

Twenty years as a manager for Jose Mourinho; this season could be his most important yet

Al Arabiya senior sports presenter Liliane Tannoury recalls interviewing the Tottenham boss - and why he really needs a trophy this season



Jose Mourinho, Benfica coach in 2000. Allsport



Liliane Tannoury
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Jose Mourinho recently celebrated 20 years in football management. This current one will, perhaps, be the most important one yet, and could define the next chapter of his career.

I interviewed Mourinho in December 2018, just before he was fired from Manchester United. Despite his charisma, he already felt a certain decline. He called himself "a special one", the infamous description he bestowed upon himself in 2004 when he arrived at Chelsea, but the context was far different.

Things have not really gone well for Mourinho in the last few years.

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engineer the move.

To have been without a club for a season post-United, supposedly left in limbo because there were no interesting offers, would have been unthinkable in the past.

He eventually ended up taking over at Tottenham Hotspur – despite in 2015 saying "I will never manage Tottenham".

Spurs made a good recovery and finished sixth last season (their lowest position since 2013-14), but the fact that he lost his top three assistants in the last 18 months indicates it has not been a smooth ride. Even Jorge Mendes, his longtime agent, was not involved in Tottenham appointment, with agent Pini Zahavi helping

On the pitch, the tactics employed by Mourinho - irritatingly defensive set-ups and opportunistic play in attack, with long passes launched for the wingers or the lone striker - have been left behind by rivals such as Jurgen Klopp at Liverpool and

Manchester City's Pep Guardiola. Now a younger generation of football managers, including RB Leipzig's 33-year-old coach Julian Nagelsmann, are introducing new concepts that are evolving the game. Mourinho, so far, has not adapted.

It shouldn't be forgotten that Spurs were 14th in the Premier League standings when Mourinho succeeded Mauricio Pochettino in November 2019. But let's be clear: sixth place in the Premier League is a defeat for Mourinho.

His culture of constant tension through conflict no longer seems to work because today's players do not have the same approach as 20 years ago.

Mourinho's style brought rewards when players had less power and influence than they do now. He was complaining to me in the interview that he can't control the players anymore, highlighting social media as a key cause. In today's times, berating players under the media spotlight to get more out of them, is a questionable approach. He knows he has to change.

Mourinho thought he would get Daniel Levy's backing in renewing the team in a way the chairman never did with Pochettino, instead always justifying the investment in the new stadium.

But he has not been wholly successful in that area either, getting Gareth Bale on loan and Sergio Reguilon in a €30 million (\$35.1m) deal from Real Madrid, in addition to the €16.6m signing of midfielder Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg from Southampton and Wolves full-back Matt Doherty for €16.7m.

In comparison, Frank Lampard has spent around £230 million (\$295m) on new signings at Chelsea.

Mourinho will need more than qualifying for the Champions League this season to be considered a real success. He needs to win a trophy. That's why Levy hired him. But if Spurs finish outside the top four, it will be a failure for Mourinho, and possible dismissal.

A question to ponder: where would Mourinho go after Tottenham, if he doesn't succeed there?

That's why this 2020/21 season could be the most important of his career.

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