

# Predicting Player Rating by Player Position for European Football

*Springboard Intermediate Data Science: Python*

*Capstone Project Final Report*

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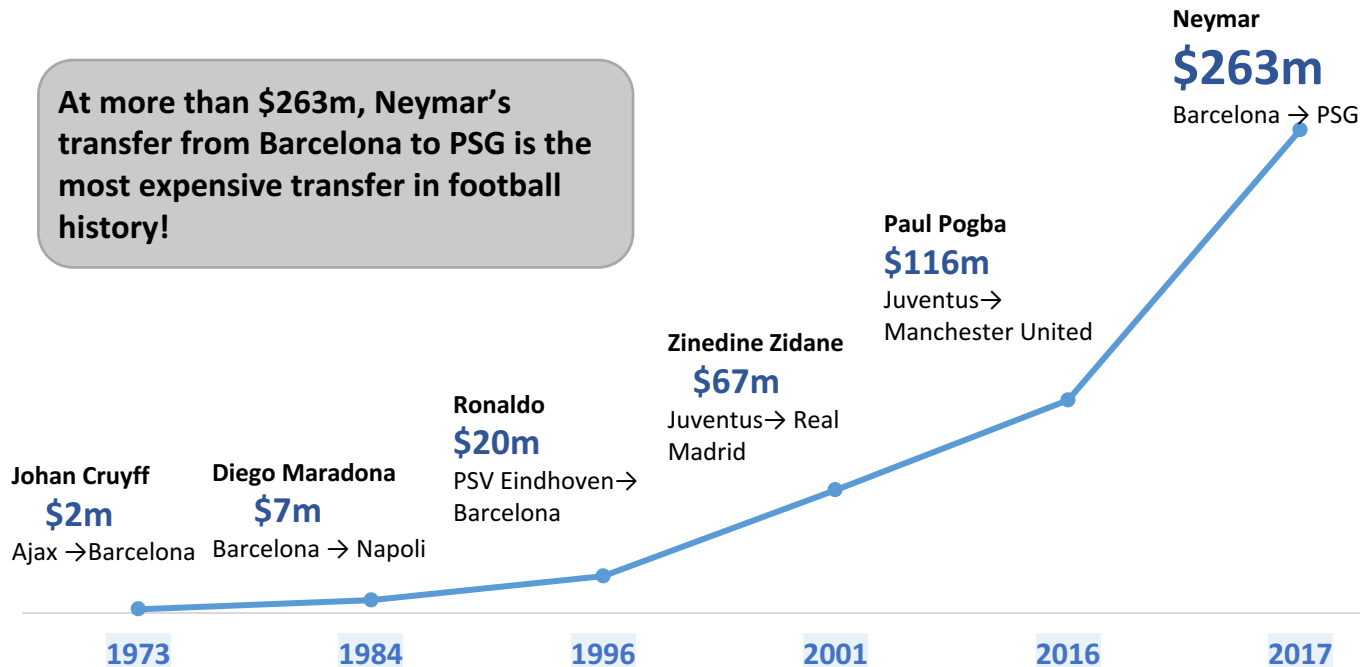


# INTRODUCTION

# PROBLEM

Player transfers in association football are multimillion dollar deals, every year clubs pay millions of dollars to sign new players. The client, a European football club wants a list of top players for each playing position so that they can shortlist desirable candidates from the players available on the transfer list.

At more than \$263m, Neymar's transfer from Barcelona to PSG is the most expensive transfer in football history!



# REQUIREMENT

- The client wants a model that can predict the aggregated overall rating of a player at each age of the player. In addition to the **list of top players at playing positions** they also want to know **the significant attributes that affect the player rating for each position**
- **Player ratings are calculated based on player attribute stats as well as other factors** such as the league the player is associated with, the specific circumstances which resulted in an attribute score and various other factors, this data (attribute and rating) is made available by EA Sports FIFA (game)
- Our aim is to **predict these ratings based only on the player attribute stats available to us from the FIFA game data** and use these predicted ratings to **identify the top players in each position**



Prediction Algorithm

#3

Forward

Under 25 years



# DATA SOURCE

- The data we will use for this problem is sourced from several websites such as [Football-Data-MX-API](#): scores, lineup, team formation and events  
[Sofifa](#): players and teams attributes from EA Sports FIFA games, FIFA series and all FIFA assets property of EA Sports;
- It is curated by Hugomathien and made available on Kaggle [\[here\]](#)
- Data available from 2008 to 2016 in form of SQLite database

## TABLES:

- **Match**: Match details data for each match like match\_date, home\_team, opponent\_team, player\_ids of players playing in the match, player\_id at each playing coordinate
- **Player**: Player details like player\_id, player\_name, birthdate, height, weight
- **Player\_Attributes**: Attributes sourced from several sources for each match player has played like player\_id, preferred\_foot, attacking\_work\_rate, overall\_rating, crossing, finishing, heading\_accuracy, short\_passing etc.
- **Country**: country\_id, country\_name
- **League**: id, country\_id, league\_name



# METHODOLOGY



## DATA WRANGLING

- Clean
- Merge
- Handle Missing Values
- Aggregate



## DATA EXPLORATION

- Data Distribution
- Hypothesis Testing: Difference Between Groups, Normality, Linearity, Multicollinearity



## DATA MODELING

- Feature Selection
- Feature Reduction (PCA)
- Regression Models: Linear, Polynomial, Ridge, Lasso, SVR
- Model Comparison
- Prediction

# DATA WRANGLING

- Player positions are calculated for each player using Match data
- Player, Player Attributes, Positions files are merged to get all player data in a single data table, the variables in this table can be seen in the adjoining image
- Less than 5% of the data was missing i.e. some features were not available for some players, also data from the season 2008-09 was very inconsistent. These missing values were removed from the final dataset
- Data was aggregated using the mean function for each player at each age of the player because the model requirement is to get predicted scores for a player at players current age

```
Data columns (total 39 columns):
player_api_id      52725 non-null int64
player_name        52725 non-null object
player_position    52725 non-null object
overall_rating     52725 non-null float64
age                52725 non-null float64
height             52725 non-null float64
weight             52725 non-null int64
finishing           52725 non-null float64
heading_accuracy   52725 non-null float64
short_passing      52725 non-null float64
volleys            52725 non-null float64
dribbling           52725 non-null float64
curve              52725 non-null float64
free_kick_accuracy 52725 non-null float64
long_passing        52725 non-null float64
ball_control        52725 non-null float64
acceleration        52725 non-null float64
sprint_speed        52725 non-null float64
agility             52725 non-null float64
reactions           52725 non-null float64
balance             52725 non-null float64
shot_power          52725 non-null float64
jumping             52725 non-null float64
stamina             52725 non-null float64
strength            52725 non-null float64
long_shots          52725 non-null float64
aggression          52725 non-null float64
interceptions       52725 non-null float64
positioning         52725 non-null float64
vision              52725 non-null float64
penalties           52725 non-null float64
marking             52725 non-null float64
standing_tackle     52725 non-null float64
sliding_tackle      52725 non-null float64
gk_diving           52725 non-null float64
gk_handling         52725 non-null float64
gk_kicking          52725 non-null float64
gk_positioning      52725 non-null float64
gk_reflexes         52725 non-null float64
dtypes: float64(35), int64(2), object(2)
```

Player data information

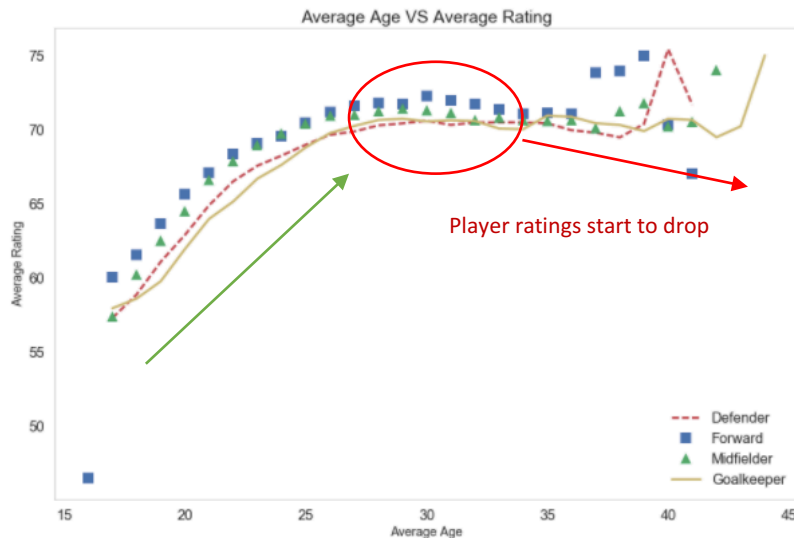




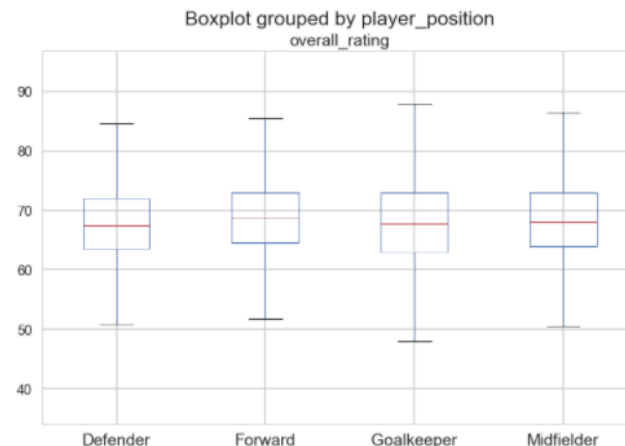
# DATA EXPLORATION



- It is assumed that a players playing position and players age affects the players rating.
- We test these assumptions and find that player rating tends to increase until the player reaches approximately 30, while after 30 the growth stops and eventually ratings go down



- We can use the entire dataset available to build a model to predict player rating, however, our assumption that player position affects players rating is correct. We tested the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between mean ratings of different position groups using the one way ANOVA test and based on results of the test we rejected the hypotheses
- As a result, we will build prediction model separately for each position



Boxplot shows mean difference between groups



# DATA MODELING

# FEATURE SELECTION



- Players at different positions have different skill sets, based on the available attribute set we identify features that are significantly affecting the player rating
- As the dataset is very large with many features (36). We select features for each player position such that if there is no significant relationship between player rating and feature we discard the feature.
- The selected features are scaled to increase modeling accuracy
- Principal Component Analysis is performed on the scaled feature data to reduce dimensionality and the new components are selected basis scree plot.
- These new components are used in two of the models: Linear Regression and Polynomial Regression as these models do not work well with high dimensions

## Defender:

Insignificant features are:

|    | features       | r_score   | r2_score | pvalue |
|----|----------------|-----------|----------|--------|
| 34 | gk_reflexes    | 0.009236  | 0.001349 | 0.2215 |
| 33 | gk_positioning | 0.003310  | 0.000012 | 0.6613 |
| 31 | gk_handling    | -0.010202 | 0.000536 | 0.1769 |

## Midfielder:

Insignificant features are:

|    | features       | r_score   | r2_score | pvalue |
|----|----------------|-----------|----------|--------|
| 33 | gk_positioning | 0.003289  | 0.000012 | 0.6406 |
| 34 | gk_reflexes    | 0.002207  | 0.001349 | 0.754  |
| 31 | gk_handling    | 0.001654  | 0.000536 | 0.8144 |
| 1  | height         | -0.016278 | 0.000819 | 0.0208 |

## Forward:

Insignificant features are:

|    | features       | r_score  | r2_score | pvalue |
|----|----------------|----------|----------|--------|
| 31 | gk_handling    | 0.023150 | 0.000536 | 0.0195 |
| 30 | gk_diving      | 0.021562 | 0.000465 | 0.0296 |
| 33 | gk_positioning | 0.003423 | 0.000012 | 0.7299 |

## Goalkeeper:

Insignificant features are:

|    | features       | r_score   | r2_score | pvalue |
|----|----------------|-----------|----------|--------|
| 3  | finishing      | -0.016550 | 0.583881 | 0.2484 |
| 6  | volleys        | -0.019294 | 0.583784 | 0.1784 |
| 21 | long_shots     | -0.020163 | 0.532845 | 0.1596 |
| 29 | sliding_tackle | -0.028369 | 0.007979 | 0.0478 |
| 7  | dribbling      | -0.028393 | 0.526532 | 0.0477 |

The respective insignificant features for each of these positions are excluded from the data modeling for the position

# MODEL COMPARISON

- All datasets are split into train and test data (80-20 split)
- Models are optimized on train data by obtaining best parameters and performing K-fold Cross Validation
- Best fitting model is selected for each position by comparing the test accuracy and root mean square error of the model
- The following modeling techniques were used:
  - **Linear Regression**
  - **Polynomial Regression**
  - **Ridge Regression**
  - **Lasso Regression**
  - **Support Vector Regression (SVR)**
- For each position Polynomial Regression had overfitting issues and was thus not considered
- SVR was the best fit model for predicting ratings for each player position. As such, the predicted player ratings for last ages (in data) of players were computed using SVR.

**Defender Model Comparison**

|   | Model             | Test_Accuracy |
|---|-------------------|---------------|
| 0 | Linear_Regression | 75.32         |
| 1 | Ridge_Regression  | 89.08         |
| 2 | Lasso_Regression  | 89.06         |
| 3 | SVR               | 97.79         |

**Forward Model Comparison**

|   | Model             | Test_Accuracy |
|---|-------------------|---------------|
| 0 | Linear_Regression | 56.22         |
| 1 | Ridge_Regression  | 91.56         |
| 2 | Lasso_Regression  | 91.64         |
| 3 | SVR               | 98.21         |

**Midfielder Model Comparison**

|   | Model             | Test_Accuracy |
|---|-------------------|---------------|
| 0 | Linear_Regression | 65.71         |
| 1 | Ridge_Regression  | 86.60         |
| 2 | Lasso_Regression  | 86.61         |
| 3 | SVR               | 97.06         |

**Goalkeeper Model Comparison**

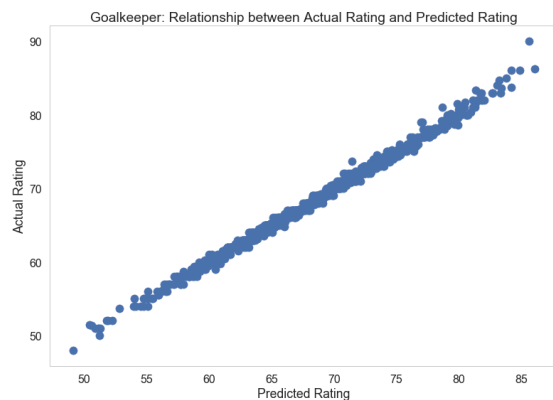
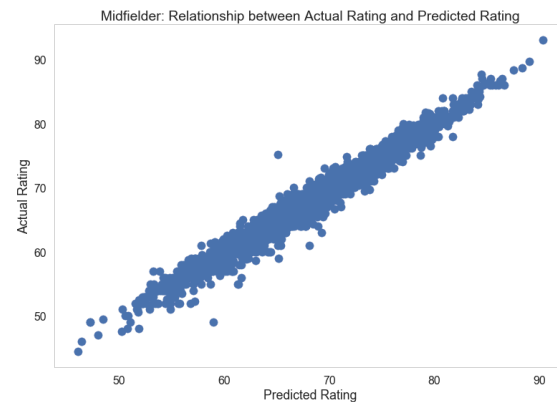
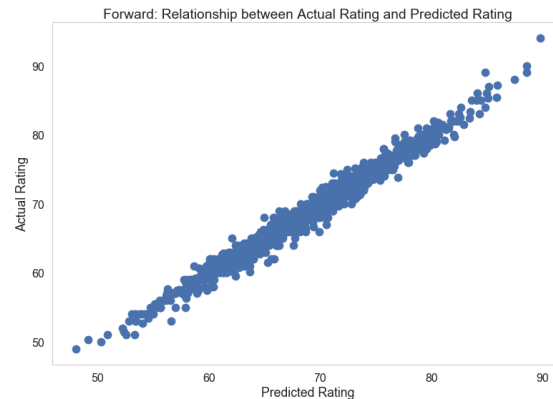
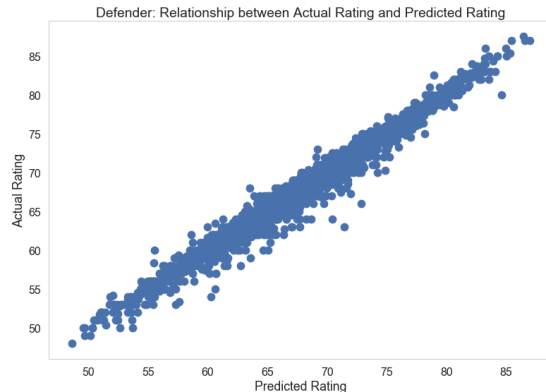
|   | Model             | Test_Accuracy |
|---|-------------------|---------------|
| 0 | Linear_Regression | -266.57       |
| 1 | Ridge_Regression  | 87.14         |
| 2 | Lasso_Regression  | 86.61         |
| 3 | SVR               | 97.06         |



**Support Vector Regression (SVR) is the best fitting model**

# PREDICTION

The scatter plots of the actual vs predicted ratings for all four positions show almost negligible dispersion indicating that our predictions have high accuracy



# RESULTS

- We identified the top attributes which have very high correlation with the ratings of players for each position
- We identified top players by position overall and also top players by position under age of 25 years
- The list of these top players is available in the appendix (slide 19)
- Our models have been successful in predicting player rating using only the attribute stats available with more than 97% accuracy
- Our predicted ratings are for 2016\*, some of our predicted top players such as Neymar, Lukaku, Morata were transferred this season. This shows how useful our list can be for player selection
- The final list can be filtered by age, country, league or other player details based on clients requirement. This will help narrow down the search as desired

\*2017 data will be added to the analysis in the future



## MOST SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

### DEFENDER

- Standing Tackle, Interceptions, Marking, Sliding Tackle and Reaction

### FORWARD

- Ball Control, Reactions, Positioning, Finishing, Volleys, Shot Power, Long Shots, Short Passing and Dribbling

### MIDFIELDER

- Ball Control, Reactions, Vision, and Short Passing

### GOALKEEPER

- Goalkeeping positioning, Goalkeeping Reflexes, Goalkeeping Diving and Goalkeeping Handling

# LIMITATIONS



There are certain limitations in the data that reduce the robustness of the models we have developed:

- Not all historical data is available for each player. Knowing that the FIFA (game) Player Ranking is based on historical data of player, we do not have this data for each player. A lot of information will not be learned by the model due to the absence of this data.
- Data related to ranks of leagues, teams and countries is also not available in this data. This information would have made the model more accurate as these factors play an important role in determining player ranking.
- There is not enough historical data available for each player, if it were, a time series model could be built to predict the future ratings of players
- There was country and league data missing for few players and more than 20% players from our players' data had not been active in the last two years. These players were excluded from featuring in the top players lists.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- The player rating increases with age and for Defender, Midfielder and Forwards around the age range of 30-35 the rating starts to drop
- For goalkeepers, the trend is different with ratings remaining high from ages 25 onwards
- The general assumption that player rating falls as age increases is true only after age range of 30-33 years. This information can be used on the best players given by the models to make better selections
- We have identified the current best players and this list can be used to filter out potential new additions to the club
- The top significant features that are identified in this study should be further analyzed and these skills should be identified early in newer players to improve their performance





# FUTURE WORK



Add FIFA 17 game data to get current player list

Analyze effect of age, nationality on player attributes

Identify patterns in attributes of top players

Make predictions for more specific player positions

Analyze historical performance of players to make future predictions

Use attribute patterns of top players to identify potentially high performing newcomers

Thank You





# APPENDIX

# TOP 10 DEFENDERS

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name        | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name            | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|-----|
| 80562         | Defender        | Thiago Silva       | 86                       | 87             | 2           | France Ligue 1         | France       | 31  |
| 30962         | Defender        | Sergio Ramos       | 86                       | 87             | 2           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 30  |
| 30894         | Defender        | Philipp Lahm       | 86                       | 87             | 2           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 32  |
| 36183         | Defender        | Jerome Boateng     | 85                       | 87             | 4           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 27  |
| 56678         | Defender        | Diego Godin        | 85                       | 85             | 4           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 30  |
| 36388         | Defender        | Mats Hummels       | 84                       | 86             | 8           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 27  |
| 121633        | Defender        | David Alaba        | 84                       | 85             | 8           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 24  |
| 31306         | Defender        | Branislav Ivanovic | 84                       | 80             | 8           | England Premier League | England      | 32  |
| 19327         | Defender        | Miranda            | 84                       | 85             | 8           | Italy Serie A          | Italy        | 32  |
| 39027         | Defender        | Vincent Kompany    | 84                       | 85             | 8           | England Premier League | England      | 30  |



# TOP 10 DEFENDERS

## UNDER 25

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name       | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name           | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----|
| 121633        | Defender        | David Alaba       | 84                       | 85             | 1           | Germany 1. Bundesliga | Germany      | 24  |
| 115591        | Defender        | Ricardo Rodriguez | 82                       | 82             | 2           | Germany 1. Bundesliga | Germany      | 24  |
| 282674        | Defender        | Daniel Carvajal   | 81                       | 81             | 3           | Spain LIGA BBVA       | Spain        | 24  |
| 230982        | Defender        | Raphael Varane    | 81                       | 82             | 3           | Spain LIGA BBVA       | Spain        | 23  |
| 267365        | Defender        | Marquinhos        | 80                       | 80             | 6           | France Ligue 1        | France       | 21  |
| 184999        | Defender        | Shkodran Mustafi  | 80                       | 82             | 6           | Spain LIGA BBVA       | Spain        | 24  |
| 188555        | Defender        | Stefan de Vrij    | 80                       | 81             | 6           | Italy Serie A         | Italy        | 24  |
| 411617        | Defender        | Aymeric Laporte   | 80                       | 81             | 6           | Spain LIGA BBVA       | Spain        | 21  |
| 213485        | Defender        | Matija Nastasic   | 79                       | 79             | 9           | Germany 1. Bundesliga | Germany      | 23  |
| 195299        | Defender        | Serge Aurier      | 79                       | 80             | 9           | France Ligue 1        | France       | 23  |



# TOP 10 FORWARDS

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name        | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name            | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|-----|
| 30981         | Forward         | Lionel Messi       | 89                       | 94             | 1           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 29  |
| 35724         | Forward         | Zlatan Ibrahimovic | 88                       | 89             | 2           | France Ligue 1         | France       | 34  |
| 40636         | Forward         | Luis Suarez        | 88                       | 90             | 2           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 29  |
| 37412         | Forward         | Sergio Aguero      | 87                       | 88             | 4           | England Premier League | England      | 28  |
| 38817         | Forward         | Carlos Tevez       | 85                       | 85             | 6           | Italy Serie A          | Italy        | 32  |
| 164684        | Forward         | James Rodriguez    | 85                       | 87             | 6           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 25  |
| 93447         | Forward         | Robert Lewandowski | 85                       | 87             | 6           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 27  |
| 30829         | Forward         | Wayne Rooney       | 85                       | 85             | 6           | England Premier League | England      | 30  |
| 19533         | Forward         | Neymar             | 84                       | 89             | 9           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 24  |
| 26166         | Forward         | Karim Benzema      | 84                       | 86             | 9           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 28  |



# TOP 10 FORWARDS

## UNDER 25

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name               | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name              | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|-----|
| 19533         | Forward         | Neymar                    | 84                       | 89             | 1           | Spain LIGA BBVA          | Spain        | 24  |
| 325916        | Forward         | Paulo Dybala              | 82                       | 79             | 2           | Italy Serie A            | Italy        | 22  |
| 181276        | Forward         | Romelu Lukaku             | 80                       | 81             | 5           | England Premier League   | England      | 23  |
| 213501        | Forward         | Alvaro Morata             | 80                       | 80             | 5           | Italy Serie A            | Italy        | 24  |
| 303824        | Forward         | Memphis Depay             | 80                       | 80             | 5           | England Premier League   | England      | 22  |
| 241825        | Forward         | Francisco Alcaraz         | 80                       | 80             | 5           | Spain LIGA BBVA          | Spain        | 23  |
| 364520        | Forward         | Domenico Berardi          | 80                       | 81             | 5           | Italy Serie A            | Italy        | 22  |
| 194165        | Forward         | Harry Kane                | 80                       | 81             | 5           | England Premier League   | England      | 23  |
| 354467        | Forward         | Yannick Ferreira-Carrasco | 79                       | 79             | 9           | Spain LIGA BBVA          | Spain        | 23  |
| 202443        | Forward         | Vincent Aboubakar         | 79                       | 78             | 9           | Portugal Liga ZON Sagres | Portugal     | 24  |



# TOP 10 MIDFIELDERS

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name       | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name            | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|-----|
| 30893         | Midfielder      | Cristiano Ronaldo | 90                       | 93             | 1           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 31  |
| 30834         | Midfielder      | Arjen Robben      | 89                       | 89             | 2           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 32  |
| 107417        | Midfielder      | Eden Hazard       | 88                       | 88             | 3           | England Premier League | England      | 25  |
| 30955         | Midfielder      | Andres Iniesta    | 87                       | 88             | 4           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 31  |
| 37459         | Midfielder      | David Silva       | 86                       | 86             | 6           | England Premier League | England      | 30  |
| 30924         | Midfielder      | Franck Ribery     | 86                       | 86             | 6           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 33  |
| 31921         | Midfielder      | Gareth Bale       | 86                       | 87             | 6           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 27  |
| 129944        | Midfielder      | Marco Reus        | 86                       | 86             | 6           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 27  |
| 39854         | Midfielder      | Xavi Hernandez    | 85                       | 86             | 9           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 35  |
| 154257        | Midfielder      | Sergio Busquets   | 85                       | 86             | 9           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 28  |





# TOP 10 MIDFIELDERS

## UNDER 25

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name       | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name            | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|-----|
| 248453        | Midfielder      | Paul Pogba        | 84                       | 86             | 1           | Italy Serie A          | Italy        | 23  |
| 184536        | Midfielder      | Philippe Coutinho | 83                       | 84             | 2           | England Premier League | England      | 24  |
| 177714        | Midfielder      | Mario Goetze      | 83                       | 84             | 2           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 24  |
| 184533        | Midfielder      | Koke              | 82                       | 83             | 6           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 24  |
| 191315        | Midfielder      | Isco              | 82                       | 84             | 6           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 24  |
| 243164        | Midfielder      | Julian Draxler    | 82                       | 82             | 6           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 23  |
| 190972        | Midfielder      | Marco Verratti    | 82                       | 84             | 6           | France Ligue 1         | France       | 23  |
| 157723        | Midfielder      | Christian Eriksen | 82                       | 83             | 6           | England Premier League | England      | 24  |
| 174850        | Midfielder      | Erik Lamela       | 81                       | 79             | 9           | England Premier League | England      | 24  |
| 242709        | Midfielder      | Roberto Firmino   | 81                       | 81             | 9           | England Premier League | England      | 24  |



# TOP 10 GOALKEEPERS

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name      | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name            | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|-----|
| 182917        | Goalkeeper      | David De Gea     | 86                       | 86             | 1           | England Premier League | England      | 25  |
| 27299         | Goalkeeper      | Manuel Neuer     | 85                       | 90             | 2           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 30  |
| 170323        | Goalkeeper      | Thibaut Courtois | 84                       | 86             | 4           | England Premier League | England      | 23  |
| 42422         | Goalkeeper      | Samir Handanovic | 84                       | 83             | 4           | Italy Serie A          | Italy        | 32  |
| 30859         | Goalkeeper      | Petr Cech        | 84                       | 86             | 4           | England Premier League | England      | 34  |
| 215168        | Goalkeeper      | Bernd Leno       | 83                       | 83             | 7           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 24  |
| 26295         | Goalkeeper      | Hugo Lloris      | 83                       | 85             | 7           | England Premier League | England      | 29  |
| 31432         | Goalkeeper      | Joe Hart         | 83                       | 84             | 7           | England Premier League | England      | 29  |
| 30717         | Goalkeeper      | Gianluigi Buffon | 83                       | 84             | 7           | Italy Serie A          | Italy        | 38  |
| 37421         | Goalkeeper      | Claudio Bravo    | 82                       | 83             | 10          | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 32  |



# TOP 10 GOALKEEPERS

## UNDER 25

| player_api_id | player_position | player_name           | predicted_overall_rating | overall_rating | player_rank | league_name            | country_name | age |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|-----|
| 170323        | Goalkeeper      | Thibaut Courtois      | 84                       | 86             | 1           | England Premier League | England      | 23  |
| 215168        | Goalkeeper      | Bernd Leno            | 83                       | 83             | 2           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 24  |
| 184554        | Goalkeeper      | Marc-Andre ter Stegen | 81                       | 82             | 3           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 24  |
| 181910        | Goalkeeper      | Mattia Perin          | 80                       | 81             | 5           | Italy Serie A          | Italy        | 23  |
| 177126        | Goalkeeper      | Jan Oblak             | 80                       | 81             | 5           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 23  |
| 212815        | Goalkeeper      | Timo Horn             | 80                       | 80             | 5           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 23  |
| 245555        | Goalkeeper      | Geronimo Rulli        | 79                       | 79             | 7           | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 24  |
| 288880        | Goalkeeper      | Jack Butland          | 79                       | 78             | 7           | England Premier League | England      | 23  |
| 287894        | Goalkeeper      | Loris Karius          | 78                       | 79             | 9           | Germany 1. Bundesliga  | Germany      | 23  |
| 210164        | Goalkeeper      | Alphonse Areola       | 77                       | 77             | 10          | Spain LIGA BBVA        | Spain        | 23  |

