

# Recruitment policies of big-5 league clubs from an age perspective

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## 1. Introduction

This Monthly Report compares the recruitment policies of big-5 league teams from the perspective of the age of players signed. The first part analyses the average age of recruitment of players currently in squads, both by league and by club. The second part studies the policies pursued over the past decade by the fifty clubs always present in the big-5 over this period.

The players from the clubs' youth academies or recruited without prior experience in adult teams were not included in the analysis. However, the latter includes both players signed on a permanent basis and those taken on loan. For players returning from loan, we have taken into account the age at the time of their initial recruitment. The same methodological choice was adopted for players recruited temporarily and subsequently signed permanently.

In total, of the 2,576 players of the 98 teams currently in the big-5, 2,214 match with the above mentioned recruitment criteria (category "recruited"), while the remaining 362 come from the training academies of the clubs they belong to or were signed without prior experience to adult clubs (category "trained"). The percentage of "recruited" players varies between 83.0% in the Spanish Liga and 89.9% in the Italian Serie A.

Figure 1: number and percentage of "recruited" players, current squads

	Players	Recruited	(%)
 Serie A (ITA)	556	500	89.9% 
 Premier League (ENG)	512	443	86.5% 
 Ligue 1 (FRA)	516	444	86.0% 
 Bundesliga (GER)	475	398	83.8% 
 La Liga (ESP)	517	429	83.0% 
Big-5 (Total)	2,576	2,214	85.9% 

## 2. Current squads

The average recruitment age of players currently present in the squads of big-5 league teams is 24.95 years of age. This average varies considerably between leagues: from 24.38 in the German Bundesliga, where clubs rely more on recruiting young talents, to 25.67 years of age in the Spanish Liga where, on the other hand, teams tend to target their external recruitment on more experienced footballers.






By age group, we notice that almost half of the “recruited” players currently present in the five principle European championships were signed between the ages of 22 and 25. This result indicates that big-5 league teams favour the signing of relatively young footballers, who nevertheless already have solid experience in professional football. With 10.6% of the total, the players aged 24 when they were signed make up the most represented age group.

The German Bundesliga clubs are the ones that recruit the fewest players aged 30 or over (8.3% of the total) and the most footballers aged 21 or younger (17.6%). Conversely, the teams of the Spanish Liga stand out by the high percentage of recruits aged 30 or older (16.1% as opposed to 11.8% for the big-5). On the other hand, the percentage of recruits aged 21 or younger is the lowest (12.6% as opposed to 15.4% for the big-5). With regard to this, however, it is useful to note that, compared to teams in the other big-5 leagues, Spanish clubs tend to rely relatively more on “trained” players promoted from their own youth academies.

Figure 2: average age of recruitment





















	Age
 Bundesliga (GER)	24.38
 Premier League (ENG)	24.79
 Serie A (ITA)	24.89
 Ligue 1 (FRA)	25.01
 La Liga (ESP)	25.67
Big-5 (Total)	24.95

Figure 3: distribution of “recruits” by age group




	≤21	22-25	26-29	≥30
 Bundesliga (GER)	17.6%	52.0%	22.1%	8.3%
 Premier League (ENG)	14.7%	53.7%	21.0%	10.6%
 Serie A (ITA)	16.6%	48.2%	23.4%	11.8%
 Ligue 1 (FRA)	15.8%	47.7%	24.5%	12.0%
 La Liga (ESP)	12.6%	43.6%	27.7%	16.1%
Big-5 (TOT)	15.4%	49.0%	23.8%	11.8%

Important differences in the recruitment age also exist at club level. In this case, the values vary between a minimum of 22.39 years of age for Stuttgart (19 “recruits” among current squad’s players) and 27.63 years of age for Ajaccio (25 “recruits”). Among the regular Champions League teams, Real Madrid focused its recruitment on the youngest players (22.70 years of age, second lowest value overall), while Sevilla has the opposite policy (27.55 years of age, second highest average).

**Figure 4: average recruitment age, by club**
**(a) Youngest**

		Number	Age	
1	 VfB Stuttgart (GER)	19	22.39	
2	 Real Madrid (ESP)	20	22.70	
3	 Bayer Leverkusen (GER)	23	22.73	
4	 RB Leipzig (GER)	21	22.92	
5	 Borussia M'gladbach (GER)	21	22.99	
6	 Arsenal FC (ENG)	19	23.04	
7	 VfL Wolfsburg (GER)	22	23.20	
8	 Torino FC (ITA)	23	23.26	
9	 Brighton & Hove (ENG)	20	23.27	
10	 Leeds United (ENG)	23	23.50	

**(b) Oldest**









		Number	Age	
1	 AC Ajaccio (FRA)	25	27.63	
2	 Sevilla FC (ESP)	24	27.55	
3	 Villarreal CF (ESP)	21	27.24	
4	 Real Valladolid (ESP)	22	26.89	
5	 VfL Bochum (GER)	26	26.81	
6	 Elche CF (ESP)	25	26.79	
7	 Rayo Vallecano (ESP)	25	26.64	
8	 Real Betis (ESP)	25	26.53	
9	 Cádiz CF (ESP)	28	26.50	
10	 Internazionale (ITA)	23	26.49	

The analysis of the percentage of players' recruitment by age group shows that Torino is the team with the highest proportion of players signed aged 21 or under, with 39.1 % of the total number of "recruits". This percentage accounts for at least a third for five other teams: Brighton & Hove, Real Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, Milan and Borussia M'gladbach. Conversely, eight big-5 league teams have not signed any player aged 21 or under.











Manchester City is notably among these teams. This may seem surprising insofar as the English club is very active in scouting young talents. However, often signed when aged just 16 or 17, the latter generally make up part of Manchester City's youth teams, with the majority of them being further transferred to other clubs to gain professional experience, and the minority being integrated into the first team squad with the status of "trained" players.

**Figure 5: % of recruitment of players aged 21 or under**

(a) Highest %

		Number	%	
1	 Torino FC (ITA)	9	39.1%	<div></div>
2	 Real Madrid (ESP)	7	35.0%	<div></div>
.	 Brighton & Hove (ENG)	7	35.0%	<div></div>
4	 Bayer Leverkusen (GER)	8	34.8%	<div></div>
5	 Borussia M'gladbach (GER)	7	33.3%	<div></div>
.	 Milan AC (ITA)	9	33.3%	<div></div>
7	 LOSC Lille (FRA)	7	31.8%	<div></div>
8	 VfB Stuttgart (GER)	6	31.6%	<div></div>
9	 Werder Bremen (GER)	6	30.0%	<div></div>
10	 OGC Nice (FRA)	8	29.6%	<div></div>

(b) Lowest %

		Number	%	
1	 Cádiz CF (ESP)	0	0.0%	
.	 VfL Bochum (GER)	0	0.0%	
.	 Fulham FC (ENG)	0	0.0%	
.	 RC Lens (FRA)	0	0.0%	
.	 West Ham United (ENG)	0	0.0%	
.	 Manchester City (ENG)	0	0.0%	
.	 RCD Espanyol (ESP)	0	0.0%	
.	 FSV Mainz 05 (GER)	0	0.0%	
9	 US Salernitana (ITA)	1	3.6%	<div></div>
10	 Union Berlin (GER)	1	3.7%	<div></div>

### 3. Transfers from the past decade

This part analyses all the recruitments carried out since the 2013/14 season by the fifty teams always present in the big-5 during this period: twelve Italian, ten English, ten German, nine French and nine Spanish. Globally, no less than 3,788 recruitments make up part of the sample analysed: from 123 for the Andalusians of Sevilla and 35 for the Basques of Athletic Club.

Apart from Sevilla, three other clubs were particularly active on the transfer market having signed more than 100 footballers over the past decade: Sampdoria (121), Fiorentina (109) and Torino (102). Conversely, Manchester City (41), Real Madrid (43), Manchester United (47) and Borussia M'gladbach (48) are the only teams alongside Athletic Club having recruited less than 50 footballers over the same time period.

At the level of the average recruitment age, the lowest values were recorded for Real Madrid (22.87 years of age), followed by two German clubs (Borussia M'gladbach and Borussia Dortmund) and two teams from the French Ligue 1 (OGC Nice and LOSC Lille). As for the other championships studied, the clubs that targeted the most their recruitment of young players are Liverpool in England (16<sup>th</sup> overall) and Sassuolo in Italy (18<sup>th</sup>).

At the other end of the scale, three English teams (Chelsea, West Ham and Manchester United) and two Italian ones (Inter and Milan) figure in the top five of clubs having signed, on average, the oldest players. Paris St-Germain (eleventh) is the French team having the most targeted its recruitment on experienced players, while Hertha BSC (29<sup>th</sup> overall) are in an equivalent situation for the German Bundesliga.

Figure 6 : number of "recruited" players (2013-2022)

Sevilla FC (ESP)	123	VfL Wolfsburg (GER)	75
Sampdoria UC (ITA)	121	Everton FC (ENG)	73
ACF Fiorentina (ITA)	109	Juventus FC (ITA)	73
Torino FC (ITA)	102	FC Barcelona (ESP)	73
Udinese Calcio (ITA)	98	TSG Hoffenheim (GER)	69
Eintr. Frankfurt (GER)	98	SS Lazio (ITA)	68
AS Monaco (FRA)	98	SSC Napoli (ITA)	68
AS Roma (ITA)	95	Montpellier HSC (FRA)	68
Milan AC (ITA)	94	Atlético Madrid (ESP)	66
Villarreal CF (ESP)	92	Olymp. Lyonnais (FRA)	65
Valencia CF (ESP)	92	Hertha BSC (GER)	64
OGC Nice (FRA)	92	Chelsea FC (ENG)	59
Atalanta BC (ITA)	91	Southampton FC (ENG)	59
Stade Rennais (FRA)	90	Bayer Leverkusen (GER)	58
FSV Mainz 05 (GER)	89	Real Sociedad (ESP)	56
West Ham United (ENG)	88	Liverpool FC (ENG)	55
Olymp. Marseille (FRA)	88	Paris St-Germain (FRA)	53
Internazionale (ITA)	87	Bayern München (GER)	53
LOSC Lille (FRA)	87	Arsenal FC (ENG)	52
Celta Vigo (ESP)	86	Tottenham (ENG)	51
Crystal Palace (ENG)	85	Bor. M'gladbach (GER)	48
FC Augsburg (GER)	82	Manchester Utd (ENG)	47
US Sassuolo (ITA)	78	Real Madrid (ESP)	43
Bor. Dortmund (GER)	76	Manchester City (ENG)	41
FC Nantes (FRA)	75	Athletic Club (ESP)	35

Figure 6 : average age of "recruited" players (2013-2022)

Real Madrid (ESP)	22.87	Stade Rennais (FRA)	24.88
Bor. M'gladbach (GER)	23.36	Olymp. Marseille (FRA)	25.08
Bor. Dortmund (GER)	23.57	Arsenal FC (ENG)	25.10
OGC Nice (FRA)	23.73	FC Nantes (FRA)	25.14
LOSC Lille (FRA)	23.88	Atalanta BC (ITA)	25.26
Real Sociedad (ESP)	23.90	Udinese Calcio (ITA)	25.31
VfL Wolfsburg (GER)	24.12	Villarreal CF (ESP)	25.38
Bayer Leverkusen (GER)	24.14	Sevilla FC (ESP)	25.43
AS Monaco (FRA)	24.22	Torino FC (ITA)	25.45
Bayern München (GER)	24.26	Sampdoria UC (ITA)	25.49
FC Augsburg (GER)	24.37	Juventus FC (ITA)	25.50
TSG Hoffenheim (GER)	24.44	SSC Napoli (ITA)	25.67
FC Barcelona (ESP)	24.48	AS Roma (ITA)	25.79
Valencia CF (ESP)	24.57	Paris St-Germain (FRA)	25.93
FSV Mainz 05 (GER)	24.60	Manchester City (ENG)	25.93
Liverpool FC (ENG)	24.65	Crystal Palace (ENG)	25.94
Tottenham (ENG)	24.69	SS Lazio (ITA)	25.95
US Sassuolo (ITA)	24.71	Everton FC (ENG)	25.99
Celta Vigo (ESP)	24.72	ACF Fiorentina (ITA)	26.03
Eintr. Frankfurt (GER)	24.73	Atlético Madrid (ESP)	26.04
Southampton FC (ENG)	24.77	Milan AC (ITA)	26.14
Hertha BSC (GER)	24.78	Manchester Utd (ENG)	26.17
Olymp. Lyonnais (FRA)	24.84	West Ham United (ENG)	26.41
Athletic Club (ESP)	24.86	Internazionale (ITA)	26.44
Montpellier HSC (FRA)	24.88	Chelsea FC (ENG)	26.71

The analysis of the percentage of signings by age group shows that LOSC Lille has adopted a recruitment policy particularly geared towards very young players: 34.5% of the 87 footballers signed over the past decade were aged 21 or under at time of their transfer. Conversely, we find Athletic Club (2.9%). The Basques privilege the in-house development of “trained” players and the external recruitment of an otherwise limited number of experienced footballers.

Four teams stand out when it comes to the percentage of players recruited aged 30 or over: Manchester United (23.5%), Milan (23.4%), Inter (23.0%) as well as Chelsea (20.3%). On the other hand, one other wealthy team, the most victorious in the Champions League over the decade studied, Real Madrid, did not recruit any player over the age of 29 during this period. It is the only club in this specific case among the fifty analysed.

**Figure 8 : % of players recruited aged 21 or under**

LOSC Lille (FRA)	34.5%	Villarreal CF (ESP)	14.1%
AS Monaco (FRA)	29.6%	Torino FC (ITA)	13.7%
Bayer Leverkusen (GER)	27.6%	Arsenal FC (ENG)	13.5%
Bor. Dortmund (GER)	26.3%	SS Lazio (ITA)	13.2%
Olymp. Marseille (FRA)	25.0%	Atalanta BC (ITA)	13.2%
OGC Nice (FRA)	25.0%	Sevilla FC (ESP)	12.2%
Bor. M'gladbach (GER)	25.0%	ACF Fiorentina (ITA)	11.9%
Bayern München (GER)	22.6%	AS Roma (ITA)	11.6%
Udinese Calcio (ITA)	22.4%	Internazionale (ITA)	11.5%
Liverpool FC (ENG)	21.8%	Everton FC (ENG)	11.0%
FC Augsburg (GER)	20.7%	Juventus FC (ITA)	11.0%
Valencia CF (ESP)	19.6%	Manchester Utd (ENG)	10.6%
FC Barcelona (ESP)	19.2%	Celta Vigo (ESP)	10.5%
Montpellier HSC (FRA)	19.1%	Chelsea FC (ENG)	10.2%
Stade Rennais (FRA)	18.9%	Southampton FC (ENG)	10.2%
VfL Wolfsburg (GER)	18.7%	FSV Mainz 05 (GER)	10.1%
Real Madrid (ESP)	18.6%	Manchester City (ENG)	9.8%
Olymp. Lyonnais (FRA)	18.5%	Crystal Palace (ENG)	9.4%
TSG Hoffenheim (GER)	17.4%	Atlético Madrid (ESP)	9.1%
US Sassuolo (ITA)	16.7%	SSC Napoli (ITA)	8.8%
Sampdoria UC (ITA)	16.5%	West Ham United (ENG)	8.0%
Eintr. Frankfurt (GER)	16.3%	FC Nantes (FRA)	8.0%
Paris St-Germain (FRA)	15.1%	Hertha BSC (GER)	7.8%
Milan AC (ITA)	14.9%	Tottenham (ENG)	7.8%
Real Sociedad (ESP)	14.3%	Athletic Club (ESP)	2.9%

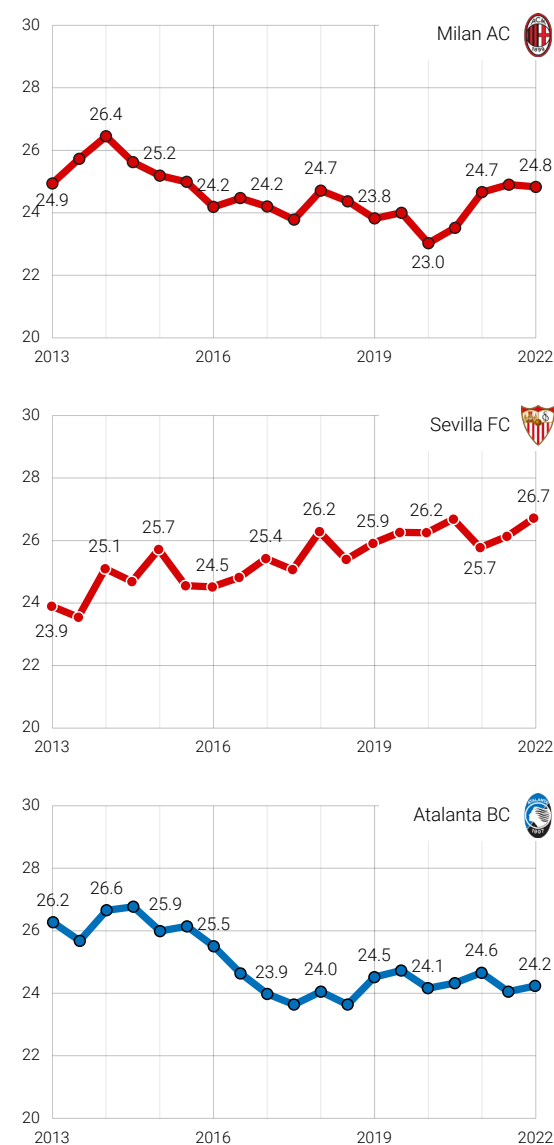
**Figure 9 : % of players recruited aged 30 or over**

Manchester Utd (ENG)	23.5%	Bayern München (GER)	13.2%
Milan AC (ITA)	23.4%	AS Monaco (FRA)	13.2%
Internazionale (ITA)	23.0%	Atalanta BC (ITA)	13.1%
Chelsea FC (ENG)	20.3%	FC Augsburg (GER)	12.2%
Atlético Madrid (ESP)	19.7%	Tottenham (ENG)	11.8%
Udinese Calcio (ITA)	19.5%	Arsenal FC (ENG)	11.5%
West Ham United (ENG)	19.3%	Stade Rennais (FRA)	11.1%
SS Lazio (ITA)	19.1%	Liverpool FC (ENG)	10.9%
Torino FC (ITA)	18.6%	OGC Nice (FRA)	9.8%
ACF Fiorentina (ITA)	18.4%	VfL Wolfsburg (GER)	9.3%
Olymp. Lyonnais (FRA)	18.4%	Montpellier HSC (FRA)	8.9%
US Sassuolo (ITA)	18.0%	Valencia CF (ESP)	8.7%
AS Roma (ITA)	17.9%	Bayer Leverkusen (GER)	8.6%
Villarreal CF (ESP)	17.5%	Hertha BSC (GER)	7.8%
Crystal Palace (ENG)	16.5%	Sevilla FC (ESP)	7.3%
Everton FC (ENG)	16.4%	TSG Hoffenheim (GER)	7.2%
Sampdoria UC (ITA)	14.9%	Southampton FC (ENG)	6.8%
SSC Napoli (ITA)	14.7%	Bor. Dortmund (GER)	6.6%
Manchester City (ENG)	14.6%	FC Nantes (FRA)	6.6%
LOSC Lille (FRA)	13.8%	Celta Vigo (ESP)	5.8%
FC Barcelona (ESP)	13.7%	FSV Mainz 05 (GER)	5.7%
Juventus FC (ITA)	13.6%	Real Sociedad (ESP)	5.3%
Olymp. Marseille (FRA)	13.6%	Bor. M'gladbach (GER)	4.2%
Eintr. Frankfurt (GER)	13.3%	Athletic Club (ESP)	2.8%
Paris St-Germain (FRA)	13.2%	Real Madrid (ESP)	0.0%

A finer temporal analysis, taking into account the evolution of the average age of players signed during the last six transfer windows (winter and summer), allows us to highlight the different policy trajectories adopted by clubs. In Italy, for example, the case of Milan is particularly interesting. At the beginning of the 2014/15 season, the average recruitment age of players signed during the last six transfer windows (winter 2011 to summer 2014) was of over 26 years (26.45). It then dropped to 23 years for the period 2017 to 2020 and risen again to almost 25 years of age between 2019 and 2022.

The case of Sevilla is also very interesting in terms of changes in recruitment policies, with a progressive increase in the average age of players signed: from 23.5 years of age between 2010 and 2013 to a record high of 26.7 years of age between 2019 and 2022. The curve of another club having enjoyed considerable success over the decade studied, Atalanta, has a quite different shape when compared to Sevilla, with the age of players signed getting progressively younger.

**Figure 8 : average recruitment age over the past six transfer windows (2013- 2022)**



## 4. Conclusion

The vast majority of squads of teams in the five major European championships are made up of players recruited from other clubs (85.9%). Thus, at present, big-5 league teams only have 326 players from their youth academies (3.3 per club on average). This statistic shows the importance of having recourse to the transfer market in the composition strategies for squads.

In terms of players' age of recruitment, the analysis reveals the existence of specific cases. German clubs stand out by their propensity to recruit young footballers (24.4 years of age on average), while the Spanish teams, by the way more inclined to give opportunities to talents from their own youth academies, are noteworthy by a greater tendency to transfer more experienced players (25.7 years of age on average).

The case of Real Madrid goes against the general Spanish trend. The Champions League title holders are, indeed, the only team among the fifty always present in the big-5 since 2013/14 not having signed a single player aged 30 or over during the last decade. The Madrid team also has the youngest average recruitment age over the past decade (22.87 years of age). Chelsea, on the other hand, are to be found at the opposite end (26.71 years of age).