

# A Tale of Two Cities

Posted on @January 23, 2018 12:43 PM by Yazdan Basir

The prospect of a club giving in Henrikh Mkhitaryan for Alexis Sanchez would have seemed ludicrous a few months back but here we are as Manchester United make another addition to their "arsenal" and Arsenal add a much-needed right-sided player to their squad as they have let go of Oxlade-Chamberlain and Theo Walcott recently.

First things first, United snatched Alexis Sanchez out of City's hand, no matter how much you or whosoever denies that. This was an established world-class player that Pep Guardiola and his City side had been chasing for months on end only to be trumped by the persuasive power of a 500k pounds per week cheque.

With a very disappointing season going so far for Manchester United and more so for Jose Mourinho, with whom the fans are growing restless and impatient by the day, the arrival of Alexis Sanchez serves as a temporary cause of celebration on three grounds: the stature of the player himself, how no party involved saw Manchester United coming in red-hot, and the subsequent daylight robbery of the second-best player of a Top 6 rival.

And now losing Alexis, Arsenal risk losing Ozil. Seeing two star players leave in the span of a year would certainly send the team down an abyss that may see them enter yet another banter era. On the other hand, Manchester City had a lot to gain with the addition of an experienced, elite left-sided player, offering Guardiola's team more squad depth and serving as a mentor to the young Leroy Sane. However, they had nothing to lose if he did not bless their ranks – City comfortably lead the Premier League table and are enjoying control of a still-unbeaten run and that too, with unbelievable squad depth.

The clear winners out of this are Manchester United. But, there still are some factors that need to be taken into consideration aside from the immense quality Alexis offers on and off the pitch – a monumental wage bill, inevitable declining consistency, form, and decision-making, and the defensive responsibilities of a left-sided player in a Jose Mourinho system.

Earning 500k per week means earning more than what Eden Hazard and Sergio Agüero earn. Combined. Do the math and you arrive at 2 million pounds per month just for one player. One player who also happens to be 29 years old and on the verge of natural decline as a footballer. Despite being magical at times in his last few matches for Arsenal, Alexis has showed prevailing signs of poor decision-making – lobbing the ball over 3 defenders for a teammate only to lose possession or deciding to cut in on his right foot even when safer, wiser passing options existed – and inconsistency in his performances. Pushing aside the image veil that surrounds Alexis, these are troubling indications for a mega-signing. Perhaps even more so is the tendency of Jose Mourinho to allocate defensive duties to his wide players.

Mourinho's last season with Chelsea was the worst of his career. The same goes for Eden Hazard, who was bogged down by defensive duties, severely affecting his attacking output. We, often at times, saw him playing the LWB role/LM role where he would go back to defend and then have to move back up forward and ultimately waste the vast reserve of talent he had for a whole season. Eden Hazard thrived under Conte's system because it focused on defensive destruction through the midfield and gave a free-hand to forwards like him to make space, create, and score. Similar to the 2015/16 Hazard, we saw Ozil and Di Maria playing wing-back roles at Real Madrid when Jose Mourinho was there which resulted in their flair and control of the game not being used effectively. Although a different case, we now see Ashley Young, a forward and wide player, who plays the wing-back role under Mourinho.

So, who knows what Mourinho has planned for Alexis? It will not be a change in formation or adjustment in style of play to fit him in, that we can be sure of. Maybe Alexis would be used as an LM or LWB and would have to defend throughout the game, choking his goals and assists contribution, which would not be good news for hopeful United fans, especially when coupled with the fact that the player in question is in decline and charges a hefty fee per week. Arsenal on the other hand, have received a player that could complement Ozil with his reading of the game and ability to pass and with a Lacazette up front and maybe even an Aubameyang to come in, who knows what wonders Mkhitarjan would work in North London. However, nothing is to be predicted in football as many journeys often take the route least expected and leave us bewildered, wondering what could have been.