

Newcastleâ??s Striker Problem Has An Obvious Fix

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Only Erling Haaland scores more frequently per minute in the Premier League this season than William Osula.

Read that again. The 22-year-old Dane, mostly used as a late substitute, has 5 league goals in 589 minutes â?? one every 117.8 minutes. By that measure, the second-most efficient finisher in the division this season, ahead of every elite forward outside Manchester City, plays for Newcastle United.

That fact is supposed to be reassuring. It is not.

Because Osula started yesterday at the City Ground. He had a one-on-one at 0-0. He did not take it. Newcastle eventually went ahead through a Jacob Ramsey through-ball and a Harvey Barnes finish, then conceded an Elliot Anderson equaliser in the 88th minute. Two more points dropped from a winning position.

And the most efficient finisher in the league outside Erling Haaland is the player who could have made it 1-0 fifty minutes earlier and quietly closed the game out.

This is the Newcastle striker problem in one match.

What the cameo numbers actually say

The minutes-per-goal stat for Osula is real. It is also misleading. He scores at that rate playing 12 to 15 minutes off the bench against tired defences in stretched, end-of-game scenarios. That is a different football to leading the line for 80 minutes against a centre-back pair set up to deny him space.

Howe has known this. Osula has had ten Premier League appearances this season and almost all of them off the bench. Yesterday was a rare full start. The miss at 0-0 was not surprising. It is what striker development looks like before the finishing catches up to the chance creation.

The question is whether you back him through that learning curve, or you stop pretending and bring in someone whose finishing is already there.

The expensive evidence is not encouraging

Newcastle spent Â£125 million on two centre-forwards last summer. The returns:

Nick Woltemade. Â£69 million from Stuttgart. 8 Premier League goals from 30 appearances. A non-penalty expected goals per 90 of 0.31 â?? average for a starting Premier League striker, not the elite tier his fee implied. By February, Howe had moved him to a left-sided midfield role in a 4-3-3, alongside Tonali. A Â£69 million striker who could not lead the line.

Yoane Wissa. Â£50 million plus add-ons from Brentford. A posterior cruciate ligament injury within days of signing. Three months out. Made his debut on 6 December. Scored 19 league goals last season for Brentford. Has 1 in the Premier League this season for Newcastle. Reportedly being shopped already.

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So that is your Â£125 million strike force: a Â£69 million striker re-rolled as a midfielder, and a Â£50 million striker the club is now exploring how to sell. With Osula starting yesterday because neither of them earned the shirt.

Barnes is the awkward part of this conversation

Harvey Barnes has 7 Premier League goals this season, mostly off the bench. His non-penalty expected goals total sits around 7.5, meaning he is finishing roughly in line with the chances he is getting. His non-penalty xG per 90 of 0.37 is the highest of any Newcastle attacker this season.

In plainer terms: when Newcastle generate a chance for Barnes, he tends to put it away. He scored the goal yesterday from the moment Ramsey released him. He rarely starts.

Howeâ??s defence of this is real. Barnes is a wide forward, not a number 9. Asking him to lead the line vacates the position he is actually best at. Fine. But there is a wider question. The most reliable finisher in the squad keeps coming on as a sub. You do not need to play him through the middle to get more out of him. You just need to start him more often in the position he already plays.

The Almiron parallel â?? honestly framed

The defence of Osula will use Miguel Almiron as the precedent. It is a fair reach but not a perfect one.

Almiron joined in January 2019. He scored zero Premier League goals across his first 21 appearances. He had four the next season, two after that, one in 2021/22, then a breakout eleven in 2022/23 â?? his first full season under Howe and the system that finally created the chances his profile suited. From signing to scoring consistently took nearly four years.

The argument that says â??give Osula timeâ?• is borrowing that template. There is something to it. Strikers do develop. The chances his cameos already produce show the movement and the runs are

there.

Two complications, honestly stated. First, Almiron is a wide attacker; Osula is a central striker. Different position, different problem. Almironâ??s breakthrough came from a system change, when Howe arrived. Osula is already inside that system. The runway is shorter. Second, Almironâ??s apprenticeship happened during years when Newcastle had no ambition to speak of. The 2026/27 squad does not have the luxury of that runway. Champions League qualification cannot wait three more seasons.

The actual decision

Strip out the noise and the season-end fatigue, and the Forest match was a clean test.

Newcastleâ??s system is built around direct, vertical, counter-attacking football. Howe wants Bruno and Tonali receiving and releasing quickly into the half-spaces, where wingers and a striker run beyond. The shape generates chances. It generated 16 shots and 6 on target yesterday. It does not consistently generate goals because the players running beyond are not finishing what they get.

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That is a fixable problem. There are exactly two ways to fix it.

One. Commit to the apprenticeship. Bench Wissa. Start Osula every game next season behind a clear â??we are training a striker for 2027/28â?• plan â?? intensive finishing coaching, video work, the lot. Accept the Almiron timeline. Win in spite of it via the existing strengths.

Two. Buy the finisher. The reported summer targets â?? Julian Alvarez, Liam Delap, Dominic Solanke â?? vary in price and profile. Solanke is the safest in this league. Alvarez is the tier-up gamble. Delap is the project. Pick one. Pay the fee. Accept that Wissa is a sunk cost and Woltemade stays as a midfielder.

What Newcastle cannot keep doing is option three. Playing Osula sometimes, Woltemade sometimes, Wissa when he is fit, Barnes off the bench, and hoping the rotation hides the gap. That is what cost two points yesterday. That is what has cost roughly 27 points dropped from winning positions across the season. That is the â??hope it clicksâ?• middle ground that Champions League clubs do not occupy.

Close

Osulaâ??s minutes-per-goal stat is not a defence. It is a clue. The chances are there. The system is producing the volume. The bottleneck is conversion, and the player who converts most reliably keeps coming on as a sub.

Howe and the recruitment team have a clean choice this summer. Train the cheap one or buy the expensive one. The middle ground does not work. The Forest game was the latest reminder.

If a single decision can move Newcastle from 13th-and-frustrated to top-six-and-credible without spending another Â£200 million, this is it.

Date Created
12/05/2026
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