5 live's Monday Night Club: "I don't think anybody can fill that role like Rodri, but Kovacic is as able a replacement out there. We've seen in the past they will find a way of coping, they always do."

## Man City XI without Rodri

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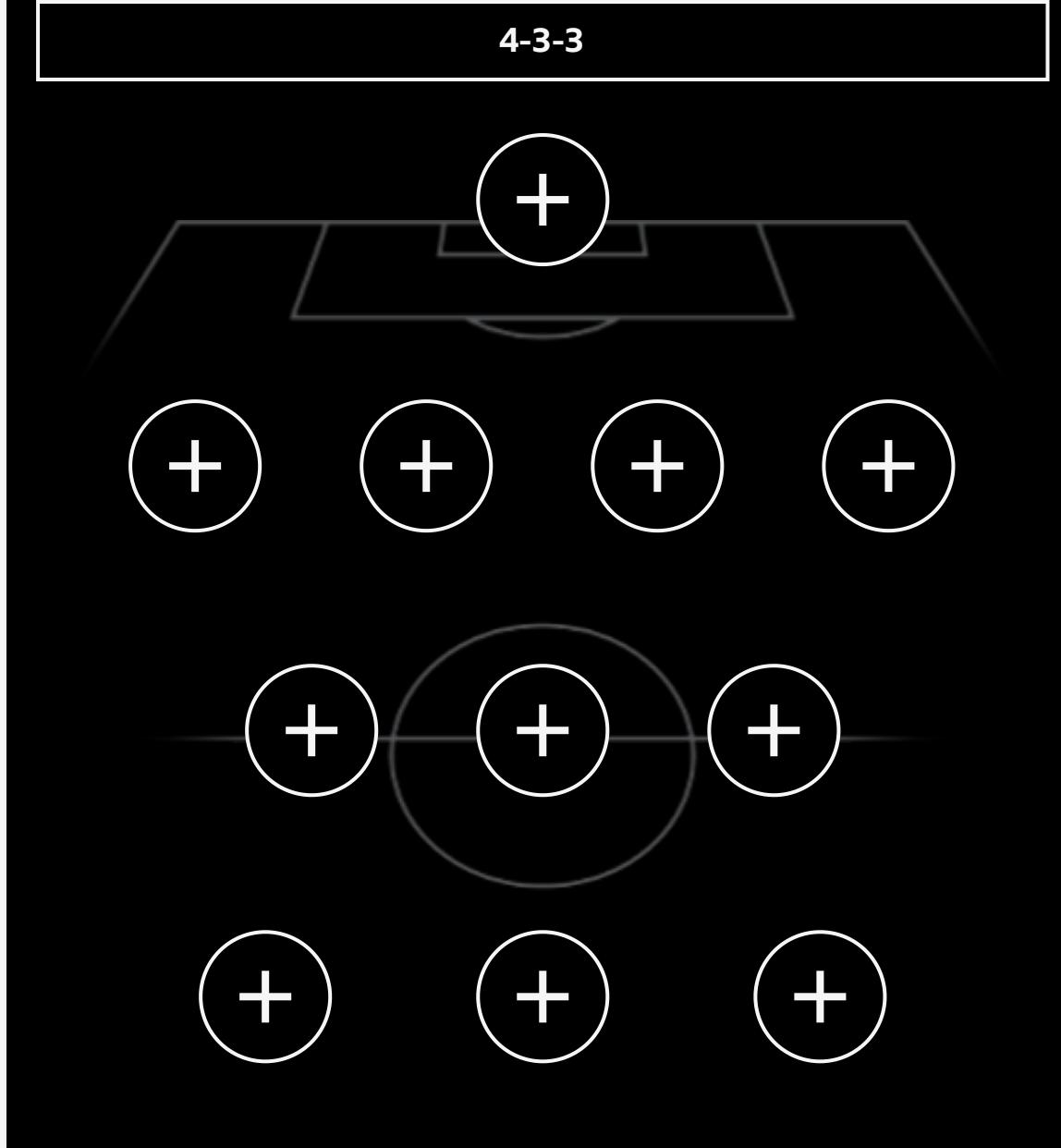


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