

Your Guide to the
2017/18 Bundesliga Season
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A note from the Editor-in-Chief, Daniel Pinder:

Crowned Bundesliga winners for the fifth consecutive season, don't let Bayern Munich's dominance in domestic football divert you away from German football. The 2016/17 provided fans with non-stop entertainment, with 11 points separating SC Freiburg's Europa League finish in seventh and VfL Wolfsburg's relegation play-off place in 16th. Not to mention, we've seen the rise of RB Leipzig, Julian Nagelsmann revolutionising football and the fall of some German footballing giants.

Both Schalke 04 (Domenico Tedesco) and Bayer Leverkusen (Heiko Herrlich) have new head coaches after both clubs failed to qualify for Europe, finishing 10th and 12th respectively, thus paving the way for other clubs. 1. FC Köln qualified for Europe for the first time in 25 years with help from Anthony Modeste, who finished the season behind Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Robert Lewandowski in the scoring charts. On limited funds and under the watchful eye of Christian Streich, SC Freiburg qualified for European football after Borussia Dortmund won the DFB Pokal.

The rise of RB Leipzig has certainly brought plenty of controversy to German football. Exempt from the 50+1 ruling and backed by Red Bull, under the management of Ralf Rangnick and Ralph Hasenhüttl, the club has qualified for the Champions League following an exceptional season. Borussia Dortmund pipped Hoffenheim to the automatic Champions League spot under Thomas Tuchel, who has since been replaced by Peter Bosz, which looks to be an interesting project.

Players such as Douglas Costa and Javier Hernandez have departed German football, but we've seen the Bundesliga retain their best talents, including Mahmoud Dahoud (Borussia Mönchengladbach to Borussia Dortmund, Serge Gnabry (Werder Bremen to Bayern Munich/Hoffenheim) and Niklas Süle (Hoffenheim to Bayern Munich).

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who has followed us on this journey. Without you, this project wouldn't be possible. A massive thanks to everyone who has contributed to this handbook, Matthew Marshall (@noobzcorp), Matthew Cowdowck (@MattCowdock), Andrew Beaumont (@Beaumont147) and Axel Falk (@Falkfurt).

We hope you enjoy the 2017/18 Bundesliga season as much as we do!



FC Augsburg

Stadium: WWK Arena (30,660)
Head Coach: Manuel Baum



Fuggerstädter haven't had too many seasons in Bundesliga, but have sensationally stayed in it since they got promoted in 2011. Bellinghausen's clutch season in 2010/2011 made it easy for them to take the step and they have since gone from strength to strength in the top flight. A special club, their hymn is one of the most loveable in the league.

HISTORY

It's an old city, Augsburg, and a truly wonderful one as well. One of the biggest cities in the Holy Roman Empire, Augsburg is known as a very pious town with a great cathedral. The city is one of the biggest in Bavaria and due to its location, the biggest rivals of FCA are of course Bayern Munich. A club younger than Hoffenheim, Augsburg featured in Bundesliga for the first time in 2011/2012.

They have since reached uncharted heights and have even featured in the Europa League Round of 32, which is truly magnificent considering the inexperience on the big stage. Augsburg have a tendency to, in the dark, produce both very promising managers and players. Thomas Tuchel took his first steps as a head coach at Augsburg, Julian Nagelsmann did the very same under the former's tutelage and many players have truly flourished at the Fuggerstädter. Dominik Kohr, Phillip Max and Alexander Esswein have all made a name for themselves at Augsburg and due to the very smart transfer policy, they often manage to bring in promising youngsters on the cheap to then develop them and sell them with a huge profit.

In the beginning of the 21st century they were damaged financially and were in desperate need of help. The help came from an entrepreneur named Walther Seinsch from Augsburg, who took over the club and introduced more sincere and sound financial policies that have kept the club afloat ever since. They have had quite a quick rise as well, considering they got promoted from Bayernliga as soon as 2002. Since the financial stability kicked in, they have gone from strength-to-strength and have during the last few summer shown that they might actually have some appeal in the transfer market after all.

LAST SEASON

The 2016/17 season basically defied both Murphy's law and the chaos theory when they managed to escape relegation against the odds. Most would have considered Augsburg to be fighting for their life at the bottom of the table come May, but instead they felt and looked rather stable in the bottom-half of the table. This must be considered a proper miracle, considering the chaotic situation at the club after Dirk Schuster was fired without an apparent reason and inexperienced Manuel Baum replaced.

MANAGER

Baum was the most inexperienced coach in Bundesliga when he replaced Schuster during the Hinrunde last season, but he managed to lead the labile Augsburg to safety. Already making a name for himself, Baum has made some interesting signings this summer.

Baum's antics as a youth coach and his six months as a head coach has made the 37-year old one of the most promising coaches of German football. Playing a counter-attacking game, he is dependent on his defensive midfielders and their quality as well as their quality regarding turnovers in play. His full-backs need to be very defensively stable as well as tactically astute and need to know when to attack and when to defend.

The 2016/17 campaign was of course heavily affected by Schuster's signings but following his departure, we might see a very different Augsburg. We might see a much more attacking side next season under Baum. Regardless, it should be fun.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Augsburg have lost a great player in Dominik Kohr who has the potential to actually step right in and start for Bayer Leverkusen, whom he's re-joined for €2m. Another departure is 33-year-old Paul Verhaegh, who's joined

VfL Wolfsburg after seven years at Augsburg. Other than that, FCA have managed to keep their key players, so losing Kohr might not be as hard as many think it will be.

In: Oh my, here's where it gets interesting... Augsburg have signed a few attacking figures who have been either very promising or very prominent at their former clubs. Michael Gregoritsch signed earlier this summer for €5.5m, which is a very good signing. HSV's fans did not want to see him go and considering the financial capabilities of both HSV and FCA, it's quite odd that Augsburg managed to secure him.

Another player that was truly key at his former club is Marcel Heller. "Schneller Heller" as he is called, was very important to SV Darmstadt 98's attack during the two seasons they had in Bundesliga, while he will most certainly improve Augsburg's attack even more with his speed and technique.

The perhaps most exciting signing of the summer might just be the Venezuelan striker/winger Sergio Cordova. At 19-years-old, he was absolutely dominant at the U20-World Cup in Korea this summer and his four goals helped Venezuela to a rather sensational second place. Cordova brings some much needed explosivity to Fuggerstädter's attack and we might finally see some great attacking football from an often too defensive of an outfit.

Augsburg will most definitely benefit from Cordova's pace and agility already this season, even he will need to acclimatise first. Trading the Venezuelan league for Bundesliga can't be easy.

KEY PLAYERS

Jeffrey Gouweleeuw: The hardest name to spell in Bundesliga? It's very possible! The Dutch defender is key to Augsburg's strong defence and it's a huge boost that he has extended his contract to 2022. The defender had a very good season last term and was probably the most prominent defender in a very stable defence.

Kostas Stafylidis: The Greek left-back has an amazing left foot, but might be a bit too weak defensively. However, his free-kicks and crosses are key to Fuggerstädter's attack and he should be considered as one of the best crossers of a ball in the league. His attacking ability and form will be key to Augsburg's goalscoring abilities with Gregoritsch and Raul Bobadilla up front.

Marwin Hitz: The Swiss national has been one of the better goalkeepers in Bundesliga since he joined the club and we all remember his acrobatic goal from a corner a few years back. Those abilities help him as a goalkeeper too as he is extremely hard to beat when on the back foot. He's a very good all-round keeper and has very few weaknesses.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Sergio Cordova: Augsburg somehow managed to get this future star from Caracas, even though bigger clubs were after him. Going head-to-head with VfB Stuttgart for

his signature, he chose Bavaria and it's a sign of brilliance. He's agile, clever, quick and very hard to beat physically. He's basically an all-round striker that can team up with both Gregoritsch and Bobadilla in excellent ways due to his very varied abilities.

"Lots of things are different. There's a clear difference between South America and Europe, but I've been very well received by my teammates. It feels like I'm joining a big family," he told Augsburger Allgemeine. Most Augsburg fans must be very hopeful of this new signing, but it's imperative that they don't expect too much too soon. It's a new league, a new place, probably the first time he's left home on a permanent basis and he isn't too experienced. Key to his performances is to make him feel at home as quickly as possible. Then, the goals will come, rest assured.

2017/18 EXPECTATIONS

Avoiding relegation feels as good a goal as any for Augsburg. A push for Europe shouldn't be possible as things stand. However, things are very circumstantial at Augsburg. Baum is inexperienced as a head coach, probably the least experienced in the league and has a rather dire task ahead of him.

However, FCA's signings this window might just be some of the best in the league and things might just not look as poor as they did when Kohr joined Leverkusen. The signings of Cordova and Gregoritsch seem very well-considered and it would come as a surprise if Augsburg found themselves relegated come May.

Key to Fuggerstädter's performance is quite simply to play as a unit. A compact team is always hard to beat and with Heller and Cordova in the team, their attack will get much quicker and their counter attacks will prove to be much more effective than they usually are. Augsburg might be a team to look out for next season and their habit of beating the Goliaths of Bundesliga could continue.

For teams like FCA, avoiding relegation will always be their goal until they get more financially stable and can build without losing key players. Avoiding the drop should and will be their main goal.

By Axel Falk.



Hertha BSC

Stadium: Olympiastadion (74,475)

2 x German Championships. Head Coach: Pál Dárdai

Hertha BSC are looking to build on another strong season as Pál Dárdai's side walk into the Europa League after a sixth placed finish. On average, a relatively young side who are gaining experience by the season will be trying their best to rally a Champions League spot in the coming season.

HISTORY

Hertha Berlin were founded in 1892 and they were one of the founding members of the German Football Association in 1900. 'The Old Lady' have won the German Championship twice back in 1930 and 1931, being runners up the four years previous.

They play their games at the Olympiastadion, which was built for the 1936 Olympic Games. The stadium capacity can be expanded to as much as 76,197. This is the 50th season that they have called the Olympiastadion their home.

Under the management of former player Dárdai, Hertha BSC have gone from strength to strength, finishing 7th and 6th in the last two seasons.

The club has famously been up and down in recent years with relegation in years 2009/10 and 2011/12, when they struggled to find any stability and momentum when getting promoted back to the Bundesliga before and after those fateful seasons. But under the regime of Dárdai, Hertha look like a different beast and are real contenders in this division.

LAST SEASON

Minimalistic transfer movement for die Alte Dame last season saw a team comfortable enough to carry on where they had left off the season previous, Vedad Ibisevic and Ondrej Duda being the only two key signings. Duda would injure his knee and only make three appearances in his debut season in the Bundesliga, Ibisevic on the other hand would end the season as Hertha's top goalscorer, with 12 league goals leading them to a 6th placed finish.

The 2016/17 season saw the emergence of young talents Mitchell Weiser and Niklas Stark as real top young German talents in the top flight. Weiser, the young wide player who can play anywhere up the right-hand side had taken his opportunity well and scored



four league goals. Stark, a tall, versatile unit in the middle of the park could cover at centre-back or dominate in central-midfield with his tall frame but also a deceptively pacey player too. Dárdai had seen talent in these two young players and they were integral to the very positive season they ended up having.

MANAGER

The DNA of Hertha Berlin runs through Dárdai and the fans certainly appreciate what he has done for his adopted club. The Hungarian played 286 times for Hertha and is the club's most capped player. He went into youth coaching after finishing his playing career and returned home after a spell as manager of the Hungarian national team to take the reins of the senior squad back in the nation's capital.

Dardai has shown his mettle in management exquisitely so far on a limited budget, getting the best out of his player's year after year and instilling the passion he has for his club into all his players he coaches. Hertha Berlin supporters will be hoping he will be staying for a very long time at the club as it is stabilising over a very healthy point in the Bundesliga.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: A couple outgoing players this transfer window for Berlin have been Alexander Baumjohann to Coritiba in Brazil, Sami Allagui to St. Pauli and most notably John Brooks who left for Bundesliga rivals Wolfsburg for a reported €20m. Being a vital part of Hertha's back line last season, it is yet to be seen if they will miss his presence at the back or if they have found a suitable replacement.

In: With the three departures, Hertha have brought in four players who they will hope will make the difference for them this season. The replacement for Brooks is Karim Rekik, formerly of Marseille, PSV and Manchester City. Rekik at 22-years-old has years ahead of him in

terms of personal progression and he could be another young talent who could flourish in the blue and white.

The signing of Matthew Leckie from relegated Ingolstadt will build competition in the wide areas alongside loan signing Valentino Lazaro from Red Bull Salzburg.

Their marquee signing from RB Leipzig would be Davie Selke who has struggled to find a regular starting place and finding consistent form has been difficult. Having a fabulous European U21 tournament, Hertha have been looking for more options in the front areas and can't rely on Ibisevic and Kalou forever.

KEY PLAYERS

Ondrej Duda: The quick footed, versatile young midfielder will have been gutted not to have made more than three appearances last season. The hype around the Slovakian international making a full impact has been a long time coming for Hertha fans, being compared to Angel di Maria and other South American talents, if he can stay off the injury table he will cause many teams problems and get more people in seats, it will be like a new signing for Berlin.

Vedad Ibisevic: The big Bosnian striker has been handed the captain's armband for this coming season and his experience and know-how will hope to invigorate hopes of Champions League football in Berlin. At the age of 33 he will more than likely make way for Selke, but the competition and similar play styles of both players will be useful for any knowledge passed down to the younger lads. Ibisevic and Selke will feed off the crosses put into the box from the wide areas and Hertha will only profit from their acquisitions made.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Arne Maier: Yet another from the Hertha academy, the young 18-year-old midfielder is one for the future, but he has all the makings of a great attacking player. Given his debut at the end of last season, his tall frame may make him seem slow, but his turn and passing ability is already at a very high quality and this lad could reach the top of the game with more minutes under his belt in the men's game. Primarily playing down the middle, he will be a creative force in the future.

EXPECTATIONS

Being their 5th consecutive season in the top flight, Hertha Berlin are flying and have worked themselves into being one of the better sides in the division. Usually slow starters, if they can rectify this they will really put themselves amongst the Champions League elite in the Bundesliga.

Another top seven finish would be realistic whilst bedding in some new players and getting further in the Europa League than they did last year, which saw them knocked out by Brondby.

With the standard of football and the high finishes, it must be becoming custom to finish strongly and end in the European places for the Hertha fans. Even if they miss

out, it won't be a disaster but retaining a level of consistency and improvement can be the hardest thing in football, although boss Dárdai is finding a way to do it season after season.

By Andrew Beaumont.



SV Werder Bremen

Stadium: Weserstadion (42,100)

4 x German Championships; 6 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Alexander Nouri

Werder Bremen were founding members of the Bundesliga in 1963 and have only spent one season outside Germany's top flight. A powerhouse in the 1980s and early 1990s, Bremen fell down the pecking order and have battled relegation during recent years. Alexander Nouri took over last September and rescued a faltering campaign, falling agonisingly short of the Europa League. Is this the season Bremen get back into Europe?

HISTORY

Sportverein Werder Bremen von 1899 e. V. have a proud history in German football having won four Bundesliga titles, six DFB Pokals and the European Cup Winners' Cup. Founded in Bremen in 1899, the northwest club are affectionately known as the die Grün-Weißen (The Green-Whites) and play at the 42,100 capacity Weserstadion.

A charter member of the Bundesliga in 1963, Bremen won the title in the league's second season but struggled in the 1970s where they eventually suffered their one and only relegation in 1979/80. Bouncing straight back up by winning the 2. Bundesliga, they have remained in Germany's top flight ever since.

Bremen were transformed into one of the best teams in Germany from 1981-95 under the management of Otto Rehhagel. Bundesliga runners-up in 1983, 1985 and 1986, they won the title in 1988 and won the DFB Pokal final in 1991. Winning the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1992, Bremen won a third Bundesliga title in 1993 and another DFB Pokal in 1994.

Rehhagel's departure in 1995 signalled an end to Bremen's success, but under manager Thomas Schaaf from 1999-2013 Bremen regained relevance and won the Bundesliga and DFB Pokal double in 2004. In 2009 Bremen were defeated in the UEFA Cup final by Shakhtar Donetsk but ended the season by winning another DFB Pokal.

Schaaf left the club in bad shape in 2013 and the club would spend the next four seasons fighting relegation. Last season appeared to be more of the same, before 37-year-old Nouri rescued campaign and fell just short of an unlikely top six finish.

LAST SEASON

After narrowly avoiding relegation at the end of the 2015/16 season, Bremen replaced sporting director Thomas Eichin with former player and captain Frank Baumann. The 40-year-old spent over five years in various boardroom roles but left the club in 2015, stating on his return that he needed to "take a step



back in the past year and reflect on my work so far, but also gather ideas and educate myself."

Baumann soon had a big decision to make. With Eichin reportedly wanting to sack under fire Viktor Skrynyk and several players unwilling to play for their manager, Baumann kept faith with the Ukrainian but was forced to sell the unhappy Jannik Vestergaard to Borussia Mönchengladbach. With Anthony Ujah departing, Bremen's acquisitions did little to inspire confidence apart from Max Kruse who joined from Wolfsburg for €7.5m.

Skrynyk didn't last long, sacked after crashing out of the DFB Pokal to third-tier side Sportfreunde Lotte and losing the first three Bundesliga games including a 6-0 opening day demolition job at Bayern Munich. Former player and youth team manager Nouri took over, the 37-year-old rookie switching to a three-man defence after the winter break which resulted in four straight defeats.

He refused to surrender and was rewarded with Bremen going on an incredible 11 match unbeaten run with the Green Whites picking up 29 points from an available 33. Striker Max Kruse returned from injury and was instrumental in the turnaround, scoring 12 goals and proving six assists in Bremen's final 11 games. Serge Gnabry scored 11 goals with important contributions from the underrated Fin Bartels and January recruit Thomas Delaney.

Sitting in sixth position with three games remaining, Europa League qualification was thrown away as Bremen scored three goals in each match, but conceded 13 goals which contributed to the worst defence in the Bundesliga, an astonishing 64 goals conceded.

MANAGER

Nouri played professionally in the lower divisions for 14 years after spending his formative years at the Werder Bremen youth academy. Beginning his coaching career at VfB Oldenburg in 2013, Nouri returned to Bremen and took over the U23 team in 2014, succeeding Skrypnyk as first team manager in September 2016.

Under severe pressure in mid-February after four straight defeats with Bremen in 16th position, sporting director Baumann stuck with Nouri, telling Bild: "We are convinced that we can get through this with Alex. There were no discussions and meetings with other coaches."

Baumann's faith was rewarded, Bremen climbing the table with the new look formation and the young manager rewarded with a contract extension. Despite losing some important players this summer and others rumoured to be leaving, Nouri will hope to hit the ground running and fight for a spot in Europe.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Bremen lost some important players and received very little in return. Rising star Gnabry was sold to Bayern Munich for a measly €8m and immediately loaned to Hoffenheim, while goalkeeper Felix Wiedwald joined Leeds for €500k.

Two players left on free transfers, promising 21-year-old central midfielder Florian Grillitsch to Hoffenheim and Santiago García to Mexican club Deportivo Toluca. Long serving central midfielder and captain Clemens Fritz retired.

Claudio Pizarro, the club's all-time leading scorer with 104 goals in three spells at Bremen, was not offered a contract extension after a poor season. The 38-year-old Peruvian striker managed just one goal in 854 minutes of Bundesliga action.

In: The players acquired so far this summer have done little to inspire. Ludwig Augustinsson has been the most expensive purchase, the 23-year-old left-back joins from FC Copenhagen for €4.5m. Jiri Pavlenka will be first choice goalkeeper after the 25-year-old arrived from Slavia Prague for €3m.

Jérôme Gondorf joins from Darmstadt for €1.2m, the 29-year-old central midfielder a solid performer for the relegated side last season. China international striker Yuning Zhang joins on a two-year loan deal from West Bromwich Albion, the 20-year-old becomes just the fourth Chinese player to play in the Bundesliga.

KEY PLAYER

Zlatko Junuzović: Signed from Austria Vienna for a paltry €800k in January 2012, the 29-year-old attacking midfielder has risen to become one of Bremen's most important and consistent performers. With a total of 14 goals and 28 assists in the past three Bundesliga seasons, Junuzović's creativity and threat from set-pieces are vital weapons in his arsenal.

Reportedly one of the players that voiced his displeasure about Viktor Skrypnyk, Junuzović was persuaded to stay at the club and has been rewarded this season with permanent captaincy, saying: "It's a special honour for me. I'm aware of the responsibility which comes with this role and will give everything to carry out my duty to the best of my ability."

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Maximilian Eggestein: Joining the Bremen youth academy in 2011, Eggestein has been slowly working his way up to the first team where he made 15 Bundesliga appearances last season. The 20-year-old converted defensive midfielder played 15

minutes in the opening 6-0 defeat at Bayern Munich last season and didn't feature again until reinstated by Nouri in January.

Playing an important role in Bremen's 11 match unbeaten run, Eggestein's goal in the recent 3-0 DFB Pokal victory at third-tier Würzburger Kickers highlighted his versatility and ability playing in an advanced position. Expect to see a lot of Eggestein for Bremen in what shapes up to be a breakout season.

EXPECTATIONS

Werder Bremen paid the price for failing to sack Skrypnyk last summer which resulted in Nouri taking over a sinking ship in September. The inexperienced manager needed time to implement a new formation which eventually came to fruition, almost guiding the northern club into Europe which would have been a miraculous achievement.

Kruse was the standout performer but another lengthy injury or sale of their star striker could prove catastrophic. Bremen were the fifth highest Bundesliga scorers with 61 last season, but conceding a league high 64 goals is a huge cause for concern. The recruitment thus far appears underwhelming with the calibre of players arriving at the Weserstadion doing little to inspire confidence.

Nouri has intimate knowledge of the youngsters coming through the ranks however, and it would be no surprise to see talented Bremen youngsters such as brothers Maximilian and Johannes Eggestein develop into important players. Pushing for a European place should be the aim, but a mid-table finish is a realistic expectation.

By Matthew Marshall.



Borussia Dortmund

Stadium: Signal Iduna Park (81,360)

8 x German Championships; 4 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Peter Bosz

Heading into a new era all eyes will be on Borussia Dortmund this season, who are now under the tutelage of Peter Bosz. Pipping TSG 1899 Hoffenheim to third place in the Bundesliga has once again put BVB in the Champions League group stage for the 2017/18 campaign, whilst the attacking prowess that Dortmund have amongst the ranks will surely push Bayern Munich for the league title once again, with RB Leipzig also in the mix.

HISTORY

Founded in 1909, Ballspiel-Verein Borussia 1909 arose after a group of youths unhappy with the local chaplain's treatment of their church-sponsored football team started their own club. Originally playing in blue-and-white stripes, BVB almost had their first taste of bankruptcy in 1929. Their debt eventually became public knowledge, which led to former president Heinz Schwaben repaying the 1200RM loan.

Consecutive titles followed in 1956 and 1957 while just six years later, Dortmund won the last German national championship before the Bundesliga was founded and as a result of their previous triumph, they were one of 16 teams to be invited. Clinching the DFB Pokal in 1965 with a win over Alemannia Aachen, Dortmund would also beat Liverpool in 1966 to secure their first European title.

What followed, was years on uncertainty. For three decades, BVB faced financial trouble and despite winning its second Pokal in 1989, their future remained up in the air. It wasn't until Ottmar Hitzfeld arrived in 1992 that saw Dortmund rise once again. Consecutive titles in 1995 and 1996 unearthed players such as Karl-Heinz Riedle, Lars Ricken and Michael Zorc, who then went on to win the 1997 Champions League in a 3-1 victory against Juventus.

The turn of the millennium saw their shares falling and despite another Bundesliga title in 2002, Dortmund were forced to sell their best players. The famous Westfalenstadion would be renamed to the 'Signal Iduna Park' to raise further funds, while it wasn't until a few years ago that Dortmund eventually became stable once again.

Under Jürgen Klopp, Dortmund again became a challenger on all fronts. His leadership took Dortmund to a further two titles – in 2011 and 2012 – whilst guiding the club to the 2013 Champions League final, where they lost to German rivals, Bayern Munich. A two-year spell under Thomas Tuchel resulted in another DFB Pokal



victory, whilst fans will be hoping new head coach, Bosz, can recreate their earlier successes.

LAST SEASON

A disappointing campaign by Borussia Dortmund standards, the eight-time league winners could only manage a third-placed finish, 18 points behind league rivals Bayern Munich. Losing Mats Hummels to the Bavarians and both Ilkay Gündogan and Henrikh Mkhitaryan to Premier League clubs, it was always going to be a tough ask to get Tuchel to improve on Dortmund's position from the prior year.

With the addition of youth players, Ousmane Dembélé is no doubt the one that shined with six goals and 13 assists in the Bundesliga, creating a great understanding with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang who went to beat Robert Lewandowski to the Torjäger with 31 goals.

Unfortunately for Dortmund, mistrust and communication failure behind the scenes led to Tuchel's eventual departure. Selling three key players and allowing experienced players to leave was just the start of the toxic atmosphere. A partial stadium closure, BVB chiefs signing Alexander Isak, who Tuchel claimed he had never heard of, and a loss to bottom-club Darmstadt was the final straw for the German. The DFB Pokal final was to be his last game as Dortmund's head coach.

MANAGER

Succeeding Tuchel as head coach of Borussia Dortmund, Bosz has the characteristics and tactical awareness to get BVB challenging Bayern Munich for the title once again. A believer in youth, we're going to see the likes of Christian Pulisic, Julian Weigl and new signing Dan-Axel Zagadou play important roles throughout the 2017/18 Bundesliga campaign.

Well-travelled, 53-year-old Bosz has played in Holland, Germany, Japan and France before becoming Feyenoord's technical director in 2006, before holding coaching roles at both Vitesse and Ajax, where he came runners-up to Manchester United in the Europa League.

Finally, although Dortmund's five-year trophy-less run came to an end last May with a DFB Pokal win over Eintracht Frankfurt, fans will be hoping he can bring the Bundesliga to the Westfalenstadion.

TRANSFERS

In: Before the 2016/17 league campaign had even finished, Borussia Dortmund had agreed a deal to sign Mahmoud Dahoud from Borussia Mönchengladbach for €12m. Even at 21, Dahoud will likely play a key role under Bosz next season and with 61 Bundesliga games already to his name, the Syrian born German could create a deadly double-pivot alongside Julian Weigl.

With news that Marco Reus would be out of action until 2018, BVB chiefs moved quickly to sign Maximilian Philipp from SC Freiburg. Although €20m may sound steep, Bosz has a forward at his disposal who is extremely versatile going forward whilst providing a goal threat, having scored 18 goals for Freiburg.

After conceding the most goals in the top four, Borussia Dortmund shored up their defence with the arrival of Ömer Toprak. In a move that was first reported back in January, the Turkey international is likely to start alongside Sokratis for the Bundesliga campaign, whilst the arrival of Zagadou from PSG on a free transfer will provide Bosz with a talented defender at the age of 18.

Out: Surprisingly, Dortmund has brought in more money than they've spent. After a three-year spell at BVB, Matthias Ginter has joined Borussia Mönchengladbach for around €17m. After 224 games in all competitions, Sven Bender has swapped the Westfalenstadion for the BayArena joining his brother Lars Bender at Bayer Leverkusen.

Elsewhere, Adrian Ramos made his permanent move to China with Chongqing Dangdai Lifan, whilst Pascal Stenzel made his loan to SC Freiburg permanent. After just one-year in Germany, Mikel Merino departed for Newcastle United in a deal which has baffled many Dortmund supporters, given his potential.

KEY PLAYER

Mario Götze: "Show the world you are better than Messi," ushered Jogi Löw when he introduced Mario Götze in the World Cup final – what happened next, was history. Then a Bayern Munich player, the now 25-year-old has returned to his 'boyhood' club following a three-year spell at the Allianz Arena.

With just 763 minutes of Bundesliga football last campaign, Götze will be eager to make up for lost time, however, at one point it looked as though the German may have faced a lengthy spell on the sidelines. Diagnosed with a rare metabolic illness, Götze missed the remaining of the season, whilst it looked as though he may've missed the start of this campaign.

Bosz is eager to get Götze back to his best, having featured in pre-season for Dortmund, ahead of schedule. With Reus out, the return of Super Mario will lift spirits within the BVB camp.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Christian Pulisic: Pennsylvania native Christian Pulisic has already got fans of Borussia Dortmund talking whilst the fast-rising talent could well propel himself to new heights in the 2017/18 campaign. Making his Dortmund debut at just 17-years-and-four-months-old under Tuchel, Pulisic has already played in the Champions League and for the USMNT, becoming a regular in both setups. And with the injury to Reus, fans could well be seeing more of the American.

At just 18, Pulisic is already breaking records. He's the youngest non-German to score two goals in the Bundesliga which game against Hamburg and Stuttgart in successive fixtures, as well as being the youngest American to both score and assist in the Champions League.

As has been proved already in Dortmund's Super Cup loss to Bayern Munich, Pulisic has all the abilities to succeed at the highest level, whilst remaining level-headed – "I don't feel the pressure from fans or media. Only I can put pressure on myself, but I'm trying to keep a lid on things as much as possible. We're ready to challenge Bayern for the title."

EXPECTATIONS

Fresh from taking Ajax to the Europa League final, the appointment of Bosz has certainly made an interesting statement in Germany. His focus on attacking football and youth production fits the Dortmund philosophy and despite a loss to Bayern Munich already, BVB look to be in safe hands.

What is perhaps is worrying for Dortmund is the fact that both Dembélé and Aubameyang both seem unsettled and while their rivals have strengthened, it's going to be a tough ask for BVB to improve on their third placed finish last campaign, but it is doable.

Opening against a strong Wolfsburg side, Bosz and Dortmund must hit the ground running.

By Daniel Pinder.



Eintracht Frankfurt

Stadium: Commerzbank Arena (51,500)

1 x Bundesliga winner; 4 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Niko Kovac

Launische Diva vom Main, as they are commonly called in Germany, is on its way back! At least if we are to believe the Frankfurters. Often a rather pessimistic fan base, last season was truly something special for most fans of the team from the heart of Europe. Hitting third in January and a cup final was more excitement than they've had for years and albeit the season ended on a low, there's lots of optimism in Hessen. Niko Kovac's men are back to prove that last season wasn't just a fluke and to prove the doubters wrong after a horrible end to last season.

HISTORY

Eintracht were founded in 1899 and have through the years amassed one German league title and four German cup titles as well as one UEFA Cup triumph. This makes them one of the most successful clubs in Germany – whilst they were also proud founders of our very beloved Bundesliga in 1963.

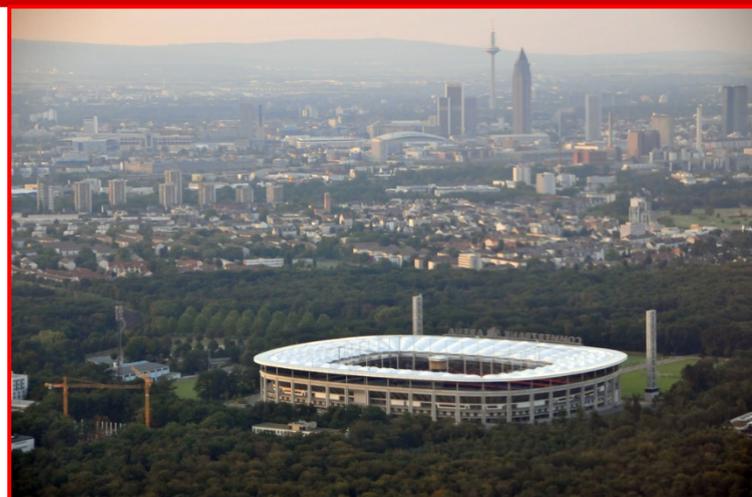
As one of the originals, the club oozes tradition, which is either very positive or very negative. Having never won a Bundesliga haunts most fans though, especially after coming so close on multiple occasions, most recently during the beginning of the 90s when they were just minutes from the title, but was snubbed due to a last minute goal at Rostock from Stuttgart, which meant that VfB won the title instead. Most Frankfurters have since been very negative towards Hansa Rostock.

The biggest rivals are Kickers Offenbach, which has a few explanations. One would assume that FSV Frankfurt or 1. FSV Mainz 05 would be the rivals, or even SV Darmstadt 98 or Wehen Wiesbaden, but no, Kickers from neighbouring city Offenbach are the rivals. This is mainly down to a penalty in 1959 that won Eintracht the league, hence snubbing Kickers of the title. Players like Oka Nikolov, Bernd Hölzenbein, Jürgen Grabowski and perhaps most notably Karl-Heinz "Charly" Körbel are among the club legends, with the latter being known for having played the most games ever in Bundesliga, 602.

In recent times, the club has struggled both financially and on the pitch. Fans have grown impatient and have earned themselves quite a reputation.

LAST SEASON

Starting off in sensational fashion, Eintracht finished like they finished the season before. However, a cup final made up for the horrible spring.



The final was a chance for Eintracht and their fans to shine on the grand stage, an opportunity they did not pass up on. The fans made it an amazing night and even though Borussia Dortmund won in the end, it was a good end to a decent season that definitely was an improvement on their prior campaign.

MANAGER

"Vertrauen ist gut, Kontrolle ist besser (Trust is good, control is better)," feels like a good quote regarding Kovac. He didn't say that, but one of my good friends in Frankfurt did when asked about Kovac this December.

A true control freak, the Croatian has that kind of Machiavellian touch, which creates mutual respect in the squad. The players respect him and are a bit scared of him even, whilst he respects the power of the masses and listens to his players.

This reminds the odd intellectual of Niccoló Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and Machiavelli's idea of governing a people and the balance needed for success. This kind of Machiavellian approach is what has made managers like Sir Alex Ferguson, Jupp Heynckes and even José Mourinho so very successful.

The magical mixture of control and belief towards his players, as well as having earned the players' respect, makes for a great future for Niko and his brother Robert Kovac as they try to get even more acclimatised to Bundesliga with all the ups and downs of Eintracht Frankfurt.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: The success of last season was down to the prominence of the loanees. Jesus Vallejo was one of the best centre-backs in the league and Eintracht will miss him dearly. Szabolcs Huszti left the club in January,

which might have been the reason for the sudden turn in form. Most recently, left-back Bastian Oczipka left the club to join Schalke and whilst these outs are hard to swallow, a handful of very promising signings still creates an aura of rarely seen optimism in Hessen.

In: Frankfurt's signing spree started with Sébastien Haller, a French striker that has impressed at former club Utrecht where he formed quite a formidable partnership with Ajax loanee Richairo Zivkovic. Haller finished last season with an impressive tally of 13 league goals and seven assists.

Danny da Costa followed from Leverkusen. The former Ingolstadt defender has seen his development heavily stalled at the rarely rotating Leverkusen. Eintracht brought in Carlos Salcedo from Chivas Guadalajara on loan, with an option to buy, whilst talented Serbian, Luka Jovic joined on a two-year loan with an option to buy from SL Benfica.

Highly-rated Japanese playmaker Daichi Kamada also arrived in Hessen from Sagan Tosu whilst the signing of Jonathan de Guzman from Napoli could prove to be one of the signings of the summer, given his experience.

Perhaps the most astute signing is Jetro Willems from PSV Eindhoven for €7 million, a suitable replacement for the outbound Oczipka. The Dutchman's arrival was made possible with the backing of new sponsors Indeed and Deutsche AM.

Other noticeable signings include veteran Gelson Fernandes and 1860 Munich GK, Jan Zimmermann.

KEY PLAYERS

Lukas Hradecky: One of the best goalkeepers in the Bundesliga cemented himself as one of the most acrobatic keepers in Europe, saving Eintracht from defeat on many occasions. The Finland international is an important member to this team, whilst his reflexes make him a very solid 'keeper.

Marco Fabian: Clutch to Eintracht's attack, the Mexican unlocks defences for breakfast with his vision and close control. His second full season with Eintracht and he's already a fan favourite – the No. 10 has shown on multiple occasions the technical ability he possesses.

Timothy Chandler: Born in Frankfurt to an American father and a German mother, Chandler chose to represent USA. His ability to pick out forwards with his pin-point crossing could be key for Eintracht this season following the arrival of Haller – transforming his crosses into assists. His versatility means he can also play in central defence, or anywhere on the right. There's a reason why Chandler is a fan favourite, and that is exactly it.

U21 PLAYERS TO WATCH

Luka Jovic: A highly-talented forward, the Serbian international shined at youth level for Benfica before his move to Germany. A partnership with Haller could prove

to be a deadly duo, and one that many Eintracht fans are looking forward to seeing.

Nelson Mandela: The name itself is enough, to be fair, but the Cameroonian striker has some true quality. Young, quick, agile, a good finisher and magical with the ball, Mandela came to Frankfurt from La Masia and that shows on the pitch. At just 18-years-old, it's unlikely he'll get a lot of playing time, but he's shown just what he can do during Eintracht's pre-season.

Aymen Barkok: Making his debut against Werder Bremen last season, Aymen Barkok is one of Germany's most talented players. At just 19, the wide-man could play an important role in Eintracht's campaign next season under Niko Kovac.

Expectations: An improvement in defence is needed for Eintracht Frankfurt this season. Do that, and they may just push for a finish in Europe next season. Fans are expecting an improvement on last season's finish following their strong start, but a 7th-10th placed finish would be considered an achievement for most fans.

Axel Falk.



SC Freiburg

Stadium: Schwarzwald-Stadion (24,000)

Head Coach: Christian Streich

Capping off a fairy tale return to Bundesliga football last season, SC Freiburg qualified for Europa League football after finishing seventh. Head coach since 2011, Christian Streich has always been an interesting figure throughout German football. The 52-year-old has spent just one season in the 2. Bundesliga since his appointment, bringing the title to south west Germany at the first time of asking. Streich's emphasis on youth development has made Freiburg a respectable club as they gear up for a move to a new stadium in 2019.

HISTORY

Located in southwest Germany, the club was originally founded in 1904 following various name changes. Playing in the highest regional league in the 1930s, their SCF club name was banned, due to the French occupation, and so it remained VfL Freiburg until reverting back to its original name in 1951.

Promoted to the Bundesliga for the first time in 1993, that's where they've spent the majority of their playing days. Their second season in the top flight saw them finish in third under Volker Finke. One thing that Freiburg has always lacked is resources. During Finke's reign, which ended in 2007, Freiburg would battle against relegation more often than not, albeit while playing their trademark attacking football.

Relegation in 2005 resulted in a four-year stint in the 2. Bundesliga before Streich earned promotion back to the top flight. Although tasting relative success, before facing relegation again in 2015, Streich would bounce straight back up, taking Freiburg to the Europa League with a seventh placed finish.

LAST SEASON

For a team to earn promotion and then qualify for a place in Europe the following year is by no means an easy task. But with the experience that Streich has mixed with young and hungry players, that's what was achieved. Their opening eight games in the Bundesliga had mixed results, winning four and losing four, conceding 14 goals in the process – the pick of the bunch being a 3-1 victory against Borussia Mönchengladbach, which saw Maximilian Philipp star.



The 23-year-old was by far Freiburg's best player going forward last season which saw him score nine Bundesliga goals, recording three assists in the process. Out of the games Philipp scored in last campaign, Freiburg lost just once – a 3-1 defeat to Borussia Dortmund.

With just six games remaining Freiburg looked set to qualify for an automatic group spot in the Europa League, but unfortunately their negative goal difference was their downfall. For all their abilities going forward, Alexander Schwolow & Co. conceded 60 goals in just 34 games – the fourth worst record in the Bundesliga – which saw them finish the campaign in seventh with a -18 difference.

MANAGER

Currently the longest-serving head coach in the Bundesliga, Streich has transformed Freiburg taking them to new heights following his appointment in 2011. Born Weil am Rhein next to the France and Switzerland borders, Streich has the Freiburg DNA in him. Following a career-ending injury in 1995, the now 56-year-old has been at Freiburg ever since, coaching the youth teams until his role as head coach.

Streich has nurtured the likes of Ömer Toprak and Oliver Baumann who have all gone on to become established Bundesliga players whilst his emphasis on youth is something that many coaches throughout Europe envy. With an average age of just 25, Streich can get the best out of his players whilst his man-management skills are what makes him one of the Bundesliga's best coaches.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: After an injury has kept Marco Reus out until 2018, Borussia Dortmund moved quickly to complete the signing of Philipp for €20m. The 23-year-old will be a

huge loss to Freiburg going forward, especially since they have yet to reinvest that money on a replacement. Joining Borussia Mönchengladbach, Grifo finished the season with six Bundesliga goals and eight assists. His dead-ball abilities will be missed at the Schwarzwald-Stadion but with a combined sum of €26m for the two, Freiburg has received a considerable fee.

Sebastian Kerk has made a permanent move to 1. FC Nürnberg following a successful loan spell whilst Havard Nielsen also joins him in the 2. Bundesliga, where he's joined Fortuna Düsseldorf. Central-defender Marc Torrejón joined Union Berlin after his contract at Freiburg expired.

In: Spending just €9m of their €26m following the sales of Philipp and Grifo, Streich made permanent moves for both Pascal Stenzel and Florian Niederlechner – following impressive loan spells – for a combined €6.3m from Borussia Dortmund and 1. FSV Mainz 05 respectively.

Marco Terrazzino re-joined the club following a three-year absence. Freiburg spent €2.5m for the 26-year-old who joins from TSG 1899 Hoffenheim and although not a like-for-like replacement for Grifo, he will more than plug a gap. After an impressive Euro 2016 with Poland, Bartosz Kapustka joined Leicester City but following a less-than-impressive year, the 20-year-old joins Freiburg on a season-long loan. Finally, Streich has replaced Torrejón with the highly-thought of France and Real Madrid defender Philipp Lienhart on an initial loan deal.

KEY PLAYER

Florian Niederlechner: Making a permanent move from Mainz following an impressive loan spell, Streich will be hoping Niederlechner can carry on his form which saw him finish last season as Freiburg's top scorer. The 26-year-old found the net 11 times last season for the Baden-Württemberg, which included goals against Hoffenheim and Schalke. In the eight games that the German did score, Freiburg lost just twice.

With the departure of Philipp to Borussia Dortmund, Niederlechner's importance to Freiburg has become even more significant. Strong with both feet, Freiburg's No. 7 not only has an eye for goal, but also possesses great movement in and around the box.

The 26-year-old really does feel at home at the Schwarzwald-Stadion: "I've received a lot of trust and a lot of playing time in the last year and a half here and I wanted to pay that back. I feel at home at Freiburg and I look forward to scoring more goals with the team in the Bundesliga."

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Caglar Söyüncü: Arriving at Freiburg following their promotion to the Bundesliga in 2016, Caglar Söyüncü has integrated quickly into the setup in Germany. At just 21, the central defender has shown an experienced head for his age, playing 24 games in the Bundesliga last campaign, as Freiburg finished seventh.

Considering the now Turkey international was unable to speak a word of English following his move from Altinordu, Söyüncü has settled well with his new squad.

"I give my best, but quite frankly: German is really hard. I've never learned a foreign language so far, but I'm on my way," said Söyüncü. "The mobile phone always rings when the guys do something together and I like to go, too. But I know that I have to listen closely to hear everything, and I understand a lot."

With no defensive pairing nailed on to start, Söyüncü played alongside the likes of Marc-Oliver Kempf, Nicolas Höfler, Manuel Gulde & Torrejón last season but his ability to play on both the left and right will make him a guaranteed starter as he looks to progress in his Freiburg career.

EXPECTATIONS

Although it would have been nice to see European football at Freiburg once again, Streich & Co. fell out at the qualification stage, which could go on to be a blessing in disguise for cementing their Bundesliga status. Without that added pressure, Freiburg can focus on finishing mid-table with a push for European qualification once again surely in their targets.

The departures of Philipp and Grifo will no doubt hurt them going forward, but with a couple of additions before the transfer window closes they could really prove an attacking force once again. Freiburg are certainly going through a transition period and with Streich at the helm, the Baden-Württemberg side certainly have the personnel at their disposal to become a formidable force in 2017/18.

Daniel Pinder.



Hamburger SV

Stadium: Volksparkstadion (57,000)

6 x German Championships; 3 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Markus Gisdol

Hamburger SV are the only club never relegated from the Bundesliga, enjoying tremendous success between 1975 and 1987 with the northern club winning the European Cup in 1983. The Red Shorts have failed to win anything significant for 30 years however, continually fighting relegation battles during the past four seasons.

HISTORY

Hamburger Sport-Verein football club was founded in 1919 but has origins as far back as 1887. Based in the ancient port city of Hamburg in northern Germany, HSV play their home games at the 57,000 capacity Volksparkstadion. "Die Rothosen" (the Red Shorts) have the unique distinction of being the only team that has played in every season of the Bundesliga.

HSV dominated football in post-war West Germany, winning the Oberliga Nord 15 times in 16 seasons before they were invited to join the formation of the Bundesliga in 1963. HSV's most successful period occurred between 1975-87 where they won the European Cup Winners' Cup, three Bundesliga titles, two DFB-Pokal's and the European Cup.

English forward Kevin Keegan joined Hamburg in 1977 and won back-to-back Ballon d'Or awards in 1978 and 1979, but the slide began in 1987 when legendary Austrian manager Ernst Happel left the club after finishing second in the Bundesliga and winning HSV's fourth DFB Pokal. The only trophy HSV would add to their cabinet in the 30 years since would be a 2003 victory in the defunct DFB Ligapokal.

Hamburg suffered financial troubles in the early 1990s and never recovered. The Red Shorts came close in the UEFA Cup with appearances in the semi-finals in 2009 and 2010, but were knocked out by Fulham with the chance to host the 2010 final. Flirting with relegation during the past four seasons, HSV managed to preserve their Bundesliga status with two relegation playoff wins, narrowly avoiding another playoff appearance last season.

LAST SEASON

2016/17 was another horror show for HSV but it could have been much worse. Bruno Labbadia didn't last long as head coach, sacked after achieving a solitary point from the opening five games. Former Hoffenheim boss Markus Gisdol took over, but no wins from his first seven games in charge left Hamburg rooted to the bottom of the Bundesliga.



Gisdol and HSV recovered from December however, eventually avoiding another relegation playoff with a last gasp 2-1 win against Wolfsburg on the final matchday. Hamburg's problems occurred at both ends of the pitch, conceding the second most goals (61) and scoring the second fewest (33) with no player managing to score more than five league goals.

Three players were acquired in January in an attempt to halt the onslaught, Brazilian defensive midfielder Wallace alongside centre-backs Mergim Mavraj and Kyriakos Papadopoulos. All three provided defensive stability and were instrumental in Hamburg's survival.

The club underwent a shakeup in the board room at the winter break with chairman and sporting director Dietmar Beiersdorfer agreeing to leave. Hamburg's former sporting director Heribert Bruchhagen returned as club chairman with Jens Todt becoming the new sporting director.

MANAGER

Gisdol had an unspectacular playing career in the German lower divisions, coaching at lower league and youth levels before serving as Schalke's assistant coach from 2011-12. Taking over at struggling Hoffenheim in April 2013, he kept the club up with a play-off victory before securing a ninth-place finish in 2013/14.

Gisdol guided Hoffenheim to eighth in 2014/15 and everything appeared to be going smoothly, but a disastrous start to the 2015/16 campaign saw him sacked in October. Returning to management with HSV 11 months later, Gisdol became Hamburg's ninth coach in the last five years. The club have shown faith in his abilities by extending his contract in March to 2019.

Gisdol was credited with the development of Roberto Firmino, Kevin Volland and Sebastian Rudy at Hoffenheim, but was unable to extract anything from the unsettled Alen Halilović who left for Las Palmas in January. Accomplishing Bundesliga survival was a fine achievement for Gisdol but the upcoming campaign is likely to provide another stern challenge.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Goalkeeper René Adler moved to Mainz on a free transfer, two defenders also departing on free transfers with Matthias Ostrzolek joining Hannover and Johan Djourou moving to Antalyaspor. 23-year-old attacker Michael Gregoritsch joined Augsburg for €5.5m.

In: Papadopoulos made his loan move from Bayer Leverkusen permanent for €6.5m with Hamburg bringing in two additional centre backs to bolster the ranks, 25-year-old Bjarne Thøelke on a free transfer from 2. Bundesliga relegated Karlsruher SC and 18-year-old Rick van Drongelen, purchased from Sparta Rotterdam for €3m.

22-year-old goalkeeper Julian Pollersbeck joins from Kaiserslautern for €3.5m fresh from playing a starting role in Germany's U21 European Championship triumph in Poland. Pollersbeck kept 14 clean sheets for Kaiserslautern in the 2. Bundesliga last season and will battle Christian Mathenia for a starting spot.

Former youth player André Hahn moves back to Hamburg from Borussia Mönchengladbach for €6m. The 26-year-old attacker will be eager to reignite his career in northern Germany after scoring just three goals and providing one assist in 30 Bundesliga appearances last season.

KEY PLAYER

Kyriakos Papadopoulos: The 25-year-old central defender moved to HSV on a six-month loan deal in January and was instrumental in preserving Hamburg's top-flight status. Papadopoulos got his Hamburg career off to a great start, scoring against his parent club Bayer Leverkusen in a 1-0 victory before hitting the target again a week later in a 3-0 win at former club, RB Leipzig.

Papadopoulos signed a three-year contract at the Volksparkstadion this summer, the powerful and passionate player hoping to put persistent injury problems behind him and lead Hamburg out of the Bundesliga basement. Sporting director Todt hailed Papadopoulos' leadership qualities, telling the club's official website: "He gave the team a push during the second half of the season, and his winning mentality and passion can also carry the other players."

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Rick van Drongelen: Hamburg's first choice centre-backs are undoubtedly Papadopoulos and Mavraj, but next in line could be Dutch 18-year-old Van Dongelen. Making his debut for Sparta Rotterdam as a 16-year-old, the teenager made 31 appearances for Sparta in the Eredivisie last season and has experience playing for Holland's youth teams, recently captaining the U19 side.

Previously linked with Ajax, PSV and Chelsea, Van Dongelen signed a five-year contract at Hamburg with Todt saying: "We are delighted that the deal is done. We have been monitoring Rick for a long time and have watched him play more than ten times. He is a strong tackler, plays with a lot of heart and has a strong winning mentality."

EXPECTATIONS

Hamburg have been absolutely atrocious the past four seasons with negativity engulfing and infecting the club. Fresh leadership under chairman Heribert Bruchhagen, sporting director Todt and head coach Markus Gisdol has the potential to turn things around as the northern club attempt to avoid a fifth straight relegation battle, but you wouldn't bet on it.

The ineptitude of the previous administration was highlighted by the sale of Kerem Demirbay to Hoffenheim for just €1.7m last summer, but the three players acquired by the new regime in January proved to be important acquisitions. Gisdol rewarded Mavraj and Papadopoulos by naming them vice captains for the upcoming campaign after spending just six months at the club.

The concerns surrounding Hamburg were exemplified in stunning fashion by crashing out of the DFB Pokal 1st Round at third-tier VfL Osnabrück. Playing against 10 men from the 18th minute, Hamburg conceded three unanswered goals in an embarrassing 3-1 defeat which leaves Gisdol under huge pressure before a Bundesliga ball is kicked.

Hamburg's transfer activity so far this summer appears satisfactory but the club desperately need more firepower up front. Bobby Wood scored nine goals in all competitions last season after joining from 2. Bundesliga side Union Berlin, but with the defence still appearing porous, more goals are surely required.

Matthew Marshall.



Hannover 96

Stadium: HDI-Arena (49,200)

2 x German Championships; 1 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: André Breitenreiter

Hannover 96 are returning to the Bundesliga after their previous 14-year stint between 2002 and 2016, looking to rectify the poor performances and bottom placed finish that saw them plummet to 2. Bundesliga. Rebounding after one season away with a 2nd placed finish, Hannover will look to secure their place for another long stint amongst the giants in the Bundesliga once again.

HISTORY

Hannover 96, based in central Germany, were founded in the year 1896. Die Roten, or 'The Reds' have won two German first division league titles (1938, 1954) and one DFB Pokal in 1992.

Mid-table finishes has been the norm for Hannover in their recent years in the Bundesliga, barring one year of overachievement when finishing 4th in the 2011/12 season. Qualifying for Europe for the first time in 19 years, H96 notably beat Sevilla to reach the group stage.

Dropping to the 2. Bundesliga with a poor 25 points gathered after a whole season while only scoring 31 goals will have been worrying signs for Hannover fans, especially after keeping the majority of their relegation squad.

Hannover 96 is notably known for being the final club Robert Enke played for, before he committed suicide back in 2009. The club paid their respects with thousands flocking to the then AWD-Arena, also having a street named after him near the stadium. The former Barcelona and Benfica stopper was beloved in the city of Hannover, going on to make 164 appearances for the club, with eight international appearances.

LAST SEASON

Losing Hiroki Sakai, Marcelo, Hiroshi Kiyotake and Ron-Robert Zieler following relegation, Hannover collected approximately €13m in transfer fees for several players, re-investing just a quarter of that back into the squad, which won promotion. The marquee signing and driving force for their season being free transfer and Austrian international Martin Harnik, from also relegated VfB Stuttgart.

This signing would go on to galvanise die Roten and give them the goalscoring outlet they so desperately needed the season previous. With 17 league goals in



30 games and 21 in all competitions, he had scored more than three times as many as the rest of his teammates. Primarily a winger for his former employers, Harnik had relished this opportunity and has fired them back to the Bundesliga.

Many their signings coming from other 2. Bundesliga sides like Niclas Füllkrug and Marvin Bakalorz from 1. FC Nürnberg and Paderborn respectively were imperative to their drive up the division, weakening sides around them but also getting personnel in that knew the division.

Throughout most of their campaign in 2. Bundesliga, they were in and around the top five with Daniel Stendel keeping die Roten within contention of promotion, but after a run with only one win in four matches, Hannover 96 sacked Stendel and replaced him with former Schalke 04 manager André Breitenreiter. He went on to lead the team to seven wins in their last 11 league games, clinching second place one point above fierce local rivals Eintracht Braunschweig.

MANAGER

Breitenreiter famously took SC Paderborn to their first ever season in the German top flight in 2014/15, going on to get the Schalke job the season after. With a disappointing season in his first big job in the top flight, he left the post at the end of the 2015/16 campaign. After taking some time away from the game, he joined the 96ers and is back in the Bundesliga with his newly promoted side.

Being a former Hannover 96 player, he was part of the 1991/92 side which beat Borussia Dortmund, Werder Bremen and Borussia Mönchengladbach on their way to clinching the DFB Pokal, being the first lower division side to do so. Returning to the club he knows well from his three-season stint as a player, Breitenreiter knows

the club inside and out, spending wisely on experienced and talented players that fit the right ethos of the football club.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: A season of rejuvenation for Hannover as they have moved on players deemed to be not good enough for this season's fight for survival in the Bundesliga. Artur Sobiech, the Polish striker, having spent six seasons with the club between 2011-2017 is the most prominent departure from the club this summer window, leaving for SV Darmstadt 98. Most of the departures leaving the club did not play much of a part in their promotion season.

In: Breitenreiter working the transfer market rather well for Hannover 96, bringing in experienced full-backs like Julian Korb for €3m and Matthias Ostrzolek on a free from Gladbach and Hamburger SV respectively.

There are two other signings that have really improved the spine of the team this summer. The signing of goalkeeper Michael Esser from Darmstadt for €2m, who has had a fantastic season despite his former side getting relegated, could prove to be a decent acquisition for Hannover 96. The other being another free transfer from Bundesliga rivals Hoffenheim, Swiss international Pirmin Schwegler has 11 years of Bundesliga experience and still only at the age of 30, could really become a permanent fixture and role model in the middle of the pitch for André Breitenreiter's side.

KEY PLAYERS

Pirmin Schwegler: This could be the signing of the summer for Hannover 96. Not known for his goalscoring from midfield with only 11 career goals. He is most noted for his tackling and timing of interceptions of the ball around the pitch. He will look to break up attacks and move the ball on to the more creative teammates. His clever passes and work will go unnoticed but with him in the side, Hannover will feel a lot more balanced and controlled going into this season.

Martin Harnik: His last season with VfB Stuttgart yielded less games than he would have hoped for and the goals dried up with only two goals in 19 appearances in the league, being used as a wide player more than a central striker. His resurgence at Hannover 96 has seen him score more than a goal every two games and with this trust as a main striker for die Roten, he will look to carry on his decent goalscoring record in the top flight. At the age of 30, he has lost a bit of his pace but being central, he will look to use his directness and timing to cause teams problems in behind or hold up for overlapping teammates and create opportunities for others. It is very important that he starts the season well and can lead Hannover to safety.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Waldemar Anton: The 21-year-old centre-back has come through the academy at Hannover, and has made 39 appearances, popping up with three goals since his debut with the main squad back in 2016. As a

homegrown boy, he will be looking to solidify his status as an up and coming young centre back in the Bundesliga. Being part of the backbone of Hannover's promotion side, this is his chance to stake a claim as one of the bright young talents in this division.

EXPECTATIONS

Breitenreiter will be looking to dispel his Bundesliga demons this time around after his poor showings with Schalke and Paderborn. Hannover will be looking to survive relegation and yet again consolidate themselves as Bundesliga full-timers like they were before their unfortunate relegation.

Hannover will be an unknown quantity in this division as the Bundesliga is ever-evolving and improving year after year. With a couple more signings in wide and attacking areas they could be a threat to a lot of teams this year. While the incoming signings look good on paper, H96 will be up against it this season.

The best chance they have is to take their decent home form from the previous season and make the HDI-Arena as much of a fortress as they can. If they look to frustrate sides at home and pinch some points on the road, then survival may be possible.

Andrew Beaumont.



Hoffenheim

Stadium: Rhein-Neckar-Arena (30,150)

Head Coach: Julian Nagelsmann

TSG 1899 Hoffenheim were first promoted to the Bundesliga in 2008, enjoying a rapid rise through the divisions after billionaire Dietmar Hopp took over in 1999. Exempt from the 50+1 ownership rule, the club appeared certain for relegation in February 2016 but survived and prospered under Julian Nagelsmann, the youngest manager in Bundesliga history.

HISTORY

TSG 1899 Hoffenheim were formed in 1945 with the merging of football club Fußballverein (founded 1921) and gymnastics club Turnverein (founded 1899). Located in the municipality of Sinsheim in southern Germany, the tiny club were an amateur side playing in the eighth division in the early 1990's, but their fortunes changed rapidly when billionaire software mogul Dietmar Hopp invested in the club in 1999.

A fifth division side when Hopp took over, Hoffenheim earned two successive promotions before spending five seasons in the third division. In 2014 the German Football League granted Hoffenheim an exception to the 50+1 ownership rule, allowing for Hopp to own the majority of the club which has caused controversy in some circles.

Hopp made his ambitions clear in 2006 by spending €100m to build the new 30,000-seat Rhein-Neckar-Arena. Signing experienced Bundesliga manager Ralf Rangnick, Hoffenheim secured back-to-back promotions which completed a swift and remarkable journey to the Bundesliga.

The 2008/09 season began sensationally with Hoffenheim in top spot at the halfway point, but faded after a season ending injury to star striker Vedad Ibišević. Rangnick resigned in January 2011, but despite securing a third-straight 11th-place finish in 2011/12, turbulence was on the horizon.

A manager merry-go-round saw Markus Gisdol become Hoffenheim's fourth manager of the 2012/13 season, the club winning a relegation play-off to survive in the Bundesliga. Gisdol did well the following two seasons but a terrible start in 2015/16 saw him sacked in October 2015. Huub Stevens took over but was unable to improve their position, resigning in February due to health reasons with the club on the brink of relegation.



Hoffenheim U19 manager Nagelsmann was already due to take over in the summer, but the then 28-year-old was thrown in at the deep end and given the challenging task of saving their season. Winning seven of his 14 games in charge, Nagelsmann defied the odds as Hoffenheim miraculously avoided relegation. It was just a sign of things to come.

LAST SEASON

Unbeaten at the Rhein-Neckar Arena, Nagelsmann transformed the team into a tactically flexible unit that preferred a formation with a back three and wing-backs who could both defend and create overloads in attack.

Employing a hard press which suffocated their opponents, they were also devastating on the counter-attack. Unafraid to shoot from distance, they took the most shots from outside the 18-yard-box and scored the most in the Bundesliga with 13 goals. They conceded the second fewest Bundesliga goals (37) and were third behind Bayern and Dortmund in possession (54.7%) and shots per game (14.6).

The two men calling the shots in Sinsheim were rewarded with extended contracts, sporting director Alexander Rosen committing to 2020 with Nagelsmann, now one of the most sought after managers in Europe, named 2016 coach of the year in Germany and extending his deal until 2021.

MANAGER

Nagelsmann was forced to retire from playing in 2008 aged 20 due to a knee injury but became an opposition scout under Augsburg II coach Thomas Tuchel. Working his way up as assistant coach to the youth team, Nagelsmann then managed the youth teams at 1860 Munich and Hoffenheim where he led the U19s to the 2013/14 German championship title.

Bayern Munich asked Nagelsmann to become their U23 team manager but he courageously declined, deciding to stay at Hoffenheim where he was scheduled to become first team manager at the start of the 2016/17 season. Thrust into the hot seat in February 2016 with Stevens' retirement, Nagelsmann became the youngest coach in the history of the Bundesliga with Hoffenheim certainties for relegation.

He's has proven to be proactive on the touchline, making the earliest substitutions in the league on average with 13 goals scored from substitutions the most in the Bundesliga. Clearly a very intelligent man, he has a degree in sports science and earned his German FA coaching licence with the highest possible mark.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Only two players of note have left thus far, but Niklas Süle and Sebastian Rudy were two of Hoffenheim's most influential players last season and will be sorely missed. Both players joined Bayern Munich, 21-year-old centre-back Süle for €20m and 27-year-old defensive midfielder Rudy on a free transfer after seven years in Sinsheim.

In: Defensive reinforcement has been a priority with versatile 27-year-old defender Havard Nordtveit joining from West Ham for €7m, the Norwegian international possesses a wealth of Bundesliga experience after spells at Nuremberg and Borussia Mönchengladbach.

Highly rated 19-year-old Dutch centre-back Justin Hoogma was signed from Heracles for €2m, with 24-year-old injury plagued left-back Nico Schulz bought from Borussia Mönchengladbach for €3.5m. Florian Grillitsch grew frustrated at Werder Bremen with the 21-year-old Austrian central midfielder moving to Hoffenheim on a free transfer.

25-year-old attacking midfielder Robert Zulj adds depth after joining on a free transfer from Greuther Fürth, but perhaps the most important signing this summer has been Serge Gnabry. Scoring 11 goals in 23 starts for Werder Bremen last season, Gnabry made his international debut in November and is one of Germany's hottest prospects.

Bayern Munich signed the versatile attacker for just €8m but he immediately expressed a desire to leave on loan, Hoffenheim snapping up the 22-year-old who will be a useful option for Nagelsmann.

KEY PLAYER

Kerem Demirbay: Strikers Kramaric and Wagner deserve much of the credit for Hoffenheim's success last season, but it was little known Demirbay who surprised many. Fighting his way to the top flight, Demirbay spent much of his youth at Dortmund's academy before an injury plagued season at Hamburg.

Demirbay then spent season long loans at 2. Bundesliga sides Kaiserslautern and Fortuna Düsseldorf, but despite a fine season in Düsseldorf where he scored ten goals

and assisted three, Hamburg decided to sell him to Hoffenheim last summer for a measly €1.7m.

Flourishing under Nagelsmann, the attacking midfielder scored six goals and provided eight assists to earn a contract extension and a call-up to Germany's Confederations Cup squad where he scored against Cameroon. Full of confidence and rapidly improving expect more goals and assists from Demirbay this season.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Nadiem Amiri: Joining the Hoffenheim U17 side in 2012, attacking midfielder Nadiem Amiri played an important role in his team's success last season, scoring two goals and providing four assists in 33 league appearances. With Liverpool, Atletico Madrid and Dortmund all reportedly interested in his services, Amiri recently agreed to a new deal.

Starting alongside Demirbay in the DFB Pokal 1st Round against Rot-Weiß Erfurt, Amiri scored the goal in the 1-0 victory which suggests the 20-year-old will continue to get opportunities to progress as Hoffenheim compete in Europe for the first time.

EXPECTATIONS

Hoffenheim exceeded their own expectations last season and surprised many in the football world with an outstanding performance. The departures of Süle and Rudy are significant, but sporting director Rosen and Nagelsmann worked wonders in the transfer window last summer, proving to be exceptional judges and developers of talent.

The players brought to Sinsheim this summer appear equally promising. Hoffenheim strengthened their squad without breaking the bank, enhancing their reputation as shrewd operators in an inflated transfer market. With Süle commanding a €20m fee and Hopp's wealth behind them, funds are available to strengthen the squad.

Handed a nightmare draw against Liverpool in the Champions League play-offs, defeat will still earn Hoffenheim a spot in the Europa League group stage. European competition will be another test for Nagelsmann, but his accomplishments thus far gives the impression that he will relish the challenge.

Matthew Marshall.



1. FC Köln

Stadium: RheinEnergieStadion (49,968)

2 x German Championships; 4 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Peter Stöger

Located in North-Rhine Westphalia, 1. FC Köln are one of Germany's largest clubs based on membership numbers alone. For such a well-supported team, they haven't enjoyed the best of times at the RheinEnergieStadion in the past couple of decades, yo-yoing between the first and second division, however, that's changing.

In head coach Peter Stöger and sporting director Jörg Schmadtke, Köln finally have some stability which has seen them improve year-on-year. Guiding the Billy Goats to their highest finish in 25 years, the duo has taken the team from 2. Bundesliga winners to Europa League football in less than five seasons – something that some clubs could only dream of. Finally, what's not to love about a club that has a goat as their mascot?

HISTORY

Formed by a merge of Kölner BC 01 and SpVgg Sülz 07 in February 1948, 1. FC Köln is not just any club. It is unique. Founder, Franz Kremer wanted a club with which the entire city could identify with and to this day, Köln remains a city mad on football. Just 14 years after the club's foundation, FC became German champions under legendary captain Hans Schäfer. Just two years after their first league title, the Bundesliga was born. 1964 was a special year for many reasons. Köln won the inaugural Bundesliga whilst Kremer and Schäfer cemented themselves as icons. What followed was a double winning season in 1997/98, making it their most successful season to date.

A regular in European competitions, unfortunately Köln had their first taste of relegation in 1998. Yo-yoing between the divisions, between 1998 & 2014, FC were relegated on four occasions. Since their latest promotion back to the top flight in 2014, Köln have established them as a Bundesliga club, and one that has brought a sense of euphoria around the city.

Thriving on their youth academy, Köln have produced the likes of Wolfgang Overath, Dieter Müller, Pierre Littbarski, Thomas Hässler, Harald "Toni" Schumacher and more recently, Lukas Podolski who all made their name in the famous red and white. A club that strives in tradition, FC have plenty of talented players in their current squad who could potentially go on to become Germany internationals.



LAST SEASON

Whilst they may not be the most appealing side to watch, they certainly gained some new followers last season. Winning six of their opening 11 games, Köln were the first team to take points from Bayern Munich whilst they went on to lose just three league games in the Hinrunde. A poor performance in the second-half of the season almost saw them miss out on Europe, but their grit and determination can see them through the toughest games which saw them pick up nine points in their final five games.

MANAGER

Stöger will oversee his fifth season in charge of Köln during the 2017/18 Bundesliga campaign. Bought out of his contract during his time at Austria Wien, Stöger arrived at the RheinEnergieStadion in 2013, replacing Holger Stanislawski following their relegation to the 2. Bundesliga.

At the first time of asking, Stöger guided Köln back to the top flight rather convincingly. Amassing 68 points, FC lost just four games during his first season in charge, finishing six points ahead of SC Paderborn 07. Since his arrival at Köln, the Austrian has turned them into a team that is defensively astute. Conceding just 20 goals during his first season as head coach, Stöger has got FC playing football that bodes well defensively. During his four years in Germany, the 51-year-old has masterminded wins over Borussia Dortmund, Schalke, Bayer Leverkusen and Hoffenheim, which has put them back on the map.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: No club will feel the loss of a player as much as Köln will with Anthony Modeste. After two seasons under Stöger, the Frenchman scored 45 goals in just 73 games, an outstanding ratio in the modern game. Finishing third in the scoring charts last season, behind Pierre-Emerick

Aubameyang and Robert Lewandowski, Modeste was always going to be linked with a move away.

West Ham United had been interested in the 29-year-old, but instead he opted for China. At one point, the move looked to be off with Köln releasing a statement announcing that both parties failed to reach an agreement but in the end, Tianjin Quanjian got their man. His goals will no doubt be missed at the RheinEnergieStadion next season, but €35m is a large sum for a club like Köln to turn down.

Other departures saw Neven Subotic return to his feeder club, Borussia Dortmund following a six-month loan spell whilst Marcel Hartel joined 2. Bundesliga side Union Berlin, after just a handful of appearances for Köln.

In: Perhaps what surprised many people is that Köln broke their transfer record to sign Jhón Cordoba this summer. The Colombian international joined from 1. FSV Mainz 05 for €15m, breaking Lukas Podolski's record in 2009. With the departure of Modeste to China, Cordoba is likely to be the focal point of Köln's attack this season and whilst he didn't break scoring records at Mainz, he has all the attributes to succeed and become a fan favourite at the RheinEnergieStadion.

Before Anthony Modeste had even departed the club, Köln brought in Jannes Horn from VfL Wolfsburg for around €7m plus incentives. Although a high fee for someone who played just 13 games in the Bundesliga last season, Stöger is getting a player with lots of potential, and someone who has represented Germany at U19 & U20 level. Horn's versatility was no doubt a key factor when Köln's management staff were looking at him. Able to play at left-back and on the left-side of a back-three, the 20-year-old looks to have a bright future ahead of him.

Another addition in defence saw the arrival of João Queirós from SC Braga. Although he had yet to make an appearance for the Liga Nos club, the 19-year-old has shown promise in the youth games he has played in, most recently captaining the Portugal U20 team at the World Cup in South Korea. Not only that, perhaps Köln's most exciting business deal this summer is Jorge Mere from Sporting Gijon. For just €7m, Stöger has got his hands on a central-defender that has over 50 games in La Liga and a player who is highly-regarded by his peers in Spain. At just 20, Mere was wanted by Malaga CF and a host of clubs in England, and so Köln have really got themselves a coup in today's market.

KEY PLAYERS

Jonas Hector: Once linked with a move to Liverpool, Jonas Hector has become an integral part to Köln. Making his debut in 2012, the left-back has gone on to play 168 times for the Billy Goats, becoming their vice-captain when Matthias Lehmann fails to make the squad. His versatility and composure on the ball makes him one of the best in the league at what he does, which has ultimately seen him cement a place in Jogi Löw's Germany team. Missing just three Bundesliga games last

season, it was clear as to what Hector brings to this Stöger team.

Jhón Cordoba: Touted as the Colombian Didier Drogba, Cordoba is the one Stöger & Co. have brought in to replace Modeste and his goals. A huge task at hand, the 24-year-old has scored just 10 league goals in 51 games for Mainz. However, Cordoba has the talent and style of play capable of replacing his predecessor at Köln. His energetic performances and bullish frame will be a problem for Bundesliga defenders this season in the tactic that guided Köln to their highest finish in 25 years.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Salih Özcan: Breaking into the Köln first team last season, Salih Özcan has gone from strength-to-strength, earning him gold in the Fritz-Walter medal, which is awarded to the best U19 German. Past winners have included Mario Götze and Toni Kroos and so the Billy Goats certainly have a talented player on their books.

Özcan has already played 13 Bundesliga games for Köln and at just 19-years-old, the central midfielder is poised to reach the top. The 2017/18 season could certainly see the youngster flourish, whilst his ability to play in a defensive or attacking position will see his playmaking abilities become a key asset to Köln.

EXPECTATIONS

The problem for Köln in the 2017/18 Bundesliga campaign is the departure of Anthony Modeste. The Frenchman scored 25 of Köln's 51 Bundesliga goals last season, whilst the arrival of Cordoba will take time to settle and integrate to the squad. With the club in the Europa League, they've managed to keep hold of their key players whilst their defence is one of the strongest in the league.

They're expected to be defensively efficient as always, and if they replace Modeste's goals, they could well go on and qualify for Europe for a consecutive campaign.

Daniel Pinder.



RB Leipzig

Stadium: Red Bull Arena (42,959)

Head Coach: Ralf Rangnick

RB Leipzig rose rapidly through the lower divisions after the Red Bull Corporation took over fifth division side SSV Markranstädt in 2009. Fulfilling its ambitions of competing in the Bundesliga within eight years, Leipzig exceeded expectations last season with a second place finish and direct qualification into the Champions League.

HISTORY

RB Leipzig enjoyed an unprecedented rise to prominence since the club's foundation in 2009 by energy drink-maker Red Bull. The company decided to expand into the German market in 2006, but resistance from the German Football Association, clubs and supporters meant that attempts to take over FC Sachsen Leipzig, FC St. Pauli, TSV 1860 Munich and Fortuna Düsseldorf were all rejected.

On the advice from Franz Beckenbauer, Red Bull returned to Leipzig in the eastern German region of Saxony and successfully invested in fifth division side SSV Markranstädt. With a population of 500,000, no Bundesliga clubs within close proximity and existing infrastructure including the 2006 World Cup venue Zentralstadion, Leipzig was the perfect location to put their plan into action.

Unable to use the Red Bull name, the club cheekily used RasenBallSport to preserve the RB corporate identity. Adopting the nickname die Roten Bullen (The Red Bulls), they won the 2009/10 Oberliga Süd at the first time of asking and moved from the 5,000 capacity Stadion am Bad to the 43,000 capacity Zentralstadion which was renamed, you guessed it, Red Bull Arena.

After two seasons in the fourth division, the 2012/13 season began with a new man in charge as former Schalke head coach Ralf Rangnick became sporting director. Leipzig went undefeated in winning the Regionalliga Nordost and earned promotion to the 3. Liga. 2013/14 was another successful season with promotion to the 2. Bundesliga secured.

The club invested €22m for the 2014/15 campaign but finished in fifth place. The 2015/16 season began with more investment, €19m spent on new players which was more than all the other clubs in the 2. Bundesliga combined and Rangnick deciding to take over as head coach in addition to his sporting director role.

Rangnick duly delivered. Leipzig secured second place in the league and direct promotion to the Bundesliga. With job done, Rangnick stepped down as head coach and appointed former FC Ingolstadt 04 manager Ralph Hasenhüttl as the man to lead them into the uncharted waters of the Bundesliga.

LAST SEASON

RB Leipzig were undefeated in the first 13 league matches and found themselves atop the Bundesliga. They were overtaken by Bayern Munich on matchday 14 but remained in



second place for the remainder of the season, a truly remarkable achievement from the newcomers who secured a place in the 2017/18 Champions League group stage.

The Red Bulls played to their strengths with a quick and aggressive brand of football, characterised by a high press designed to keep constant pressure on their opponents. Emil Forsberg was sensational with eight goals and 19 assists, Naby Keïta a revelation in central midfield with eight goals and seven assists. Striker Timo Werner tormented defenders in a breakthrough season with 21 goals and a call up to the national team.

Much of the credit must go to Rangnick who masterminded the on-field philosophy and proved an astute buyer of young and intelligent players. Bernardo, Keïta and Werner proved to be vital components in Leipzig's success and have all significantly increased in value after just one season. Despite Rangnick being the main orchestrator, we can't forget the work done by manager Hasenhüttl.

MANAGER

Hasenhüttl did a fantastic job at Ingolstadt, the former Austrian striker guiding the Bavarians to the 2. Bundesliga title in 2014/15 and achieving eleventh place in their Bundesliga debut. Taking over at Leipzig last season, Hasenhüttl proved to be a manager that instils confidence and belief in his team, able to adapt his tactics to suit the quality of players at his disposal.

Recently discussing Leipzig's philosophy with, Hasenhüttl said: "The focus of our play is our work off the ball. When we have the ball ourselves, then our quality within the team makes it hard for teams to defend against us." Hasenhüttl demands maximum effort from his players which guarantees the supporters are always fully behind the team.

The 50-year-old deserves huge credit for achieving the league's third-best defence with a young and inexperienced line-up that often played on the front foot. Leipzig were also the second-best team away from home where his players were vociferously abused by hostile crowds.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: The only player of note to leave RB Leipzig thus far has been 22-year-old striker Davie Selke. Sold to Hertha BSC for €8m, Selke was primarily used off the bench last season and scored four goals in 436 minutes of Bundesliga action. Despite being a promising talent, Selke was deemed surplus to requirements and will hope for first-team opportunities in Berlin.

In: Yvon Mvogo joins from BSC Young Boys for €5m, the 23-year-old Cameroon born Swiss goalkeeper set to battle Peter Gulacsi for a starting role. Promising 18-year-old French defender Ibrahim Konaté was signed from Ligue 2 side Sochaux after playing just 12 senior first team games, while Leipzig paid fellow Red Bull club Salzburg €7m for 20-year-old Austrian central midfielder Konrad Laimer.

Jean-Kévin Augustin joins from Paris Saint-Germain for €13m, the 20-year-old striker top scorer with six goals as France won the European U-19 Championship last summer. The man he beat to the scoring title? Kylian Mbappe, who scored five times. Scoring four goals in three games in the recent U-20 World Cup, Augustin was unable to break into PSG's first team but gained invaluable experience alongside Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Edinson Cavani.

The attack has been further bolstered with the addition of 22-year-old speedy Portuguese winger Bruma from Galatasaray for €12.5m. The former Sporting CP youth product flourished in Turkey last season with 11 goals and six assists, making the most dribbles in the Super Lig with an average of 4.4.

KEY PLAYERS

Emil Forsberg: Signed from Malmö in January 2015 for just €3.7m, Forsberg has emerged as Leipzig's key contributor and creative outlet. With eight goals and a European-high 19 assists, the Swede's electric pace, passing from open play and effectiveness from set pieces proved difficult to stop. Primarily playing centrally as an attacking midfielder, Forsberg spends a lot of time on the left wing to confuse the opposition.

With interest understandably high in the Swedish international and the club unwilling to sell, his agent caused a storm by telling Bild: "They will have to live with the fact that they are destroying his dreams." The ugly confrontation has apparently been resolved, Forsberg telling Kicker: "For me everything is good and I am fully motivated and focused and I want to have an even better season than the last with RB."

Naby Keïta: Born in Guinea without the luxuries that many enjoy, Keïta made his way to Europe in 2013 with Ligue 2 side FC Istres. Rangnick visited Keïta in 2014 to sign him for RB Salzburg for just €1.5m where he was a double league winner and Austrian Bundesliga Player of the Year.

Becoming Leipzig's record signing last summer for €15m, the powerhouse box-to-box player is the definition of complete midfield player. Able to snuff out opposition attacks, dribble past mesmerised opponents and score or set up a teammate, Keïta scored eight goals and provided eight assists last season.

With Liverpool determined to buy the 22-year-old, Leipzig have rejected offers in the region of €75m with Hasenhüttl recently saying: "Until next summer we keep the door closed and then we have a look."

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Timo Werner: The 21-year-old striker enjoyed a breakout season after moving from relegated Stuttgart for €10m last summer. Werner dramatically increased his productivity with 21

goals and five assists in the Bundesliga last season, taking his top flight appearances to 126 in the process.

Scoring 34 goals in 48 matches for Germany at youth level, Werner was called up for the recent Confederations Cup in Russia and didn't disappoint. He produced three goals and two assists to win the Golden Boot award and establish himself as the likely candidate to take over as first choice striker for Die Mannschaft.

Hasenhüttl is clearly enamoured with the young striker, saying: "He's already a very good player, but I think he will be a massive player... In terms of forwards, he has the biggest and best stock in German football. He's matured with us and become a more complete footballer. He has an unbelievable path ahead of him."

EXPECTATIONS

RB Leipzig have caused controversy in Germany with many traditional and prominent figures labelling them a commercial club. The club clearly has a long term strategy in place which has been executed in swift and ruthless fashion thus far. Establishing a successful youth academy and adhering to a policy of acquiring talented players under the age of 23 is bearing fruit.

Rangnick and his scouting network have a track record or unearthing gems and developing them into world class players. Keeping hold of their stars has presented obvious challenges, but as we have seen with Forsberg and Keïta, the club have been able to resist the financial might and lure of some of Europe's biggest clubs. For now...

With the bar set high in Leipzig, it will be fascinating to see how Hasenhüttl fares with the expectation and increased workload of the Champions League. The haters gonna hate, but RB Leipzig just gonna shake it off and continue to stick it to the establishment.

Matthew Marshall.



Bayer Leverkusen

Stadium: BayArena (30,210)

1 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Heiko Herrlich



Bayer Leverkusen have been a permanent fixture in the Bundesliga since they were first promoted in 1979. Winning one UEFA Cup and DFB Pokal, the Bundesliga title has eluded them despite being runners-up on five occasions. Leverkusen established themselves as a top half club with regular runs in Europe before a disappointing 12th place finish last season.

HISTORY

Bayer 04 Leverkusen Fußball GmbH was founded in 1904 by employees of the German pharmaceutical company Bayer in the industrial North Rhine-Westphalia city of Leverkusen. Die Werkself (The Company XI), play at the modest 30,000 capacity BayArena.

Promoted to the Bundesliga for the first time in 1979, Leverkusen spent the 1980s in the top half of the league and won its first major trophy with victory in the 1988 UEFA Cup. Leverkusen won the 1993 DFB Pokal, were almost relegated in 1996 but managed to recover under manager Christoph Daum and earned four second-place finishes from 1997 to 2002.

Leverkusen suffered two particularly heart-breaking seasons in 2000 and 2002 with Bundesliga titles virtually secured. On the final matchday in 2000, Leverkusen only required a draw at SpVgg Unterhaching to win the title, but a 2-0 defeat opened the door for Bayern Munich who became champions.

The disappointment of 2000 would pale in comparison to multiple defeats in 2002 however, which would forever be known as the "Treble Horror". With a five point lead and three matches remaining, Leverkusen lost twice which allowed Borussia Dortmund to steal the title. Beaten by Schalke in the DFB Pokal final, die Werkself completed a treble of defeats with a Champions League final loss to Real Madrid.

Leverkusen's two most important players Michael Ballack and Zé Roberto were sold to archrivals Bayern Munich, but the club eventually recovered to regularly finish in the top half. Jupp Heynckes was appointed manager in 2009, securing a second place finish in 2010/11 but he too jumped ship to Bayern Munich.

Leverkusen survived and became regulars in the higher echelons of the Bundesliga and regularly qualified for the Champions League. Everything came crashing

down last season however, a tumultuous season with the club finishing a disappointing 12th place.

LAST SEASON

Last summer Leverkusen sold Cristoph Kramer to Borussia Mönchengladbach for €15m but the club spent significantly in acquiring Aleksandar Dragović from Dynamo Kyiv (€18m), Kevin Volland from Hoffenheim (€17m) and Julian Baumgartlinger from Mainz (€6m). Roger Schmidt began his third season in charge with high expectations but wouldn't see out the season.

Leverkusen went unbeaten in their Champions League Group but inconsistency, injuries and suspensions plagued their Bundesliga campaign. Javier Hernandez, Volland, Karim Bellarabi, Lars Bender and Jonathan Tah all spent significant time out injured but the bizarre suspension to Hakan Calhanoglu was a significant blow.

Leverkusen's most important and influential player, Calhanoglu missed the entire Rückrunde due to an issue between previous club Karlsruhe and Trabzonspor in 2011. The club purchased 19-year-old Jamaican winger Leon Bailey from Genk in January for €13.5m, but he hardly featured and became involved in a ludicrous confrontation after mocking a boxer on snapchat. Leverkusen's season just went from bad to worse.

Destroyed by Atlético Madrid 4-2 in the Champions League Round of 16 first leg at the BayArena in February, a 6-2 defeat at Borussia Dortmund two weeks later left Leverkusen in 10th position. Schmidt was sacked, the inexperienced Tayfun Korkut appointed care-taker manager but never popular among fans, the club making the wise decision not to extend his contract after a depressing season.

MANAGER

Heiko Herrlich had a successful playing career that began at Leverkusen before spells at Mönchengladbach and Dortmund. An experienced coach at youth level with Dortmund, the German national side and Bayern Munich, Herrlich most recently led Jahn Regensburg from the fourth division to 2. Bundesliga in the space of 18 months.

Sporting director Rudi Völler described Herrlich's playing style: "He favours an attractive, aggressive and active way of playing football and thus a style that is very close to our expectations." Herrlich's experience working at youth levels was another reason he was hired, die Werkself currently possessing an abundance of talented youngsters.

A lack of Bundesliga experience is a concern, Herrlich spending six months at VfL Bochum where he was sacked in 2010 following a run of ten games without a win. Understandably upbeat ahead of the upcoming campaign, Herrlich said: "We want to get the best we possibly can from the coming season and get ourselves back in among the leading pack."

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Two central defenders have departed, Kyriakos Papadopolous making his move to Hamburg permanent for €6.5m and Omer Toprak joining Borussia Dortmund for €12m.

Hakan Calhanoglu joined the AC Milan revolution for €22m and Javier Hernandez moved to West Ham for €17.8m. Calhanoglu and Hernandez were influential players and crowd favourites who could prove difficult to replace.

In: With no European football to contend with this season, die Werkself have signed just two players thus far. Sven Bender joins his brother Lars in Leverkusen after the 28-year-old central defender made a €12.5m move from Borussia Dortmund.

Former youth player Dominik Kohr returns to Leverkusen after making a €2m move from Augsburg, the central midfielder starting and scoring the opening goal in the 3-0 DFB Pokal win against Karlsruher.

KEY PLAYER

Jonathan Tah: Born in Hamburg, Tah spent his formative years at the northern club before Leverkusen signed the young centre-back for €7.5m in 2015. Now 21-years-old, Tah has already developed into a key player in the heart of defence and risen up the Germany ranks with three senior caps for die Mannschaft.

Strong in the air and a beast on the ground, Tah is a solid tackler and quickly developing a reputation as a ball playing defender who is comfortable bringing the ball out from the back. An intelligent reader of the game, it's no wonder Liverpool have been strongly linked with a move.

Tah still has a lot to learn, but with an appetite for European competition on domestic and international levels, a move to a European powerhouse might not be far. He will earn Leverkusen a healthy profit when eventually sold, but until that happens Tah is a vital player for die Werkself.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Kai Havertz: The 18-year-old joined the Leverkusen academy aged 11 and broke into the first team last season, the attacking midfielder becoming the club's youngest ever debutant and goalscorer. Finishing the season with a brace in the 6-2 win at Hertha BSC, Havertz finished with four goals and five assists in just under 1500 minutes of Bundesliga action.

Havertz is a joy to watch with his confidence, technical ability and vision defying his age. Rudi Völler is clearly excited, saying: "His ability to stroke the ball, to do the simple things in full serenity is outstanding. I call it sensational, but of course he's just starting. If his development continues at this pace then he will be a brilliant addition to our squad."

Don't miss a chance to watch Havertz in action this season as he definitely has all the tools to develop into a world class player.

EXPECTATIONS

Last season was definitely one to forget for Leverkusen who had to contend with multiple injuries, the Calhanoglu saga and Schmidt's sacking. After becoming used to regular European campaigns, the road back to Europe will be difficult especially without Calhanoglu and Hernandez.

Rudi Völler has done a fine job as sporting director since 2005, but this could be his sternest test yet, specifically in the striker department. Much of the goal scoring responsibility will fall to Kevin Volland, but the squad does appear thin in that area with Admir Mehmedi, Joel Pohjanpalo and Stefan Kießling behind him.

The attacking midfield is stacked with top class talent, Julian Brandt, Karim Bellarabi, Kai Havertz and Leon Bailey all capable goal scorers, but Herrlich also needs to contend with a shaky defence that conceded 55 goals last season. Leverkusen have an abundance of talented youngsters who are more than capable of securing a return to Europe, but everything appears to depend on how quickly Herrlich can adapt to the Bundesliga.

Matthew Marshall.



1.FSV Mainz 05

Stadium: Opel Arena (30.034)

Head Coach: Sandro Schwarz



Since their promotion in 2009, 1. FSV Mainz 05 have proved to be one of the most exciting teams to watch in the Bundesliga. Perhaps what is more exceptional than their style of football is their ability to churn top-class managers off a conveyor belt. Jürgen Klopp started his coaching career at Mainz while Thomas Tuchel followed in his footsteps, from the Rhineland-Palatinate club to Borussia Dortmund.

Under a new head coach following the dismissal of Martin Schmidt, Mainz have once again promoted from within, appointing 38-year-old Sandro Schwarz is certainly a bold move, but he has the characteristics and backing from his players to take Mainz into Europe once again.

HISTORY

With various merges between 1903 and 1938, 1. FSV Mainz 05 spent much of their history playing in Germany's second division.

Following financial incapability's, Mainz played a decade in the amateur leagues before having an extended run in the 2. Bundesliga in 1990 before their promotion to the top flight in 2003 after being denied promotion the previous year through a 93rd minute goal. Under Klopp, the small football club – by city population – brought a new style of football to the Bundesliga – enter Gegenpressing. Pressing from the forward line is so often seen throughout Europe's top leagues in the modern game – with the style of football following Klopp to Liverpool, via Borussia Dortmund.

Following relegation and failure to bounce straight back up, Tuchel replaced Klopp, taking the Karneval club back to the top flight at the first time of asking in 2009, where they have played ever since. Finishing 5th in 2011, Tuchel guided Mainz to their first ever European campaign – moving to their new modern stadium the same year. The focus on youth players at Mainz has long being their philosophy and long may it continue under Schwarz.

LAST SEASON

Their current stint in the Bundesliga has seen them establish themselves as a mid-table side, with the potential to challenge for a place in Europe. Unfortunately, last season didn't go to plan. During his first year in charge, Schmidt led them to a sixth-place finish, however, perhaps those extra European games had a knock-on effect to their league form.

With just 10 wins in 34 league games during the 2016/17 campaign, Mainz tasted their first relegation battle for the first time since promotion in 2009. Picking up just two wins from the final 12 fixtures saw them in the relegation play-offs. Luckily for them, they had the better goal difference (-11) of the bottom five teams which worked in their favour, finishing 15th.

MANAGER

"He is precisely the right coach for our team and our club," sporting director Rouven Schröder said. "The aggressive, courageous style of play of his teams is deeply rooted in the club's philosophy." As is with many clubs in Germany, certain playing styles can be identifiable to certain clubs – it's imperative that Schwarz is able to continue that tradition in football-mad Mainz.

Appointed as Mainz' reserve team coach in 2015, last season saw the second-string relegated from the third-tier of German football. However, that doesn't mean that the 38-year-old will go on to become a failure. Schwarz worked under Tuchel while undergoing his coaching badges, while his management capabilities are similar to that of Julian Nagelsmann.

With some interesting attacking signings, Schwarz has already got fans excited with his promise to play entertaining and exciting football. Time will tell as to whether Mainz have unearthed yet another coaching gem.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: In the past, Mainz have always dealt with losing their best players rather well and this season should be no different. Jhon Cordoba departed for 1. FC Köln for €17m after just two-years following his arrival from Granada CF for €6.5m in the only real outgoing.

In: Needing to shore up their defence, Mainz welcomed Abdou Diallo from AS Monaco in a €5m deal. For a 21-year-old, Diallo is experienced for his age having featured for the Ligue 1 side on 19 occasions, whilst last year he was shipped out to SV Zulte Waregem on loan. The central defender also has Champions League experience which could prove vital to Mainz next season.

Following the departure of Jonas Lössl, the management at Mainz welcomed René Adler to the club – someone who is more than adequate at filling that No. 1 spot. The 32-year-old is one of the most experienced shot stoppers in the Bundesliga, having played 255 league games for Bayer Leverkusen and Hamburg combined.

Despite having the best goal difference of the bottom six teams, Schmidt's Mainz had trouble finding the net. Japan international Yoshinori Muto missed much of the season through injury whilst the departure of Cordoba doesn't help. As a result, Kenan Kodro arrived from relegated Osasuna in Spain. Thus, the 23-year-old left for a cut-price fee of €1.75m and with seven La Liga goals last season, Kodro could well prove to be a decent buy for Mainz, where he will be surrounded by better players.

In attacking positions, Mainz also beat Leeds United to the signing of Alexandru Maxim who arrives from VfB Stuttgart. If Schwarz can get the best out of him, then there's no doubt he could prove a fruitful signing for the Nullfünfer's. Challenging him for a starting place will be Viktor Fischer who joined from Middlesbrough having yet to reach his potential.

KEY PLAYER

Daniel Brosinski: Perhaps one of Mainz' better-buys in recent seasons, Daniel Brosinski joined from SpVgg Greuther Fürth in 2014 for just €1.5m. Ninety-one Bundesliga games later, the 29-year-old became an integral part to Martin Schmidt's setup, becoming one of the first names on the team sheet. Brosinski can play in either full-back position while he can also play on the right-flank. What the German lacks in tackling, he makes up for in positional sense whilst his dead ball specialities can be a key asset to Mainz under Schwarz.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Levin Öztunali: Grandson of the great Hamburg and Germany forward Uwe Seeler, Levin Öztunali has excelled at Mainz following his move from Bayer Leverkusen last summer. With five goals and six assists, Öztunali turned in impressive performances against both Borussia Dortmund and Bayer Leverkusen as they battled against relegation. The 21-year-old has settled in to life at Mainz rather problem-free whilst he could become pivotal for the Bundesliga side as they look to challenge for a place in Europe once again.

EXPECTATIONS

New head coaches generally take a while to adapt to a new lifestyle, but moving up to head coach from within the Mainz setup eases that process, as both Tuchel and Schmidt has proved. Schwarz has lost just once in pre-season with Mainz, who put in an impressive win over Newcastle United. If Mainz are to have a successful 2017/18 Bundesliga campaign, then it's extremely important that they keep their key players fit.

Muto can be key going forward for Mainz with his awareness inside the penalty area, even more so now following the departure for Cordoba. What's more impressive is that they've able to strengthen their goalkeeping and defensive situation with impressive additions. As fans have witnessed in previous campaigns, they could well push for a place in Europe once again.

Daniel Pinder.



Borussia Mönchengladbach

Stadium: Borussia-Park (54.057)

5 x German Championships; 3 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Dieter Hecking

Borussia Mönchengladbach are an established Bundesliga club that enjoyed its most prosperous period in the 1970s, but success has been few and far between since 1980. Sporting director Max Eberl is one of the best in the business, Gladbach achieving six consecutive top half finishes but missing out on Europe last season. The Foals begin their 50th Bundesliga campaign with realistic expectations of challenging for a top six position.

HISTORY

Borussia VfL 1900 Mönchengladbach e.V. were founded in 1900 in the North Rhine-Westphalia region in western Germany. Joining the Bundesliga in 1965, Gladbach have played at the 54,000 capacity Borussia-Park since 2004. Enjoying tremendous success in the 1970s with a fast and aggressive team led by prolific striker Jupp Heynckes, "die Fohlen" (The Foals) went head-to-head with Bayern Munich for domestic supremacy.

Winning the league and cup double in 1969/70, by 1979 Gladbach had won five Bundesliga titles, two DFB Pokals and two UEFA Cups, unfortunately losing the 1977 European Cup final against Liverpool. Heynckes managed the club from 1979-87 shortly after hanging up his boots, but financial problems signalled an end to the glory days which have yet to return.

Gladbach's last trophy was a DFB-Pokal victory in 1995, but in 1999 the Foals were relegated to 2. Bundesliga where they spent two seasons. Returning to the Bundesliga in 2001, a succession of bottom half finishes followed before another relegation in 2007. Bouncing straight back up, their fortunes would improve in January 2011 with the arrival of manager Lucien Favre.

After guiding the Foals to safety, Favre's Gladbach improved to finish fourth in 2011/12 on the back of Marco Reus' sensational season. The following three seasons were successful with eighth, sixth and third positions in the Bundesliga, but an inexplicably horrendous start to the 2015/16 season with five consecutive defeats saw the Swiss manager resign in September.

André Schubert took over and rescued the campaign, leading the team off the bottom of the table to fourth place and qualification to the Champions League for a second successive season. Widely expected to build on that success, Schubert's reign would turn out to be short lived.



LAST SEASON

Granit Xhaka's €45m move to Arsenal weakened the team but Christoph Kramer's arrival and Mahmoud Dahoud's development was expected to fill some of the void. After a promising start the club went through a difficult period in the Bundesliga, tasting victory just once in 11 games, dropping to 14th position. Schubert was sacked on December 21.

Former Wolfsburg manager Dieter Hecking took over and guided the Foals to ninth position in the Bundesliga, the DFB Pokal semi-finals and the Europa League Round of 16. Lars Stindl finished their top scorer with 18 goals in all competitions, Raffael adding 13 and Thorgan Hazard 11, but their Bundesliga total of 45 goals scored was their lowest tally since 2012/13.

The two main off-season acquisitions Jannik Vestergaard and Kramer performed adequately but there appeared to be an X-factor missing from their play. Xhaka's loss proved to be significant alongside the persistent injuries to 32-year-old Brazilian attacker Raffael which reduced his minutes and effectiveness.

MANAGER

Hecking is a former midfielder who began his managerial career in 2000 at SC Verl in the German fourth division. The 52-year-old has been managing in the top flight since 2006 when he took over at Hannover before spells in charge of 1. FC Nürnberg and VfL Wolfsburg where he enjoyed considerable success.

Hecking was named 2015 German Football Manager of the Year after guiding the Wolves to second place in the 2014/15 Bundesliga with victories in the DFB Pokal and DFL Supercup. Despite the significant financial

resources available at Wolfsburg including the substantial windfall from Kevin de Bruyne's sale to Manchester City, Hecking was unable to build on that success.

One view is that Hecking's achievements at Wolfsburg were largely due to the outstanding form of de Bruyne. In any case, Wolfsburg and Hecking deteriorated and he was sacked in October 2016 with the Wolves 14th in the Bundesliga after seven games. His hiatus was short lived however, taking over Mönchengladbach two months later. With no continental distractions this season, anything short of a return to Europe will be considered a failure.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Two rising 21-year-old stars have left Borussia-Park, central midfielder Dahoud snapped up by Borussia Dortmund for €12m and centre-back Andreas Christensen returning to Chelsea after a successful two-year loan spell.

Three players that were rather unproductive last season have also departed. Attacker André Hahn moves to Hamburg for €6m, two full-backs sold for €3m a piece as Nico Schulz joins Hoffenheim and Julian Korb moves to Hannover.

In: Christensen was replaced by 23-year-old Matthias Ginter who makes the short journey from Borussia Dortmund for €17m. 18-year-old Reece Oxford also provides competition for the centre-back role following a loan move from West Ham, the teenager handed starting roles by Hecking during a bright pre-season.

Vincenzo Grifo was signed for €6m, the 24-year-old German born Italian one of Freiburg's most influential players during the last two seasons where he contributed 20 goals and 19 assists. The left-winger is comfortable playing a central attacking role and will be keen to exhibit his expertise from set piece situations.

Denis Zakaria arrives from Young Boys for €12m with the 20-year-old towering central midfielder set for a starting role. Two teenagers may also see some playing time this season, highly rated 17-year-old French central midfielder Mickaël Cuisance signed from Nancy U19 for a paltry €250k and 18-year-old Paraguayan striker Julio Villalba returning after a six-month loan spell at Cerro Porteño.

Raúl "The Tank" Bobadilla has rejoined Gladbach from Augsburg for €2m and is set to be a crowd favourite. The 30-year-old Paraguay striker spent two-and-a-half years with The Foals from 2009-12 and will provide Hecking with a robust option up front.

KEY PLAYER

Lars Stindl: Signed on a free transfer from Hannover in July 2015, Stindl has become Gladbach's most indispensable player, captain and top scorer. Equally adept as a striker or attacking midfielder, Stindl's versatility and consistency saw the then 27-year-old

rewarded with a call up to the German national side for the first time.

Stindl scored three goals in Germany's recent Confederations Cup triumph in Russia including the goal that secured a 1-0 victory against Chile in the final. With Gladbach eager to return to the European competitions and challenge for the DFB Pokal, expect another big season from Stindl as he eyes a place in Löw's squad for the World Cup in Russia next summer.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Denis Zakaria: Dahoud's departure and Tobias Strobl's long term injury opens the door for 20-year-old central midfielder Zakaria who arrives from Young Boys. Originally a striker, the versatile youngster moved to a defensive position before settling into the holding midfield role.

Playing 50 top-flight games for Young Boys as they secured two consecutive runners-up finishes in the Swiss Super League, Gladbach beat many of Europe's top sides to Zakaria's signature and tied him down until 2022. The powerful 6ft 3in Swiss international is set to move straight into the starting side and could prove to be a vital player for the Foals.

EXPECTATIONS

Last season was a challenging one for Gladbach as they competed on three fronts and felt the effects of injuries to key players. Xhaka's departure was significant and the Foals must now contend with the losses of Dahoud and Christensen. Zakaria and Ginter appear to be handy replacements however and extended time on the training pitch should be beneficial.

Without the demands of European competition the Foals can concentrate solely on domestic duties. The recruitment this summer has been promising with many of the young players acquired possessing a large scope for improvement. With stability in the boardroom and successful 43-year-old sporting director Eberl recommitting to the club until 2022, Gladbach are in a good position.

Two late goals were required to squeeze past fourth-tier Rot-Weiss Essen in the DFB Pokal 1st Round, but another deep run in the competition wouldn't surprise. Eberl wants to finish at least eighth this season, but that could be a conservative expectation as I believe Hecking possesses a squad with enough talent and versatility to realistically challenge for the top six.

Matthew Marshall.



Bayern Munich

Stadium: Allianz Arena (75,000)

27 x German Championships; 18 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Carlo Ancelotti

In the last five years, most previews looking ahead to Bayern Munich's season will have been much the same. Unfortunately it appears that, yet again, it's tricky to see past the apparently perpetual champions for the Bundesliga and cup double yet again, unless RB Leipzig or Borussia Dortmund can pull off something truly remarkable. But even if the latter two play at their best, the sheer might and talent of Bayern would surely still be enough to see off any potential challenge.

HISTORY

After winning their first domestic title in 1932, Bayern had to wait another 37 years to taste league success. However, they have not looked back since. Having won at least three Bundesliga titles per decade since the 1970s, there is no more dominant or decorated team in German history than FC Bayern Munich. However, while their 'golden age' is generally accepted to have stretched from the end of the 1960s until the late 1970s, they have been Germany's leading team for some time now. Five Bundesliga titles in a row, with a view to a sixth this season make Bayern the team to beat in Germany this season yet again.

Bayern's European history, however, is a bit more complicated. Having won the European Cup five times, the Bavarians have struggled of late after their 2013 Wembley victory over fellow German giants Dortmund. In years gone by, Bayern have been regarded as some of the favourites for the Champions League yet they have met unceremonious ends recently, much to the disappointment of the fans.

LAST SEASON

Last season, the first under Carlo Ancelotti, ended in domestic success in the Bundesliga and the DFL Supercup while they fell short in the DFB Pokal semifinals and Champions League quarters. In addition to this, they were briefly pushed close by the astonishing rise of RB Leipzig but when the East Germans couldn't maintain their challenge, Bayern were able to pounce.

Besides their trials and tribulations in Europe, Bayern lost just twice in the league overall as they racked up 82 points and a goal difference of a staggering +67. It is for this reason that it is difficult to look past FC Hollywood, especially as they have managed to add some stellar players to their already impressive roster.



MANAGER

Carlo Ancelotti was appointed for two reasons; 1) To maintain some stability in the face of losing Pep Guardiola to Manchester City in 2016 and 2) To win the Champions League once again. Having certainly maintained Bayern's status as the dominant force in German football, Ancelotti will be gunning hard for his favourite competition yet again this season.

Having won the European Cup twice as a player and three times as a manager, there is nobody better suited to once again take Bayern from point A (domestic supremacy) to point B (European glory) in a stylish yet efficient manner. He has recruited well, so do not put it past him to lift the famous trophy for a sixth time.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Xabi Alonso and Philipp Lahm, two greats in the modern game, have retired from football, which will ultimately be to the detriment of Bayern. In terms of the market itself, Mehdi Benatia made his move to Juventus permanent for €17m, while Brazil international Douglas Costa joined him at the Serie A champions after just two years in Germany.

In: An outrageous summer has seen French starlet Kingsley Coman arrive on a permanent deal, along with former Arsenal man Serge Gnabry, while the established star signings most notably include €40m-man Corentin Tolisso and the loan acquisition of James Rodríguez, who has much to prove in the coming two years of Bundesliga football. Elsewhere, Niklas Süle joins from TSG 1899 Hoffenheim for €20m, coming in as cover for Mats Hummels and Jérôme Boateng.

KEY PLAYER

James Rodríguez: While someone like Robert Lewandowski or Arturo Vidal may be the best player at Bayern, perhaps the one to watch will be the Colombian. With so much to prove after his exclusion by European

champions Real Madrid, he will be desperate to fulfil the potential which Los Blancos saw in him after the 2014 World Cup - and it may well be that the Bundesliga might be his outlet.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Kingsley Coman: The fit-again Frenchman is only 21, but will surely be one of the leading lights of world football along with the likes of Kylian Mbappé, Ousmane Dembélé and Dele Alli in years to come. With a space on the left now up for grabs after loaning out Douglas Costa, Coman will be keen to make it his own over the course of the season.

EXPECTATIONS

Predictably, Bayern will see anything other than the league title as a failure - and they will have enough to finish 1st. The real intrigue will come in their Champions League performance and, having strengthened and with players eager to prove themselves, expect to see them challenge seriously with Ancelotti at the helm.

By Matthew Cowdock.



FC Schalke 04

Stadium: Veltins-Arena (54,740)

7 x German Championships; 5 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Domenico Tedesco

Despite limited successes since their glory days of the early-to-mid 1900s, FC Schalke 04 still hold a place as one of the Bundesliga's most prestigious clubs. As UEFA Champions League regulars until recently, they appear to be in the midst of a blip which has seen them struggle to hold on to their best players, losing the likes of Leroy Sané and Sead Kolašinac to the allure of the Premier League in the last two years. But will the slump continue, or will they return to days gone by in 2017/18?

HISTORY

Founded as Westfalia Schalke in 1904 (hence the '04' in the club name), they were the original proponents of stylish, passing football in Germany -- what the Spanish now call 'tiki-taka' was referred to as the Schalker Kreisel, or 'gyroscope', in the 1920s. And it was this dizzying one-touch football which helped Schalke become the early dominant force in German football, winning the domestic championship six times in eight years between 1934 and 1942, as well as finishing as runners up in 1938 and 1941.

Schalke's success has largely dried up of late, having not won the domestic top flight title since 1958, with only fleeting cup successes permeating the years of drought. This, however, should not detract from the fact that they have been one of the most consistent representatives of Germany in European competitions over the last ten years. Indeed, 2017/18 will be the first season since 2009/10 to not include European football for die Königsblauen.

LAST SEASON

If ever a season had summarised mid-table mediocrity, it was Schalke's campaign in 2016/17. Again, having been one of the regular challengers for the Champions League spots in the Bundesliga over the last few years, their 10th place finish and quarter-final cup exits will have sent them crashing down to earth with a thud.

In addition to these results, Markus Weinzierl's side sold their talismanic youngster Leroy Sané to Pep Guardiola's Manchester City, while they also almost lost Max Meyer to Tottenham Hotspur in what proved to be a difficult transfer window.

Their 10th place finish in the Bundesliga is not as bad when you consider the fact that the chasing pack last season was incredibly tight, with only eight points separating fifth and 12th. However, the fact of the



matter is that they plummeted five places from the previous season and dropped seven points. It was no surprise, therefore, when Weinzierl was sacked after just one season in Gelsenkirchen.

MANAGER

As aforementioned, Weinzierl was sacked after last season's dreary showing. He has since been replaced by 31-year-old Italian Domenico Tedesco, whose meteoric rise is not to be sniffed at. Having been appointed head coach of 2. Bundesliga side FC Erzgebirge Aue in March this year, he spared the Vielchen from relegation with 13 points from five games.

This led to him becoming Schalke coach, an appointment which has raised many eyebrows in the Bundesliga - however, with coaches such as Julian Nagelsmann and Heiko Herrlich also making the jump from 1899 Hoffenheim U19s and SSV Jahn Regensburg respectively, it seems as if Schalke are following the trend of hiring inexperienced yet ambitious young managers. Thus far in pre-season, it appears to be going well.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Schalke have lost a raft of players on free transfers, most notably their prized and versatile left-back Kolašinac to Arsenal and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting to Stoke City as well as Klaas-Jan Huntelaar. In addition, players such as Holger Badstuber and Abdul Baba Rahman's loan spells have ended meaning that they were in desperate need of signings.

In: There has not been a huge amount going on in terms of recruitment either, with only Nabil Bentaleb and Yevhen Konoplyanka representing the incomings - and they have only made their loans permanent. French youngster Amine Harit has arrived from Nantes for

around €8m, while young centre-half Pablo Insua has arrived from Deportivo La Coruña for €3.5m.

KEY PLAYER

Leon Goretzka: Their newly-appointed vice captain, stands out as the man to lift the team after a dull and somewhat damaging summer. In addition, he is arguably their best outfield player and his versatility makes him indispensable. While there are only a few weeks of the transfer window remaining, Schalke must fight tooth and nail to keep Goretzka after the likes of Bayern Munich and Arsenal have reportedly been circling in recent months.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Breel Embolo: After something of a quiet debut season, the departure of Huntelaar means this could be the year Embolo steps up as a key member of the team. His combination of pace and physicality makes him an impressive asset already, but if he can develop technically under the tutelage of Tedesco then Schalke will have a frightening talent on their hands.

EXPECTATIONS

As it stands, Schalke need to recruit. Their squad is something of a skeleton at present, but their contingent of young players may inject some vigour and youth into the team. However, this will not be anywhere near enough to see them reach the heights with which they have become acquainted over the last ten years. Expect to see them finish in a similar position to last season, probably in 10th again.

Matthew Cowdock.



VfB Stuttgart

Stadium: Mercedes-Benz Arena (60,469)

5 x Bundesliga winners; 2 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Hannes Wolf

VfB Stuttgart return to the Bundesliga at the first time of asking after a season spent rebuilding in 2. Bundesliga. An overhaul at boardroom and management level was undertaken in an attempt to reclaim their identity, die Schwaben set to reclaim their status as permanent Bundesliga residents with a host of talented youngsters.

HISTORY

Verein für Bewegungsspiele Stuttgart 1893 e. V. are one of Germany's oldest, biggest and most historically successful clubs. Founded in 1893 in Stuttgart in south-western Germany, Die Schwaben (The Swabians) have won three Bundesliga titles and three DFB Pokal's.

Stuttgart's youth academy has a proud and illustrious history, producing a long list of talent that have contributed to international and domestic success. VfB's 2006/07 Bundesliga triumph was built on home-grown talent including Timo Hildebrand, Serdar Tasci, Andreas Beck, Christian Gentner, Sami Khedira and Mario Gomez.

Following two miserable seasons flirting with relegation, Stuttgart finally went down in 2015/16 after conceding 75 goals and winning two of their final 13 games. It was just the second relegation in the club's history and first since 1975.

Relegation prompted a boardroom and management overhaul. Head coach Jürgen Kramny was predictably sacked with President Bernd Wahler and Sporting Director Robin Dutt both resigning. Jos Luhukay was installed as coach, Jan Schindelmeiser taking over the Sporting Director role with Wolfgang Dietrich elected President in October.

LAST SEASON

Despite losing important players such as Daniel Didavi, Filip Kostic, Timo Werner, Serey Die and Lukas Rupp, Stuttgart had a superior team to the majority of the 2. Bundesliga competition and were expected to be promoted at the first opportunity.

Luhukay sensationally resigned after just five games in charge, conflicting with Schindelmeiser, who signed Takuma Asano, Carlos Mané and Benjamin Pavard against the managers wishes. Schindelmeiser emerged victorious in the power struggle, saying: "I realised during our first meeting that it just does not fit." Luhukay's replacement was already lined up.

36-year-old Hannes Wolf was appointed as head coach after winning three consecutive German championships with the under-17 and under-19 teams at Borussia



Dortmund. Stuttgart won 18 of Wolf's 29 games in charge to top 2. Bundesliga, mostly down to 29-year-old striker and second division specialist Simon Terodde, who scored 25 goals.

Carlos Mané, Emiliano Insúa, Alexandru Maxim, Christian Gentner, Timo Baumgartl and Mitchell Langerak all played important roles in the successful campaign, buoyed on by a record setting attendance at the Mercedes-Benz Arena. An average attendance of over 50,000 was the most in 2. Bundesliga history, with 31,000 season tickets already sold by the Swabian club for the upcoming season – another record.

MANAGER

"We're firmly convinced Hannes Wolf really suits VfB Stuttgart as a football expert and as a person," said Sporting Director Jan Schindelmeiser after unveiling the young manager. Wolf's appointment followed the forward thinking approach at Hoffenheim where 30-year-old Julian Nagelsmann is enjoying tremendous success.

Schindelmeiser recognised the need to return to Stuttgart's roots, saying: "You could see that our problems had penetrated right through to the soul... It was about whether we were to take this club's DNA seriously or not." Known for nurturing young and talented players, Wolf is emblematic of a revolution in German football where young managers with fresh and innovative ideas are replacing an older brigade.

Wolf has justified the faith placed in him thus far, securing promotion and attracting a promising group of youngsters for the upcoming campaign. Stuttgart supporters are hoping the attack minded manager can bring some much needed stability to the club after a revolving door of managers during the past four seasons.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: The only notable departure has been Alexandru Maxim who requested a transfer and was sold to Mainz for €3 million. The 26-year-old attacking midfielder played an important role last season with five goals and

seven assists in 25 league appearances. Two sparingly used defenders departed, Toni Sunjic to Dinamo Moscow and Florian Klein released.

In: Stuttgart have scouted impressively across Europe and secured some up-and-coming youngsters. Versatile 22-year-old Congolese forward Chadrac Akolo joins from Swiss side FC Sion for €6m and 20-year-old Greek attacker Anastasios Donis signing from Juventus for €4m after some encouraging performances on loan at Nice.

22-year-old Brazilian left-back Ailton joins from Estoril for just €1a, while goalkeeper Ron-Robert Zieler was signed for just €4m after an unhappy season at Leicester City. Arsenal forward Takuma Asano rejoins Stuttgart on loan for another season.

Two 19-year-old central midfielders that played under Wolf at Borussia Dortmund youth levels supplement the squad, Belgian Orel Mangala from Anderlecht for €1.8m and Dzenis Burnic from Dortmund on loan. Expect more quality signings this summer.

KEY PLAYERS

Christian Gentner – Stuttgart's captain begins his 10th season at the Mercedes-Benz Arena, part of the 2006/07 Bundesliga winning team before spending three seasons at Wolfsburg where he collected another title. Returning to Swabia in 2010, the 31-year-old central midfielder will provide invaluable experience and leadership in a young squad.

Simon Terodde - The 29-year-old was signed from Bochum for €3M after top scoring with 25 Bundesliga 2 goals in 2015/16, the striker repeating the feat last season with another 25 goals for his new club. Terodde profited from Die Schwaben's wide players providing countless opportunities which he put away with lethal efficiency. An unproved quantity at Bundesliga level, only time will tell if he can make the step up.

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Anastasios Donis - The 20-year-old forward joined Juventus as a youngster with loan spells at Sassuolo, FC Lugano and Nice. Despite impressing with limited playing time at the Côte d'Azur club, Nice declined the option to buy with Stuttgart seizing the opportunity.

Recently making his international debut for Greece, the forward can play up front or as a second striker by utilising intelligent movement, excellent dribbling and passing abilities. He could prove to be an important player for Stuttgart this season.

EXPECTATIONS

VfB Stuttgart are expected to avoid relegation and build on the solid foundations laid by Schindelmeiser and Wolf. With a predominantly young and talented squad the faithful at the Mercedes-Benz Arena will expect nothing less, but competing in the Bundesliga might be trickier than anticipated. The performance in the DFB Pokal victory against Energie Cottbus on penalties was a reminder that there is much work to be done.

On August 4 Schindelmeiser was surprisingly dismissed with immediate effect. The reason became clear the following day as Bayern Munich's former technical director and scouting guru Michael Reschke was named Stuttgart's new sporting director. The Swabians have secured a highly experienced and talented man to oversee the recruitment process as they pursue long term success.

Questions have to be asked about a defence that conceded 37 goals last season. Wolf expressed the need to reinforce and tighten up, saying: "We still need players for the defence... we have to put a focus on the defence in this preparation." This will be Wolf's first experience at Bundesliga level as it will be for many of his players, another justified concern.

Schindelmeiser stamped his mark on the club but Reschke could be considered an upgrade. The lack of Bundesliga experience from Wolf and Terodde are legitimate concerns, as is the striker position, but VfB Stuttgart certainly appear to be on the right path after years of mismanagement and disappointment on the pitch.

Matthew Marshall.



VfL Wolfsburg

Stadium: Volkswagen Arena (30,000)

1 x German Championship; 1 x DFB Pokal. Head Coach: Andries Jonker

VfL Wolfsburg are relative newcomers to the Bundesliga, first promoted in 1997 and winning the title in 2008/09. Years of instability followed until Kevin de Bruyne inspired the Wolves to a second-place finish in 2014/15 with victories in the DFB Pokal and Supercup. Last season was a shocker however, manager Dieter Hecking and sporting director Klaus Allofs were sacked with Bundesliga survival eventually achieved through the playoffs.

HISTORY

Verein für Leibesübungen Wolfsburg originated in 1945 as a club set up for the Volkswagen workers that populated the city. Owned and run by the powerful Volkswagen Group, the Lower Saxony club play at the 30,000 capacity Volkswagen-Arena and have been Bundesliga regulars since their first promotion in 1997.

“Die Wölfe” (The Wolves) enjoyed their most successful period under Felix Magath, the autocrat appointed in July 2007 as CEO, sporting director and head coach. Wolfsburg flourished with a fifth place finish in 2007/08 and qualification for the UEFA Cup, but there was more to come from Magath.

Wolfsburg won the Bundesliga title in 2008/09, guided by strikers Grafite and Edin Džeko who scored an amazing 28 and 26 goals respectively. Magath believed he had fulfilled his mission at Wolfsburg and joined Schalke, departing with the prophetic statement: “This team is young and is bound to develop further in the future.”

It wasn't to be. A succession of management failures resulted in disappointment on the pitch until Hecking took charge in January 2013. Securing a fifth place finish in 2013/14, De Bruyne inspired the Wolves to a second place finish in 2014/15 and victories in the DFB Pokal and Supercup.

Despite De Bruyne's €74m move to Manchester City, the 2015/16 season started well for Wolfsburg who were third in December and topped their Champions League group. Defeating Real Madrid 2-0 in the quarter-final first leg at home was a high point, but Ronaldo's hat-trick in a 3-0 defeat in Spain ended their European campaign with an eighth place finish in the Bundesliga another disappointment.



LAST SEASON

An exodus of players left the Volkswagen-Arena last summer with Naldo, Dante, Max Kruse, André Schürrle and Bas Dost all departing. The majority of their replacements proved disappointing however, Hecking was sacked after seven games with Wolfsburg 14th in the Bundesliga. Valérien Ismaël took over but after just four wins in his first 16 games, sporting director Allofs paid the price and was also dismissed.

38-year-old Olaf Rebbe was promoted to sporting director in January, wasting little time in dismissing Ismaël who was sacked in February. Former Wolfsburg assistant manager and head of Arsenal's youth academy Andries Jonker was given the task of guiding the Wolves away from danger.

The Dutch manager's reign started well, but despite Mario Gomez banging in the goals, five defeats in the final eight matches including an electrifying 2-1 defeat at Hamburg on the final matchday consigned Wolfsburg to a relegation playoff. They defeated Eintracht Braunschweig 2-0 on aggregate to remain in the top flight, a happy end to a forgettable season.

MANAGER

54-year-old Jonker boasts a wealth of coaching experience at youth and assistant levels, serving as Netherlands youth coordinator from 1990-97 and as Louis van Gaal's assistant at Barcelona and Bayern Munich. Wolfsburg's assistant manager from 2012-14, his familiarity with the club was a factor in his appointment with Rebbe stating: “He is an internationally experienced coach and a proven tactician.”

Jonker's main task is to rebuild the confidence and belief in a squad which appeared mentally broken last season. Their fragility was cruelly exposed as Bayern Munich came to town on matchday 31 and destroyed the Wolves

6-0, Jonker telling Deutsche Welle: "They told me they haven't been sticking to the plans the coaches have proposed them in the past. I've told them, stop that. You can't work if you're not all committed to the plan."

Despite his vast experience, this is Jonker's second job managing a top flight team after an unspectacular 47 games in charge of Eredivisie strugglers Willem II from 2007-09. Jonker talks a good game, but his tenure and legacy at Arsenal was not universally applauded and the Dutchman has a long way to go before convincing he is the long term solution at Wolfsburg.

TRANSFER REVIEW

Out: Ricardo Rodriguez finally departed Wolfsburg after years of speculation, the versatile player joined AC Milan for €18m. Promising 20-year-old left-sided defender Jannes Horn was snapped up by Köln for €7m, midfield enforcer Luiz Gustavo leaving for Marseille for €10m.

Veteran Swiss goalkeeper Diego Benaglio moves to Monaco on a free transfer. The 33-year-old departs after making 259 Bundesliga appearances and most ever for Wolfsburg, but reached a deal to return to the club in a new role when he eventually retires.

In: John Anthony Brooks was signed from Hertha BSC for €17m, the 24-year-old Berlin born central defender becoming the most expensive American player in history. Ohis Felix Uduokhai adds depth to central defence with the promising 19-year-old Germany U20 international signed for just €1m from 1860 Munich.

Two right backs have been acquired, 22 year-old Brazilian William from Internacional for €5m and 33-year-old former Augsburg captain Paul Verhaegh signing a two-year deal. Luiz Gustavo was replaced by 27-year-old Ignacio Camacho, brought in from Málaga for €15m while 22-year-old left winger Marvin Stefaniak joins from Dynamo Dresden for €2m.

Two 19-year-old forwards were signed to boost the attack. England youth international Kaylen Hinds follows Jonker to Wolfsburg from Arsenal for an undisclosed fee and has scored three goals in five pre-season appearances, the Wolves also paid €10m for Congo DR born Belgian striker Nany Landry Dimata who scored 14 goals for Oostende last season.

KEY PLAYER

Mario Gomez: The 32-year-old striker scored 18 competitive goals last season, half the amount of the entire squad. A veteran of over 250 Bundesliga games, Gomez flourished after Jonker took charge, scoring 11 goals in Wolfsburg's final 13 matches and scoring in the play-off first leg against Eintracht Braunschweig.

Gomez had an option to leave Wolfsburg but chose to stay, saying: "I have complete confidence in our team, the club and the fans, and have therefore made the decision to play here next year. I feel very good here and believe the club can be successful." Expected to captain the side after the Benaglio's departure, Gomez is the undisputed leader on and off the pitch.

Jonker's plans for Gomez are quite clear, as he revealed to Deutsche Welle: "What I'm doing is trying to use his quality, so I'm trying to make him stay in the box. Don't go in the midfield, don't go to the outside, stay in the box and I try to give my players options how they can deliver the ball to him so he can make the goals."

U21 PLAYER TO WATCH

Nany Landry Dimata: The 19-year-old striker was born in the DR Congo but chose to represent Belgium for whom he has played from U17 level. Powerful and fast, Dimata has drawn comparisons with compatriots Romelu Lukaku and Christian Benteke, following in the footsteps of Vincent Kompany and Axel Witsel by winning the Pro League's Young Player of the Year award.

Bought for a respectable €10m, Dimata has solid positional sense, scoring 14 goals at Oostende last season with many of them close range headers. Sporting director Rebbe stated: "Nany is a young, versatile front man, whose potential to develop is something we have been paying great attention to for quite some time. He is quick and determined. He will definitely develop with us."

EXPECTATIONS

2016/17 couldn't have been much worse for Wolfsburg but Bundesliga survival was achieved. A fresh start for Jonker and Rebbe may be just what the doctor ordered at the Volkswagen-Arena, but Jonker's inexperience managing a top flight club is a concern while 39-year-old Rebbe is new to the sporting director role.

After riding on the back of Kevin De Bruyne's in 2014/15, Wolfsburg proved incapable of spending their substantial funds wisely and deteriorated on the pitch. Many players sunk to the levels of those around them, apparently infected with demoralisation and simply unable to recapture their form at previous clubs. One way or another, it's set to be an interesting season at VfL Wolfsburg.

Matthew Marshall.

N.B. All quotes are taken from the club's official website unless stated otherwise. Images are free to use under the Creative Commons and all stats have been taken from WhoScored.com and Transfermarkt.