

TECHNICAL REPORT 2022/23 PART ONE



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Cover image: The Sevilla and Roma captains collide as Jesús Navas (right) and Lorenzo Pellegrini battle for the ball

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INTRODUCTION

TRACKING THE TRENDS



Sevilla celebrate getting back on level terms

UEFA's technical observers were keeping a close eye on the action as Sevilla eventually defeated Roma on penalties to win the title for a seventh time

The penalties, when they came, were to be taken in front of a white wall of 13,000 Sevilla fans. The Roma supporters, slightly larger in number at the opposite end of Budapest's stunning Puskás Aréna, had just witnessed Chris Smalling's header hit the cross bar deep inside extra time. It didn't go in; nothing did apart from Paulo Dybala's first-half opener and a 55th-minute own goal from Gianluca Mancini in a game where the observers praised José Mourinho's organisation and energy in the first half and Sevilla's change of tactics and creativity in the second.

And so to penalties. Sevilla's Lucas Ocampos, Erik Lamela, Ivan Rakitić and Gonzalo Montiel all scored. But only one Roma penalty, the first from Bryan Cristante, was converted. Sevilla's goalkeeper Yassine Bounou made key saves from Mancini and Roger Ibañez before



Argentinian defender Montiel slotted in the decisive kick at the second time of asking.

It was a dramatic conclusion to a Europa League campaign which featured 57 teams from 33 UEFA member associations. For the group stage, 32 teams were drawn into eight groups of four, with the clubs representing 23 different countries.

Roma had finished six points behind Real Betis in Group C, but while Betis were eliminated by Manchester United – themselves defeated by Sevilla at the quarter-final stage – Roma would edge towards Budapest, eliminating Salzburg, Real Sociedad, Feyenoord and Leverkusen. Sevilla's path to the Hungarian capital came after they entered the competition from the Champions League, then defeated PSV Eindhoven, Fenerbahçe, United – whose knockout play-off first leg in Barcelona attracted the Europa League's highest ever crowd – and Juventus in the semi-final.

The 2022/23 Europa League brought group stage debuts for Bodø/Glimt, Nantes, Union Berlin and Union Saint-Gilloise. All impressed among other names already familiar in the competition: Arsenal won Group A, with victories in all three home games without conceding, while PSV Eindhoven, who finished second in the section, scored 15 goals; more than any of the other 31 teams. UEFA's technical observers are always looking for new styles, trends and tactical innovation. The game between PSV and Bodø/Glimt in Eindhoven warrants more detail within this report.

Group B was the only one where the top two teams remained unbeaten. Fenerbahçe won it, with four wins and two draws, ahead of Rennes whose record was won three, drawn three in a group where Dynamo Kyiv lost all three home matches – which were played in Kraków, Poland.

Group F was fascinating, with all four teams finishing on eight points after each winning two, drawing two and losing two. The 4-2 game between Lazio and Feyenoord is highlighted in this technical report. Freiburg won Group G by five points after winning four and drawing two of their six games. Group H was tighter, with Ferencváros and Monaco reaching ten points to finish first and second.

Every game from the knockout round play-offs onwards was observed and analysed in depth by members of UEFA's technical observer panel, comprising of Britta Carlson, Boštjan Cesar, Savvas Constantinou, Frans Hoek, Stefan Kuntz, Hans Leitert, Ginés Meléndez, Mixu Paatelainen, Willi Ruttenseiner and Thomas Schaaf. Their individual reports formed the basis for an ongoing discussion into the season's trends and talking points. The observations in these reports were discussed in depth at a meeting in Budapest the day after the final, where the team, player and young player of the season were also selected in addition to the best ten goals being ranked.

This post-final discussion fuelled further debate on the topics mentioned through this season and led to the production of this 2022/23 UEFA Europa League Technical Report, which serves as a record of the season and a source of expert insight and analysis. The complete report will be available to read in August, but in the meantime here are some of the key talking points of the season as well as an early glimpse at some of the articles from the report itself.

TALKING POINTS

Our observers have put together their key takeaways from the season – including wise heads and long balls – in advance of the full report



Sevilla mainstays Ivan Rakitić (left) and Jesús Navas celebrate another Europa League success

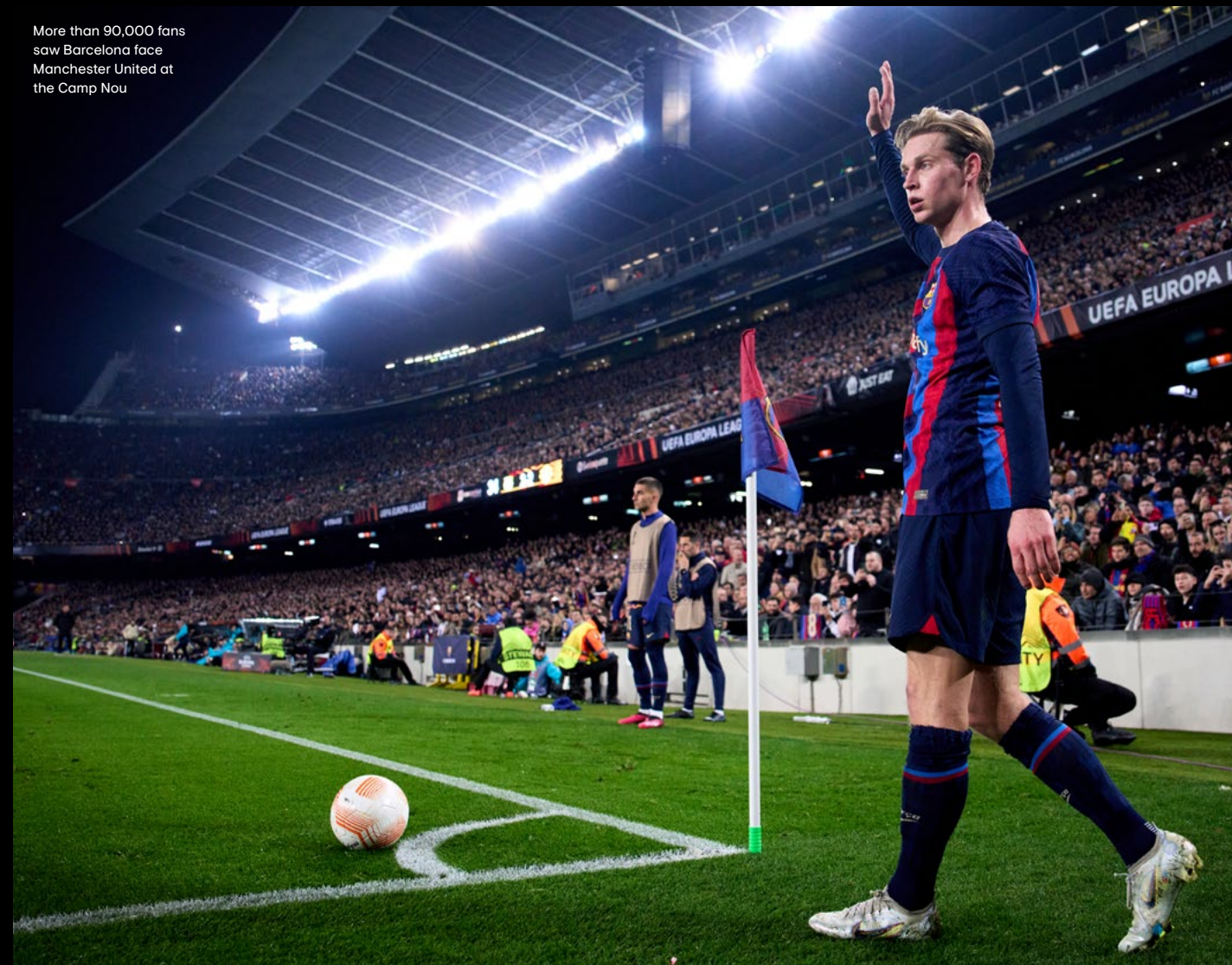
VETERANS FLOURISH

Jesús Navas at the age of 37, Ivan Rakitić aged 35, Chris Smalling at 33 and Nemanja Matić, 34: all made the UEFA Europa League team of the season, having been vital cogs in their respective teams' progression to the Budapest final. There were other high points for experienced players too, notably Ángel Di María, 35, scoring a stunning hat-trick for Juventus when they defeated Nantes 3-0 away in the knockout round play-off second leg. All of these veterans would accept that they're no longer at their peak but they were crucial to their sides and almost ever-present, trusted by their coaches to lead in the biggest games.

GIANTS CLASH

Manchester United versus Barcelona, Juventus against Sevilla, Arsenal taking on Sporting CP: the 2022/23 Europa League bore witness to some big-name battles. Huge crowds too, including 90,225 – a competition record – at the Camp Nou for Manchester United's visit. United sold out of all their home games in the competition for the first time in the club's history, including group matches against Omonoia, Real Sociedad and Sheriff.

More than 90,000 fans saw Barcelona face Manchester United at the Camp Nou



NUMBERS GAME

Group F was fascinating, with all four teams finishing on eight points, each winning two, drawing two and losing two. Lazio and Sturm Graz headed the group going into Matchday 6, but both suffered defeats. With overall goal difference needed to separate the teams who were tied on head-to-head results, Feyenoord's 6-0 victory over Sturm Graz in the second round of fixtures was crucial in the Dutch club eventually finishing top and advancing – and the Austrian side being eliminated from European competition in fourth place. Midtjylland squeezed through in second.



Feyenoord's 6-0 home win against Sturm Graz on Matchday 2 proved crucial in Group F



Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczęsny frequently played long passes to good effect

GOING LONG

The technical observers noted that the modern narrative is that goalkeepers who like to play with the ball at their feet have found favour, which was especially true in this season's Champions League. However, it wasn't the case in this season's Europa League, just as it wasn't last season when Eintracht Frankfurt's Kevin Trapp was so important. The observers picked out Yassine Bounou's long kicks for Sevilla, plus Wojciech Szczęsny for Juventus and David de Gea for Manchester United.

381

goals were scored in this season's competition – an average of 2.7 per match

66.5%

was the figure that put Ajax top of the average possession ranking; they also had the best passing accuracy, with 87.5%

165

Roma midfielder Nemanja Matić regained possession more than any other player, amassing a total of 165 (127 recoveries, 22 interceptions, 16 tackles)

FINE MARGINS

Manchester United only finished second in Group E, despite picking up 15 points by winning five of their six matches. The issue was that Real Sociedad also won five from six, and in the process managed what none of the other 13 teams visiting Old Trafford in all cup competitions last season could: victory. To complete the symmetry, their one defeat came at home to United on Matchday 6. That game proved notable as Cristiano Ronaldo, in his last European game for United, set up Alejandro Garnacho for his debut goal in European competition. It was only the second goal Real Sociedad conceded in all six group games – better than the three United let in, which ultimately forced the English side into runners-up spot.



Alejandro Garnacho celebrates his winner at Real Sociedad with Cristiano Ronaldo



SEVENTH HEAVEN

Yassine Bounou was the decisive figure as Sevilla lifted the trophy again in the third successive final to be settled on penalties

Goalkeeper Yassine Bounou was the hero as Sevilla lifted the UEFA Cup/Europa League trophy for the seventh time – all since 2006 – defeating Roma 4-1 on penalties in Budapest's Puskás Aréna after the teams had finished level at 1-1 after extra time.

Roma were hoping for a second consecutive European trophy following last season's inaugural UEFA Europa Conference League success and coach José Mourinho had won all five of the previous European finals in which he'd been involved. With Sevilla having emerged triumphant on all six of their previous final appearances, something had to give.

In front of a 61,476 crowd, Paulo Dybala struck first for Roma, coolly finishing a Gianluca Mancini pass after 35 minutes. Mancini made a less welcome contribution ten minutes after half-time, turning a Jesús Navas cross into his own net to bring Sevilla back on terms. Both

Sevilla's Yassine Bounou and Gonzalo Montiel get ready to accept their team-mates' congratulations at the end of the shoot-out

sides had chances to score a second goal but neither could find a winner, meaning a penalty shoot-out – the third final in a row to be settled in that manner.

The spot kicks were taken in front of the 13,000 travelling Sevilla fans and it was those supporters who returned to Spain delighted yet again by success in this competition. Bounou saved from Mancini and Roger Ibañez, leaving Gonzalo Montiel – who had converted the winning penalty in the World Cup final for Argentina six months earlier – to repeat the feat in Hungary with a retaken effort.

Roma’s defensive excellence was already well known and perfectly illustrated in the two semi-final games against Leverkusen. It was quickly apparent in Budapest too. “Roma were defensively solid, focused and minimised any threats from Sevilla; they defended the long balls and crosses well in the first half,” noted a UEFA technical observer.

“Their 5-3-2 system was clear, yet flexible. We’d see Pellegrini, for instance, sprint from his position to check a Sevilla full-back. Sevilla had to try and go wide because Roma were so well organised, with men doubling up on Sevilla players if necessary to stop the Spanish side creating chances. Roma even encouraged Sevilla to go wide before doubling up on their wing-backs. Roma had to work incredibly hard to do this, running hard and maintaining a high press. As a result, they were never open to a counterattack and Sevilla got very little in the first half.”

Roma kept this intensity up for the opening 45 minutes and snatched the lead after a brilliant transition. An unexpected starter following four matches out with an ankle injury, Dybala ran on to a through ball from Mancini (who also set up the goal in the Europa

Conference League final last year) which went between Navas and Loïc Badé. Dybala, reborn in Rome, let the ball run across him before stroking a low left-foot shot into the bottom corner.

“Striker Tammy Abraham was always a target man for Roma,” noted the observers. “He would receive the ball, lay it off and make runs behind the Sevilla defenders. He worked hard to close the gaps and make Roma more compact and also came back to defend set pieces, with his height and that of Nemanja Matić used as an advantage. Every Roma player was behind the ball at set pieces.”

When Sevilla did have an opportunity to cross the ball, Roma made sure they had men close to the white shirts in the box. Only 15% of Sevilla crosses were effective in the first half and the Spaniards were thus restricted to shots from distance, although that nearly paid dividends in first-half added time when Ivan Rakitić rattled the upright. As Roma were so well organised, physically stronger and deep when they needed to be, they were very difficult to get behind in the first period.

If the first half was Roma’s then the second belonged to their Spanish opponents. “The match changed in the second half when Sevilla stretched the game and got into better positions to cross from. One such position and cross, delivered by Navas, would lead to the equalising goal,” noted the UEFA technical observer. “Roma found it harder to close spaces, it was very difficult for them to maintain the intensity of the first half.

“Navas got higher in the second half and as the game went on, Sevilla’s pressure and more possession – 66% for Sevilla to 34% for Roma – meant the distances increased between the Roma players and Rakitić could exploit those spaces with a variety of balls forward into



Ivan Rakitić and Jesús Navas lead the Sevilla celebrations as they lift the trophy again



Yassine Bounou saves Roma’s third penalty from Roger Ibañez in the shoot-out

the final third. Sevilla, especially, in the second half, were looking for more variety to break Roma down and Rakitić getting wide helped this.”

The Liga side also had more joy in one-v-one situations but were unable to find a second goal, although they were initially awarded a 75th-minute penalty, overturned by VAR. Roma’s Chris Smalling sent a looping header on to the crossbar deep into extra time but, as Sevilla coach José Luis Mendilibar noted, “We then had the success of the penalties.”

Sevilla, whose captain Navas was involved in their first UEFA Cup triumph against Middlesbrough in 2006, converted all four of their kicks in the shoot-out; Roma managed to score only one. The wall of white behind the goal in which the penalties had been taken began to celebrate yet another trophy in this competition.



Sevilla
1-1
Roma

AET; Sevilla win 4-1 on penalties

Wednesday 31 May 2023
Puskás Aréna, Budapest

Goals
0-1 Dybala 35; 1-1 Mancini 55 og

Sevilla	Roma
13 Bounou	1 Patrício
3 Telles (4 Rekik 94)	3 Ibañez
6 Gudelj (23 Marcão 120+8)	4 Cristante
10 Rakitić	6 Smalling
15 En-Nesyri	7 Pellegrini (C) (92 El Shaarawy 106)
16 Navas (C) (2 Montiel 94)	8 Matić (52 Bove 120)
20 Fernando (8 Jordán 120+8)	9 Abraham (11 Belotti 75)
21 Torres (7 Suso 46)	19 Zeki Çelik (59 Zalewski 91)
25 Gil (17 Lamela 46)	21 Dybala (25 Wijnaldum 68)
44 Badé	23 Mancini
55 Ocampos	37 Spinazzola (14 Llorente 106)
Coach José Luis Mendilibar	Coach José Mourinho

Yellow cards
Sevilla Rafa Mir 36, Rakitić 65, Lamela 109, Joan Jordán 120, Montiel 120, Ocampos 120+12
Roma Matić 21, Pellegrini 45, Mancini 48, Cristante 65, Zeki Çelik 74, Zalewski 105, Mourinho 120, Karsdorp 120+12

Referee
Anthony Taylor (ENG)

Sevilla	Match statistics	Roma
1	GOALS	1
64	POSSESSION %	36
18	TOTAL ATTEMPTS	11
3	ATTEMPTS ON TARGET	3
6	CORNERS	4
6	YELLOW CARDS	8
0	RED CARDS	0
689	PASSES ATTEMPTED	341
574	PASSES COMPLETED	237
83	PASSING ACCURACY %	70
146.5	DISTANCE COVERED KM	153.9



Paulo Dybala holds off Loïc Badé to give Roma a first-half lead

PLAYER AWARDS

Sevilla veteran Jesús Navas was the observers' selection as player of the season while Leverkusen tyro Florian Wirtz took the young player award

PLAYER OF THE SEASON JESÚS NAVAS | SEVILLA

The evergreen Sevilla mainstay has matured into a creative force whose influence and impact remain as potent as ever

Now 37, Jesús Navas played 12 European games in 2022/23, three in the Champions League and nine in the Europa League where he was a key performer in another Sevilla run towards the final. The club captain lifted his fourth UEFA Cup/Europa League in Budapest after the penalty shoot-out triumph against Roma, advancing into positions which troubled José Mourinho's side and producing the cross which Gianluca Mancini diverted past his own goalkeeper to make the score 1-1.

"Navas got higher in the second half and as the game went on, Sevilla's pressure and increased possession meant the distances increased between the Roma players. Ivan Rakitić could exploit those spaces with a variety of balls forward into the final third. Sevilla were looking, especially, in the second half, for more variety to break Roma down and Rakitić getting wide helped this," said one UEFA technical observer.

Navas was born 30km from Seville and joined Sevilla at 14, making his B team debut at 16 and his first-team debut two days after his 18th birthday in November 2003. Initially a pacy winger, he joined Manchester City in 2013, returning to his hometown club four years later. No longer quite so blisteringly quick, he had developed into a key creator and remains hugely effective when on form, as he was when Sevilla needed him in tight knockout ties against Fenerbahçe, Manchester United, Juventus and Roma in the final, where he played 95 minutes.

Sevilla were without a major trophy since 1948 when Navas initially signed, but he has been a key figure during the club's most successful period, winning eight trophies: four UEFA Cup/Europa Leagues and a Super Cup in addition to two Copa del Rey triumphs and one Spanish Super Cup.

"I know that 'Never give up' is this team's motto," said a delighted Navas following the latest addition to that trophy collection in Budapest. "That can certainly be seen on the pitch. We are a family. Those of us who have been here for a longer time, the veterans, pass it on because this competition made us great."

2022/23 EUROPA LEAGUE STATS

Appearances: 9
Assists: 3
Passing accuracy: 78%
Distance covered: 10.57km average per match
Top speed: 30.3km/h



Sevilla captain Jesús Navas with the trophy (left); Florian Wirtz jumps for joy after scoring for Leverkusen against Union SG



YOUNG PLAYER OF THE SEASON FLORIAN WIRTZ | LEVERKUSEN

After a lengthy injury absence, the Leverkusen midfielder quickly recaptured his best form to inspire the German club to the semi-finals

The 20-year-old Leverkusen midfielder missed the first half of the season with a cruciate knee ligament injury, sitting out all six Champions League games as the German club finished third in Group B. After 11 months on the sidelines, Wirtz returned to action in late January and was quickly back to his best for the Europa League knockout stages as Xabi Alonso's side made it to the semi-finals.

Wirtz is described by one UEFA technical observer as: "Still young but already absolutely essential to his team. He covers a lot of ground, closes spaces, scores, assists, runs at opponents and breaks the lines. He can play as a central attacking midfielder or wider as an inverted winger."

He started all eight of his side's Europa League fixtures, scoring in both legs of the knockout round play-off against Monaco, with his goal at home placing fourth in the Goal of the Season poll. Wirtz also assisted another goal in the away second leg, when his team advanced after penalties.

In the last 16 against a Ferencváros side hoping to reach the final in their own city, Wirtz set one up as Leverkusen won 2-0 home and away. His third and final goal in the knockout stage was a crucial late equaliser at home to Union Saint-Gilloise in their quarter-final opener.

According to his coach, Alonso, Wirtz had his side's best chance to score in the semi-final first leg at Roma, where the Italian side identified him as the player who would try to find the pockets of space. Roma told Gianluca Mancini, a central defender, to surge forward and deal with Wirtz to try and win the ball back for his team. Leverkusen dominated the semi-final second leg, with 72% of possession and 17 goal attempts to Roma's one, but Wirtz was unable to inspire a breakthrough as the Bundesliga side bowed out.

Despite only turning 20 at the start of May, Wirtz has been a senior German international since September 2021. After coming through the ranks at Köln, he joined Leverkusen in 2020, becoming their youngest ever Bundesliga player aged 17 years 15 days; he has quickly blossomed into one of the most important members of their team.

2022/23 EUROPA LEAGUE STATS

Appearances: 8
Goals: 3
Assists: 2
Shots: 9
Passing accuracy: 84%



Nemanja Matić keeps a close eye on Óliver Torres during the final

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Finalists Sevilla and Roma dominated the observers’ selection, each providing four players for the all-star XI

“I’ve had a lot of moments like this and I realised that you must be very calm to deal with them,” said a smiling Yassine Bounou after becoming Sevilla’s hero of the Europa League final with two penalty saves in the shoot-out. “Sometimes you don’t really analyse what’s going on.” The Moroccan international, who excelled in the World Cup six months earlier, was the undisputed choice of the UEFA technical observers after conceding only five goals in his six appearances.

Jesús Navas, the Europa League player of the season, appeared in all nine games as his hometown team again triumphed, his cross leading to the equalising goal in the final – the 37-year-old’s third assist of the campaign.

Centre-back Jonathan Tah played in all eight of Leverkusen’s Europa League games and was second on his club’s charts for both attempted passes – completing 94% – and ball recoveries.

Only four players featured for more minutes of the 2022/23 Europa League than Roma’s Chris Smalling, who clocked up 1,155. The 33-year-old centre-back was only denied a last-gasp final winner by the crossbar.

Sevilla left-back Marcos Acuña was suspended for that final but played in every game of Sevilla’s run to Budapest. His 16 successful tackles was a team best, and he made 52 ball recoveries.

Ivan Rakitić, 35, started all nine of Sevilla’s games. His vision and experience were essential; he also led the way for his side in terms of attempted passes (537) and balls recovered (72).

Roma’s Nemanja Matić is another veteran midfielder to have made the cut. He may now be 34 but he remained a key figure for the runners-up; the Serbian’s 127 ball recoveries totalled 27 more than any other player this season.

Attacking midfielder Lorenzo Pellegrini was crucial to Roma’s run to the final, scoring four goals and providing four more assists. His tally of 28 key passes was the joint most in the competition overall.

Roma’s top scorer on the road to Budapest, Paulo Dybala put the Giallorossi ahead in the final with a sweet left-foot finish – his fifth goal in the 2022/23 Europa League.

Victor Boniface made a big impact at Union Saint-Gilloise having joined from Bodø/Glimt: he was the Europa League’s joint top scorer with six goals. The 22-year-old’s total came from only 12 shots on target and an xG of just 3.3.

Marcus Rashford also scored six goals, despite missing three games to injury and not going beyond the quarter-final stage. The Manchester United forward had 32 shots – fewer only than Pellegrini’s 35 – with 18 on target, three more than any other player.





GOALS OF THE SEASON



In another season of stellar Europa League strikes, Pedro Gonçalves’ stunning long-range effort for Sporting CP was the technical observers’ pick



Sporting midfielder Pedro Gonçalves lets fly from just inside the Arsenal half (left), sending the ball soaring over home goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale

1

PEDRO GONÇALVES

Arsenal 1-1 Sporting CP
Round of 16 second leg,
16/03/23

The Portuguese midfielder picked up the ball in his own half, advanced ten metres and unleashed a stunning long-range effort over Aaron Ramsdale with his right foot to level the score.

2

ÁNGEL DI MARÍA

Nantes 0-3 Juventus
Knockout round play-off
second leg, 23/02/23

The first goal of the Argentinian’s hat-trick. Di María came inside from the right to meet Nicolò Fagioli’s pass at the corner of the penalty area with a first-time effort that curled inside the far post.

3

OMRI ALTMAN

AEK Larnaca 3-3
Dynamo Kyiv
Matchday 5, 27/10/22

The Israel forward created space in the area with some clever movement, then capitalised by meeting a high ball from the right wing with a dramatic mid-air volley from the penalty spot.

4

FLORIAN WIRTZ

Leverkusen 2-3 Monaco
Knockout round play-off
first leg, 16/02/23

Wirtz’s strike at home to Monaco was a tribute to his balance and ball control. The Leverkusen midfielder evaded the attention of five defenders before beating Alexander Nübel with a low shot.

5

AITOR RUIBAL

Real Betis 3-0
HJK Helsinki
Matchday 6, 03/11/22

The midfielder’s only two goals in 2022/23 both came in this game. Ruibal cleverly turned one HJK defender on the edge of the area before nutmegging another and firing in from 25 metres.

6

LUCAS OCAMPOS

Sevilla 3-0 PSV Eindhoven
Knockout round play-off
first leg, 16/02/23

The eventual champions’ first Europa League game of the campaign featured this fine goal, for which Ocampos controlled a high ball into the area with his right foot and turned to shoot with his left via the far post.

7

LORENZ ASSIGNON

AEK Larnaca 1-2 Rennes
Matchday 1,
08/09/22

The defender struck in added time to snatch victory in Cyprus. He met Kamaldeen Sulemana’s left-wing cross with an improvised volley – using the outside of his right foot – to send the ball high into the net.

8

ALEKSANDAR KATAI

Crvena zvezda 2-1
Trabzonspor
Matchday 5, 27/10/22

The winger set Crvena zvezda on their way to a home victory in style, curling a precise first-time shot into the top corner from the edge of the penalty area. It left goalkeeper Uğurcan Çakır rooted to the spot.

9

SUSO

Sevilla 2-1 Juventus
Semi-final second leg,
18/05/23

Another pinpoint strike from long range, Suso collecting an Erik Lamela pass and skipping away from one challenge before finding the back of the Juventus net with a fierce left-foot effort.

10

ANASTASIOS BAKASETAS

Trabzonspor 1-0
Ferencváros
Matchday 6, 03/11/22

Trézéguet did the legwork for this early winner, bursting into the area and finding Bakasetas. The latter’s intelligent movement created space for a first-time left-foot shot past Dénes Dibusz from 20 metres.



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