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## The Impact of Breaks in Football

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### Strategy Summary:

*We look at how teams in the Big Four European leagues have fared following international and winter breaks.*

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## THE IMPACT OF BREAKS IN FOOTBALL & HOW TO PROFIT

The recent disruption in the football calendar got us thinking about the effect a mid-season layoff has on team morale and performances. Using other interruptions and scheduled rests that are currently in place in the football calendar, like international and winter breaks, we've assessed how teams might perform on their return to action in both their results and from a goals sense to see if we can profit from such opportunities across Europe's Big Four leagues.

### Outright Markets

#### International Breaks

Firstly, reviewing the matches that we have historical odds for taking place after an international break, we see a resounding result in favour of the bookies. Indeed, when considering all teams in their first game back after the September, October, November and March international breaks over Europe's Big Four leagues, there would be a resounding negative return on your investments should you have backed them playing at home or away since 1998/99 (Table 1).

Venue	Matches	Win	Draw	Lose	Win ROI	Draw ROI	Lose ROI
All	5298	36.72%	26.68%	36.57%	-7.81%	-7.24%	-8.27%
Home	2655	45.12%	26.55%	28.29%	-7.12%	-7.67%	-8.75%
Away	2645	28.28%	26.81%	44.88%	-8.52%	-6.81%	-7.77%

Table 1: First Matches Following an International Break Since 1998/99 in Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga & Serie A

However, some interesting results start to form if we isolate teams based on their finishing position and therefore quality. Top-four finishers have excelled after this kind of break, winning 58.43% of their first matches after the breaks since 1998/99, returning a profit of 6.38% had you backed each of them using average odds from the 1097 such matches (Table 2). We'd expect that to rise around 5% too if using best price odds. Furthermore, if we refine that to look at how top-four sides have done against non-top-four outfits in their first game back after an international break, this increases to an ROI of 7.13% and a win percentage of 63.34%. On the contrary, it would've been a very poor idea to take on those top-four outfits, as you'd have been nearly 25% down.

Venue	Matches	Win	Draw	Lose	Win ROI	Draw ROI	Lose ROI
All	1097	58.43%	23.34%	18.14%	6.38%	-12.22%	-24.69%
Home	532	67.48%	20.11%	12.22%	5.86%	-15.00%	-27.33%
Away	566	49.82%	26.33%	23.67%	6.88%	-9.61%	-22.21%

Table 2: First Matches Following a Winter Break Since 1998/99 in Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga & Serie A

Obviously, international breaks are typically no longer than seven days for nations to play their matches before the players return to their clubs, usually accounting for around a 15-day period between domestic matches. That certainly isn't anywhere near the current break of around two months currently in play, but it can go some of the way in understanding who's likely to come out the blocks firing.

### Winter Breaks

Perhaps a better way of assessing where the value lies post the Covid-19 season break is to look at how teams have fared following their winter breaks. The German league usually gives its players a rest of around a month, while both Serie A and La Liga do slightly less over the Christmas period (excluding La Liga's winter schedule in 2015/16 season). The Premier League on the other hand continue their season over the winter without any breaks, although that was put to an end this term.

Below, we've taken how teams have done in their first matches back after a winter break from 1998/99 to the end of last season, and we can see that it follows a similar trend to the international breaks. Across the board it has returned negative ROI's (Table 3), but unlike the international breaks' returning losses of around 7%, first matches after a winter break almost see a profit no matter what team you back. In fact, using best odds we'd likely see a profit from backing teams after this lay-off, especially the current positive return of 0.07% when backing those teams at home.

Venue	Matches	Win	Draw	Lose	Win ROI	Draw ROI	Lose ROI
All	1188	38.89%	21.80%	39.23%	-1.21%	-24.98%	-1.44%
Home	595	48.91%	22.18%	28.74%	0.07%	-23.74%	-3.77%
Away	594	28.79%	21.38%	49.66%	-2.50%	-26.23%	0.90%

Table 3: First Matches Following a Winter Break Since 1998/99 in Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga & Serie A

Again, like the international break, if we look a little in a little more detail at the data, we can see that you'd return a profit of 4.48% backing a top-four team on their return from the winter break, while this increases to 15.63% in the 125 such matches for those top teams at home.

Venue	Matches	Win	Draw	Lose	Win ROI	Draw ROI	Lose ROI
All	250	58.40%	20.80%	20.40%	4.48%	-24.97%	-14.20%
Home	125	71.20%	17.60%	10.40%	15.63%	-34.10%	-25.02%
Away	126	45.24%	23.81%	30.16%	-6.58%	-15.92%	-3.46%

Table 4: Top-Four Teams First Matches Following a Winter Break Since 1998/99 in Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga & Serie A

It's clear that it's the higher calibre of teams in these leagues that seem to be more profitable on their return. However, when combining the data of teams playing in their first match following either a winter or international break, it's interesting to see which leagues can be more profitable than others.

## All Mid-Season Breaks

League	Matches	Win	Draw	Lose	Win ROI	Draw ROI	Lose ROI
All	1346	58.47%	22.88%	18.57%	6.03%	-14.58%	-22.75%
Premier League	209	68.42%	18.66%	12.44%	10.64%	-28.16%	-45.44%
Bundesliga	410	58.05%	20.49%	21.22%	16.84%	-24.24%	-15.36%
La Liga	400	56.25%	24.25%	19.25%	-1.71%	-6.30%	-13.68%
Serie A	330	54.85%	26.67%	18.18%	0.93%	-4.05%	-28.58%

Table 5: Top-Four Teams First Matches Following Both Winter & International Breaks Since 1998/99 in Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga & Serie A

Over the board it looks profitable to get behind top-four teams in all of Europe's Big Four leagues. However, it's certainly a considerably stronger angle in the Bundesliga and Premier League than the other two leagues, returning 16.84% and 10.64% respectively.

There is obviously an assumption here that we know the top-four finishers, but replacing finishing position with current position at the time of the match for both the German and English leagues still produces a profit and so we can look to use this angle in the coming weeks when football returns.

## Goals Markets

There is reason to believe that following a long lay-off, teams can become a little more vulnerable at the back. Looking at how sides have performed in their first game back following both international and winter breaks since 2005/06 in Europe's top four leagues, we can see that if you'd backed all 4,376 teams in this situation in the Over 2.5 Goals market you'd have returned a profit of 1.42% using average odds. Moreover, you could also just about turn around a profit backing both the Over 1.5 and 3.5 goals markets if using best prices, where we'd expect an increase of around 5% to be seen across the board, meaning that 1.42% for the Over 2.5 Goals could rise to as high as 6% ROI. On the contrary, had you backed any of the 'Unders' markets in these return games, you'd have lost at least 9% ROI, with the Under 1.5 Goals market returning a miserly 18% loss. That suggests there is some truth behind this phenomenon and crowds can expect a few more fireworks to be seen.

Venue	Matches	U1.5	U2.5	U3.5	O1.5	O2.5	O3.5
All	913	-21.75%	-20.28%	-11.74%	2.12%	4.37%	2.91%
Home	440	-31.78%	-25.31%	-14.18%	0.44%	7.39%	8.00%
Away	473	-12.42%	15.59%	-9.21%	-4.50%	1.55%	-1.86%

Table 6: Top-Four First Matches Following Both Winter & International Breaks to have Over/Under Goals since 2005/06 in Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga & Serie A

If we look at that data a little further, similar to what we did in the outright markets, then we see a pattern on display when looking at the better teams. Indeed, top-four teams on their return from such breaks across Europe's Big Four leagues have consistently seen big negative returns when backing the 'Unders' markets, while 'Overs' would have paid dividends. A return of 4.37% and 2.91% for Over 2.5 and 3.5 Goals respectively presents a nice angle, which only increases to 7.39% and 8% in those respective markets when considering just the home games.

Of course, that data is looking at all those four leagues as a whole and doesn't quite give us the finer picture we need in order to place our bets. Breaking that down to look at league specific we can see that there's some huge profit to be made in the 'Overs' markets in both the Premier League and Bundesliga, while it would pay to avoid the Serie A and La Liga. Table 7 shows how Bundesliga and Premier League top four teams have fared following all mid-season breaks between 2005/06 and 2018/19.

League	Home Matches	Home			Away Matches	Away		
		O1.5	O2.5	O3.5		O1.5	O2.5	O3.5
<b>Both</b>	213	3.54%	14.87%	35.08%	241	-3.05%	7.00%	0.09%
<b>Premier League</b>	93	4.01%	22.47%	48.68%	103	-6.47%	10.73%	-3.29%
<b>Bundesliga</b>	120	3.18%	9.00%	24.50%	138	-0.51%	4.23%	2.71%

Table 7: Top-Four First Matches Following Both Winter & International Breaks to have Over Goals since 2005/06 in Premier League & Bundesliga Only

It would have been very wise to back these English and German top four sides when playing at home to see 'Overs' in their return games. Particularly, the Over 3.5 market returned a substantial 35.08% across those two leagues from 213 such matches, and an astonishing 48.68% from 93 Premier League outings.

### Conclusion

- **Back Premier League & Bundesliga top-four teams in their first game back after a mid-season break**
- **Back Over 3.5 Goals in Premier League & Bundesliga top-four teams' first home games back after a mid-season break**