



# 100

German  
football's top  
players of 2025



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**Images are taken from club official X accounts**

**Stats via: Transfermarkt, FotMob, FBRef**

# A note from the editor

After a five-year absence, we would like to present to you, our loyal readers, the 2025 Get German Football News 100. This publication comprises our selection of the top one hundred talents that German football has to offer, judged solely on their performances in 2025. To be eligible for the GGFN 100, a player must be a registered squad member of a Bundesliga or 2. Bundesliga club on the 28 December 2025 - heading into the transfer window.

2025 provided us with plenty of memorable moments. Whether that's Hamburger SV returning to Germany's top flight following a seven-year absence, or Said El Mala's rise at 1. FC Köln, the Bundesliga continues to set a high standard. Mainz, Freiburg and Heidenheim have each represented the Bundesliga in Europe, while Eintracht Frankfurt qualified for the Champions League for the first time in their club's history via their league placing after a phenomenal campaign.

We also saw Bayern Munich wrestle their Bundesliga crown back from Bayer Leverkusen - who are rebuilding themselves under Kasper Hjulmand - as Vincent Kompany's side continue to set the standard with Borussia Dortmund and RB Leipzig looking to bridge the gap. Given Bayern's performances in 2025, unsurprisingly this list is heavily dominated by the Rekordmeister, but there has been some incredible performances in the calendar year.

Although this publication looks back at the last 12 months, it's also a guide for 2026 and proves that German football is set to continue its upward trajectory for time to come, with some of Europe's best talents plying their trade in the Bundesliga.

Thank you for your continued support, it certainly doesn't go unnoticed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Pinder".

Daniel Pinder, Get German Football News Editor-in-Chief

# 100

# Rayan Philippe

- **Club: Hamburger SV**
- **Position: Attacker**
- **Age: 25**
- **Games in 2025: 37**



French forward Rayan Philippe's 2025 saw him pull Eintracht Braunschweig back from the brink of relegation to the 3. Liga last spring. With plenty showing an interest in the summer, the Frenchman ultimately landed with newly promoted Bundesliga outfit Hamburg.

Philippe hails from Nice and, after working his way up through the Dijon academy, earned some scant action in Ligue 1 before disappearing off the scene for a couple of years. Braunschweig plucked Philippe out of the Luxembourg wilderness on a free transfer in the summer of 2023. He would go on to score eight goals and provide five assists for the Löwen during the 2023/24 2. Bundesliga campaign.

After his inaugural 2. Bundesliga campaign, the rumour mills went into overdrive after Philippe's sophomore season. His 13 league goals and six assists placed him firmly on the radar of several Bundesliga clubs. However, his performances couldn't keep Braunschweig from the relegation play-offs.

Philippe's finished the 2024/25 2. Bundesliga campaign in especially strong form. After a prolonged slump at the beginning of the 2025 calendar year, Philippe roused up to score three goals and record two assists in four fixtures during the month of April. He also netted in May before going quiet during the last two games of the season. Philippe then scored and assisted over two legs in the relegation play-off against Saarbrücken to help Braunschweig maintain their 2. Bundesliga status.

A hectic summer nearly saw Philippe join the current last-placed Bundesliga side Mainz, but Hamburg ended up picking him up for €2.5m. Philippe ended up bagging a brace against the side he nearly joined during a 4-0 home matchday six rout of Mainz. Philippe openly mocked the club that opted against acquiring him with a taunting cell phone goal celebration.

Four goals in 15 Bundesliga games nevertheless remain a solid haul for a player working with a newly promoted outfit in his first top division season. Comfortable enough on the right-hand side of Polzin's 4-3-3, Philippe has shown his clinical edge in front of goal (xG: 3.8), yet severely underperformed on his xA (1.1). One senses that he will continue to get his name on the scoresheet. Despite the recent slump, Polzin hasn't dropped Philippe from his starting line-up.

**Peter Weis**

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# Oliver Burke



- **Club:** 1. FC Union Berlin
- **Position:** Attacker
- **Age:** 28
- **Games in 2025:** 33



Since breaking into the Nottingham Forest first team as a teenager, Oliver Burke has had quite the journey. The Scotsman's early-season performances for the Reds in the summer of 2016 earned him the pick of some of Europe's biggest clubs, with admirers including the likes of Manchester United, Bayern Munich and Liverpool.

Burke's game has long been defined by his explosive pace, power and directness. He is someone who thrives on the transition, driving at defenders with his unique ability to carry the ball at great speed. Operating primarily from the right but comfortable anywhere on the forward line, he offers a constant threat and an eagerness to attack space behind opposition defences. While his decision-making in the final third has occasionally been critiqued, his raw pace and ability to frighten defences remain his standout qualities – attributes that explain why he was so sought after at a young age.

At the age of 19, Burke chose to sign for newly promoted Bundesliga outfit RB Leipzig, though he would spend just a season in Saxony. During his time under Austrian manager Ralph Hassenhüttl, he made 25 appearances, mostly from the bench, scoring once and assisting once - both of which came in the early stages of the season. Hassenhüttl promised the young Burke more game time in the following season as Leipzig prepared to make their Champions League bow. The winger had seen enough, however and returned to England, signing for West Bromwich Albion.

Various loan spells and a permanent move to Sheffield United followed before the Scot eventually found himself back in Germany with Werder Bremen in 2022. He spent just six months under the guidance of Ole Werner before returning to England on loan for the rest of the 2022/23 season, as well as the following season. His only full season in the Hanseatic City came in 24/25, where he made 25 appearances, scoring five goals and laying on two assists. His best performance of the season came when he bagged a brace in a 2-1 win away to Stuttgart in April, helping Werder finish the season within just a point of the European places.

In the summer of 2025, Burke found himself on the move again as he rejected the opportunity of a new contract at Bremen, instead signing for Steffen Baumgart's Union Berlin. Missing just one game thus far this season for Die Eisernen, Burke announced himself in spectacular fashion on Matchday 4 by scoring a hat-trick in a 4-3 win away to Eintracht Frankfurt. Whether Burke makes himself at home in the German capital and sticks around for longer than his time at previous clubs remains to be seen, but early signs are looking good for the 28-year-old Scot.

**Harry Good**

# 98

## Mert Kömür



- **Club:** FC Augsburg
- **Position:** Attacker
- **Age:** 20
- **Games in 2025:** 32

It's been a highly exciting 2025 calendar year for one of Augsburg's homegrown products. Mert Kömür is a flexible midfielder with plenty of attacking prowess who has been rising through the DFB youth ranks. Kömür's specific case is one of careful grooming and growing trust. Thanks to the fact that his Bundesliga club invested both of these in him, Kömür's stock has increased from €2m to €12m over the last 12 months.

The Dachau-native actually made his professional debut for Augsburg in April 2024. Kömür didn't have to wait long to score his first Bundesliga goal either. Former Augsburg head coach Jess Thorup trusted Kömür to start as a No. 10 in Augsburg's 2023/24 season finale. The youngster repaid Thorup's trust with his first Bundesliga goal in a 2-1 away defeat.

But Thorup only used Kömür sparingly as a substitute during the first half of the 2024/25 season. Once 2025 hit, however, things began to take off. Kömür began to turn some heads during four consecutive relief appearances between matchdays 17 and 20. The then 19-year-old scored a goal and registered an assist in his last two appearances off the bench, earning him five more starts and another goal before the campaign was out.

Augsburg made certain to reward Kömür with a lucrative contract extension over the summer. New FCA head coach Sandro Wagner, having fewer options at the No. 9 position, began tapping Kömür to spearhead his attack at the beginning of the season. While the newly-capped Germany U21 international hasn't always been up to the task of leading the line on every occasion, two goals and two assists in 14 games this season remain a solid haul.

Kömür has demonstrated a penchant for delivering for his side in clutch occasions and remains a celebrated component for both club and country. The youngster, who has demonstrated footballing intuitions reminiscent of Florian Wirtz, might be capable of developing further if stationed farther back in midfield. Kömur does have experience working all along the second attacking axis and can even play deep as a No. 6.

What 2026 has in store for the youngster should prove interesting. If Augsburg's long-term prospect can deliver as he did against Wolfsburg on Matchday 6, where he registered two goal contributions, it may well prove to be another eventual year.

# 97

# Finn Dahmen



- Club: **FC Augsburg**
- Position: **Goalkeeper**
- Age: **27**
- Games in 2025: **35**

At 27, Finn Dahmen has blossomed into one of the most reliable goalkeepers in the Bundesliga - and 2025 has been a breakthrough year. Raised in Wiesbaden with an English mother and German father, he's eligible for both countries, but this year he earned his first call-up to the German senior national team after a string of outstanding performances for Augsburg.

Following a rocky start to the season, Dahmen rediscovered form after the winter break. From then on, he conceded only 10 goals in 16 Bundesliga games while keeping nine clean sheets. He even broke his club's record for minutes without conceding: going 523 league minutes without letting in a goal.

His recovery arc turned many heads: eight clean sheets in his first 11 Bundesliga appearances in 2025, a vast improvement in shot-stopping, and composure under pressure saw "a dream come true" as he pulled on the Germany jersey for the 2026 World Cup qualifiers. As Germany plans for life after Manuel Neuer, Dahmen remains a candidate for the No. 1 spot.

Oscar O'Mara



# 96

# Samuel Mbangula



- **Club:** SV Werder Bremen
- **Position:** Winger
- **Age:** 21
- **Games in 2025:** 14

In a way, Samuel Mbangula wasn't supposed to be at Werder Bremen. The 21-year-old should have ideally been linking up with the mercurial Kenan Yildiz under the bright lights of Turin, but Juventus had other plans. As they have done for multiple Next Gen graduates, Mbangula departed, joining Die Werderaner for €10m.

Silently, the youngster is starting to make many at the Bianconeri regret the decision, which was made largely to earn capital gains. Something about the Belgium U21 talent feels different in Germany - almost like he is out to prove a point, away from the comfort zone.

So far this season, Mbangula has three goals and three assists for Bremen. The winger is already on his way to going past his tally from last season at Juventus, where he contributed to seven goals in 23 league appearances in the 2024/25 campaign.

It can be argued that at the Allianz Stadium, Mbangula became a victim of instability. He was constantly asked to play in different positions, and when Thiago Motta saw him as a future star, Igor Tudor's arrival ruled him out of first-team contention almost completely. At Werder Bremen, though, it is the simple magic of stability that is working like a charm.

Mbangula has constantly been used as a left winger by Horst Steffen, who utilises a settled 4-2-3-1 setup in every game. More than that, it is the 56-year-old's reputation for blossoming younger players that is giving a real impetus to the Belgian.

Steffen, during his time at Elversberg, proved key to launching Nick Woltemade and Paul Wanner, showcasing his temperament as a manager who isn't afraid of trusting talents. While the German is bound to his ideas, he uses young players to bring his attacking approach to light.

That is also evident from the way the Mbangula operates. He is getting on the ball more, being more ambitious, taking defenders on and trying to go past them. There is a higher sense of freedom from the top in the environment that he finds himself in. In Turin, Motta's approach was hyper-focused on structure and making very specific movements without his teams ever finding reliable solutions in the final third.

Steffen's system relies on high pressing and wide overloads, with the latter benefiting Mbangula quite a bit. This helps him combine with Marco Friedl often on the left. The youngster has received 4 progressive passes per 90 minutes in the Bundesliga this season, per FBref, also receiving a little over 15 touches in the final third per 90.

Those numbers can certainly be higher, and Mbangula still has to grow when it comes to his final product, but he has won the most tackles in the final third out of any Bremen player this season. It shows that he means business, and if he does have weaknesses, he is making it up by working harder than ever. This puts him in good standing for the rest of the season, especially if the ex-Juve man avoids injuries. If things go to plan, the Bianconeri will regret letting another player depart.

**Kaustubh Pandey**



# 95

# Maximilian Arnold



- **Club:** VfL Wolfsburg
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 31
- **Games in 2025:** 30

Since breaking into the first team as a fresh-faced 17-year-old, Maximilian Arnold has been the near ever-present stalwart of Wolfsburg. Now the club's record appearance maker, Arnold has made just shy of 400 Bundesliga appearances for the Wolves, never making less than 27 appearances in any of his full seasons in the first team since making his debut in 2011.

Arnold has seen it all during his time at the club, with Wolfsburg's fortunes fluctuating dramatically since their maiden Bundesliga title in 2009, ranging from runners-up in 2015 to surviving the relegation play-off twice in the following three seasons.

Arnold blends intelligence and technical quality to operate as the archetypal modern central midfielder. At his best, he dictates the flow of matches with crisp, defence-splitting passes and the ability to contribute goals himself, tallying 49 goals and 59 assists for the club, with three goals and six assists in 2025. Defensively, he is disciplined and combative, pressing aggressively and reading passing lanes with ease. Dangerous from set pieces, Arnold thought he had secured three points with an outrageous free-kick nine minutes into stoppage time against 1. FC Köln in September, only for Jakub Kamiński to equalise moments later.

The three-time capped German international's leadership skills are second to none and were recognised when Niko Kovač handed him the captain's armband in July 2022. The face of the club, Arnold, extended his contract again with the club in November despite it being rather turbulent at times so far this season. He is often the one who will be up front and speak directly with the clubs' fans during tough times, as he has done multiple times throughout 2025/26.

In an era of constant turnover at VfL, Arnold remains a rare constant - an academy product who evolved into the defining figure of a generation at Wolfsburg. He spoke of his unparalleled loyalty to the club after his recent contract extension was announced, saying: "Wolfsburg and VfL have been my sporting home for many years. I also feel incredibly comfortable here with my family. I am convinced of the path the club has taken and want to continue taking responsibility for the team, the club, and our fans. That's why it was clear to me: I am staying with full conviction at VfL."

Harry Good

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## Isac Lidberg

- Club: **SV Darmstadt 98**
- Position: **Striker**
- Age: **27**
- Games in 2025: **33**

Isac Lidberg has established himself as one of the leading goalscorers in the 2. Bundesliga since arrival in Darmstadt from FC Utrecht in June 2024.

The Swede, who came through Hammarby IF's academy before spells at Gefle IF and Go Ahead Eagles, has scored 26 goals and provided nine assists across all competitions for Die Lilien, which earned him a call-up to the national team.

The 6'1" hitman started the calendar year injured, and his five goals and three assists were unable to secure promotion to Germany's top-flight, but Lidberg has started the 2025/26 season in spectacular fashion.

A Matchday 1 hat-trick against relegated Bochum fired the Swede to the top of the goalscoring charts. Darmstadt's No. 7 then scored on five consecutive matchdays and would see the calendar year out with 11 goals and one assist in 14 2. Bundesliga games.

Lidberg, known for his poacher-like instinct with explosive pace and high endurance, is currently averaging a goal contribution every 96.5 minutes. Speaking to Kicker in 2024, Darmstadt's goalgetter has an admiration of Arsenal's Viktor Gyökeres, formerly of St. Pauli, but idolises former Stuttgart and Bayern Munich striker Mario Gomez: "He was simply a good striker."

Daniel Pinder

# 93



## Joel Chima Fujita

- Club: **St. Pauli**
- Position: **Midfielder**
- Age: **23**
- Games in 2025: **18**

Belgium has often been a pathway to Europe for Japanese players and in particular, Sint-Truiden. And that is the case for Joel Chima Fujita.

After 63 games for the Jupiler Pro League club, the Japan international earned a move to St. Pauli, who were playing in Germany's top-flight for a successive season. A tenacious midfielder with a bite about him, Fujita puts himself around the pitch, covering almost every blade of grass. Fujita ranked in the 88th percentile for interceptions in the Jupiler League last season, and is a standout player for the Kiezkicker.

There's only a handful of players who have covered more distance than Fujita in the Bundesliga this season. Able to operate as a No. 6 or No. 8, only Bayern Munich's Joshua Kimmich and Michael Olise has registered more through balls than the Japanese midfielder this season, who also ranks in the top 10 for interceptions in the 2025/26 Bundesliga campaign.

"He's a very lively player and has a good feel for space. He intercepts balls and is neat and tidy in his passing," said Alexander Blessin. At €3.5m, Fujita has been worth every penny to St. Pauli since his July transfer.

Daniel Pinder

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# Marvin Wanitzek



- **Club:** Karlsruher SC
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 32
- **Games in 2025:** 36



A 2. Bundesliga player this high in the ranking for a team that is ninth. Well, there is a reason for this. Marvin Wanitzek has been the driving force behind Karlsruhe's flirting with promotion over the past few seasons. Head coach Christian Eichner called the 32-year-old: 'one of the top players (in the league)', and the stats back it up too.

Last season, Wanitzek ended the year with 13 goals and 12 assists, putting him at 25 goal contributions, only bettered by current Hoffenheim striker Fisnik Asllani. This season, the club captain has five goals and three assists in 17 Bundesliga games so far. The midfielder's consistency means he is close to breaking the record for all-time assists in the second division, and with his form, may even surpass it.

Wanitzek came through the academies of both Hoffenheim and Stuttgart before ending up at the Wildparkstadion, gradually becoming an important player for the club before inheriting the captaincy in 2024.

A strong passer of the ball, both long and short, a great chance creator as well as a prominent goalscorer too, Wanitzek can do it all. If you want a comparison for the 32-year-old, think Steven Gerrard at Liverpool when they were struggling. Over the past year, the midfielder has been linked with moves to Heidenheim and 1. FC Köln but remained loyal to KSC, extending his contract: "KSC is home, responsibility, and passion for me. This team, this club, these fans: it's something very special."

Wanitzek is already a club legend due to his longevity at the club, but if he can lead them back into the top flight, that might take him to a completely different level. If he achieves such an achievement with the team formerly known as the Eurofighters, it would also realise 'the fulfilment of a great dream' for the 32-year-old.

The only hurdle will be allowing his consistency to carry over to the team. In the past two seasons, KSC have come close to promotion, but have fallen short due to inconsistency during a lengthy period of the season. Last year, they were in the top three heading into the winter break, but fell apart in the new year. 11 points off of the promotion places may be a big ask, but if anyone can help close the gap, it's Wanitzek - one of the most underrated players in the 2. Bundesliga.

# 91

# Fabian Rieder



- **Club:** FC Augsburg
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 23



**The footballing landscape across Europe and beyond continues to allow for talented players from nations not lauded on the global stage to shine on a platform which gives them the recognition they deserve, and the Bundesliga is no different.**

There are some nations that fly just under the radar when it comes to their influence in top European competitions, and Switzerland is certainly among them. Now off to another World Cup in 2026 across the pond, the perennial UEFA dark horse enjoys a fine mix of talent, grit, determination, and a resolve that few can top. And perhaps that is currently embodied by Augsburg's Fabian Rieder better than anyone.

In the midst of a laudable season in Bavaria at WWK Arena, the manner in which Rieder has settled to life at Augsburg should come as no surprise to club colleagues and supporters alike after a credible baptism of fire across a loan spell with DFB Pokal winners Stuttgart last season.

Known for his attacking instincts and creativity in central spaces when he starred for hometown club Young Boys from 2020-23, which culminated in Swiss Super League Player of the Year honours (2022), Rieder's rise would initially see him draw interest from Serie A giant Roma before ultimately heading to Ligue 1 outfit Rennes where he endured a spell of mixed reviews in Brittany.

Fast forward to the current 2025/26 season, and Rieder's all-action nature has seen him become a prominent figure for an Augsburg side who are in flux after the departure of Sandro Wagner, a man who heavily pushed for Rieder's arrival in the summer.

Turning 24 in February, Rieder is so much more than just a traditional attacking midfielder whose sole contributions are in the final third. Once dubbed 'an ankle-biting attack dog' by former Stuttgart teammate Ermedin Demirović, Rieder's three goals and two assists this season in 13 Bundesliga appearances constitute a fine return for a side struggling for goals, but his importance extends beyond direct contributions.

Per the official Bundesliga website, Rieder has logged 237 sprints, 1022 intensive runs, while covering nearly 138km before the conclusion of the Hinrunde, while also winning the ball on 119 occasions. A progressive passer (3.93/90min) melded with a near-expert ball-winner (1.60 tackles/90min, and 0.60 interceptions/90) makes Rieder an absolute nightmare for any side looking to build from the back and maintain methodical possession in the build-up.

While Augsburg's season may end in relegation if they're not careful, Rieder unquestionably is in the midst of a season that could see him draw attention from bigger clubs should his form continue.

Drew Thompson

# 90

## Finn Jeltsch



- **Club:** VfB Stuttgart
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 19
- **Games in 2025:** 30

**Finn Jeltsch's stock has risen markedly over the last year or so after establishing himself at 2. Bundesliga side 1. FC Nürnberg. After 33 games for der Club, the German centre-half secured a move to Stuttgart, where he's since established himself in Sebastian Hoeneß's back three alongside Jeff Chabot and Roman Hendriks, making 21 Bundesliga appearances for his new club, starting 17 of them.**

Born in Neuendettelsau, Jeltsch is the latest player to emerge from Nürnberg's conveyor belt of talent, following the likes of Stefanos Tzimias, Can Uzun and Nathaniel Brown. Making his 2. Bundesliga debut at 17 in February 2024, Jeltsch featured 18 times for Nürnberg in 2024/25 before securing a €9.5m transfer to VfB in February 2025. "The boy has come in and made a very mature impression. We've got a young player here who will also bring us a lot of joy in the future," raved Hoeneß.

At 6'2", Jeltsch is a commanding presence in the defensive third with an ability to progress the ball with his excellent passing range. With 20 Bundesliga appearances in 2025 and five in the UEFA Europa League, the 19-year-old was named U19 Fritz Walter gold medal winner ahead of Saïd El Mala and Max Moerstedt.

"The medal is a recognition of Finn's development, and at the same time, it is an award for all the clubs, coaches, and support staff who have supported Finn throughout his career," said VfB sporting director Fabian Wohlgemuth. Previous winners of the prestigious award include Manuel Neuer, Toni Kroos, Mario Götze, Kai Havertz and Florian Wirtz, and the hype around German youth international is justified.

A ball-playing centre-half, Jeltsch ranks in the 90th percentile for progressive carries and 88th percentile for pass completion. Combined with his extraordinary game-reading ability and defensive prowess, the future is certainly bright for the youngster, who finds himself at the perfect setup in Stuttgart.

**Daniel Pinder**



# 89

# Jamie Leweling



- Club: **VfB Stuttgart**
- Position: **Winger**
- Age: **24**
- Games in 2025: **46**



**Jamie Leweling's performances in 2024/25 earned him a maiden call-up to Julian Nagelmann's Germany squad in October 2024, scoring on his debut against the Netherlands.**

Confidence was high for the Stuttgart attacker entering 2025, registering two assists in VfB's first six games of the calendar year. His performances in the first half of 2025 would help secure Sebastian Hoeneß's side a European berth, so much so that VfB - who were reluctant to lose another prized attacking asset after the departures of Enzo Millot and Nick Woltemade - rejected several approaches from the Premier League.

The 6'0" winger started 2025/26 in exemplary fashion, recording assists in three successive Bundesliga games between Matchday 2 and 4, which constituted a return to the national team. Notably, Leweling's performance against Werder Bremen in December inspired Stuttgart to a 4-0 win, which matched their biggest wins of the calendar year.

The 24-year-old contributed to three of VfB's goals, assisting for Bilal El Khannouss and Deniz Undav while finding the net himself with a Goal of the Season contender from 32 metres, taking his tally to one goal and five assists in 13 Bundesliga games to see out the year in emphatic fashion.

After joining on loan from Union Berlin in July 2023 before making a permanent move, Leweling is beginning to look like a bargain at €5m. Only three players have drawn more fouls than the explosive attacking player, who ranks high in goal-creating actions (7th) and progressive carries (5th) in 2025/26.

**Daniel Pinder**



# 88

# Lennart Karl



- **Club:** Bayern Munich
- **Position:** Winger
- **Age:** 17
- **Games in 2025:** 22



Autumn 2025 shall be remembered as a season in which two very young German wonderkids began to blossom. In the case of 1. FC Köln's Said El Mala, however, there were plenty of indications last spring that the teenage talent was getting set to blossom.

The case of 17-year-old phenom Lennart Karl counts as more of an out-of-nowhere, overnight success. Though the youngster did begin to attract some attention to himself during Bayern Munich's summer training camp, it's important to note that Karl didn't even feature for Bayern II last spring.

What happened? Bayern's recruitment team spotted the potential of the former Viktoria Aschaffenburg academy youngster three years ago and carefully shielded Germany's "next Jamal Musiala" until he reached a certain level. The fact that Karl possesses a "healthy arrogance" and has repeatedly stated that he sees no reason to ever fear an opponent for any reason meant that, at the age of 17, this diminutive little firecracker was prepared to take on the world.

The 5'6" attacker showcased his dribbling skills and exquisite touch in a pre-season friendly, earning him a place in Vincent Kompany's squad for their opening Bundesliga game against RB Leipzig, where he came off the bench. Assisting against Hamburg in his third Bundesliga appearance, Karl opened his goalscoring account on Matchday 8.

Karl also famously became Bayern's youngest ever Champions League goalscorer with a stunning run and finish against Club Brugge in late October. Since then, he's bagged a brace on his Germany U21 debut and added more goals to both his Bundesliga and Champions League accounts. Every bit of the hype has proved justified.

The left-footed maestro not only dazzles from open play but also demonstrates an excellent understanding of set-piece variants. This has been observed via his positioning and movements in dead-ball situations for both club and country. Should Karl continue this excellent form into 2026, then it's quite possible that he could be a wildcard for Julian Nagelsmann's World Cup squad.

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# Jakub Kamiński

- Club: **1. FC Köln**
- Position: **Winger**
- Age: **23**
- Games in 2025: **29**



Polish international Jakub Kamiński has experienced a fabulous revival in 2025. Matters never really took hold for the now 27-times-capped international since his arrival in Germany on a €10m transfer from Lech Poznan in 2022. He initially earned a role as a regular starting winger under then Wolfsburg head coach Niko Kovač, notching three assists prior to the 2022 World Cup, then scoring four goals after the Bundesliga resumed in 2023.

All of this wasn't sufficient to help Wolfsburg qualify for Europe, however, and the next two seasons proved dark indeed. Kovač, and later Ralph Hasenhüttl, struggled to find a regular place for Kamiński. The wait for the Pole's fifth Bundesliga goal dragged on for over two full years, which saw his market value decline from €12m in 2023 to a lowly €5m at the end of last season, with the Wolves wanting rid.

Thankfully, Kamiński was able to pull himself together and record two assists during a string of solid performances during the final nine matchdays of the 2024/25 campaign. Newly promoted Bundesliga outfit 1. FC Köln took notice of what Kamiński still had to offer and began pursuing him over the course of the summer. The Domstadt club were ultimately able to land the now 23-year-old on loan. And what has Kamiński managed to do for Die Geißböcke since? Only exceed every expectation.

Kamiński ended his long Bundesliga scoring drought with the opener in what became a 4-1 rout of Freiburg on Matchday 2. He then scored a dramatic late equaliser against his parent club in the following weekend, in the process setting a Bundesliga record for the latest ever recorded goal. Kamiński has continued to shine for the Domstädter and has now scored more goals (5) than he did in the entirety of his three-year Bundesliga career (4). Tactically, Kamiński has also defied the footballing cliche of 'a coach's Swiss army knife'.

Köln head coach Lukas Kwasniok has deployed Kamiński nearly everywhere on the pitch. He naturally brings with him the versatility of being able to serve as a full-back, wing-back, or winger on either side, while operating centrally in midfield and as the forward. A key cog in Kwasniok's system, Kamiński has missed just four minutes of Bundesliga action in 2025/26. Giving his all, Kamiński is a strong contender for the best domestic transfer in 2025.

# 86

# Alexis Claude-Maurice



- Club: **FC Augsburg**
- Position: **Attacker**
- Age: **27**
- Games in 2025: **33**

French attacking midfielder Alexis Claude-Maurice announced his arrival at Augsburg with a brace against Borussia Dortmund on his first Bundesliga start in October 2024.

Establishing himself as a key figure as Jess Thorup's side went from relegation candidates to European hopefuls with six wins and five in their first 12 league games of 2025, Claude-Maurice's directness, silky dribbling and explosive pace caused Bundesliga defences problems.

With four goals in his first nine games to mark his arrival at the WWK Arena, the former OGC Nice attacker entered 2025 with the aim of replicating his first three months.

After three straight defeats, Claude-Maurice's brace against Union Berlin secured a vital away win to kickstart Augsburg's 11-game unbeaten streak. The Frenchman's first of 2025 was a thunderous effort before ghosting into Union's penalty area, stroking the ball home to see his new club triumph in Berlin.

In Gladbach, the 27-year-old demonstrated his finishing ability, scoring a 'Lupenreiner' - or a perfect hat-trick in Germany, when a player scores three unanswered goals in one half of football. How long did Claude-Maurice take? Just 15 minutes.

Now, Augsburg have been unable to replicate last season's form after parting ways with Thorup in April. Manuel Baum has taken interim charge following the sacking of Sandro Wagner, Thorup's replacement, but FCA's 5'7" dazzling technician is yet to register a goal contribution in 2025/26.

The Fuggerstädter enter 2026 just two points above the promotion-relegation play-off, and if they are to secure their top-flight status for another season, for a 15th straight campaign, Claude-Maurice will likely play a key role.

**Daniel Pinder**



# 85

# Ernest Poku

- Club: **Bayer 04 Leverkusen**
- Position: **Winger**
- Age: **21**
- Games in 2025: **22**



**After the high-profile departures of Florian Wirtz, Jeremie Frimpong and Amine Adli, Bayer Leverkusen moved quickly to snap up Europe's emerging talent.**

While Ibrahim Maza has received plaudits and Eliesse Ben Seghir's ceiling is exponentially higher, it's actually Ernest Poku who has been an unsung hero for Die Werkself in 2025/26.

Arriving at the club just 20 days before Erik ten Hag's dismissal, the Dutchman never started his three appearances under his compatriot, but has since emerged as a key player under Kasper Hjulmand.

Poku returned the Dane's faith in him with four goals and two assists in his first seven Bundesliga games. What's more impressive is that despite zero goal contributions in the UEFA Champions League, the 21-year-old put in a notable performance against Manchester City as Leverkusen ran out 2-0 winners.

He notched a highest speed of 33.9 km/h, the most of any player, but also ranked second for tackles (4), third for defensive recoveries (8), and fourth for duels won (4) as he completed 90 minutes.

Born in Hamburg to Ghanaian parents, Poku is able to utilise his speed to stretch opposition defences, whether that's running with the ball or making intelligent runs and attacking the space in behind. "He is tricky and assertive, and with his tempo and his dynamism," lauded B04 sporting director Simon Rolfes.

With 22 games already for Bayer 04 in 2025, Poku promises to be an exciting acquisition by Leverkusen, who rarely miss in the transfer market.

**Daniel Pinder**



# 84

# Ragnar Ache



- **Club:** 1. FC Köln
- **Position:** Striker
- **Age:** 27
- **Games in 2025:** 33

Frankfurt-native Ragnar Ache has been on the radar for quite some time. The fact that the physically gifted striker is finally finding his feet brings a great deal of joy to those following his career from the beginning. Born in Frankfurt, Ache moved with his parents to Holland at a young age. After working his way up through the Sparta Rotterdam academy, Ache returned to the city of his birth via a €2m transfer to Eintracht Frankfurt in the January 2020 transfer window. Within nine months, Ache was already representing the SGE first team.

The striker made seven substitute appearances under Adi Hütter during the 2020/21 campaign and scored his first Bundesliga goal off the bench on the final matchday of the season. That year, Ache also earned three Germany U21 caps and represented Germany at the COVID-delayed summer Olympics before making 13 Bundesliga and three Europa League appearances under Oliver Glasner the following year. Plenty of talent remained on display, but Ache's second Bundesliga goal would elude him, resulting in a loan spell at Greuther Fürth in 2022/23 before joining fellow 2. Bundesliga side Kaiserslautern for €1.5m, returning 16 goals in his first season for Lautern.

Some inconsistencies in his first season as a Pfälzer Teufel still left Ache's career rather stagnant. He faded significantly, along with the rest of the FCK squad, during the second half of the season. Such was not the case in the current calendar year. Ache's 2024/25 season saw him split his 19 2. Bundesliga goals evenly distributed between the two calendar years. He really caught fire in March 2025 with six goals spread across four games. In general, he finished the campaign strongly, only faltering on the season's final matchday against his current club 1. FC Köln in the match that prevented Lautern's promotion.

Ache's performances for Lukas Kwasniok's Köln demonstrate what a well-rounded attacker he's become. He's only scored twice but has provided six assists across all competitions while working a variety of tactical roles. A battling forward, Ache's stats are even more impressive when one considers the fact that four of his six assists have come off the bench.

The now 27-year-old has only started three times in the Bundesliga and once in the DFB Pokal. It's worth noting that Ache has made all of his starts worthwhile as well, getting his name on the scoresheet on all four occasions. When discussing the current form of this player, Germans generally consider Ache to be worthy of consideration for a national team call-up. Though something like that may well be contextually impossible in the current constellation, much remains possible for this "late bloomer" down the line.

**Peter Weis**

# 83

# Ramy Bensebaini



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 30
- **Games in 2025:** 46

Now in his seventh season in Germany, across spells with Borussia Mönchengladbach and, since 2023, Borussia Dortmund, defender Ramy Bensebaini has once again proven himself as a solid Bundesliga defender in 2025. A pivotal component of Niko Kovač's back three, the reliable Algerian appeared in all but six games for Die Schwarzgelben in the first half of 2025 but has recently found himself rotating in and out of the starting line-up after the return of captain Emre Can.

Being left-footed, he operates comfortably on the left side of a back three, usually alongside Nico Schlotterbeck and Waldemar Anton, or as an out-and-out full back, both of which he has done effectively throughout the year. With Schlotterbeck having license to roam into deep midfield, Bensebaini often finds himself covering the danger areas during counterattacks, though his calmness under pressure means he is comfortable in such situations. Like his defensive partners at BVB, he reads the game superbly, allowing him to cut out passing lanes and track runners effectively.

It is not just his defensive game that makes him an asset for Dortmund. Aggressive in duels and a strong aerial game, the 30-year-old is also an under-the-radar attacking outlet for Kovač's men, having forged a wonderful understanding with wing-back Daniel Svensson, allowing Bensebaini to overlap when the timing is right. Back in January, with Dortmund holding a slender lead over Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League, Bensebaini found himself in space to attack just inside the attacking third and after a neat one-two with Gio Reyna, he showed his composure by lifting the ball over the onrushing keeper to seal a crucial three points.

The Algerian is also now Kovač's designated penalty taker, a point made clear after a small scuffle with striker Serhou Guirassy over who would take one in the pulsating 4-4 draw at Juventus in September. Bensebaini ended up taking and slotting it away calmly, a feat he repeated in Copenhagen a month later.

As Dortmund balances transition and ambition in 2025, Bensebaini's versatility, leadership and composure remain invaluable. Whether starting or coming on as a substitute, his tactical intelligence and reliability ensure he continues to play a decisive role in Kovač's ever-evolving side, exemplifying consistency at the highest level.

Harry Good

# 82

# Jean-Luc Dompé



- **Club:** Hamburger SV
- **Position:** Winger
- **Age:** 30
- **Games in 2025:** 29



Throughout 2025, Jean-Luc Dompé has been Hamburg's ever-present talisman, firing the club to promotion back to the Bundesliga after a seven-year absence. The 30-year-old winger scored nine goals and provided 14 assists last season as Hamburg finished the season in second place. His standout performance came at the Max-Morlock-Stadion, where he scored twice and assisted for Robert Glatzel in a comprehensive 3-0 win.

Dompé's two goals in that game encapsulate his playing style. The opener came as he held his position on the left side of the box, waiting for the ball to break to him before firing a low shot underneath the onrushing goalkeeper. The second showcased his quality, cutting inside, he beat two defenders with ease before playing a neat one-two and guiding his shot into the far bottom corner. It was the type of display that highlighted not only his technical ability but also his growing maturity and stature within the Hamburg squad.

Since promotion, Dompé has found the net twice in his first 11 Bundesliga appearances. A modest total on the face of it, but it's worth remembering that Hamburg have struggled for regular goals after losing last season's top scorer Davie Selke. Without Selke, Glatzel, and the often-injured Yussuf Poulsen, Dompé has had to cope with the lack of a natural target man to attack his exquisite crosses. At times, he has had to adjust his game to compensate, with Ransford-Yeboah Königsdörffer preferred as Merlin Polzin's central striker and new signing Rayan Philippe operating from the opposite wing but drifting inside more than a typical winger.

The Frenchman is your classic tricky winger, a constant threat to defenders. He frequently uses his pace, low centre of gravity and close control to thrive in one-on-one situations. Whether cutting inside onto his right foot or driving towards the by-line, he is equally comfortable. Once he escapes his marker and finds a pocket of space, the quality of his final ball is usually unquestionable, as evidenced by his excellent service to Selke and Glatzel. His composure in front of goal has also taken significant strides in recent campaigns, making him a far more complete attacking threat.

Hamburg's hopes of avoiding relegation will rely heavily on Dompé's influence. With the team lacking consistent goals, his creativity and ability to deliver decisive moments could prove vital in keeping the newly promoted side clear of danger this season.

# 81

## Victor Boniface



- Club: SV Werder Bremen
- Position: Striker
- Age: 25
- Games in 2025: 23

Victor Boniface continues to prove himself one of the most dangerous strikers in the Bundesliga. After a hamstring injury kept him sidelined late in 2024, he returned in early 2025 to make a decisive impact. In a February league game against Hoffenheim, he scored after just 15 minutes and made winning contributions in the league and DFB Pokal.

However, his performances stuttered, and he joined Bremen on loan in the summer. Boniface has made an encouraging first impression. He marked his Bundesliga debut for Die Werderaner by providing an assist in a resounding 4-0 win over Borussia Mönchengladbach and a match-winning assist in added time against Wolfsburg.

Though still searching for his first league goal for Bremen, Boniface's readiness to adapt, his movement off the ball, and his ability to link play give the club optimism. If he stays fit and settled, he could become the focal point of Bremen's attack and help stabilise their push up the table for 2025/26.

Oscar O'Mara

# 80



- Club: VfL Wolfsburg
- Position: Defender
- Age: 22
- Games in 2025: 34

After losing Micky van de Ven and Maxence Lacroix in the space of 12 months, Konstantinos Koulierakis has been the player to fill the void. With European football experience, the 6'2" defender soon embedded himself with his new team, but it hasn't been plain sailing for the Greece international, who has already featured under three different coaches during his short time in Germany.

A left-footed centre-back, Koulierakis formed a strong partnership alongside Denis Vavro in 2024/25, but he had to do without his partner this season due to injury. Koulierakis nonetheless has continued to excel, despite Paul Simonis' sacking. Starting 13 of his 15 Bundesliga games in the Hinrunde, according to FBRef, Wolfsburg's No. 4 averages 1.7 interceptions and 6.81 clearances per 90, among the highest in Germany's top flight this season, and an improvement on last season's numbers.

A progressive ball-playing centre-half, Koulierakis finds himself in the 86th and 83rd percentiles for long-range passing and chances created, per FotMob. With the departures of the aforementioned duo, there's no doubt that Koulierakis can be just as good, if not better, than his predecessors. One thing is for certain: VfL won't be short on offers on their defensive stalwart come the summer.

Daniel Pinder

# 79

# Marius Bülter



- **Club: 1. FC Köln**
- **Position: Forward**
- **Age: 32**
- **Games in 2025: 30**

When rumours began surfacing this summer that the newly promoted Bundesliga outfit 1. FC Köln were in negotiations with Hoffenheim over potentially acquiring Marius Bülter; excitement abounded. In the opinion of many, Köln were about to land one of the great steals of the summer. Some hyperbole aside, the intuition has largely been proven correct.

Bülter's three goals and three assists in 13 league appearances for the Domstädter may not be the most earth-shattering stats, but the 32-year-old has served as an invaluable asset to Lukas Kwasniok's team. The former lower league journeyman has always possessed a wide array of footballing skills. Many of the goals he scored whilst representing Union Berlin during the 2019/20 campaign were highlight-worthy and memorable. Germans also still talk of his late winner against Mainz while playing for Schalke on Matchday 31 of the 2022/23 campaign.

Difficult as it may be to fathom, there was actually talk of Bülter representing the German national team despite the fact that he was playing 2. Bundesliga football in Autumn 2021. The following year, after Schalke were promoted, Bülter proved himself to be a striker of top-flight calibre. He ended up scoring 11 goals and contributing four assists for Die Königsblauen despite the fact that he was playing for a poor team that ended up getting relegated.

It came as no surprise to see Hoffenheim snatch him up that summer; however, he was never used properly in Sinsheim. The fact that most of his goals came from dribbles and cut-ins on the left led to a succession of Hoffenheim coaches deploying him as a left-sided striker. In a not-unpredictable turn of events, Bülter often appeared hamstrung. An atrocious 2023/24 season saw him score only one goal.

Last year wasn't much better, but Bülter managed to score three goals and add two assists in his final five matches for Hoffenheim in the spring. Now that Bülter is back playing as a centre-forward, it seems as if he's back where he can put up better production numbers. At a cost of only €1m to FC, the native Westphalian is unquestionably one of the steals of the summer.

# 78

# Rasmus Kristensen



- Club: **Eintracht Frankfurt**
- Position: **Defender**
- Age: **28**
- Games in 2025: **41**

With the amount of quality on show at Eintracht Frankfurt, Rasmus Kristensen often gets overlooked.

He's not flashy, nor is he the most technically gifted player, but he's a prized asset for the Hessen club. On course to secure a Champions League berth for the first time in the club's history, Eintracht opted to sign the Dane on a permanent basis from Leeds United for around €6m, a snip at that price.

With goals in three straight games in May, he featured in all but one game in the first half of 2025 as Dino Toppmöller's side secured third place ahead of Borussia Dortmund.

What Kristensen doesn't possess in technical ability, he more than makes up for in sheer hard work. Only Eintracht teammate Nathaniel Brown has won more tackles than the 28-year-old (23), while he's also in the top five Bundesliga players for dribblers tackled (19).

More impressively, Kristensen ranks in the top six percent for aerials won per 90 (1.82) and blocks (1.73) compared to positional peers in Europe's top five leagues. In the 91st percentile for progressive passes, Kristensen is often ignored.

After struggling at Ajax, Roma and Leeds, Kristensen has found a home at the Waldstadion. Off the pitch, Eintracht's No. 13 clearly holds himself to a high standard, and you can also feel the intensity that he brings through the screen.

This intensity transpires onto the pitch as well, especially when he is playing as a wing-back, with him regularly marauding down the wing and getting into the opponent's box.

With just one defeat in their last nine Bundesliga games, 2026 promises to be an exciting one for Eintracht. After struggling elsewhere, Kristensen has embedded himself within the setup at Frankfurt, and it will be interesting to see what he can achieve in 2026.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 77

# Paul Nebel



- **Club:** Mainz 05
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 39

This is only Paul Nebel's second season of Bundesliga football, but he has already made an impact. A product of the Mainz academy, the 23-year-old spent two years on loan at Karlsruhe before he got his break in the first team.

2024/25 saw Nebel play a big role in Mainz's push for European football, ending the year with 10 goals and six assists in his maiden Bundesliga campaign. In the second half of the year, like Mainz themselves, Nebel struggled, being sent off more times (2) than he scored (1).

Considering Nebel can play either centrally or on the wing, the Bad Nauheim native faces competition from some of Germany's most talented ever players in the position, so he could still turn out for Ireland, for whom he is eligible through his grandmother. But the Mainz academy graduate still seems set on playing for Germany, stating his intention in an interview with the Bundesliga website: "When the Germany call-up came, it was clear for me. That's what I always dreamed of as a kid."

Nebel has shown he has the talent to succeed in the Bundesliga, but he has struggled to show it this season, and if there is one way to do that, it is to play a big role in turning Mainz's season around under new head coach Urs Fischer.



Jack Meenan

# 76

## Eric Martel



- **Club: 1. FC Köln**
- **Position: Midfielder**
- **Age: 23**
- **Games in 2025: 38**



Eric Martel was influential in Cologne's return to the Bundesliga, starting in each of his 31 2. Bundesliga appearances as the Billy Goats returned to Germany's top flight after a year's absence.

A quiet leader, he then captained Germany U21 to a European Championship final, losing out to England after extra time. "I'm not someone who needs to stand out and make big speeches," he told Kicker. "I always try to lead by example. [Teammates] can talk to me normally. Body language is the key to leadership. I just try to help them along."

Returning to Müngersdorf in the summer, Martel missed just 49 minutes of action in 2025/26 upon their return to the Bundesliga. Starting every game under new head coach Lukas Kwasniok, the German midfielder's mix of calmness and ball-playing ability while shielding the defence, where he's often had to deputise, is a valuable asset for Cologne, who have so often relied on his services. Martel's excellent positioning and anticipation rank him in the 98th percentile for blocks, 99th percentile for clearances and 99th percentile for aerials won, making him a valuable asset for Kwasniok.

With Martel's contract expiring in the summer, Cologne's management has tried to tie down their No. 6 to a new deal, but it's yet to come to fruition. That means that the 23-year-old is free to negotiate with clubs in January ahead of joining a new team in the summer. And if that happens, it will be a huge blow for Cologne, who have so often relied on Martel. Cologne's No. 6 has already featured 118 times since his arrival from RB Leipzig for €1.2m in July 2022. He's a firm fan favourite and should he decide to leave the club at the end of the season, fans will certainly be sad to see him go.

# 75

# Julian Brandt



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 29
- **Games in 2025:** 51

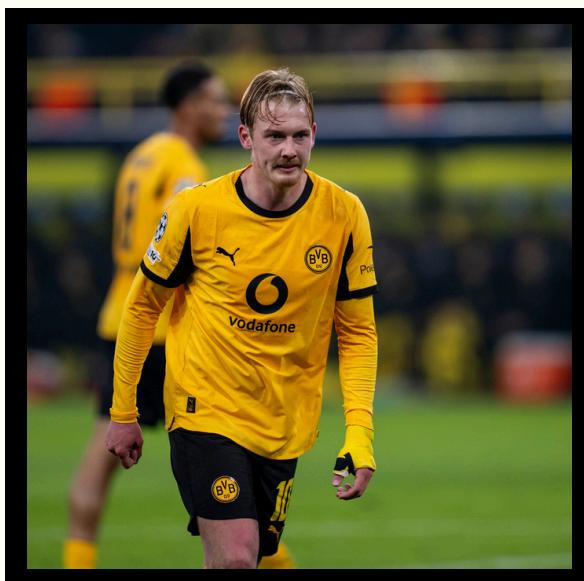


It feels as though Julian Brandt has been plying his trade in Germany's top-flight for a lifetime, and because of that, it is easy to forget that he has not yet reached his 30s. Having consistently provided a solid output of goals and assists every season since emerging at Bayer Leverkusen in the latter stages of the 2013/14 season, it is difficult to imagine the Bundesliga without the Bremen-native.

The 29-year-old has, at times, found minutes difficult to come by throughout 2025; generally, he starts around 50% of games on the Borussia Dortmund bench. It must be said, though, that this is really through no fault of his own. Niko Kovač took over as head coach in January and has deployed a 3-4-3 system, which ordinarily does not involve the traditional No. 10 role that Brandt has fitted so perfectly into over the years.

That being said, Brandt's output has not suffered despite limited game time. In 2025, he scored 11 goals and provided 13 assists across all competitions. This includes a recent brace against Bodø/Glimt, a telling reminder perhaps to the bosses in the Ruhrgebiet that he still has a great deal to offer.

With his contract due to expire in the summer of 2026, his performances in 2025 may have wrestled back control of his future. With Premier League clubs said to be interested in acquiring his services, Brandt is certainly one to watch as next summer approaches.



Harry Good

# 74

# Arthur Theate



- **Club: Eintracht Frankfurt**
- **Position: Defender**
- **Age: 25**
- **Games in 2025: 43**

At 25, Arthur Theate has had quite a journey in the game. Currently at Eintracht Frankfurt, the defender has starred for Bologna, Rennes and Oostende in Belgium, making a mark everywhere he has gone. In the process, he has also played regularly at Euro 2024. On the way, Theate has grown as a player and as a personality, while the fundamentals of his playing style have remained the same.

Since joining Eintracht Frankfurt initially in the summer of 2024, the Belgian has played over 60 games for Die Adler. He has missed only three games in this period - two due to an injury, one due to a suspension, establishing himself as one of their most consistent players. His versatile nature has allowed the left-footer to play at centre-back, but he has also slotted in effectively at left-back when needed. This has always been a trademark for Theate, who did the same at Rennes and Bologna.

One look at him would make many question his physical traits. That is a fair critique, but Theate is arguably one of the most reliable ball-playing centre-backs around now. As per FBref, he is 98 percentile for progressive passes per 90 minutes. The Belgian plays 6.78 of those per 90 minutes, suggestive of his true nature as a footballer. More than that, he is 95 percentile for progressive carries per 90 minutes, highlighting his ambition to help the team build attacks and progress. Theate's passing from the back is incisive, as he plays close to 7 passes into the final third per 90 minutes. That is no small feat for a centre-back. Dino Toppmöller's setup encourages verticality, and this makes Theate a perfect fit, as he doesn't waste time in playing passes forward quickly and in an effective manner. Playing as a centre-back lets him have more of the ball too, bringing more out of his innate strengths. This wasn't always true at Bologna or Rennes, where the setups he played in were much different.

This usage of him as a progressor reduces the load on the 25-year-old to do the dirty defensive parts. It has never been one of his strengths, as he will always suit systems that thrive on ball-possession, and the ex-Bologna man is being given the license to maraud forward constantly. A close comparison can easily be made to Riccardo Calafiori, who has always played a similar role at his clubs. It is no coincidence that the Belgian was actually replaced by the Italian at Bologna right after his departure for Rennes. Calafiori, in a way, is just a bit more astute out of possession, but Theate is more of a pure footballer. The Arsenal player has a taller frame and enjoys the benefit of that. But Theate brings about an equal impact in possession.

With the game going toward a direction where teams appreciate multi-functional players who have a high technical ceiling, Theate is likely to be very useful for many teams across Europe. There has always been talk of major clubs in Italy and England looking at him, and the way things are going, a move might not be too far away.

# 73

# Jean Bahoya

- Club: **Eintracht Frankfurt**
- Position: **Winger**
- Age: **20**
- Games in 2025: **43**

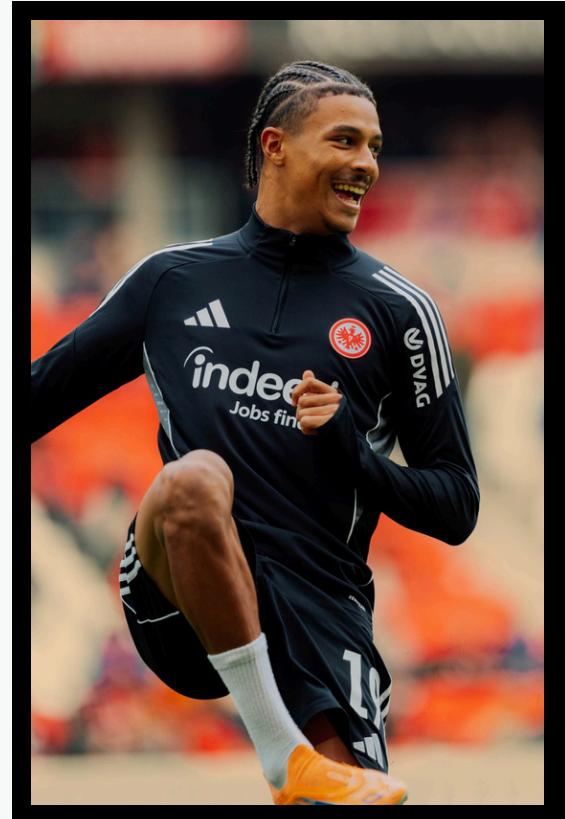


Eintracht Frankfurt fought off stiff competition from Arsenal and Milan to sign Jean-Mattéo Bahoya in January 2024. The young Frenchman was lighting up Ligue 2 with five goals and two assists in 19 league games for Angers in 2023/24, which attracted attention from Europe's elite. It was Die Adler that won the race to sign the Parisian native, whose career continues on an upward trajectory.

In his first full season in Frankfurt, Bahoya registered a goal contribution - three goals and five assists - every 183.8 minutes for the Hessen club. It wasn't until Matchday 23 of 2024/25 (February 2025) that the French youth international became a regular feature in Dino Toppmöller's starting line-up. Assisting Can Uzun against Wolfsburg from a central position, it wasn't until Bahoya's switch to left-wing that many started taking notice.

The 20-year-old saw out 2024/25 with two goals and one assist in eight Bundesliga games as Frankfurt secured a return to Champions League football. In August, the French attacker netted his first brace for Frankfurt, against Werder Bremen. Positioned as a wide forward, he exhibited poacher-like instinct with a controlled header at the far post before remaining composed to lift the ball over Mio Backhaus. Gleeful after his brace, Bahoya told Kicker: "I played with a lot of energy and pace. Hopefully, this is just the beginning. I have the freedom to show my football, and I'm playing with confidence now."

Bahoya has also featured in every Champions League game for Toppmöller in 2025, becoming a useful asset with his explosive pace and neat close dribbling. If the Angers academy graduate becomes more effective in the final third, then 2026 could well be his year in a Hugo Ekitiké-less attack.



# 72

## Ibrahim Maza



- Club: **Bayer 04 Leverkusen**
- Position: **Midfielder**
- Age: **20**
- Games in 2025: **38**



Moving to Bayer Leverkusen at the age of 19 was always going to be a daunting proposition for Ibrahim Maza. Having arrived at the club as the latest wonderkid to emerge from the 2. Bundesliga, with expectations in some quarters to replace the outgoing Florian Wirtz, the pressure was on from the very outset. But some six months on from the move, the teenager looks well on his way to stardom. Born in Berlin to an Algerian father and a Vietnamese mother, Maza's footballing journey began at the age of 11, when he joined Hertha Berlin's academy. After progressing through the youth ranks, he made his Bundesliga debut in 2023 - even scoring in his second top-flight game as a teenager. That early promise continued in the 2. Bundesliga, where he became a key creative force for Hertha during the 2024/25 season with five goals and five assists, catching the eye of scouts across Germany. Even then, the youngster possessed what Scouted Football describes as an "absolute hammer" of a right foot.

Despite being a Berlin native, when the Bundesliga giants came calling this summer, Maza opted to take the next step in his burgeoning career. A €12m move to Bayer Leverkusen gave the midfielder a platform to showcase his talents at the highest level, as within months of signing, he'd be playing Champions League football. "Ibrahim is one of the most interesting young attackers right now. He has outstanding technical abilities, is a good dribbler and also has vision for his teammates, knowing how to set them up in a brilliant way," Leverkusen managing director for sport Simon Rolfes stated when Maza signed for the club.

Initially integrated into Kasper Hjulmand's squad as a rotation option, Maza was soon turning heads with flashes of brilliance off the bench. His confidence grew into regular Bundesliga involvement, and in November, he delivered a breakout performance: a first top-flight brace in a 6-0 rout of Heidenheim, showcasing a blend of pace, technical control and a striker's instinct well beyond his years. His second goal, which saw him effortlessly push the ball past a rooted Heidenheim defender before slotting it home with the outside of his boot, was Wirtz-esque.

Taking everything in his stride, Maza then made headlines in the Champions League with another stand-out display at the Etihad against Manchester City in November, after beautifully assisting Patrick Schick's opener. A second UCL assist against Newcastle United in December was similarly vital, helping his side rescue a late point at the BayArena.

As a player, Maza's skillset looks perfectly tailored to the No. 10 position, fuelling natural comparisons to former Bayer man, Wirtz. And those comparisons are not without merit, as Maza also has a penchant for game-breaking moments of creativity and flair. Highly technical and confident in the final third, a similar career trajectory to that of the Liverpool superstar cannot be ruled out.

He won't be partnering with Wirtz at international level anytime soon, however. After representing Germany at several youth levels, Maza made a high-profile decision in 2024 to switch his international allegiance to Algeria, debuting in late 2024 and adding multiple caps throughout 2025. That choice could see him feature for Algeria at the 2026 FIFA World Cup - a path that probably wouldn't have been possible in a crowded German national pool.

In 2025, Maza has shown time and time again that he is no longer content to be a mere prospect – he's in a hurry to be the chief protagonist. From 2. Bundesliga heroics to assisting at the Etihad, he's developed into a bona fide future superstar this calendar year. In the words of the Algerian playmaker: "I can develop further in Leverkusen and win the titles - that's what drives me."

**Tom Fenton**



71

# Tim Lemperle



- **Club:** TSG Hoffenheim
- **Position:** Striker
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 26



Tim Lemperle saw out 2024 in exemplary fashion, scoring eight goals in 15 games in the 2. Bundesliga for Cologne, but a hamstring injury ruled the Hessen native out of the first seven fixtures of 2025. Still, his performances and high ceiling were enough for Hoffenheim to reach an agreement with the player, signing the attacker on a pre-contract, where he would switch the Rhein to Sinsheim in the summer. Seeing out 2024/25 with Cologne, Lemperle returned two goals and two assists in the Billy Goats' final five league games as they secured their return to Germany's top flight.

Hitting the ground running, Lemperle scored on his Bundesliga debut for Hoffenheim, scoring the winning goal against Bayer Leverkusen in August. The 23-year-old followed that up with a goal and assist as TSG ran out 4-2 winners against Union Berlin. Making up a new-look Hoffenheim attacking trident consisting of Bazoumana Touré and the returning Fisnik Asllani, Lemperle adapted to his new life with ease.

“Tim not only stands out thanks to his intense playing style and his unbending will to win on the pitch, but also his eye for goal,” said Andreas Schicker, TSG’s managing director of sport. In just four months, Lemperle has established himself as a key component in TSG’s attack, benching Andrej Kramaric in a passing of the baton. His 6’2” lanky, yet powerful, frame, excellent turn of pace and a ferocious right foot make the 23-year-old problematic for Bundesliga defences.

Already Lemperle has attracted attention from Atletico Madrid, but unlike Asllani, Lemperle doesn’t have an exit clause, which means that Hoffenheim may be more protective of their prized asset as Christian Ilzer looks to bring European football back to the quiet town of Sinsheim.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 70

## Jeff Chabot



- **Club:** VfB Stuttgart
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 27
- **Games in 2025:** 40

Hanau-native Jeff Chabot has had somewhat of an unorthodox journey to the Bundesliga. Graduating from RB Leipzig's youth academy, the 6'5" defensive monster crossed the border to the Netherlands, where he spent the next two years learning his trade at Sparta Rotterdam and FC Groningen. It was his time at Spezia and Sampdoria where many first took notice of Chabot, for his commanding displays at the heart of defence. An 18-month loan at Cologne then followed, but upon their relegation from Germany's top flight, Stuttgart swooped to sign the former German youth international.

VfB's return to Champions League football would coincide with the signing of Chabot, but despite carving an excellent defensive partnership alongside Anthony Rouault, who later joined Stade Rennes, was unable to prevent Stuttgart's elimination from the competition following a defeat against PSG in January.

Notable performances in the Bundesliga did, though, produce a Man of the Match performance in Stuttgart's 2-1 win over RB Leipzig in January, with VfB's stalwart recording 11 defensive contributions as Sebastian Hoeneß's side recorded three straight league wins to welcome 2025. In a new look VfB back three alongside Ramon Hendriks and Leonid Stergiou, Chabot recorded 13 defensive contributions against Borussia Dortmund, his goal giving VfB a 2-0 lead at the Westfalenstadion.

An under-appreciated skill of Chabot is his ball-playing ability. With 4.72 progressive passes per 90, the 27-year-old is ranked in the 85th percentile for shot-creating actions (1.28 per 90), making him a reliable asset for Hoeneß with his ability to progress the ball under-valued. Not to mention, his 3.90 headers won ranks him in the 97th percentile in Europe's top 5 leagues, making him one of the best headers of the ball.

Chabot has certainly proven his worth, and his commanding defensive performances have made him a fan favourite in Swabia. A leader, Chabot being able to maintain his form will be crucial to VfB returning to Champions League football in 2026.

Daniel Pinder

# 69

## Nicolas Seiwald



- Club: RB Leipzig
- Position: Midfielder
- Age: 24
- Games in 2025: 41

# 68

## Danhilo Doekhi



- Club: 1. FC Union Berlin
- Position: Defender
- Age: 27
- Games in 2025: 37

The Kuchl native rose through the ranks at local club RB Salzburg before graduating from their famed academy, embedding himself within the Austrian Bundesliga club before switching to Leipzig in 2023. Brought up in a pressing-focused setup, Nicolas Seiwald naturally adapted to life in the Bundesliga seamlessly. Given his club's defensive problems, Seiwald entered 2025 deputising at centre-half. It wasn't until March that he got an extended run in his favoured position.

At 24, Seiwald has become a mainstay in Ole Werner's midfield, starting 14 of his 15 Bundesliga games in 2025/26. The Austrian, alongside compatriots Christoph Baumgartner and Xaver Schlager, has proved a tireless midfield trio with their effortless running capabilities. A tenacious defensive midfielder, Seiwald has excellent game-reading capabilities and is one of Europe's leading tacklers. Ranked second across Europe's top 5 leagues for interceptions (32), the 24-year-old ranks in the 96th percentile for clearances, 94th for interceptions and 95th for blocks.

Within the Austrian national team setup, Seiwald is also working with one of the greatest coaches, well-known to Bundesliga viewers. "He gives me tips, and we exchange ideas. That helps me and shows me what I can keep improving," he said of Ralf Rangnick. If Seiwald maintains his form, with a contract until 2028, he will prove crucial to Leipzig's plans of a return to Champions League football.

Daniel Pinder

Though absent from the usual spotlight of Bayern, Dortmund or Leverkusen, Danhilo Doekhi deserves attention among 2025's breakout defenders. The Dutchman has quietly but steadily grown in importance since arriving in 2022.

Doekhi is an imposing physical presence with composure on the ball: he's comfortable in both defensive duels and building out from the back. For Union Berlin, his performances have added solidity and improved defensive organisation, but it is his attacking contribution that has caught the eye in 2025.

Doekhi already has his highest goalscoring return in a season with five goals and one assist since October, including braces against Gladbach and Bayern Munich. He has been the Union's standout performer so far this season.

Though not yet capped at the senior level for the Netherlands, his consistent club form and age (27) suggest he could be knocking on the national team door soon. In a year when the Bundesliga increasingly values ball-playing, versatile centre-backs, Doekhi's trajectory may just be beginning.

Oscar O'Mara

# 67

# Alexander Nübel



- Club: **VfB Stuttgart**
- Position: **Goalkeeper**
- Age: **29**
- Games in 2025: **45**

Struggling to oust Manuel Neuer at Bayern Munich, Alexander Nübel spent time with Principality club AS Monaco before switching to Stuttgart in 2023. Still on loan from Bayern, the now 29-year-old has found a home with VfB. His performances in his maiden campaign under Sebastian Hoeneß were rewarded with a contract extension at Bayern in 2024 before a subsequent two-year loan spell at VfB.

Nübel has impressed at Die Schwaben, recording 32 clean sheets in 102 appearances across all competitions, as his team secured a return to Champions League football in May 2024 for the first time since the 2009/10 season, and are currently enjoying a Europa League campaign. VfB's No. 1 has enjoyed success between the sticks at the Rheinneckar with little competition. Just 15 Bundesliga games into the current season, Nübel continues to showcase his excellent shot-stopping ability.

The ever-present Nübel has already registered six Bundesliga clean sheets, one away from last season's tally of seven, and we're not even halfway through 2025/26. According to FBRef, the man tasked with taking the No. 1 jersey upon his return to Bayern in the summer is ranked third for save percentage (71.9) and clean sheets (6), bettered only by Gregor Kobel and Péter Gulácsi.

Nübel's form will be a catalyst for anything that Stuttgart will achieve in 2026. Given Germany's next biggest star is rising through the ranks at Paderborn, Dennis Seimen - on loan from VfB - will likely take the No. 1 spot from Nübel next season. If Neuer signs an extension at Bayern and Jonas Urbig is the chosen replacement, where Nübel will be playing his football in 2026/27 remains unclear.

**Daniel Pinder**



# 66

## Romano Schmid



- **Club:** SV Werder Bremen
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 25
- **Games in 2025:** 33

Now in his sixth season at the heart of Werder Bremen's midfield, Romano Schmid has enjoyed his most prolific year in 2025. The Austrian playmaker has proved himself to be an essential cog under former head coach Ole Werner and current boss Horst Steffen.

Werder enjoyed a strong 24/25 campaign, finishing in 8th place – just a point short of a place in European competition. Central to that rise were the performances of Schmid alongside Danish teammate Jens Stage. In the second half of the season, as Werner's side pushed for a European place, Schmid excelled, scoring four goals and providing three assists for his teammates.

His standout performance came in a man-of-the-match display in a 2-0 win at home to fellow European hopefuls Eintracht Frankfurt. Both the Austrian's goal and assist in that fixture showcased his quality. The assist saw Schmid whip in a pinpoint corner to the far post, leaving Oliver Burke with the simplest of finishes. His goal underlined his composure under pressure, as he collected the ball on the left side of the area and curled a precise effort past the onrushing defenders and into the far corner.

The current season began in a similar fashion for the 25-year-old, racking up two goals in the first three games of the season and twice providing two assists in a game, even with Bremen struggling to reach the heights of last season's eighth-place finish. Schmid has been near ever-present for Werder since the summer, starting every game and being substituted only twice, totalling just 32 minutes spent on the bench this season.

It has not only been at the club level where Schmid has impressed. He appeared in all eight of Austria's World Cup qualifiers, as Ralf Rangnick's side suffered just one defeat on their way to securing qualification for next summer's tournament.

**Harry Good**

# 65

# Bazoumana Touré



- **Club:** TSG Hoffenheim
- **Position:** Winger
- **Age:** 19
- **Games in 2025:** 29



The 2025/26 Bundesliga season is shaping up to be one of celebration in Sinsheim, as Hoffenheim is once again reborn and pushing for European football. What has seemingly become the club's modus operandi, Kraichgauer have followed up a season of near-relegation with a polar opposite effort under Christian Ilzer, sitting fifth in the table and banking wins over Bayer Leverkusen and RB Leipzig this season.

One of Ilzer's chief on-pitch adjutants this season has unquestionably been Ivorian youngster Bazoumana Touré, a gifted winger who is on course to follow a pathway many have taken before him. Still just 19 and already a prominent figure at PreZero Arena, Touré's influence on the pitch cannot be understated, returning two goals and five assists.

Beyond his direct contributions in the final third, Touré's total chances created and expected assists (xA) are both among the top-three at Hoffenheim, sharing airspace with the Vladimír Coufal as well as cult hero Andrej Kramarić.

But Touré is so much more than just how he has directly contributed on the scoresheet for Ilzer's outfit, with the Ivorian quickly becoming one of the most feared one-vs-one players in the Bundesliga. Per FBRef, the once standout performer for Allsvenskan side Hammarby is a progressive monster both when on the ball (4.58 progressive carries/90min, and 2.00 successful take-ons/90min) as well as receiving it during the run of play (9.75 progressive passes received/90min).

Combined with blistering pace that has clocked Touré as the joint second-fastest player in the league this season (36km/h) alongside fellow Ivorian and RB Leipzig starlet Yan Diomandé, his rapid rise in Germany after first taking Sweden by storm should come as no surprise.

As an attacking facilitator with a high ceiling, Touré's pathway is likely to see him leave Sinsheim nearly as fast as he arrived. Rated as the fifth-highest teenager in all of Europe and one of the most effective dribblers of his age group on the continent, the sky could be the limit for the young Ivorian. With the AFCON holders set to defend their title in Morocco with a talented attacking side that includes Touré, a breakout international tournament could be just the tonic that could see him follow the likes of Maximilian Beier, Angelo Stiller, and Roberto Firmino, who have shone in the Rhine-Neckar Triangle before moving on to top clubs both in Germany and abroad.

Drew Thompson

64

# Johan Manzambi



- **Club:** SC Freiburg
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 20
- **Games in 2025:** 32

**Born in Genève, Johan Manzambi hopped the border to join Freiburg's academy at the age of 17 in 2023. His performances attracted the attention of Julian Schuster, who afforded the youngster nine minutes against Heideheim on Matchday 4 of 2024/25. However, he would have to wait until Matchday 19 for his next foray into the first team, playing 26 minutes across four games between January and March 2025.**

It was then April 2025 when Manzambi launched himself into the limelight, opening his Bundesliga account with a game-winning 90th-minute goal against Borussia Mönchengladbach on Matchday 29. He would see out 2024/25 with four goal contributions (two goals, two assists) in Freiburg's final six Bundesliga games as they clinched a Europa League place, earning him a contract extension and a first Switzerland call-up in June.

Manzambi has repaid the faith shown in him by Schuster, returning three goals and three assists in 13 Bundesliga appearances in 2025/26. An all-round midfielder, the youngster is equally adept at playing a No. 6 as he is playing as a second striker. "He has the quality to be an incredibly good player, and he has proved that already. He should keep on being as creative and lively as he is now. He knows how to beat opponents, too - not everyone can do that," said SCF teammate Vincent Grifo.

A unique skillset, Manzambi's physical stature makes him naturally difficult to get the ball off, while he's added goals to his game without sacrificing any of his creativity. Enjoying a breakout 2025, playing with confidence, expect the stock of Freiburg's protege to rise in 2026.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 63

## Assan Ouédraogo



- Club: **RB Leipzig**
- Position: **Midfielder**
- Age: **19**
- Games in 2025: **12**

# 62

## Chrislain Matsima



- Club: **FC Augsburg**
- Position: **Defender**
- Age: **23**
- Games in 2025: **36**

Fans of Football Manager will know the name, but this campaign has really been Assan Ouédraogo's breakout season after joining from Schalke in 2024 for €10m. The 19-year-old's first season at the Red Bull Arena was marred by injuries, which limited him to only five appearances.

Under Ole Werner, Ouédraogo has found his place in the Leipzig midfield three, offering strong ball-carrying skills as well as the ability to crash the box, which he has done with plenty of success this season. In 11 Bundesliga games, the 19-year-old has three goals and three assists, and even got a call-up to the German national team, where he scored on his debut in the Red Bull Arena.

Praising his prized asset, head coach Werner said: "It's incredibly rewarding - and Assan has developed superbly so far. He certainly hasn't reached his full potential yet."

Ouédraogo currently ranks third in Europe in goal-creating actions per 90 behind only Manchester City's Rayan Cherki and Barcelona's Raphinha, which goes to show the true impact that the Schalke academy graduate has had in his early Leipzig career. While he missed the final four Bundesliga games of 2025, 2026 promises to be an exciting one should he remain injury-free.

Jack Meenan

Chrislain Matsima rose through the ranks in the Principality, making 41 appearances for the first team. Although featuring for ASM in 2023/24, first-team minutes were naturally hard to come by. After a loan at Clermont Foot, Augsburg moved to strengthen their defensive ranks with the signing of Matsima, whose stock has risen since his move.

With nine consecutive Bundesliga starts to see out 2024, Augsburg moved quickly to sign Matsima on a permanent basis in January 2025. Creating an excellent partnership alongside Cédric Zesiger and Jeffrey Gouweleeuw at the start of 2025, Augsburg went on an 11-game unbeaten run going from relegation candidates to European hopefuls under Jess Thorup. FCA would ultimately fall short at the final hurdle with four straight defeats to see out 2024/25, but Matsima's arrival at Augsburg contributed to their defensive heroics as they picked up nine clean sheets during their streak.

2025/26 has certainly been a lot more testing under Sandro Wagner, who was sacked at the beginning of December. Still, Matsima continues to sit high among his Bundesliga competitors, ranking third for interceptions (29) and 10th for clearances (86). A leading player in the Augsburg defence, if the 23-year-old continues to fine-tune his game and develops as expected, then expect several European clubs to show an interest.

Daniel Pinder

# 61

# Farès Chaïbi



- **Club: Eintracht Frankfurt**
- **Position: Midfielder**
- **Age: 23**
- **Games in 2025: 39**

2025 has been something of a mixed bag for Eintracht Frankfurt's Farès Chaïbi. Off the back of the Eagles' record-breaking Hinrunde in 2024/25, the Algerian midfielder found regularly breaking into the starting line-up a real challenge.

Frankfurt's No. 8 made just 12 appearances in the Bundesliga – of which only three were starts – in addition to six appearances in the UEFA Europa League (only one start). Over those 18 total appearances, Chaïbi recorded three assists, which he added to his sole strikes in both league and cup to finish the season with five goal contributions to his name over a combined 38 appearances. However, the winds of change blew in Chaïbi's favour in the summer. Eintracht's record-breaking campaign – in which they qualified for the UEFA Champions League via the Bundesliga for the first time in the club's history – precipitated a large summer turnaround.

After star forward Omar Marmoush departed Deutsche Bank Park in January to join English giants Manchester City, joint-top scorer Hugo Ekitiké followed the Egyptian out the exit door in July, similarly bound for the North-West of England to join fellow European titans Liverpool.

These exits, combined with the acquisitions of Jonathan Burkardt and Ritsu Dōan from Mainz and Freiburg, respectively, initiated a change to Frankfurt's system, which placed greater emphasis on creativity in midfield. While Chaïbi had primarily been deployed as a No.10 or out on the wings in 2024/25, he had struggled to nail down his position as a starter given the stiff competition for places provided by the likes of Ansgar Knauff, Jean-Mattéo Bahoya, Can Uzun and Mario Götze.

Given that, coach Dino Toppmöller devised a plan to relocate Chaïbi to a deeper role in midfield. It's a decision that has paid dividends for Die Adler and Chaïbi. So far in 2025/26, the midfielder has already made 21 appearances, starting 19 of them. He has also already bettered last season's goal contributions tally, with one goal and seven assists.

Success has also fallen into Chaïbi's lap on the international stage, too, as he featured in all six of Algeria's World Cup qualifiers to help his country reach the 2026 North American instalment of the tournament. 2025 may have started slow for Chaïbi, but after a strong end to the year, Frankfurt's No. 8 should be one to watch in 2026.

Sam Carey

# 60

# Ilyas Ansah



- **Club:** 1. FC Union Berlin
- **Position:** Striker
- **Age:** 21
- **Games in 2025:** 34



Lüdenscheid-born Ilyas Ansah is somewhat an unknown entity. It wasn't until his 2024/25 breakthrough campaign with Paderborn that many started taking notice.

A goal and assist against Preußen Münster in February kickstarted SCP's promotion push, but they would ultimately lose out after losing four of their last eight league games. But Ansah - a standout player for Lukas Kwasniok, who would switch to 1. FC Köln in the summer - finished the 2024/25 campaign with six goals and six assists in 33 2. Bundesliga games, which caught the attention of Union Berlin, who moved quickly to secure his services.

Difficult to bully off the ball, Ansah's 6'4" profile makes him suited to Steffen Baumgart's high-octane philosophy. The German youth international has become a valuable asset at Union, returning five goals and two assists in 15 Bundesliga games - 13 of which he has started. Developing an excellent relationship with strike partner Andrej Ilić, Ansah is seen as a wide forward, able to utilise blistering speed to stride past opposing defenders, ranking eighth in the Bundesliga for successful take-ons in 2025/26, while he's also out-performing his xG by three goals, ranking him 10th among Europe's top 5 leagues.

There's no doubt that Ansah is raw, but his ceiling is incredibly high, modeling his game on Thierry Henry. "I watched countless videos of him on YouTube and thought: I want to play football the way he does – that's my goal. I have a picture of him at my home," he told Sport Bild. Ansah is a fan favourite in Köpenick. Continue his upward trajectory, and Union probably won't be short of offers in the next 18 months.

**Daniel Pinder**



# 59

# Rocco Reitz



- **Club: Borussia Mönchengladbach**
- **Position: Midfielder**
- **Age: 23**
- **Games in 2025: 30**



**Rocco Reitz became an important part of the restructuring of Borussia Mönchengladbach's squad in 2025. Coming out of their own academy and playing his first games in the Bundesliga in 2020, he was later loaned to Belgian first division Sint-Truidense. The reason for this was relatable, as Borussia had a few quality players still in their squad after their international participations, such as Manu Koné. After returning to Mönchengladbach, he established himself in the centre-midfield and became an important part of the team's spine.**

A very versatile player that can play as a deep-lying playmaker as well as a box-to-box midfielder, the 23-year-old likes to be involved in ground duels as he is not that strong in the air with a height of 5'7", which makes him one of the shorter midfielders in the Bundesliga. His stamina is very remarkable as he is capable of running 11 kilometres per game with 18 sprints and 67 intensive runs per 90 minutes. His passion and mentality, combined with his history as an academy player, making it to the first team instantly made him a fan favourite from the first minutes he played in the 2024/25 season.

Reitz has a pass completion rate of around 80% with 41 passes played per game, which makes him average in comparison to other midfielders in the Bundesliga. Since Gladbach have a lot of good players on the ball, he is the missing puzzle piece. Establishing himself as vice-captain of the team, he's improved massively when in possession. When first starting for Borussia's first team, he was often very hardworking but not as efficient as he could've been. He adapted his play style to what the team needed. He became more involved in possession and was not only focused on transitions, as he was in his first appearances.

Reitz has been a fan favourite from day one and scored important goals in his first appearances with the team as he established himself. He has developed well since then, but the potential for improvement is still huge. He still needs to get more consistent in being a leader for the team throughout all games and can improve in possessions. If Reitz manages to stay consistent and humble, he could very well earn a chance to play in the German national team.

**@ZonalMarc - Borussia Xplained**

58

# Ridle Baku



- **Club:** RB Leipzig
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 27
- **Games in 2025:** 36



Ridle Baku has been a shining light for RB Leipzig and is perhaps one of the Bundesliga's most underappreciated players. The Mainz academy graduate switched to Wolfsburg in 2020, where he made 166 appearances across all competitions. Incredibly versatile, Baku, who made his league debut as a central midfielder, found himself on the wing at Wolfsburg before moving to right-back. And it's there for Leipzig where the now 27-year-old is starting to carve a name for himself.

With over 200 Bundesliga games to his name, costing a lowly €4.5m, his move to Saxony has been beneficial for club and player. Baku started 15 of his 19 Bundesliga games for Leipzig in the first half of 2025 but was unable to prevent his new side from missing out on European football completely. Pressing the reset button with Ole Werner's appointment, Leipzig are now playing free-flowing attacking football, while remaining defensively resilient - and Baku is influential at both ends of the pitch.

Following Leipzig's humiliating opening day defeat against Bayern Munich, Baku followed that up with an assist for summer signing Romulo in a 2-0 win over Heidenheim. A once attack-minded player is now a leading defensive player in the Bundesliga. Starting 2025/26 with 12 consecutive starts in the Bundesliga prior to an ankle injury in December, no player has tackled more dribblers than Baku (21), who ranks 10th for tackles (31) and eighth for blocks (24) in the current campaign.

His defensive performances coincided with a return to the German national team under Julian Nagelsmann. A key player under Werner, the Mainz-native has fine-tuned his game to make himself into one of the Bundesliga's leading right-backs.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 57

# Kaishu Sano

- Club: **Mainz 05**
- Position: **Midfielder**
- Age: **25**
- Games in 2025: **44**



Kaishu Sano is simply a monstrous footballing marvel. Over the course of the last 14 months, the 25-year-old has seen his estimated market value literally increase tenfold from €2.5m to €25m. Where this true "Iron Man" is headed next shall prove madly interesting. Many Bundesliga clubs are rumoured to be interested in the Mainz 05 professional, but it's questionable as to whether they can afford him.

The "Iron Man" moniker provides a segue into the next reason Sano is so valuable for his club. Sano served as an indispensable anchor of head coach Bo Henriksen's midfield last season, starting all 34 league fixtures and going the full 90 minutes on all but two occasions. Sano found himself subbed off in the 85th minute of Mainz's matchday one encounter against Union Berlin. A few weeks later, he exited the pitch in the 79th minute of a matchday three fixture against Werder Bremen.

From that point forward, Sano's number was never once placed on the fourth official's board again. Sano also went the full 90 in both of Mainz's cup fixtures. On the occasion of his scoring debut, Sano has played almost every minute for Mainz. For whatever reason, Henriksen decided to rest him in the Conference League recently. Sano has still done very well over the course of his 2094 minutes this season, not even incurring a single booking.

Sano - like any solid defensive midfield anchor - breaks up play and eats up traffic in a way that isn't always highlighted by the casual footballing observer. Those with the trained eye cannot miss his merit. The Bundesliga club that once played host to famous forwards such as Yoshinori Muto and Shinji Okazaki may now (for a time) possess the best defensive Japanese midfielder in a generation. As preparation for his impending departure, Mainz has already recruited Sano's countryman Sota Kawasaki to potentially take his place.

**Peter Weis**

# 56

# Andrej Kramarić



- **Club:** TSG Hoffenheim
- **Position:** Forward
- **Age:** 34
- **Games in 2025:** 36

Although losing his starting berth in recent months with the arrival of Tim Lemperle and the return of Fisnik Asllani, Andrej Kramarić remains a fan favourite at Hoffenheim since his arrival in January 2016. A regular fixture in the Croatian national team, the 34-year-old has done plenty to prove that he's one of Europe's most active goalscorers with 129 goals and 64 assists in 301 Bundesliga appearances.

Naturally, as you get older, the goals start drying up, and while that has been the case with Kramarić, he remains an influential player for the Sinsheim club. Notably, after entering 2025 with successive defeats against Wolfsburg and Bayern Munich, conceding six and failing to find the net, his now infamous outburst kicked Hoffenheim into life. "It was clear from the start that this was going to happen, this is the picture of the whole season, this is one big shit season, I'm going to be honest. I'm still soft as if I want to say the truth and something which is on my mind about the club and the current situation, I would probably get the biggest punishment in the history of the Bundesliga," he told Archie Rhind-Tutt.

His outburst was clearly taken on by his teammates. Kramarić scored and assisted in the following games against Holstein Kiel and Eintracht Frankfurt as TSG suffered just three defeats in their following 10 Bundesliga games, as a struggling Hoffenheim mounted a charge to secure their Bundesliga status.

With just one defeat in their nine Bundesliga games to see out 2025, Hoffenheim rightfully have European football in their sights. Averaging a goal contribution every 135 minutes (three goals, three assists), Kramarić remains an impactful player for Christian Ilzer despite starting just nine of his 15 appearances. And with an expiring contract, it's unclear where, if he doesn't retire, the Croat will be playing his football in 2026.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 55

## Ansgar Knauff



- Club: **Eintracht Frankfurt**
- Position: **Forward**
- Age: **23**
- Games in 2025: **43**

# 54

## Robin Koch



- Club: **Eintracht Frankfurt**
- Position: **Defender**
- Age: **29**
- Games in 2025: **43**

It feels as though Ansgar Knauff has been around the block and is older than he is, having played over 158 games for Eintracht Frankfurt, featuring in their 2022 Europa League triumph and winning the Young Player of the Competition by UEFA.

During his four years on the banks of the Main, the 23-year-old has developed into a dependable winger on either side, and has also been deployed across a variety of other positions, like Frankfurt's own Swiss army knife.

Knauff featured 30 times for Die Adler as they qualified for the Champions League through league positioning for the first time in their history. The former Borussia Dortmund player matched his best-ever season, contributing with four goals and six assists.

With Frankfurt's struggles both in defence and when it comes to a lack of options in attack, Knauff has constantly been moved around and has struggled to look settled at times. With Dino Toppmöller's side looking for a striker in the winter window, a move back to the wing will get the best out of Knauff once more.

**Jack Meenan**

Over the last few years, Eintracht Frankfurt have established themselves as a leading Bundesliga club with a now-renowned transfer policy. The latest player to add to his portfolio is Robin Koch, who arrived on a free transfer from Leeds United in 2024.

A replacement for now PSG defensive stalwart Pacho, Koch's experienced head has been a valuable asset to a youthful Eintracht defensive line. Establishing a formidable partnership alongside Nmandi Collins and Arthur Theate, Koch continues to rise to the occasion.

Entering 2025 with three straight wins with two clean sheets, including a 2-0 win against Borussia Dortmund, Koch was nearly ever-present for Eintracht in 2024/25 as they went on to secure a Champions League berth for the first time in the club's history with just one defeat between March and May. Naturally, with the increased workload, Eintracht haven't been able to replicate last season's form, but Koch remains a figurehead at the heart of the Hessen club's defence.

Koch has missed just 28 minutes of Bundesliga football in 2025/26 as Dino Toppmöller's side sees out 2025 with just one league defeat in nine games. Ranking sixth for clearances (103) and third for aerials won (59), Koch is a typically old-fashioned no-nonsense defender who remains a valuable asset for Frankfurt.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 53

# Antonio Nusa



- **Club:** RB Leipzig
- **Position:** Winger
- **Age:** 20
- **Games in 2025:** 27



**Norway is once again on the up when it comes to the footballing landscape in Europe, after Landslaget embarked on a brilliant World Cup qualifying campaign under Ståle Solbakken.**

Led by Bundesliga alumnus and goalscoring super machine Erling Haaland, Norway went a perfect eight-for-eight in Group I while bagging a whopping 37 goals in the process. But there were two fixtures in particular that truly defined Norway's qualification campaign, and one player not named Haaland that shone on both nights in Oslo and Milan: Antonio Nusa.

Still just 20, Nusa's two-goal contributions (one goal, and one assist) at Ullevaal during Norway's 3-0 home win proved what many already knew about the former Stabæk academy graduate, that he was the genuine article. Months later, he netted against the Azzurri again, this time at San Siro, in a 4-1 away drubbing to cap a qualifying run that saw Norway post the best record of any UEFA nation that has reached the 2026 promised land.

However, swap his national team kit for that of RB Leipzig, and it's been a far more difficult period for the Oslo native. After rising to continental attention during a credible period with Club Brugge, Nusa's move to Red Bull Arena in 2024 was lauded both at home and in Saxony.

An expert in one-on-one situations (2.52 successful take-ons per 90 minutes, via FBRef) and a near-constant progressive threat down the left channel, how Nusa profiled before making the jump from the Jupiler Pro League to the Bundesliga has offered little surprise.

Clearly talented and with a high ceiling that already has some of the biggest clubs in Europe rumoured to be circling ahead of next summer, the biggest chink in the winger's armour is one that has ruined many a career before they have begun: injuries.

Since the 2022/23 campaign, before even being an option on the recruitment board at Red Bull HQ, Nusa has already missed a combined 34 matches through injury, and since arriving in Germany, he suffered his biggest injury layoff yet due to a knee injury last term that kept him out for over two months.

With that, it's been difficult for the dynamic forward to find any semblance of consistency in the end product despite regularly featuring in the RBL starting line-up, with Nusa offering a return of just four goals and four assists in 37 Bundesliga outings; a figure dwarfed by his seven goals in 20 caps for Norway.

Still, few would look at Nusa as anything other than a young player primed for his first true European breakout party, and there could have been no better time than for him to become crucial for his country ahead of a World Cup summer. Though now confirmed to have suffered another injury that will keep him out until the new year, once fit, expect Nusa to continue to turn heads on his way to what might be a big summer move after shining on the big stage in North America.

**Drew Thompson**



# 52

## Nadiem Amiri



- **Club:** Mainz 05
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 29
- **Games in 2025:** 37

A Bundesliga career spanning 13 seasons, Nadiem Amiri is perhaps one of the league's under-appreciated players. Rising through the ranks at Hoffenheim, the Ludwigshafen-native switched to Bayer Leverkusen in June 2019, but his performances never lived up to expectations.

After 146 appearances across all competitions for Die Werkself, Amiri joined Mainz in January 2024 for €1m, where he's since found a home for himself. His performances in 2024/25 secured Bo Henriksen's side a European berth, returning four goals and three assists in 16 appearances in the first half of 2025.

During his time at Hoffenheim and Leverkusen, Amiri was primarily seen as a No. 10, a playmaker with superb vision. But since his move to Mainz, the 29-year-old has re-tuned his game. Operating as a No. 8, Amiri is now a tireless box-to-box goalscoring midfielder. Assured in possession, Mainz's midfield engine continues to develop in his new role, which has seen a return to the German national team under Julian Nagelsmann.

While offering defensive stability alongside Kaishū Sano, Amiri remains effective in the final third, albeit from a deeper position. He ranks in the 96th percentile for shot-creating actions, 94th percentile for shots, 93rd percentile for progressive passes and 89th percentile for successful take-one. His key passes (27) in 2025/26 is only bettered by five players, and his 34 passes into the penalty area rank him eighth among Europe's top 5 leagues.

As Mainz enters 2026 bottom of the Bundesliga, Amiri's performances in 2025 aren't representative of Die Nullfünfer's form. In the best form of his career, Amiri certainly won't be short on offers should Mainz's 16-year stay in the Bundesliga come to an end.

**Daniel Pinder**

51

# Saïd El Mala



- Club: **1. FC Köln**
- Position: **Winger**
- Age: **19**
- Games in 2025: **17**

**1. FC Köln** have had a series of exciting young players come through their ranks in recent years, such as Ismail Jakobs and Jan Thielmann, but none have a higher ceiling than Said El Mala.

After his 13 goals and five assists in the 3. Liga for Viktoria Köln, which saw him named the 3. Liga 2024/25 Newcomer of the Season, the 6'2" teenager shone at the summer's U19 European Championship, returning four goals and three assists. Heading into 2025/26, few could have predicted his upward trajectory.

Bypassing the 2. Bundesliga, El Mala has not looked out of place in the top flight this season. The dazzling winger followed up his debut against Mainz with Cologne's fourth against Freiburg on Matchday 2, earning him a first start under Lukas Kwasniok. The 19-year-old took the ball past three players before firing a thunderous effort past Bundesliga veteran Oliver Baumann to secure a 1-0 win against Hoffenheim on Matchday 3. "Saïd is a good boy, a street footballer who simply has God-given gifts," Kwasniok lauded El Mala after his solo effort in Sinsheim.

El Mala's strike at the PreZero Arena kickstarted a run of five goals and two assists in eight league games as Cologne's protege launched himself into the limelight, earning him a nomination from Julian Nagelsmann for the November international break. Although unused, it's a valuable experience for the youngster, who is destined to be one of Germany's greats, following in the footsteps of fellow Kölsche Jung Lukas Podolski. El Mala has already attracted attention from Europe's biggest clubs, and 2026 promises to be an exciting year for one of the Bundesliga's hottest prospects.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 50

# Fisnik Asllani



- **Club:** TSG Hoffenheim
- **Position:** Striker
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 35



Fisnik Asllani's rise to prominence in 2025 has been nothing short of staggering. After a solid start to the 2024/25 2. Bundesliga campaign with Elversberg, the young forward continued to shine in the second division.

As Elversberg's talisman up top, the Kosovan helped steer the Saarlanders to a third-place finish - the brink of promotion to the Bundesliga's dizzying heights. All the while, Elversberg had the joint-second best offensive record in the league – something of which Asllani was a key component.

Along the way, Asllani contributed 18 goals and eight assists, ranking him joint-third and ninth place in the respective charts. He also took the second-most shots in the league (102). Perhaps his most memorable period of the season came on Matchdays 28 and 29, when he scored a brace in a 6-0 thrashing of Jahn Regensburg before following up with a heroic hat-trick away to Hannover.

In the relegation/promotion play-off against Heidenheim, Asllani scored and assisted in the first leg 2-2 draw away to the Bundesliga side, but couldn't quite affect the game the same way for the reverse fixture, as Elversberg suffered a narrow 2-1 defeat at home to keep them in the second tier.

Asllani carried his stellar form from his breakout season onto the international stage with Kosovo, too. Although he had made his debut back in 2024, the young forward was yet to score his first goal – at least until June, when he netted in a 4-2 friendly win over Comoros. Developing a taste for it, Asllani followed that up with goals against Sweden and Slovenia in World Cup qualifiers in October and November, respectively.

After departing Elversberg in the summer to return to parent club Hoffenheim, there were understandably some question marks as to whether Asllani could remain on this staggering upward trajectory, given that the previous season Hoffenheim had finished just three points above Heidenheim, one place clear of the play-off spot.

However, Hoffenheim's No.11 has hit the ground running at the start of 2025/26 for the Sinsheimers. Despite having technically made his top-flight debut all the way back in 2022, this season has felt like the start of his Hoffenheim career proper. With six goals in 15 appearances, he sits joint-seventh in the race for the Torjägerkanone and is leading the way for a Hoffenheim side which finds itself challenging for the European places this term.

**Sam Carey**

# 49

# Hugo Larsson



- **Club: Eintracht Frankfurt**
- **Position: Midfielder**
- **Age: 21**
- **Games in 2025: 42**

Eintracht Frankfurt has quickly become one of the premier transfer proving grounds in Europe across recent seasons, and much of that can be attributed to Die Adler once again becoming somewhat of a force in the top flight of German football.

From Europa League winners in 2021/22 to now being viewed as a side that should be challenging for the Champions League places on an annual basis, Frankfurt have taken those expectations and - like so many German clubs have done and continue to - found room to lean on gifted young players that raise performance levels during their time at Deutsche Bank Park.

And the list is long and distinguished regarding the talents that have entered and left the seat of financial might in the country, with players such as Omar Marmoush, Randal Kolo Muani, Hugo Ekitiké, Filip Kostić, and Jesper Lindstrøm all departing after shining bright. The next in line on that well-trodden pathway is undoubtedly Hugo Larsson.

After bursting on the scene in the Allsvenskan with Swedish powerhouse Malmö to the tune of banking Young Player of the Year in 2022 before pushing Di blåe to league honours the following season, the 21-year-old midfield fulcrum quickly became a key cog in the Frankfurt wheel after arriving along the Main in the summer of 2023.

Fast forward to the current 2025/26 Bundesliga campaign, and Larsson is still viewed as a vital piece of the puzzle in the centre of the park, though by his own standards, he has fallen short of the mark. One of the most reliable young midfield talents in Europe, Larsson's footballing IQ and tactical intelligence remain ahead of the curve, and his dual capacity of offering a shield while boasting top-quality vision when on the ball. It's no wonder that the likes of Real Madrid have been rumoured to be interested in his services.

Admittedly, Larsson has not hit the same level seen in his previous two seasons at Frankfurt, though much of that can be attributed to being in and out of the team due to injury, missing four Bundesliga games in 2025/26.

Still, it is perhaps telling that Frankfurt are heading into the winter break outside of the top four, and perhaps that is due in part to Larsson not being at his best. And if anything, it stands as a testament to the influence the young midfielder has already garnered at the club. As a midfielder that can do it all and do it rather well, Larsson looks primed to push onward to the next level should he rebound after the Winterpause.

If he can add more direct contributions in the final third while remaining ever-present in all phases of play, his notable progression during his time at Frankfurt puts him in line for a big move in the summer of 2026, and it would certainly be well deserved.

**Brian Szlenk**



# 48

## Nathaniel Brown



- Club: **Eintracht Frankfurt**
- Position: **Defender**
- Age: **22**
- Games in 2025: **45**

This year has seen Nathaniel Brown establish himself as a Bundesliga left-back, make his debut for the German national team and be linked with a move to Real Madrid - an impressive year for the 22-year-old.

Along with his friend and former Nürnberg teammate, Can Uzun, Brown has played himself into being one of Frankfurt's most important players, offering an attacking threat from the left wing, either as a left-back or a wing-back in a three-at-the-back formation. With one goal and three assists in 15 Bundesliga games this season, Brown has caught the eye.

And he's a player who could definitely throw his name in the hat to be called up to the Germany squad by Julian Nagelsmann for the World Cup in the summer, but he will face competition from both Maximilian Mittelstädt and David Raum for the position.

What also doesn't help the 22-year-old is that he has found himself in a Frankfurt side that has one of the worst defences in the Bundesliga. While Dino Toppmöller's setup allows SGE to get the best out of Brown, they are often exposed when it comes to defending transitions. Regardless, 2026 promises to be an exciting year for the youngster.

**Jack Meenan**

# 47

## Aleix García



- Club: **Bayer 04 Leverkusen**
- Position: **Midfielder**
- Age: **28**
- Games in 2025: **44**

Originally signed as competition for Granit Xhaka, Aleix García - tried and tested in several positions - struggled under Xabi Alonso after being unable to oust the Swiss midfielder, while being unable to develop a fruitful relationship when deployed alongside the now Sunderland player.

This season, under Kasper Hjulmand, it's a completely different story. While compatriot Alejandro Grimaldo has grabbed the headlines, García is as important. The Spaniard has blossomed into one of the better midfielders in the league, and he would probably place much higher in this list if he were able to maintain his form throughout the calendar year.

The 28-year-old has made himself a lynchpin of the Leverkusen midfield, leading the league in touches (1643) while he also ranks highly in stats such as shots (56) and goal-creating actions (9), passes into the final third (166) and progressive passes (110). He showcases his ability on the ball, as well as knowing how to make Leverkusen tick.

The Xhaka replacement has finally shown that he is more than capable of replacing his former teammate.

Whatever Leverkusen achieves in the second half of the season, García will be pivotal, and the 28-year-old could be a key player in a title-winning team in the future, similar to Xhaka

**Jack Meenan**

46

# Vincenzo Grifo



- **Club:** SC Freiburg
- **Position:** Winger
- **Age:** 32
- **Games in 2025:** 43

**Vincenzo Grifo is known for two things: one, for having a wand of a right foot from set pieces, and two, for changing between Freiburg and Hoffenheim four times!**

The 32-year-old Italian/German is synonymous with the Bundesliga, having played over 300 appearances in the competition. Having represented Freiburg since 2019, it seems that Grifo has now found his 'forever club', having played over 200 times in this spell.

Since 2019, Grifo has played in five full seasons (discounting the current season) and has been Freiburg's top scorer in four of them. His most successful season with SCF was during the 2022/23 campaign, where Freiburg finished fifth, qualified for the Europa League, and scored 15 goals. Despite now being 32, Grifo is still a regular in Freiburg's starting line-up, returning five goals in 15 Bundesliga appearances. Playing mainly on the left, the playmaker likes to cut inside to either have attempts on goal for link-up with forwards, playing a pass that can unlock defences.

When it comes to free-kicks and penalties, Grifo is usually the first man to pick up the ball. In truth, you'd be a brave or perhaps foolish man if you wanted to take a set piece in this team. Grifo has taken 48 penalties in his career, scoring 41 of them. What's more, since 2020, Grifo has taken 19 free kicks, which have resulted in goals, nine of which were direct goals from the player himself.

Yet Grifo's impact extends beyond set pieces. Operating primarily from the left wing, despite being right-footed, he excels at cutting inside to create scoring chances or unlock defences with incisive passes. His vision, technical control, and ability to dictate tempo have made him Freiburg's creative engine, orchestrating moves and providing a steady supply of goals and assists. Now a leader in the Freiburg squad, Grifo's versatility on the pitch makes him a backbone in Freiburg's attack and one of the Bundesliga's most consistent, creative forward players.

**Jamie Allen**

# 45

# Julian Ryerson



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 28
- **Games in 2025:** 50

Norwegian wing-back Julian Ryerson has been a name well-known to Bundesliga fans for several years now. His stint in Germany began in the capital when he signed for Union Berlin in 2018. After a four-and-a-half-year spell in Köpenick, where Ryerson helped the club gain promotion to the Bundesliga and establish themselves at German football's top table, the 28-year-old signed for Borussia Dortmund in January 2023.

Ryerson's first six months in the Ruhrgebiet ended with mixed emotions. When making his debut on Matchday 16 of the Bundesliga season, BVB were languishing in sixth place. Dortmund became a different team in the second half of the season, with the Norwegian marauding down each flank. With Ryerson missing just two of the remaining 19 fixtures, Dortmund lost only once before the agonising final-day draw with Mainz, which ultimately cost Edin Terzić's side a first Meisterschale in 11 years. 2025 has been something of a mixed bag for Dortmund, but one constant has been the form of the Norwegian.

A high-energy full-back known for his relentless work rate and tactical intelligence, Ryerson is comfortable on either flank and combines defensive discipline with aggressive pressing, often disrupting opponents high up the pitch. This is underlined by his impressive output, racking up eight assists throughout the year.

Ryerson excels in one-on-one duels, using his strength and timing to win tackles and recover possession quickly. Going forward, he provides width and direct running, supporting attacks with overlapping runs and superb crosses. His stamina allows him to maintain intensity for the full match, making him a reliable option.

With BVB's signings of both Yan Couto and Daniel Svensson during the year, Ryerson has had to fight hard for his place. When he does play, however, especially from the right, he has developed a brilliant understanding with the opposite wing-back, usually Svensson. That being said, he has still managed 51 club appearances in 2025 and was an ever-present for his country as Norway qualified for next summer's World Cup.

**Harry Good**

# 44



## Haris Tabaković

- Club: **Borussia Mönchengladbach**
- Position: **Striker**
- Age: **31**
- Games in 2025: **29**

# 43



## Ermedin Demirović

- Club: **VfB Stuttgart**
- Position: **Striker**
- Age: **27**
- Games in 2025: **34**

Haris Tabaković is currently having the best season of his career with Borussia Mönchengladbach. The Bosnian's first season in the Bundesliga at Hoffenheim was a forgettable one after finishing joint-top scorer in the 2. Bundesliga at Hertha Berlin in 2023/24, but at Borussia Park, the 31-year-old may have found his new home.

Signed as an option for the injured Tim Kleindienst, what seemed an underwhelming move has blossomed into one of the best signings of the summer.

Kick-started by a late equaliser against Bayer Leverkusen, Tabaković has seven goals and two assists in 14 games and has been central to Gladbach's turnaround. The Bosnian is currently scoring at a better rate than in his 2. Bundesliga campaign in the Hauptstadt, averaging a goal every 141 minutes.

Head coach Eugen Polanski's biggest dilemma will be to find a way to fit both Tabaković and Kleindienst into the starting line-up when the latter returns from injury. If he does find a way, the duo could make a very effective attacking pair and push Gladbach as an outsider for a European place. What is clear is that Tabaković is undroppable right now, and the phrase 'never fall in love with a loan player' is quite difficult when they are performing at such a level.

Jack Meenan

Since joining Stuttgart in 2023/24 from Augsburg for €20m, Ermedin Demirović has had an odd time at Mercedesstraße. During the meteoric rise of Nick Woltemade, the Bosnian was collateral as VfB head coach Sebastian Hoeneß opted for Deniz Undav as the partner for the now Newcastle striker. However, despite this, Demirović still ended the campaign with 15 goals in the Bundesliga, a tally that saw him finish sixth in the top scorer race.

This season, the departure of Woltemade and an injury to Undav allowed Demirović to become undisputed No. 9 at Stuttgart, and he started the season off strongly, providing three goals and one assist in his first six Bundesliga games, but a foot injury has since derailed his campaign.

Considering Undav is now in the form of his life, and Stuttgart are looking to sign an additional striker in the winter, the Bosnian will face a tough challenge to find his feet and place in the starting line-up once again. However, what he has continued to show is that he is a reliable Bundesliga striker and offers a much more physical outlet to the Stuttgart forward line, which they are currently missing.

Jack Meenan

# 42



## Mohamed Amoura

- Club: VfL Wolfsburg
- Position: Striker
- Age: 25
- Games in 2025: 34

A product of the Union Saint-Gilloise scouting system, Mohamed Amoura has been a revelation since swapping Brussels for Wolfsburg.

Despite VfL's poor form and change of coach, it hasn't stopped the Algerian from scoring six and assisting twice in 14 games. His first season in Germany saw him end with 10 goals and 12 assists, with five goals and five assists coming in the first half of 2025. The 25-year-old stands out due to his small frame, his blistering speed, and his strong ability when it comes to carrying the ball.

With Wolfsburg having recently turned a corner, and the likes of Christian Eriksen and Lovro Majer improving in their performances, Amoura will potentially be given more service upon his return from the Africa Cup of Nations, while he can also start to develop an interesting partnership with Dženan Pejčinović, who has played backup to Amoura during his time at Morocco.

If Amoura maintains his form in an underperforming Wolfsburg side, it won't be long before he does leave the Autostadt, but VfL will be able to command a significant figure for the explosive attacker.

Jack Meenan

# 41



## Edmond Tapsoba

- Club: Bayer 04 Leverkusen
- Position: Defender
- Age: 26
- Games in 2025: 40

Talk about a player who everyone could recognise as special right away. When the 20-year-old Edmond Tapsoba joined Leverkusen during the January 2020 transfer window, it didn't take long for him to start turning heads. Now in his seventh season as a Bundesliga professional, Tapsoba is arguably better than he ever was.

Now 26, the Burkinabé has already equalled his goalscoring tally from his last six league seasons in a season. His only absence from Leverkusen's 2025/26 Bundesliga campaign was Matchday 15, due to his call-up for the Africa Cup of Nations.

While Tapsoba was integral to Xabi Alonso's Meisterschale-winning team in 2024, he perhaps didn't get the plaudits that Jonathan Tah and Odilon Kossounou did. Now in a new-look Leverkusen defence alongside Loïc Badé and Jarell Quansah under Kasper Hjulmand, the trio are creating a formidable partnership, reminiscent of the Bundesliga and DFB Pokal-winning team.

Tapsoba is simply the complete package one wants in a defender: fierce tackling, timing, superb creativity on attack builds, and striking recovery speed. His performances over the years have naturally attracted attention from the Premier League, with Newcastle United and Tottenham Hotspur keen suitors, but with a reported €95m exit clause, Die Werkself, known to drive a hard bargain, clearly have no intention to sell.

Daniel Pinder

# 45

# Bilal El Khannouss



- **Club:** VfB Stuttgart
- **Position:** Attacking Midfielder
- **Age:** 21
- **Games in 2025:** 20



As Leicester City endured relegation from the Premier League last season, Bilal El Khannouss emerged as one of the shining lights from a truly miserable campaign. He scored twice and assisted three times, but the attacking midfielder's talent was quite clear to witness throughout.

In a Foxes' team that didn't offer much in attack, El Khannouss always stood out, finding solutions in the final third and being ambitious on the ball. Leicester City could never really find a tactical identity across the campaign, and this held him and many other players back.

Now at Stuttgart, the Moroccan has already bettered his tally from the previous campaign, contributing to six goals for VfB. Those contributions have come consistently across the campaign and at vital points. He has sparkled in the UEFA Europa League too, scoring thrice already.

He has stood out with an ability to unlock defences, progress the ball from midfield, with Sebastian Hoeneß's free-flowing possession-based setup really bringing the most out of him. He thrives on exchanging positions across the pitch, instead of being forced to stick to certain spaces on the pitch. This allows the instinctive El Khannouss to be himself, as he looks much more unpredictable and untamed under the German. In a way, having more of the ball is one of the biggest advantages the midfielder has seen in Stuttgart. This has allowed him to showcase his ability in possession, with FBRef ranking him in the 89th percentile for most passes into the final third and 85th percentile for progressive passes, playing as many as 2.20 key passes per 90 minutes.

He has a real nose for finding pockets of space in attacking midfield, and this is evident every time he steps onto the pitch. His goal against Heidenheim earlier in the season is a great example, as El Khannouss finds the right space, receives, and curls one past the goalkeeper. He made that look particularly easy, but unlike a lot of attacking midfielders - especially like Xavi Simons, he isn't oriented towards the left side.

The Morocco international is much more varied in his movement and also often finds himself in spaces down the right. As surprising as it sounds, the midfielder has already played as many as 29 times for his country at the tender age of 21. That is no mean feat, considering how he has been a constant in the first team since his debut in 2022, too. It is a massive reflection of his quality and how much trust coaches have in El Khannouss. That ability is clearly shining through once again, with Stuttgart currently having an obligation to buy him permanently from Leicester City. The way things are going, it can yet get better for the talent. For someone who was dubbed a wonderkid since his time in Belgium, it will be well deserved.

Kaustubh Pandey

# 39

## Castello Lukeba



- **Club:** RB Leipzig
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 32



It's been a mixed year for Castello Lukeba. The Frenchman suffered a hamstring injury in December 2024 and wouldn't make his next Bundesliga appearance until February 2025. While the former Olympique Lyonnais centre-half shone, RB Leipzig missed out on European football completely, resulting in the dismissal of Marco Rose. Points against Holstein Kiel and Werder Bremen, and a 4-0 loss at Eintracht Frankfurt, just wasn't good enough for a team that is supposed to challenge Bayern Munich. As Lukeba played six consecutive 90-minute games in an unfamiliar position, at left-back, he was one of the few bright spots in a mostly disappointing season for Die Roten Bullen.

But Leipzig's absence from European football has perhaps been a blessing in disguise. Under Ole Werner, Rose's replacement, Lukeba leaves 2025 as one of the Bundesliga's leading defenders outside of last season's top three teams. The 23-year-old has featured 1260 minutes from a possible 1350 in the Bundesliga this season, establishing himself as a mainstay in Leipzig's defence in his favoured centre-back position. 11 games unbeaten, returning nine wins and two draws after their Matchday 1 loss against Bayern Munich, Lukeba - who didn't feature in the defeat at Hoffenheim - has naturally attracted attention from Europe's biggest clubs.

At 6'0", Lukeba isn't the biggest of defenders but remains an imposing figure in Leipzig's back four. Strong in duels, the Frenchman's 91.7% of dribblers tackled ranks him third in the Bundesliga and across Europe's top five leagues. With a desire to remain at Leipzig and help bring Champions League football back to Saxony, the Lyon native is naturally a favourite among fans.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 38

# Maximilian Beier



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Attacker
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 47



While Maximilian Beier's first season for Borussia Dortmund was stop-start at the best of times, due in large part to the Black and Yellows' turbulent form under Nuri Şahin and later the adjustment to his managerial replacement, Niko Kovač, who took the reins in January 2025, by the turn of the year, the exciting young forward had begun to find his feet on the Ruhr.

Nevertheless, Beier still found himself largely restricted to appearances as a substitute – something for which he had developed a tendency at the start of the campaign. However, this all changed on Matchday 23, when Beier was started in a 6-0 thrashing of Union Berlin in which the German international grabbed a goal and an assist.

It is without doubt that Beier enjoyed his finest spell of the season in March and April. On the continent, Beier started just his third UEFA Champions League game in a tricky last 16 clash away to French side Lille, scoring the winner in a 2-1 victory before Dortmund were ultimately knocked out in the quarter-finals by Barcelona.

Ultimately, his form peaked between Matchdays 27 and 29, when the 23-year-old grabbed five goal involvements in three games (three goals, two assists) against in-form Mainz and Freiburg sides, as well as a memorable strike in a 2-2 Der Klassiker draw away to fierce rivals Bayern Munich.

Unfortunately for Beier, however, his good run of form would be cut short as he was forced off with an ankle injury in the subsequent win over Borussia Mönchengladbach, which left him sidelined for the remainder of the season. Nevertheless, after adding to his tally at the FIFA Club World Cup over the summer - against Real Madrid, no less - Dortmund's No.14 enjoyed a solid first campaign with Die Schwarzgelben, claiming 10 goals and five assists in 50 appearances.

So far in 2025/26, Beier has continued much the same. He's shown impressive flashes, but goal involvements have continued to be somewhat sporadic, with three goals and two assists in 20 appearances across all competitions to his name at club level.

At the international level, he has made three appearances in World Cup qualifiers for Germany as Julian Nagelsmann's side have booked their place at next year's tournament. As such, he'll no doubt be hoping for a repeat of last season's upturn in form in the Rückunde if he's to be on that plane next summer.

**Sam Carey**

# 37

## Yan Diomande



- Club: RB Leipzig
- Position: Winger
- Age: 19
- Games in 2025: 16

# 36

## Loïc Badé



- Club: Bayer 04 Leverkusen
- Position: Defender
- Age: 25
- Games in 2025: 22

Yan Diomande joined Leipzig for €20m in the summer from Leganes following their relegation to LaLiga2. Considering he had played just 542 minutes, returning three goal contributions (two goals, one assist), it raised questions about the fee. However, in his first 14 Bundesliga games this season, the Ivorian has shown that he is a star in the making.

After a baptism of fire against Bayern Munich in the opening game and a short adjustment period, the winger has sprung into life, scoring six and assisting three, the showpiece being his first career hat-trick against Eintracht Frankfurt.

The 19-year-old, in an interview with Transfermarkt, has previously stated Vinícius Júnior is the player he models his style of play off, and it is not hard to see when he ranks seventh in Europe for successful take-ons with 42, not far behind the Brazilian, and the likes of Jeremy Doku and Lamine Yamal.

Diomande now heads to Morocco for the Africa Cup of Nations with the Ivory Coast. There, the 19-year-old could play an important role as they look to win the competition for the second time in a row.

**Jack Meenan**

Tasked with replacing Jonathan Tah, Loïc Badé has quickly established himself in a new-look Bayer Leverkusen defence alongside fellow summer arrival Jarrel Quansah and Edmond Tapsoba. The 2024 Bundesliga champions fought off competition from Sunderland and Aston Villa to land Badé for €30m from Sevilla, who were reluctant to sell.

A mentor for compatriots Jeanuël Belocian (20) and Axel Tape (18), the Frenchman is already seen as an experienced figurehead after his 2023 Europa League triumph with Sevilla. A leader in Kasper Hjulmand's squad, Badé is a defender who excels in one vs. one situations. An aggressive tackler, Leverkusen's No. 5 ranks sixth in the league for percentage of dribblers tackled. Possessing explosive pace and an excellent ability to read the game, Badé combines these two core skills expertly in the defensive third, where he ranks in the 96.5th percentile for recoveries.

The defender has already made 22 appearances, starting 18 of them, with a notable display against Manchester City, where Leverkusen ran out 2-0 winners at the Etihad Stadium. Badé registered 11 defensive contributions, covered 11.1km, and was successful in his ground and aerial duels. It's safe to say that Bayer's summer arrival has slotted seamlessly into Hjulmand's system.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 35

# Leon Goretzka



- **Club:** Bayern Munich
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 30
- **Games in 2025:** 49



An almost ever-present figure in the centre of midfield during an unprecedented era of domestic dominance for Bayern Munich, Leon Goretzka has little left to prove. The experienced German international has won it all during his time in Bavaria, including playing the full 90 minutes of the triumphant 2020 Champions League final against Paris Saint-Germain.

A classic box-to-box midfielder, Goretzka has slotted in seamlessly alongside multiple partners over the past 12 months. Whether lining up next to long-time partner Joshua Kimmich, Aleksander Pavlović, or even newcomer Tom Bischoff, Goretzka consistently does his job with little fuss and often goes under the radar.

The sheer amount of midfield quality available to head coach Vincent Kompany has meant Goretzka has averaged just over 60 minutes per game in the Bundesliga so far this season. Despite this, the 30-year-old has proven himself to be one of Kompany's most consistent performers. His duel success rate of 50% and 0.58 possessions won in the final third per game highlight that he is more combative and physically imposing than much of his direct midfield competition at Bayern.

With his contract set to expire in 2026, Goretzka is another Bundesliga player who - should Bayern decide to move on from him, as has looked possible at times this season - would attract strong interest from clubs across Europe.

**Harry Good**



# 34

## Waldemar Anton



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 29
- **Games in 2025:** 48



Borussia Dortmund defender Waldemar Anton has, over the last few seasons, asserted himself as one of Germany's best defenders, and 2025 has been no different. He is an important cog in Niko Kovač's defensive trio alongside Nico Schlotterbeck and Ramy Bensebaini.

By Dortmund's standards, 2024 was extremely sub-par. Things changed, however, after Nuri Şahin was let go at the beginning of the year. Kovač arrived, implemented new ideas, and turned BVB's season around by securing a Champions League place that looked impossible when he took over. Anton was ever-present as Die Schwarzgelben picked up 22 points from a possible 24 in their final eight games. The German scored two crucial goals in that run: one in a 2-2 draw at Bayern Munich and another deep into stoppage time to secure an invaluable away win at Hoffenheim.

Composed, intelligent, and versatile are three words that describe Anton to a tee. Not yet in the conversation for the captaincy, he nevertheless leads by example from the back, with his positional awareness and calmness on the ball exemplary. He reads the game with ease, stepping out to intercept passes and breaking up attacks before they can develop. In possession, he is confident under pressure, often carrying the ball forward or playing crisp passes to initiate build-up play.

The 2025/26 season has only reinforced his importance to BVB. Anton failed to complete the full 90 minutes just once in the first 21 games before picking up a hamstring injury in the UEFA Champions League at home to Bodø/Glimt, which ultimately ended his year prematurely.

Anton has excelled not only for Dortmund but also for the German national team. Since his first call-up by Julian Nagelsmann in 2024, he has made 12 appearances and delivered a Man of the Match performance in a crucial win over Luxembourg in November, putting Germany on the brink of World Cup qualification - a campaign that at times appeared to be in jeopardy.

In his peak years, Anton represents both reliability and ambition for Dortmund's future. If he maintains his fitness, his blend of leadership, tactical intelligence, and clutch contributions positions him as a cornerstone of BVB's defensive evolution and a defender capable of shaping decisive moments on both the domestic and European stage.

**Harry Good**

# 33

# Luka Vušković



- **Club:** Hamburger SV
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 18
- **Games in 2025:** 15



Towering central defender Luka Vušković announced himself to the mainstream in 2025. Two years after agreeing the move, the 18-year-old joined up with Premier League outfit Tottenham Hotspur in July. After impressing throughout pre-season, new Spurs manager Thomas Frank wanted to keep Vušković in and around his first-team squad. The ambitious young defender wasn't content, though, and expressed his desire to spend the season out on loan to get regular game time.

Naturally, the team of Luka's suspended brother, Mario, were interested. Hamburg's unwavering support during Mario's EPO doping case added a sense of romance to what ordinarily would've been an impossible signing for HSV to pull off. It was virtually guaranteed that the 18-year-old would be universally adored by the Hamburg faithful. The move wasn't just motivated by that emotional connection, however. After being promoted back to the Bundesliga for the first time in seven years this summer, Hamburg had a genuine need for extra quality across the pitch – something the Croatian possesses in abundance.

Playing as the central defender in a back three for Merlin Polzin's side, Vušković displays leadership qualities well beyond his years. Commanding his fellow defenders, one would not be mistaken for recognising that he is captain material, at just 18.

On Matchday 4, Vušković became the first Hamburg player in seven years to score a Bundesliga goal, firing in a low shot to put his team ahead in an eventual 2-1 win over Heidenheim. A week later, he won an astonishing 18 aerial duels in a match against Union Berlin at the Alte Försterei – the first time that feat has been achieved in one of Europe's top five leagues in five years.

After the record-breaking performance in the capital, HSV full-back Miro Muheim was full of praise for his Croatian teammate, stating: "He's a monster, for sure. I don't think he's lost a single header. He's doing a great job. The boy is a superb footballer and is helping us tremendously." His performances for Hamburg earned him recognition by winning back-to-back Bundesliga Rookie of the Month awards in September and October.

Despite his young age, it feels as though Vušković is destined for a future at the top of the European game. Tottenham see him as a long-term option and consider him untouchable in terms of a permanent sale, though his pathway to regular game time in north London does appear blocked by Cristian Romero and Micky van de Ven. Hamburg will, of course, be interested in retaining him for another season, but according to BILD, Niko Kovač's Borussia Dortmund are also keeping a close eye on his development.

Harry Good

# 32

# Jarell Quansah +

- **Club: Bayer Leverkusen**
- **Position: Defender**
- **Age: 22**
- **Games in 2025: 20**



Jarell Quansah joined Bayer Leverkusen for a club record fee of €35m in the summer. A big fee for a 22-year-old who had barely featured for Liverpool last season. However, in the first six months of his career at the BayArena, the substantial fee may prove to be a bargain.

In the Leverkusen back three, Quansah has been forced to mature as a player due to the leadership void in the squad following the departure of Jonathan Tah in the summer. Speaking to the *Guardian* earlier this season and the mass exodus in the summer, Quansah said: "It has been tough to build the leadership groups..." Learning to play alongside Virgil van Dijk has clearly had an effect on the Warrington-native as he continues to become a leader for Leverkusen on the pitch.

Along with Loïc Badé and Edmond Tapsoba, the trio, who have an average age of 24.3, have led Die Werkself to the fourth-best defence in the league, as they currently sit third in the table. The back three also occupy three of the top 10 places in % of dribblers tackled in the Bundesliga, with Quansah sitting in fourth.

The new England international has found his home in the right-centre back role of the Leverkusen back three. Quansah has a similar style to that of former Leverkusen defender Odilon Kossounou, not only when it comes to the wide gate when running, but also in their qualities as a player.

The former Liverpool defender will regularly occupy a position closer to a right-back and will carry the ball forward into midfield. Similar to how the Ivorian played behind Jeremie Frimpong.

Liverpool will continue to monitor the development of Quansah while at the BayArena. The Premier League side have a buyback clause worth €70m, which could rise to €82m. If Leverkusen are able to sell the defender for that high a fee when his time on the banks of the Rhein comes to an end, the deal made in the summer will be another masterstroke.

**Jack Meenan**



# 31

# Daniel Svensson



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Defender
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 45



The name Daniel Svensson was likely an unfamiliar one to many when Borussia Dortmund were first linked with the tenacious Swedish fullback, but having joined during last season's winter transfer window from FC Nordsjælland, the Swede has had ample time to impress and make a name for himself in schwarz-gelb. In many ways, the Svensson deal was an ode to Dortmund's past brilliance of bringing in lesser-known players from outside the confines of Europe's top five leagues and helping them flourish into exquisite players that many who follow the upper echelons of European football are now familiar with.

The 23-year-old brought his tenacious nature and dynamic play to Dortmund's defence, and from the off it seemed to be a perfect fit. This level of work ethic on the pitch has earned him the affectionate nickname "the Duracell bunny".

Under Niko Kovač, the Swede developed into a key player last season, complementing Julian Ryerson quite well. Having both players in the fullback positions really upped Dortmund's game, with Svensson in particular always equally ready to bomb forward and add a hint of his own creativity in attack as he was to dig in and defend. In 15 Bundesliga appearances, Svensson notched a goal and three assists, 12 of which were starts. A 27% cross accuracy for the club that season made him a welcome addition, as Dortmund had struggled to create chances from the wide areas in seasons past.

Svensson's versatility has also helped Dortmund, with the player moving into midfield during games, showing his capability to play in such a position. It was something Kovač implemented, especially when the player first joined, reminiscent of Ian Maatsen's time at BVB.

This season, Svensson's numbers really underline the qualities that he brings. In the Bundesliga alone, he has a goal and an assist to his name, followed by an additional two goals in the Champions League. The player boasts an expected assists of 0.20 with 13 chances created and an improved cross accuracy of 28.8%. His expected goals also sit at a very healthy 0.76 for a fullback. Svensson also averages 2.15 touches in the opposition box per 90, emphasising his ability to find himself in a positive attacking position for Dortmund. Defensively, the Swedish international has played more of a wingback position under Kovač. When called upon, Svensson has made crisp tackles and won possession in the opponent's final third to help transition the team from defence to attack. He also has an impressive aerial duel success rate of 47.6%.

The Swede is the archetype for the brand of players Dortmund should once again seek to target.

**Brian Szlenk**

# 30

## Tom Bischof



- Club: Bayern Munich
- Position: Midfielder
- Age: 20
- Games in 2025: 39



Few German footballers have had a better calendar year than Tom Bischof. While Bischof's career really began to take off in the autumn of 2024, the Aschaffenburg native was still only considered a €12m-valued player as the year drew to a close.

Some 12 months later, he is now the €30m-valued Germany U21 captain, not to mention a regular feature for reigning champions Bayern Munich. The 20-year-old has also earned his first German senior men's team cap, earlier this year.

After agreeing to join Bayern in the summer in January, the midfielder ended his time with Hoffenheim, starting 18 of the TSG's 19 league fixtures and scoring three goals. As the Kraichgauer bowed out of the Europa League, Bischof turned in an excellent goal and assist performance in the final match against Anderlecht.

The depth in the midfield position in Munich meant that Bischof could only play limited minutes. Fortunately, Bischof began to excel in a new position, left-back, which sent him into the November international break high on confidence, before scoring a splendid hat-trick in his first match back for the Germany U21s.

When one reflects on Bischof's development, he initially garnered a reputation as a defensive workhorse. His carefully staggered (yet steady) deployments at Hoffenheim over the course of three seasons between 2021 and 2024 kept him on the radar. We never really considered him a genuine box-to-box threat, however, until early last season.

Once the scoring prowess portion of his game emerged, it came as no surprise to see Bayern begin courting him. Bischof begins to refine his game into something that resembles that of vintage German attacking midfielders like Mehmet Scholl, Bernd Schneider, and (with the distance precision) Torsten Frings.

**Peter Weis**



# 29

# Tim Kleindienst



- **Club:** Borussia Mönchengladbach
- **Position:** Attacker
- **Age:** 30
- **Games in 2025:** 19

When Borussia Mönchengladbach secured Tim Kleindienst's signature from Heidenheim in summer 2024, this represented more than an ordinary transfer. The 28-year-old striker had just played a pivotal role as goal guarantor in helping the promoted side sensationally qualify for the Conference League, scoring 12 goals in his debut Bundesliga campaign despite recurring injury problems. Gladbach identified the potential early and acted decisively. Yet reality exceeded even optimistic expectations: 16 goals and 9 assists in 31 Bundesliga appearances made Kleindienst the key figure in a season that stabilised Gladbach sportingly.

Kleindienst's mentality constituted his greatest weapon. With 2.43 fouls per match, he led the Bundesliga statistics – not a sign of indiscipline, but tactical astuteness in disrupting opposition attacks. His 32 sprints per match demonstrated extraordinary work intensity that fundamentally improved Gladbach's collective pressing.

With 10.5 aerial duels per match (ranked fifth among all strikers) and a 50% success rate, he dominated through intelligent positioning. His xG value of 17.6 in the previous season ranked fourth behind Harry Kane, Serhou Guirassy and Victor Boniface – 11 of his 12 goals came from inside the box.

Kleindienst's shot accuracy of 53.6% significantly surpassed his predecessors, Tomáš Čvančara (38.2%) and Jordan Siebatcheu (33.3%). The reason: aggressive penalty area occupation and more explosive jumping power. Combined with Franck Honorat's crossing prowess, a devastating weapon emerged. Gladbach increased their shot accuracy from the previous season by 5% to 37%.

Within Gerardo Seoane's vertical style of play, Kleindienst became the ideal target player. Gladbach played 47.6 long balls per match (third in the league) - predominantly directed towards Kleindienst. With Alassane Pléa as hybrid No. 10, Robin Hack in the inside channels and Honorat on the wing, a harmonious attack emerged that produced 55 goals across the season.

Kleindienst's 16 Bundesliga goals represented the best individual season by a Gladbach player in the 2000s - only Marco Reus scored more. His breakthrough with the national team (four goals, one assist in six competitive matches) underlined the level. Julian Nagelsmann recognised what Gladbach supporters had long known: a world-class striker at the peak of his powers.

For €7m, Borussia secured not merely a goalscorer, but the complete modern striker - intense and instinctive. Returning from injury, Kleindienst could develop a fruitful partnership alongside Haris Tabaković under Eugen Polanski.

# 28

# Oliver Baumann



- **Club:** Hoffenheim
- **Position:** Goalkeeper
- **Age:** 35
- **Games in 2025:** 31



Oliver Baumann has been largely overlooked during his career, with the veteran goalkeeper finally gaining international recognition for his performances with Hoffenheim. Although not a stranger to the German national team, Baumann was awarded his debut under Julian Nagelsmann in October 2024. Given Manuel Neuer's retirement and Marc-André ter Stegen's injury, the 35-year-old has firmly established himself as Germany's No. 1 ahead of the 2026 World Cup, starting eight of Die Nationalelf's 10 fixtures in 2025.

The German's career has been quite remarkable. Competition has always been difficult with the aforementioned duo, and Kevin Trapp in recent years, but Baumann certainly isn't a late developer by any means. Although he's someone who perhaps spectators have ignored. An incredibly private person who doesn't like to launch himself into the limelight, Hoffenheim's shot-stopper has been Mr. Consistent.

Making his Bundesliga debut at 19 for Freiburg, Baumann has been almost ever-present in the Bundesliga, missing 27 games through injury and illness throughout his career. Baumann made his 500th Bundesliga appearance in November, ranking him fifth among goalkeepers in Germany's top flight since records began. An active shot-stopper, his 157 saves in the 2024/25 Bundesliga season were the most of any goalkeeper in Germany's top flight last season as the Sinsheim club narrowly avoided the relegation play-off, finishing three points above Heidenheim after picking up one win in their last 10 games.

Ilzer remained in charge despite discussions surrounding his future, and Hoffenheim would enjoy an incredible start to the 2025/26 Bundesliga season, which saw them go six games unbeaten. With the Austrian favouring attacking football, Baumann has been kept busy between the sticks, which has naturally seen his number of clean sheets decline. A standout performer, his 71 percent save percentage is among the highest in the league, and he put in a notable performance against Bayer Leverkusen on Matchday 1, "defending some excellent scoring opportunities," remarked Ilzer.

Even at 35, Baumann shows no signs of letting up. Speaking to Kicker, Hoffenheim's No. 1 revealed that he doesn't drink alcohol and has never been drunk, and football has always been his top priority. It's conceivable that Baumann could yet play for years to come, similarly to his compatriot, Manuel Neuer, who turns 40 in March and looks set to sign an extension until 2027.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 27

# David Raum



- Club: RB Leipzig
- Position: Defender
- Age: 27
- Games in 2025: 37

David Raum has become a pivotal figure for RB Leipzig, combining defensive solidity with incisive attacking contributions that make him one of the most complete modern full-backs in the Bundesliga. As Leipzig's regular left-back and club captain, his presence influences both phases of play, helping to balance structure with forward momentum.

Defensively, Raum brings strong positional awareness, speed, and the ability to match wingers in one-on-one scenarios. His capacity to track back quickly after attacking forays ensures Leipzig aren't left exposed on the counter.

Offensively, Raum's impact is perhaps even more pronounced. His pace and awareness allow him to make effective overlapping runs, getting high up the left flank to stretch opposition defences and supply crosses into dangerous areas. Across the current season, he's contributed goals and assists while delivering a high volume of crosses, underlining his threat going forward.

His technical ability also shines in set-piece situations, where his deliveries often create scoring opportunities; if not, they often go straight into the back of the net. This blend of defensive grit and attacking ambition, combined with leadership on the pitch, makes Raum a crucial catalyst for Leipzig's style of play.

**Jamie Allen**



# 26

## Can Uzun



- **Club: Eintracht Frankfurt**
- **Position: Attacker**
- **Age: 20**
- **Games in 2025: 34**



One of the great young German talents - and not the first or last to opt to represent Turkey - has really hit his stride in his second season at Bundesliga level. That isn't to suggest that the highly coveted former Nürnberg academy man Eintracht Frankfurt paid €11m to acquire in the summer of 2024 stumbled during his first year with the SGE. Can Uzun collected two league goals and an Europa League assist before the calendar year of 2024 was out. After 2025 hit, Uzun was on target for two more Bundesliga and one more UEFA Europa League goal.

SGE head coach Dino Toppmöller - perhaps in response to some complaints from Uzun's camp about lack of playing time - handed the youngster a start against Holstein Kiel on Matchday 22 in February proved himself to be a wizard of the half-spaces working behind Hugo Ekitiké and across from German legend Mario Götze. Uzun scored in the 3-1 victory. Unfortunately, Uzun's fourth Bundesliga goal of the campaign would prove his last. The then 19-year-old had problems accruing regular minutes after that.

All of that notwithstanding, few doubted that it wouldn't take too long for Uzun to break through. An exceptionally strong summer training camp left Frankfurt confident enough to allow some of Uzun's competitors in attacking midfield to depart. In an opening day victory against Werder Bremen, Uzun set a new club record by becoming the youngest Eintracht player ever to pick up three goal contributions (one goal and two assists) in a match. The then 19-year-old Uzun then scored a goal in his next five fixtures across all competitions.

Four straight Bundesliga and one UEFA Champions League goal left one wondering if there would ever be a match in which Uzun would not score. After netting a goal and registering an assist in an insane 6-4 win at Borussia Mönchengladbach, however, Uzun's form dipped slightly before a muscle tear injury forced him to bow out for a time. The fact that the Regensburg native only just turned 20 in early November nevertheless leaves most German footballing journalists convinced that his historic career has only just begun.

Uzun's new role as a No. 10 seems almost perfectly suited to him. With the ball at his feet, Uzun can be both a technical marvel and an exquisite dribbler. Those currently impressed by the dribbling skills of young 1. FC Köln phenom Said El Mala should definitely give Uzun a deeper scout. Uzun isn't quite the dribbling artist, but is a much more well-rounded player. Even on his more mediocre days, Uzun's sense of space, touch, and feel for distribution renders him a footballer worth watching. The sky is truly the limit for him.

**Peter Weis**

# 25

# Ritsu Doan

- **Club: Eintracht Frankfurt**
- **Position: Attacker**
- **Age: 27**
- **Games in 2025: 41**



Ritsu Doan's rise from a promising winger at Arminia Bielefeld to a crucial forward at Freiburg, and now an important new signing for Eintracht Frankfurt, reflects both his individual development and the growing recognition of his influence in the Bundesliga.

Doan's time at Freiburg spanned three seasons, where he showcased his natural flair, eye for goal, and all-around energy. Over 123 competitive matches, Doan delivered 26 goals and 23 assists. Prior to his move in the summer, last season was the Japanese international's most successful year to date in the Bundesliga, scoring 10 and assisting on eight occasions. Now at Frankfurt, Doan arrives as a mature, versatile attacker expected to provide the same dynamism while taking on new responsibilities in a possibly more ambitious environment.

One of Doan's best qualities is his dribbling ability, which allows for quick counterattacks and for his team to move swiftly up the pitch. Very few Bundesliga players attempted more dribbles than he did across his time at Freiburg, placing him alongside the likes of Jamal Musiala and Florian Wirtz (prior to his move to Liverpool). What's more, the creative midfielder is averaging more than three goal-scoring moments per 90 minutes over the last few years in the Bundesliga. Possibly an underrated asset, however, he'll get the chance to showcase this more on Europe's biggest stages with Frankfurt in the future.

Doan's move to Eintracht Frankfurt in 2025 signalled both his personal progression and Frankfurt's ambition. The club identified his technique, speed, and mentality as traits suited to a team competing for European places and needing greater creativity in wide areas.

At Frankfurt, he is expected not only to replicate his Freiburg productivity but to take on greater responsibility in a more possession-oriented system. His capacity to impact games through dribbling and chance creation makes him a natural candidate to become one of Frankfurt's key attacking figures. Already this season, Doan has netted four goals and assisted on four occasions in 15 Bundesliga matches.

**Jamie Allen**

# 24

## Deniz Undav



- **Club:** VfB Stuttgart
- **Position:** Goalkeeper
- **Age:** 29
- **Games in 2025:** 41

Deniz Undav's rise to the top hasn't been particularly easy. Released from Werder Bremen's academy in 2007 after five years because he was 'too small', his path to Stuttgart came via TSV Havelse, Eintracht Braunschweig II and SV Meppen.

Before his move to Swabia, Undav rose to prominence in Belgium, playing for Union Saint-Gilloise, where he returned 42 goals and 15 assists over two seasons, which caught the attention of Brighton and Hove Albion. His time in England, though, was a forgettable one. After struggling to break into the first team, Undav was shipped to Stuttgart, who signed the German forward on a permanent basis for €26.7m after his initial loan produced 18 goals and 10 assists in 30 Bundesliga games, helping VfB return to Champions League football for the first time since the 2009/10 campaign.

After missing the final six Bundesliga games of 2024 through injury, Undav made a bright start to 2025. Returning two goals and one assist in Stuttgart's opening three games of the calendar year, it would take Undav another 11 games before finding the net again, scoring against Union Berlin in April. "Naturally, there are times when one is benched and has to work one's way back," Undav told Sky Germany of his goalscoring drought.

And that he did. Time and again, Undav has been shot down, but his determination to succeed is unrivalled. He suffered a tear to the medial collateral ligament in his left knee against Borussia Mönchengladbach in August, and didn't return to action until October. He marked his first start with a spectacular game-winning lob against Mainz, setting the foundation of what was to come.

Undav's November return of six goals in five games wasn't matched by anyone. A brace against Augsburg preceded a superb hat-trick against Borussia Dortmund as Stuttgart recovered from 2-0 and 3-2 down to take a share of the points. The 29-year-old enjoyed his third goal, a poacher's effort: "It was like a typical striker goal, a typical Deniz goal," beamed Undav, who scored in a third consecutive game but was unable to prevent a defeat against Hamburg.

Stuttgart's No. 26 has established himself as one of the Bundesliga's elite, yet under-appreciated, finishers, averaging a goal every 75 minutes in November. Carry on his goalscoring form, and he could well be included in Julian Nagelsmann's World Cup squad.

**Daniel Pinder**

# 23

# Noah Atubolu



- **Club: SC Freiburg**
- **Position: Goalkeeper**
- **Age: 23**
- **Games in 2025: 35**

It's been a calendar year of records for this German footballing favourite. Already in his third season as Freiburg's No. 1 at the age of 23, Noah Atubolu is repaying the trust placed in him by his hometown club tenfold. Setting a new club record in the spring and breaking a Bundesliga record in the Autumn, it's hard to think of many better German players who have enjoyed a better 2025. During the summer break, the native Breisgauer led the Germany U21s to the U21 European Championship final, in the process breaking Manuel Neuer's record for number of appearances for the U21s.

Last winter, Atubolu collected an incredible string of six consecutive clean sheets between a Matchday 20 encounter against Bochum and a Matchday 25 fixture against RB Leipzig. Over the course of the Leipzig affair, Atubolu passed SCF keeper Richard Golz's record of 510 goalless minutes in the 26th minute of the match. For a time, Atubolu was in contention for a Bundesliga record too. Timo Hildebrand's all-time record of 885 minutes without conceding a goal was in reach until the streak ended in Mainz the next week at 610 minutes.

Atubolu's 21st cap for the Germany U21s, in the semi-finals, broke Neuer's record for the most appearances by a keeper at Germany's highest youth level. Renowned for his penalty saving antics, he saved two on the final matchday of 2023/24 and recorded a further two penalty saves during 2024/25. Atubolu tied the record against Werder Bremen on Matchday 23 in spring, then broke it against the very same club on Matchday 4 this season, becoming the first goalkeeper in Germany's top flight to save five successive penalties.

As of November, Atubolu is an official German senior men's national team call-up, though he still awaits his first cap at senior level. A first appearance may come soon with Germany's current No. 1 Oliver Baumann turning 36 in 2026 and back-up Alexander Nübel capped just twice. Atubolu's biggest competitor for the No. 3 slot is Augsburg's Finn Dahmen, who still has the option to switch his nationality to England if he wishes.

Atubolu's success simply warms the hearts of all those who have spent years rooting for him. Freiburg took some serious flak for committing to a then 21-year-old youngster as their regular starter ahead of the 2023/24 campaign. Atubolu did struggle in his first year as a Bundesliga No. 1 and, quite uncommonly given the friendly nature of the Breisgau area, took a lot of flak from club supporters as well. In his final year as SCF head coach, the legendary Christian Streich stuck up for Atubolu and all that he is capable of. Streich has always known how to develop young talents, and Atubolu may one day rise to be one of the all-time greats.

**Peter Weis**

# 22

# Christoph Baumgartner

- Club: RB Leipzig
- Position: Attacker
- Age: 26
- Games in 2025: 38



The 2025/26 season always felt like a pivotal moment in Christoph Baumgartner's career. During his time at Hoffenheim, the Austrian scored 30 goals and provided 22 assists in 138 games across all competitions for the Sinsheim club, and was often heralded as one of the Bundesliga's brightest prospects.

In 2023, Baumgartner switched to RB Leipzig, who spent big on Benjamin Sesko and Lois Openda, while Xavi Simons also arrived on loan in the same transfer window and with Dani Olmo also at the club, TSG's protégé saw his Bundesliga minutes diminish by more than 1,000.

Once the first name on the teamsheet at Hoffenheim, Baumgartner had to get used to a place on the bench, starting just 44.83 percent of Bundesliga games under former head coach Marco Rose.

At one point, the 26-year-old questioned his future: "To be quite honest, as a player, you start to worry. You're not playing in the cup, and you realise things might be difficult," he told Sky Germany.

But a change of coach heading into the 2025/26 campaign brought a renewed sense of belief that would establish Baumgartner as one of the Bundesliga's leading attacking midfielders.

As Leipzig restructured with the appointment of Ole Werner after missing out on European football, Sesko, Openda and Simons were shown the exit door, but Baumgartner remained.

A leading player under Werner, he pulls the strings behind a new look attacking trio consisting of Antonio Nusa, Romulo and Johan Bakayoko. Leipzig's No. 14 has started in all but one of their Bundesliga games this season, returning six goals and providing six assists.

In scintillating form, Baumgartner scored five and created five goals in eight games between October and December, including a brace against Hamburg. "He is such an intelligent player, who always knows exactly what kind of space he should look to exploit," beamed Werner.

Operating as the No. 8 alongside Nicolas Seiwald, Baumgartner has begun to make a real impact, reminiscent of his old Hoffenheim form. Ranking highly in non-penalty goals (0.40) and touches in the opposition penalty area (4.33) per 90, Baumgartner is an active playmaker. But not only that, his defensive contribution among attacking midfielders across Europe's top five leagues is admirable, ranking high for tackles (2.26) and blocks (1.59).

Heading into 2026, 12 points behind Bayern Munich, Baumgartner is playing with a smile again and has only one aim: to make Leipzig into challengers again.

Daniel Pinder

# 21

## Maximilian Mittelstädt



- Club: **VfB Stuttgart**
- Position: **Defender**
- Age: **28**
- Games in 2025: **45**

# 20



- Club: **Bayern Munich**
- Position: **Midfielder**
- Age: **28**
- Games in 2025: **50**

Stuttgart's Maximilian Mittelstädt is a dynamic left-back whose blend of defensive reliability and attacking play has made him a key figure for the Swabians as well as an emerging talent at the international level.

Standing out for his high work-rate and excellent defensive attributes illustrates his ability to disrupt attacks and regain possession down the left during forward play. His defensive awareness and positioning help provide stability for his team, which in turn allows more adventurous teammates to push forward with confidence.

Offensively, Mittelstädt thrives as a modern full-back. His crossing ability and involvement in forward play add a vital dimension to transitions, often supplying width and service into the box. His stamina and speed allow him to consistently make overlapping runs, support wingers, and link play effectively.

Mittelstädt's influence goes beyond raw numbers; his tactical intelligence and energy help Stuttgart maintain balance between defence and attack, while also energising team cohesion on both phases of play. With goals and assists already to his name this season, Mittelstädt is a key figure for his side.

**Jamie Allen**

Konrad Laimer has quickly established himself as a valuable player at Bayern Munich. The Austrian brings an energetic playing style both in defence and attack, helping Bayern transition from defence to attack instantly. Industrious and tactically intelligent, Laimer thrives in high-intensity systems, constantly pressing, covering space, and disrupting opposition build-up. His defensive awareness allows Bayern to maintain a compact shape, while his willingness to track runners and make recovery sprints provides essential protection for the back line.

What makes Laimer especially influential, however, is his seamless transition from defensive duties to attacking support. Whether deployed as a right-back, defensive midfielder, or box-to-box engine, he frequently joins forward movements with well-timed overlapping runs beyond the winger. This not only stretches opposing defences but also creates numerical advantages on the wings. His crossing, passing combinations, and smart underlapping movements help maintain quick passing rhythms and open lanes for more naturally creative teammates.

Laimer's relentless energy sets the tone for Bayern's pressing game, while his versatility allows the team to adapt tactically without losing balance. Defending with intensity and still contributing in attacking phases makes him an understated but highly impactful figure in the squad.

**Jamie Allen**

**19**

# Felix Nmecha



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 25
- **Games in 2025:** 43



Over the course of the last eight months, Felix Nmecha has emerged as one of Borussia Dortmund's leading players. After an initially difficult start to the calendar year as BVB slumped to three straight defeats under Nuri Şahin prior to a knee injury at the end of January, it wasn't until the appointment of Niko Kovač, who coached Nmecha during his time at Wolfsburg, that we saw an uptick in form.

After substitute appearances against Freiburg and Bayern Munich, Nmecha started the final five games of 2024/25, playing an integral role as Dortmund, who won seven and drew one of their final eight Bundesliga games, secured a UEFA Champions League berth. His performances drew attention from Manchester United and Inter, but BVB's dynamic midfielder remained in the Ruhr.

Heading into 2025/26 injury-free and with renewed confidence, Nmecha has established a formidable partnership alongside Marcel Sabitzer. An ability to play as the six or eight, the 25-year-old is BVB's beating heart. An athletic ability to cover large areas of the pitch, the Hamburg-born midfielder has added goals to his game. With an impressive strike against Juventus and a brace against Copenhagen, he was rewarded for his early-season form with a return to the German national team.

After a difficult start to 2025, Nmecha has developed into a leading Bundesliga player under Kovač at Dortmund, and he's finally repaying the €30m fee BVB paid Wolfsburg in July 2023 with his performances on the pitch. If he can keep fit, Nmecha promises to be a player to watch in 2026.

**Daniel Pinder**



# 18

# Jonathan Tah



- Club: **Bayern Munich**
- Position: **Defender**
- Age: **29**
- Games in 2025: **41**



After a decade with Bayer Leverkusen, Jonathan Tah joined Bayern Munich for €2m in the summer, signing a four-year contract.

During his 10-year stay at the BayArena, Tah developed from a talented prospect at Hamburg to one of the leading defenders in the league. The now 29-year-old won the Bundesliga, DFB Pokal, DFL Supercup, featured in two Bundesliga Teams of the Season, and three Europa League Teams of the Season. Tah's start at Bayern Munich has shown exactly why the club moved quickly to secure him.

The Hamburg native has added immediate stability to Bayern's defence, forming an effective partnership with Dayot Upamecano and leading the strongest defensive record in the league during the early 2025/26 campaign, with Vincent Kompany's side only conceding 11 goals in 15 games.

Physically dominant and composed in possession, Tah has continued the excellent distribution that defined his Leverkusen years, regularly posting passing accuracy above 90% and progressing play from deep. His aerial strength has been a key asset, particularly in Bayern's early-season success.

Internationally, Tah captained Germany in a 2025 World Cup qualifier against Luxembourg, underlining his growing leadership status.

While Bayern's high-pressing system has brought occasional challenges, his consistency remains his greatest strength.

Under former defender Kompany, Tah, like his defensive partner Upamecano, could be given the opportunity to take further steps in his development, despite being in the prime of his career, as he has been given the opportunity to work under one of the Premier League's greatest ever defenders.

With his blend of experience, athleticism and tactical discipline, Tah looks increasingly like a long-term cornerstone of both Bayern and Germany's back line heading into a big 2026, which is highlighted by the World Cup in the summer, where Tah should be expected to be a central figure in the heart of Julian Nagelsmann's side.

**Oscar O'Mara**

17

# Karim Adeyemi



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Attacker
- **Age:** 23
- **Games in 2025:** 53

Since arriving in 2022, Karim Adeyemi has emerged as one of the Bundesliga's and the country's most exciting talents. With a blend of directness, raw pace, and an eye for goal (particularly in the UEFA Champions League), Adeyemi plays a vital role at Borussia Dortmund. A player who has often been monitored by other top European clubs, the winger is quite comfortably one of the league's most exciting players on his day.

You'll have to travel far and wide in the Bundesliga to find a player who can outrun Adeyemi on his day. The 23-year-old once recorded one of the highest top speeds ever tracked in the Bundesliga, having been clocked at 36.7 km/h. During one Champions League night, the winger reached a speed of 37.3 km/h against Real Madrid. Clearly dangerous during transition, Adeyemi is most effective during one-on-one situations as well as playing off the shoulder of the last defender. The wideman has scored countless goals for BVB throughout his career at the club.

While pace is clearly one asset, his clear ability to link up with teammates and create goalscoring chances is another. Last season, Adeyemi had 21 goal involvements, having scored 12 and assisted nine times. Such output underscores how effective he can be even when used rotationally. So far this season, Adeyemi has scored six goals and assisted three times in 22 matches, including during crucial matches against Bayer Leverkusen, Wolfsburg and Mainz.

Tactically, Adeyemi offers the kind of versatility modern football demands. He can play wide and also drift inside to link play or attack centrally. Under the right circumstances, his movement helps pull opposing defenders out of position, creating space for his teammates and enabling fluid attacking patterns. More than just a winger, Adeyemi is a dynamic attacking threat whose presence can change how the opposition defends.

In summary, the Munich-native represents a modern attacking profile, blending electrifying pace and clinical efficiency, combined with tactical flexibility and team-oriented mentality. While perhaps not (yet) a ruthless traditional No. 9, at Dortmund, he serves as a bridge between wing and centre-forward play. As he continues to mature, his influence on Borussia Dortmund's attacking identity is only likely to grow.

Jamie Allen

# 16

# Serge Gnabry



- **Club: Bayern Munich**
- **Position: Attacker**
- **Age: 30**
- **Games in 2025: 51**



The summer 2025 transfer window brought about a major attacking overhaul at the Allianz Arena. Bayern Munich parted ways with club legends Thomas Müller and Kingsley Coman, while they also sold Mathys Tel on a permanent deal to Tottenham Hotspur, in addition to allowing Leroy Sané to leave on a free transfer. But despite losing three key figures in their offensive arsenal, Bayern only made two attacking signings: Nicolas Jackson and Luis Díaz. This shortfall, combined with the long-term injury to Jamal Musiala, has forced Serge Gnabry to step up and embrace far more accountability in his role in attack.

Born in Stuttgart, Gnabry was 16 when he left Germany for England, ascending Arsenal's youth ranks but failing to consolidate his spot in the first team. And after struggling to convince on loan at West Brom, Gnabry elected to return home and make his mark in the Bundesliga with Werder Bremen and Hoffenheim before finally getting a shot to play for Bayern Munich in 2018 after joining the Bavarians for €8m.

Fast-forward seven years, and it's fair to say that this has been money well spent. Gnabry has won six Bundesliga titles, a UEFA Champions League title, four DFL Supercup/Franz Beckenbauer Supercup, a UEFA Super Cup, a FIFA Club World Cup, as well as two DFB Pokal titles, racking up 98 goals and 69 assists in 306 appearances.

After helping Bayern wrestle domestic supremacy back from Bayer Leverkusen's grasp, he's proving crucial in their flawless start to the Bundesliga campaign and is on track to surpass last season's tally of seven goals and nine assists in 47 appearances, having chipped in five goals and eight assists in 21 games thus far.

Whether it's wiggling past his opponent with an elaborate stepover move, or getting goal-side of his opponent with a breathless sprint in behind, or carving out a through ball past the defensive block, or tracking back and applying the counter-pressure immediately after losing the ball, Gnabry has emerged as a ubiquitous cog in Vincent Kompany's attacking unit.

He may not get the same plaudits as the likes of Michael Olise and Harry Kane, but the 30-year-old has proven time and time again that he is one of the Bundesliga's premier attacking players. And whilst there was ample speculation that he would be yet another veteran forward on the chopping block in last summer's rebuild, Gnabry staying put in Munich has ended up being a win-win as Bayern have gracefully manoeuvred an undermanned start to the campaign and given themselves a seemingly unassailable advantage in the title race.

Gnabry has made an impact both on and off the ball, ranking fourth in Bayern's squad for goals (4), goal contributions (9), and goals per 90 (0.55) in the Bundesliga, and fifth for tackles per 90 (1.5). And whilst he ranks behind Lennart Karl, Olise and Díaz with just 1.5 successful dribbles per 90, he boasts a significantly higher dribble success rate of 50%.

As he approaches 31, Gnabry is well aware that next summer could be his second and final opportunity to compete in a FIFA World Cup, as well as his last chance to secure a lucrative contract. With just six months remaining on his deal, expect Gnabry to continue delivering the goods and arguing his case to the Bayern board about why he deserves a long-term extension.

**Zach Lowy**



# 15

# Aleksandar Pavlović



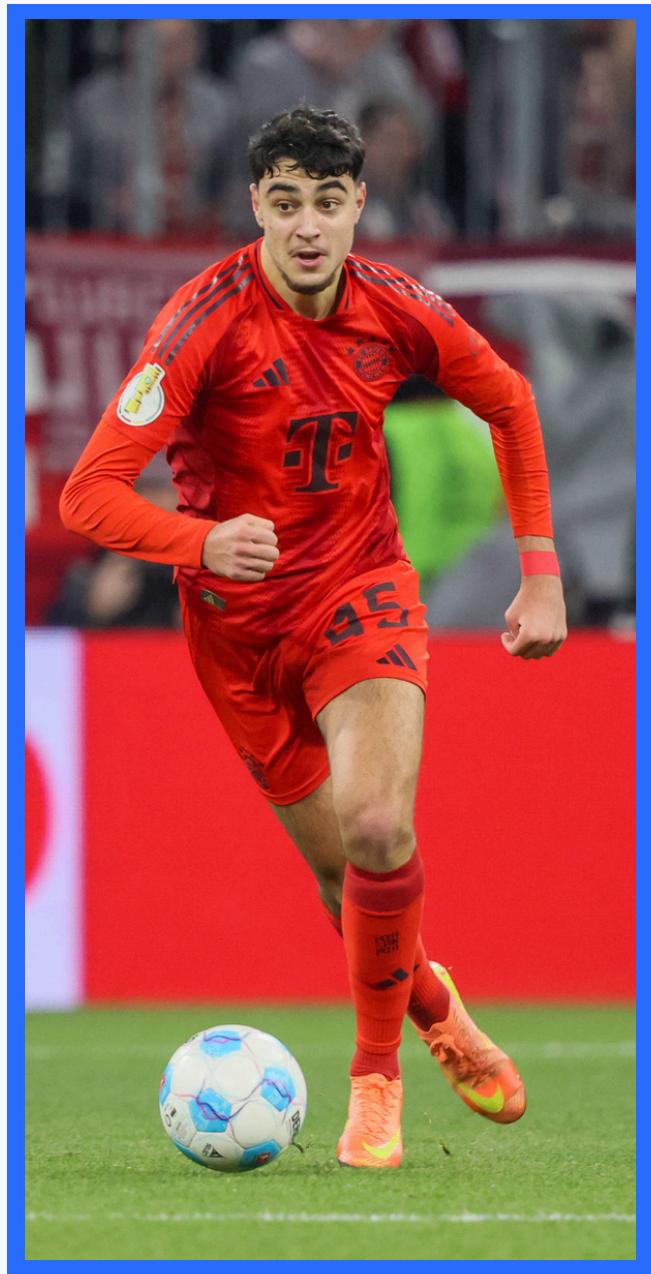
- Club: Bayern Munich
- Position: Midfielder
- Age: 21
- Games in 2025: 40

Since breaking onto the scene in 2023 under Thomas Tuchel, Aleksandar Pavlović has firmly established himself as not only a future mainstay of both Bayern Munich and the Germany national team but also a key player for the former.

The Bayern boyhood fan has thrived in midfield alongside Joshua Kimmich, showcasing his strong ball-playing ability. With the 21-year-old's inclusion ahead of Leon Goretzka, Vincent Kompany's side is immediately a better team.

Of course, Pavlović is still young and needs to improve in areas such as the defensive side of the game, but as he continues to get older and develops physically, that will come too. The Munich-native's main downside remains his proneness to injuries and illness over the last three seasons, missing 170 days while being absent from a home European Championship following tonsillitis.

But, developing well and on an upward trajectory, Pavlović has the ability to be one of the best players in his position in the world, something that he's envisioned: "And my goal, as I've said before, is to become the best No. 6 in the world." With 601 Bundesliga minutes to see out 2025, Bayern's academy graduate continues to excel in his passing metrics, establishing himself as one of the Bundesliga's best young talents.



Jack Meenan

14

# Gregor Kobel

- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Goalkeeper
- **Age:** 28
- **Games in 2025:** 56



A world-class goalkeeper is often said to win any given team 10-15 points a season based on their contributions in goal, and it makes sense. The last line of defence, having a truly special one, can make a world of difference. This is certainly the case for Gregor Kobel and Borussia Dortmund.

Kobel joined Dortmund from Stuttgart in 2021 and since then, he has cemented himself as an integral part of Dortmund's core starting line-up. Prior to his arrival, it was a position that was very much in flux, with Dortmund mainly fielding either Marwin Hitz or Roman Bürki. The latter, brought in from Freiburg to be Roman Weidenfeller's successor, never provided the consistency that Dortmund craved in this position, and therefore set the stage for Kobel's much-needed arrival.

One of the biggest advocates for Kobel's arrival was, incidentally, Weidenfeller himself. The club legend disclosed this in an interview in the advent of Kobel's extension until 2027, back in 2023: "He is very young, and he has had great performances before...he knows the Bundesliga, but the future is in his hands, and Gregor is the future of Borussia Dortmund. He signed a new contract just now, so it is a great sign for BVB and for Gregor Kobel."

Having the support of one of the club's legends from the off must have been a significant boost for Kobel, and he has so far, in large part, lived up to expectations. The Swiss shot stopper boasts a 74% save percentage per 90, followed by 0.80 goals conceded per 90, with eight clean sheets to his name across 15 matches in the Bundesliga. These numbers are illustrated by the impressive saves he often makes for BVB from a variety of positions. Kobel is very much capable of coming out of the box and making himself big to stop, excelling in one on ones, showing that he's extremely adept at making saves from close range.

Aside from his prowess when it comes to shot-stopping, Kobel has a strong command of his box and great communication skills. Despite Dortmund's ups and downs in form, Kobel has been part of the most improved Dortmund defence in several years under Niko Kovač. His commanding presence gives the back line in front of him confidence, and when all else fails, he is often able to come up big for Die Schwarzgelben.

One aspect of Kobel's play that is often criticised is his ability to play out of the back. Last season, some of Kobel's mistakes led to direct goal opportunities for opponents. This season, Kobel has cleaned up this aspect of his game to a degree, but that doesn't mean the problem has completely evaporated. Dortmund's Matchday 14 clash with Freiburg is a testament to this, with Kobel's pass to Jope Bellingham leading the Englishman to put in a knee-jerk tackle that led to a red card for the player.

Kobel made comments after the game stating that he felt Bellingham wasn't in danger from Freiburg, but that he does indeed take responsibility for the mistake. In the face of the mistake, the 28-year-old worked admirably to keep a clean sheet, and despite not succeeding in this respect, he did once again display his strong shot-stopping abilities, making numerous big saves to keep Dortmund in the game. The mistake didn't rattle Kobel completely, as perhaps it may have another player, and keeping his head up to go about the rest of the game professionally, as opposed to crumpling under pressure, is commendable.

Kobel's influence as a leader in the team must also be taken into account. The player has shown that he is a player to be respected, and this is invaluable to a club working to build a strong spine capable of challenging for silverware. Of course, at this point in time, the club are dealing with a rough patch in terms of being able to see out games, but it is figures like Kobel that should be tasked with helping lead the club to better results in the short term, and a brighter future overall.

### **Brian Szlenk**



# 13

# Angelo Stiller



- **Club:** VfB Stuttgart
- **Position:** Midfielder
- **Age:** 24
- **Games in 2025:** 47

Angelo Stiller is a part of the 'ones who got away' group of players who left the Bayern Campus early due to a lack of playing time, along with Kenan Yıldız of Juventus. A natural leader, the 24-year-old has followed head coach Sebastian Höeneß everywhere, and so it's no surprise that the nephew of Bayern's Uli Höeneß is able to get the best out of the midfielder. Since joining Stuttgart, after a brief detour at Hoffenheim, Stiller has been a revelation.

Initially alongside Atakan Karazor and more recently next to Chema Andrés, the German international is the heart of the Stuttgart team, and his inclusion as the midfield lynchpin is what makes them tick. His importance is best shown with the two assists he provided in the DFB Pokal final this year, where the Swabians beat Arminia Bielefeld 4-2.

What makes the 24-year-old so good is his passing ability. It is second to none, and his two assists showed that. A deft pass to play in Nick Woltemade to open the scoring, Stiller then showcased the defensive side of his game too, winning the ball back in midfield, before playing through Deniz Undav, who made it 3-0.

The start of this season has seen the midfielder take another step in his development, and he has been crucial in VfB's form this season, both in the Bundesliga and in the UEFA Europa League too. When Stiller was not called up to the Germany squad in the November international break, there were several question marks about why, especially when the likes of Leon Goretzka and Nadiem Amiri received nominations.

Stiller is set for a bright future, and along with Aleksandar Pavlović, should make the base of Germany's next generation midfield. Liverpool have previously also been linked as have former club Bayern Munich, which shows, wherever the midfielder goes next, it will be to become a centre piece for a top team. In a recent interview, Stiller said he thought Florian Wirtz's move to Liverpool was 'cool', which suggests Bayern could miss out on another German talent following Wirtz and Woltemade, but this one may hurt a little bit more knowing he was once on their books.

**Jack Meenan**

# 12

# Manuel Neuer



- **Club: Bayern Munich**
- **Position: Goalkeeper**
- **Age: 39**
- **Games in 2025: 41**

Although Manuel Neuer nears 40, he remains a foundational figure for Bayern Munich. In February 2025, the club extended his contract until summer 2026, a clear sign they still view him as their No. 1 between the posts despite the January signing of Jonas Uribig from 1. FC Köln.

When it comes to Neuer, we also mustn't forget that he had, for a player of his age, what would be a career-ending injury when he broke his leg skiing in 2023. Despite what looked like the beginning of the end for the former Schalke goalkeeper, he has still been one of the better keepers in the league since his return two and a half years ago.

Retiring from international football after UEFA Euro 2024, Neuer finished his Germany career with 124 caps. One of the most decorated goalkeepers in the country's history, his departure has left a void between the posts for the national team following an injury to long term number two Marc-André ter Stegen, so much so, there is even calls from members of the media for the 40-year-old to follow in the footsteps of Toni Kroos and return to the national team for one last dance.

Being one of the greatest of all time naturally comes with enhanced criticism, with his club performances remaining under the microscope. While largely dependable, Neuer has had a few high-profile mistakes, No goalkeeper of his age escapes them, but his leadership, experience, and sweeper-keeper style still provide Bayern with a sense of security.

With Bayern still pushing on multiple fronts, Neuer's continued presence offers stability, skill, and mentorship to any successor. While the 40-year-old is approaching the end of his career, there is no doubt that he is one of the most influential goalkeepers in the history of the game when it comes to revolutionising the position and that has laid the path for other goalkeepers like Alisson or Gregor Kobel, both great at shot-stopping as well as on the ball.

It is quite easy to say that Neuer is one of, if not the greatest, goalkeeper of all time.

**Oscar O'Mara**

# 11

# Jamal Musiala



- **Club: Bayern Munich**
- **Position: Attacker**
- **Age: 22**
- **Games in 2025: 22**

Eleven may seem low for one of Germany's most talented players, but the fact that Jamal Musiala has not consistently played since April is why he has dropped from a more than certain top three finish.

At just 22, Musiala remains one of Europe's most electric attacking talents. In the 2024/25 season, he asserted himself as Bayern Munich's creative fulcrum — his 12 Bundesliga goals and eight assists earned him various individual accolades. Internationally, he has continued to deliver for Germany, winning the national "Player of the Year" award for 2024 with five goals and five assists from 13 appearances.

What stands out this year is how Musiala has developed into a more complete forward. He's added aerial strength — four of his 2024/25 goals came with his head — and improved his long-range shooting. His intelligent movement, dribbling, ball control, and finishing make him Bayern's go-to man whenever the game opens up. The Stuttgart-born attacker also developed a lethal attacking trio along with Harry Kane and Michael Olise.

Musiala's importance and influence is so great that his presence is one of the likely reasons while Florian Wirtz opted to move to the Premier League, rather than link up with his international teammate at club level.

That said, his 2025 will be remembered in a bittersweet fashion. First, a muscular injury ended his Bundesliga season early before a serious fibula fracture and dislocated ankle in the quarter-final of the FIFA Club World Cup against Paris Saint-Germain ruled him out for the rest of the calendar year. Considering the breakout season of Lennart Karl, along with the arrival of Luis Díaz, it will be interesting to see where the 22-year-old will fit into the Bayern attacking line-up once he returns from his lengthy layoff at the beginning of 2026.

Nevertheless, when fully healthy, Musiala remains among the most exciting attackers in Europe and his time spent on the sidelines will be a bump in the road for a player who is already central to one of the biggest teams in the world. With the World Cup in the summer, Musiala will want to be fit and ready for the tournament to show the world that he is still the same player he was before his injury, and in fact maybe even better.

**Oscar O'Mara**



10

## Dayot Upamecano



**Club: Bayern Munich | Position: Defender | Age: 27 | Games in 2025: 37**

There are few better defenders in the Bundesliga than Dayot Upamecano. The Bayern Munich man has done well to bounce back after injuries and intense criticism prior to Vincent Kompany's appointment to establish himself as one of Europe's leading centre-backs. The one criticism of Upamecano has always been his concentration, making high-profile mistakes - notably against Liverpool, but the Frenchman has rectified that over the years, and is now perhaps enjoying his best year to date despite difficulties.

As Bayern wrestled their Bundesliga crown back from Bayer Leverkusen, Upamecano missed the final eight Bundesliga games of the season with a knee injury, which needed surgery. In the past, the Normandy-native has struggled to find form after a substantial lay-off, but returning for the Franz-Beckenbauer-Supercup against Stuttgart in August, where he registered 11 defensive contributions and won 60 percent of his duels, Upamecano has gone from strength to strength.

Combining his pace and power, Upamecano is a physical monster. Now comfortable on the ball, it's rare to see a misplaced pass from the France international, who has excellent defence-splitting capabilities and is a leading Bundesliga player for passes into the final third. Aggressive in duels and with impeccable timing of tackles, the 27-year-old has honed his skills under Kompany, who he sees as a role model. "He helps me a lot; we do a lot of videos, he talks to me about my positioning. With him, it's always very intense," Upamecano told *Le Parisien*.

There are clear comparisons between the two, and there's no doubt that Kompany sees a bit of himself in Upamecano. With similar skillsets, the Belgian is moulding Bayern's No. 2 into a world-class defender who, at one point, didn't look as though he would have a future at the Allianz Arena. When Bayern signed Kim Min-jae with Matthijs de Ligt already at the club, it looked as though Upamecano's time at Germany's record champions would come to an end. But showing incredible determination to overcome his critics and compete with world-class competition, Upamecano has established himself as a figurehead in Bayern's defence.

However, with six months remaining on his current deal, Upamecano's future remains uncertain. Several reports claim that the Frenchman is happy in Munich and would like to remain at the club but, as of writing, the Rekordmeister are yet to meet the Frenchman's €16m salary demands. Starting 11 of his 12 Bundesliga appearances in 2025/26, the former Leipzig defender has been an instrumental player for Kompany, whose side have conceded just 11 goals in 15 league games.

It's imperative that Bayern sign Upamecano to a new deal, but free to negotiate with other clubs from January, teams such as Real Madrid and Chelsea could potentially offer more than Bayern are willing. After seeing his market value drop €15m from €60m to €45m between December 2023 and May 2024, the Frenchman's stock has risen considerably in 2025/26, reaching an all-time high of €70m. Transfermarkt's market value coincides with the defender's uptick in form under Kompany, who continues to get the best out of Upamecano.

**Daniel Pinder**





9

Nico



Schlotterbeck



**Club: Borussia Dortmund | Position: Defender | Age: 27 | Games in 2025: 33**

With the future of Emre Can uncertain beyond next season, Nico Schlotterbeck has increasingly been viewed as the natural successor to the Borussia Dortmund captaincy ahead of the summer of 2026. At 26, the defender has grown into one of the most influential figures in the squad, combining elite defensive performance with leadership qualities that extend beyond the armband. However, his rise has not gone unnoticed. With his contract set to expire in 2027 and reports of his delay in committing to a new deal, Schlotterbeck's long-term future at BVB remains uncertain.

Among the Bundesliga's standout centre-backs for several seasons, his level this year has marked a clear step forward. Despite suffering a meniscus tear that ruled him out between April and September, he returned without any visible drop in form. In fact, his importance only grew. In the prolonged absence of Can, Schlotterbeck frequently assumed responsibility as the defensive leader, organising teammates and dictating the tempo. When available, he completed the full 90 minutes in all but one of Dortmund's matches throughout 2025, underlining the trust placed in him by the coaching staff.

Schlotterbeck operates at the heart of Niko Kovač's back three, in the centre of Waldemar Anton and Ramy Bensebaini. He is tasked with anchoring the defence while also progressing the play in possession. This role demands both positional discipline and the confidence to step forward. Schlotterbeck excels in balancing the two, holding his position to protect the central route to Gregor Kobel's goal and often driving into midfield to overload the opposition when the opportunity presents itself.

Defensively, his greatest strength lies in his reading of the game. Schlotterbeck frequently anticipates passes early, stepping in front of attackers to intercept and immediately turn defence into attack. He is proactive in his approach, pressing high and engaging opponents well away from his own penalty area. He is aggressive in duels and unafraid to commit, yet rarely reckless. When forced to recover, his timing in the tackle is composed, using his physicality intelligently rather than relying on last-ditch challenges. While this front-foot style can occasionally expose him when risks do not come off, it is also what makes him so unique.

On the ball, Schlotterbeck adds a dimension that sets him apart from more traditional centre-backs. His long-range passing is a key weapon in Dortmund's build-up, with diagonal switches regularly stretching opposition defences and creating space for wide players. He is equally comfortable threading progressive passes into midfield, accelerating transitions and allowing Dortmund to bypass pressure. His trademark forward carries, where he steps confidently into midfield with the ball, often force opponents to break shape, creating opportunities higher up the pitch.

Curiously, the Bundesliga was treated to something rather unexpected back in March during BVB's 3-1 win over Mainz. Schlotterbeck was the designated corner taker from the left side after Daniel Svensson fell ill before the match. With his wand of a left boot, he provided two assists for Can and Maximilian Beier.

Beyond his technical qualities, Schlotterbeck's mentality has earned him widespread respect within the squad. Known affectionately as "Schlotti" by teammates and supporters, he leads through performance rather than volume, setting standards with consistency and intensity. His statistical output reflects that influence: across the year, he has been Dortmund's best-performing player, posting an average rating of 7.42, per FotMob.

In his newfound role as team leader, the 26-year-old does not hold back when he feels things could be done better. Three days after Schlotterbeck struck a brilliant left-footed effort to seal a 2-0 win against Hoffenheim, he made his anger known following Die Schwarzgelben's disappointing draw with Bodø/Glimt: "We start to play extremely erratically after the 1-0, have incredibly bad first contacts. Everyone plays a little bit of their game. The players who come in lose every ball. I always say that the winning mentality is to kill the game. We didn't manage that. We chip in front of the goalkeeper, round one or two more players and want to do it nicely. That's not enough."

The German international continued by calling out the standards of specific teammates: "If you come on in the 60th minute, I expect 30 minutes of full steam. It all looked nice, we combined a bit right-left. But you have to kill. We didn't do that."

Moments like this suggest that Schlotterbeck's comments are driven less by frustration with individuals and more by a desire to raise collective standards. His expectations appear rooted in a belief that the team is capable of more, with his leadership reflecting an insistence on accountability. As Dortmund look toward the future, Schlotterbeck stands at a crossroads. He appears ready to assume the captaincy and become the long-term defensive cornerstone of the club, yet his contract situation and growing interest from Europe's elite introduce uncertainty. Whether he remains in black and yellow or moves on, Schlotterbeck has firmly established himself as one of Germany's most complete modern defenders, entering the prime years of his career.

**Harry Good**



8

**Jonathan  
Burkardt**



**Club: Eintracht Frankfurt | Position: Attacker | Age: 25 | Games in 2025: 33**

Throughout the German national team's struggles post-2016 European Championship in France, it has coincided with, perhaps unsurprisingly, a lack of an out-and-out striker. Various players have accepted the pressure that comes with being Germany's striker, with Timo Werner, Kai Havertz, Niclas Füllkrug and Thomas Müller all experiencing varying levels of success.

Over the years, Germany has boasted some of the best out-and-out forwards football has had to offer. Through the decades, the likes of Uwe Seeler, Gerd Müller, Rudi Völler, Jürgen Klinsmann and Miroslav Klose have all been uber-reliable for their country, particularly in tournament football. All five sit in the nation's top eight scorers of all time. However, rarely have the careers of any of these elite forwards overlapped.

That standard might be about to change, though, with two up-and-coming German strikers bursting onto the scene in 2025. Of course, Nick Woltemade is now a name well known among foreign viewers. However, fellow bagsman Jonathan Burkardt has made a similar impression throughout the calendar year, going from a relatively unknown figure at Mainz to a striker consistently delivering on the biggest stage in Germany and Europe's premier club competition.

A lightning first half of 2024/25 for Die Nullfünfer saw the German bag himself 10 Bundesliga goals before the winter break. Despite a thigh injury that kept him out of action for the best part of a month at the beginning of 2025, his goalscoring form did not fade. He added a further eight goals in the second half of the campaign, helping Mainz finish in sixth place.

His total of 18 league strikes saw him finish behind only the established names of Harry Kane, Patrick Schick and Serhou Guirassy in the Bundesliga scoring charts. While not his breakthrough season - having previously made his name during the 2021/22 campaign with 11 goals and three assists - 2024/25 was the year Burkardt truly established himself as one of Germany's hottest striking prospects.

In the latter stages of the season, as Mainz battled for a place in Europe for the first time since 2016, Burkardt stepped up when it mattered most. The final three games saw the 25-year-old score in each of them, with crucial draws against Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayer Leverkusen sandwiching a 4-1 win over Bochum to secure a place in the UEFA Conference League. The pick of the bunch came against the soon-to-be-relegated Bochum, as Burkardt picked up the ball 25 yards from goal, firing a powerful strike effortlessly into the bottom corner.

Burkardt's performances across the season earned him widespread praise within the German game and secured a move to one of the league's big hitters, Eintracht Frankfurt, with Die Adler paying a reported €21m. Handed the No. 9 shirt by head coach Dino Toppmöller, Burkardt has vindicated that decision by continuing exactly where he left off at Mainz. His first goals came in a Man of the Match performance on his UEFA Champions League debut at home to Turkish giants Galatasaray, where he scored twice and provided a superb assist for Can Uzun.

His first Bundesliga goals for Frankfurt followed in two remarkable fixtures. A dramatic 4-3 home defeat to Union Berlin was followed up by an astounding 6-4 victory away to Borussia Mönchengladbach, with Burkardt scoring in both games. A couple of weeks later, he scored two goals in back-to-back matches against Freiburg and St Pauli. Another brace followed a month later in yet another thriller, this time a 4-3 win away at 1. FC Köln. Burkardt's year came to a frustrating end following the match at the RheinEnergieStadion as a calf issue kept him out of the final month of action.

A quintessential modern-day centre forward, the German has all types of finishes in his locker and often finds himself in the right place at the right time to convert chances. He is also, perhaps surprisingly for his stature, very capable in the air, as demonstrated by his two headed goals against Galatasaray. Able to beat his marker with both pace and skill, he is a difficult proposition for any defender. Burkardt is not just a penalty box poacher. He actively contributes to build-up play by pressing aggressively from the front, linking with midfielders, and dragging defenders out of position. Tactically intelligent and team-oriented, he consistently prioritises collective structure over individual flair, making him especially valuable in disciplined, hard-working sides.

With his club career now firmly on an upward trajectory, the next logical step for Burkardt is to translate this form onto the international stage where he has now made five appearances since his debut in late 2024. Germany's long search for a reliable number nine may finally be nearing its end, and Burkardt's blend of consistency, intensity, and composure makes him an increasingly compelling option. Still only 25, he combines the hunger of a late bloomer with the maturity of someone who has overcome setbacks. If his development continues at its current pace, Burkardt has every chance to establish himself not just as a Bundesliga standout, but as a central figure in Germany's next attacking generation.

Harry Good

7

# Patrik Schick



- **Club: Bayer 04 Leverkusen**
- **Position: Attacker**
- **Age: 29**
- **Games in 2025: 44**



Back to his best in 2024/25 with 21 goals in 31 Bundesliga appearances, Patrik Schick finished the campaign joint-second in the standings alongside Borussia Dortmund striker Serhou Guirassy. The Czech Republic international created a formidable partnership alongside Florian Wirtz, with the pair combining eight times.

Schick's return to form came after an injury-hit two seasons at the BayArena following his prolific 24-goal campaign in 2021/22. The 29-year-old was on the periphery in Leverkusen's title-winning season, then started only 19 of his 31 Bundesliga games last season, with Xabi Alonso opting for Victor Boniface, or a strikerless formation in big games. Naturally, Schick was linked with a departure in the summer, but he ended up staying and has become a part of the older players leading this young Leverkusen team forward.

The Czech striker is a lot closer to the traditional striker mould, which is becoming increasingly less common in the Bundesliga, especially with Harry Kane's evolution, as well as the recent emergence and sales of Hugo Ekitiké and Nick Woltemade.

Schick already has six goals and two assists in 12 games this season and has established himself as the clear Werkself No. 9, unlike the previous two years, despite Christian Kofane, a young Cameroonian striker signed from Albacete in the summer, impressing in his first months under the Bayer Kreuz.

In an interview with bundesliga.com in July, Schick said that the older players in the squad would have to "step up" following the exodus in the summer. With an average of 25.3, the likes of the striker as well as Alejandro Grimaldo, Aleix García, Jonas Hofmann, and to an extent Martin Terrier and Edmond Tapsoba have all performed at a higher level compared to last season and have played a key role in Leverkusen finishing the year in the top four, despite a disastrous start to the campaign under Erik ten Hag.

Schick just needs one more goal to overtake Dimitar Berbatov and become the third-highest scorer in Die Werkself's history behind Ulf Kirsten and Stefan Kießling. If Schick can lead Leverkusen to potentially more silverware, he can cement his legacy as a modern-day legend at the BayArena.

**Jack Meenan**

# 6

# Alejandro Grimaldo



- **Club: Bayer 04 Leverkusen**
- **Position: Defender**
- **Age: 30**
- **Games in 2025: 43**



After the mass exodus of Bayer Leverkusen players in the summer, there were question marks about what this team could achieve. With the core of Xabi Alonso's Bundesliga-winning squad now gone, Alejandro Grimaldo struggled following the departures of Jonathan Tah, Jeremie Frimpong, Granit Xhaka and Florian Wirtz. There were also suggestions that the Spaniard could follow the quartet out of the door, but Grimaldo stuck around and has been able to replicate his title-winning 2023/24 form.

Stepping up as vice-captain in the absence of Robert Andrich, Grimaldo has very much showcased not only his crossing ability during his Leverkusen career, but this season, his dead-ball ability has taken centre stage. In Kasper Hjulmand's first major test in charge, the Spaniard produced two finely taken free-kicks to help Leverkusen win 3-1 against Eintracht Frankfurt. Against Copenhagen, Grimaldo produced another free-kick to rescue a point in Denmark. The left-back has also been used more centrally this season, often drifting into midfield, which has helped minimise the loss of Wirtz.

Offering a very unique skillset within the Leverkusen team, Grimaldo is irreplaceable, so much so that there is no clear backup option for the 30-year-old in Hjulmand's squad. Both Ernest Poku and Arthur have deputised on the left, but both are naturally better on the right. As such, it may be in the best interests of each party if Leverkusen look for a more natural left-back to at least relieve some of the pressure on Grimaldo.

As a former La Masia graduate, it's public knowledge that Grimaldo would like to return to Spain at some point, having never played in La Liga. "I am almost 30 years old and would like to try my hand in Spain, playing in my home country. It doesn't have to be this year. It could be next year, it could be in two years, or even five years," he said.

As such, Grimaldo will likely leave Leverkusen for his homeland within the next 18 months, and the club's management has to be ready. Establishing himself as a fan favourite, his time at the BayArena could end up being short, but it's been impactful, and one that will be looked back upon with great fondness.

**Jack Meenan**

# 5

# Luis Díaz



- **Club:** Bayern Munich
- **Position:** Attacker
- **Age:** 28
- **Games in 2025:** 22



Arriving at Bayern Munich carries certain expectations. Luis Díaz has quickly become one of Bayern Munich's most influential attacking players since his move from Liverpool in the summer of 2025. Bringing a distinctive blend of pace and creativity that adds a new dimension to the Bavarians' offensive play, it's easy to see why the Colombian has slotted in almost immediately with his new club.

At his core, Díaz is a dynamic wide forward, typically deployed on the left wing where he utilises his explosive acceleration and low centre of gravity to beat defenders in one-on-one situations and drive attacks forward at speed. His capacity to take on opponents, draw fouls, and create space for teammates is central to Bayern's transitional play. Once in possession, he often leads breaks down the wing, putting defenders under immediate pressure.

In Vincent Kompany's system, which emphasises aggressive pressing and quick transitions, Díaz's work rate and defensive effort are especially valuable. He participates actively in Bayern's press, harrying ball carriers and helping force turnovers high up the pitch. This relentless energy not only contributes to defensive phases but also sets up offensive opportunities, as Bayern can quickly exploit unsettled opposing teams.

Statistically, Díaz has made a significant offensive impact in his first few months at Bayern, contributing goals and assists consistently, returning eight goals and six assists in his first 14 Bundesliga appearances, while maintaining high top speeds and covering large distances each game with his intense running profile. This output underpins Bayern's attacking potency and complements other stars like Harry Kane and Michael Olise, forming a multifaceted front line capable of breaking defences in multiple ways.

But perhaps most importantly, Díaz brings a holistic influence on play. He doesn't merely wait for goalscoring opportunities but actively creates them through movement, pressure, and daring attacking choices. This makes him not just a scorer but a creator and engine in Bayern's tactical setup, helping the team dominate possession and convert pressure into concrete goal threats.

**Jamie Allen**

# 4

# Serhou Guirassy



- **Club:** Borussia Dortmund
- **Position:** Attacker
- **Age:** 29
- **Games in 2025:** 54



At the end of last season and the beginning of this season, Serhou Guirassy scored 10 goals in eight games across both campaigns, showing how he had the capability to potentially challenge Harry Kane for the Bundesliga Torgjägerkanone. However, since that run, the Guinean has only scored one goal in 11 games, losing touch with the scoring rate of the Englishman. However, despite this barren run of goals, the quality that Guirassy possesses is still not in doubt.

Very much a late bloomer, the 29-year-old only found his feet in the 2023/24 season at Stuttgart, where he ended the campaign with 28 goals in 28 games, helping the team finish second in the league. Then, following his €18m move to Borussia Dortmund, in his first season at the Westfalenstadion, Guirassy at times singlehandedly carried the team into the top four. His performances in Europe also saw him finish top scorer in the UEFA Champions League.

In an interview with France Football in March, Guirassy spoke on his hot streak over the past two years: "I have had two crazy seasons, but I've not changed anything. I'm not working more, I'm not sleeping more, I'm not doing more video analysis. It's just a question of confidence. And I have understood that at the highest level, talent isn't enough. You have to push through the pain barrier in challenges, in the effort you put in, in making high-intensity runs again and again, more quickly and more frequently than your opponents. Perhaps that is where the change has come from."

Guirassy's build means he is able to hold up play where needed, but he is also a lot more versatile than a traditional striker and can drop deep, allowing regular attacking partner Karim Adeyemi and runners from midfield to exploit any space in behind.

Filling the goalscoring void left by Erling Haaland's departure nearly four years ago, Guirassy's poacher-like instinct naturally makes him one of the best goalscorers in football today, but what's worrying for Borussia Dortmund is the player's reported release clause for certain clubs, with interest also arising from Saudi Arabia. As such, Guirassy's time in Dortmund could be just as short and impactful as his time at Stuttgart.

**Jack Meenan**

# 3

# Joshua Kimmich



- **Club: Bayern Munich**
- **Position: Midfielder**
- **Age: 30**
- **Games in 2025: 54**



Joshua Kimmich's influence on Bayern Munich's play is multifaceted, underpinned by a rare combination of tactical intelligence, technical excellence, and a relentless work ethic. At the heart of Bayern's midfield, or perhaps in the "engine room", Kimmich operates as the crucial link between defence and attack, dictating tempo and shaping the team's transitions.

A trademark of Kimmich's style is his versatility. He has excelled across multiple positions, from right-back in the German national team to defensive midfield at club level. However, it's in midfield where his influence shines. His exceptional positional awareness ensures that he is almost always available to receive the ball, while his ability to read the game makes him a constant factor in breaking up opposition play.

Defensively, the 30-year-old combines aggression with discipline, contesting duels effectively and frequently intercepting passes to disrupt the opposition's rhythm. He covers ground tirelessly, averaging some of the highest distances in the Bundesliga.

On the ball, his influence is even more visible. Kimmich's vision and passing range set him apart: in 2024/25, he led the Bundesliga in progressive passes (362), the highest of any player in Europe's top 5 leagues, and in Germany's top flight is also topping the same metric this season while maintaining a pass completion rate well above the league average.

His creative contributions aren't limited to distribution. Kimmich has the awareness and skill to drive forward into attacking phases, delivering incisive through balls and well-timed passes that create goalscoring opportunities for teammates. What's more, long-range shots and dangerous set-piece deliveries further broaden his offensive repertoire.

Beyond raw statistics and tactical roles, what makes Kimmich exceptional is his consistency and leadership. As a vice-captain and long-standing figure at Bayern, he exudes a winning mentality rooted in the club's identity.

In summary, Kimmich's playing style at Bayern is defined by defensive intelligence, metronomic ball progression, and creative impetus. He protects the defence with calculated positioning, orchestrates attacks with precision passing, and always strives to influence the game in both phases, making him indispensable to the team's sustained success.

**Jamie Allen**



2

Michael  
Olise



**Club: Bayern Munich | Position: Winger | Age: 24 | Games in 2025: 57**

800 words simply isn't enough to sum up Michael Olise's 2025 and the impact he has had on Bayern Munich since joining from Crystal Palace. 18 months after his move from south London, the €53m spent on the French international can be considered great business, even going as far as saying it was a bargain, more so when considering today's inflated market.

With the absence of Jamal Musiala this season, Olise has stepped up, returning 10 goals and 14 assists in all competitions this season and, averaging 1.17 goal contributions per 90, he is already on course to surpass his output from last season. It is crazy to say that, despite producing these numbers, the 24-year-old is still overlooked in the team due to the presence of our No. 1 in the GGFN 100.

The Frenchman's standout game this season was his performance against Freiburg in a 6-2 win. Despite being 2-0 down, Olise led the comeback and played a role in five of the goals, showcasing his wide range of skills, from his crossing and passing to his one-on-one ability and finishing.

Olise leads the league when it comes to metrics such as shot-creating actions (93) and progressive carries (81), showing how important he has been to Bayern's early-season dominance. What will be interesting is how Bayern's No. 17 will adapt his game once Musiala is fully up to speed and returns to the Bayern starting line-up, as the German international will need his own space and time to shine, while Luis Díaz and emerging Lennart Karl require game time too.

One of the Frenchman's hobbies away from the pitch is chess, playing it at Crystal Palace with Eberechi Eze, and now at Bayern too. Speaking to the Bayern magazine 51, Olise revealed that there are similarities between his chess game and football style: "Both at the chess board and on the pitch, I'm a player who likes to attack, who attacks opponents and puts them under pressure. Unfortunately, I'm sometimes too fixated on attack in chess and forget that I also have to think about defence."

The ironic thing about the latter half of the quote is that since Olise moved to Bayern and has been coached by Vincent Kompany, the 24-year-old has bought into the Belgian's needs defensively and has seen a slight increase in his defensive numbers compared to his time at Palace. This is also needed as Olise shares the right-hand side with Konrad Laimer, who is not a traditional right-back, and if the winger does not contribute, it leaves the Austrian vulnerable.

Compared to Bayern legends Franck Ribéry and Arjen Robben during his 18 months at the club, Olise is establishing himself as a fan favourite. Sharing a nationality with Ribéry, his style of play is also similar to that of the former Dutch international. Regularly using his trickery and skills on the right wing, before cutting inside to either shoot or provide a cross for his teammates. Several times throughout his short Bayern career so far, Olise has made use of cutting in and shooting with his left.

Given his performances, Olise has naturally garnered interest from Premier League clubs. However, with the importance that the winger holds at Bayern, especially in the attacking front, the peacefulness of life in Bavaria, as well as the chance to constantly compete at the top of European football, especially with the way Kompany's side has been playing this season and the 24-year-old's personal performances too, there is no reason for the attacker to leave the Allianz Arena any time soon and return to England.

The only time a move to England seems attractive would be when he has completed all there is to achieve in Germany, but Bayern are still a long way off doing that. Last season, Olise won the Bundesliga Rookie of the Season. With the way he has played in the first half of this campaign, a strong argument could be made that he could win the Player of the Season award come May.

**Jack Meenan**



**Harry  
Kane +**



**Club: Bayern Munich | Position: Attacker | Age: 32 | Games in 2025: 56**

No transfer guarantees success. No matter the fee involved, a club is always taking a leap of faith when signing a player. It is, almost always, a calculated gamble. But every once in a while, a big-name transfer has all the hallmarks of being an absolute banker. In the summer of 2023, that was Harry Kane's record-breaking move from Tottenham Hotspur to Bayern Munich.

Since making the switch, the England captain has reached previously unimaginable heights. Building on the legacy of Gerd Müller and Robert Lewandowski before him, he has redefined what it means to be a Bayern Munich No. 9.

A scarcely believable record of 100 goals in just 104 matches tells only half the story of Kane's remarkable spell in Munich. For the other half, you'd have to quiz his club teammates, so often the beneficiaries of his ludicrously expansive passing range. Now, 32, England's leading goalscorer has evolved into his final form - the ultimate modern forward.

From the very outset, he has established himself as a reliable talisman at Bayern. In his first two seasons at the club, he delivered exactly what was expected - goals, leadership and stoic-like professionalism. He broke Bundesliga records for debut-season scoring (36 goals in 32 games), helping Bayern reclaim the league title earlier this year, and became a real fan favourite along the way. Yet, beyond the statistics, he also established himself as the heartbeat of a side that was firmly in the midst of a tactical overhaul.

Under Vincent Kompany, hired in 2024 as the club's new head coach, Kane's game slowly began to morph. At the end of the Belgian's first season at Bayern, the club regained the Bundesliga title - the first senior trophy in Kane's career. The partnership was beginning to blossom, as Kane had been liberated by Kompany's methods in more ways than one.

"Now that you have many injuries at Bayern, to important players like Jamal Musiala, you have a really good option to let Kane play deeper in the No. 10 position," BILD football chief and Bayern insider Christian Falk states. "You already saw that when Bayern didn't get Florian Wirtz or Xavi Simons, they instead signed a striker in Nicolas Jackson. So, you can see how big the idea is in Kompany's mind that he can play Kane in behind a striker."

For most players, August marked the beginning of 2025/26. For Kane and his Bayern teammates, the main priority this summer was the inaugural edition of a new-look FIFA Club World Cup. Taking place in the United States, it would be Germany's record champions who'd steal the headlines on Matchday 1. An eyebrow-raising 10-0 win against New Zealand club Auckland City showed the watching world that Bayern's attack was truly firing on all cylinders.

Despite scoring three goals in Bayern's subsequent matches, Kane's FIFA Club World Cup journey would ultimately be halted by European champions Paris Saint-Germain in the last eight. Nevertheless, on that showing alone, it was abundantly clear his maiden Bundesliga triumph hadn't blunted his desire to win. If anything, the opposite was true.

After a well-earned break, Kane returned to Munich this summer a man possessed. Emboldened by manager Kompany to fill the void left by the injured Musiala, the striker now had the responsibility – and opportunity – to showcase his value as a creator.

Historically, it's been easy to categorise Kane as the archetypal poacher, but that label now feels wholly inadequate. Behind the scenes, Bayern's coaching team under Kompany have reportedly encouraged him to roam, press, and participate in the early phases of possession. Yet, simultaneously, he is more prolific now than ever, scoring 30 goals in his first 25 matches this season. There's also more to Kane's German adventure than initially meets the eye. Indeed, the Londoner has made Munich his home by learning the language and moving his family over, where they enjoy an added layer of seclusion and privacy.

"Harry's consistency is very impressive," Kompany stated earlier this season. "You can tell he feels at ease in Munich, with his family and in this team. We have an absolute leader in Harry."

Moreover, the addition of stars like Michael Olise, Luis Díaz and Eric Dier in recent years has proliferated English as an unofficial language in the Bayern dressing room. If it didn't feel like home in 2023, it surely does now. It's little wonder, then, that Kane has won over the Bayern faithful in a way few other foreign players have managed in modern times. Unlike some of his goalscoring predecessors at the Allianz Arena, Kane is a true leader and ambassador off the pitch, as well as on it.

Ending 2025 with 19 goals in 15 Bundesliga games, Kane has three hat-tricks this season. The most recent of which, away at Stuttgart in December, saw him come off the bench and completely dismantle the beleaguered hosts. With over half the domestic season left to play, Robert Lewandowski's Bundesliga record of 41 goals in a season is once again under threat.

Far bigger prizes remain up for grabs this season, however. While Kane finally has the trophy hoodoo off his back, some may argue his time at Bayern won't truly be complete without a crowning European triumph. With five goals already in this season's UEFA Champions League group stage and Bayern on the verge of automatic qualification for the next round, he looks well-positioned to challenge in 2026. A DFB Pokal quarter-final also awaits in February, as Kane eyes a first-ever domestic cup triumph.

With just over 18 months left on his current deal, the Bayern hierarchy may well have feared a drop in form this season, mirroring that of the similarly aged Mohamed Salah. Perhaps that is why the club spent most of the summer trying to sign forward Nick Woltemade – only to lose out on the player to Newcastle United.

However, far from tailing off, Kane has reached new heights of late. He may be turning 33 next year, but he isn't about to be displaced by a young understudy anytime soon – as Nicolas Jackson has discovered this season.

In Kane, Bayern have a world-leading No. 9, and a Bundesliga-leading No. 10, 8 and 6 all rolled into one. As the years have passed, he has refined his game and, in doing so, redefined what it means to be a forward in 2025. It's set to be a momentous few months for him, with the UCL knockout stages and a FIFA World Cup with England to follow. But in this vein of form, there's every reason to believe Kane can deliver the biggest prizes of them all in 2026 – for club and country.

**Tom Fenton**