

SPORT

REDS 'FULL OF TALENT BUT SHORT ON EXPERIENCE'

Ex-Anfield star Macca raises concern over squad depth as they bid to win EPL title

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Liverpool are in for a challenging season ahead as they cope with some high-profile departures, and former Anfield star Steve McManaman believes they need to sign more experienced, quality players to bolster their bid to reclaim the English Premier League trophy.

This summer, the Reds have seen scoring talisman Mohamed Salah, Andy Robertson and Ibrahima Konate leave on free transfers. Curtis Jones is set to join Inter Milan, while Hugo Ekitike, Conor Bradley, Giovanni Leoni and Joe Gomez are in the physio room. This has raised concerns about squad quality and depth ahead of their first league match at Newcastle United on Aug 23.

Young players like wonderkid Rio Ngunmoh, who turns 18 on Aug 29, have given the Anfield faithful some hope for the future, but McManaman warned that "talents for the future don't win the Premier League this year".

He said: "Rio's a superstar in waiting... he's got immense talent. But he's 17, 18 and he cannot fill Mo Salah's boots because Mo was scoring 30, 40 goals a season for almost every season."

"Some of the kids like Trey Nyoni and James McConnell are getting older, which is good. But it's a challenge with the league and the Cups and the Champions League, and Liverpool need a bigger, deeper, stronger, more experienced squad than they have now."

"Unfortunately, in football everything is about winning here and now. So, as much as we've got a huge amount of talent... we need more experience to help them get through it because it's hard playing in the Premier League."

The 54-year-old former England international, who also played for Real Madrid and Manchester City, is in town as part of Standard Chartered Bank's partnership with the Reds.

Following a 20-minute media roundtable at the bank's headquarters at Changi Business Park on Aug 21, he appeared at a Standard

Chartered football clinic for 100 children aged seven to 13 at CARE Singapore – a non-profit organisation that helps at-risk youth – and also attended a dinner with the bank's clients.

With the transfer window closing on Sept 1, Liverpool have been linked to Brighton winger Yankuba Minteh and Paris Saint-Germain forward Bradley Barcola.

But business has been slow – they have signed only centre-back Jeremy Jacquet and winger Victor Munoz for around €100 million (\$148 million), and brought in centre-back Ronald Araujo on loan from Barcelona. This is a far cry from the €483.13 million they splurged on players last summer.

Besides being impressed by Araujo's ability to neutralise world-class attackers such as Vinicius Jr in La Liga – despite having to take a couple of months off due to mental health issues – McManaman also has high hopes for the highly rated Jacquet and Munoz, and hopes that attackers Alexander Isak and Florian Wirtz will come through after a bumpy first season.

Reds manager Andoni Iraola also has his vote of confidence, with the former Liverpool winger opting to overlook pre-season results in



Former Liverpool winger Steve McManaman making a guest appearance at a Standard Chartered football clinic for children aged seven to 13 at CARE Singapore on Aug 21. PHOTO: STANDARD CHARTERED

FUTURE SUPERSTAR

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STEVE MCMANAMAN, former Liverpool star who's also known as Macca, on wonderkid Rio Ngunmoh.

which they squandered 2-0 leads to lose to Leeds United (4-2) and Monaco (3-2) as their key players were still coming back from the World Cup or working their way back to full fitness.

He said: "Everybody's been incredibly impressed with what Andoni did, the signings he brought in, and the style of football he had at Bournemouth, so the Liverpool fans will really appreciate the way Liverpool play under him."

"They prefer some intensity into the game, and I'm not saying Arne Slot didn't do that, but I thought last year it did slow down a little bit from his first year and Jurgen Klopp's last year. That bit of intensity around the pitch closing down, hunting people down."

While he hopes his beloved club will come good at the end of the season, McManaman appeared to tip the scales in Arsenal's favour for

having a strong and stable squad. They have added Bruno Guimaraes, Ezri Konsa and Christos Tzolis, while losing only Leandro Trossard, as their rivals Manchester City and Liverpool are still in flux.

He added: "Arsenal have got an extremely strong squad, and the fact that they were very dominant last year – absolutely they can do it again."

"Man City have lost Rodri, Tijjani Reijnders, James Trafford, Nathan Ake, John Stones and Bernardo Silva... and that's without even mentioning Pep Guardiola. Elliot Anderson's come in, but they have lost a lot of experience and a lot of what made them great."

"Everybody just needs to wait until Sept 1 to know what we are going to deal with for the rest of the season."

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School sports

Two-goal 'Spidey' to the rescue as SJI bag C Div title hat-trick

Melvyn Teoh

A Spider-Man mask came off at Our Tampines Hub on Aug 21, and underneath it was the boy who helped St Joseph's Institution (SJI) to their third consecutive C Division boys' football title.

Applingly donning the superhero's face cover as SJI posed with their medals was Gabriel Ng, who had just scored a double in their 3-0 win over St Gabriel's Secondary School in the National School Games final.

The 14-year-old, who wanted to celebrate with the mask as he and his classmates had painted it in class the previous day, also scored during SJI's 1-0 extra-time win over Montfort Secondary in the 2025 final.

At the final whistle, a sea of green and white in the stands broke into the Viking Row – the Norwegians' famous celebration at the 2026 World Cup – as SJI supporters marked the school's third straight title in style.

"We finished so much better this year," said Gabriel. "We got a goal in the first half and had more security coming into the second."

"I was begging my coach to let me stay on so I could get my hat-trick, but I'm still happy with a brace."

Gabriel, who has racked up 11 goals this season, is part of a lethal front three alongside Tan Sheng De and captain Zayden Ng, who has 10 goals.

The trio helped SJI score 44 goals in eight games in the lead-up to the final, which included a win by the same scoreline over St Gabriel's in the preliminary round on July 24.

Top scorer and vice-captain Sheng De, who has 17 goals, including one in the final, said: "This sea-



St Joseph's Institution captain Zayden Ng lifting the trophy during his team's celebration after they beat St Gabriel's Secondary School 3-0 to win the C Division boys' football final for a third straight year. Gabriel Ng (right), who scored a brace, had also bagged the winner in the 2025 final. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

son has been a great season, I think we worked really hard, and we really put our hearts into this."

"Today was a bit frustrating because I feel like we had a lot of chances but we just didn't finish. Both teams played well, but in the

end, I think we were just the team that tried harder."

Reflecting on the team's threepeat, SJI co-teacher in charge of football Mohamad Syaifudin said: "It was a nice effort from the boys, I think it's a nice finish after a long

season."

"It's always (about) maintaining the high standards, so the challenge is always to ensure the new batches that come in every year maintain that high standard set by our previous teams, and thankfully

the boys displayed that and we are proud of them."

While SJI dominated early proceedings, they were unable to create any clear chances initially.

Their fullbacks combined to create the first meaningful chance in

the 25th minute when left-back Elijah Oh's cross found Ian Hasif Irwan unmarked in the box, but the right-back's header went just wide.

But SJI were not to be denied three minutes later. A corner from Sho Tay Takayama found Gabriel, who arrowed his header into the far corner of the net, sending their supporters into a frenzy.

There was nearly an instant response by St Gabriel's from the restart.

A through ball found Nur Farhat Fairouz bearing down on goal, but the right-winger's lobbed effort sailed just wide of SJI goalkeeper Joash Teo's post.

SJI then doubled their lead in the 37th minute through Sheng De, who slotted into the bottom corner after a mix-up in the box.

St Gabriel's midfielder Limbu Tanchhok nearly reduced the deficit in the 43rd minute as his shot from 20m out forced Joash to tip the ball over the bar.

But the game was put to bed nine minutes later when both scorers combined to make it 3-0.

A through ball by Sheng De found Gabriel, who calmly rolled the ball into the far corner.

Gabriel nearly got his hat-trick two minutes later, but saw his shot rattle off the upright, with St Gabriel's custodian Arshavin Afiq Fanddy rooted to the spot.

Despite the defeat, St Gabriel's assistant coach Andre Loh said he felt proud of his boys.

He said: "We tried to hold off a really strong team as much as possible, but unfortunately we conceded late in the first half, and after that we had to chase the game, leaving numbers behind and conceding again... But I couldn't be more proud because they gave it their best."

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