Liverpool FC's Transfer Market Analysis

Will the midfield rebuild be fruitful?

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Introduction

Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool, alongside Manchester City, dominated the Premier League during some of the recent seasons, showing a tremendously consistent team that was able to play an enthralling football. Apart from the domestic success, they also managed to win the 2018-2019 UEFA Champions League. However, the lack of big signings led to a significant drop off in 'The Reds' performances last season, which was Klopp's worst ever since he arrived at Anfield Road, finishing in a disappointing 5th place considering that, in the season prior, they got 92 points.

Given this, a rebuild was almost mandatory to get Liverpool back to their best, especially at the midfield, where players like Fabinho and Jordan Henderson were at a noticeable decline and the back-up options were far from ideal for a 'Big-6' Premier League club.

Despite not spending large amounts of money in the previous years, FSG, the owners of Liverpool Football Club, decided to buy 4 midfielders: Alexis Mac Allister from Brighton & Hove Albion (42M €), Dominik Szoboszlai from RB Leipzig (70M €), Stuggart's captain Wataru Endo (19M €) and Ryan Gravenberch from FC Bayern München (40M €). With a reasonably huge net spend, 'The Reds' have undeniably strengthened their squad. Nevertheless, whilst trying to fill a hole in the team, another one, equally important, is forgotten and is left without any improvement. The defence department lacks solid alternatives to the starting "back four", which might cause severe trouble to Liverpool's consistency over the course of the season.

Club's Context

Liverpool began last season playing in their traditional structure: 4-3-3 with overlapping full-backs. However, such setup became vulnerable in the defence as teams were figuring out Klopp's tactics, which increased drastically their xGCp90. In response to this, Liverpool's manager changed the team's approach, with an inverted full-back (in this case, Trent Alexander-Arnold). The back four altered to a back three in possession while the front 3 remained the same. This allowed a box-midfield to be created, a tactic that has become popular since last season, with clubs like Manchester City, Arsenal and Barcelona implementing it in order to gain numerical advantage in the midfield, which helps the team in and out of possession, but it requires technical and tactical skills from the players, as well as the usual intensity that Klopp's game has. With the new signings, Liverpool's midfield certainly looks fresher going into the 2023-2024 season as they are able to dominate possession and counter-press exceptionally well.

Signings Brief Analysis

First of all, it should be taken into account that, in Liverpool's box midfield, 3 positions must have one of the 4 signings, that is the Left Centre Midfielder (LCM), Right Centre Midfielder (RCM) and Left Defensive Midfielder (LDM). Trent Alexander-Arnold plays in the Right Defensive Midfielder (RDM) position. Even though 'The Reds' possess the likes of Harvey Elliot, Curtis Jones and Stefan Bajčetić, Klopp should have world class players at his disposal to fight for big prizes and win trophies. Squad rotation will play an instrumental role later in the season, with the young stars showcasing their talent.

☐ Alexis Mac Allister

The 2022 World Cup winner for Argentina, as it was seen when he was at Brighton, can play as 6, 8 or 10. This undoubtedly adds versatility to the team. However, deploying him as a 6 may not be the best choice as his defensive underlying numbers are not that good, especially for a team that suffered constantly in defensive transitions. Nonetheless, he can make some tackles and recover the ball sometimes.

Alexis Mac Allister had a great shot volume while he was at 'The Seagulls', but that will diminish since he will be tasked will controlling the tempo of the game, something he does quite well, participating in the attack and the pressing. Even though he is superb at circulating the ball, the 24-year-old does not excel on progressive passing and carring, being slightly above average when compared to other Premier League midfielders. He rarely loses balls with this conservative approach, which isn't a concern because Trent Alexander-Arnold is perfectly capable of creating numerous and big chances with a single pass. Besides this, the Argentinian is good at dribbling too.

To sum up, Mac Allister is a great addition to the squad as he is versatile, relatively young, has Premier League experience and possesses significant attributes to bolster Liverpool's midfield in the LCM or even LDM positions.

☐ Dominik Szoboszlai

Coming from the Bundesliga, Szoboszlai's technique will be a joy to watch since he has a stupendous passing skill and awesome playmaking abilities. The Hungarian is also exceptional at long balls, progressive passing, creating opportunities, long-distance shots and taking set pieces.

Dominik Szoboszlai is not just excellent on the ball. When his team does not have it, he's tactically disciplined to position himself in the right place in order to make a tackle and has intensity when doing so, something that suits Klopp's tactics perfectly with 'The Reds' counter-pressing strategy.

As opposed to his teammate Alexis Mac Allister, the former Leipzig player looks to play the ball forward, which, again, is good for Liverpool as they tend to play direct football.

For 70M €, it's an amazing and worthy acquisition as, at only 22 years old, the Hungarian's consistency in the RCM position is what Liverpool need to bounce back.

☐ Wataru Endo

After big hopes, LFC fans get a 30-year-old Japanese player that captained relegation contenders Stuggart, in Germany, for a relatively low fee of just 19M €. It may sound quite depressing and sad given Liverpool's status and ambitions, but it's far from a nonsense transfer.

While Endo is not a deep-lying playmaker, he is surprisingly good at passing the ball, not just horizontally, but also forward. He does like to take a shot when space is afforded. However, at Liverpool he will be deeper, playing as 6 or even at a LCB if Andrew Robertson advances up the field (something he really likes) and tasked with defensive chores, which the Japanese isn't bad at, tackling and clearing the ball often. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Endo does not have top-level composure as he can, sometimes, make the wrong decision without the ball or waste a chance by passing it forward when the tempo game needs to be slowed down.

Considering all of this, 'The Reds' have in their hands a player that can partially solve their problems defensively. Even though Wataru Endo is not a world-class defensive midfielder, he improves the squad depth and gives Klopp time to develop Stefan Bajčetić.

☐ Ryan Gravenberch

With an enourmous potential yet to be showcased in the top leagues, Gravenberch's lack of game time at FC Bayern München (576 minutes played in the 2022-2023 Bundesliga season) has led to this move, costing FSG 40M € to get the Dutch player.

By analysing his data during his last season in the Eredivisie, it is possible to acknowledge that Liverpool's attacking style should suit Gravenberch, who loves to carry and pass the ball forward. He prefers to make short or medium-range passes, with a vast number of them being to the attacking third, which highlights his playmaking ability. A fantastic aspect about his game is that the Dutch star excels on dribbling, a helpful quality when evading the press or dismantling low and compacted blocks.

In spite of his defensive numbers not being great, the former FC Bayern München player can prove to be a key asset in the counter-pressing. Apart from that, Gravenberch is capable of winning aerial duels, a crucial element of the game, especially given that Liverpool are proficient in pressing and usually force long balls from the opposition. This also drastically reinforces the side at defending set pieces.

In conclusion, Ryan Gravenberch is a superb footballer which adds even more athleticism to 'The Reds' midfield. With his versatility, Klopp has more tools in order to maintain a well-structured midfield capable of providing the intensity Liverpool lacked last season.

Final Remarks

Summing up, Liverpool's midfield rebuild was highly successful. Alexis Mac Allister, Dominik Szoboszlai, Wataru Endo and Ryan Gravenberch were the type of players 'The Reds' heavily needed. With them at Klopp's disposal, Liverpool can finally become Liverpool again, the Liverpool that regained possession of the ball in a matter of seconds and the Liverpool that was a fear for opposition teams due to their electric attack.

However, as said before, the defence department is not in a ideal state in a season when LFC fans hope their team can bounce back and achieve UEFA Champions League football next season.

Sources

- [FBref](#)
- [Transfermarkt](#)