



# State of Play:14

## Football's Top 10 European Cities

A Game of the People observation



# Cities: Where football passion grows

**FOOTBALL, to a large degree, is an urban pastime. The sport's leading clubs generally come from sizeable metropolitan areas. As a game that grew out of the industrial revolution, it was only natural that cities would provide the backdrop for the world's most intense distraction.**

Some football clubs are indelibly linked to the image of their home city – you cannot think about Madrid for too long before bringing Real Madrid into the conversation. Similarly, Barcelona, Munich, Manchester and Liverpool are known for their football clubs almost as much as they are acknowledged for their tourist sights, cultural highlights, gastronomy and personalities. Football clubs can put a town or city on the map, raise its profile and provide an instantly recognisable marker. Some cities have capitalised on this and the economic contribution of a major football club, such as Real Madrid and Liverpool, can be hugely beneficial to the local community.

A football club can provide significant psychological advantages, strengthen community ties and give local GDP a boost. For decades, football's mass appeal and social importance was overlooked by academics, economists, politicians and commentators. In fact, for many years, thanks to hooliganism and the general behaviour of some leading figures, football clubs were something of an embarrassment for civic leaders. Today, the commercial and cultural growth of the game has meant that cities and towns are embracing their football clubs as an important element of their identity. Often, a football club can simply make a city more relevant.

Judged by the success and standing of their clubs, both at home and abroad, as well as popularity, influence and passion, we have ranked the top 10 football cities in Europe. It is a list that will undoubtedly promote debate and disagreement, and there's no way it should be considered as anything other than one way to slice and dice the information and data available. One thing to remember is that it is not based on the merits of a single club, so a top performing team can be dragged down by the displays of other local entities.

## Domestic domination by cities (\*Capital)

	City	Country	% of titles	Leading club(s)
1	Belgrade*	Serbia	97%	Red Star Belgrade, Partizan
2	Glasgow	Scotland	86%	Celtic, Rangers
3	Budapest*	Hungary	85%	Ferencvaros, MTK, Ujpest
4	Istanbul	Turkey	81%	Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray, Besiktas
5	Zagreb*	Croatia	77%	Dinamo Zagreb
6	Sofia *	Bulgaria	73%	CSKA, Levski
7	Tirana*	Albania	72%	Tirana, Dinamo, Partizan
8	Copenhagen*	Denmark	70%	FC Copenhagen
9	Prague*	Czech Rep	66%	Slavia, Sparta
10	Lisbon*	Portugal	65%	Benfica, Sporting

**A well-branded, effectively marketed football club can not only make a city more visible on the map, it can also make any metropolis seem more interesting, vibrant and relevant to the rest of the world.**

## 1: Madrid

Population: 3.2 million

Major clubs: Real Madrid, Atlético Madrid

Major European prizes: 20

Percentage of domestic league titles: 51%

In 2022, Real Madrid won the UEFA Champions League once more and were also La Liga champions. Moreover, the club was a strong advocate of the European Super League project and also underwent a major refurbishment of the Santiago Bernabéu stadium. Very clearly, the club is a huge influence in Europe. At the same time, Real's local rivals, Atlético Madrid, remained a pivotal figure in Spanish football. Madrid, because of the role played by these clubs, continues to be the top football city in Spain. It is Real's European record that keeps the Spanish capital at the forefront of the game and the "soft power" of the two Madrid clubs is reflected in their stubborn involvement in the European Super League. Real, in particular, and their president Florentino Pérez, have the clout to be a disruptive force, but the opposition to the super league is very strong. Everybody expects Real to lose some of their lustre in Europe, but they have acquired the knowledge of how to win the Champions League and the 2022 success, against Liverpool in Paris, was their 14<sup>th</sup> and their fifth since 2013-14.

## 2: Milan



Population: 1.4 million

Major clubs: AC Milan, Inter Milan

Major European prizes: 14

Percentage of domestic league titles: 32%

Milan, the only city to provide two Champions League winners, is resurgent once more after a lack lustre period that saw both of the city's clubs fall from their position at the forefront of Italian football. Inter won their first scudetto since 2010 in 2021 and in 2021-22, AC Milan were champions for the first time since 2011. Both clubs have passed out of Italian hands, Inter are majority-owned by China's Suning and Milan's main owner is Redbird Capital, a US private investment firm.

The Milan public appear to believe once more in their two giant clubs – they are both averaging 72,000 for their home games at the San Siro stadium in 2022-23. The iconic home ground has a limited lifespan in its current form, both clubs are driving a new stadium plan that will enable them to become more competitive on the international stage.

## 3: Manchester

Population: 552,000

Major clubs: Manchester City, Manchester United

Major European prizes: 6

Percentage of domestic league titles: 22%

Manchester is a tale of two clubs at present, with their fortunes contrasting greatly. At present, City are dominating the local landscape with six Premier League titles since 2012. As well as having the vast wealth of Abu Dhabi behind them, City also have the world's most coveted coach in Pep Guardiola, and a squad that is the envy of the rest of football. The club's resurgence has made United's current plight seem far worse, especially after the trophy-laden era of Sir Alex Ferguson. It is now almost a decade since Ferguson retired and United have floundered, notably in recent years, making poor decisions and hiring the wrong players. Furthermore, there is considerable unrest around the club's ownership, although at the back end of 2022, the Glazer family suggested they were willing to sell United. United and City are among Europe's top cash-generating clubs and it will not take much to restore the fortunes of the red half of Manchester.

## 4: Liverpool

Population: 486,000

Major clubs: Liverpool, Everton

Major European prizes: 10

Percentage of domestic league titles: 22%

From the perspective of football passion and a club reflecting the identity of a city, Liverpool ranks among the highest in Europe. Aside from Glasgow, there is no place where the football club seems to act as a standard bearer for a city's politics and social standing. While this often creates a siege mentality, it also acts as the catalyst for fanatical support for the club. It is sometimes overlooked, however, that Liverpool is a two-club city, with Everton now pushed into the shadows and struggling to keep pace with their neighbours. There seems to be less of the famed "one city" mentality in Liverpool around its clubs and the rivalry has become more adversarial. Liverpool have enjoyed considerable success under Fenway Sports, their owners, notably with Jürgen Klopp in charge of the team. Fenway may now be eager to sell the club and nobody knows how long Klopp will remain at Anfield. As for Everton, the Goodison fans are urging a change of regime, although once they move to their impressive new stadium, things may fall into place.

## 5: London

Population: 8.9 million

Major clubs: Arsenal, Brentford, Chelsea, Crystal Palace, Fulham, Tottenham Hotspur, West Ham United.

Major European prizes: 12

Percentage of domestic league titles: 17%

With three of the top four best supported clubs in English football, all of whom average over 60,000 for their home games, London is gaining in prominence. Three of the so-called "big six" in the Premier League are London clubs, although the trophy haul still looks a little like underperformance given the size of London and the number of clubs in the top flight. The last London team to win the Premier League was Chelsea in 2017 and since 2004, the Blues have been the only capital side to win the title. Indeed, in that period, Chelsea have won 16 major prizes to Arsenal's five and Tottenham's one. With Chelsea no longer under the ownership of Roman Abramovich, an era has definitely come to an end. There are other good news stories across London, however, with Brentford showing how small and mid-sized clubs can prosper and Arsenal demonstrating that patience can pay off.

### Top 16 cities by European prizes

		UCL/EC	UEFA/EL	ECWC	ICFC	Total
1	Madrid	14	5	1	0	20
2	Milan	9	3	2	0	14
3	Barcelona	5	0	4	3	12
4	London	2	4	5	1	12
5	Liverpool	6	3	1	0	10
6	Munich	6	1	1	0	8
7	Amsterdam	4	1	1	0	6
8	Manchester	3	1	2	0	6
9	Turin	2	3	1	0	6
10	Seville	0	6	0	0	6
11	Porto	2	2	0	0	4
12	Valencia	0	1	1	2	4
13	Lisbon	2	0	1	0	3
14	Rotterdam	1	2	0	0	3
15	Brussels	0	1	2	0	3
16	Parma	0	1	2	0	3



## 6: Barcelona

Population: 1.6 million

Major clubs: Barcelona, Espanyol

Major European prizes: 12

Percentage of domestic league titles: 29%

CF Barcelona may have fallen from their pedestal in the past few years, especially with regards to their financial model, but the city remains one of the most passionate and committed to its football club. The days of Pep Guardiola and Lionel Messi have long gone, but Barca are in the process of building a new team and have used various financial techniques to start working their way through their recent crisis, some of which caused some controversy. Barca have not won the UEFA Champions League since 2015 and their performances in the competition over the past two seasons have been far below what is expected of the club. The city has two representatives in La Liga's top flight, with Espanyol joining Barca. There are other, less celebrated clubs in Barcelona in the lower reaches of Spanish football: CE Europa (founded 1907), CF Montañesa (1927), UE Sant Andreu (1909) and Sants (1922).

## 7: Munich

Population: 1.5 million

Major clubs: Bayern Munich, TSV Munich 1860

Major European prizes: 8

Percentage of domestic league titles: 30%

You don't have to look far to find evidence of the football ownership of the very affluent city of Munich: FC Bayern is everywhere, from souvenir shops to beer halls. Bayern's domination of German football is not necessarily a good thing for the bigger picture, the Bundesliga has become a monopoly and shows little sign of changing. But the passion for Bayern is incredible, from its 75,000 crowds to the place the club has in society, playing its part in major cultural events such as the Oktoberfest. In 2021-22, Bayern won the Bundesliga for the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive season and although they fell short in the Champions League, going out to Villarreal, they were still ahead of their rivals at home and will probably remain so in 2022-23. There are other clubs in Munich – TSV Munich 1860, a famous name from the past, play in Liga 3, alongside Türkücü München, who were founded in 1975 among the Turkish community. In the fourth tier, there are two Munich sides, SV Heimstetten from the Kirchheim district and Unterhaching. As well as the Allianz Arena and TSV's Grünwalder stadion (once used for a Monty Python sketch), Munich also has the very iconic Olympic stadium that was built for both the Olympic games of 1972 and 1974 World Cup.



## 8: Porto

Population: 232,000

Major clubs: FC Porto, Boavista

Major European prizes: 4

Percentage of domestic league titles: 35%

Porto may be a city with two top flight clubs, but it is really all about FC Porto, who won the "double" in 2021-22, beating off the competition of the two Lisbon giants. A colourful and vital football city, Porto has also become a destination for players from South America and the club is renowned as a top trader of football talent. They are also regular UEFA Champions League participants and have already reached the last 16 in 2022-23. Porto dominates the local area, but there are a host of smaller clubs in the region, such as Salgueiros from Paranhos, who were founded in 2011, Varzim, who are known as Lobos do Mar (sea wolves) and Paredes.

## 9: Amsterdam

Population: 920,000

Major clubs: Ajax

Major European prizes: 4

Percentage of domestic league titles: 32%

Amsterdam is effectively a one-club city, but that club happens to be Ajax, the most successful Dutch football entity and one that carries so much history with it. There are other clubs, but the second biggest club in the city is Jong Ajax, the club's reserve side. Then there's Amsterdamsche FC, who were founded in 1895 but play in the third tier, and De Dijk, who are in the fourth level, but they cannot possibly compete with Ajax. There have been other clubs, such as DWS Amsterdam and Blauw-Wit,, but Ajax seem to have beaten off any challengers in their neighbourhood. Ajax are also one of the greatest developers of footballing talent in Europe, an essential part of the club's business model. Periodically, Ajax create outstanding teams that only have a short lifespan as, by necessity, they have to sell their best players to remain competitive. Domestically, they are the top side in the Netherlands and although they reached the final of the Europa League in 2017, their objective is to play in the Champions League, although a place in the semi-final, which they reached in 2019, is a very bold aspiration. Ajax's fans can be boisterous, but they have also been schooled in the appreciation of innovative football, not least in the 1970s when the club of Johan Cruyff won three consecutive European Cup titles.



## 10: Glasgow

Population: 632,000

Major clubs: Celtic, Rangers

Major European prizes: 2

Percentage of domestic league titles: 86%

Glasgow is a red-hot football city in many ways, notably in the rivalry between Celtic and Rangers. But there are many clubs in and around Glasgow, including Clyde, Patrick Thistle, Queens Park and Morton. It is also the location of the famous Hampden Park stadium (pictured), where the Scottish national team plays.

In 2021-22, Rangers revived memories of their European hey-day by reaching the UEFA Europa League final, narrowly losing to Eintracht Frankfurt. In 2022-23, they were reminded of their current status when they conceded 22 goals in six Champions League group games, including a seven-goal drubbing by Liverpool. Celtic also finished bottom of their group, but are well clear at the top of the Scottish Premiership. Celtic and Rangers are very well supported, drawing over 100,000 between them at their home games, the only negative being the sectarianism that creeps into the relationship between the two clubs.

+++

While this report focuses to a large degree on past performance, there is no guarantee that the leading cities will retain their position at the top. Much depends on club ownership, which can transform a major club in a relatively short space of time. Newcastle United are one such club, the full benefit of their new ownership model has yet to be seen. From a city perspective, the really strong football location really needs more than one club, such as Milan, Madrid, London and Manchester. Paris has not been mentioned much in this report and that is largely because it is not seen as a football hotbed. That may change, of course, but at present, it is a charming city of many distractions with a Qatar-owned club that enjoys enormous benefits. Paris will have its day and will, eventually, win the Champions League, the trophy they covet so badly. But will that make the French capital a key football hub?

**The best supported clubs in Europe 2022-23**

	Club	City	Average	Country
1	Barcelona	Barcelona	83,194	Spain
2	Borussia Dortmund	Dortmund	81,032	Germany
3	Bayern Munich	Munich	75,000	Germany
4	Manchester United	Manchester	73,729	England
5	AC Milan	Milan	72,656	Italy
6	Inter Milan	Milan	72,080	Italy
7	West Ham United	London	62,450	England
8	Olympique Marseille	Marseille	62,136	France
9	AS Roma	Rome	61,790	Italy
10	Tottenham Hotspur	London	61,667	England
11	Schalke 04	Gelsenkirchen	61,046	Germany
12	Arsenal	London	60,135	England
13	Celtic	Glasgow	58,671	Scotland
14	Real Madrid	Madrid	57,552	Spain
15	Benfica	Lisbon	54,578	Portugal
16	Atlético Madrid	Madrid	54,507	Spain
17	Liverpool	Liverpool	53,271	England
18	Hertha Berlin	Berlin	53,197	Germany
19	Manchester City	Manchester	53,152	England
20	Ajax	Amsterdam	52,892	Netherlands

**Game of the People, December 2022**

Photos: PA/Alamy

Text and research: Neil Jensen, GOTP

[www.gameofthepople.com](http://www.gameofthepople.com)

**State of Play past reports:** Birmingham City (August 2016), Charlton Athletic (June 2017), Nottingham Forest (January 2018), Sheffield Wednesday (February 2019), Ipswich Town (March 2019), Derby County (April 2019), Brazilian domestic football (June 2019), Benfica (Apr 2020), QPR (Apr 2020), Norwich City (December 2020), West Ham United (May 2021), Newcastle United (April 2022), Stoke City (July 2022).