

## Sports

# Data, tracking technology 'very important' for young coaches

PARIS: Player tracking and live data in football offer tactical boosts to coaches, with incoming Bayern Munich boss Julian Nagelsmann saying modern technology is "very important". Teams are using technology which transmits data immediately to a computer screen with players' positions shown by colored dots, much like fans would have seen on television coverage.

Coaches and club staff can see different live data, including by using a microchip inside the ball, to discover the distance of passes played, the speed of passes, and size of the average gap between defenders. "I think data is a big topic, and will become bigger in the future," said Nagelsmann, who is leaving RB Leipzig to take over at six-time European champions Bayern at the end of the season. The 33-year-old was speaking over video call during the official announcement of FIFA's new partnership with football data company Kinexon.

"To control things by data is important, to control the efforts of the guys and the training is still a big topic for me, but in the future it will become more important to control the tactics for a young manager like me," he added. "Because of the tracking possibility for the ball, it's important to try to improve the tactical things. It's important to learn what is a ball-winning moment, what is a ball-losing moment, what is a counter-pressing (moment), what is a counter-attack (moment)."

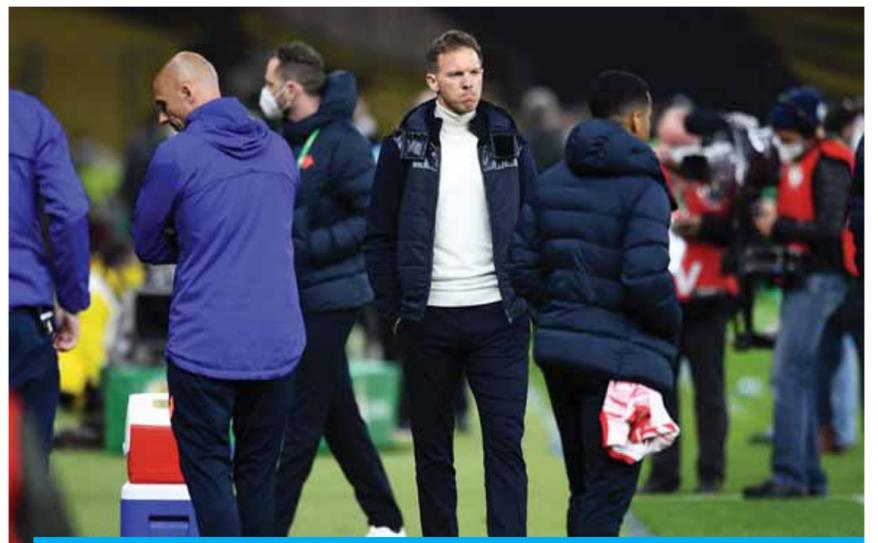
Netherlands defender Dominique Janssen said

tracking technology showed how her team pressed better than their rivals when they claimed a shock title at the women's Euro 2017. "About the pressing part, after the Euro, we had a few statistics from the coaches and they also showed that we were being really compact and that also was what made us successful compared to other teams," she said. "It can help tactically to be better if you see those things on the screen."

But the 26-year-old Wolfsburg player admits that you "cannot substitute the human part with data". "You need explanations if you're not in the starting XI," Janssen said, pointing out that human interaction in football will always be crucial.

"Obviously we won't replace that human factor, we can bring things together, we can give you information, but of course at the end, data won't win the game," agrees the head of research at FIFA, Nicholas Evans. Like most clubs in Europe's biggest leagues, Bundesliga side Hoffenheim have used such technology for several seasons.

"Having the live data gives you an idea of how a player should work in training. And in a match, (that) immediately gives us the opportunity to react," Sascha Haertel, the performance scientist at the German team, told AFP. Kinexon co-founder Maximilian Schmidt said the technology can cost a club between 25,000 euros (\$30,379) and 75,000 euros per season "depending on the scope of the services offered". — AFP



BERLIN: Leipzig's German headcoach Julian Nagelsmann reacts after the German Cup (DFB Pokal) final football match RB Leipzig v BVB Borussia Dortmund, in Berlin on May 13, 2021. — AFP

## Veteran Modric to lead Croatia at Euro 2020

ZAGREB: Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic named a 26-man squad for Euro 2020 on Monday, comprising players who won silver at the 2018 World Cup and their younger peers and led by veteran Luka Modric. "Our latest results were not the best, but I'm an optimist. Our first goal is to get out of the group," Dalic told reporters.

Croatia have been drawn in Group D, and will play England in London on June 13. Dalic described that opening match as the toughest in the group stage as England "have good quality and we play at Wembley". Croatia then travel to Glasgow where they will face the Czech Republic on June 18 and Scotland four days later. "We have difficult opponents, but I believe in us. We are at our best when the going gets tough," Dalic said.

Captain Modric, 35, is among several players who took part in Croatia's wonderful run at the World Cup in Russia in 2018 where they beat England in the semi-final before losing 4-2 to France in the final. That group of experienced players includes defenders Domagoj Vida, Dejan Lovren and Sime Vrsaljko, midfielders Mateo Kovacic, Marcelo Brozovic and Milan

Badelj as well as attackers Ivan Perisic, Andrej Kramaric and Ante Rebic.

While expectations from the team at home are high, Dalic is cautious. "The bar is set too high, our ambitions are not realistic," he said in an interview with Sportske Novosti daily Monday. "We are still among the 10 strongest (teams) in Europe, but there are many candidates for the throne who are ahead of us."

Young players like midfielder Nikola Vlasic, forward Josip Brekalo and goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic bring a new energy, but they need time to reach their maximum, he said. Dalic's squad includes also uncapped 19-year-old Dinamo Zagreb defender Josko Gvardiol. The squad includes a stand-by list of eight players. It must be officially declared to UEFA by June 1 at the latest. — AFP



LONDON: In this file photo taken on May 16, 2021 Crystal Palace's English manager Roy Hodgson arrives for the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Aston Villa at Selhurst Park in south London. — AFP

## Hodgson to step down as Palace boss at season's end

LONDON: Roy Hodgson is to step down as Crystal Palace manager at the end of the season, the club announced yesterday. The 73-year-old will bring the curtain down on his four-year spell at his boyhood club against one of his former sides, Liverpool, on Sunday. The former England manager's contract was due to expire in the close season after another campaign in which he maintained Palace's Premier League status.

"After more than 45 years of coaching, I have decided that the time is right for me to step away from the rigors of top-flight Premier League football," Hodgson said in a statement. "So our final two matches will be my last ones as manager of Crystal Palace. It's been a particularly rewarding period of my football life and career to have been able to spend these last four seasons with Palace."

Former Chelsea manager Frank Lampard has been mentioned in the media as a potential replacement for Hodgson at Palace. Palace fans will recall Hodgson's first season in charge with particular affection. He was appointed early in the 2017-18 campaign, Palace were pointless and had failed to score during their opening four league games after a disastrous start to life under Frank De Boer.

The former Inter Milan and Switzerland manager looked to have an insurmountable task when the Eagles lost their first three games under him. However, he engineered an astonishing revival which saw them preserve their elite status, eventually finishing 11th in the table. It was the first time in Premier League history a team had stayed up in the top flight after losing their first seven games (itself a Premier League record).

### 'Give us stability'

They are presently enjoying their longest consecutive spell in the top flight — they have been in the EPL since the 2013/14 season. "It has been an absolute privilege and pleasure to work alongside Roy, who is both a magnificent human and an outstanding football manager," said Palace chairman Steve Parrish. "I know how much it has meant to Roy managing the club he supported as a child. His record with us simply cannot be overstated, he is the only Palace manager to secure four years in the Premier League and he has helped give us stability in the most turbulent of times."

Hodgson is a much respected coach despite low points with Liverpool and ultimately England. He resigned after England lost to minnows Iceland in the Last 16 clash at Euro 2016 — following a first round exit at the 2014 World Cup. However, he has worked wonders with mid-level teams.

He built his reputation firstly with Malmo in Sweden and then taking Switzerland to the 1994 World Cup and Euro 96. After a rebuilding job with Inter Milan and further league title glory with Copenhagen, Fulham offered Hodgson the chance to boost his reputation in England in 2007 and he enjoyed a memorable three years there taking them to the 2010 Europa League final.

Another successful survival battle at West Brom secured him the England job when Fabio Capello walked out prior to Euro 2012. The England job was expected to be his last but the temptation to manage a club so close to his heart proved too much. He departs Palace with the record of being the oldest person to ever manage in the Premier League. — AFP

## Mancini names pre-Euro 2020 friendly squad

ROME: Italy coach Roberto Mancini on Monday named a 33-man squad for a pre-Euro 2020 friendly with San Marino after signing a new deal with the national team that runs until June 2026. The 'Azzurri' face San Marino on May 28 in the Sardinian city of Cagliari in one of their final two tests before kicking off the European Championship against Turkey in Rome on June 11.

They will then face the Czech Republic in Bologna on June 4, by which time Mancini will have named his 26-man squad for the continent-wide tournament. Mancini gave Sassuolo forward Giacomo Raspadori his first senior call-up, while Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Marco Verratti has been selected despite picking up a knee injury that could yet rule him out of the Euro.

Veteran Juventus defenders Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci are also included. Former Italy forward Mancini's new deal will keep him as coach until after the 2026 World Cup, being held in the USA, Canada and Mexico. He took over in May 2018 and was charged with helping his country forget the humiliation of failing to qualify for that year's World Cup.

Mancini, 56, has led Italy to qualification for Euro 2020 and the Nations League semi-finals, and has also claimed three wins from as many 2022 World Cup qualifiers. He coached Italy to 11 straight wins in 2019, breaking a record that had stood since the 1930s.

"I'm very happy... we want to continue a job that has started to bear fruit. In the next year we will have the Euro, the Nations League finals and the World Cup," said Mancini. "The goal is to win knowing that it won't be easy and that we will need a bit of luck." — AFP



Roberto Mancini

## Kane wants to leave Spurs: Reports

LONDON: Tottenham striker Harry Kane has told the club he wants to leave at the end of the season, according to reports on Monday. Kane is unhappy at Tottenham's lack of progress this season and is willing to leave after 12 years with the north London side, according to Sky Sports.

The England captain reportedly wants his future resolved before the delayed Euro 2020 starts on June 11. Kane's contract with Tottenham has another three years to run and chairman Daniel Levy is known to be a tough negotiator, which could ruin the 27-year-old's hopes of a quick resolution.

Tottenham refused to be drawn into debating Kane's future in public as they focus on their final two Premier League games, with Europa League qualification in their sights. "We won't be commenting - our focus is on finishing the season as strongly as possible. That's what everyone should be focused on," a club spokesman said.



LONDON: In this file photo taken on March 4, 2021 Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane reacts during the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Tottenham Hotspur at Craven Cottage in London. — AFP

## Martinez targets trophy as he names Belgium's Euro 2020 squad

BRUSSELS: Belgium coach Roberto Martinez said his target was to lift the trophy as he named a 26-strong squad for Euro 2020 on Monday. Former Everton boss Martinez however said he felt England would be favorites for the tournament but was planning to scupper Gareth Southgate's men as was the case in the 2018 World Cup's third-place play off. "We are stronger than we were at the last World Cup," Martinez told television channel RTBF. "Many of our players have more experience at the top level now."

"England have a superb generation of young players and will have home advantage for most of their matches especially if there are fans," Martinez added.

Axel Witsel has been included in the squad even though he underwent an operation on his Achilles tendon in January and resumed running just a few days ago, leaving his availability for the June 11-July 11 tournament in doubt.

"With a squad extended to 26 (instead of 23), I can take this risk (on Witsel), he's a unique player," said Martinez. The squad, which also includes a stand-by list of 11 players, must be officially declared to UEFA by June 1 at the latest. Belgium, the world's top-ranked side, have been drawn in Group B and will play Russia on June 12, Denmark five days later and Finland on June 21. — AFP