

# How does Ramos fit all of them in the Spurs squad?

By Norman Hubbard

The cliché is that goals - and by extension, goalscorers - win games, not their suppliers. Tottenham seem intent on putting that long-established theory to the test this season. They may lose a 46-goal strike partnership this summer but Robbie Keane, sold to Liverpool, and Dimitar Berbatov, wanted by Manchester United, could not earn them a top-half finish in the Premier League last year. Exit the goal machines, it seems, and enter the inventors.

Luka Modric, Giovanni dos Santos and David Bentley have already joined. If Tottenham, who have left their iconic No. 10 shirt free since Keane's departure, get their way, Andrei Arshavin will follow. There seemed a need for a high-class creator, but Juande Ramos has acquired a surfeit of them. Recruiting Russia's talisman would complete a quartet and highlight the issue of how could they operate together.

Having been so busy in the transfer market, Spurs also appeared to have moved the problem from one department of the team to another. Keane and Berbatov represented arguably the finest strike partnership in England, and certainly the only top-flight duo to both reach the 20-goal landmark in each of the last two campaigns. The midfield, in contrast, prompted much of Ramos' imaginative tinkering.

No central midfield duo could contain Didier Zokora's energy, Tom Huddlestone's distribution and Jermaine Jenas' attacking instincts. No quartet had the requisite blend of resilience and imagination. A revamp results in casualties. Aaron Lennon appeared a source of frustration to his manager, but it may be the winger left irritated; Bentley has supplanted him in the England squad and could replace him on the right flank at White Hart Lane.

Few things remain consistent. A year ago, Spurs possessed perhaps the most envied forward-line in England. Jermain Defoe was sold in January and should Berbatov follow Keane out, the sole survivor will be its least successful member, Darren Bent. While pre-season form is a notoriously unreliable guide, the £16.5million man may be a beneficiary of the sales. The nine goals he scored in a week, albeit against inferior opposition, still exceeds the eight he managed in competitive football last season. While there is talk of Diego Milito, Diego Forlan, Luis Garcia and the outstanding Roman Pavlyuchenko being recruited as Berbatov's replacement, it may be pertinent that Bent's finest form at Charlton came as a lone striker.

The assembly of such a sizeable creative contingent suggests Ramos will struggle to field two. There is talk of the attack-minded 4-3-3. There is a theory, too, that the Spaniard will opt for a 4-4-1-1 formation away from home to reinforce the midfield. Perhaps the likeliest scenario, however, is that he prefers 4-2-3-1, a system that could enable Modric to adopt a central role without forcing the Croatian playmaker into the trenches of the midfield battle. Allow him that more advanced role and discussions as to whether the slight midfielder could adapt to the physicality of the Premier League would be rendered redundant.

It would permit Bentley and the left-footed dos

Santos to operate on either side of Modric. Add Arshavin and it is complicated further, however. That could be amended to 4-1-4-1, but then the defensive midfielder risks becoming overworked and as Jenas, who enjoys his forays forward, has been appointed vice-captain, it is safe to assume he plays a prominent role in his manager's plans too. Incorporate all and Ramos risks comparisons to Ossie Ardiles, whose attempts to field five forwards were entertaining but ultimately misguided.

Whatever the system, it certainly represents an ambitious blueprint. It is to Ramos' credit that - unlike in previous summers - he has recruited proven quality. Tottenham's fondness for quantity, sometimes at inflated prices, produced a bloated squad who, belatedly, have been given a dieting regime, aided by Roy Keane's fondness for signing much of their second-string side.

Real Madrid and Barcelona's reserve teams are permitted to compete in the lower leagues in Spain; Tottenham appear to have gone one better by entering theirs in the Premier League, cunningly disguised as Sunderland. With Steed Malbranque, Teemu Tainio and Pascal Chimbonda at the Stadium of Light, Paul Robinson joining Blackburn, Anthony Gardner loaned to Hull and Younes Kaboul on the verge of a move to Portsmouth, an intolerance of mediocrity is being established.

Nonetheless, there is a risk of a shortage of personnel in two key positions, in attack - where an injury to Bent would be problematic - and at centre-back, where Ledley King and Jonathan Woodgate are prone to lengthy absences. Both departments may have been neglected with the focus on midfield, but it may prove telling that pre-season has featured the versatile pair of Zokora and Huddlestone taking their turns in defence.

Moreover, such wholesale changes run the risk of forcing Tottenham into transition. Few clubs spend more seasons in that state, despite their annual commitment to spending. Yet with perhaps half a new team, reshaped and operating a different system with, presumably, an altered ethos to cater for the creators, Spurs need to adapt rapidly if, for once, they are to resemble the finished article.

And, of course, they have to remedy a shortfall of 46 goals. Each of Ramos' flair players should contribute. Dos Santos, whose deft finishing has been a feature of pre-season, is likely to adopt a position furthest up the pitch and is the main candidate to muster most, at least if Arshavin does not arrive.

Precociously skilful as the Mexican is, swift and penetrative as Modric's passing invariably is and expert as Bentley's crosses, corners and free kicks are, a highly-accomplished team should play some excellent football. Yet one question may remain: where are all the goals coming from?



Ramos



Modric



Giovanni