



# The Sun

## How does Erik ten Hag compare to possible replacement managers for Manchester United?

**Erik ten Hag**  
**Simone Inzaghi**  
**Kieran McKenna**  
**Gareth Southgate**  
**Ruben Amorim**  
**Thomas Tuchel**  
**Zinedine Zidane**  
**Graham Potter**  
**Thomas Frank**  
**Michael Carrick**  
**Roberto De Zerbi**

4 October 2024

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# 1. How do the objective performance levels of the head coaches compare with each other?

The table in Exhibit 1 (below) summarises the key quantitative ratings and metrics for a selection of current head coaches who have been touted as possible replacements for **Erik ten Hag** (who is also included as a comparator). The ratings and metrics are explained in the **Glossary** of this report (Section 7 below).

Exhibit 1: Table outlining the ratings for each head coach, including quantitative metrics indicating relative strengths and weaknesses (as of 4 October 2024)

	Objective Achievement Rating	Strategic Intelligence Rating (Home)	Strategic Intelligence Rating (Away)	Strategic Intelligence Rating	Tactical Command Rating (Home)	Tactical Command Rating (Away)	Tactical Command Rating	Attacking Coefficient (Home)	Attacking Coefficient (Away)	Attacking Coefficient	Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient (Home)	Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient (Away)	Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient	Shot Conversion Rating	Opposition Shot Conversion Rating	Shot Creation Ratio	Possession Goal Conversion (Home)	Possession Goal Conversion (Away)	Possession KME Creation (Home)	Possession KME Creation (Away)	Overall Possession (Home / Away)	Most Used Formation	Overall Rating (Weighted Metrics)
Ruben Amorim	504.00	50.00	38.24	88.24	3.53	2.97	6.50	12.78	12.93	25.71	12.78	9.89	22.67	45.88	26.52	2.70 : 1	5.55	2.38	11.48	5.98	61 / 58	3-4-3	151.4
Zinedine Zidane	543.40	36.84	36.84	73.68	1.71	2.63	4.34	12.98	12.75	25.73	9.35	9.66	19.01	41.59	23.03	1.49 : 1	3.07	2.19	8.01	5.37	60 / 60	4-3-3 Attacking	132.7
Simone Inzaghi	429.2	40.35	42.11	82.46	1.76	2.97	4.74	8.62	8.62	17.24	6.96	7.26	14.22	42.8	20.83	1.84 : 1	4.2	3.11	10.96	6.44	58 / 56	3-5-2 flat	128.8
Thomas Tuchel	508.70	42.16	28.43	70.59	2.29	1.26	3.56	10.14	10.34	20.49	8.52	5.88	14.40	38.19	31.98	1.92 : 1	5.36	2.27	13.69	5.80	61 / 62	4-2-3-1	117.8
Kieran McKenna	261.20	39.13	30.43	69.57	3.87	2.15	6.02	10.34	10.34	20.69	8.10	6.30	14.39	34.39	33.33	1.51 : 1	5.03	2.84	13.07	9.27	53 / 53	4-2-3-1	105.6
Ruud van Nistelrooy	260.10	45.83	28.13	73.96	3.61	1.82	5.42	10.13	8.73	18.86	8.55	5.17	13.72	35.76	31.31	2.13 : 1	5.70	2.12	13.77	6.98	57 / 54	4-3-3 Defensive	105.0
Erik ten Hag	462.20	28.95	23.68	52.63	2.26	0.97	3.24	10.25	9.98	20.24	5.85	4.72	10.57	31.40	28.97	0.92 : 1	3.22	2.96	11.59	8.64	54 / 47	4-2-3-1	99.4
Gareth Southgate	190.2	43.33	32.22	75.56	2.03	1.97	4.00	13.56	11.49	25.06	11.03	7.82	18.85	44.52	25.14	3.04 : 1	4.02	1.83	8.99	4.11	65 / 65	4-3-3 Attacking	96.7
Graham Potter	245.50	26.32	25.44	51.75	1.45	1.42	2.87	11.12	10.53	21.64	5.78	5.41	11.19	27.77	25.67	1.24 : 1	2.74	1.68	8.90	5.43	55 / 54	3-4-2-1	74.2
Michael Carrick	202.40	24.64	25.36	50.00	0.72	1.87	2.59	10.31	10.12	20.43	5.11	5.02	10.13	31.31	33.13	1.25 : 1	1.91	3.83	9.32	9.78	54 / 49	4-2-3-1	66.1
Roberto De Zerbi	302.2	26.32	15.79	42.11	1.37	0.47	1.84	10.48	10.57	21.05	5.46	3.34	8.8	25.84	34.44	1.22 : 1	2.66	1.58	9.78	5.87	60 / 60	4-2-3-1	63.9
Thomas Frank	282.5	19.3	14.91	34.21	1.05	-0.13	0.92	11.07	9.98	21.05	4.64	3.48	8.12	32.1	39.6	0.92 : 1	3.26	2.56	10	7.85	47 / 42	4-3-3 Attacking	53.3

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## 2. Quantitative Analysis: Headlines

- The *Overall Rating* for each manager is based on their achievements over the past six seasons, but is weighted by the league they competed in. Based on this rating, we can rank the managers in the following order:

1. **Ruben Amorim**
2. **Zinedine Zidane**
3. **Simone Inzaghi**
4. **Thomas Tuchel**
5. **Kieran McKenna**
6. **Ruud van Nistelrooy**
7. **Erik ten Hag**
8. **Gareth Southgate**
9. **Graham Potter**
10. **Michael Carrick**
11. **Roberto De Zerbi**
12. **Thomas Frank**

- **Ruben Amorim** has exceptional metrics. He is the best of all the managers in the study for his ‘football intelligence’ - including setting up his teams to win matches (*Strategic Intelligence*: **88.24** (67% better than **ten Hag**)), and transforming matches (within the match itself) for incrementally better results (*Tactical Command*: **6.50** (100% better than **ten Hag**)).
- In addition, **Amorim** has an incredibly high *Attacking Coefficient* (**25.71**—bettered only by **Zinedine Zidane (25.73)**). This style of play would fit perfectly with the Manchester United supporters’ ‘attack, attack, attack’ mentality—high energy, fast-paced, with a very quick transition from defence to attack.
- **Amorim** has successfully used this style of play to achieve excellent results at Sporting Lisbon, and his *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient* (**22.67**) is significantly better than all the other managers—19% above the next best, **Zidane (19.01)**, and over 100% better than **ten Hag (10.57)**!
- Indeed, **there is no principal metric on which ten Hag is better than Amorim**. Shot creation, shot conversion, and overall possession are all substantially better with **Amorim** than with **ten Hag**.

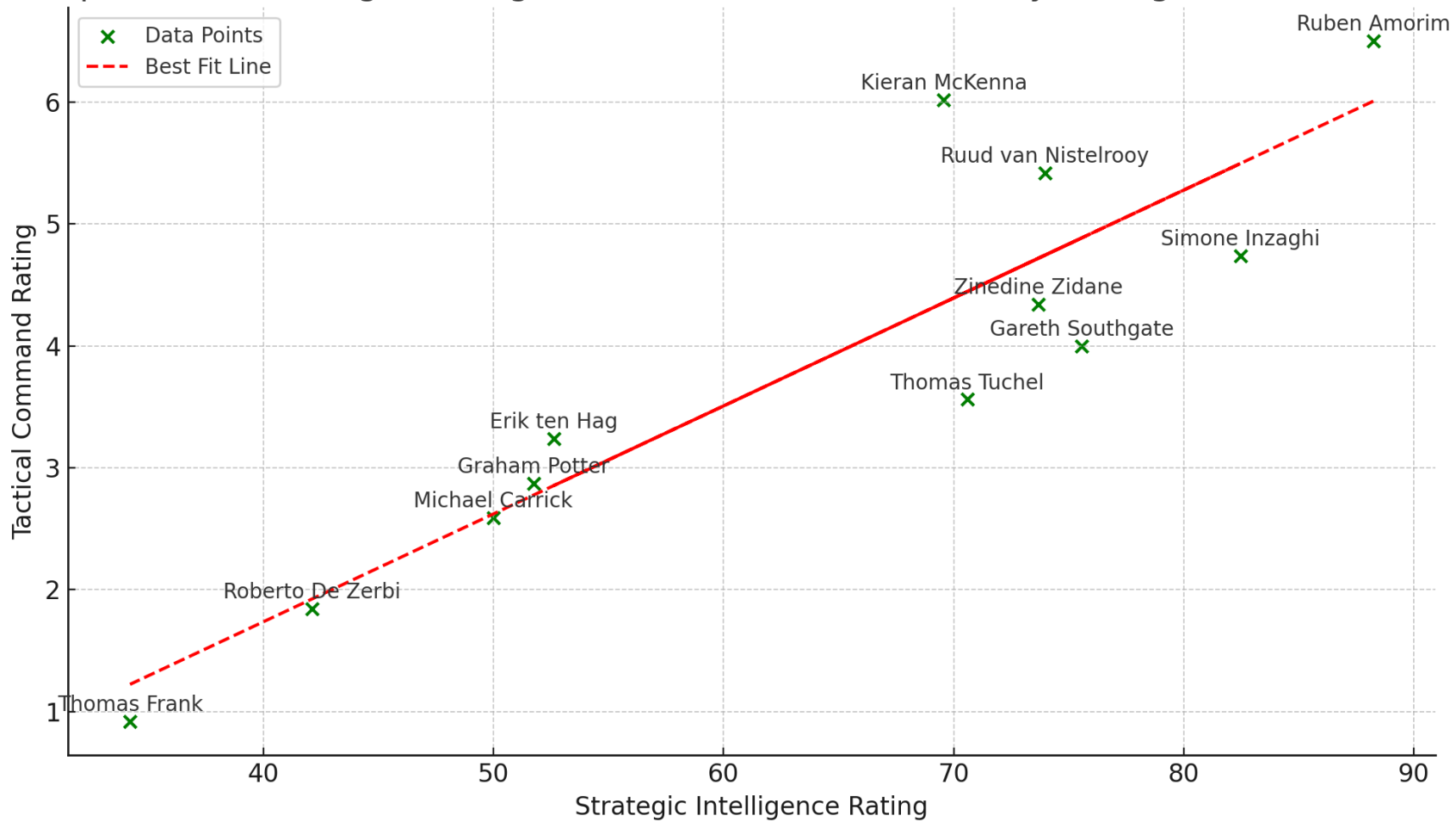
- We understand that **Amorim** was seriously considered for the Liverpool manager position, but a deal could not be done (for whatever reason). Does this suggest there are challenges with integrating his approach and/or personality? His style of play would certainly match the attacking preferences of Manchester United supporters.
- So what if **Amorim** is not an option? Well, if football intelligence is important - and successful managers in the Premier League all demonstrate exceptional levels of *Strategic Intelligence* and *Tactical Command*, and empirical evidence has shown that it is a highly transferable skill between leagues - then the chart at Exhibit 2 (below) suggests that Manchester United might already have an option on the payroll!
- **Ruud van Nistelrooy** has demonstrated excellent levels of both *Strategic Intelligence* (**73.96**) and *Tactical Command* (**5.42**) during his time in charge at PSV Eindhoven. This does need a note of caution because he was only head coach for a single season. Nevertheless, even in that short period, he has shown that he has a good measure of football intelligence.
- Likewise, another ex-Manchester United employee—**Kieran McKenna**—has shown excellent levels of football intelligence at Ipswich Town, especially with his *Tactical Command* (**6.02**) of transforming matches into wins from a losing or drawing position. He is second only to **Amorim** in this respect.
- If ‘**attack, attack, attack**’ is an important consideration (and more specifically, achieving successful results from an attacking style of play), then the chart at Exhibit 3 (below) illustrates that **Zidane** (**19.01**) is the best option after **Amorim**, followed by **Gareth Southgate** (**18.85**) (even though it has been tempered by his more defensive approach in the recent Euros). Both of these managers have been out of club management for a number of years (for different reasons), and there is certainly a question mark over whether their relatively high *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficients* can be transferred to the Premier League in 2024/25?
- If they are both discounted, then the next best ‘attack, attack, attack’ options are **Simone Inzaghi** (**14.22**), **Thomas Tuchel** (**14.40**), **McKenna** (**14.39**) and **van Nistelrooy** (**13.72**).
- **Tuchel** has an advantage, perhaps, because he is available and not attached to a club. However, in addition to his ‘attack, attack, attack’ credentials, **Inzaghi** has the best ratio - between the shots that his teams convert to goals, and the number of opposition shots that lead to goals being conceded - of any manager in the list (see the chart at Exhibit 4). **McKenna** is poor in this respect, and **van Nistelrooy** is only equivalent to **ten Hag**.
- Are there any other managers on the list that stand out as a better option for Manchester United than **ten Hag**? Well, **De Zerbi** gets a lot of column inches, but his objective performance metrics are comparatively low. The same applies to **Thomas Frank** and **Graham Potter**. On a purely objective basis, these managers should be eliminated from consideration.

- The same applies to **Michael Carrick**, although he is relatively successful at converting possession into *Key Match Events* (that could, in principle, lead to match-winning outcomes). However, he has not been particularly successful, in reality, at translating these *Key Match Events* to scoring goals or preventing goals (see the chart at Exhibit 5 below).
- In any event, possession *for the sake of possession* is not what it used to be. Empirical evidence based on recent Premier League winners (Manchester City and Liverpool) demonstrates that levels of possession have reduced over recent seasons and are now regarded by us as a secondary metric.
- So, in short, **Amorim is head and shoulders above all the other candidates and would be a substantial improvement over ten Hag in almost every respect.**
- **Zidane** offers the best option for currently available managers (without a club). Still, there are question marks about his ability to immediately adapt to the Premier League because of his period out of the game. **Tuchel** would be the next best 'free' option, but with recent managerial experience.
- After that, **McKenna** and **van Nistelrooy** are younger managers, and with a Manchester United connection. Both offer a **slight uplift on ten Hag**, but there is a risk for a club the size of Manchester United to appoint managers with such limited experience.
- Finally, if **Amorim** is not an option, and Manchester United want a manager with a high level of recent experience (and high objective performance levels) then **Inzaghi would be a choice that offers a significant uplift on all metrics vs ten Hag - with one exception.** **Inzaghi** has a much more defensive style of play than **ten Hag** (although **Inzaghi** is more successful than **ten Hag**, despite the highly defensive style). This could prove a critical issue with Manchester United supporters if **Inzaghi** experiences a poor run of results.

### 3. Football Intelligence

Exhibit 2: Chart illustrating relative levels of football intelligence (*Strategic Intelligence* and *Tactical Command*)

#### Comparison of Strategic Intelligence and Tactical Command by Manager with Best Fit Line



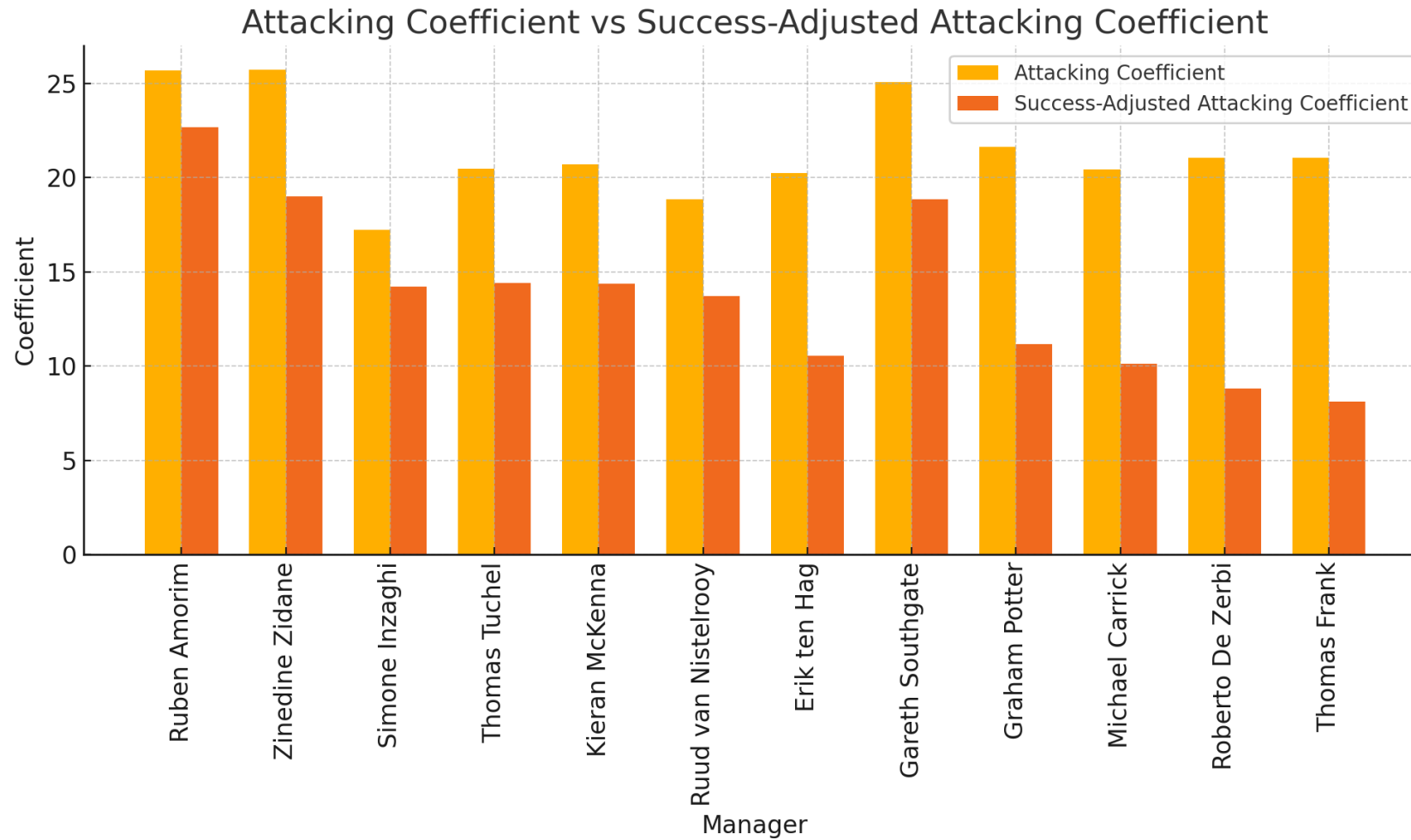
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- Comparing *Strategic Intelligence* and *Tactical Command* can show us how a manager can impact matches through preparation and analysis before matches and tactical alterations throughout the game. The aim is to win matches, and having a high rating in both metrics shows a manager's 'football intelligence'.
- **Erik ten Hag** places slightly below average in the table in Exhibit 1, with very mediocre ratings for both *Strategic Intelligence* (**52.63**) and *Tactical Command* (**3.24**). The aim is to be on the top right of the chart, showing a manager's ability to transform matches into winning situations.
- The manager who stands out is **Ruben Amorim**. **Amorim** was linked to Liverpool last season, but this never progressed. The current Sporting CP manager has the highest ratings in both metrics (SI: **88.24** - TC: **6.5**), making him the most 'football intelligent' manager on the list.
- **Ruud van Nistelrooy**, **Erik ten Hag's** assistant manager, actually places higher than his boss. **Van Nistelrooy** performed well in both metrics during his season as manager of PSV Eindhoven, with a *Strategic Intelligence Rating* of **73.96** and a *Tactical Command Rating* of **5.42**.
- One of the more surprising managers in these metrics is **Kieran McKenna**. Regarding *Tactical Command*, **McKenna** (**6.02**) scores second highest to **Amorim**. This suggests his ability to transform matches into winning positions is very strong. The second highest rating for *Strategic Intelligence* is **Simone Izaghi** (**82.46**). The Inter Milan manager is able to prepare and set his team out to a good level, which allows him to maximise his chances of winning the next match.
- If Manchester United is looking for an 'intelligent' manager, they should target a manager with a high rating in both *Strategic Intelligence* and *Tactical Command*. Based on this, **Ruben Amorim** is the manager who fits the best.
- Even though **ten Hag** places above fellow Premier League manager **Thomas Frank**, he still falls below the alternatives by some margin.

## 4. Attack, Attack, Attack!

Exhibit 3: Chart illustrating relative levels of an attacking style of play, and the success generated by that style (*Attacking Coefficient* and *Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient*)



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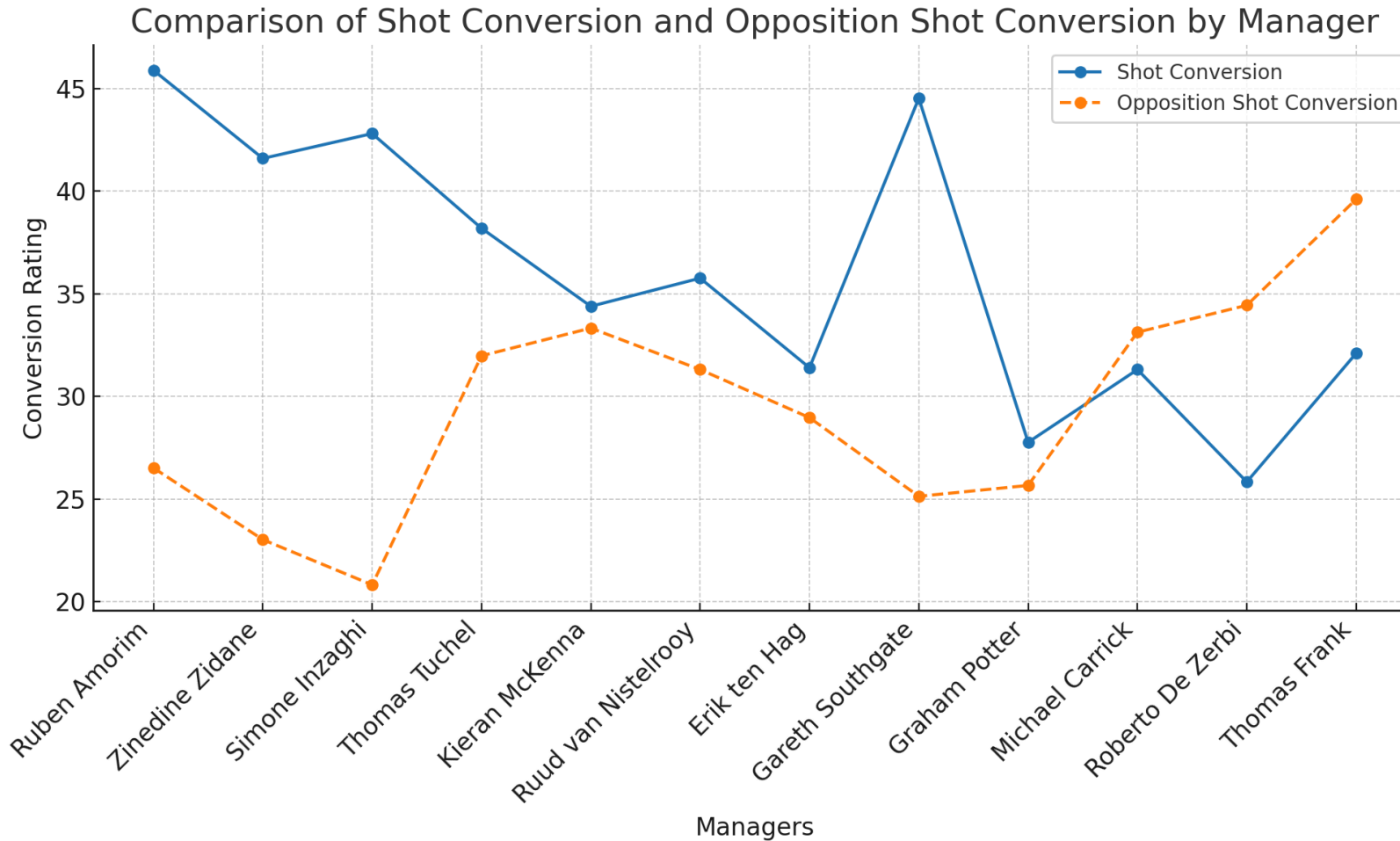
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- Manchester United is famous for its attacking approach to matches. However, as shown in Exhibit 3 (above), this has not happened under **Erik ten Hag**.
- **Erik ten Hag's** *Attacking Coefficient* is **20.24**, which is below the average (**21.51**). This rating does not bode well with Manchester United fans, who love an attacking match approach. Once success from this style of play is considered, **ten Hag** falls way below average, which further justifies the fanbase's disapproval.
- One possible reason for **Ten Hag's** rating is his preferred **4-2-3-1** formation, which is usually used to balance attack and defence.
- The managers with the highest *Attacking Coefficient* are **Amorim (25.71)**, **Zidane (25.73)**, and **Southgate (25.06)**. **Zidane** and **Southgate** favour the **4-3-3 attacking** formation, while **Amorim** prefers a **3-4-3**. Both formations are utilised in an attacking sense, with players playing further up the field.
- These three managers also have the highest *Success-Adjusted Attacking Coefficient*. Once success adjusts the rating, **Amorim** comes above the others (**22.67**).
- **Simone Inzaghi** has a low *Attacking Coefficient* (**17.24**), indicating that he does not play the most attacking style of football. This is uncommon for a modern Italian side, which tends to play fast-paced attacking football. However, his *Success-Adjusted Attacking Coefficient* (**14.22**) is the sixth highest.
- **Thomas Frank** is the manager whose *Attacking Coefficient* (**21.05**) falls the most (**-12.93**) once *Success* is taken into account (**8.12**). **Erik ten Hag** also falls (**-9.67**), which suggests that his approach to attacking has a large negative impact on the team's ability to win matches.

## 5. Shots - For and Against

Exhibit 4: Chart comparing shots converted by each manager's team vs shots converted by the opposing team (*Shot Conversion Rating* and *Opposition Shot Conversion Rating*)



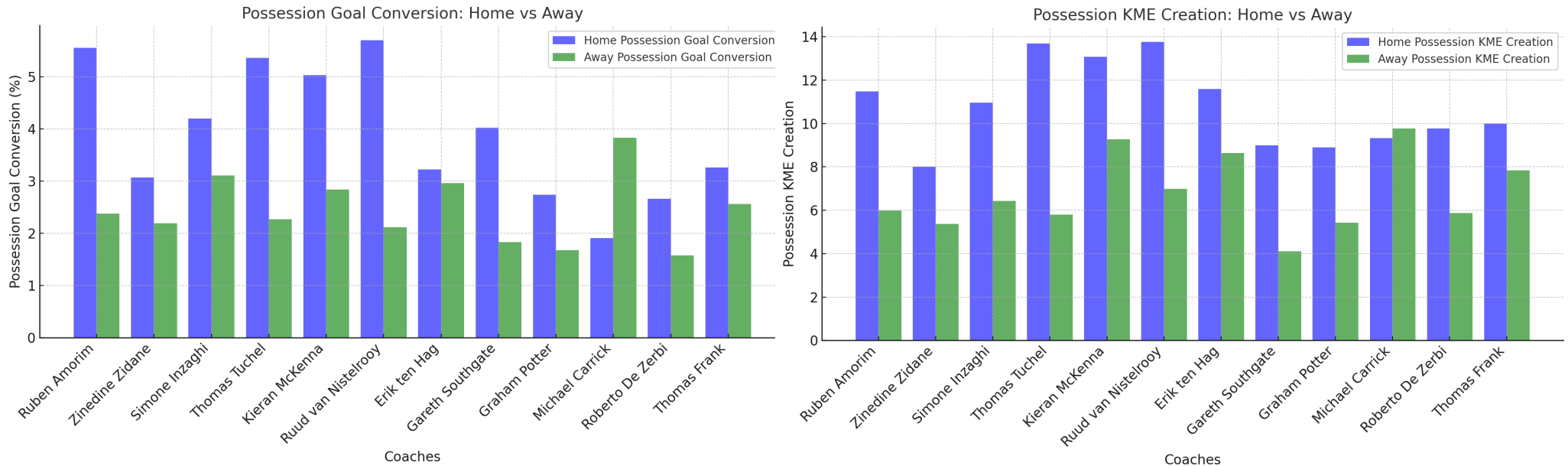
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- Identifying a *Shot Conversion Rating* and *Opposition Shot Rating* allows us to understand a manager's attacking and defensive efficiency. Having a high *Shot Conversion Rating* and a low *Opposition Shot Conversion Rating* is important.
- The managers with the strongest *Shot Conversion Rating* are **Amorim (45.88)**, **Southgate (44.52)**, **Inzaghi (42.8)**, and **Zinedine Zidane (41.59)**. These managers are the most efficient at converting shots into goals with their respective teams.
- **Erik ten Hag** has a very modest *Shot Conversion Rating* (**31.4**), which shows a lack of ability to convert shots. The aim should be to have the highest conversion rating possible. Even though he has not got the lowest rating of all the managers, he is ranked 9th out of 12, finishing above **Carrick (31.31)**, **Potter (27.77)**, and **De Zerbi (25.84)**.
- Ten Hag does not stand out among the other Premier League managers on the list. **Thomas Frank (32.1)** and **Kieran McKenna (34.39)** both have a higher *Shot Conversion Rating*.
- At the other end of the pitch, the *Opposition Shot Conversion Rating* illustrates how efficient a manager's defence is. The objective is to have the lowest rating possible, which ideally is lower than the *Shot Conversion Rating*.
- The best example to illustrate this is **Simone Inzaghi**. The Inter Milan manager has a high *Shot Conversion Rating* (**42.8**) and the lowest *Opposition Shot Conversion Rating* (**20.83**).
- Once again, **ten Hag** does not stand out as remarkable, with an *Opposition Shot Conversion Rating* of **28.97**. Even though his *Shot Conversion Rating* is higher, there is not a significant difference between the ratings. Average ratings in both metrics show that ten Hag is not the most efficient at either attacking or defending.
- A *Shot Creation Ratio* is a comparison between a team's shots on goal and the opposing team's shots on goal. In the case of **Erik ten Hag**, he has the lowest *Shot Creation Ratio* (**0.92:1**) alongside **Thomas Frank**.
- All the other managers have a ratio above 1, with the highest being **Gareth Southgate (3.04:1)**, but this has not been achieved in club football.

## 6. Possession - Tika, Taka

Exhibit 5: Chart illustrating relative levels of goals being converted, and key match events being created, from possession



- Even though *Possession* does not win matches, it holds data that can be used to help understand a team’s attacking ability.
- The *Overall Possession* can tell us how much the team holds the ball, but not how they use it. **Erik ten Hag** has low statistics (54%/47%), which on initial viewing could mean that they do not dominate matches. The manager with the highest *Overall Possession* is **Gareth Southgate** (65%/65%), but this is in international football and which needs to be taken into consideration.
- Regarding *Possession Goal Conversion*, the metric itself highlights an effective use of possession, and in turn utilising it to score goals. It is common for managers and teams to have a higher rating when playing at home. However, this is not the case for **Michael Carrick**. **Carrick** has the lowest home rating (1.91), but he has the highest away rating (3.83). This means that he can utilise the team’s *Possession* to a higher standard in away matches - which is unusual.

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- **Ruben Amorim** appears towards the top of most metrics, although his *Possession KME (Key Match Events) Creation* is actually below **ten Hag** in home matches (**Amorim: 11.48 vs ten Hag: 11.59**). Even though there is a small difference between the two managers in terms of creation, when it comes to converting these *Key Match Events* into goals Amorim's side is much more efficient (**Amorim: 5.55 vs ten Hag: 3.22**). **Erik ten Hag** has a very poor conversion rate; even though his team can create chances, they struggle to finish them.
- One of the more surprising managers is **Zinedine Zidane**, with low *KME Creation and Goal Conversion* from possession - certainly compared to his ratings in other metrics. Even though **Zidane** has higher *Overall Possession* than **ten Hag (60/60 vs 54/47)** his *Goal Conversion* is lower at both home and away (**Home - 3.07 vs 3.22, Away - 2.19 vs 2.96**). The same is true for *KME Creation* home and away (**Home - 8.01 vs 11.59, Away - 5.37 vs 8.64**).
- **Ten Hag** appears to utilise his *Possession* to a more solid degree, in particular in away matches with a *Goal Conversion* of (**2.96**) and a *KME Creation* of (**8.64**), indicating that with an average of **47% Possession** his team is able to have a modest positive impact when attacking.
- **Erik ten Hag** ranks second to last in terms of *Overall Possession* (**Thomas Frank** is last). Although possession is not crucial in winning matches, high possession statistics are expected to demonstrate dominance. **Roberto De Zerbi** is an example of under-utilised *Possession* - with **60%/60%** home and away, he has below-average ratings in both *Possession Goal Conversion* and *Possession KME Creation*.

## 7. Glossary

### **Objective Achievement Rating**

This is a unique quantitative measure of overall ability. It is based on the premise that the primary objective of a manager/head coach is to win football matches, and the Objective Achievement Rating (OAR) is an assessment of his success in this regard over the last six seasons. Whilst we can determine a manager's OAR over a longer period (if necessary), we have calculated that the most accurate and predictive indicator of success for a manager is based on his prior six seasons, with an incremental weighting towards the most recent seasons.

The OAR is also weighted for the level of the league in which the manager has operated at any point in time during the last six seasons. We apply a significance metric based on the level of data population for the last six seasons (the lower the figure the better), and which could be impacted, for example, by periods of inactivity within that period. Finally, as a means of comparison, we have also worked on a club specific premise that the club would want their next manager to guide the club to a particular position in the league and other relevant competitions (e.g. Champions League) at the conclusion of Season 2024/25.

### **Overall Rating (Weighted Metrics)**

This provides an overall rating score for each head coach, and is based not only on the actual achievements of the head coach over the prior six seasons but also takes account of individual quantitative metrics. These individual metrics are (i) weighted for the league in which they coached during each of these seasons and (ii) weighted for importance and transferability of each of the individual metrics between leagues. It provides the best prediction of relative future success.

### **Strategic Intelligence Rating**

This measures the manager's ability to prepare and set his team, and analyse the opposition, to maximise the chances of the team winning the next match. The higher the figure, the better. We consider this to be a very important metric because a manager who is able to achieve a high probability of a successful match outcome through a combination of understanding the objective performance abilities and form of his/her [available] players, and their players' contributions to successful outcomes from pitch positions and formations, increases the probability of achieving a higher league position at the conclusion of the season. This metric also includes manager ability to adjust for the same objective indicators in the opposition players (in various formations and combinations).

## **Tactical Command Rating**

This is a measure of the manager's ability to transform a match (during the match), and, in particular, to develop a winning position for the team from various match scenarios. The Key Match Events (KMEs) are those events within a match that lead to a goal being scored; could lead to a goal being scored; lead to a goal being conceded; or could lead to a goal being conceded. This part of the analysis assesses how the probability of each and every specific KME is altered within each and every match to transform a leading, equal, or deficient scoreline into a win (or, as a secondary measure, a draw). A match loss will lead to a weighted negative assessment, based on the preceding scoreline position within every match. The Tactical Command Rating is a 'per match' rating, the higher the figure the better.

## **Attacking Coefficient**

### **Success-adjusted Attacking Coefficient**

The attacking coefficient measures the manager's propensity to play an attacking style of football - the higher the figure, the more attack minded is the manager. We have also measured the relative impact of the manager's attacking coefficient on the success of the team winning matches - again, the higher the figure the better. Success is not wholly related to a manager's attacking coefficient, but an attacking style of play, married to the team winning football matches, might be a consideration for the Club.

## **Team Shot Conversion Rating**

### **Opposition Shot Conversion Rating**

This is an extract of one of the KMEs. Based on the premise that the primary objective of the Club is to win matches, in order to achieve the specific target of guiding the Club to a particular position in the league and other relevant competitions at the conclusion of Season 2024/25, this is a key metric that highlights a team's ability to increase the probability of winning matches. There are a whole series of impact metrics that measure and rate the contribution to KMEs, but this is a useful metric to extract both in terms of its overall objective influence, and as an illustration of attacking efficiency. We have also included the requisite metric for the opposition teams from each of the matches, to give a relative sense of attacking and defensive efficiency. It is preferable for the Team Shot Conversion Rating to exceed the Opposition Shot Conversion Rating.

## **Shot Creation Ratio**

It is obvious that a shot on goal significantly increases the team's opportunity of scoring a goal, which in turn significantly increases the team's chances of winning the match. It is a statistically significant exercise to assess the comparative ratio of shots on target, between the team and the opposing team, as an indicator of propensity for winning matches. In the ratio above, the manager's team is listed first. It is sometimes preferable that his figure should exceed the opponent's figure, but the key factor, of course, is the conversion of a shot on goal to an actual goal (as per the Shot Conversion Rating above).

**Possession - Goal Conversion Rating (Home)****Possession - KME Creation Rating (Home)****Possession - Goal Conversion Rating (Away)****Possession - KME Creation Rating (Away)**

Possession is a metric that is often referenced and debated - and misapplied. Possession is a good base for KMEs - if the team has possession at a specific point in time, then it is highly unlikely that a goal will be conceded at that point in time (unless it is an own goal) - and equally the team is only likely to score a goal if it has possession (again, a specific type of own goal being an exception). However, football provides an immensely fluid data population with a myriad of time points, and so it is vital to identify the key points (in relation to possession) that have the highest relative impact on winning matches. The Possession Goal Conversion Rating assesses the positive impact of possession at key points within each and every match, that lead to a goal being scored - a high figure indicates a more effective conversion of possession by the team, rather than possession for the sake of possession. Likewise a high Possession KME Creation Rating indicates a positive utilisation of possession to improve the quantity of KMEs that lead, or could lead, to match winning scenarios.