

Data/Analysis Utilization vs. Recency Bias

Recency bias – a tendency to give overdue weight to the newest events -- pushes false narratives in soccer and distorts accurate assessments of the value and performance of players individually and relative to one another. This study uses analytics for two Premier League stars to show how recency bias reflected in fan opinions and punditry leads to wildly inaccurate judgements. Manchester City's Jack Grealish is currently performing at a level most players should be happy with yet many fans now regard him as "overrated." But analytics show that contrary to public and media perceptions, he's having a solid season and is a key contributor.

In 2 Premier League starts, Grealish has 2.7 dribbles per game, 2 key passes per game, 1 shot per game, is fouled 2.3 times per game, and has an average match rating of 7.50, with 1 goal in 212 minutes. Yet many observers regard the star forward as a "flop", based on his high transfer fee from Aston Villa, his limited game time and the way his eye-catching style at his previous club has less latitude at talent-stocked City.

However, compared to one of the consensus "on form players" right now -- Marcus Rashford – it's clear Grealish is being judged too harshly.

Rashford's current output is 2.5 shots per game, 1.2 key passes per game and 1.3 dribbles per game. He is fouled 0.8 times per game, with an overall average match rating of 7.16, with 3 goals & 2 assists in 6 starts. The Manchester United forward's direct output (goals and assists) is not a good comparable to Grealish, however since he plays in a counter-attacking system and is used as an outlet he will have more clear cut opportunities. But overall, their analytics are similar. In fact, Rashford's numbers should be better than those of his England teammate, because United under manager coach Erik ten Hag are a counter-attacking team and hold a deeper line, partly because of goalie David De Gea's poor distributional skills. City meanwhile hold a very high line, are more possession based, and therefore have less space to exploit behind their opponent's defensive line because they pin the other team in their own half.

This analysis proves public and media hysteria over Grealish's form, due to recency bias rooted in his underwhelming first year at City is distorting reality. We hear claims that he "could end up back at Aston Villa" or he "hasn't done enough to be in Gareth Southgate's England" But my research disproves these opinions. Facts show Grealish is having a good start to the year even if the sample size is still small. More broadly, this research shows how recency bias can push untrue narratives in soccer, and how it can detrimentally shape perspective, scouting, team culture and transfers.

Analytics is therefore a more reliable guide to a player's value than hot takes of TV pundits or prejudices that gel into narratives on the terraces.

Citations:

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