

A demographic analysis of four Latin American leagues

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1. Introduction

For the first time, a CIES Football Observatory report turns its eye exclusively to Latin America. Based on the model of the annual study carried out since 2009 for 31 European leagues, this Report compares four top division Latin American championships from the point of view of the demographic characteristics of players. It comprises the Brazilian Serie A, the Argentinean Superliga, the Chilean Primera División and the Mexican Liga MX.

The analysis covers seven complementary thematics: the number of players used, their age, their height, the percentage of expatriates, that of club-trained footballers and the percentage of new recruits within the squads. The sample is made up of players fielded in domestic league matches during the second semester of 2019. In total, the study covers 79 clubs and 2,015 footballers.

2. Number of players used

On average, the teams studied used 25.5 players during domestic league matches played from the 1st July 2019 onwards. Important differences exist between championships. With 31.6 footballers used per club, the Brazilian Serie A teams fielded the greatest number of players (+24% in comparison to the average observed for all of the leagues taken into account).

Fourteen of the fifteen teams having fielded at least 30 players are Brazilian. The high number of matches played in Brazil during the period studied only partially explains the differences observed. The desire shared by the clubs and the empresários to showcase players in order to stimulate interest from foreign teams and increase their value on the transfer market also enters into consideration.

Figure 1: number of players used, by league

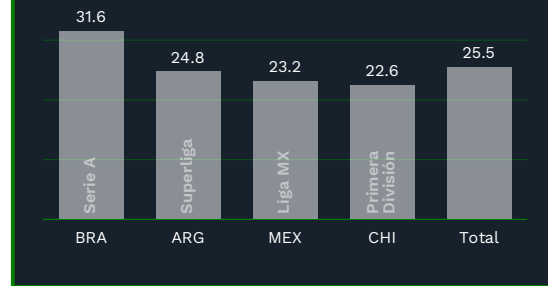
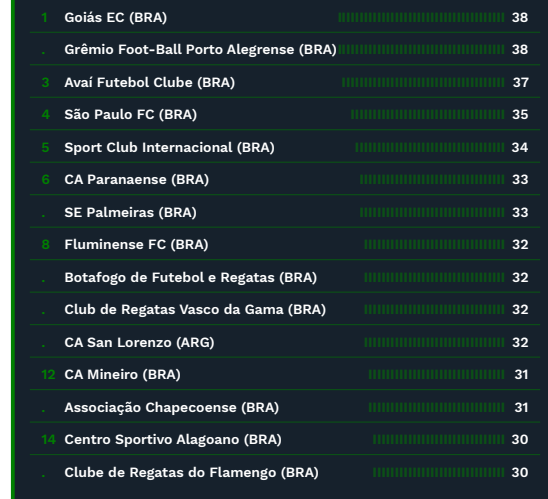


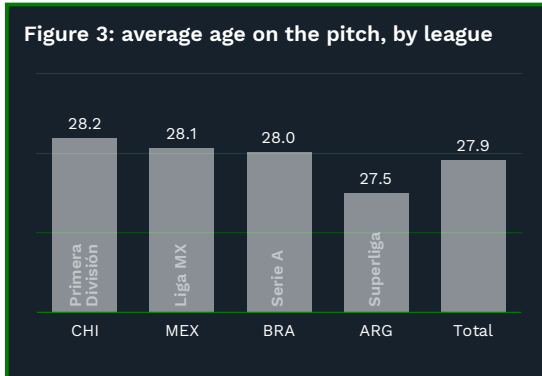
Figure 2: clubs having used the most players



3. Age

The leagues analysed present similar characteristics from the point of view of age. While the Chilean clubs fielded the most experienced line-ups (28.2 years of age on average), the youngest championship, the Argentinean Superliga, also regroups relatively seasoned players (27.5 years of age). This result reflects the same tendency to transfer to Europe the most promising young players, who only return to South America at a relatively advanced age.

The only three teams whose average age on the pitch is under 25 are Argentinian. With an average age on the pitch of 23.1 years, CD Godoy Cruz stands out from the crowd. However, during the writing of the present report, this team occupied the last place of the Argentinian Superliga. The two oldest teams are Chilean: Universidad de Concepción (30.8 years) and Curicó Unido (30.1 years).



4. Height

The average height on the pitch varies between 177.4cm in the Chilean top division and 179.9cm for the top-flight Brazilian league. The general average is 178.9cm. By way of comparison, this value is around 182cm in Europe. Though it can make migration more difficult, the height deficit is often compensated by a greater technical mastery. This state of affairs makes the South American market very attractive for international scouts.

There are no Brazilian clubs among the ten teams with the lowest values in terms of average height on the pitch. On the other hand, there are seven among the ten with the highest values. Aside from the differences in the average height of populations in the countries concerned, this result probably also shows the preference of Brazilian teams for taller players, who are easier to transfer abroad.

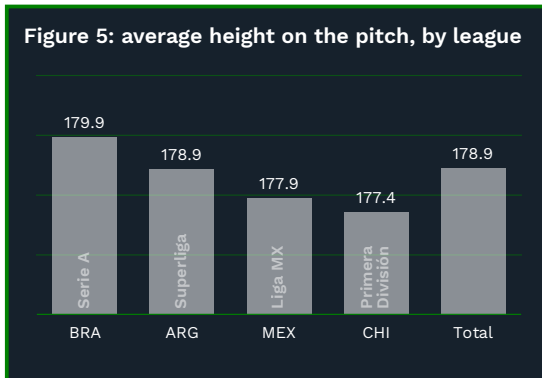


Figure 6a: shortest clubs (average height in cm)

1	Everton de Vina del Mar (CHI)	174.8
2	Club León (MEX)	175.0
3	CD Curico Unido (CHI)	175.2
4	CD Huachipato (CHI)	175.3
5	Audax Club Sportivo Italiano (CHI)	175.9
6	Querétaro FC (MEX)	176.1
7	CA Talleres (ARG)	176.2
8	CD Tiburones Rojos de Veracruz (MEX)	176.3
9	Monarcas Morelia (MEX)	176.5
10	AA Argentinos Juniors (ARG)	176.8

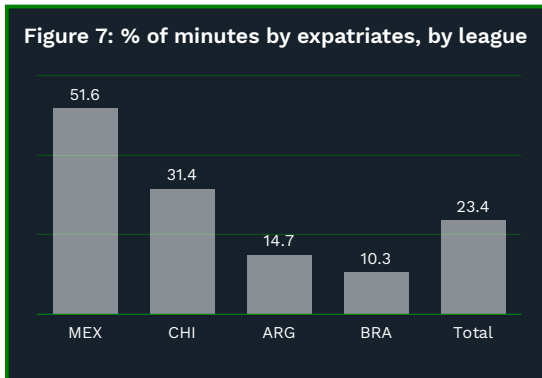
Figure 6b: tallest clubs (average height in cm)

1	CA Tucumán (ARG)	182.2
2	Fluminense FC (BRA)	181.5
3	Club de Regatas Vasco da Gama (BRA)	181.3
4	CA Patronato de la Juventud Católica (ARG)	181.1
5	Cruzeiro EC (BRA)	181.0
6	CF Tigres de la UANL (MEX)	180.8
7	Avai Futebol Clube (BRA)	180.6
8	Ceará SC (BRA)	180.5
9	Grêmio Foot-Ball Porto Alegrense (BRA)	180.5
10	Botafogo de Futebol e Regatas (BRA)	180.4

5. Expatriates

Important differences exist at the level of the percentage of expatriate players. This notion refers to footballers who have grown up outside of the association of their owner club. At one extreme, players imported from abroad were fielded for only about a tenth of minutes in the Brazilian Serie A. At the other, this percentage is over half in the Mexican MX league. The value measured in Argentina is close to that of Brazil, while that observed in Chile is situated in the middle.

The ten clubs where expatriate footballers played the most minutes are Mexican, with a maximum value of 65% for Club Tijuana. The highest figure for a non-Mexican team was recorded for Curicó Unido (48.1%). In contrast, many Brazilian and Argentinian teams are among those where expatriates are less numerous. Two of them, Arsenal de Sarandí and Ceará SC, did not field any.



With 138 nationals, Argentina is by far the most represented origin among the expatriates in the leagues analysed. Argentinians are particularly numerous in Mexico and Chile. They are also the primary source of foreign labour in Brazil. In total, they account for almost one-third of expatriates. Three other countries have substantial expatriate contingents: Colombia, Uruguay and Paraguay. On the contrary, only eight Brazilians are expatriated in the leagues studied (all are in Mexico).



6. Training

Club-trained players are footballers having played at least three seasons between the ages of 15 and 21 at their owner club. This category of footballers played 16.8% of minutes in the leagues taken into account. The lowest percentage was measured in the Mexican Liga MX (13.3%), where clubs employ many players imported from abroad. Conversely, the highest proportion was recorded in the Argentinian Superliga (22.6%), where more clubs rely on players from their academies to make up their squads.

Club-trained footballers played a majority of domestic league minutes in only three of the 79 clubs taken into account: CA Banfield, Gimnasia y Esgrima and Pumas UNAM. The latter club constitutes a notable exception in the Mexican context. Two of the three teams not having fielded any club-trained players are Mexican: FC Juárez and Atlético San Luis. The third, CS Alagoano, is Brazilian.

Figure 10: % of minutes by club-trained players, by league



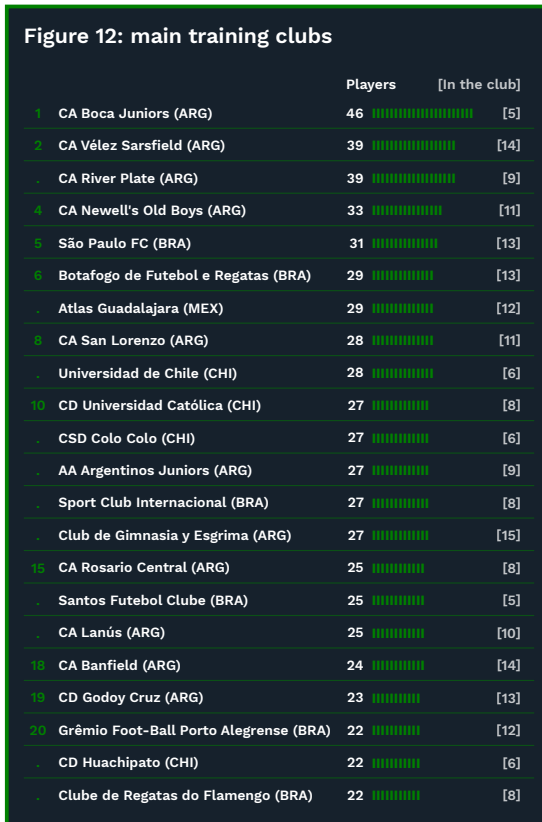
Figure 11a: lowest % of minutes by club-trained

1	FC Juárez (MEX)	0.0%
	Atlético San Luis (MEX)	0.0%
	Centro Sportivo Alagoano (BRA)	0.0%
4	Ceará SC (BRA)	0.2%
	Club Necaxa (MEX)	0.2%
6	Club Tijuana (MEX)	1.1%
7	SE Palmeiras (BRA)	1.3%
8	CA Tucumán (ARG)	2.0%
9	EC Bahia (BRA)	2.1%
10	Arsenal de Sarandí FC (ARG)	2.2%

Figure 11b: highest % of minutes by club-trained

1	CA Banfield (ARG)	60.3%
2	Club de Gimnasia y Esgrima (ARG)	54.6%
3	Pumas UNAM (MEX)	52.4%
4	CA Vélez Sarsfield (ARG)	44.8%
5	CA Lanús (ARG)	39.8%
6	CD Godoy Cruz (ARG)	35.7%
7	Audax Club Sportivo Italiano (CHI)	33.8%
8	AA Argentinos Juniors (ARG)	31.6%
9	CA Newell's Old Boys (ARG)	31.3%
10	Fluminense FC (BRA)	31.1%

Boca Juniors is at the top of the rankings for clubs having trained the greatest number of players within the leagues analysed. The Buenos Aires team is ahead of three other Argentinian clubs: Vélez Sarsfield, River Plate and Newell's Old Boys. The most important training clubs for the countries of the other three championships surveyed are São Paulo FC in Brazil, Atlas Guadalajara in Mexico and Universidad de Chile in Chile.



7. Recruitments

New recruits are players having joined their employer club during the year (from the 1st of January 2019 onwards in this case). Footballers promoted from youth academies are not included in the new recruit category. The percentage of new recruits is high in each of the four leagues studied. In all of the championships, more than 40% of players have been present in their employer club for less than one year. The greatest instability was observed in the Chilean top division (47.4%).

Numerous bottom-ranked teams are among those with the highest proportion of new recruits in their squads. The record high was observed for CS Alagoano (76.7%), who were eventually relegated. Conversely, many successful teams figure among the most stable. At the top of the list are the finalists of the Copa Libertadores, River Plate, followed by three ambitious Mexican teams (Pumas UNAM, CF Monterrey and CF Tigres of the UANL).

Figure 13: % of new recruits, by league



Figure 14a: lowest % of new recruits



Figure 14b: highest % of new recruits



8. Conclusion

The Report highlights some of the essential characteristics of the principle Latin American leagues. It notably illustrates the specificity of the Brazilian Serie A regarding the plethora of players used by teams. This situation reflects the status of Brazil as a global source of labour par excellence. From this point of view, just playing a few matches can open the doors towards a transfer abroad, even though not in the most prestigious football countries.

The study also shows the central role of Argentina as a provider of players for the leagues analysed. Indeed, Argentinians constitute the most numerous contingents of expatriates in Mexico, as well as in Chile and Brazil. On the contrary, only eight Brazilians are expatriated in the leagues studied (all in Mexico). The other countries with many expatriates in the championships taken into account are Colombia, Uruguay and Paraguay.

The study also illustrates the unique case of the Mexican MX league from the point of view of the presence of players imported from abroad. Expatriates account for the majority of players in line-ups, while they only play about a tenth of minutes in Brazil and Argentina. With about one-third of minutes played by expatriates, the Chilean Primera División occupies an intermediate position.

The championships studied do not differentiate themselves greatly when it comes to the footballers' age, which is quite high everywhere (almost 28 years of age on average on the pitch). This result reflects a tendency to transfer abroad, mainly to Europe, the most promising young players, who only return to South America at a later age.

The Report also brings to light the greater emphasis on the promotion of talents from youth academies by Argentinian teams. Boca Juniors is the most important training club, followed by three other Argentinian clubs: Vélez Sarsfield, River Plate and Newell's Old Boys. The most important training clubs for the other three countries studied are São Paulo FC in Brazil, Atlas Guadalajara in Mexico and Universidad de Chile in Chile.