

The EPL at 25

The English Premier League will kick off its 25th season this week, with competition for the title fiercer than ever. Here are the teams who will define the season, as they seek the elusive edge to land the ultimate prize come May.

2017-18 club preview: Arsenal

Gunning for a long-overdue league trophy

Focus is on EPL with no Champions League action, but doubts remain over Sanchez, Ozil

LONDON • Despite winning a third FA Cup in four years last season and the Community Shield on Sunday, there remains an air of unease around Arsenal heading into the new Premier League campaign.

Even their usual dominance in north London has been turned on its head, with rivals Tottenham Hotspur finishing above them last season for the first time in 22 years.

Arsenal fans were split on whether Arsene Wenger deserved a new two-year contract with the club in May, with the FA Cup final triumph over Chelsea the clincher.

But, though many fans will lament the absence of Champions League football this season for the first time in two decades, recent history indicates it may be the break they need to mount their most serious title challenge since they last lifted the trophy in 2004.

The previous two English champions, Leicester City and Chelsea, were unburdened by the pressure of European football.

Arsenal will be competing in the Europa League but will surely be tempted to give their younger players that stage to prove their worth.

In China recently, chief executive Ivan Gazidis spoke about how Arsenal were committed to letting their youngsters flourish.

"At Arsenal we're very much driven by our values, like giving

young people a chance," he said. Rest and recuperation for first-team regulars will be important too, especially given Arsenal's frequent injury issues.

The question whether Arsenal have strengthened enough is a difficult one to answer, with a fair amount of potential transfer activity still unresolved.

Perhaps, helped by canny acquisitions such as French forward Alexandre Lacazette and Bosnian left-back Sead Kolasinac, Arsenal can steal a march on their rivals.

Wenger proved last season, particularly in the 2-1 victory over Chelsea in the FA Cup final in May, that he is still a master tactician.

Knowledge such as his does not simply evaporate and, if he is heading into his final years at the club, he is not the type to leave meekly.

However, whether or not Arsenal will be in the title reckoning come next May could depend on what happens in the next few weeks.

Despite repeated assurances from Wenger that Mesut Ozil and Alexis Sanchez will be staying, the duo have still not signed new contracts. Their current deals expire next year.

Sanchez has been linked with a move to Manchester City and would be the bigger loss in a potential title challenge.

The Chilean scored 24 goals in

Olivier Giroud (third from left) celebrating with his team-mates after scoring the winning penalty for Arsenal in a shoot-out following the 1-1 draw with Chelsea in the Community Shield on Sunday. PHOTO: EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY



the league last season, and provided 11 assists. He also attempted the most shots in the whole team, with 129.

Were Sanchez to leave, it would undoubtedly be for a hefty sum which could help secure the services of Monaco's young attacker Thomas Lemar, who has been linked with a move to the Emirates.

There is a common theme to many of Arsenal's silly season stories this summer. The majority of players linked with a move in, out or a contractual shake-about are attack-minded.

Add Danny Welbeck, Theo Walcott, Alex Iwobi and Ozil, and Arsenal are currently overstaffed in forward positions.

What all this masks is the area of

the team that is arguably most in need of boosting. There were issues in central midfield last season, which settled only when Granit Xhaka and Aaron Ramsey got a sustained run together.

But, with the much-missed sophistication of Santi Cazorla, ongoing doubts about Jack Wilshere, and Francis Coquelin and Mohamed El-neny providing useful backup without ever looking like world beaters, it does seem that a powerful signing in the midfield heartland should be a matter of priority.

Tactically, Arsenal look set to continue with the back three who Wenger introduced late last season, a formation that made the whole team look more balanced and resilient.

Kolasinac offers a blend of physical presence and a keen eye for carving the game open high up the pitch. He promises to add qualities to match Hector Bellerin or Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain on the opposite flank.

The shape and potential of Arsenal going forward does feel strongly linked to whether new man Lacazette will be used in tandem with Sanchez or as a replacement should the worst happen.

One season out of the Champions League may be too much for 28-year-old Sanchez.

However, the rest of the squad, with their average age of 26, may find it is the ideal time to upset the odds.

REUTERS, THE GUARDIAN

TRANSFERS

IN
 • Sead Kolasinac (Schalke): Free
 • Alexandre Lacazette (Lyon): £46 million (\$\$81.8 million)

OUT
 • Wojciech Szczesny (Juventus): £10 million
 • Kaylen Hinds (Wolfsburg): £2 million
 • Dan Crowley (Willem II): undisclosed fee
 • Takuma Asano (Stuttgart): on loan
 • Marc Bola (Bristol Rovers): on loan
 • Emiliano Martinez (Getafe): on loan
 • Yaya Sanogo (Toulouse): Free
 • Chris Willock: released

KEY FIXTURES

- Aug 27: Liverpool (away)
- Sept 17: Chelsea (a)
- Oct 21: Everton (a)
- Nov 5: Man City (a)
- Nov 18: Tottenham (home)
- Dec 2: Man United (h)
- Dec 23: Liverpool (h)
- Jan 1: Chelsea (h)
- Feb 3: Everton (h)
- Feb 10: Tottenham (a)
- Feb 24: Man City (h)
- April 28: Man United (a)

Fan view

It's time for another 'Invincibles' season

Dhanesh Jagwani, 41, regional sales manager, president of Arsenal Singapore Club

Q Who will be the key player for your team in the new Premier League season?

A It goes without saying, Alexis Sanchez. He is a beast, a true animal. His work rate is unquestionable. He gives 100 per cent every game. Fans applaud his attitude

and his team-mates admire him for it. He is a winner, no doubt about it.

Q Would you rather Arsenal win the Europa League or finish in the top four of the Premier League?

A Every Arsenal fan would want his beloved team to become Premier League champions. To do that, Arsenal have to be consistent week in, week out. Players must give their all in every game. We last won in 2003-04, the "Invincibles" season.

It's our time to be league champions again.

Q The Premier League has reached its 25th season. What were your favourite moments in the last 25 years?

A Every Arsenal fan would cherish the "Invincibles" season. Other favourite moments include (manager Arsene) Wenger's first double in 1997-98, Ian Wright becoming the all-time highest scorer in 1998,

then Thierry Henry overtaking Wright. And signing Arsenal legends like Henry, Dennis Bergkamp, Robert Pires, Jens Lehmann and many more. Wenger completely revolutionised the free-flowing football from 1996 that is now recognised as the beautiful football played by Arsenal.

LIVEVIEWING

Five Square Bar, 1 Pickering Street, #01-03



PHOTO COURTESY OF DHANESH JAGWANI

Ben settling in well at Fulham's academy

Nicholas De Silva

It has barely been a month into his Fulham stint but national youth footballer Ben Davis has quickly found his feet and scoring touch with two goals notched up in pre-season.

The 16-year-old midfielder, a former Singapore Sports School (SSP) student, admitted that it was difficult in the beginning as he came to grips with the nature of the English game.

He said: "They (English players) know how to use their physicality well to win the ball and not just (through) fouling."

The 1.72m, 60kg teenager may lack the physical strength now, but he showed his goal-scoring ability with a brace against Portuguese club Boavista Under-19s in a 4-1 pre-season friendly win in Portugal last month.

He earned a two-year academy scholarship with the English Championship side after impressing in trials and pointed to the example of

Ryan Sessegnon, another Fulham scholarship recipient.

The 17-year-old England U-19 left-back signed his first professional Fulham contract in June.

Ben, who stays with a foster family in London about five minutes away from Fulham's training ground, said: "I hope to earn a professional contract and eventually play for the first team in the Championship or the Premier League Under-23 teams."

He will feature for Fulham's U-18 team in the upcoming Premier League U-18 season where they will compete against academy sides from top clubs like Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea.

Ben was born in Thailand, moved to Singapore with his family when he was five and gained citizenship in 2009. He studied at the SSP from 2013-2015 before moving to Harrow High School in London last year.

He was in Singapore yesterday on a one-day trip to complete his pre-enlistment National Service medical check-up, required for an



Fulham academy scholar and ex-Singapore Sports School student Ben Davis was in town to finish his pre-enlistment National Service medical check-up yesterday. The 16-year-old midfielder has his sights set on breaking into the first team of English Championship side Fulham. PHOTO: GIN TAY FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

application for deferment.

Having been recalled to the National Football Academy (NFA) U-18 team for the Asian Football Confederation U-18 Championship qualifiers in October, Ben was thrilled to be donning national colours after a two-year absence.

He last played for the NFA U-16 team at the AFC U-16 Championship qualifiers in 2015.

He said: "I want to play for Singapore because I've lived here almost all my life."

ndesilva@sph.com.sg

LOTTERY

TOTO Mon, 7 Aug 2017 Draw No. 3290/2017
 Group 1 Prize \$1,110,516

Winning Numbers: 05 17 34 40 42 46 22

Prize Group	Share Amount	No. of Winning Shares
Group 1	\$555,258	2
Group 2	\$77,931	3
Group 3	\$2,115	76
Group 4	\$374	235
Group 5	\$50	4,080
Group 6	\$25	5,672
Group 7	\$10	75,485

Group 1 prize and total share amount for Group 1 may differ due to rounding.

Next Draw Thu, 10 Aug 2017 Draw No. 3291/2017
 Group 1 Prize **\$1,000,000** est.

Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS

Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Wed, 9 Aug 2017				
UE Super Cup	Real Madrid	Manchester Utd	2.45am	LW

Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.
 LW: LiveWire (MBS) & LiveWire (RWS) (21 years and above)
 LiveWire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during 'Live' telecast)
 SB: SportsBuzzer@Kranji (18 years and above)
 Singapore Pools Account Service. Call 6786 6688 for more details.

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