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Lisandro Martinez: Who is Man Utd's new 'Butcher of Amsterdam'?

By Emlyn Begley
BBC Sport

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Lisandro Martinez was Ajax's player of the year last season

Manchester United have agreed to sign Ajax and Argentina defender Lisandro Martinez, a man nicknamed the 'Butcher of Amsterdam', so what can they expect?

The 24-year-old won two Dutch titles in three years under Erik ten Hag with Ajax, is their current player of the year and follows the manager to Old Trafford.

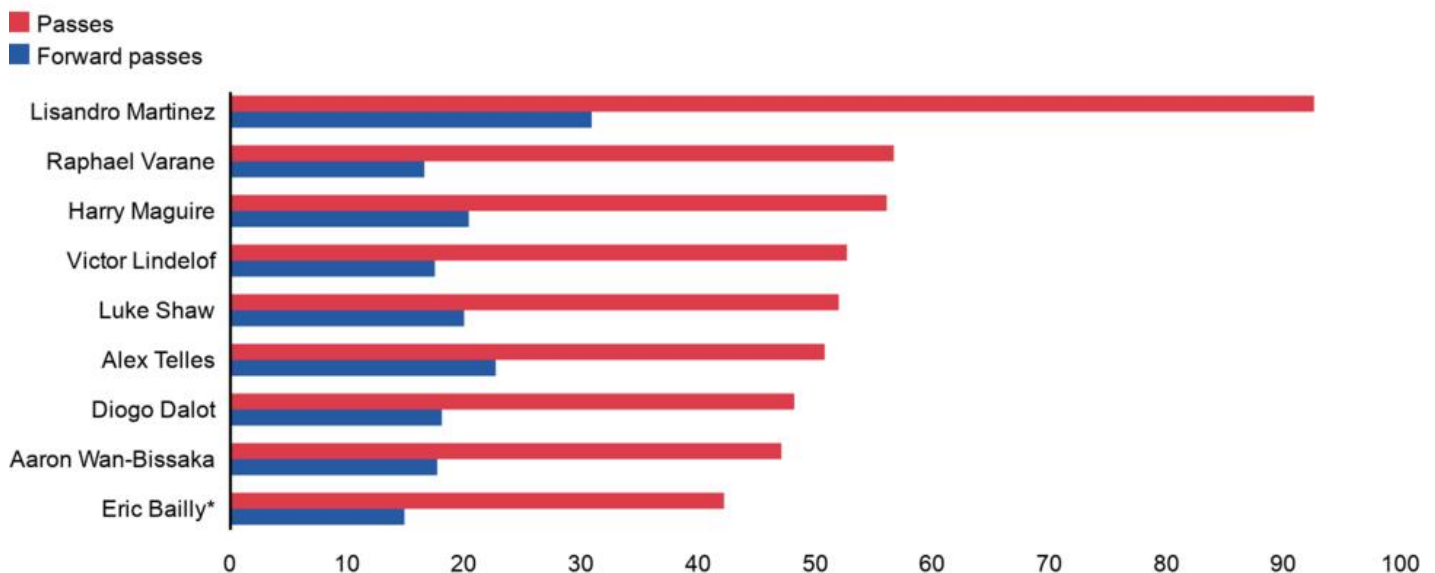
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Despite standing 5ft 9in, he won more aerial duels in the league than Harry Maguire last season and won the ball more times than any United defender.

Want to know more about Martinez? Read on.

How good is he?

Stats per 90 minutes in the league last season



* Bailly's stats are for his whole time at Man Utd in the Premier League

Source: Opta

BBC

Martinez's stats compare well to his new team-mates, although that should be qualified by the fact he played in the Dutch Eredivisie, the league ranked seventh by Uefa.

He spent the whole of last season at centre-back but his first two campaigns at Ajax, following a 2019 move from Argentina, also saw him feature in both full-back roles and as a defensive midfielder.

Martinez ranked higher than United's other defenders per 90 minutes in the league for passes, forward passes, aerial duels won, interceptions and possession won last season. He also won more tackles and completed many more dribbles than United's centre-backs.

Despite being seven inches shorter than Maguire - and playing six league games fewer because of injury - Martinez still managed to win 80 aerial duels to Maguire's 75.

Dutch football expert James Rowe said: "Martinez has made quite an impression in Amsterdam since his move to AFC Ajax from Defensa y Justicia and he hit the ground running, being part of the team that beat PSV 2-0 in the 2019 Johan Cruyff Shield.

"What stood out immediately was his composure on the ball, being self-assured at the centre of defence and his wide range of passing.

"Amsterdam has really become a home away from home for Martinez. It's certainly not easy to transition from South American to Dutch football and all the cultural differences that come with it both on and off the pitch, but Lisandro has taken everything in his stride and it has also culminated in him becoming capped by his country, making his debut against Venezuela in 2019.

"He leaves Ajax with his head held high, two Eredivisie titles and one Dutch Cup - and the love of the Ajax fans.

"A big factor in his move to United will be Ten Hag, who has always shown such confidence in him. Ten Hag likes his players to find solutions on the pitch at all times in order to have the best chance to win games, and he is acquiring a centre-back who will do just that.

"Some may point to his size of 5ft 9in, but he will quickly adapt to the demands of the Premier League and he will enjoy the challenge. There will also be a huge sense of pride for the young man from Gualeguay who came through the youth set-up and made his debut at Newell's Old Boys that he has made it to the Premier League.

"I am sure as a defender he will go from strength to strength at club and international level."

Martinez was involved in four goals (one goal and three assists), as many as any of the United defenders.

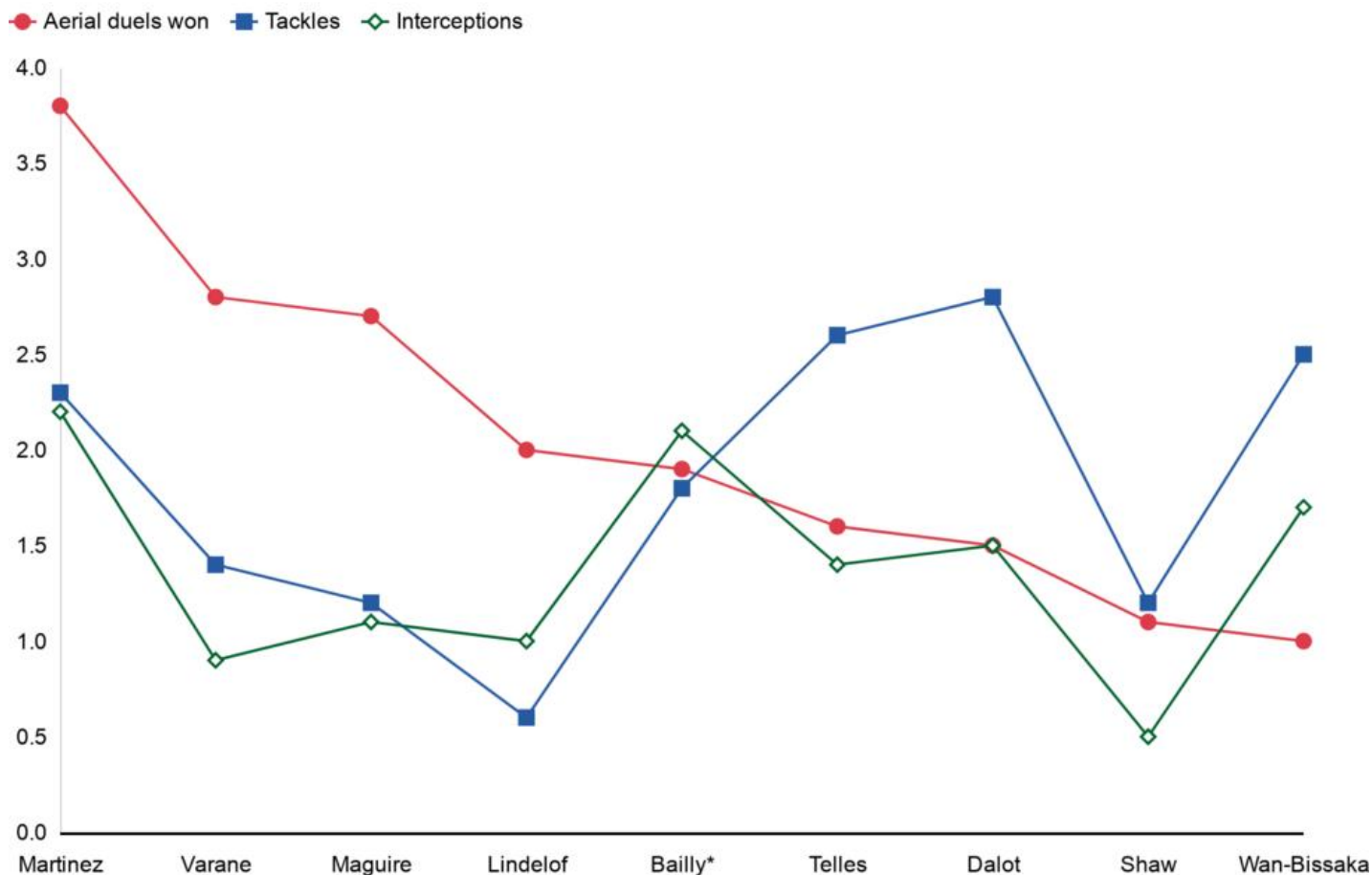
Despite his nickname, he was shown only six yellow cards in 36 games in all competitions last season, fewer than Luke Shaw (11) and Maguire (nine) and the same as Diogo Dalot. Raphael Varane, by contrast, was booked only once.

In **quotes reported in the Mirror**  this month, Martinez said: "I am called the carnicero - the Butcher of Amsterdam. We Argentines do everything with passion and when I go out on the

pitch I fight for every ball. If I have to step over dead bodies, I do it.

"I want to win every 50-50 situation because I know that I am fighting for food for every member of my family and for my friends. That is the feeling I have - and every Argentinian has. It is the kind of motivation I cannot explain."

Stats per 90 minutes in the league last season



* Bailly's stats are for his whole time at Man Utd in the Premier League

Source: Opta

BBC

Where will he fit in at United?

Martinez becomes one of six senior centre-backs at Old Trafford, along with captain Maguire, Varane, Victor Lindelof and the often injured Eric Bailly and Phil Jones, who played four Premier League games each last season.

Martinez's arrival could see a reshuffle in roles at the back, including a move for the skipper. Ten Hag prefers a 4-3-3 formation, so there is only likely to be room for two central defenders.

"It is already becoming apparent actions speak louder than words as far as Ten Hag is concerned," said BBC Sport's Simon Stone.

"He has not said too much about Maguire. He has confirmed the England man will keep the captaincy but he has not really explained his reasoning, nor the qualities he sees in Maguire.

"However, he has already made a very subtle change that hints at what is to come.

"For virtually all his time at Old Trafford, Maguire has played on the left of a two-man defence, often with Lindelof on the right.

"In Friday's **friendly win over Melbourne Victory** they swapped positions. No explanation was offered but the reasoning seems fairly clear.

"Lisandro Martinez is a left-sided defender. It is where he played for Ten Hag at Ajax. The way seems to be being cleared for him to come straight into the team."

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