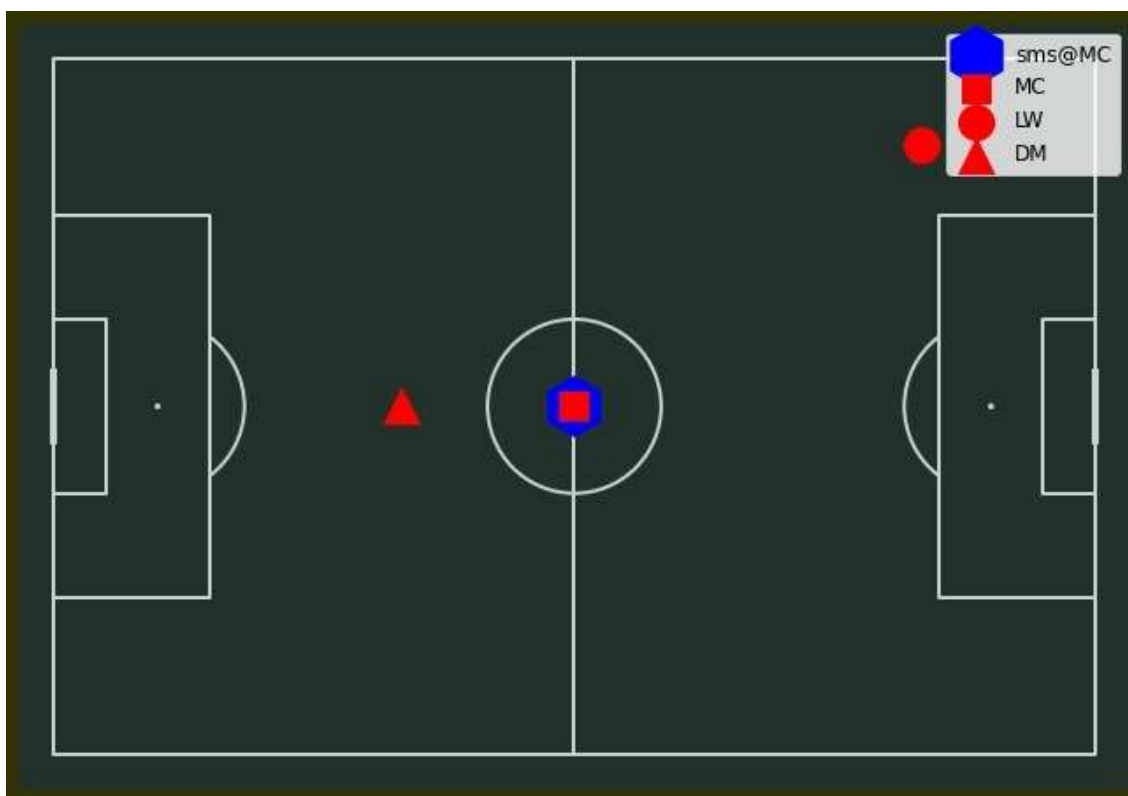
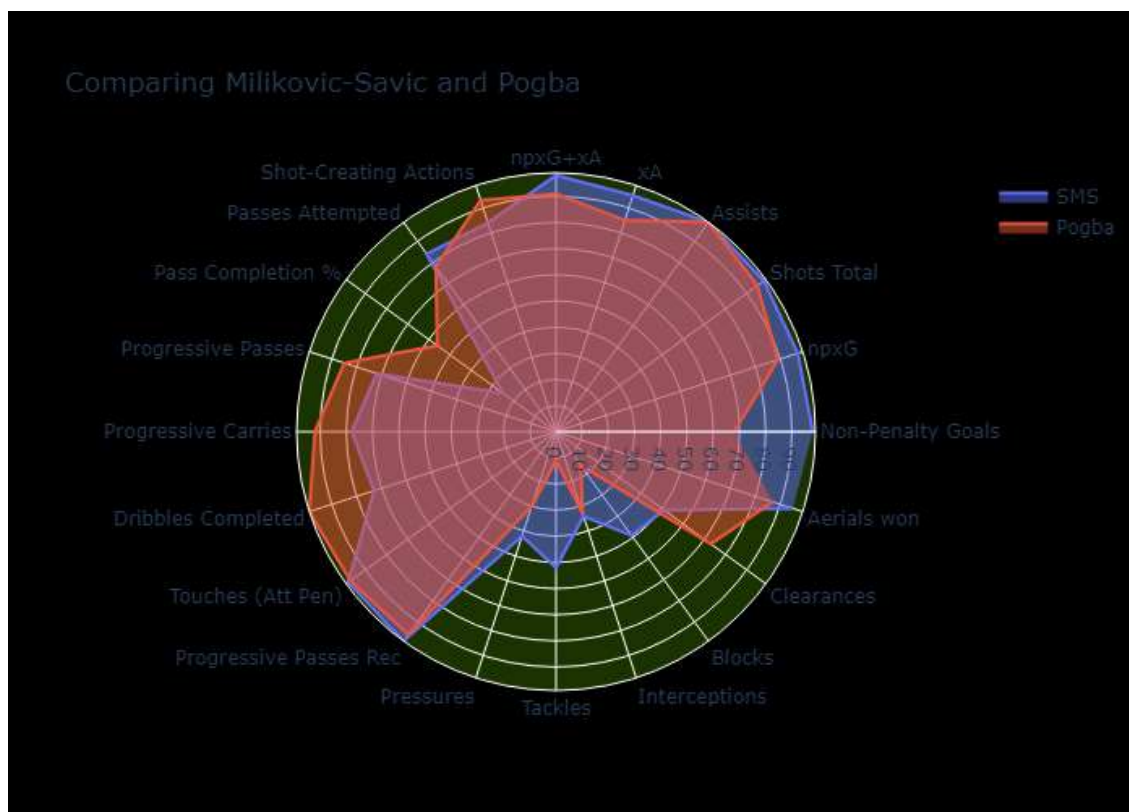


Sergej Milinković-Savić and Paul Pogba are widely considered to be members of a class of midfield powerhouses with the ability to successfully tear into an opposition's half, exuding an air of dominance when performing at their relative best. There is a certain elegance associated to Milinković's style of play in addition to the athleticism, technique and anticipated movement that sets him apart from the average central midfielder not only in the Serie A but perhaps in World football. Pogba's influence on Juventus' success is obvious and it takes some doing to stand out from a crop of complete midfielders to have graced the pitch for the club. Nonetheless, his struggles at Manchester United are well documented and while at times exaggerated, his failure to recapture his best form and injury issues at the club have resulted in reduced playing time. Today's report pits Milinković-Savić and Pogba against every central midfielder in the 'Big Five' European leagues over the last year (Minutes played: SMS- 3615 Pogba-2083), comparing the two on variables that we believe represent player traits essential to being an elite box-to-box midfielder. Milinković-Savić can be perceived to be a player perennially burgeoning at the cusp of joining a club consistently in the frame for major honours, whilst Pogba's plight despite his obvious talent continues to be an enigma for most fans. This comparison helps us understand the level of equivalence at which these two players stand and more so whether the former is a suitable replacement at the centre of midfield for Manchester United.



To begin with, the player position map demonstrates the versatility demanded from each player over the last year. In Ole Solskjaer's system at United, we witnessed Pogba occupy a wide attacking midfielder role at left wing, play as a defensive midfielder in a pivot and in his natural central midfield position as well. He is yet to start under Ralf Ragnick at the time of writing this report. Conversely, Milinković-Savić has been a mainstay at the centre of the pitch for Lazio, equating to his importance to the team as opposed to Pogba's sporadic influence on United. It remains to be seen whether Milinković-Savić can demonstrate the

same level of versatility that Pogba has shown at United. Pogba's best form for Juventus did in fact come at the centre of the pitch and so we believe that it is his preferred choice of position. By comparing key attributes demanded from a central midfielder regardless of differing systems and aesthetics, we can better understand the similarities and differences between the pair.



## ATTACKING FRONT

Milinković-Savić and Pogba are mercurial attacking threats. A rare mix of stature and ability to find themselves in attacking positions in and around the opposition penalty area (Progressive passes received, SMS- 99th percentile, Pogba- 98th Percentile, touches in attacking pen, SMS & Pogba-99th percentile) means they are hard to contain once they get going with the ball at their feet. For Pogba, this is also reinforced by his numbers for dribbles completed and progressive carries both amongst the best scores across the top 5 leagues over the last year. While Milinković-Savić does not boast the same level of carrying ability on a consistent basis as pogba, his shots taken, expected goals and assists and actual goals and assists are just incredible for a central midfielder. Ranking amongst the highest in all those categories, Milinković-Savić has single handedly decided results in Lazio's favour all from the base of midfield. The chart illustrates how their skill sets differ and intersect in magnitude with one another, however it is undeniable that the pair are drawn towards the offensive side of play in their own right.

A lot is expected from the contemporary midfielder, a pillar aforementioned is certainly progressive carrying but another and in growing importance for most systems of play; Ball distribution. Milinković-Savić is at a startling low percentage for completed passes

(28th percentile) and his numbers for shot creating actions and attempted passes does little to suggest all of those passes are inevitably risky due to being offensive passes. Pogba has been frequently scrutinised and maligned for loose passes while also being lauded for his long ball distribution when it is successful. He is comparatively higher in terms of completed passes (58th percentile) and this could be a potential area of concern for fans hoping to replace Pogba with Milinković-Savić.

## **DEFENSIVE FRONT**

Given their incredible physicality, one would easily assume that these midfield powerhouses contribute to their teams defensive side of play. Albeit their sheer size, the pair combined do not cross the 50th percentile for tackles, pressures, interceptions and blocks. Both Pogba and Milinković-Savić would be expected to pose considerably higher numbers albeit from central midfield (and not specifically a defensive midfielder) if they were to potentially fit within Ralf Rangnick's system of Gegenpressing.

## **CONCLUSION**

Milinković-Savić and Pogba are world class attacking midfielders that have the ability to influence their teams probability of progressing in an attacking sense, tremendously. The stark difference in their defensive numbers would seem to suggest that they are better suited to the transitional/attacking phase of the game as a central attacking midfielder or 'Mezzela' where they can mercilessly attack the spaces in the opposition half, with less emphasis on defence. Their bulky presence can lead to the false assumption that they are restricted to progressive runs through sheer force, when in reality both are adept at weaving through a defensive press with the ball at their feet. If Ralf Rangnick was to reprise his role as head coach for the foreseeable future, it remains to be seen whether Milinković-Savić would be able to adapt himself to expectations of Rangnick's style of play. If Rangnick does in fact hold the key to improving the defensive output of a midfield of Milinković-Savić's ilk, it could instead offer Pogba one last opportunity at salvaging his United career.