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INTRODUCTION

by James Pacheco

The best odds, thousands of markets and great liquidity – put simply, Betfair is the best place on the internet to do your football betting.

There are loads of football punters already on Betfair and this large community of punters is good news for you for two main reasons.

Firstly, competition among layers is so strong that they usually have to offer you a slightly better price than anyone else if they are to get their bet matched. Market forces therefore ensure the Betfair price is almost always bigger than those other bookmakers are offering. By the same token, there are plenty of people looking to back bets, which means you are always likely to find someone willing to take the opposite view to you.

The second is that because so many people are on Betfair, there's a lot of money waiting to be matched, especially on the more popular markets. High-street bookmakers very often limit the amount of money you can have on any given bet to a few hundred pounds, but on Betfair you can generally wager a few thousand on any big match odds or over/under 2.5 goals market, not to mention any winner market amongst the major leagues.

And if you're happy to take a price that's a couple of ticks shorter as a backer (or longer as a layer) there is plenty more waiting to be matched. When big Premier League or Champions League matches come around it's not unusual for there to be hundreds of thousands of pounds at a particular price on either side of the bet – if those are the sort of figures you like to deal in!

Betfair is also among the market leaders when it comes to offering in-play football markets. These are markets that you can bet on whilst a match is in progress and are available for every match played in the Premier League, Champions League and many more.

Though Betfair is not widely known for betting on 'specials', these are also available from time to time. Specials markets that always attract a lot of attention are Premier League "Next Manager" markets, so much so that newspapers and websites often quote Betfair prices as the most reliable source of assessing a candidate's chances of ultimately landing the job.

This book is solely concerned with betting on Premier League markets. If you've never placed a bet on Betfair before you'd be advised to read "Betfair for Dummies" for a thorough explanation of how it all works, from depositing money into your account, to the difference between backing and laying and how to ensure you win on a market whatever the outcome, also known as a "green book".

The 2009/10 season promises to be a cracker on the pitch and should, as ever, make for exciting betting prospects on Betfair. Whether you prefer to stake your money on season-long bets such as the Premier League winner market or prefer to get involved on a match-by-match basis, this guide should hopefully point you in the right direction so you're fully prepared when all the action kicks off on the 15th August.

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DOING YOUR HOMEWORK: STATS AND RESOURCES

By Tobias Gourlay

It does matter more when there is money on it, Sky Bet, but you don't mention that it is also likely to cost more unless research is done into where to put that money.

As the new football season approaches, the most serious – and successful - punters are preparing to take a long-term view on the Premier League. Not for them the last-minute wager on the match they are about to go to the pub for. Well, occasionally, perhaps, but only once some homework has been done.

Playing a long game means being prepared to assess your P&L line on a seasonal basis. Whether a punter makes 25 bets a season or 2,500 bets a season, the principle of value remains the same.

Briefly, Betfair's odds on a particular outcome reflect someone's view on how likely that outcome is. For example, odds of 1.25 – Manchester United's price to win their opening-day home game against Birmingham – suggest the bet will pay out 80% of the time; if the match was played 100 times, United would win 80 times.

If someone has an idea that United would actually win that match 90 times out of 100, they should take that bet because, if they are right, after the 100th game they would have a profit equivalent to the payouts from the 10 extra matches they won (therein lies the holy grail of value). Assuming – quite reasonably, experience tells us – that no one makes the right bet all of the time, following the value seems to be the surest way to long-term profit.

Now, where would someone get such an idea about the value in United's price? They might be a fan who makes a leap of faith every time he places a bet. They might have done some qualitative analysis and decided that the Darren Fletcher-Anderson midfield axis is underrated and will be to the fore in the coming campaign.

Better, perhaps, they might know that Manchester United have won 18 of their last 20 similar matches. In which case, they take the 1.25 price because (assuming all other factors are constant) it is better than the 1.10 they think it should be.

Some punters will be prepared to wade through every Premier League game ever played to find a riveting stat like the one above.

That's great, but for those with less time on their hands – perhaps they have a job or a girlfriend – there are internet resources to help them out. Football-data.co.uk, for example, provides free spreadsheets containing information that can help identify value bets across many markets.

BettorLogic.com releases statistically based betting recommendations each week, as well as titbits of quantitative information about the importance of individual players to their clubs, in the hope that readers will then pay them for more comprehensive data.

The free scraps hint at trends that others in the market might have missed and can form the basis of value bets to be made again and again through the season.

Betfair's own www.stats.betradar.com/statistics/betfaircom/?language=en page will provide basic statistical support (or not) to those with pre-conceived ideas about how a match will go off. Reckon that Tottenham's opening-day home fixture with Liverpool is going to be a low-scorer? It is easy to find out here that 13/19 league games at White Hart Lane produced -2.5 Goals last season, just like 11/19 of the Reds' away matches. Those numbers suggest 1.60 would be a fair price. Closer to kick-off, the price will probably settle around 1.90. That's some value right there, if the numbers on their own convince you.

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There's a nagging question, though. How can you know whether a statistic is relevant or not? In short, you cannot. But you can make sure you have the best possible idea about its relevance. If you found out that those 13 low-scoring games at White Hart Lane came at the beginning of last season, would the bet be as appealing if Spurs were on an unbroken run of 13 straight home games with -2.5 Goals? You decide. This sort of information is easily come by at many different websites, including the official Premier League site.

There are also qualitative factors that must be taken into account, even if they cannot be quantified. If, heaven forefend, someone didn't know that Liverpool sold Fernando Torres and Steven Gerrard to Manchester City yesterday, and the rest of the market did, they would probably find the Reds' longer-than-usual win price rather appealing.

ESPN's Soccernet tends to get this sort of news right and early, and that helps it stand apart from some of the UK-based sites whose pedigree is not so obvious. Official club websites vary in usefulness, but once a good one has been discovered, it can become a very useful source of team news and the like.

A small investment of time in crunching the numbers and researching the details will help maximise your chances of a good return on your financial investment in the coming season.

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THE PREMIER LEAGUE WINNERS MARKET ON BETFAIR

by James Pacheco

Great League, even better betting opportunities

It's no surprise that every year the Premier League Winner market proves to be just about the most popular football market on Betfair.

After all, the English top flight is the most exciting in the world, boasting some of the hottest talents in the game and captivating fans with its fast, attacking football.

It also makes for a good betting platform. True, since the creation of the Premier League in 1992 there have been only four winners: Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea and Blackburn Rovers. However, there is a genuine belief at the start of every season that each of the Big Four are in genuine contention to win the title. The betting certainly backs this up with all trading lower than 10.0 – remember, close contests always make for good betting opportunities. Better still, Premier League campaigns have, in recent years, had quite a few twists to them and most have only been decided on the last couple of days of the season, meaning the “traders” have had plenty of opportunities to lock in profits.

Of course, tying up your money for 10 months until the market is settled isn't everyone's cup of tea and some prefer to bet on individual matches and collect after 90 minutes. But as far as long-term market betting goes, this is a good one.

The 2009/10 winner market

The usual suspects dominate the market with Manchester United - bidding for a fourth consecutive title - at the top of the market at odds of 3.1. Sir Alex Ferguson knows what it takes to win this competition and has mastered the art of putting together an irresistible championship winning run, often from around Christmas through to the end of the season. With money to spend on new players every summer, United remain the team to beat.

Chelsea come next at 3.55. The Blues are no strangers to winning Premier League titles, having won back-to-back titles as recently as 2004-5 and 2005-6 under Jose Mourinho. Their squad looks as strong as ever and new boss Carlo Ancelotti has no shortage of transfers funds but how the Italian adapts to the Premier League remains to be seen. Just look at Luiz Felipe Scolari.

Why Liverpool are yet to win a league title since the start of the Premier League is a mystery given the quality of players and managers that have been through the door, their levels of support and success in other competitions. They're 4.2 to break their duck this season so the layers clearly aren't taking too many chances.

Doubts continue about Arsene Wenger's transfer policy but suffice to say that at the moment it's not working with Arsenal's last league championship coming back in 2004. The Gunners are the title outsiders of the Big Four at 9.8.

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This may be one season too soon for the richest club in football but if anyone is going to break into the big four it's Manchester City. Craig Bellamy, Robinho, Roque Santa Cruz, Wayne Bridge and Shay Given are just a few of the big names to have joined since the start of last season and the spending is unlikely to stop. If Mark Hughes can get the new players to gel as a team those odds of 23.0 may look generous at some stage of the season.

The Ronaldo Factor

Betfair's Premier League winner market reacted immediately to Cristiano Ronaldo's £80 million transfer from Manchester United to Real Madrid. Hovering around the 2.6 mark prior to the news, United drifted to a market high of 3.25 with all their rivals' prices coming in a few ticks. Does one player's exit really justify moving a whole market in such a dramatic way? Only time will tell but the key to the 2009-10 season may well be the quality of players Fergie brings in to replace the prolific number seven.

Top Tip

If you think Man Utd will win a fourth consecutive title, it may pay to bide your time before backing them. Over the last couple of seasons they have been slow starters, taking just two points from their first three matches of the 2007-8 season and just five points from their first four matches last season. Wait a few weeks before backing them or better still, lay them at the off and re-back them a few weeks into the season at a bigger price for a nice green book.

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THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH TO BETTING ON BETFAIR

by Gary Boswell

Defining “portfolio”

Portfolio betting means taking a number of positions on a single market, usually a long-term one. On Betfair, these could be a number of backs, lays or a combination of both.

Given that it is an approach generally associated with long-term markets, it is not recommended for the punter who likes a quick flutter and who is keen to collect his winnings the day before yesterday; this is the marathon rather than the sprint.

As mentioned above, the chief characteristic of this technique is having several bets on the one market; these backs and lays can be hedged at any time as prices become favourable. That is one of the fascinating aspects of this approach. Not just trying to predict ultimate outcomes but predicting short term ones too.

The 2009/10 Premiership Rock Bottom market

This is an ideal market to construct a portfolio in. Who is destined to become this season's West Brom and get themselves adrift at the bottom early in the season? If you can predict that, there's good money to be made in backing them at pre-season price and laying back after six games.

The two teams to concentrate on in the 09/10 season are **Burnley** and **Hull** who lead the market at 3.1 and 5.1 respectively. Owen Coyle's Clarets could be a massive price at 3.1 given that they have games against Manchester United, Everton, Chelsea and Liverpool in their first six – two of those away from home.

A realistic prediction for their first six games is a maximum of four and that should see them rooted early. The old maxim that solid defence is paramount for Premier League survival is likely to be of concern at Turf Moor. They conceded 60 in 46 league games last year – the worst defensive record in the top six – and you have to think that Birmingham's 37 in 46 is more like the requirement necessary for survival.

For the Clarets, much will depend on whether Danish goalkeeper Brian Jensen can repeat his Carling Cup heroics against Chelsea and Arsenal. The 'Beast' must get off to a good start to prevent the heads going down. Thirty-five-year-old defender Graham Alexander is also key as his experience was undoubtedly the holding factor in their Championship campaign last season.

Can he really be expected to repeat that against the likes of Manchester United and Chelsea though? Those tough opening six games make them a good bet to be bottom after the early exchanges. Likewise Hull would have been rock bottom by a long way last season if proceedings had started in January. Back these two pre-season, watch their price come in and then adjust your position accordingly.

The 2009/10 Premiership Top Goalscorer market

This market provided an excellent portfolio possibility towards the end of last season when the current Golden Boot holder Cristiano Ronaldo was underpriced to defend his crown. He had a serious contender in **Nicolas Anelka** who did indeed pip him to the title and this season is a baffling 17.5 fourth favourite to repeat that feat in the 2009/10 season. Fernando Torres is 5.0 favourite with Didier Drogba and Wayne Rooney second and third favourites at 13.0 and 16.0 respectively.

Michael Owen is a ridiculously short 14.0 – on the drift though from an early market price in single figures!! – and the sneaky outsider in the market is **Carlos Tevez** at 34.0. Stoke's **Ricardo Fuller** may also be worth a small flutter at a massive 260.0 after his 11 goals in Stoke's debut season. He can be fancied to build on that again this season and the opening game against Burnley's

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questionable defence gives him the chance to be top after game one! Chance for an early profitable hedge!

A lot of money is coming for Andrei Arshavin – currently 34.0 in from 50.0 - after his goal gluts that ended last season's campaign whereas Peter Crouch – who raced to 11 goals last season but then dried up – is a whopping 110.0 which might also be worth including in your portfolio – especially if he moves to a team that creates more chances for him than he got at Portsmouth.

Top Tip

Portfolio betting across a season isn't solely about removing your liability at the first opportunity. You can adjust your position accordingly many times. If you decide to back Burnley to finish rock bottom and you manage to lay them off for more than your stake at 1.5, which results in you getting a green position on all runners in the market, your activity doesn't have to end there. You may decide that Sunderland, who are just two points off the bottom and trading at 2.2 won't be finishing bottom either so you can then lay your profit on them, thus increasing your green position on the field.

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THE MATCH ODDS MARKET ON BETFAIR

by Matthew Walton

Match odds market at the heart of the matter

For the casual or committed punter, football betting is concerned with one question: which team is going to win the match?

Once you've decided on this, your view will have a direct bearing on all manner of other related Betfair markets, many of which are discussed throughout this publication (over/under 2.5 goals, first goalscorer, asian handicaps etc).

However, seeing as the match result is at the heart of most of the main markets on the exchange, what better way in which to use this opinion (and profit from it) than by getting involved with the 'match odds' market itself?

Playing the odds

Let's take one of the new season's opening day fixtures as an example of this market, which of course, involves only three possible results. Hence, at White Hart Lane, we find Spurs 3.50, Liverpool 2.28 and the draw 3.40 as the available options for the 90 minute match result.

When selecting a bet on this market any number of factors can be considered but, whatever the process involved, the final decision is made a lot easier by the limited number of potential outcomes: either Spurs or Liverpool will win, or it'll be a draw.

It is no surprise that such a simple market is by far the most popular when it comes to the amount of punters betting on it, and thus the liquidity available. Whatever your bet and whatever your stake, you'll be able to get on. Furthermore, as is the norm pretty much right across Betfair, you'll find the best prices on offer for any given result - far better than with most fixed-odds bookmakers anyway.

So, think about it. You've got the simplest of bets, with the highest levels of market liquidity, added to the best possible odds ... playing this market suddenly makes an awful lot of sense!

Even more so when you note that the match odds are always the first set of prices to go up on Betfair about a match. This enables you, as a backer or layer, to secure the best of the early value - possibly trading in and out well before the game itself. Assuming the market moves in a favourable direction as far as your bet is concerned, you may well have secured a "green book"* before the match has even kicked off.

Keeping it simple

A study of this market also highlights a valuable point about betting in general. Namely the benefit which can be had in concentrating your efforts on one specific bet in one particular market. As such, the match odds offer a gentle introduction to the possibilities of Betfair with a market which all football punters know well and can easily comprehend.

Moreover, this starting point comes with a market that has long been the curse of conventional bookmakers. For years they limited match betting solely to live matches, games played within the top divisions or with the ludicrous requirement you backed in trebles!

The match bet win single remains the most potent weapon in the armoury of the backer (and now the layer) in that the bet is concerned purely with one aspect of one match. Do your research, know your form and evaluate the odds on Betfair and you've got an excellent chance of backing a lot of winners.

So you might back Liverpool at 2.28 because you simply think Rafael Benitez's team are the better side, lump on Spurs at 3.50 because the form is good (Spurs have actually won five of the last 10

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home matches against the Reds, making the price a fair piece of value) or you could plump for the draw at 3.40 as being early season, it might be a tight match. The choice is yours.

Top Tip

Some teams have a very good record when it comes to winning matches but they may not be necessarily the best of starters. Look for teams who very often start at odds-on and either leave it late before breaking the deadlock or tend to go a goal behind before they get going. Lay them pre-match and then back them in-running if they go behind or are locked at 0-0 after a while.

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THE OVER/UNDER MARKET ON BETFAIR

by Ed Nicholson

Why bet on the over/under 2.5 market?

The over 2.5 goals market has become an increasingly popular over the last few seasons.

There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, betting on this market, you have less to research than for some of the other markets. For example, in the match odds market you have to consider home and away records, motivation and absences while in the first goalscorer market you need to consider which players will start, who will be on penalty duty or to what extent a midfielder will be rushing to get into the box. Overs/unders are much more straightforward: will there be goals in the match or not?

Secondly, there are just two possible outcomes (under or over 2.5 goals) so pre-match and in-running betting is much easier to play.

Thirdly, the actual ratio of under 2.5 goal games and over 2.5 goal games in the Premier League is very near to 50%, which is always a good starting point for the in-running trader. The table below shows as much.

Table 1:

<u>Year:</u>	<u>% of Premier League games over 2.5 goals %/% of PL games under 2.5 goals</u>
2008/9	48:52
2007/8	45:55
2006/7	47:53
2005/6	45:55
2004/5	45:55
2003/4	50:50
2002/3	49:51
2001/2	47:53:00

How to research the market

As with any bet, the first question to ask yourself is whether there's value in the selection you're thinking of backing.

You should take into account recent head-to-head records between the teams. Some fixtures always produce low scoring games while others consistently provide a flurry of goals, though admittedly the prices strongly reflect this.

Recent home results and recent away results should also be analysed as trends may well direct you one way or another. For example, after six or seven games into the season anyone looking at the Premier League table would have seen that Fulham's home fixtures produced few goals, while Man Utd's away fixtures also produced few goals. It may be worth putting United's visit to Craven Cottage in your diary as a good chance to back "unders" should the trend continue, assuming the price is still value of course!

You may also benefit from looking at the number of shots on and off target that each team has achieved in recent games. This, allied to team selection and formation provides more evidence of how a team is playing. For example, when Arsenal drew 4-4 with Liverpool last season, the Gunners actually only had four shots on target, yet when Man United beat Sunderland 1-0 at Old Trafford the Reds had 15 shots on target, and 12 shots off target. These statistics give you a better overall view of the game than just looking at the number of goals that have been scored in recent matches.

M & M

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Finally, pay close attention to the two Ms – motivation and momentum. If a team lets in five goals one week, you can be sure their motivation will be skewed to defending the following weekend rather than attacking. Similarly, if a team are playing in the Champions League on a Tuesday night, they are unlikely to field a full strength side against a bottom three team at home the Sunday before. Or if they do, they're likely to bring off a couple of key attacking players if they go a goal up rather than go in search of more.

Top tip

If you have reasons to go against the crowd and back the outsider of the two options, then you should have no hesitation in doing so. Occasionally markets are priced up the wrong way, even in markets as liquid as the Premier League's, so fill your boots when you think the price is wrong.

For example, when a top four club is playing a bottom three team at home it's tempting to back the over 2.5 goal option almost blindly; sometimes it will be a wise move, but usually the value bet will be to back the under 2.5 goal option at odds against. This is because the away team will come to defend, deploying a damage limitation strategy or, if they're really fortunate, nick a 1-0 win. A 1-0, 2-0 home victory may also be a satisfactory result for the home team with other future, more difficult/important games on the horizon.

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ASIAN HANDICAPS

by Tareq Quiroz

An interesting bet out of any match

Asian Handicap markets offer an attractive alternative to simple Match Odds.

At first, they can appear a little complicated but the truth is quite the reverse, they are available on all Premier League games and have a lot going for them.

Asian Handicaps were designed to eliminate the troublesome third option; the draw. There are only ever two options per line, thus making a decision on which way to go a little simpler. A handicap is a way of giving the outsider an artificial head start. The greater the gap in quality between the two teams, the more of a start the outsider is given. When the match ends you take the final score and then apply the handicap to it.

Each match is handicapped to try and produce a line that gives each option a roughly equal chance of winning. Betfair delivers that market but also gives you the added service of a slightly higher and a slightly lower handicap.

For example, if you backed Hull +1.5 goals @ [2.0] away to Chelsea on the opening day of the season and the match ended 1-0 to Chelsea, you'd take the goal Hull lost by, add the 1.5 goal start they were given and Hull would have been 0.5 goals up after you applied the handicap. Your back of Hull +1.5 would therefore have been a winner.

However, Betfair will also give the handicaps either side, which in this case would be the lower line of Everton +0 and also the higher Everton +0.5. To some that will already seem a little confusing but it really isn't if you give it a few minutes of playing around in the market without placing a bet.

Finding your way around the Asian Handicap

One of the great things about the Betfair Asian Handicap is that if you are not quite sure how a certain handicap line works, then it is very easy to get the answer.

Simply click on the option you wish to back and type a stake into the box. Before you submit, the text below will tell you exactly what your return is for each possibility. Big spenders Man City travel to Blackburn for the first game of the season and the handicap there is Blackburn +0&+0.5. This handicap should make the two options roughly even money.

If you wanted to back Blackburn on that handicap you would see that for a £10 stake at [2.0], if Blackburn wins you would make a profit of £10. If the game was a draw, you would make a profit of £5. And should Blackburn lose then you would lose your stake of £10. Whatever the handicap, the payout explanation is always there in the Place Bets box to help you out before you submit the bet.

One Sided Games

Asian Handicaps provide a betting interest in games where it's pretty obvious who is going to win. International football throws up greater mismatches than you'd ever get in domestic leagues and therefore bigger handicaps. Teams like San Marino are often given a start of several goals and your task is to decide if they can hold on with that start. When they played England recently they were given a 4.5 goal start which on that occasion wasn't enough as England put six past them with no reply.

You'd never get that sort of handicap in a Premier League match because no side is deemed so poor that they would be predicted to lose by four or five goals against another Premier League side. That said, when the likes of Wolves travel to Old Trafford this season you might find the handicap at around the 2.5 goal mark.

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Top Tip

The principle behind an Asian Handicap is to get the two teams handicapped so they are equal. But don't get so drawn into the concept that you don't take advantage of Betfair's offer of the higher and lower handicaps. You don't always have to bet on the middle line and there are often better value odds to be had on the other lines. Put in an offer at odds you would like as you never know if that extra quarter goal might just be what gives you the profit you are seeking.

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FIRST GOALSCORER AND TO SCORE MARKETS

by Mike Norman

Big payouts and lots of fun

If it's a quick and sizeable profit you're after, then Betfair's "first Goalscorer" and "to score" markets are definitely the ones for you. Get your bets right and the rewards are big. They also represent some of the most fun markets to play.

The beauty of these markets is that they are simple to play, and it really doesn't matter whether you're an expert on football or a complete novice watching the game for the first time. You can wager as little as you like (minimum bet is £2), and use any selection process. As mentioned above, as well as being an exciting bet it's also an opportunity to win big for a small outlay.

How does it all work?

The "first goalscorer" market asks you who is going to score the opening goal of the match; there can obviously only be one player scoring first. If you back a player who wasn't on the pitch at the time when the first goal was scored your bet is refunded but this doesn't include a player who started the match and then came off or was sent off before the first goal was scored. That player at least had a chance to score the first goal.

Should the first goal of the match be an own goal, the first goalscorer market will be settled on who scores the second. First goalscorer markets on Betfair list 10 players from each team plus an "any other player" runner and a "no goalscorer" runner. The former includes any player who scored the first goal who wasn't part of the list of 20. The latter is settled as the winner if there are no goals in the match or if all the goals were own goals.

The "to score" market looks at whether a particular player will score at any time during the match. Unlike the "first goalscorer" market, it can have no winners (if the match ends goalless or all goals are own goals), one winner or several winners if there are several goalscorers.

For a bet to stand the player must have played some part in the match, even if he was only on for one minute. If you're a backer be aware that the odds you get on a player to score are always far shorter than in the first goalscorer market as that player just needs to score - it doesn't matter if it's the first goal of the match, the second or the fifth.

Getting to know players who offer value

If you're serious about making a profit on these markets then it's important that you recognise which players offer genuine value over a period of games.

An attacking midfielder – like Frank Lampard for example – will usually be priced at much shorter odds in the First Goalscorer market than a defensive midfielder, simply because he scores more goals throughout a season.

Yet a closer inspection of some basic stats (which are freely available on the web) show that Lampard started 37 league games last season scoring 12 times, but only scored the first goal of the game on two occasions. As a backer, he's clearly a player to be looking to side with in the "to score" market rather than the first goalscorer one.

Compare that to a defensive midfielder like Michael Essien, who can usually be backed at up to four times the price of Lampard. During the last two Premier League seasons, Essien has started 33 league games for Chelsea, and has scored the first goal of the game on five occasions. Going on these stats, you don't have to be any kind of expert to realise that backing Essien in the First Goalscorer market at around 30.0 is much better value than backing Lampard at 8.0.

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The above is not an example of why you should back a defensive midfielder ahead of an attacking midfielder – it is an example of using simple stats to find players who represent value.

Top Tip

A happy footballer can be a profitable one, so stay on the right side of in-form players and avoid out-of-form ones.

Last season, an unhappy Didier Drogba scored just three goals in 23 appearances under then Chelsea boss Luiz Felipe Scolari (in all competitions), but under Guus Hiddink, the Ivorian hit nine goals in just 11 appearances. However, his odds in the “first goalscorer” and “to score” markets when he was out of form would have been very similar to his odds in those markets when he was in form. You should have been backing him when he was in form and laying him when he wasn't.

So don't put yourself at a disadvantage by backing someone who hasn't scored in an age. All the goal-scoring statistics you need are at your fingertips; so take a few minutes and use them to make your punting more enjoyable and profitable.

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THE RELEGATION AND ROCK BOTTOM MARKETS

by Andrew Athlerley

It pays to ignore the obvious

With plenty of twists, turns and relegation dogfights that usually go down to the wire, these are two of Betfair's most exciting season-long betting markets. This is really where the highly competitive nature of the Premier League comes into play and, with the relegation situation often changing week by week, there are plenty of trading opportunities for backers and layers.

Sometimes one of the big names can be sucked into the relegation abyss – Newcastle last season and Leeds in 2003/04 - and that means big prices can be available for backers. Newcastle started last season at 24.0 to be relegated and were odds-against for most of the season, even after it became clear they had plenty of problems, whilst Birmingham were relegated in 2005/06 after starting the season at 18.0.

On the other hand, for layers it can pay to lay the obvious favourites. Hull and Stoke survived last season, having started at 1.44 and 1.53 respectively, and in two of the past four seasons both of the two shortest-priced teams in the relegation market have stayed up.

The 2009/10 Relegation market

Bets in the Relegation market are settled on whether a team finishes in one of the bottom three places (18th, 19th, 20th) and the three promoted teams always start the season at, or near, the top of the market. This season is no exception – Burnley are favourites at 1.66, Birmingham are next at 2.08 and Wolves are fourth favourites at 2.56. Splitting them are Hull, who survived by the skin of their teeth last season and, like Birmingham, are 2.08 to go down this time.

Yet the promoted teams don't go down as often as most people think. In the 14 seasons since the Premier League was reduced to 20 teams, fewer than half of the promoted teams (20 out of 42) have been relegated.

The other grouping to look at, especially for backers in search of bigger prices, is the worst six survivors from last season (the teams that finished in places 12th-17th). In the past 14 seasons, 16 of the 42 relegated teams have come from this group.

Overall, that means 36 of the last 42 relegated teams have been either (a) promoted teams or (b) among the worst six survivors from the previous season. So, for this season, that gives us a list of nine teams that are likely to contain the three relegated teams – as well as the aforementioned Burnley, Birmingham, Wolves and Hull, that list includes Sunderland (16th last season) and available at 10.0 to be relegated, Blackburn (15th) at 9.8, Portsmouth (14th) at 4.9, Bolton (13th) at 8.6 and Stoke (12th) at 4.3.

The Rock Bottom market

This is the market for backers who think a particular team won't be able to cut it in the Premier League this season, with bets settled only on whether a team finishes bottom (20th) in the Premier League. With only one place available, backers have to be spot on with their predictions, but the attraction is that bigger prices are available than in the relegation market.

The favourites this season are Burnley at 3.05, though it is worth bearing in mind that the favourite has finished bottom in only four of the past 10 seasons.

Of the other eight teams that start the season in greatest peril, Hull are next in the Rock Bottom market at 5.1, Birmingham are 7.2, Wolves 8.6, Portsmouth 15.5, Stoke 18.0, Sunderland 29.0, Blackburn 32.0 and Bolton 40.0.

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The other team the market is pointing towards is Wigan, 11th last season under Steve Bruce but now managed by novice Premier League manager Roberto Martinez. The Latics are 16 in the Rock Bottom market and 5.6 sixth favourites in the Relegation market.

Unlike the Relegation market, it usually pays to bet on one of the promoted teams in the Rock Bottom market. In the past 14 seasons, a promoted team has finished bottom on nine occasions, including in five of the past six seasons. Two of the other five bottom-placed teams had finished 17th the previous season, so the likelihood is that the bottom team this time will be one of the three promoted teams - Burnley, Birmingham or Wolves – or last season's 17th-placed finisher, Hull.

Top Tip

Backers in the Rock Bottom market should concentrate their search on the top four in the betting (Burnley, Hull, Birmingham, Wolves), which has produced the bottom-placed club in 11 of the past 14 seasons. And Burnley at 3.05 look the best starting point, as relegation has been the outcome for five of the seven clubs promoted in the past 14 seasons from a Championship position below third, with three of the seven finishing bottom.

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SPREAD BETTING

by Dave Farrar

The Premier League Points market on Betfair

For those who aren't satisfied with simply trying to pick the winner of the 2009/2010 Premier League and want to make things a little more specific, there are always opportunities in Betfair's spread betting markets.

With the outright market dominated by five clubs, the Premier League Points and Finishing Position markets allow you to take an opinion on any club in the Premier League, and give you a chance to trade in or out of a position at any stage of the season. These markets are all about over and under-performing, and with so much interest focussed on the top five, there have to be chances to be snapped up lower down.

Fulham would have been a good example last season of an excellent finishing position sell (the higher up they finished the better for you as a seller), and points buy (as a buyer the more points they got the better for you). Even though they wouldn't have paid out in the outright market, you were well rewarded for predicting that they would perform better than expected.

The keys this season will be to work out who will be this year's Fulham, and who will be its Newcastle United. Spread or range betting markets always seem complicated, but they're actually pretty simple once you get your head round them.

If you buy a team's points at 81, and they end up with 90, you make a nine point profit on your initial stake. If they end up with 70, then you make an eleven point loss. Throughout the Premier League season, you'll be able to place range bets on both number of goals and corners in individual Premier League games.

Over 90 minutes, these will be a lot more volatile than season-long bets: if this is your first go at spread betting, start off with the longer term, less risky season-long bets. But if you do play 90 minute spread markets, don't blindly buy in the hope that things will happen. More often than not, it's better to go against your optimistic instinct, and sell. It's more common for nothing to happen in football matches than highlights programmes lead you to believe.

The 2009-10 Premier League points market

There are subtleties in the points market that can't really be factored into the outrights. Manchester United are favourites, with their points available to buy at 83, and to sell at 81. Given that United won the title with 90 points last season, you may see this as a buying opportunity, but given that a stronger challenge is likely to come from Liverpool and Chelsea in particular (not to mention Manchester City), 83 would be a brave buy.

Chelsea are rated to gather as many points as they did last year and are also available to buy at 83. Rather surprisingly, you can buy Liverpool points at 81. They got 86 last season. At the other end of the table, Wolves' points can be bought at 37, with Birmingham and Burnley available to buy at 36 and 33 respectively. Hull are rated as the third worst team in the Premier League, and you can buy their points at 35.

The fixture list

In the early days of spread betting, one way to make some profit, at least by trading, was always to have a close look at the fixture list and take a short, rather than long term view. You might look at Arsenal's first six fixtures and decide they are certain to drop at least eight points given their opposition, making their pre-season points total of 75 an initial sell, with an instant chance to then buy at a higher price. All well and good, but if they win all six you'll struggle to get out of a very precarious position.

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This therefore has always been a policy fraught with danger. By all means have a look at the fixture list, but judge how well you think a team will do over the course of a season and not try to get too cute in defining form over short runs of games. This approach can go wrong very quickly.

Top Tip

An opinion on Manchester City is where any analysis of points totals needs to start: if they challenge for the title then obviously they will be a buy at 67, and that performance will have an effect on the points totals of the rest of the top four, making them potential sells. I am not convinced that City will have the instant impact that many seem to expect. They have acquired some very good players, but unlike, say, Blackburn Rovers all of those years ago, there has been a rather disjointed nature to their recruitment.

They haven't signed an Alan Shearer or even Chris Sutton equivalent, and there will be some tough personalities for an as yet unproven (Hughes is no Dalglish) manager to control.

If City underperform, then there'll be a cheap points buy elsewhere amongst the top teams, and my focus will be on Liverpool. Everton are another side which regularly does better than expected, and further down the table, admirers of Steve Bruce will be interested to see Sunderland predicted to struggle again. Bruce, with a bigger budget than he ever had at Wigan or Birmingham, surely won't let too many people down.

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IN-RUNNING BETTING

by Andrew Hughes

What is it?

One of the many advantages of betting on the Premier League with Betfair is the opportunity to back and lay in-running. There are few more exciting ways to bet and you only have to watch how the match odds fluctuate during a game to realise that these are volatile markets in which those who know their football can find a hundred and one ways to cash in. Though you'll find plenty of action on the likes of the over/under 2.5 goals and correct score markets, the most liquidity is in the match odds market.

If you are going to try betting in-running, you will need access to live coverage – radio, or preferably television. Obviously it's best to use commentary or pictures with the smallest time delay possible. After all, you wouldn't be wanting to back a team to win who have just conceded a free-kick on the edge of the box before you realise what's happened. In-running football markets are always suspended in the event of a goal, sending off or penalty and unmatched bets are cancelled.

Take a view

As with all sports betting, the better you know your teams, the more opportunities you will spot in-running. You can use your knowledge of the competitors to take a view on how the match is likely to go and wait for an opportunity to exploit it. For example, you may feel that Everton have a fitness edge over Sunderland. If the game appears to be heading for a draw, the odds on both teams will start to drift and you may want to back David Moyes' men to make their fitness tell in the last few minutes.

If you know how a team usually plays, this can also present you with opportunities. If you spot that Spurs for example are playing more defensively than usual or you notice that their full-backs are not making their usual surging runs, you may feel they have a negative game plan and are worthy lay candidates. Teams with defences that you do not rate can also be worth opposing in-running if it looks like they are sitting back trying to hold on for a point, particularly if they are up against opponents with plenty of attacking options.

The key thing to remember about in-running betting is flexibility. You may have pre-conceived ideas about the merits of the two teams involved, but you should be prepared to adapt to circumstances during the game based on what your eyes are telling you. Stubbornness is not a helpful quality in this kind of betting.

Against the crowd

Follow the match odds during a live football game and you will see that the market fluctuates wildly and often overreacts to events, even comparatively minor events such as corners. A series of attacks can see a team's odds tumble as punters scramble to back them as they appear to be on top. But 90 minutes is a long time and the fortunes of the two teams are likely to flip-flop many times. The way to take advantage of this overreaction is to go against the crowd, not to follow them.

In some cases, the overreaction is so marked that you can profit from it without too much thought, risk, or even without having to wait too long.

Following on from the above example, look at some stats regarding how often a team scores from a corner – not as often as one might think. Should Liverpool win a corner, their odds will momentarily shorten. A swift lay of them and when the corner comes to nothing, their price will lengthen to a more sensible level and you can back them to make a profit of some sorts. An even better strategy is to be continually asking yourself whether the prices on offer represent the true chances of the two teams.

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With just 10 minutes left on the clock and Man Utd drawing 1-1 at the Stadium of Light should they be as short as 2.2? The stats tell you Sir Alex Ferguson's side should rightly be favourites but isn't that price just too short? Very often the market assumes the favourites will eventually win and in the process prices them up in-running shorter than they should be. This provides good opportunities for laying. As long as they don't score within the next few minutes, at worst you can re-back them at a slightly bigger price.

TOP TIP

Trading the draw in the last ten minutes of a match is an old favourite, but a pretty reliable one for in-running punters. In games that are all-square, the draw price tends to collapse significantly around the 80-82 minute mark. Back it before this and watch the price drop. Then choose your moment to lay it off and lock in a profit.

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MULTIPLES BETTING:

Doing it the Betfair way

An accumulator (in old-school bookie terminology) or multiple (as it is in the modern-day Betfair era) is an ideal way to achieve big returns for small stakes. If that's your game then the Multiples section should be your first port of call.

Winning doubles, trebles, four-folds and bigger have been the holy grail of the small stakes punters since the dawn of the bookmaker. But don't count on paying off your mortgage overnight just yet. There is a logical reason for small stakes to return big dividends; the chances of collecting are greatly decreased.

An accumulator/multiple does what it says on the tin. Take two or more selections, combine the odds, and if they all win, you win. For example: if you fancy Man Utd, Liverpool and Arsenal all to win at odds of 2.0, 1.8 and 1.5 respectively, then the price for your accumulator will be: $2.0 \times 1.8 \times 1.5 = 5.4$. Note that the prices quoted on the Multiples product will be slightly shorter than the odds that you will be offered on Betfair's exchange, though they are still likely to be greater than what your regular high street bookie will give you.

And unlike your regular fixed-odds operator, Betfair allows you to combine both backs and lays in your Multiple. So if you're from the red half of Merseyside you can have a double on the opening day of the season by backing Liverpool to beat Tottenham and laying Everton at home to Arsenal. That way it will be twice as sweet when Torres bags the winner at Anfield and Moyes is bemoaning his side's lack of luck at Goodison Park.

Goals, Goals, Goals

Betfair also offers you the opportunity to have multiple bets on the Over/Under 2.5 goals market. Combine two, three, four, five or more Over/Under 2.5 selections and if your predicted goal feasts or famines oblige, you're in the money.

An accumulator on over 2.5 goals is also one of the few betting areas where you can potentially count your winnings before the end of a game. If you've had a treble on Bolton, Wigan and Sunderland all to have over 2.5 goals in their respective games, and each side is leading 2-1 with 30 minutes to go, you can begin planning on how you will spend your winnings safe in the knowledge your bet is in the bag. Or you could do the opposite and hope for a miserable day of Premier League action by having a treble in which all selections are under 2.5 goals. Or mix and match and go "overs" on some and "unders" on others. The choice is...yours.

Vital Statistics

A popular approach amongst punters is to back all of the Big Four to win (whenever they're not playing each other). But is this a profitable tactic? Throughout the 2008/09 season the big four played independently of each other in 24 sets of fixtures with all four winning just eight times, a 33% strike rate. And in the 2007/08 season there was a six out of 23, 26% strike rate.

So looking at the data from the last two seasons, you should be looking for a Man Utd, Liverpool, Chelsea and Arsenal four-fold to pay at an average price of 3.35 just to break even over the season. It is also worth noting that in the 2008/09 season only three of those eight occurrences came before the month of April; maybe this is a bet for the latter stage of the season when the big teams really press home the advantages of their big squads.

Top Tips

Don't become a cliché. Drinking establishments up and down the country are littered with bitter old men lamenting their weekend accumulator that got away. Invariably you will hear that they had four or five winners on the Saturday and were just waiting for their 'sure thing' to win on the Sunday.

Should you find yourself waiting for one result to bag that elusive accumulator, take the sensible option and lay that selection. Given that your Multiple is likely to pay out at a big price, you don't want to end up with nothing should the last leg not win. At the very least lay the final selection for the value

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of your stake on the Multiple. Or if you want to ensure you walk away with a profit, lay it for more, particularly if it's an odds-on shot. If the final selection on your Multiple doesn't win you collect on your lay of it on the exchange. If it does win you can look forward to a nice payout courtesy of your original Multiple. Albeit minus the liability of your lay on the exchange.

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ARSENAL

by James Pacheco

Arsenal fans can be forgiven for thinking that after this summer's transfer activity they are worse rather than better off with the ever-reliable Kolo Toure joining the much-criticised Emmanuel Adebayor at Manchester City. The criticism of Adebayor may be slightly unfair; he scored 46 goals from just 104 appearances and at worst provided Arsenal with a Plan B when the free-flowing passing game wasn't working. Thomas Vermaelen joins them from Ajax with a big reputation but is unproven at this level.

Arsene Wenger's transfer policy is a discussion for another day but the truth is that every year they are considered less of a genuine title candidate and seem to have to work harder to achieve even a top four finish. Whilst the likes of Cesc Fabregas and Robin Van Persie approach the peaks of their careers and Theo Walcott continues to improve, William Gallas and Niklas Bendtner continue to frustrate and Eduardo seems to be sidelined more often than not.

With Man City recruiting two of their first team players, not to mention Tevez, Barry and Santa Cruz, this could be the season Arsenal find a top four finish a bridge too far.

Key Player – Andrei Arshavin

Best Bet: Lay Arsenal for a top 4 finish at 1.58.

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ASTON VILLA

by James Pacheco

New recruit Stewart Downing will add some natural width and yet another set-piece option when he returns from injury a few weeks into the season. That said, if Martin O'Neill was given the choice, he'd surely have sacrificed signing the former Boro man if it meant hanging on to Gareth Barry, who has joined the Man City revolution.

After his on-off transfer to Liverpool the summer before, Barry was demoted to vice-captain which meant the superb and inspirational Martin Laursen wore the armband for much of the season before falling foul of injury which ultimately led to his retirement. It may well prove harder to replace Laursen than the England man.

If O'Neill stays for a few more years and the cheque book comes out we may see further progress, but this season should prove to be relatively similar to the last few at Villa Park with a tussle against the likes of Everton and Spurs for a fifth or sixth place finish on the cards.

Key Player: Ashley Young

For all the strength of Emile Heskey and pace of Gabriel Agbonlahor, it is Young who is the real match-winner when Villa go forward. A real threat on either wing or as a second striker, the time has come for Young to step up from promising youngster to Premier League superstar.

Best Bet: Back Aston Villa in a season match bet against Tottenham @ 2.3

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BIRMINGHAM CITY

by James Pacheco

Alex McLeish was one of the busier managers over the summer months bringing in Christian Benitez for a club record £8.5 million and securing permanent moves for a duo of midfield bad boys in Lee Bowyer and Barry Ferguson. Unlike Burnley they've been here before and unlike Wolves , they've beaten the Premier League drop before.

What's more, the squad looks a balanced one with Man City's on-loan Joe Hart set to play in goal, some wise old heads such as Stephen Carr in defence, plenty of bite and experience in midfield and options up front – the pace of Marcus Bent complimenting the trickery of James McFadden and the goal threats of an evergreen Kevin Phillips and an ever-improving Cameron Jerome.

Key Player: Lee Carsley

Carsley's long spell at Everton will be of huge value to Alex McLeish this season as the aforementioned hot-headed duo of Bowyer and Ferguson will need their aggression channelled into productive contributions; the Ireland international is just the man to help them do that. He may not cover as much ground as in yesteryear but his tackle still bites and his short-range passing remains pretty tidy.

Best Bet: Lay Birmingham for relegation at 2.2.

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BLACKBURN ROVERS

by James Pacheco

Blackburn averted possible disaster last year by sacking the very inexperienced Paul Ince and replacing him with the very experienced Sam Allardyce in time to avoid a nervy end to the season.

The summer transfer activity saw them finally lose their most valuable player in Roque Santa Cruz to Manchester City, as well as other first team players Matt Derbyshire and Aaron Mokoena. Gael Givet, on-loan from Marseille last season, completed a permanent move during the summer to become their most significant signing.

Allardyce's objective is to build a team similar to the one he had at Bolton: aggressive, hard-working, difficult to beat at home and unappealing to have to face anywhere, anytime. In Brett Emerton, El Hadji Diouf, Ryan Nelsen and Stephen Warnock the gaffer will have the sort of players who should keep Blackburn out of trouble. That said, anything higher than an eighth place finish is simply too ambitious.

Key Player: Ryan Nelsen.

At times you feel the New Zealand captain is simply playing football because he felt he couldn't cut the mustard as an All Black. Barrell-chested and scarred, Nelsen is the poor man's John Terry, inspirational and willing to put his body in places that most wouldn't. But he's a better player than just a brave warrior and will be the man entrusted to marshal Blackburn's defence yet again.

Best Bet: Back the draw in Blackburn v Man City on the opening day of the season at 3.45.

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BOLTON WANDERERS

by James Pacheco

How Kevin Nolan wishes he'd stayed within the tranquilly of the Reebok Stadium rather than move to the mad house that is St James Park. Bolton may not reach the dizzy heights of top seven finishes and subsequent UEFA Cup campaigns anymore (as they did under Sam Allardyce) but you won't see the Trotters involved in too many last-day relegation dogfights either.

Four decent recruits with Premier League experience have come through the door this summer in the form of Sean Davis (Portsmouth), Paul Robinson (West Brom), Sam Ricketts (Hull) and Zat Knight (Aston Villa) and with no exits of any note, Bolton fans could be forgiven for hoping they might build on last season's very respectable 13th place finish.

All of which suggests Bolton are likely to have "mid-table mediocrity" written all over them this season and the next few but this is no bad thing. Are you listening Charlton fans?

Key Player: Kevin Davies.

Every year the same two criticisms are made of the burly striker: he gets booked too much for a forward and doesn't score enough goals. He went some way to rectifying the second by scoring 11 times last season, his best-ever return. And his four yellows in 08/09 were nine less than the previous season and six fewer than the year before. But even if he's back to double figures again this season, one just needs to accept that an all-action, swinging-elbows approach is just the way he plays. And don't defenders know it. The man who took over the captaincy from Nolan certainly leads the line in more ways than one.

Best bet: Back Bolton to beat Sunderland on the opening day of the season at 2.2.

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BURNLEY

by James Pacheco

There are two approaches a newly-promoted team to the Premier League can take. The first is “to do a Sunderland”. Use the Sky money to pay big transfers and big wages to attract big name players to come and add a little class and experience at this level to a squad that was good enough to get you in the division but may not be necessarily good enough to keep you there. All well and good if the plan works but relegation leaves you with a squad of players on wages far too rich for The Championship who don’t want to be there and whose transfer value has been halved because of relegation.

The second is “to do a West Brom”. Show faith in the squad that got you promoted, make a couple of signings and if you do end up being relegated, the club will still have some of Rupert Murdoch’s money left for a rainy day and a wage bill fitting for English football’s second tier. This is clearly the approach adopted by Burnley and no-one should blame them for choosing it. It’s to their credit that in times of financial instability the long-term financial health of the football club is the primary concern.

It’s also very much to Owen Coyle’s credit that he turned down interest from Celtic to have a go at proving himself in the Premier League. Come May, it may well be a decision he regrets though. This is by far the weakest and most inexperienced side of the twenty contesting the 2009/10 Premier League and avoiding the drop would be an incredible achievement.

Key Player: Joey Gudjonsson

Spells at Real Betis, Wolves, Aston Villa, Leicester and AZ Alkmaar before his move to Burnley suggest the Icelandic international is something of a journeyman who has never quite settled anywhere. There may be some truth in this but the pint-sized midfielder is a good passer of the ball who contributed six valuable goals last term. More importantly, he has played at this level before at Molineaux and Villa Park and his experience of doing so will be a useful addition to the team.

Best bet: Back Burnley to finish rock bottom at 3.2.

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CHELSEA

by Max Liu

Roman Abramovich will be hoping that Carlo Ancelotti brings stability and success to Stamford Bridge but the Italian's lack of Premier League experience makes him an unknown quantity and, as Luiz Felipe Scolari's troubled reign demonstrated, appointing a manager who does not speak fluent English can have catastrophic results.

Senior pros such as John Terry and Frank Lampard, as well as those in the boardroom, will be determined to get it right this time but remember; Chelsea started superbly last season before falling apart around Christmas. So it might pay to wait before assessing their title credentials. Despite this they remain hard to break down and can be expected to be even more resolute under Ancelotti.

Star man: Frank Lampard

The England man remains a good bet in "To Score" markets. Despite all the money spent in the last five seasons, the pre-Abramovich signing will once again be Chelsea's most reliable performer.

Suggested Bet: Back the Blues for a top two finish at 1.85.

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EVERTON

by Max Liu

Chairman Bill Kenwright is committed to selling his majority stake in the club in order to attract the type of investors the Toffees need if they are to push on but the suspicion remains that David Moyes' has taken Everton as far as he can.

However, as a leading contender to succeed Sir Alex Ferguson, the Scot would love to bolster his CV by winning a trophy or breaking the big four monopoly this season. Everton came close to achieving both of those things last year but Moyes' desire to impress his potential employers down the East Lincs Road may just get his team over the line this time around.

Star man: Tim Howard.

Tim Cahill is the obvious choice but Tim Howard's athleticism was integral to both Everton's consistency last season and the USA's success at the Confederations Cup this summer. Moyes will be delighted that his goalkeeper has signed a new contract.

Suggested Bet: Back Everton in season match bets against Arsenal (2.66) and Aston Villa (1.6).

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FULHAM

By Max Liu

Last season's seventh place was a record finish for Fulham but Roy Hodgson's greatest achievement may be that he has made his side hard to beat while playing attractive football. Their formidable home form is based on the understanding at the back between Mark Schwarzer and Brede Hangeland while in midfield, Danny Murphy remains so industrious that Fulham are yet to notice the loss of Jimmy Bullard.

Up front Andy Johnson would benefit from a strong, imposing strike partner in the Peter Crouch/Emile Heskey mould. Hodgson's experience of European football has paid dividends in the transfer market, where he has made shrew, understated signings, but although his tactical acuity will be an asset in the Europa League, he knows from his experiences at Blackburn that a club's fortunes can change dramatically from one season to the next. Domestic points remain the priority.

Star man: Brede Hangeland

The giant Norwegian is the rock on which fortress Craven has been built and Hodgson will be relieved to hear him say he is happy at the club.

Suggested Bet: Back Fulham in the winner w/o Big 4 market at 25.0 with a view to lay at a shorter price.

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HULL CITY

by Max Liu

The sight and sound of Phil Brown singing *My Way* through a megaphone after the final game of last season underlined what a massive achievement staying up was for The Tigers. Hull competed in the Premier League with a team of Championship players so reinforcements are essential. If Jimmy Bullard recovers from a second serious injury in three seasons, his class could steer them away from danger.

Brown will have learned from his mistakes in the second half of last season but, while Hull were everybody's second team while they were beating the likes of Arsenal and Tottenham, that momentum has gone and dwindling of public affection for Hull - largely due to the manager's antics - makes a bout of the dreaded second season syndrome more likely.

Star man: Michael Turner

If Jimmy Bullard comes good then he will dictate and work tirelessly in midfield. However, centre-back Michael Turner was a giant last season and was, at one point, in contention for an England call-up. Another mammoth effort from him is essential.

Suggested Bet: Back Hull for relegation at 1.96.

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LIVERPOOL

by Max Liu

But for a mid-season blip, Liverpool would have won their first league title for 19 years last season and, after five years at the club, Rafael Benitez knows that he must deliver the Premier League soon. The task hasn't been made easier by the failure to land Gareth Barry and, in terms of transfers, it's been a quiet summer at Anfield, Glen Johnson the only signing of note .

Liverpool lost less games than Manchester United last season but drew too many at home against average opposition. However, they finished strongly and if Torres and Gerrard can play with the same abandon as they did in the second half of last season, this could be the Reds' year.

Star man: Fernando Torres

Liverpool skipper and Kop favourite Steven Gerrard remains the engine and the inspiration but Torres proved last term that he's no one- season-wonder and the way he tore apart Manchester United at Old Trafford showed that he is the most devastating striker in the Premier League.

Suggested Bet: Back Liverpool to win the Premier League at 4.4.

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MANCHESTER CITY

by Max Liu

The arrivals of Emmanuel Adebayor, Carlos Tevez, Roque Santa Cruz and Gareth Barry have made for a sensational summer at Eastlands but if City are determined to gatecrash the Premier League top four, they must invest at the back. The pursuit of John Terry has been one of the more compelling transfer sagas and David Moyes' resolve could yet be tested by an increased bid for Joleon Lescott.

Last season, City had the third best home record in the top flight but picked up a paltry 22% of their points away from Eastlands. The arrival of two top notch centre-backs would significantly improve their form on the road as well as their hopes of a Champions League spot but if City fail to lure a seasoned Premier League defender, 2009/10 might yet be another campaign of unfulfilled promise.

Star man: Carlos Tevez

Strong, aggressive and boasting a fierce shot, Tevez shares much in common with Mark Hughes. The Argentine's vow to score the goals which will bring City the title may be a little fanciful but, in his fourth season in the Premier League, Tevez is ready to fire for his new club.

Suggested Bet: Lay Manchester City in the Winner Without Big Four market @ 2.16

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MANCHESTER UNITED

by Max Liu

Signing of the season or injury-prone aberration? The truth about Michael Owen is probably somewhere in between. His experience and eye for goal will be invaluable but he is more a replacement for Carlos Tevez than for Cristiano Ronaldo and is likely to be deployed from the bench to score goals in big games.

Ronaldo's departure should galvanise Sir Alex Ferguson's squad; Wayne Rooney will relish the opportunity to move into a central attacking position with new recruit Antonio Valencia providing the width and Dimitar Berbatov expected to surpass last season's 14 goals.

Ferguson is tipping big things for youngsters Danny Wellbeck and Federico Macheda and it's step up or step off time for Nani and Anderson. At the back, a regular replacement for Gary Neville is required and this might prove to be one campaign too far for Edwin Van der Sar. A fit Owen Hargreaves would provide welcome muscle in midfield.

Star man: Wayne Rooney

Rooney complains about playing on the left but he was a revelation out wide last season, scored 20 goals and was arguably United's best performer. Now, as he moves inside, he must score more if he is to fulfil his undoubted potential and establish himself as a United legend on a par with Roy Keane and Eric Cantona.

Suggested Bet: Lay Man Utd pre-season at 3.3 and back them at a bigger price as they drift.

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PORTSMOUTH

by Joe Dyer

Doubts have swirled around Fratton Park all summer long with Portsmouth mired in a period of deep uncertainty. While its very ownership is still to be decided, the club have said goodbye to Glen Johnson already this summer with Peter Crouch almost certain to follow him out the door. Few signings have been made to replace the large holes left in the squad.

After much speculation throughout the summer that his stint as manager was over, Paul Hart will stay on but he was quick to warn fans that trouble may lie ahead. The signs are grim and a season of woe is a distinct possibility.

Key Player: David James.

For teams facing relegation a top class goalkeeper is often the difference between going down or staying up. After all, it's inevitable he'll have plenty to do. If this Jekyll & Hyde-like character is Super James this season Pompey should be ok, if he's Calamity James, The Championship beckons.

Best Bet: Back Portsmouth to be relegated at 4.0.

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STOKE CITY

by Joe Dyer

Resilient and passionate – Stoke produced the consummate debut Premier League season in 2008-09. Their survival was down to extremely solid form at home – 10 wins, five draws, four defeats – where they were backed by the most vociferous crowd in the league.

The Potters' 'defence-first' style of play is highlighted by the fact that the heaviest defeat they inflicted on an opponent was just 2-0 – the victims being Rotherham, Wigan, West Brom and Bolton. More of the same should be expected next season with Pulis unlikely to change his footballing philosophy.

Key Player: James Beattie

Injuries and a few weight issues deprived James Beattie of a more sparkling career and a shot at being England's long-term number nine. But in a team with a direct style of play centred around providing him with chances, Beattie could flourish just like he did in his Southampton days. Expect him to reach double figures with relative ease, including the odd goal against some of the Premier League's more illustrious opponents.

Best Bet: Back Stoke to beat Burnley at evens on the first day of the season.

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SUNDERLAND

by Joe Dyer

The Black Cats may have only just dodged the drop last year but fans will be more upbeat about their chances in 09-10. Steve Bruce should prove to be a solid appointment as manager and will think he's finally arrived at a club of such stature that winning trophies, rather than mere survival, is the aim.

That may not happen this year as the Geordie manager gets rebuilding work underway, but the signs are that new owner Ellis Short is keen to establish the club as a solid force with transfer dealings brisk. A Cup run is possible, as is an upper table finish.

Key Player: Kenwyne Jones.

It's not by chance that the one Sunderland player that other Premier League clubs keep coming back to enquire about is the big Trinidad & Tobagan. 10 goals from 29 appearances doesn't quite reflect his all-round contribution to the team and there isn't a defender in the league that will relish having to face him.

Best Bet: Buy Sunderland season points at 45.

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TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

by Joe Dyer

Tottenham underlined their rollercoaster status last season after a campaign that was plagued by moments of high drama, near disaster and unlikely triumph. A nightmare start under Juande Ramos was turned around by Harry Redknapp, who nearly picked up silverware within months of his arrival by taking the club to a Carling Cup final against Manchester United.

Expectation will fill the hearts of the faithful after such a strong finish and fans will be looking forward to another season watching, among others, Luka Modric whose attacking verve was so impressive in 2008-09.

The task facing Redknapp is to maintain the good form shown in 2009, but Spurs have been here before and failed. Fifth place, maybe even better, would not be such a big surprise, but then again neither would 10th.

Key Player: Robbie Keane.

For all the inspirational qualities of Ledley King, guile of Luka Modric and goals of Jermaine Defoe, it is the form of Robbie Keane that could well be the difference between failure and success. After his disastrous spell at Liverpool he'll be wanting to show the White Hart faithful that he made a mistake in leaving in the first place and Rafael Benitez that he should have been given more chances at Anfield.

Best Bet: Lay Tottenham for a Top 6 finish at 2.9

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WEST HAM UNITED

by Joe Dyer

The Hammers confounded expectations last season when overcoming off-field turmoil of all types to secure a respectable 10th place finish, only missing out on European football by three points. Gianfranco Zola got the Hammers playing an effective brand of football which had defensive solidity at its heart but which did not lack for attacking flair. Carlton Cole's played well enough to land an England cap and youngster Jack Collison also impressed.

Signings have been thin on the ground this summer as the club adapt to new financial conditions in E13, so more of the same should be expected next season, provided England duo Matthew Upson and Rob Green are persuaded to remain at the club.

Key Player: Scott Parker.

Every team needs one. An all-action old school central midfielder who tackles, passes and controls the tempo of the game; happy to leave dribbling and scoring for others to worry about. Step forward Scott Parker. As match-winners like Dean Ashton and Kieron Dyer have shown glimpses of their talent before falling foul of injury time and again, Parker is the man to build a team around at Upton Park and Gianfranco Zola knows this only too well.

Best bet: Lay Wolverhampton Wanderers against West Ham on the opening day of the season at 2.9.

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WIGAN ATHLETIC

by Joe Dyer

Losing Antonio Valencia and the moody yet dangerous Amr Zaki will hurt but the departure of Steve Bruce could be potentially disastrous for Dave Whelan's small town survivors.

New boss Roberto Martinez enjoyed a great season with Swansea last year but Whelan has undoubtedly taken something of a gamble appointing such an inexperienced manager. That said, defensive duo Emmerson Boyce and Titus Bramble have signed on for more at the JJB Stadium while the promising Jason Scotland has left Swansea to join his old manager.

Wigan fans can take some heart from the fact that they are now into their fifth season in a row of Premier League football and know what it takes to stay in the division and that could be the difference between them and their less experienced rivals at the business end of the season. But whether they can actually achieve that is another matter.

Key Player: Paul Scharner.

As other players come and go through the revolving door at the JJB Stadium, the versatile Austrian continues to be an integral part of the squad. And has been since their first year in the Premier League. Not one for the Fantasy Football team but a player the boss can rely on week in week out.

Best Bet: Back Wigan to be relegated at 5.6 and lay off for a green book if they touch evens.

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WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS

by Joe Dyer

Wolves came up as champions but fans will be wary of their last experience in the Premier League back in 2003-04 when they went down with a meagre 33 points. The signs are that the club want to stay a while longer this time round with Kevin Doyle joining a strikeforce of Sylvain Ebanks-Blake and Chris Iwelumo.

That pair were responsible for 39 goals between them last year while Doyle struck 18 times for Reading. So, it could be that Wolves resume the freescoring approach that brought them up with a Championship best of 80 goals. But, though Doyle scored 15 and eight goals in Reading's Premier League seasons, the other two are untested at the top level.

Key Player: Marcus Hahnemann

All the summer transfer talk was of persuading Sylvain Ebanks-Blake to sign a new deal and recruit Kevin Doyle. But Mick McCarthy also snapped up Doyle's former Reading team-mate Hahnemann on a free and that may prove to be the best business he did with a view to them staying up. Key saves at key stages of key matches make all the difference come the end of May and the American is just the sort of man to make them.

Best Bet: Lay Wolves for relegation at 2.7

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