

I can't not start by talking about Manchester City and their historic treble, the first since cross-city rivals Manchester United did it in 1999. To crown that remarkable achievement was their maiden Champions League triumph, courtesy of a 1-0 win over Inter Milan in the final held in Istanbul – finally getting that Champions League hoodoo off their backs, even if it was a case of “when” rather than “if”. Sure, the oil money / influx of investment from the United Arab Emirates has enabled City to turn a corner from a lower mid-table Premier League side into the world's best, but that's a giant oversimplification of the causes behind this historic triumph. Many critics will look at Pep Guardiola's managerial success with scepticism, pointing to the size of each club he's managed (Barcelona, Bayern Munich, now Manchester City... and no one else). But his impact is about so much more than simply winning titles. He's crafted institutions wherever he's gone, constantly innovating new tactics and ways of playing, building juggernaut football teams the likes of which we've rarely seen before. He won two Champions League titles in three years at Barcelona, but was the figurehead of a team that is widely regarded as the best club side in history. Now at Manchester City, he's built a team that aren't too far away from those heights.

City will often be branded with the tag that they 'buy success'. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I can't remember a single occasion under Pep's tenure where they've gone out and bought a player considered to be one of, if not the best, in his position at that moment in time. Erling Haaland this summer was perhaps the closest to that, but at just 22 years of age his journey to the very top is still a work in progress. Kevin de Bruyne is widely considered by many to be the world's best midfielder, and sure he was good when he joined, but Pep has created a monster there. I really like lots about this current Manchester City team – they play as a well-oiled unit executing

Pep's mastermind plans to perfection, and all the players have not only flourished under his management but are hugely likeable and hard-working. Guys like Rodri (who scored the winner in Istanbul), John Stones, Bernardo Silva to name a few. Of course there's the captain Ilkay Gundogan as well, the unheralded midfield maestro who will surely get a statue outside the Etihad for his treble-winning exploits.

You could argue that City were heavy favourites in both the FA Cup final (against Manchester United) and the Champions League final, and therefore could've inflicted more damage on their opponents, but that simply shows just how far the club has come. Looking ahead, the concern now is that they're going to be too hard to stop for a long time. Given that the Saudi Arabian sports washing at Newcastle is already signed and sealed, we might be reliant on them to splash the cash in order to compete with City. The other candidate is Arsenal, managed by Pep Guardiola's former apprentice Mikel Arteta. I can see them competing for the Premier League title next season, but only if England and West Ham star Declan Rice comes into their midfield. Which brings us swiftly on to ...

West Ham lifting silverware for the first time in 43 years - and European silverware for the first time in 58 years. A 2-1 win in the Europa Conference League final against Fiorentina, thanks to a last minute winner from Jarrod Bowen and a dogged defensive display characteristic of David Moyes' finest teams. Well-behaved Hammers fans created a party atmosphere on the streets of Prague, and then the streets of east London where they paraded the trophy. Sure, it's a “mickey mouse” trophy, and winning it only qualifies them into the Europa League – a competition the Hammers reached the semi-finals of just over a year ago. But winning silverware is priceless (just ask Tottenham fans), and

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after a below-par league season ending with West Ham in 14th, it's exactly what the club needed - and arguably deserved. A superb way for Declan to finish his time in east London as well.

Onto tennis now, and Wimbledon's on the horizon (more on that in a second), but let's recap the French Open – and safe to say, I got my predictions absolutely spot on.

Having turned 22 at the start of the tournament, Poland's World No. 1 Iga Swiatek grabbed her third French Open in just four years and cemented her status as the "Queen of Clay," consolidating her position firmly at the peak of the women's game right now. I predicted Coco Gauff would challenge her closely; they met in the quarter-finals but Swiatek brushed the young American aside with reasonable ease. In fact, the Pole only dropped one set in the entire tournament; in the final against Karolina Muchova. The French Open, and in particular the women's French Open, tends to throw up a surprise package – and this year that was the unseeded Muchova, who knocked out second seed Aryna Sabalenka, eighth seed Maria Sakkari, and 2021 runner up Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova - but the final proved one game too many to cap off that miracle run.

On the men's side, Novak Djokovic soared to glory, beating hotshot Norwegian Casper Ruud in straight sets in the final. Ruud reached the final in 2022 as well, losing to Rafael Nadal in similar circumstances. At just 24 years of age, the world No. 4's time will come. But let's focus on the winner. I always like to lay on the praise for Novak because I think he's been hard-done-by by time, coming through in the same era as two generational talents who are universally adored – Roger Federer and the aforementioned Nadal. Novak perhaps doesn't get quite the same love from the wider public, and certainly didn't endear himself to fans with the 2022 Australian

Open Covid vaccine saga. But he's now secured a record-breaking 23rd Grand Slam title, moving past Nadal (who was quite frankly carried by an absurdly strong knack for the clay courts of Paris.) Novak has been at the top on all other surfaces throughout most of his career, and for me has to be the undisputed greatest of all time. Even if that's just for the incredible shape he's kept himself in whilst performing at the highest level for so long; he's 36 now, an age at which many players have already retired. Ten Wimbledon titles is the standout on his list of accolades – and look what's coming up in July.

Wimbledon is back: from Monday 3rd until Sunday 16th. Perhaps because I spend most of my time in southwest London these days, I'm particularly excited – a 15-minute jog from my front door and I'm within striking distance of the hallowed grass. If Djokovic were to claim an astounding 11th Wimbledon title... well it's just more icing on the cake at this point. A calendar year Grand Slam is very much on the cards, having already lifted both the Australian and French Open titles. He'll be challenged once again by the likes of Ruud, by the likes of Daniil Medvedev (the talented Russian who missed out in 2022 due to the ban on Russian athletes), by the likes of 20-year-old Carlos Alcaraz. But surely, as Novak proves time and time again, he'll see them off.

And on the women's side, I'm going to go a little against the grain and actually predict against Iga Swiatek, instead opting for the Belarusian World No.2 Aryna Sabalenka. But regardless, I'm most looking forward to (hopefully) getting down to SW19 and catching some great tennis in the flesh.

I say hopefully, because I'll actually be spending the first week and a bit of Wimbledon in northern Spain. I fly out to Bilbao on Saturday 1st July, which by an absolute stroke of luck is the day the Tour de

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France kicks off ... in Bilbao. If you've been reading this column long enough, you'll know that I'm a Tour de France aficionado, and therefore will be calling foul play on my claims that this was coincidental. On my life, I only clocked it when I looked at this year's route and joined the dots.

But if you've recently caught the scintillating Netflix series *Unchained*, about the trials and tribulations of being a cyclist on "Le Tour", you'll know why I'm mad about it. The race winds through the French (and I suppose a bit of Spanish) countryside for three weeks – along picturesque flats and rolling hills, through quaint villages and big towns, and, of course, up, over and down both the Alps and Pyrenees.

As for the action itself, I'm anticipating a pulsating battle for overall glory (that is, the rider who completes the 21 stages in

the lowest total time) between 2020 & 2021 winner Tadej Pogacar, and 2022 winner Jonas Vingegaard. As for Brits to look out for, there'll be no Geraint Thomas this year, who instead chose to focus on the recent Giro d'Italia (which he narrowly lost by a mere 14 seconds). Whether we'll see Mark Cavendish in France is another question; he recently won the Giro d'Italia's crowning sprint stage and is of course level all-time with Eddy Merckx for stage wins at Le Tour. This is the "Manx Missile's" final season before retirement, and all he needs is one sprint stage win over the three weeks to break that elusive record. Tune into ITV4 for the highlights every night from the 1st until the 23rd to see if he manages it.

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