



## How Palmer and Foden lost Tuchel's battle for the England number 10s

### Description

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Two years can feel like a lifetime in football, and none more so than for Cole Palmer and Phil Foden who were firmly at the top of the England pecking order after Euro 2024. They were winners of major individual awards, fixtures in Gareth Southgate's big-game plans, and widely tipped to be central to England's future. Fast forward to the present and both are conspicuously absent from Thomas Tuchel's [World Cup squad](#). The shift is stark, and it's driven by one brutal truth: form matters more than pedigree under Tuchel.

Palmer and Foden's trajectories were once parallel. Both came through Manchester City's academy, both collected domestic and individual honours, and both looked like automatic selections for tournament football. But football's calendar is unforgiving. A dip in output, a few underwhelming displays and one coach's clear preference for current performance over past glories have reshaped the selection map.

## England squad selection: decline in output

[Palmer's first seasons at Chelsea were explosive](#) 37 Premier League goals across his opening two campaigns set expectations sky-high. This season, though, the edge has dulled. Nine goals in 25 league appearances is respectable, but it lacks the consistent flash that once made him look like the next elite player. The moments that once defined him, sudden, decisive interventions, have been fewer and far between.

Foden's slide has been longer and more jagged. After a purple patch before Christmas that produced six goals in five games, he has not scored since. That's a sharp fall from the 2023-24 campaign when he hit 19 league goals and 27 in all competitions. Sporadic moments, a clever backheel assist here, a bright touch there, have not been enough to convince Tuchel that he offers the kind of

reliable, match-shaping influence the manager demands.

## The Uruguay test that mattered

If there is a single turning point for Phil Foden, it was the friendly against Uruguay in March. With Harry Kane absent, Tuchel tried Foden in the central number 10 role. The experiment failed. Foden drifted, struggled to impose himself and was substituted early in the second half, replaced by Palmer. That substitution, and the lack of impact that preceded it, felt decisive. Tuchel's selection philosophy is clear: give players a chance, but don't let reputation override what you see on the pitch. Foden's performance in that match looked to have closed the door.

Palmer, meanwhile, had his own opportunities but could not force a reappraisal. Moments of brilliance that once made him a must-pick were not frequent enough to dislodge Tuchel's growing conviction that other options offered more immediate value.

## Tuchel's ruthless pragmatism

Tuchel has shown little patience for [reputational inertia](#). He has repeatedly picked players on the basis of current form and tactical fit rather than name recognition. Bellingham's place was never in doubt; Tuchel has picked Morgan Rogers from Aston Villa and rewarded consistent club performances. That approach leaves little room for players whose recent output is patchy.

Tuchel's selections have also highlighted a preference for variety and unpredictability in the attacking midfield slots. He wants players who can change the tempo, add pace and create different angles of attack, attributes that have become decisive in his thinking.

## The replacements

Eberechi Eze is the clearest beneficiary. His season at Arsenal, seven league goals and two assists in a title-winning campaign may not leap off the stat sheet, but his performances for Tuchel in qualifying have been persuasive. Three goals in six qualifiers and a style that offers pace, unpredictability and directness have made him a compelling alternative to the more familiar names.

Morgan Rogers has also earned trust through consistent displays, while other contenders have shown enough to convince Tuchel that they can slot into the system and deliver. Even Morgan Gibbs-White, despite a late scoring surge at club level, has not done enough in Tuchel's eyes to force selection, underlining how selective the coach has been.

## Reality check for Palmer and Foden

Once predicted as guaranteed starters, Palmer and Foden now face the humbling reality of being judged on present form. That is a hard lesson for two players who have already achieved so much so young. But it is also a reminder of the merciless nature of elite international selection: past awards and promise count for little when a manager is building a squad for a specific tournament and a specific

tactical plan.

For both players the path back is straightforward in theory: rediscover the consistency and cutting edge that made them indispensable. In practice it will require sustained excellence at club level, adaptability to Tuchel's tactical demands, and the kind of decisive performances that force a manager to rethink his plans.

Tuchel's message to England players is unambiguous, the plane to the World Cup is for those who are delivering now. For Palmer and Foden, the challenge is to make sure the next selection window tells a different story.

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