



## Expert: Player injuries up 20 per cent as Europe's elite clubs count cost of Covid-19 and match calendar pressure

- A combination of Covid-19 infections and isolations and increased soft tissue injuries have increased player absences dramatically year on year.
- Total bill for clubs in the first half of 2021/22 were €274.49 million across big five leagues. The survey reveals surprising numbers for the Bundesliga.
- **Why it matters:** Increased pressures on match calendar are only going to increase with European club competition expansion, increasing injury risks and costing clubs millions.
- **The perspective:** Higher injury levels may see clubs' insurance premiums soar, with one insurance expert saying that he has already seen an increase in wageroll insurance premiums.

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## Most Important News



### 1. UEFA set to replace FFP rules with new spending caps

UEFA is planning to replace its current Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules with new financial sustainability regulations that will place restrictions on wage and transfer spending for the first time.

**The Times reports** that, if agreed the rules will come into force from 2023. The European Club Association (ECA) board is due to consider UEFA's plan at a meeting on Thursday after the governing body was forced to change its previous proposals for a luxury tax.

Under the new squad cost rule, clubs will be limited to spending 70 per cent of their revenue in a calendar year on player wages, transfers and agents fees – though any income from selling players will allow clubs to spend more.

Breaches will lead to fines and points deductions, and repeat offences could lead to relegation from the Champions League to the Europa League and even exclusion from European competition.

UEFA accepts that many clubs would struggle to hit the 70 per cent mark at the moment so has agreed to make it 90 per cent for 2023, 80 per cent for 2024 and then 70 per cent after that.

The new rules will also result in clubs being allowed more flexibility around annual losses. Under the FFP rules, clubs were only permitted to lose €30 million over three years – this will be increased to €60 million if the club owners cover the losses by cash injections.

However, money spent on youth football, building new facilities and women's football will no longer be able to be written off when the losses are calculated.

### 2. City Football Group agree deal to buy Dutch club NAC Breda

Manchester City owners City Football Group have agreed a takeover of NAC Breda. The Dutch second tier club become the eleventh in City Football Group.

**An official club statement read:** "We presented the results of our investigation to the shareholders.

"On that basis, they have chosen to sell their shares to City Football Group.

"All other parties that have applied since the start of the sales process have now been informed and thanked for their efforts."

Breda will become the fifth European club to be added to the stable – alongside Man City, Girona, Troyes and Lommel.

### 3. Russia and Turkey launch surprise bids to host Euro 2028

Russia has launched a shock bid to host Euro 2028, with Turkey also entering the running after the UK and Ireland had looked set to be handed the rights to host the tournament unopposed.

**UEFA confirmed** the four bidders on Wednesday, noting that Russia and Turkey had declared their interest in hosting either the 2028 or 2032 edition of the Euros, and that Italy had announced its intention to bid for Euro 2032.

A meeting of the Russian Football Union executive committee decided on Wednesday to "support the decision to declare interest" in the tournaments, the organisation said in a statement ahead of the deadline for expressions of interest.

Russia's federation was not suspended by UEFA despite the ban on its teams from playing since last month. The RFU president, Alexander Dyukov, still sits on the UEFA executive committee and is CEO of an oil subsidiary of state-owned Gazprom, which was dropped as a Champions League sponsor over the war in Ukraine.

"We must take the opportunity to host the Euros," Dyukov told Russia's Match TV. "It will be at the World Cup stadiums and we have developed infrastructure."

UEFA will provide the tournament requirements to bidders next Wednesday and then confirm their candidacies on 5th April. The deadline to submit final bid dossiers is not until April 2023, with a decision by the UEFA executive committee due in September 2023.

### 4. Stoke City owners ease finances after reducing club debt by £160m

Stoke City's owners, bet365 Group, have eased the EFL Championship club's finances by reducing debts by £160 million.

**In a statement**, the club confirmed that bet365 has converted £40 million of shareholder loans into equity in Stoke City Holdings Limited and has also waived £20 million of shareholder loans.

Joint chairman John Coates said the move "greatly strengthens the club's balance sheet and also provides more long-term stability for the club."

He added: "On the field, the last four or five years have not proved to be as successful as any of us would have hoped. However, our commitment to the club, its future success, financial sustainability and place at the heart of our local community remains as strong and focussed as ever."

The debt reduction follows Stoke's recent announcement that a £20 million five-year redevelopment programme at the bet365 Stadium and Clayton Wood training ground is to get underway this summer.

More than £4 million will be invested in facilities ahead of the 2022/23 season, including the installation of 8,400 seats.

### 5. Nick Candy's Chelsea bid backed by AC Milan owner Elliott

The American hedge fund Elliott Management, which owns AC Milan, is among the minority backers of the UK property developer Nick Candy's takeover bid for Chelsea, it has emerged.

**Sky News reports** that an affiliate of Elliott Management, the New York-based investor, has agreed to inject a multimillion pound sum into Chelsea as part of Candy's offer.

Elliott has controlled AC Milan since 2018, although recent reports in Italy have suggested that it may seek to sell the club in the next couple of years. It has also been financially involved at Ligue 1 club Lille for some time.

It is understood that Elliott's stake in Chelsea would be below the threshold regarded by UEFA as problematic in relation to dual club ownership. It would also hold no voting or governance rights.

### 6. Premier League criticised for not allowing clubs to sign players from Ukraine and Russia

The Premier League has come in for criticism over its refusal to allow clubs to sign players who have been at leagues in Ukraine and Russia outside of the regular transfer window.

FIFA and UEFA have given special dispensation for the rest of the season for clubs to sign players from the two countries after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

However, the Premier League, as well as Serie A, have made it clear they will not accept any requests on the basis that it could damage the sporting integrity of the competition. By contrast, LaLiga is allowing clubs to sign the players from the two leagues.

**The Times reports** that the position of the English and Italian top-flights has infuriated UEFA's leadership and has also been criticised by Tim Sparv, the former Finland captain. Players such as the former Chelsea winger Victor Moses, who is at Spartak Moscow, are among those potentially looking for new clubs.

The Premier League declined to comment to The Times but its position is understood to be that because some clubs already have full squads they could not sign any new players, and that would put them at a disadvantage to those who could bring in new signings at a critical point in the season.

## Here's what else is happening

- Nottingham Forest confirm that **director of football Kyriakos Dourekas** has been added to the Club's Board of Directors
- FIFA announce that Crypto.com will be an official sponsor of the **FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022**.
- The Argentine Football Association have entered a partnership with Wanda Sports which makes the company the **exclusive commercial agent** of the Argentine national teams in China.
- New York City Football Club have announced a new partnership with **Bermuda Tourism Authority**
- Hertha BSC have presented the tailoring brand Andrews & Martin as the **club's new official outfitter**.
- The German insurance company **Allianz has secured the naming rights** for the redeveloped sports stadium at Sydney's Moore Park.
- The online streaming platform **FanCode has secured** the media rights to the Japanese J.League in the Indian subcontinent.

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