

The trend in Premier League Managers that played for their club

An analysis by Football Economics

Football Economics

Premier League managers - the decline in club-playing experience

In this analysis, we look at the extent to which top-flight clubs still look to former players to manage their club.

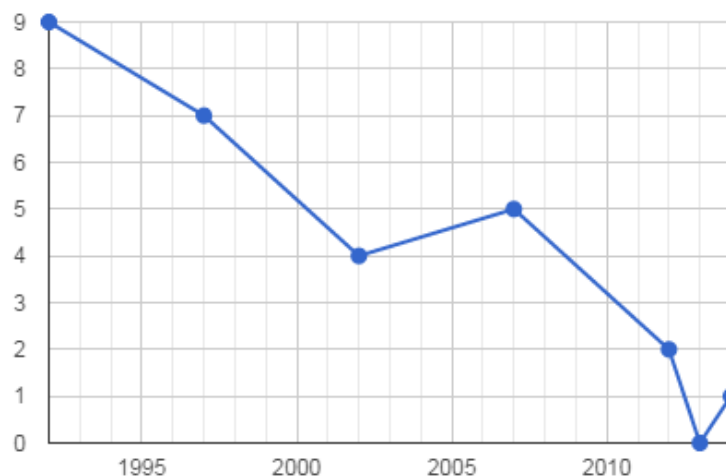
There are recent high-profile examples of former players taking over the managerial reigns at the top level - notably Tim Sherwood at Tottenham, Garry Monk at Swansea and Ryan Giggs at Manchester United. Still, as our analysis will show, these examples are very much against the general trend.

Of course, managers that have a successful history at a club usually enjoy at least a period of goodwill from fans and, along with a familiarity with the clubs set-up and area, and the fact they may already be on the coaching staff could make a player a more likely candidate to be manager.

Graeme Souness, George Graham, Peter Reid...

We start our analysis at the end of August 1992 and look at five year intervals. In 1992, 9 of the 24 managers (the league shrinks to 20 in all other data points) had played for their club they managed. Examples include George Graham at Arsenal, Peter Reid at Manchester City and Graeme Souness at Liverpool (see annex for full data).

Premier League Managers that played for the club they manage

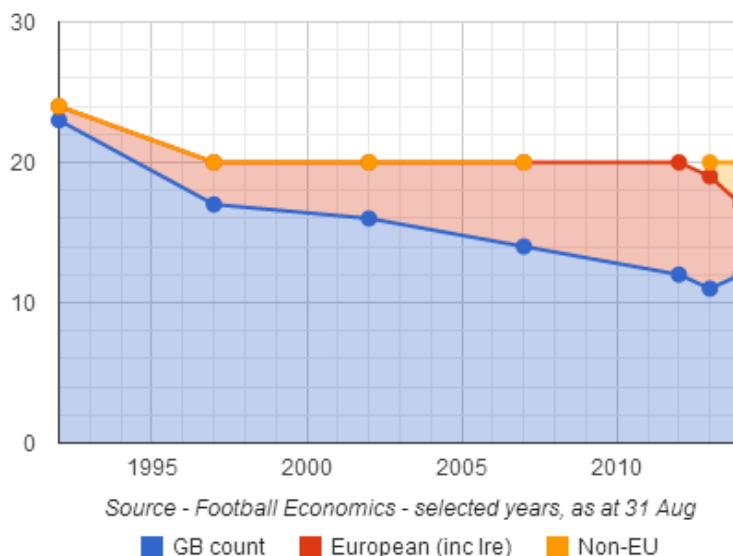


Source - Football Economics - selected years, as at 31 Aug

Five years on, in 1997, this had shrunk to 7 out of 20 (35%). In 2002, it had fallen further to 4 (20%), and in 2007 it was a 5 (25%).

Of course, a key trend over this period was the significant increase in foreign managers which followed the -influx of players from overseas.

Nationality of Premier League Managers



In 1992, all managers were from the UK and Ireland, whereas in 2012, 7 out of the 20 were from elsewhere. We intend to return to the topic of manager nationality in future analyses.

At the start of the Premier League, there was only a small pool of overseas players that had played at a club but, by the end of August 2012, the only two Premier League managers that had played for their clubs - Roberto Di Matteo at Chelsea and Roberto Martinez at Wigan - were themselves part of the overseas influx.

A further relevant trend may be the increase in foreign ownership of Premier League clubs. Roman Abramovich became the first foreign owner in the Premiership in 2003 and now eleven Premiership clubs are majority controlled by foreign owners. Looking at whether foreign owners are less likely to appoint British managers, or past players, could be examined in further analysis.

Perhaps a more fundamental driver might be the resources going into developing clubs managers over the 90s and 00s - were clubs and the governing bodies investing in the development of their future managers?

Rock bottom

In 2013, for the first time ever, no manager in the Premier League had played for their club previously. We compare end August in each year, but the drop to one occurred as Di Matteo left Chelsea in November. The figure fell to zero when Wigan were relegated with Roberto Martinez and were replaced by Cardiff (Malkay Mackay), Hull (Steve Bruce) and Crystal Palace (Ian Holloway) - none of whom had played for the clubs they managed.

During the 2013/14 season, Sunderland (Kevin Ball), Palace (Keith Millen) and Man Utd (Ryan Giggs) all appointed caretaker managers that had played for them. Still, the first ongoing appointment with club playing experience was when Tim Sherwood became Tottenham manager in December (for almost six months). He was followed by Garry Monk at Swansea in February and by Neil Adams who took over in April at Norwich.

Outlook, Conclusions and Further research

For the start of the 2014/15 season, Garry Monk is the only Premier League Manager to play for his club and at 40-1 to be sacked next, his outlook is relatively healthy.

Does this decline matter? It's not clear whether fans value having a manager with playing pedigree, nor whether that would lead to a higher level of success. These could be questions for further research. Still, seen as an indicator of progression from playing to managing at the top level of club football, it suggests that for the vast majority of clubs, former players have not been developed sufficiently to take over the managerial reigns.

Managers are now a key club asset, and arguably as, or more, important than a club's star player (though they're generally payed much less). Given the effort that goes into scouting and developing players then it would follow that manager development deserves similar attention.

In the cases of Sherwood and Giggs, there is some evidence that clubs are starting to take forward planning for their manager position seriously. Some are putting significant effort into developing their current players' coaching and management skills - and as these efforts come to fruition, we may see a renaissance in managers who have played for their clubs previously.

This also poses a number of questions for some further analyses - for example, looking at whether this trend is replicated in other European leagues, seeing whether managers with club experience are more successful and considering the link to investment in manager development, or foreign ownership.

We think manager development is key for clubs and countries, and will be looking more at the topic in future analysis.

Notes to Editors:

Football Economics is a UK-based think tank providing insights to the football world through research and analysis.

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