



Strangled Steadiness



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To his credit, football history is littered with Marcelo Bielsa's name. The current Leeds United manager has been a mentor to some of the greatest managerial minds — like Guardiola, Pochettino, and Simeone — and has been an advocate of many pioneering philosophies and unique things in the footballing world. However, no one could have imagined that a bucket would be one of those things.

During the game versus Stoke, Marcelo Bielsa brought out a big blue bucket to the touchline and sat on it for the duration of the game. For Leeds fans and people not acquainted with the ways of *El Loco*, this was a bizarre sight. However, for those who know, this had always been the Bielsa way. Most people find it odd but for Bielsa, it just works; he insists his position on the bucket offers him a “better vantage point” to view the game from.

Aside from picking up Bielsa’s positional play ideologies, it seems Mauricio Pochettino has also picked up his former manager’s tendency to sit down at the touchline and analyze his team. This time, however, instead of a shade of blue, the bucket is a bright yellow: it’s symbolic of Pochettino’s very own personal touch to the philosophies of Bielsa and *juego de posicion*.

For perfectionists like Pochettino, there’s always something to add, something to improve, something to fix, and for all this perfection it’s strange how, amidst a resurgent Arsenal, a metamorphosed Chelsea, and, somehow, an even better Manchester City, it’s the team that’s made its best ever start to a league season receiving the least attention.

And it’s strange how despite Spurs’ best start ever, this season has been Pochettino’s unhappiest yet with him even claiming it to be “the worst feeling I’ve had in the five years I’ve been here”.

These aren't words that are to be taken lightly in any way, shape, or form, and understanding what caused them to be said so publicly means putting the issues of the club's management — that have shrouded Pochettino and everything he brings to the table — in a perspective that seems to offer an explanation as to why no one, frankly speaking, seems to care about Spurs' potential anymore.

It all starts with the decision to not make any signings in the summer. Spurs had set a Premier League record in doing so and it was definitely one they never would've wanted to set. This, aside from being extremely unfair to the each and every player, was more unfair for Pochettino, whose consistent overachievement and unwavering results with the club are taken for granted amidst the boardroom culture. Daniel Levy couldn't have been that delusional to think that there were no players available to reinforce the squad so why were Spurs unable to sign a single player this window?

It eventually boils down to the new stadium, which we'll get to later. All of us are already aware of the penny-pinching culture present at Spurs and hesitation to spend big like the other Top 6 clubs. This unwillingness to splash the cash is evident from the fact that Spurs' net spend, from the day Pochettino arrived, is £29 million only. Compare that to the next lowest: £183 million for Liverpool. The net spend simply rises from here, peaking at £518 million for Manchester City. The sheer difference is staggering. Despite the

clear disadvantage that continues to cripple Pochettino and his players to this day, they still rank 3rd in the table of most overall points won (right behind City and Chelsea) from the day Pochettino was appointed and they've only made four signings whose value exceeded £20 million at the time of transfer. It wouldn't be out of the blue to declare Pochettino's work as something short of miraculous.

As we can see, Spurs have had the same core of players since 2014. They had the most players present in the World Cup semifinals, they signed no one in the summer, they've had the most injuries in the league, and there are only three clubs with a lower net spend than them since 2014. Now, top all of these problems off with the stadium's mismanagement, completion delays, and debt, and you have a crisis that has been, seemingly, swept under the rug by the performances of Pochettino's men. Just like Jose Mourinho, Pochettino was screwed over by his board and institutional mismanagement.

The only difference, however, is that Pochettino has accepted the chain of events that took place, doesn't complain to the media week in, week out, is continuing the wonderful work he's been doing all these years, and as a result, does not sit in 7th place in the league. Spurs are just 5 points off the top despite everything they've been through.

However, the results do not excuse what's going on at the club. None of the players or the staff deserve the pervasive stinginess and this is where the stadium comes in. It's probably the biggest factor in Pochettino's unhappiness as he's expressed his disappointment, on several occasions, that the club was unable to complete the construction by September 2018, despite making promises of doing so, and have the 2018/2019 season played in their new home. With new inclusions to the new project, the stadium is now valued at £637 million, from the original £400 million, resulting in Spurs having to take loans of around £237 million. This just pushes their net debt to around £600 million, further strangling the finances available. Levy's reluctance to pull out his checkbook each year is a choice but being pushed into debt and not having much to spend isn't. It just further complicates any plans of reinforcing the squad that Pochettino had.

Spurs are the only club to finish in the Top 3 consecutively in the past three seasons and they've won the most away points in the last ten months. No one can deny the positive outcomes of Pochettino's arrival but he's absolutely right when he says "the club needs to be focused on trying to win titles" and how there is an immediate "need to fix other problems" that result in "different circumstances" from the rest of the Top 6.

If what's happening right now continues, Spurs are going to immensely regret not spending more on, and for, their best manager in a very long time

and their greatest squad in a very, very long time.

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