

Jonathan Agnew



There is a busy weekend of international football to look forward to in which England entertain Slovenia and Wales travel to Belgium, giving us the first chance to reflect on the opening quarter of the Premier League season.

With the majority of teams having now played 11 fixtures, one quick glance at the table reveals a club that

has beaten the odds and enjoyed a storming start to the campaign.

Before a ball was kicked in anger, the odds on Southampton being relegated were 7-2. Several of their best players had been sold, their manager had moved to Tottenham Hotspur and Katharina Liebherr appeared to have little interest in the club she had inherited from her father, Markus. Her critics claimed she was merely cashing in the key assets at Southampton before flogging it to the highest bidder.

And yet Saints are currently second in the table, just four points behind the leaders, Chelsea. Remarkably they have conceded only five goals thus far, compared to Chelsea's 11 and Manchester City's 12 and recently they beat Sunderland by a record margin of eight goals. Not only has Ronald Koeman just been awarded manager of the month, but their Italian striker and new signing Graziano Pellè is the player of the month.

There is still a long way to go until this season reaches its climax and who knows if Southampton can keep up this level of performance over such an extended period. But every sports lover knows that once a team gets on

a roll, it can be surprisingly hard to stop as confidence soars and support grows. Opponents start to approach matches too cautiously because they are fearful of providing even the slightest opportunity to a team that is now enjoying a reputation for punishing mistakes.

It has been fun charting Southampton's success this season and it makes such a pleasant contrast to the never-ending analysis of Manchester

United's struggle or the inflammatory comments made by the more outspoken managers who, to be fair, have probably already grown weary of the stream of banal questions they face in their compulsory press conferences.

Injuries will play a critical part in determining Southampton's progress from here. Koeman simply must keep his players fit, and also with their feet firmly on the ground. There is a fine line between confidence and complacency and although Southampton have started brilliantly, the Premier League is all about the long haul.

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