The New Generation of Football Stars

Four to Watch | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Which young football players, men or women, can you name? What do you know about them?
2. Did you play football or another team sport as a child? Which position or role did you enjoy, and why?
3. How might the path to becoming a professional footballer differ from one country or region to another?

Reading: The New Generation of Football Stars

Football has always produced young stars, but the current **crop** arrived unusually early and from very different places. Lamine Yamal was born near Barcelona in 2007 and played for the club's first team at 15. At the 2024 European Championship, he became the youngest player ever to score at the tournament. He was also the first player to win the Kopa Trophy twice. It is the award for the best player under 21. Yamal plays on the right wing but prefers his left foot. Even his admirers say he has one **flaw**: his work without the ball.

In 2026, a hamstring injury cost Yamal his **sharpness**, and he scored only once at the World Cup. Still, every defender **assigned** to him left more space for his teammates, and Spain won the tournament. Estêvão Willian of Brazil, born the same year, is also a left-footed player on the right wing. He moved from Palmeiras to Chelsea in 2025. Many people praise his **composure**, because he seems to know when to dribble and when to pass. A serious hamstring injury in April 2026 kept him out of the World Cup, but he scored in his first game back.

Yan Diomande grew up in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and moved to an academy in Florida at 15. His **trials** at several European clubs **came to nothing**. Then a small Spanish club signed him, and a year later he was in Germany with RB Leipzig. In August 2026, Real Madrid signed him for a reported fee of about 140 million euros. He is fast, uses both feet, and takes on defenders **relentlessly**.

Melchie Dumornay of Haiti, born in 2003, is a few years older but just as **striking**. In 2023, her two goals against Chile sent Haiti to its first Women's World Cup. At Lyon, she is hard to **pin down**. She **drifts** between midfield and attack, and then she **surges** past opponents or slides a pass behind the defense.

All four reached an **elite** club as teenagers, and success that early can **take a toll**. Two of them had serious hamstring injuries in 2026. FIFPRO, the global players' union, has warned that the **workload** is too heavy, especially for young players.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

sharpness	**elite**	**pin down**	**came to nothing**	**drifts**	**surges**	**assigned**	**relentlessly**
workload	**flaw**	**composure**	**crop**	**striking**	**trials**		

1. The university is proud of its latest _____ of young scientists.
2. The design has one serious _____: the door is too narrow for a wheelchair.
3. After the long break, the players needed a few games to get their _____ back.
4. Each volunteer was _____ to a different part of the festival.
5. The pilot kept her _____ and landed the plane safely in the storm.
6. The music school holds _____ every spring for new students.
7. All our efforts to find the missing cat _____.
8. The journalist questioned the politician _____ until he finally answered.
9. There is a _____ difference between the city and the quiet village nearby.
10. Scientists are still trying to _____ the exact cause of the disease.
11. My mind often _____ off when a meeting goes on too long.
12. When the gates open, the crowd _____ toward the stage.
13. Only _____ athletes are chosen for the national team.
14. With three new projects, my _____ has become hard to manage.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. a fatal	_____	**a.** composure
2. lose your	_____	**b.** relentlessly
3. be assigned	_____	**c.** toll
4. a striking	_____	**d.** flaw
5. at the elite	_____	**e.** resemblance
6. take a heavy	_____	**f.** workload
7. reduce a player's	_____	**g.** level
8. work	_____	**h.** to a task

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Even when the crowd booed, she stayed calm and _____. (*composure*)
2. The goalkeeper gave a _____ performance and made no mistakes at all. (*flaw*)
3. The two brothers look _____ alike. (*striking*)
4. The coach gave each player a different _____ for the training session. (*assigned*)
5. The team kept up a _____ pace for the whole match. (*relentlessly*)
6. A _____ striker needs only one chance to score. (*sharpness*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. When and where was Lamine Yamal born, and how old was he when he first played for the first team?

2. What record did Yamal set at the 2024 European Championship?
3. What weakness do even Yamal's admirers mention?
4. Yamal scored only once at the 2026 World Cup. How did he still help Spain?
5. Why did Estêvão miss the 2026 World Cup?
6. What do many people praise about the way Estêvão plays?
7. Describe Yan Diomande's route from Abidjan to Real Madrid.
8. What did Melchie Dumornay do for Haiti in 2023, and why is she hard to pin down?
9. Why might early success take a toll on young players? Use the reading and your own ideas.
10. **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Melchie Dumornay has won the Women's Champions League with Lyon."* Explain your answer using the reading.
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer suggests that a heavy workload may be a risk for young players."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer mention FIFPRO? Is it (a) to show that the players' own union is worried about workload, (b) to explain how much players are paid, or (c) to name the organization that runs the World Cup?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. Yamal played for Barcelona's first team at the age of 15. **T / F**
2. Spain lost the 2024 European Championship. **T / F**
3. Yamal prefers to use his right foot. **T / F**
4. Estêvão and Yamal were born in the same year. **T / F**
5. Estêvão played for Brazil at the 2026 World Cup. **T / F**
6. Diomande moved to an academy in Florida at the age of 15. **T / F**
7. Diomande's first trials at European clubs were a great success. **T / F**
8. Real Madrid signed Diomande for a reported fee of about 140 million euros. **T / F**
9. Dumornay is younger than Yamal. **T / F**
10. Dumornay's goals helped Haiti reach its first Women's World Cup. **T / F**

Language Focus: Superlatives and Ordinals with the To-Infinitive

After a **superlative** (*the youngest*, *the best*) or an **ordinal** (*the first*, *the second*, *the last*, *the only*), English often uses a noun + **to-infinitive**.

Pattern: *the* + superlative or ordinal + noun + *to* + base verb. *She was the first student to finish.*

From the reading:

"He became the **youngest player ever to score** at the tournament."

"He was also the **first player to win** the Kopa Trophy twice."

Tip: The to-infinitive replaces a relative clause: *the first player to win = the first player who won*.

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you.

Ordinals (first, last, only)

1. The first person in my family to _____
2. In my home, the last person to go to bed is usually _____
3. The only place in my town to _____

Superlatives (best, easiest, most)

4. For me, the easiest way to learn new words is _____

5. The best time of day to study is _____

Part B. Questions

Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to answer using the + superlative or ordinal + noun + to-infinitive. *Then ask a partner.*

6. Who was the first person in your class to get a smartphone?

7. What is the best place in your city to meet friends?

8. Who was the last person to send you a message today?

9. What is the most useful thing to bring on a long trip?

10. Who is the oldest person you know to still play a sport?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. Which of the four players would you most like to watch, and why?

2. Do you enjoy watching players who dribble a lot, or players who pass quickly? Why?

3. Who is the most exciting young athlete in a sport you follow, and what makes them stand out?

4. When you were younger, did you dream of becoming a professional athlete or performer? What happened to that dream?

5. Yamal is famous for his attacking skill but has a weakness in defense. Is it better to be excellent at one thing or good at everything?

6. Can you remember a time when you had to keep your composure under pressure? What helped you?

7. Diomande's early trials came to nothing. What can people learn from early rejection?

8. Should a talented teenager stay at a smaller club longer, or move to a big club as soon as possible? Why?

9. Can a transfer fee of about 140 million euros for one player ever be reasonable? Why or why not?

10. Women's football is growing in many countries. What would make it more popular where you live?

11. How can talented young people in poorer regions get a fair chance to be seen by top clubs?

12. Who should decide how many matches a player plays: the player, the club, the national team, or a union?

13. Should there be limits on how many matches teenage athletes can play, even if fans want to see them?

14. Does early fame help or harm young people, in sport or in other fields?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/new-football-stars** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.