Comparative Analysis of Leicester City’s English Premier League Title Win

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Abstract

Background: Football is a complex game as it requires much game plan, different strategies according to opponents with some statistics. It was a fairy-tale for the sporting world as an underdog team went on to win the premiership with making their core team strong. In this paper, the season 2015/16 of premier league has been investigated and the researcher has analysed how Leicester City emerged as the champions and what went wrong with the big clubs, looking at Leicester City’s last 5 years journey against all odds and logic. Two major aspects of the footballing world have been mentioned which have a great influence and impact on the team’s performance i.e. Transfer market and Manager’s impact.

Methods: The data was collected through Several journals, research papers, blogs, newspapers, and articles.

Conclusion: The club’s signing of players was outstanding in the transfer window and the team got good players in reasonable amounts. The manager’s game plans and strategies with the team’s efforts lead them to success. Their ball possession was negligible while they excelled when it came to counterattack. Finally, they have bagged the title with team effort. We cannot say that it was all about luck as a lot of team involvement was seen and everything felt in the right places at the right time. Indeed, it was a roller coaster ride for them.

Keywords: Ball possession, Counterattack, Football, Manager’s impact, Premier League, Transfer market.

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1. Introduction:

Leicester City Football Club is a professional football club based in Leicester in the East Midlands [1]. One of the most prominent clubs of the EPL and most of the people remember them because of their 2015/16 season, they went on to win, but then it was not a direct win. There was an entire process that went behind. Winning the title is not an easy task as it involves a lot of planning and implication of strategies looking at the opponent. Presently the club competes in the Premier League which operates on a system of promotion and relegation with English Football League (EFL). Before jumping to the EFL and then to EPL, the researcher would like to discuss the scenario of club football and how it is the most popular game in Britain. It is a great saying that “Football in England is a source of national identity, a reflection of our country and its position in the world, and a constant point of discussion, disappointment, and general hysteria for our countrymen”[2]. People of Britain have developed a culture of football. A huge fan base can be seen for the clubs. The chanting, the banter, the face paints, and the singing between two sets of fans is what makes club football matches in Britain so unique. It is very fascinating to hear that the UK is the world’s premier tourist destination and more people visit the UK for sports. From figures of the visitors coming to Britain, it can be seen that football is a
significant contributor to inbound tourism to Britain. Of visitors stating that their primary reason for their tour to Britain was to watch sports and almost 75% attended a football match. There is a lot of money involved starting from broadcasting to sponsorship, ticketing sales to merchandise and there are various forms of finance being pumped in for the smooth and successful conduct of football matches in Britain. The transfer market is buzzing words when it comes to football. Selling players from one club to another extract a huge amount of money depending on the skill and stat that a player possesses. Because of the popularity of sports, the professional clubs generate a huge amount of money, so they are not just a club rather a company with many shareholders and have turned their customers into fans.

English Football League Championship is often known as Championship or Sky Bet Championship as Sky Bet is the title sponsor and has a contract for broadcasting. This league competition was founded in the year 1888 as Football League and is the oldest and wealthiest competition in world football, which features professional footballing clubs of England and Wales. It remained the topmost competition from foundation till 1992 and then the top 20 teams dissected from the league to form their own Premier League. Below the Premier League, there are three more leagues as the Championship, League One and League Two with each league consisting of 24 clubs. Each team plays a home and an away match with every other team. The teams are promoted and relegated according to their standing in the table which is determined by the team’s performance in the entire season allowing the top teams of the table to get promoted to the higher tier league while the bottom teams are relegated to the lower-tier league and this is how the English football league system runs. Total three teams get a chance to participate in the Premier League, the top two teams of the league and one from 3rd to 6th through play-offs are promoted to the upper league. While the bottom three are directly relegated to the lower league. The same process takes place with the other leagues too but the team relegated from League two is relegated to the national league. EFL might be the second division league of the footballing system of England but it’s not that easy to compete as the players have to play a series of matches throughout the year and make sure the team performs well without them being fatigued and neglecting relegation.

English Premier League is the top division league of England's football league system. The Premier League is popular as English Premier League or EPL outside England. It was founded in 1992 as the FA Premier League. 20 professional teams are competing in the season which starts from August to May every year and each team play 19 home games and 19 away games. A total of 38 matches in an entire season decide their fate. Total 49 clubs could compete in the league since its inception in 1992, but only 4 teams Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, and Manchester United were able to dominate and were known as ’Top-Four’ clubs. Most of the league’s matches are played on Saturday and Sunday. From the league, the top 4 teams fix their spot for UEFA Champions League while the bottom 3 gets relegated to the EFL every year according to the table results. This league is the most-viewed sports league across the globe and is broadcasted in more than 200 territories to around 650 million homes and has a potential TV audience of 4.7 billion people. The Premier League ranks second in the UEFA coefficients of leagues based on performances in Europe competitions over the past five seasons as of 2019, only behind Spain's La Liga and is believed that the inclusion of premier league has globalized the English game.

The club ‘Leicester City FC’ was founded in the year 1884 in the name of Leicester Fosse F.C. as they were playing on a field near Fosse Road. Then they were shifted to FilbertStreet in 1891 and were selected to the Football League in 1894. In the year 1919, they adopted the name as Leicester City F.C. and moved to the nearby Walkers Stadium in 2002 which was renamed as the King Power Stadium in 2011. Leicester plays their home matches at the King Power Stadium. ‘The Foxes’ is the most common nickname used for the club by many, as Leicestershire is known for foxes and fox hunting. So, the first incorporated an image of a fox into the club’s crest in the year 1948 and that is how their nickname originated. Their club mascot is a character called ‘Filbert Fox’.

This paper shows how an underdog club with a limited transfer budget and funds can compete with the big clubs of the league. What were the game plans and strategies involved by the underdog team that eventually got them the Premiership title?

This topic has been discussed by many in the past where almost every paper focuses on the dream run of fairy-tale of Leicester City while they did not consider other big clubs’ performances in that particular season i.e. 2015/16. So, this paper is unique from others as it relates to the other club’s performance with Leicester. This paper covers the part of how the foxes did their homework well

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by having proper game plans and strategies for every game and other teams failed in executing their set of game plans hence could not perform well.

The objective or purpose of the study was to see how and whether an underdog team can also win from the bigger teams in the Premier League and if at all they won, what are the different strategies and techniques used by the smaller teams while the big teams failed to execute such plans.

Leicester City FC is an English professional football club, competing at the first-tier division of England’s football league system and has achieved a feat that only seven clubs could achieve by winning the Premier League in the season 2015/16 which was the 111th season in England’s football league. A little-heralded with a medium skilled player, no European heritage, and without expending much on players won the EPL title (5). This feat meant a lot to them as they got a chance to take part in UEFA Champions League in the following season and made history by making their first-ever appearance in the club’s history to date. But emerging as champions of the Premier League is not an easy task to be done but the club made it and there were a lot of processes involved in the whole run. The researcher can state that Leicester city was fortunate in various ways but at the same time he couldn’t attribute all their success to luck. Their success is a story of confluence. Things were coming together at just the right time in just the right way. Their story depicts how good fortune can bring you success and success can build confidence. And how that confidence will bring greater focus and determination which eventually will lead to even more success. Observing the transfer window closely will give a clear image of how they hit on the right players and those players particularly were able to execute their plans game by game and ultimately, they rode their team through the championship. So, their winning of the title was not about just luck rather helped with luck (9). But their whole process started back in the season 2011/12 when they were competing in the second-tier league.

Before emerging as the champions of the EFL in the season 2013-14, Leicester city passed through many highs and lows. But the only thing that kept them moving was their persistence, patience, dedication, and determination. They had an attitude that reflected they never give up character(10).

In season 11/12 they spent big to make an attempt and gain promotion to the Premier League. But due to their inconsistency at the early stage of the season, manager Sven-Goran Eriksson was sacked soon after their 3-0 defeat at home to Millwall and they were struggling with 13 points after 13 games. This compelled them to bring back their former manager Nigel Pearson, who was re-appointed after negotiations and was ready to start his second spell at the club. But re-appointment of Pearson didn’t bring any changes to the performance of the team remaining at the mid-table. The club continued their inconsistent form under Pearson throughout the season and eventually finishing 9th. Meanwhile, the transfer window bought goalie Kasper Schmeichel from Leeds United, they also had Danny Drinkwater from Manchester United and Wes Morgan from Nottingham Forest, Centre Midfielder and Centre Back were their position respectively. The next season started pretty well and they continued to stay at the second place of the league table till mid-season but a dramatic turnover took place when the foxes won just 2 of their 16 ties. That the chances of getting promoted disappeared in no time and somehow managed to finish sixth on the table. That season we saw striker Jamie Vardy and midfielder Matty James on the transfer window and the club got them in a cheaper deal. The next season was a confidence booster for them as they claimed the EFL title after playing for 5 consecutive seasons in the league. This was their seventh second-tier title win, equaling Manchester City’s record for the most second-tier titles. They earned a comfortable promotion to the Premier League with six games to spare and winning the title with 2 games to spare. Along the way, they broke many club records like most home wins as well as away wins in a season (17) & (13), most points in a season(102), most consecutive league games scored(31), most consecutive away league win(5), most league wins(31) and many more records were made to their name. When it comes to transferring, Riyad Mahrez joined the club. In the season 2014/15, they got a chance to participate in the top division of English football, their first participation in Premier League after 10 years as they were promoted from Championship as the champions. As the season began, the club was struggling at the latter half of the table for more than 4 months but the underdogs somehow managed to win 7 matches out of their final 9 ties of the season finishing 14th on the table which was quite appreciable. And the season after was indeed a surprise for the sports fraternity especially footballing freaks and is considered as one of the greatest sporting stories of all time. History was made as Leicester City FC emerged as the champions of the Premier League when they participated in their second consecutive season. That season they signed a few more players like Fuchs, Okazaki, and N’Golo Kante. They also had Claudio Ranieri, a new man-in-charge for the club as manager. The man who suffered his biggest...
managerial setback by getting sacked as national coach of Greece after a humiliating 1-0 defeat at home to Faroe Island. The fans of the club were surprised to see this move of bringing in Ranieri. Before the season kicked-off, Leicester City FC was one of the underdogs of the EPL for the 15-16 season with the odds of them securing the championship being a slim 5000-1. However, by the end of the season, they outclassed almost every premier league giant by going on to attain championship status, piping heavyweights like Manchester City, Manchester United, Tottenham, Arsenal, Liverpool, and the defending champions Chelsea. The club had many records to their name in the championship but here many individuals made history for the very first time. Jamie Vardy went on to break the record by scoring most goals in consecutive matches in a Premier League (11). While Riyad Mahrez was the first African as well as Algerian to receive the prestigious PFA Player of the Year award. It was a roller coaster ride for the whole team with many reasons to cherish.

Jamie Vardy, N’Golo Kante, Riyad Mahrez, Danny Drinkwater, Wes Morgan, Christian Fuchs, and Kasper Schmeichel are some of the stellar performers who have done exceptionally well in the club’s title run. Morgan, Schmeichel, Drinkwater, James, Mahrez, and Vardy were scouted incredibly well and were inexpensive players who helped in making a strong foundation of the club. This was their core team which showed some outstanding performances reaching their peak stage individually. While the jackpot was hit when the club got Kante in a very good deal and he was a very good contender to join a club like Leicester. The team displayed some extraordinary game plans and all the players did collectively well under their new manager Ranieri, the mastermind who was calm and composed throughout the season and made history with the so-called underdog and people mostly expect the underdogs to lose but here the underdog team “Leicester City FC” emerged the champions of the Premier League(11). So, before jumping to the two main aspects on which a football club heavily relies upon, let’s have a look on what were some errors and issues faced by the big teams in the season 2015/16.

Focusing on each prominent club individually and see where they were lacking compared to Leicester City FC.

Manchester City- Having a bunch of star players they were confident of scoring a couple of goals in every tie, omitting the thought of relegation easily. The team was aging while injuries to Kompany, Silva, and Aguero were major concerns. But they always failed to deliver with the big teams. But they mostly manage to avoid criticism as they always finish in the top 4 and somehow make their place into the semi-finals of UCL. Pep Guardiola joined the club in the latter half and could’t do much.

Liverpool- Team balancing is a must in team sports and their squad was not balanced(12). With strong attackers, they lacked in defense and midfield while having a mediocre goalkeeper. The team lacked inspiration, direction, trust, and leadership. Many mistakes made on the pitch and their inconsistency in play. The managerial issue as Klopp was a new man to the team, he couldn’t make much impact on the team so, they were never in the title contest in that season.

Manchester United- Possession was a very strong point for Red devils but they could not convert their dominance into chances despite having immense string talents like Lukaku, Martial, and Rashford (13). They lost 10 games in the league while Leicester lost just 3. The team lacked rhythm and was confused on many occasions. The rate of injury was high while their manager didn’t have any plans and was clueless on many occasions. Still, the team came 5th in the table which was great news for the Mancunians.

Chelsea- As the season kicked off, they were the favorite team to win the title again as their previous year’s performance was truly amazing. But this season was an off-season for them as Hazard and Costa struggled injury and ban respectively. Fabregas and Matic couldn’t continue their fine last year form. Their defense was getting old and the team lacked enthusiasm. There were some differences inside the management and reports stated some players are against Mourinho.

Arsenal- Manager Arsene Wenger has achieved great feats with Arsenal but no improvement was seen from a couple of years and he should be on the way out. After signing star goalie Petr Cech no other player was bought in the transfer window, he did not give young talented players much game time while giving more chances to underperforming players like Flamini and Arteta. Still with so many issues and considering other big teams’ poor performance many believed them to be a good contender for the title. They came 2nd next to Leicester after the result which left Wenger to come under fire from fans.
2. Material & methods:
Here the study shows how an underdog team has managed to win the premiership beating other big teams in the league. So, here the study mainly focused on English Premier League and Leicester City in a detailed manner taking other big teams of the league in consideration like Manchester City, Liverpool, Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal for certain comparison of variables. Here the comparison is made taking two major aspects as the variables i.e. Transfer market and Manager’s impact. The data about Leicester was taken from few researcher papers and Tranfermarkt.com, the website where entire transfer and players’ stats related data can be seen. Similarly, a study from a journal shows how Arsene Wenger suffered giving less chance to talented youth players and in a same way a research paper reveals Klopp being completely new for Liverpool could not do much with the team. So, the data were collected from many research papers, newspaper article, blogs, journals and few official websites which shows everything that goes around football looking at the transfers and managerial impact as variables. A qualitative approach has been taken to write this paper.

3. Results and Discussion:
Now I would like to describe the two key aspects required for every team as their success and failure excessively depend on these two factors that are Transfer Market and Manager’s Impact. Here is the comparison of Leicester City FC and other big teams of the league focusing on these two elements and how the team gets affected if these elements are not considered appropriately.

Transfer Market:
When it comes to club football, the most important decision to be made is the signing and releasing of players in the transfer window. Issues related to players’ valuation, especially determining the transfer fee and market value are the major concern if we think from a manager’s perspective\(^{(1)}\). And these values were estimated by footballing experts like managers or sports journalists in earlier days. But considering the present situation where data is the new oil, people heavily rely upon data and crowdsourcing has emerged to be the popular approach for estimation of the player’s value\(^{(2)}\). So, the researchers have come up with the various discipline of studying the transfer market as it plays an enormous role and have a tremendous impact on the club’s chances for success as those players will play an essential role for a club to succeed. For a team, the players are your most important assets so you must invest in them accordingly looking at both sporting perspective and business perspective\(^{(3)}\). So, comparatively, Leicester City has a better signing in the last couple of years that made their core team a stronger one than other big teams in the league, which paid off for them in the later stage. While other teams couldn’t perform well in signing new players and have to suffer terribly in the season. Big clubs like Arsenal, Manchester City, and Liverpool must have focused on signing good players as per their game strategy and requirement of the team. Liverpool needed good defense and midfielders, Man City could release their old guns and invest in some youngsters. But they completely lacked in singing players that the team needed and had to pay a huge amount for their blunder. Thus, transfer or signing players is very crucial from a team’s perspective and it affects the team’s performance.

Manager’s Impact:
For a team, their manager plays the most crucial role when it comes to football. A team is headed through their manager; we can also call them coach of the team. Starting from game planning, strategy making, giving responsibilities, selecting team players, team formation, etc. everything depends on the manager. He is the anchor of the team and is responsible for the team’s performance\(^{(4)}\). He is the man to chalk down the strategies and tactics that the players would follow in each game and competition. He is the man who spreads positivity by motivating players and staff members all around the pitch and in the dressing room as well so that everyone in the team gives their best\(^{(1)}\). He makes sure every player in the squad gets ample chances to prove themselves. He is the man who has to bargain and negotiate with the team owners and stakeholders who are pumping money into the team and convince them to release good amounts of funds so that he can sign-in good players in the transfer window and his agreement is required in releasing a player too. Thus, a team manager or coach is the most important and crucial player of the entire

team and his strategies and tactics determine the success or failure of the club\(^{(19)(20)}\). For Leicester City, Ranieri tapped into their winning mentality that the team had at the end of last season by winning 7 out of 9 ties and avoid relegation. A continued win can uplift the confidence and gives a boost to the team which can lead to an upcycle that will help players to make the same run of success and every player wants to play for a long-lasting winning team. Meanwhile the London club, Chelsea suffered back to back losses the very next season after bagging the league title which cost their managers a job. Guardiola for Manchester City had many individual star players but he couldn’t perform in big games when it matters the most. Wenger of Arsenal was poor in the transfer window and didn’t give chances to players like Chambers and Campbell, two young talents who didn’t get much playtime. While Klopp couldn’t fix a strong defense for Liverpool despite having solid attackers and a mediocre goalie it was a tough task to achieve. So, the managerial impact is huge when it comes to club football. They are the actual mastermind behind the team performing on the pitch. Looking at these two key aspects keenly i.e. Transfer market and Manager’s impact; and how these aspects have played a major role in winning the title for Leicester city in the season 2015/16. Other big teams underperforming were not at all an issue for Leicester as every team playing the league wants to win the league. The underdogs were 5000-1 to win the title but that didn’t put their morale down. They had their game plans ready for every match. The team’s stability and tactical guide helped them bag the premiership. Their team played the top division league last year barely escaping for the relegation by winning 7 out of 9 ties and bring in a new manager who was sacked a few days before. But Ranieri somehow managed to keep the team stable and wanted to continue the winning run of the team. He assured conceding a smaller number of goals is more important than scoring more goals. He made it possible by focusing on and making their defense stronger. The defense of Leicester City was assumed to be the best defense in the league for that particular season so they conceded lesser goals while making major use of counter-attacks. To be honest, they had very less injury rate which helped them a lot by keeping the same set of players, the team usually had the same starting 11 for most of the games which eventually helped the team as they got a better understanding of their team-mates. Club’s signing of players was outstanding in the transfer window and getting good players in inexpensive amounts since the last 4-5 years was a plus for the team. They did not release their star performers and somehow the team was lucky too that the players didn’t leave the team when didn’t perform well and were inconsistent. So, it kept their team aligned throughout the season. Most of their players reached their peak in the same period which eventually helped the team winning league games. The manager’s calm and composed attitude showed that you need not have to play mind games rather be a vindictive person to be a winner. It was a virtuoso performance by the manager. The manager will give all sets of game plans or strategies but the players are the ones who need to execute them in an appropriate way for the team’s success. The team was fortunate in many cases but as skilful as well. But with all odds and logic, everything came their way at the right time in the right way and that was the game-changer moment in the entire season and the team made history which very few teams could achieve. Overall, it roller coasters ride for the club and the manager to emerge as champions of the topmost division of the English football league system. Their name is engraved in the history of sports and people will be talking about this fairy-tale for years to come as the underdogs are always expected to lose but these foxes never lose hope and created history.

4. Conclusion:
From the above study the researcher established that we saw how an underdog team with a minimum transfer budget and funds played against all odds and logic, struggled to avoid relegation in last season and finished 14th on the table and still emerged as champions in the very next season of the top tier football league of England. 38 season matches including home and away, where 6 teams battling hard for the top 4 spots, out of 20 teams competing in the league. Many good teams with a set of talented players and still the foxes managed to lift the title was surely not a matter of luck. They focused on every match equally, they didn’t underestimate their potential, they didn’t lose hope and took every advantage of the chances if created. Their new manager, Claudio Ranieri took every opportunity seriously unlike other big team managers. They produced their own set of players like Vardy, Mahrez, Kasper, and Morgan and made them better with each season and always retained these talented players. Joining of Kante benefitted the team enormously. Kante and Drinkwater enhanced their midfield work. The defense was taken by their captain Morgan, Fuch
while Kasper looked after saving most goals. Stellar winger Mahrez created a lot of goals while star striker Vardy was busy creating individual records. Most of the players performing at their peak level in the same period have given them most wins and ultimately leading them to the title glory. The team was exceptional in the transfer window as well as when it comes to the manager’s impact on the team. These two major aspects have been addressed by the team in an appropriate manner which eventually gave a fruitful result in the end. Ranieri showed that your passion, desire, and determination can make impossible things possible. Winning the premiership is never an easy task as only 7 teams were able to clinch the title including big 4 and Leicester City FC. They had a proper vision; they had a fighting spirit and they had immense courage to achieve something big. Leicester city’s triumph in the EPL is one of the most exciting and enthralling stories in the sporting world. The whole world is aware of this true story which was none lesser than any miracle. So, they say “Foxes Never Quit”.

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