

MANCHESTER UNITED SUMMER
TRANSFER TARGETS -
3rd CM/DM



WILLAM REES

RECRUITMENT TASK

FIND MANCHESTER UNITED A THIRD MIDFIELD SIGNING TO COMPLETE THE NEW-LOOK MIDFIELD GROUP

IDENTIFY A PHYSICAL, DEFENSIVE-MINDED CENTRAL MIDFIELDER WHO CAN PLAY AS A LONE 6 IN A 4-3-3 OR AS THE DEEPER MIDFIELDER IN A 4-2-3-1

COMPLEMENT ANDREY SANTOS, YOURI TIELEMANS, AND KOBBI MAINOO BY ADDING DUEL POWER, TRANSITION DEFENDING, AND MIDFIELD SECURITY

MATCH THE POSITIONAL PROFILE AND SUITABILITY TO THE CURRENT STYLE OF PLAY

COMFORTABLE OPERATING AS A STARTER, ROTATION OPTION, OR HIGH-IMPACT SQUAD PLAYER ACROSS MULTIPLE MIDFIELD STRUCTURES



RECRUITMENT PROCESS



CURRENT SQUAD DEPTH



ISSUE - MIDFIELD DEPTH

POSITIONAL DEPTH - CM/DM

Manchester United's current midfield group lacks enough reliable depth in the pivot, especially with European football adding extra demands across the season. **Andrey Santos**, **Youri Tielemans**, and **Kobbie Mainoo** give the squad strong technical quality, progression, and midfield control, but the group still feels short of a more physical defensive midfielder who can protect the back line and offer true balance in different systems.

This issue becomes even clearer with **Manuel Ugarte** expected to miss a long period after suffering an ACL injury, while **Casemiro's** departure removes the club's most natural #6. **Mason Mount** can provide useful depth as a number 10 or from wider areas, but he is not a natural pivot player and should not be relied on as a defensive midfield option. As a result, United are left with limited cover for the deeper midfield roles, which creates risk across Premier League, cup, and European fixtures.

The squad needs one more midfielder who can operate as a physical CM, a defensive-minded partner in a 4-2-3-1, or a lone 6 in a 4-3-3 when required. This player would not need to be the main creative force, but must bring duel-winning, transition defending, positional discipline, and the ability to give **Mainoo**, **Santos**, and **Tielemans** more freedom.

Adding this profile would round out the midfield group by giving United a more complete blend of technical quality, defensive security, and physical presence. It would also reduce the risk of overloading **Mainoo** or forcing players into roles that do not suit them, while giving the team enough depth to compete properly across multiple competitions.



POSITIONAL PROFILE - CM

TECHNICAL QUALITIES

- **Ball security** — Reliable first touch under pressure, able to receive from centre-backs and protect possession in deeper areas.
- **Simple progression** — Can move the ball forward through carries or short vertical passes without forcing risky actions.
- **Passing range** — Comfortable switching play, finding full-backs/wide players, and connecting midfield to attack from the base of midfield.
- **Press resistance** — Able to receive with opponents around him, turn out of pressure, and help United build through midfield.
- **Defensive technique** — Clean tackler who can engage in duels, intercept passes, block lanes, and win the ball without constantly giving away fouls.

TACTICAL QUALITIES

- **Lone 6 capability** — Comfortable operating as the deepest midfielder in a 4-3-3, protecting the back four and holding position when others advance.
- **Double pivot fit** — Can play as the more defensive midfielder in a 4-2-3-1, allowing Kobbie Mainoo, Andrey Santos, or Youri Tielemans more freedom.
- **Positional discipline** — Understands when to hold, when to press, when to cover wide spaces, and when to drop between centre-backs.
- **Transition defending** — Strong awareness and recovery instincts to stop counter-attacks before they expose the back line.

OUT OF POSSESSION

- **Duel-winning** — Physical enough to compete in midfield battles, win second balls, and handle Premier League intensity.
- **Screening ability** — Protects central spaces, blocks passing lanes into attacking midfielders, and forces play away from dangerous areas.
- **Defensive work rate** — Covers ground consistently, supports full-backs, tracks runners, and recovers into shape quickly.
- **Counter-pressing** — Reacts quickly after turnovers, closes space aggressively, and helps United regain control before attacks develop.
- **Box protection** — Strong defensive presence around the edge of the area, especially when defending cutbacks, second balls, and late runners.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- **Responsibility** — Comfortable taking on a disciplined, selfless role that may not always stand out but is vital to the team structure.
- **Composure** — Stays calm when pressed, avoids panic decisions, and gives the team control in difficult game states.
- **Tactical intelligence** — Reads danger early, anticipates transitions, and understands how to manage space behind the midfield line.
- **Reliability** — Can be trusted to start important matches, rotate across competitions, or come on to protect leads.
- **Mentality** — Competitive, aggressive, and disciplined enough to add edge to United’s midfield without losing control.

PHYSICAL

- **Strength** — Able to hold off pressure, compete in shoulder-to-shoulder duels, and protect the ball in central areas.
- **Mobility** — Covers large spaces across midfield, especially when defending transitions or shifting across to support wide areas.
- **Stamina** — Capable of maintaining intensity across Premier League, cup, and European fixtures.
- **Agility** — Quick enough over short distances to react to loose balls, close passing lanes, and adjust body position defensively.
- **Durability** — Strong availability record preferred, as United need dependable midfield depth across a full season with European football.



LOGLIST CRITERIA

Age: 22-28

Player should be old enough to contribute immediately, but still young enough to develop within the squad. The ideal profile is entering or already in their prime rather than being another long-term project.

Position: CM / DM

Must be comfortable playing in the pivot. The player should be able to operate as a physical central midfielder, the deeper player in a 4-2-3-1, or as a lone 6 in a 4-3-3 when needed.

League Level: Top 5 European league or strong European competition experience

Player should be coming from a level close enough to adapt quickly to Premier League and European demands. Champions League, Europa League, or high-level domestic experience would be preferred.

Market Value: Maximum £70m

Allows United to target a higher-level midfield profile after already adding Andrey Santos and Yuri Tielemans through cost-effective deals. This signing should be treated as the major midfield investment: a player with the physicality, defensive quality, and long-term upside to become a key part of the squad.

Profile Fit: Physical CM capable of playing DM

The player must add duel-winning, defensive coverage, transition defending, and positional security. United already have technical quality through **Mainoo**, **Santos**, and **Tielemans**, so this signing should bring balance, physicality, and defensive reliability.



LOGLIST

ANGELO STILLER – VfB STUTTGART (SPORTS360 GmbH)

AYYOUB BOUADDI – LILLE (RELATIVES)

JAMES GARNER – EVERTON (TRIPLE S SPORTS)

TYLER ADAMS – BOURNEMOUTH (YMU MANAGEMENT)

LAMINE CAMARA – AS MONACO (RELATIVES)

MANUEL LOCATELLI – JUVENTUS (EXCELLENCE SPORT)

MAMADOU SANGARÉ - RC LENS (12 MANagement)

JOAO GOMES – WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS (CARLOS LEITE)

ANTON STACH – LEEDS (ROOF)

MANU KONÉ – AS ROMA (ESN)

ADAM WHARTON – CRYSTAL PALACE (OMNI SPORTS)

CARLOS BALEBA – BRIGHTON (IF FOOTBALL)

ANDRÉ – WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS (CARLOS LEITE)

RUBEN NEVES – AL HILAL (GESTIFUTE)

SANDER BERGE – FULHAM (KEYPASS AS)

LUCIEN AGOUME – SEVILLA (ND SPORTS MANAGEMENT)

IBRAHIM SANGARÉ - NOTTINGHAM FOREST (JBM SPORTS)



LOGLIST FILTERING CRITERIA

1. Starting-Level Suitability

Prioritised midfielders who are capable of competing for a starting role immediately, rather than joining purely as depth. The target should be good enough to start important Premier League and European matches.

2. Pivot Capability

Filtered for players who can operate in deeper midfield areas, either as a lone 6 in a 4-3-3 or as the more defensive midfielder in a 4-2-3-1. The player must be comfortable receiving under pressure, protecting central spaces, and anchoring the midfield.

3. Physical & Defensive Profile

Focused on midfielders who add duel power, ball-winning, athleticism, and defensive coverage. With United already adding technical quality through **Santos** and **Tielemans**, this signing needs to bring a stronger physical and defensive presence.

4. Tactical Compatibility

Considered players who can complement **Kobbie Mainoo**, **Andrey Santos**, and **Youri Tielemans** by giving the midfield better balance. The ideal profile should allow players like **Mainoo** more freedom while still giving United structure, protection, and control without the ball.

5. Market Opportunity

Considered age, contract situation, current club context, likely fee, and whether the player could realistically be attainable within a £60m-£70m budget. The focus is on a major midfield investment, not a short-term squad filler.

6. Squad Value Across Competitions

Prioritised players who can contribute across the Premier League, domestic cups, and European football. With **Casemiro** gone, **Ugarte** injured, and **Mount** not suited to the pivot, United need a reliable midfield option who can handle volume, intensity, and tactical responsibility.



SHORTLIST

CARLOS BALEBA – BRIGHTON & HOVE ALBION (IF FOOTBALL)



MANU KONÉ- AS ROMA (ESN)

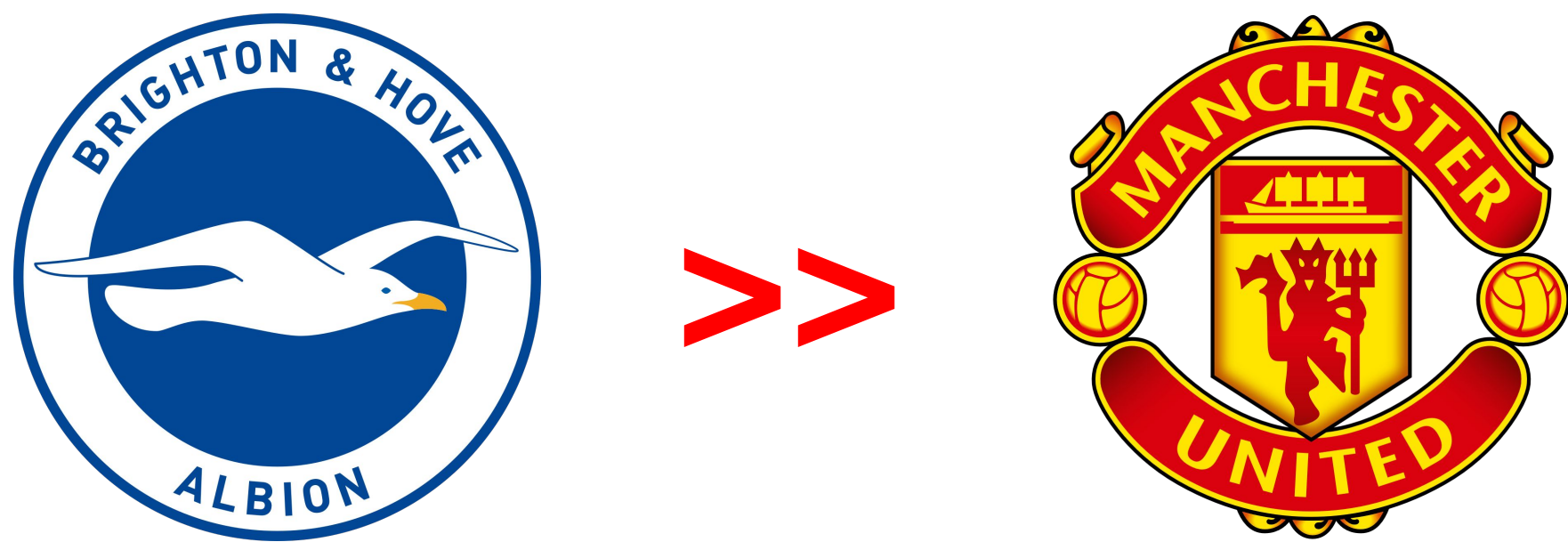


AYYOUB BOUADDI – LILLE (RELATIVES)



RECOMMENDED PLAYER

CARLOS BALEBA



PLAYER DOSSIER - MANCHESTER UNITED



CARLOS BALEBA

AGE: 22 (03/01/2004)

HEIGHT: 180cm / 5' 10

POSITION: CENTRAL/DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

PREFERRED FOOT: LEFT

CURRENT CLUB: BRIGHTON AND HOVE ALBION

CONTRACT END: 30/06/2028 (OPTION FOR A +1)

AGENCY: IF FOOTBALL

PLAYER OVERVIEW

Carlos Baleba is a 21-year-old Cameroonian defensive midfielder currently playing for Brighton & Hove Albion. He is a full international for Cameroon and is regarded as one of the most physically gifted young midfielders in Europe.

POSITIONAL PROFILE/PLAYING STYLE SUITABILITY

Baleba profiles primarily as a defensive midfielder capable of operating as a single pivot or in a double pivot. He combines elite athleticism with ball-carrying power, regularly driving through midfield with intensity and confidence. In possession, he is comfortable receiving centrally and progressing play through carries and forward passes, though his game remains more direct than controlling. Out of possession, he is aggressive, covers large areas, and excels in duels and recovery actions, making him well suited to teams that demand high physical output and defensive presence from their midfield anchor.

POTENTIAL/FUTURE VALUE

Baleba has significant upside due to his age, physical tools, and exposure to a high-level development environment. As his positional discipline and decision-making continue to mature, he has the potential to develop into a top-level defensive midfielder capable of competing at Champions League level. His international experience at a young age further supports his long-term projection.

TRANSFER STATUS

Baleba is under long-term contract at Brighton and is considered a core asset within their squad. Any transfer in the near term would likely require a substantial fee, with Brighton historically well positioned to retain or maximise value on players of this profile.

RECOMMENDATION

Baleba would offer United a powerful, athletic midfield presence capable of impacting games physically and defensively. His ability to cover ground, win duels, and carry the ball from deep make him well suited to be the next addition to the Manchester United midfield.

PLAYER DOSSIER - MANCHESTER UNITED



CARLOS BALEBA

AGE: 22 (03/01/2004)

HEIGHT: 180cm / 5' 10

POSITION: CENTRAL/DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

PREFERRED FOOT: LEFT

CURRENT CLUB: BRIGHTON AND HOVE ALBION

CONTRACT END: 30/06/2028 (OPTION FOR A +1)

AGENCY: IF FOOTBALL

2025/26 OVERVIEW

Premier League: 31 appearances (23 starts), 1,662 minutes

EFL Cup: 3 appearances (2 starts) 167 minutes

FA Cup: 1 appearance (1 start) 62 minutes

International: 10 appearance (9 starts), 742 minutes

INTERNATIONAL APPEARANCES

Cameroon Senior National Team: 16 appearances, 1 assist, 1,234 minutes

INJURY HISTORY

Unknown muscle injury Jan 2025 - Feb 2025 (missed 8 days, 1 game)

132 games played with over 7,500 minutes in his career, indicating he has played in most games in his career.

RELATIONSHIPS

Bryan Mbeumo - Current teammates with the Cameroon National team

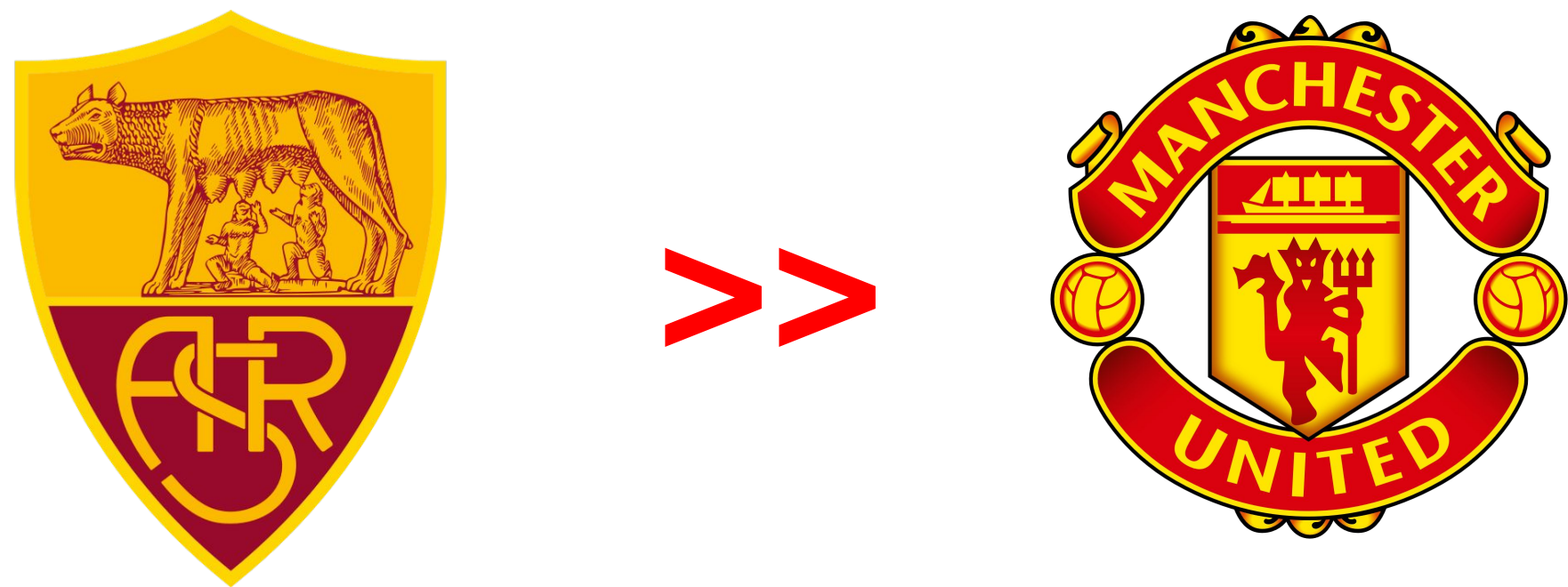
Leny Yoro - Ex teammates at Lille

SUMMARY

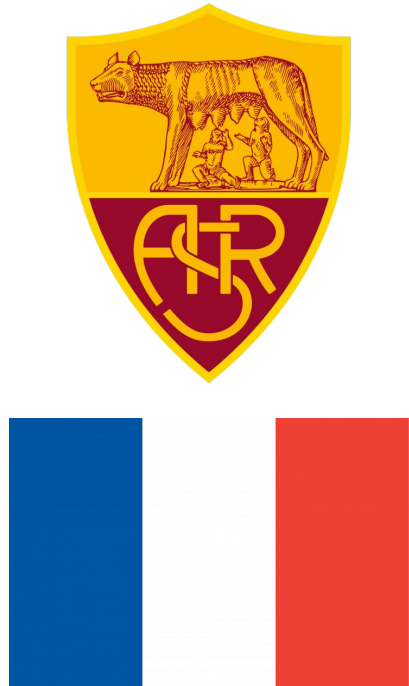
Baleba is a physically dominant defensive midfielder who would bring athleticism, ball-winning ability, and presence to United's midfield. He is capable of covering large areas, competing aggressively in duels, and contributing to both defensive stability and ball progression. His profile suits high-intensity environments and adds a strong physical dimension to the midfield group.

RECOMMENDED PLAYER

MANU KONÉ



PLAYER DOSSIER - MANCHESTER UNITED



MANU KONÉ

AGE: 25 (17/05/2001)

HEIGHT: 185cm / 6'1

POSITION: CENTRAL/DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

PREFERRED FOOT: RIGHT

CURRENT CLUB: AS ROMA

CONTRACT END: 30/06/2029

AGENCY: ESN

PLAYER OVERVIEW

Manu Koné is a 25-year-old French central midfielder currently playing for AS Roma. He is a powerful, athletic midfield profile with strong ball-carrying, duel-winning, and defensive transition qualities. Unlike a pure holding midfielder, Koné is more of a physical CM who can play in the pivot, drive through pressure, cover ground, and add intensity to United's midfield. At 6'1, with Serie A, Bundesliga, and France experience, he offers the level, physical tools, and maturity to step into a major Premier League role.

POSITIONAL PROFILE/PLAYING STYLE SUITABILITY

Koné fits the profile of a physical CM capable of playing as the more defensive midfielder in a 4-2-3-1, while also having the tools to operate as a lone 6 in a 4-3-3 depending on the game state. His biggest value comes from his ability to defend space, win midfield duels, carry the ball forward, and help the team survive transitions. He would complement Kobbie Mainoo well because he can take on more of the athletic and defensive workload, allowing Mainoo to focus more on receiving, progressing play, and connecting midfield to attack.

POTENTIAL/FUTURE VALUE

Koné offers both immediate impact and long-term value. He is not a short-term squad filler, but a starting-level midfielder entering his prime years. His physicality, ball-carrying, and defensive aggression make him a different profile to Mainoo, Tielemans, and Andrey Santos, which gives United better midfield balance. If he adapts well to the Premier League, he has the potential to become a key part of the midfield core rather than just another rotation option.

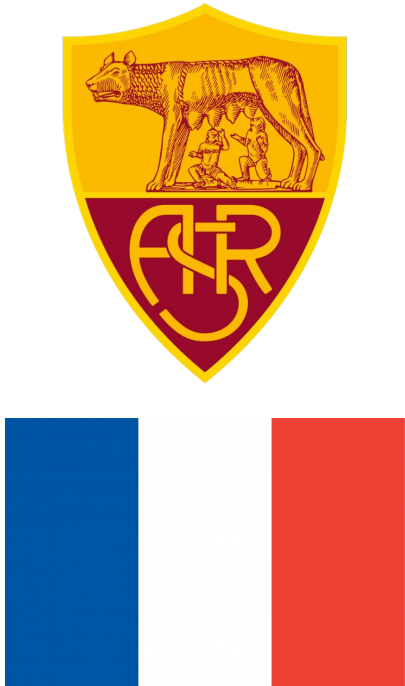
TRANSFER STATUS

Koné would not be a cheap deal, but he fits the £65m-£70m "big midfield investment" bracket. Roma have him under contract until 2029, so they are not under immediate contract pressure, but he is a valuable asset and could be attainable if United make a serious offer. With United already adding Santos and Tielemans through more cost-effective deals, Koné would represent the major midfield signing to replace the physical and defensive presence lost through Casemiro's departure and Ugarte's injury.

RECOMMENDATION

Koné would be a strong target for Manchester United because he directly addresses the squad's biggest remaining midfield gap. He adds physicality, defensive coverage, carrying power, and flexibility across the pivot. He is not the cleanest pure number six on the market, but his athletic profile and ability to play across midfield make him a high-upside signing who could start with Mainoo, rotate with Santos and Tielemans, and give United the depth required for Premier League, cup, and European competition.

PLAYER DOSSIER - MANCHESTER UNITED



MANU KONÉ

AGE: 25 (17/05/2001)

HEIGHT: 185cm / 6’1

POSITION: CENTRAL/DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

PREFERRED FOOT: RIGHT

CURRENT CLUB: AS ROMA

CONTRACT END: 30/06/2029

AGENCY: ESN

2025/2026 OVERVIEW:

Serie A: 29 appearances (28 starts), 2 goals, 3 assists, 2,459 minutes
Coppa Italia: 1 appearances, 33 minutes
UEFA Europa League: 7 appearances (5 starts), 226 minutes

INTERNATIONAL APPEARANCES

France National Team: 18 appearances, 1252 minutes
France U23: 5 appearances, 350 minutes
France U21: 11 appearances, 538 minutes
France U19: 8 appearance, 535 minutes
France U18: 3 appearances, 183 minutes
France Olympic Team: 4 appearances, 372 minutes

INJURY HISTORY

Inner ligament tear Jul 2021 - Sep 2021 (missed 64 days and 4 games)
Knee injury June 2023 - Sep 2023 (missed 69 days and 4 games)
Torn muscle fiber Mar 2024 - April 2024 (missed 33 days and 4 games)
Hamstring injury Jan 2026 - Feb 2026 (missed 25 days and 4 games)
Hamstring muscle injury Mar 2026 - April 2026 (missed 40 days and 7 games)

RELATIONSHIPS

N/A

SUMMARY

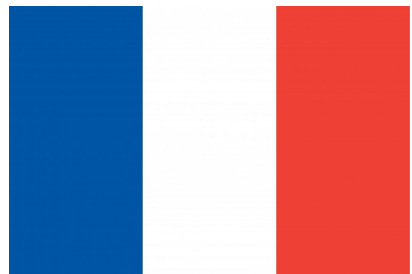
Koné is a powerful, starting-level midfield option who would give Manchester United the physicality, duel-winning, ball-carrying, and transition defending currently missing from the pivot. He is not a pure sitting number six, but his ability to play as a defensive CM, operate in a double pivot, and cover large spaces would make him a strong fit alongside Kobbie Mainoo. With Casemiro gone, Ugarte injured, and Mount not suited to deeper midfield roles, Koné would add the athletic profile and defensive security needed to complete United’s midfield group.

RECOMMENDED PLAYER

AYYOUB BOUADDI



PLAYER DOSSIER - MANCHESTER UNITED



AYYOUB BOUADDI

AGE: 18 (02/10/2007)

HEIGHT: 187cm / 6'1

POSITION: CENTRAL/DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

PREFERRED FOOT: RIGHT

CURRENT CLUB: LILLE

CONTRACT END: 30/06/2029

AGENCY: RELATIVES

PLAYER OVERVIEW

Ayyoub Bouaddi is an 18-year-old Moroccan midfielder currently playing for Lille. He is one of the most highly rated young midfielders in Europe, combining size, technical security, composure, and tactical intelligence at a very young age. At 6'1, he has the physical frame to develop into a strong Premier League midfielder, while his comfort receiving in deeper areas gives him the foundation to play as a CM or DM long term. Bouaddi's maturity on the ball, defensive awareness, and ability to operate across midfield make him one of the highest-upside options in midfield

POSITIONAL PROFILE/PLAYING STYLE SUITABILITY

Bouaddi fits the profile of a modern midfield controller who can eventually play as a lone 6, a deeper player in a double pivot, or a more balanced central midfielder. He is comfortable receiving from the back line, keeping possession under pressure, and connecting play through midfield, which would suit a United side looking to build around Kobbie Mainoo, Andrey Santos, and Youri Tielemans. The main question is whether he is physically and defensively ready to immediately become the solution for United's pivot depth. He has the tools to grow into that role, but compared to a more senior target, he may need more protection and development time.

POTENTIAL/FUTURE VALUE

Bouaddi's future value is extremely high. He is already playing senior football at a young age and has the technical and physical base to become an elite-level midfielder if developed properly. Unlike a short-term squad signing, Bouaddi would be a long-term investment who could grow with Mainoo and Santos to form part of United's next midfield core. His ceiling is one of the strongest in the longlist, but the risk is that United need immediate defensive reliability now, not just a future star.

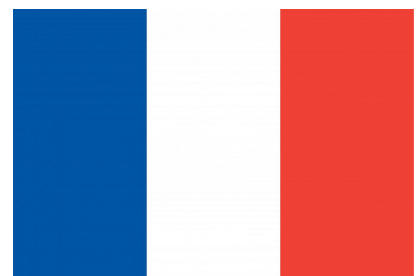
TRANSFER STATUS

Bouaddi would likely be expensive because of his age, contract length, and reputation across Europe. Lille have him under contract until 2029, which puts them in a strong negotiating position, and reported interest from major clubs means United would face strong competition. He may fit the £65m-£70m "big investment" bracket depending on Lille's demands, but the deal would be based more on long-term upside than immediate certainty. If United want a ready-made defensive midfielder for next season, Bouaddi may be a riskier option; if they want to secure one of Europe's top young midfielders before his value rises further, he is a serious target.

RECOMMENDATION

Bouaddi should be viewed as a high-upside shortlist option rather than the safest immediate solution. He has the technical quality, size, intelligence, and positional flexibility to become an excellent CM/DM for Manchester United, especially in a midfield group built around Mainoo and Santos. However, because United's current need is urgent after Casemiro's departure, Ugarte's injury, and Mount's lack of suitability in the pivot, Bouaddi may need to be paired with patience. He is a strong option if United are willing to invest in long-term midfield dominance, but a more experienced physical midfielder may be safer for the immediate squad need.

PLAYER DOSSIER - MANCHESTER UNITED



AYYOUB BOUADDI

AGE: 18 (02/10/2007)

HEIGHT: 187cm / 6'1

POSITION: CENTRAL/DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER

PREFERRED FOOT: RIGHT

CURRENT CLUB: LILLE

CONTRACT END: 30/06/2029

AGENCY: RELATIVES

2025/2026 OVERVIEW:

Ligue 1: 30 appearances (28 starts), 2328 minutes, 1 assist
Coupe de France: 2 appearances, 159 minutes
Europa League: 10 appearances (7 starts), 666 minutes

INTERNATIONAL APPEARANCES

Morocco National Team: 8 appearances, 564 minutes
France U21 National Team: 10 appearances, 1 goal, 1 assist, 643 minutes
France U20 National Team: 1 appearance, 90 minutes
France U18 National Team: 3 appearances, 230 minutes
France U17 National Team: 5 appearances, 384 minutes
France U16 National Team: 8 appearances, 3 goals, 1 assist, 420 minutes

INJURY HISTORY

N/A

RELATIONSHIPS

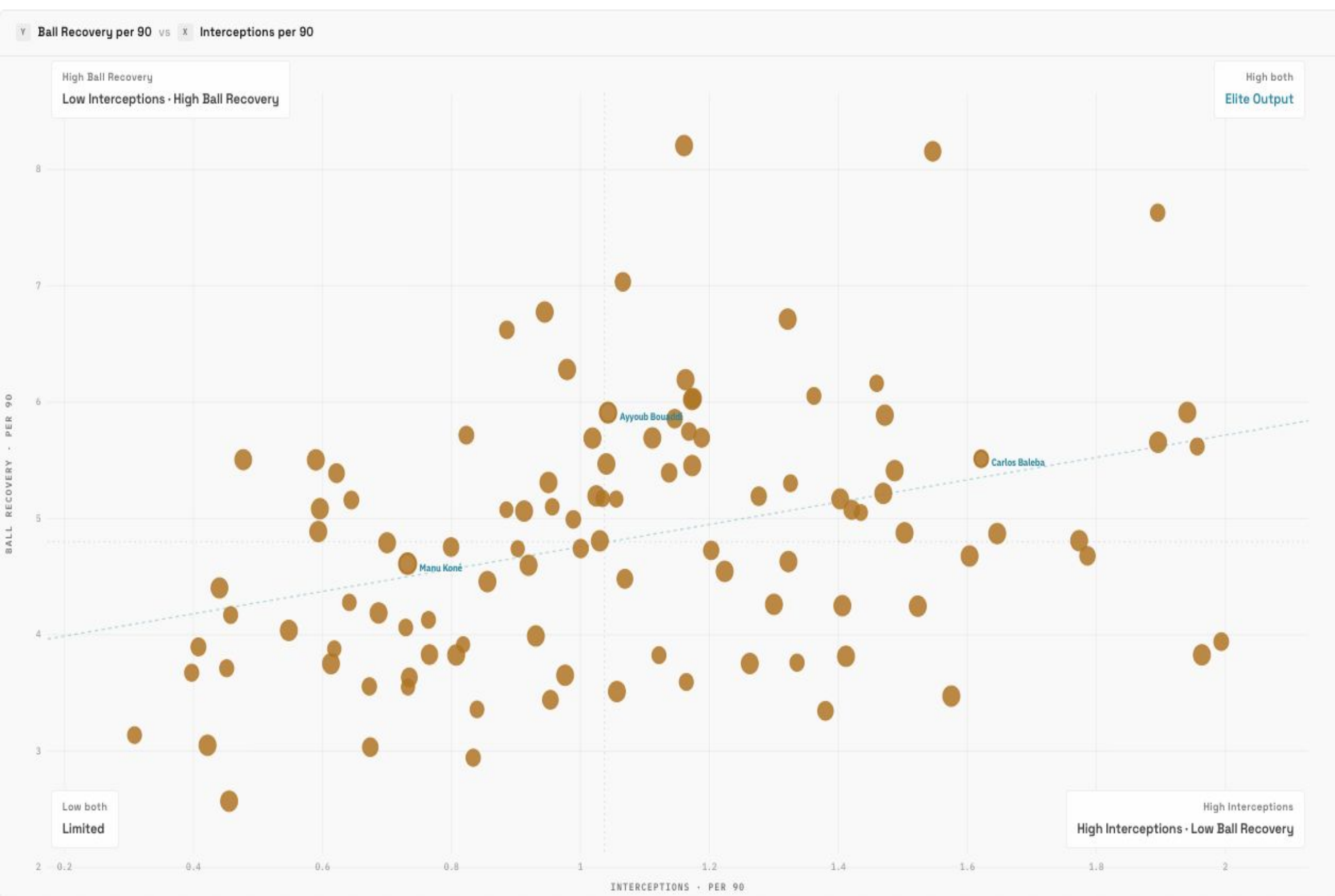
Leny Yoro - Ex teammates at Lille
Noussair Mazraoui - Teammates in the Moroccan National Team

SUMMARY

Bouaddi is one of the highest-upside midfield options in the longlist, offering technical security, size, composure, and the potential to develop into a modern CM/DM. He would fit United's long-term midfield project alongside Mainoo and Santos, but he is still only 18 and may not be the safest immediate answer to the club's pivot depth issue. With Casemiro gone, Ugarte injured, and Mount not suited to deeper midfield roles, Bouaddi would be an exciting major investment, but more of a future cornerstone than a guaranteed ready-made defensive midfield solution.

BALL WINNING VS RECOVERY COMPARISON

Compared to all CMs/DMs from the Top 5 Leagues, aged 18-26, min 1500 mins played

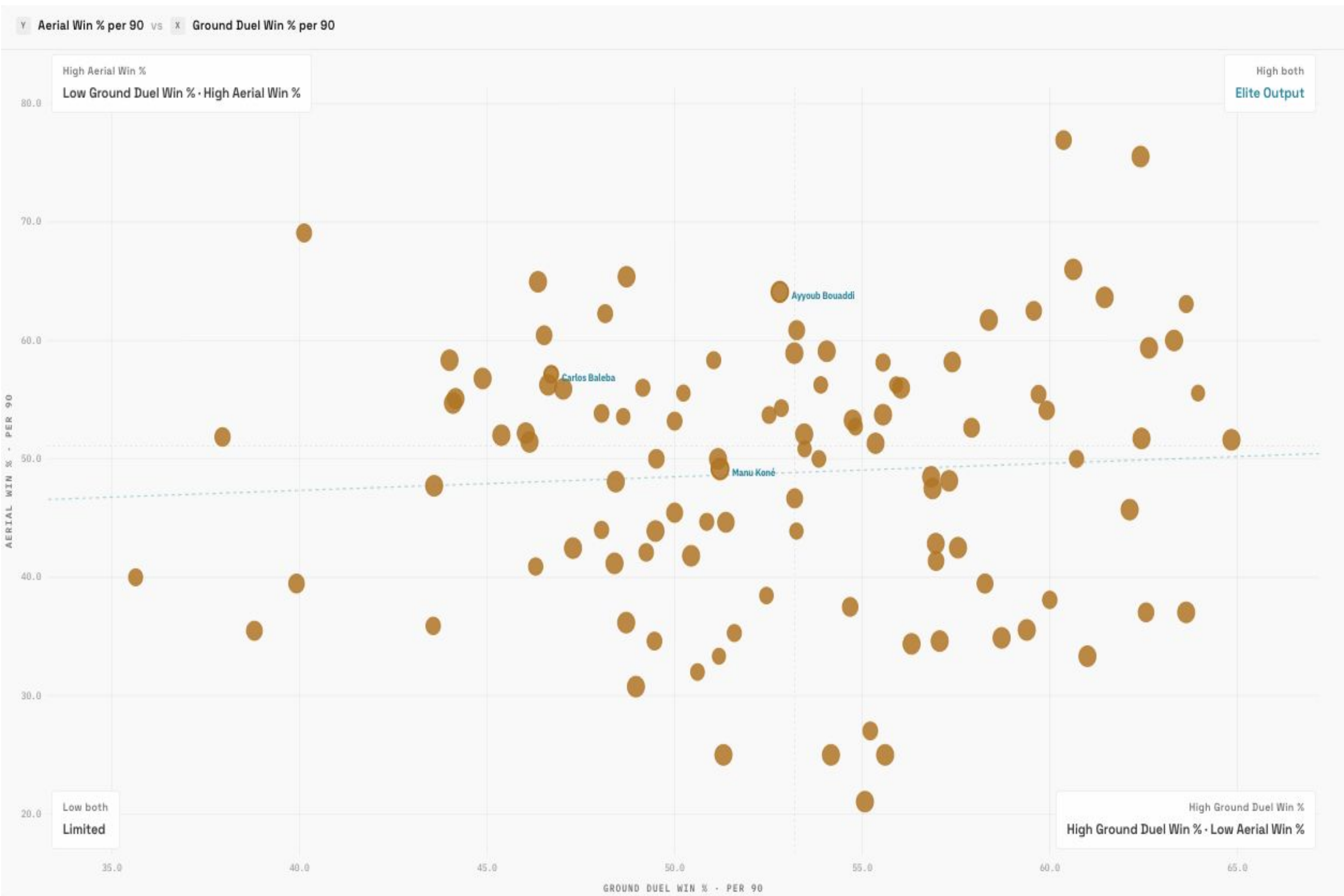


This graph shows how often each midfielder regains possession through recoveries and interceptions. **Bouaddi** stands out with strong ball recovery numbers and solid interception output, showing his ability to stay active defensively and read play. **Baleba** profiles as more interception-heavy, while **Koné** offers a balanced defensive contribution. For United, all three would help improve the midfield’s ability to regain possession, but Bouaddi and Baleba look especially strong for adding defensive activity in central areas.



PHYSICAL MIDFIELDER COMPARISON

Compared to all CMs/DMs from the Top 5 Leagues, aged 18-26, min 1500 mins played

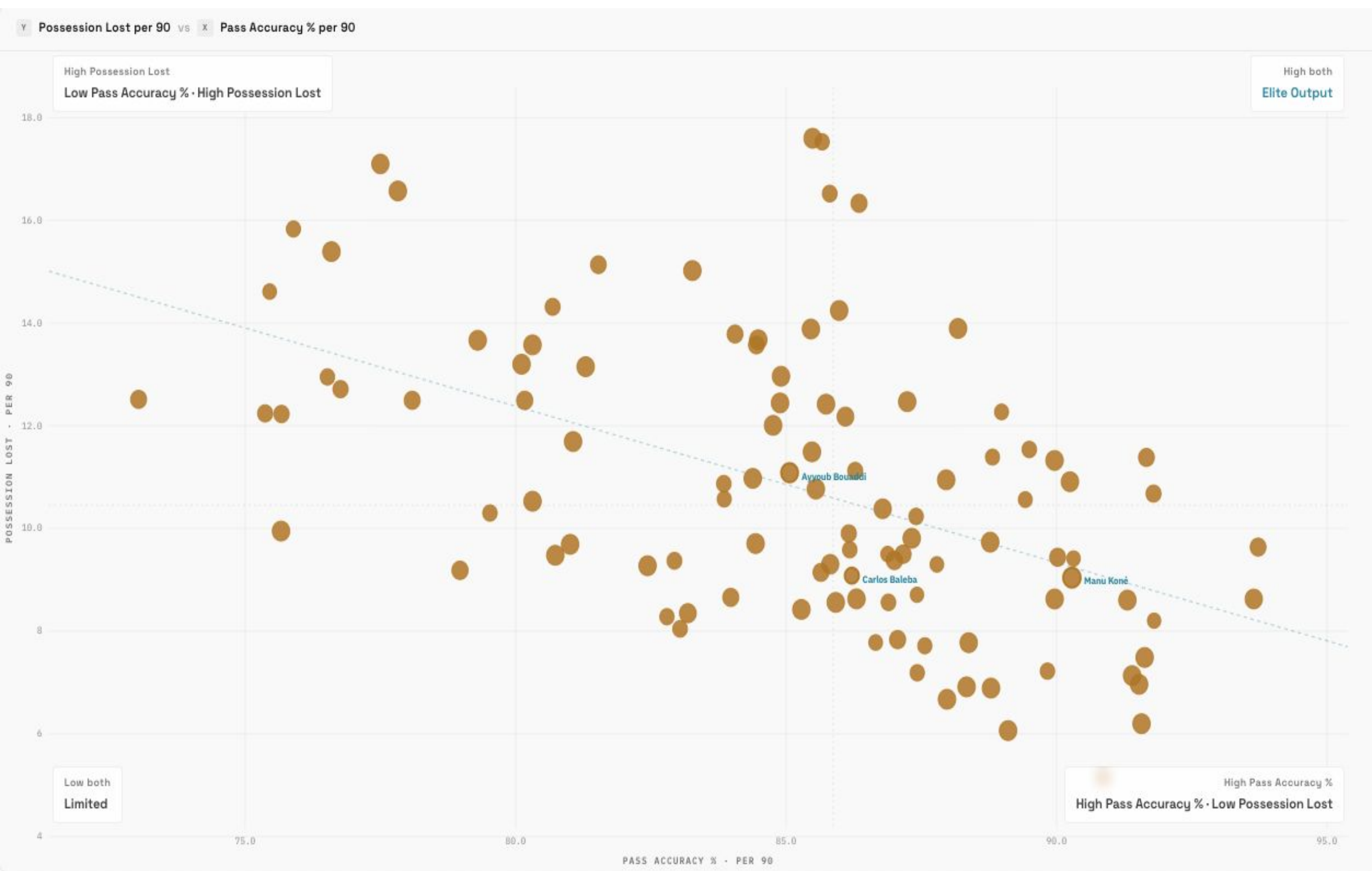


This graph compares each player’s physical duel profile, looking at both ground duels and aerial contests. **Bouaddi** performs well across both areas, which highlights his physical upside and ability to compete in different types of midfield battles. **Baleba** is also strong aerially, while **Koné** sits closer to the average but still offers useful physicality and intensity. For United, this matters because the next midfield signing needs to add size, duel power, and defensive presence around **Mainoo**, **Santos**, and **Tielemans**.



PASSING SECURITY COMPARISON

Compared to all CMs/DMs from the Top 5 Leagues, aged 18-26, min 1500 mins played

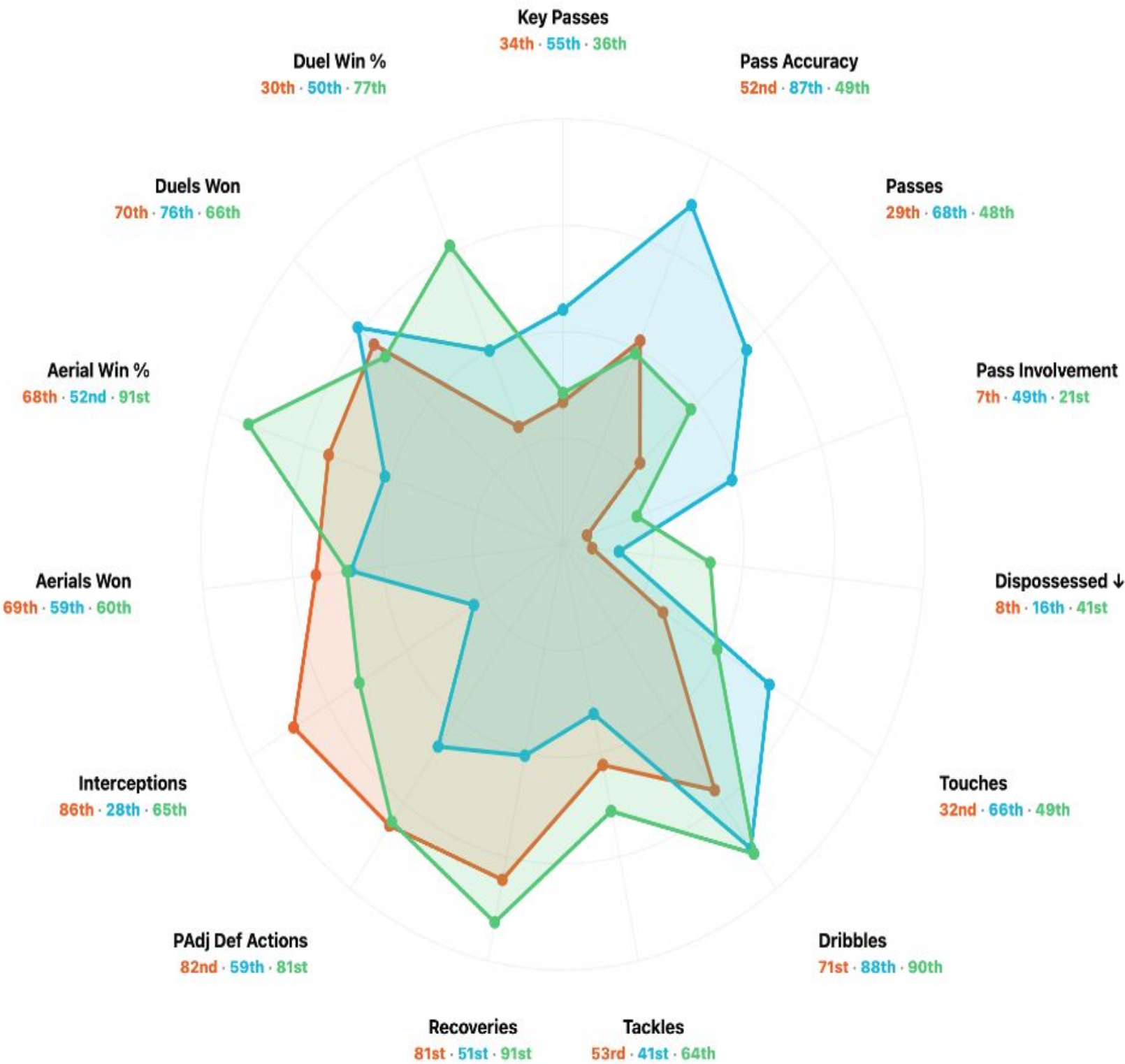


This graph helps show which midfielders can handle possession securely while playing in deeper areas. **Koné** and **Baleba** both sit in a strong zone, combining high pass accuracy with relatively low possession losses, which is important for a pivot player in the Premier League. **Bouaddi** is slightly higher for possession lost, but still shows good pass accuracy and strong technical security for his age. For United, this suggests Koné and Baleba may be safer immediate options, while Bouaddi offers longer-term upside with room to improve his decision-making.



CARLOS BALEBA vs MANU KONÉ vs AYYOUB BOUADDI

Custom template · per-90 percentile · each player vs own-position peers



BIGGEST DIFFERENCES

The 7 stats where they differ most

INTERCEPTIONS	1.62	0.73	1.04
DUEL WIN %	49.3%	50.8%	54.5%
PASS INVOLVEME	8.7%	10.8%	8.7%
RECOVERIES	5.51	4.61	5.91
AERIAL WIN %	57.1%	49.2%	64.1%
PASSES	40.0	50.1	40.9
PASS ACCURACY	86.2%	90.3%	85.1%

This pizza chart compares **Carlos Baleba**, **Manu Koné**, and **Ayyoub Bouaddi** across the key midfield metrics most relevant to Manchester United’s search for a physical CM/DM. The chart highlights three different profiles: Baleba as the most explosive defensive athlete, Koné as the safest senior two-way option, and Bouaddi as the highest-upside long-term midfield talent.

Baleba stands out for defensive aggression and ball-winning output. His high numbers for interceptions, PAAdj defensive actions, dribbles, and recoveries show why he fits the role of a dynamic Premier League midfielder who can defend forward, cover ground, and carry the ball out of pressure. He is not just a destroyer; his ability to progress the ball through carries gives United a more athletic route through midfield, which would help balance technical players like Mainoo, Santos, and Tielemans.

Koné profiles as the most secure and mature option in possession. His strong pass accuracy, solid duel numbers, and good carrying profile suggest he could step into the pivot and provide immediate reliability. He may not dominate every defensive category in the same way as Baleba, but he offers a well-rounded blend of physicality, ball security, and experience, making him a safer short-term option for Premier League and European fixtures.

Bouaddi is the standout long-term upside profile. His duel win %, aerial win %, recoveries, tackles, and dribbling numbers are extremely impressive for his age, showing a player with the physical frame and technical quality to develop into a complete CM/DM. The main concern is his lower pass involvement and less polished possession profile compared to Koné, which suggests he may need more development time before becoming the main defensive midfield solution.

Overall, the chart supports **Baleba** as the strongest fit for United’s immediate squad need. He offers the clearest mix of defensive intensity, physical power, ball-winning, and Premier League-ready athleticism. **Koné** would be a strong alternative if United prioritise experience and possession security, while **Bouaddi** is a high-ceiling option who could become elite long term but may be less ready to solve the midfield issue straight away.

Carlos Baleba
Brighton & Hove Albion · 25/26 Premier League
185 DM peers

Manu Koné
Roma · 25/26 Serie A
489 CM peers

Ayyoub Bouaddi
LOSC Lille · 25/26 Ligue 1
303 CM peers

SUMMARY

STRATEGY

United need one more starting-level midfield addition to complete the new-look midfield group. After adding Andrey Santos and Youri Tielemans, the final signing should bring physicality, defensive security, and true pivot depth rather than another technical or attacking midfielder.

POSITIONAL

The target profile is a physical CM/DM who can play as the deeper midfielder in a 4-2-3-1 or operate as a lone 6 in a 4-3-3. The player must be able to win duels, cover transitions, protect the back line, and still remain secure enough in possession to play through midfield.

TEAM

With Casemiro gone, Ugarte injured, and Mason Mount not suited to playing in the pivot, United currently lack enough reliable options for the deeper midfield roles. Mainoo, Santos, and Tielemans give the squad quality, but they need a more defensive and athletic profile to balance the group.

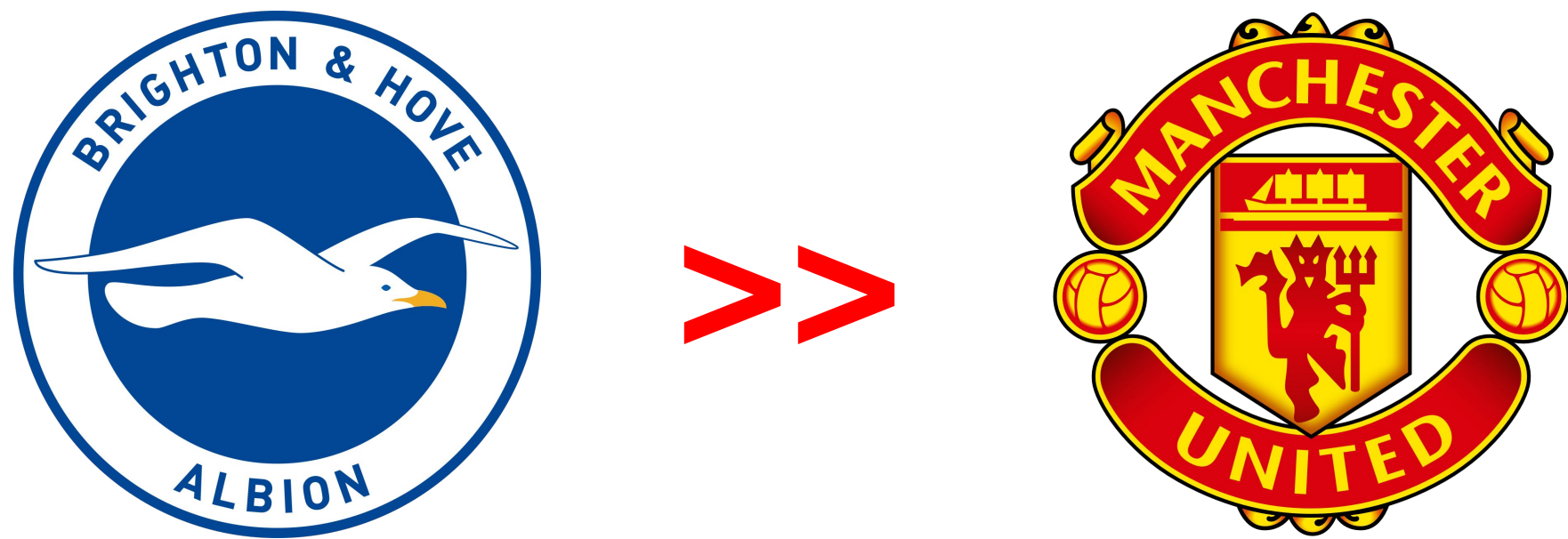
NEED

Data, scouting observations, and squad planning all point towards the same requirement: United need a midfielder who can add physical presence, ball-winning, and defensive coverage across Premier League, cup, and European fixtures. This signing would reduce pressure on Mainoo, improve squad balance, and give the team a more complete midfield structure.



RECOMMENDED PLAYER

CARLOS BALEBA



WHY CARLOS BALEBA?

Carlos Baleba stands out as the best midfield option because he offers the clearest balance of role suitability, Premier League readiness, physical upside, and long-term value. He is a 22-year-old defensive midfielder at Brighton, with a strong athletic profile and the ability to play in the pivot, carry the ball forward, win duels, and defend large spaces. For United, this is important because the squad already has technical midfield profiles in Kobbie Mainoo, Andrey Santos, and Yuri Tielemans, but lacks a powerful defensive presence after Casemiro's departure and Ugarte's injury.

Baleba would give Manchester United a midfielder who can play as the deeper option in a 4-2-3-1, while also having the tools to develop into a lone 6 in a 4-3-3. He is not just a destroyer; he can receive under pressure, progress the ball through carries, and help United play through midfield rather than simply protecting the back line. His Premier League experience with Brighton also reduces the adaptation risk compared to signing directly from another league. While he would be expensive, his age, profile, and ability to solve both immediate and long-term midfield issues make him the strongest fit for the specific role United need.



RISK ASSESSMENT

The main risk with Carlos Baleba is transfer cost rather than role suitability. Brighton have him under contract until 2028 and have previously been reported to value him extremely highly, which means United would likely need to pay a major fee to make the deal realistic. For a third midfield signing, that creates pressure: if United spend big, Baleba would need to become more than a rotation option and quickly develop into a regular starter.

The sporting risk is still manageable because Baleba already understands the Premier League and has the physical tools United are missing. The main question is whether he is ready to be trusted as the main defensive midfield solution every week, especially as he is still only 22 and not yet a finished product. He can be aggressive, powerful, and progressive, but United would need to manage his decision-making and positional discipline as he develops. If the fee is controlled within the £60m-£70m range, Baleba would be a high-upside risk worth taking; if Brighton demand a fee closer to elite midfielder money, the value becomes harder to justify.



POTENTIAL SQUAD 2026/2027





THANK YOU