

I won't lie, the last month has been a bit dry for myself in terms of the variety of sports that I've been watching. Can we count darts as a sport? Because the recent PDC World Championship was a bit of a thriller. But mostly the new year has seen me go back to binging on Premier League action – and whilst binging might not be a healthy habit in most aspects of life, I'm really enjoying this binge.

I have to start with Brentford - it just gets better and better, doesn't it? It's got to a point where I'm now just expecting the Bees to keep on pulling results out of the bag. Since the return to action following the World Cup, Brentford have won three, drawn one and lost just the once – and that was only against West Ham in the FA Cup. Fortunately that defeat didn't mean all that much to many of us Bees fans; I think it's also good to have a reality check, the occasional little bump in the road. Huge winning streaks can come crashing down like a house of cards with just one defeat, so I personally think a semi-regular slip-up (let's say monthly) is a good thing.

Wow, I can't believe I've actually just written that – Brentford, in the Premier League ... and I'm wanting us to drop points here and there just to stay resilient. To have got to this stage, we've clearly been in tremendous form. The World Cup winter break definitely did us some favours, allowing most of our first team players plenty of time off. Last season Brentford struggled around the turn of the year, going on a bad streak that left us hovering not far off relegation, before turning fortunes around in mid-March thanks to vital wins over strugglers Norwich and Burnley, catalysed by the arrival of Christian Eriksen and goalkeeper David Raya's return from injury. But this season the momentum does really seem to be with us through these cold months - and crucially we've got a huge cushion above clubs floundering near relegation.

We're great at the giant killings, beating Manchesters United and City as well as Liverpool already this year, as well as holding Chelsea and Spurs to draws. Tactically, manager Thomas Frank has it spot on for these games - soaking up the pressure and

counter attacking with real panache, usually creating more chances than the opposition despite having less possession. The stats speak for themselves: four of our seven league wins have come against teams in the top half. And sure, we've only won seven games out of 19 (at the time of writing), but we're difficult to beat too – only four defeats in the whole first half of the season. It's a crazy statistic, and even more so in context – it's bettered only by the current top four.

Even the Ivan Toney saga doesn't seem to have caused any real consternation at all. He went down injured away to West Ham at the end of December and was hauled off on a stretcher – many fans thought there was a real chance that we'd never see him play for the club again, with the outcome of an FA investigation into his betting on the horizon. Fast forward a few weeks though and he's back out on the pitch slotting away penalties with aplomb – the latest in a 2-0 win over Bournemouth. This was the kind of match where we tend to come unstuck, attempting to break down lesser teams who sit back and defend. But this season we've got the tools to unlock them. Christian Eriksen was our creative saviour last season - this season Mathias Jensen has seamlessly stepped into his departed Danish compatriot's shoes. Fittingly, Jensen is the man who replaced Eriksen for Denmark in the Euro 2020 match that Christian had his cardiac arrest, and was also the man who was subbed off for Eriksen when he made his miraculous return to football in West London eight months later. Jensen has often been on the receiving end of stick from Bees' fans – too many 'Hail Mary' passes, easily shrugged off the ball, lazy, ... But this season he's quietly worked on all of those flaws and is now one of the first names on the team sheet. Creativity and goals are coming from all over though, with the whole team singing off the same hymn sheet. We've got a slew of no-nonsense centre-backs able to rotate in and out of the side at Thomas Frank's behest – Ben Mee signing on a free transfer from relegated Burnley in the summer is right up there with the best bits of business

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any club in the country did. Rico Henry has to be knocking on Gareth Southgate's door now, with the bombarding left wing back, for me, our most consistently excellent performer. Goalkeeper David Raya moves like a cat and passes like a midfielder – what a combination. Even some of our more maligned players like Bryan Mbeumo are looking sharper than ever post Qatar.

So if Toney does gets banned for a while I'm not worried – sure, I'll be sad, but there's a Plan B, Plan C, Plan D ... Thomas Frank's got it all planned out. We beat Liverpool 3-1 without our star striker, and actually had the ball in the net five times (two were ruled out by VAR for minor offside calls). Now we've got a new 21-year-old attacking signing, Kevin Schade, who was snapped up on an initial loan from Freiburg (currently 2nd in Germany's topflight). He's added a totally different dimension to our attack coming off the bench – versatile as a winger or centre forward and quick when running behind tired opposition defenders, all he needs is a goal to get off the mark.

Premier League standard strength in depth is a real thing at Brentford now. There's even a Beckham on our books too, with the signing of David and Victoria's second oldest son Romeo to our B team. Building for the future both on and off the pitch; I can't ask for any more.

The rest of the Premier League is really hotting up. Arsenal are on course to win the league – now don't count your chickens too early with things like this, as an eight point gap can shrink in an instant. But on the pitch they look possessed. Manchester City are stumbling behind them, and arguably that club's biggest priority is to finally win a Champions League. Newcastle and Manchester United seem to be forming a tight top four, with a chasm growing to Spurs in 5th. I'd then have Brighton in 6th (yes, I've stumbled into writing a predictions paragraph). The swashbuckling Seagulls have defied the odds once again and look even better under new manager Roberto De Zerbi than they did under his predecessor Graham Potter. Potter is floundering a little under the

spotlight at Chelsea, with a squad of players who give the impression that they're there for the pay check. Liverpool also seem to be in disarray, with an ageing squad perhaps not able to keep up with the intensive demands of Jurgen Klopp's tactics. I think both are too big though to stay behind Brentford any longer and will battle it out amongst themselves for that final European slot. Rounding out the top half, I genuinely believe the Bees can finish in 9th, pipping West London rivals Fulham – but putting rivalry aside for a second, Fulham themselves are having a remarkable season too. Looking down at the bottom half, Aston Villa, Crystal Palace and Wolves should all finish comfortably in mid-table, with the two Midlands sides each bolstered by a new tactically astute manager from Spain. Nottingham Forest too should be safe, all 30 of their new players finally clicking after a revolving door of a summer transfer window. I then think there's six teams in the mix for relegation. Both Leicester and West Ham need to stop the rot, with managers Brendan Rodgers and David Moyes respectively on the cusp of losing their jobs, and key England internationals like James Maddison and Declan Rice linked with big money moves away. Southampton have to be in the mix too but for altogether different reasons – namely an inexperienced squad and an inexperienced manager. But the three clubs I think will go down are Leeds, Everton and Bournemouth. Not enough quality, iffy owners, bad form ... need I say more?

I would love to have done a full preview of the Six Nations but once again I've rambled on about football. A new era for England though, which will hopefully be exciting. Our new head coach Steve Borthwick captained the national team between 2008 and 2010, and is fresh off the back of guiding Leicester Tigers back from the brink of oblivion to a Premiership title. Let's be patient with him in this month's matches – but secretly I've got a good feeling about our chances, and so should you.

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