

Exclusive interview with David James: England backed to win the World Cup, why Harry Kane shouldn't win the Golden Boot, Jordan Pickford penalty shootout credentials, Liverpool's dream Mo Salah replacement, James Trafford told to stay and fight for his place at Manchester City

Speaking exclusively to **Grosvenor Sport**, former Liverpool and Manchester City star David James has given his verdict on the World Cup, Premier League and more.

James, who won 53 caps for England and was included in three major tournament squads, has backed the Three Lions to end 60 years of hurt and go all the way in North America.

The former goalkeeper has also revealed his dream replacement for departing Liverpool legend Mohamed Salah, while suggesting that Enzo Maresca's expected arrival at Manchester City could provide fresh hope for Jack Grealish.

On England's World Cup hopes and the differences between Tuchel & Sven

If England are to go far in the World Cup or even win it, what do you think will be the most important factor?

David James: "I think what I like about this England squad is the balance. I know it sounds obvious in one sense, but I think everyone's going to have to play their part.

"What we've seen already in the World Cup is some heavy scorelines. I think there are going to be times where the defence are obviously going to need to be at their best.

"But, as much as I love clean sheets, I don't think it's about keeping clean sheets, ironically. I just think it's about the big moments and, as I say, the defence needing to be solid, Harry needing to score, but I think that load will be shared as well. So yeah, I think it is literally a team performance rather than looking at any individual areas.

"In this, the best defence, i.e. the one that keeps the most clean sheets, isn't necessarily the team that is going to win it. As I say, there will be moments, but I just think it is on the basis that they hold strong enough to allow the likes of Harry Kane, Jude Bellingham or Bukayo Saka, whoever it is, to score goals."

Q: What do you think to this England squad and how Tuchel has put it together?

David James: "There isn't a starting XI. I think in the past it's been possibly 11 or 12 players that people were looking at to start a game. If he is talking about 14 or 15 starters, then straight away you're looking at four rotations, possibly.

“He made a very clear point in his squad announcement press conference. He said every player knows their role, and I think that was key. He has got a squad that knows why they are there and what they are expected to do.

“Of course, there will be some kind of change, but he trusts the characters that he has got that will be able to make that change. When I say that, if there's an injury, suspension, whatever, then obviously the roles will change slightly, but I just feel really confident. I like what I hear, and I like what I see so far.”

Q: Jordan Pickford recently said he would like to take a penalty if England end up in another shootout. Could you see him being one of the first five?

David James: “I could definitely see it!

“Do I think he's got the confidence to do it? Yes. Do I think he's got the capability to do it? Yes. Do I think Thomas Tuchel will put him in there? Do you know what, I wouldn't put it past Thomas Tuchel saying, “Yeah, fine, if you're one of our best five, then do it.”

“Jordan Pickford is one of the best strikers, accuracy-wise, technical strikers, I think, in the game, from goalkeepers. But I think his passing capability is up there with a lot of outfield players.

“So, with regards to other goalkeepers, I wouldn't say they are as good or anywhere near as good, in fact. So, it doesn't surprise me that goalies don't take them.

“However, it's only 12 yards and all you need to do is put it in the top corner. So I don't see what all the fuss is about. But you'd like to think, especially at national level, just to protect the goalkeepers' union, that you could find five better outfield players than the goalkeeper to step up for those first penalties.”

Could it become a distraction in a shootout that you don't really want your keeper to have?

David James: “Do you know what? I think when you take everything into consideration, walking from the halfway line, all the time and effort that, and people say you can't replicate the pressure.

“I think you can replicate taking a penalty, but for the goalkeeper to have gone in goal, walk 20 yards just outside the box, and then take a penalty, it'd be a lot easier for everybody. And I faced this exact situation in 2004 from a goalkeeper, Ricardo, against Portugal.”

Q: The England camp now is very different compared to back when you were playing. From the outside looking in, how do Tuchel's camps differ to Sven's?

David James: “A lot has changed because in the Premier League, there's a lot more opportunity for people to see what you're up to. The same applies to the Champions League perhaps, I think there's a lot more guarding of tactics and stuff like that.

“Things changed because technology has changed. What we had, especially under Sven, we didn't have the luxury of technology to be able to get us away from just sitting around in hotels for long periods of time. That changed, obviously, slightly in 2010, but even now, as I say, it is so advanced that there will be plenty of stuff for the guys to do.

“But when it comes to the football side, again, using technology, they will have access to whatever analysis they need. If they are that kind of player, and I think this is where I feel a little bit envious of the current players, if they are that kind of player who can sit there and go through analysis, then they will have that on tap.

“So, I think with Thomas, he has picked the squad, first of all, because they can play football, which was easy. But also, I think he will pick the squad because of what they can do when they are not playing football. That environment that they are in, in base camp at the moment, will be set up according to what I believe Thomas thinks the team need to prepare for games.”

Q: So, is football finally coming home?

David James: “Yeah, I think we can do it!

“It is funny when you look at the opening round of games and suddenly there are massive scorelines and you think, "Oh, hang on a minute, have I got this one wrong?" But I just feel, for every argument that England can't win, it is applicable to another team that you think can win.

“So why not just support the team that you think is going to win, which is England? And as I say, everything the manager, Thomas Tuchel, has spoken about so far has given me more confidence.

“I think the idea that we have to play wonderful, attractive football would be nice, especially for the fans who have spent all the time and effort to get out and watch the games live.

“Ultimately, it's about winning games of football. I know it's very cliché, but it is just win games of football, however that happens. If we can do that all the way through to the final, then we become world champions. Simple as that.”

Q: Harry Kane's had yet another stellar season in Germany. Do you think he's in with a strong chance of winning the Ballon d'Or?

David James: “Yeah, prior to the Champions League final, I was thinking Khvicha Kvaratskhelia could be a rare case where he wins a Ballon d'Or without actually playing at the World Cup finals.

“But Harry Kane will definitely be ahead of him if England win the World Cup, providing he scores a couple of goals. I don't want him to get the Golden Boot, simply because the Golden Boot generally doesn't go to the winning team. So, I will be happy with him finishing second.

“If we win the World Cup and Harry Kane gets the Ballon d'Or, that would be the perfect season.”

On the Tartan Army

Q: Players from a couple of your former clubs, John McGinn and Andy Robertson, are playing for Scotland. Are you rooting for them to go far in this tournament?

David James: “I want them to do well!

“I flew over to Germany last week and there were loads of Scotland fans in the airport and then in Heathrow looking excited, all dressed up as well. This is days before the game, all dressed up!

Then the scenes in Boston the other day, salmon pink, I've been told the colour was. They bring a lot of life and colour to the World Cup, and I'm just hoping that they can get a draw against Morocco, which will hopefully see them through.

“Any home country doing well in the World Cup has got to be good for us.”

On Dominik Szoboszlai's long term future, Liverpool's next captain and the dream Mo Salah replacement

Q: How important is it for Liverpool to extend Dominik Szoboszlai's contract, and do you think he could eventually replace Virgil van Dijk as Liverpool captain in the long term?

David James: “Yeah, he has definitely got the potential to be a future Liverpool captain.

“I mean, the Virgil van Dijk one is interesting because I was trying to do the maths in my head. I think with Ali and Virgil, they are the only two over 30 at the moment, along with Endo.

“But there's part of it where you think, if one of those leaves, does the other one leave? Because then you become the very senior player in a changing room. What we have seen from Virgil, and again, it's another example of a Liverpool player coming out of a very difficult environment and playing very well for the Netherlands.

“But with regards to Dom, one of my favourite players, of course, many Liverpool fans will have him as their favourite player. Having him tied down would be good. Again, with Iraola only having a couple of years, and I know Pep only used to sign a two-year deal.

“He ended up staying at City for 10 years, didn't he? So there's a part of it where you think, if things go well with Liverpool over these next two years, Iraola might stay there longer and therefore someone like Dominik would be that mainstay throughout his tenure at Liverpool.

“We saw some amazing things from Dom last season, and we also saw him playing in a position which wasn't suited to getting the best out of what he was capable of. And with Iraola's system, it's high energy, but if he is playing in the right place, then you get the best out of that high energy rather than put him in a right-back position, which didn't necessarily suit that.

“We will see in a fresh environment with hungry players. He's got time to recover over the summer. We could see some amazing things from Dom.”

Q: Do you think Mo Salah would have stayed if he knew that Slot was going to leave?

David James: “That I don't know. I think at the same time, his performances last season were not anywhere near the level that they were, first of all, the season prior to that. His contract would have been a very hefty contract with regards to the wages and stuff like that.

“And it's whether Liverpool really wanted to carry that contract, knowing that they might not get the returns again. As I say, I think there's going to be a lot of recruitment done in the summer and therefore the money that they would have paid Mo would go a long way to getting, dare I say, one, two or three players in.

“So, I don't think this was purely down to Mo. I think this was a club decision at the same time.”

Q: How do you even go about replacing someone like Mo Salah? If it was up to you, who would you go for?

David James: “I'd go for Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. I know he's not the same position, but he can play multiple positions. The guy is fantastic and he's up there for a Ballon d'Or nomination, but he would cost a few quid.

“Although I don't think it would happen, it's a bit of a dream, isn't it? But if Liverpool want to be successful next season, then someone like, if you were going to go and buy a ready-made player, then Kvaratskhelia would be the one.

“But with a new manager and everything that we have talked about with Iraola, there's a part of me that thinks they don't have to go out and spend anywhere near that kind of money to get the kind of player that Iraola can get performing.

“What will be a new-look Liverpool side doesn't require someone like Mo, if that makes sense. I just think there's an opportunity here just to freshen everything up.”

On Manchester City's new era, and the futures of Jack Grealish, James Trafford & Omar Marmoush

Q: Do you think James Trafford should stay at Manchester City or move on to get first team football?

David James: "If I were him, I would stay and try and fight for my place.

"What he has demonstrated when he has played, he has been superb. I mean, there are a couple of league games granted, and I think he only played four league games in the end.

"But definitely in the cups, where he is playing under pressure, especially at Wembley in front of 90,000 people in tough games, he has handled that pressure extremely well.

"I think Man City look a more controlled side when he is playing. I love Donnarumma, I think he is a fantastic goalkeeper, but I think with James Trafford, there's a lot more scope for Man City to play and I think, depending on how Maresca wants to set his thing up, James Trafford would be my number one there.

"However, if Maresca or the club thought that James wasn't going to be the number one, then I think he would have to move on because, Jordan Pickford, excellent as he is, needs a proper challenger from someone who is playing regularly in a first team.

"The question for James Trafford is where would he go?

"Would it be one of the promoted sides where he could be under pressure again like he was when he was at Burnley in that relegation season, or would there be a bigger club looking for a goalkeeper of his stature? Maybe a Newcastle? And I think all the boxes could be ticked with James Trafford.

"But, you're not going to get much bigger than Manchester City. Well, actually, you're not going to get as successful as Man City over the last five or six years.

"I would stay, but if not, then he has got to be playing to get that England number one spot."

Q: Do you think Omar Marmoush could leave City this season? Perhaps Eli Junior Kroupi could replace him?

David James: "Kroupi would be an amazing signing for Manchester City.

"I think now that Iraola has gone, there will be a number of players at Bournemouth that will all of a sudden be looking to, I wouldn't say looking to leave, but I think there will be a lot of interest in their players, Kroupi being one of them.

"I think the issue for Marmoush is he was brought into the club with a phenomenal goalscoring record in Germany. But I did a sort of little study on him and the goalscoring

came with a big caveat, and that was a heavy, heavy number of shots involved in order to get the goals, which is not how City play.

“So, I think he was hamstrung a little bit by that. It's whether Maresca wants someone like Marmoush to make City a slightly different operating team. If you do that, then he is the best man for it. I mean, the guy can score from literally anywhere. And then you add that to Erling Haaland's capabilities inside the box, then all of a sudden City become a more two-dimensional side rather than a very oppressive, controlling side.

“However, again, if Maresca doesn't want to play that way, then I think he would have to move because ultimately, as you said, Erling Haaland is always going to be the number one choice. What I do like if it is to happen, if he was to move on, is the fact that some players like to play football, not just sit around and wait for the odd chance.”

Q: Do you think there's a way back for Jack Grealish at Manchester City with a new manager coming in?

David James: “What I find interesting for any new manager, Iraola is the same, because of the World Cup, he is going to get limited time getting players ready. I know in Liverpool's case, they are going on a pre-season tour, I think, a few days after the World Cup finishes. So, a lot of the squad won't be there, so he won't get the opportunity to actually get into the team straight away.

“Someone like Jack Grealish, if he is going to come back to City for pre-season, it will give him a chance to show the manager what he is about and whether or not that will be enough for him to stay at the club, I'm not sure. Because what you want is everybody there to get the full feeling of how things are going to look going into the season.

“But I love Jack. I mean, I love him as his character. I love him as a player, and in that treble season, I thought he was awesome. And you'd like to think that the move was the right move, just possibly at the wrong time, and there is still a chance for him to show more of his best qualities at City.

“But he's coming off a tough injury and I've had injuries myself, not necessarily that bad, but there's always a chance that if the recovery is correct, then we can still see the best of Jack Grealish.”

On West Ham's hopes of returning to the Premier League at the first attempt, and the future of Mateus Fernandes

Q: Mateus Fernandes looks like a player that West Ham will cash in on this summer. Just how good is he and where do you think he will end up?

David James: “Yeah, I think he flourished when Paqueta left. I think that gave him the space to be able to operate a lot more and show his qualities. As you say, it's unfortunate that West Ham went down. They deserved it in the end because they just

didn't get enough points. I know it sounds very simple, but football is easy. It's very simple at times.

“I can't see him staying. I think there's going to be, first of all, a heavy financial burden on West Ham, obviously depending on how the contracts are written up, but there will be a financial burden which they will need to settle, I'm sure, and allowing him to move on will probably make that a lot easier.

“They are going to have to rebuild. The concern is, I've got a lot of friends who are West Ham fans and I meet a lot of West Ham fans where I live. Their concern is that they might not bounce straight back up again.

“And having been in a relegated side with West Ham, losing a lot of players, again, we talk about environments, it's having an environment which didn't feel confident necessarily of going straight back up and that doesn't help for performance.

“So, I think West Ham have to be prepared that it might not be straight away. I'd love to think it would be. But if you sell on Fernandes, recruitment is key, getting players in that will get you back up, then it will only be a short-term visit in the Championship, hopefully.”

Q: Real Madrid and Manchester United have both been linked with him, is he capable of stepping up?

David James: “Do you know what? It would be nice if they are both really interested, because then they can push the price up. He's got the quality, so he's definitely capable of playing for Real Madrid or Manchester United.

“But again, when you have got clubs of that calibre being linked, then the suggestion would be that he is not going to be hanging around to be playing Portsmouth next season down at Fratton Park.

On Bournemouth's rise from League One to the Europa League in a decade

Q: You played for Bournemouth in League One 10 years ago, and now they're about to play in Europe for the first time. Did you ever see this coming when you were at the club?

David James: “When I joined, I've got to tell you the story, when I joined Bournemouth, the first training session was on a Thursday. And as you said, it was League One and I went home afterwards and I thought, "Okay, it's fine, it's League One, that's why they are the way they are.

“And I went in on the Friday, and it was like a different team. I straight away thought, this lot could be Bristol City. There was something about them and we got promotion that

year. Two years later, they are playing in the Premier League. There were seven players from the squad in the League One team that were playing in the Premier League two years later.

“And I just thought, do you know what, a lot of this was down to Eddie. But what I have subsequently realised is that this is the club as well, if not more so. Because Eddie has gone, Iraola comes in, they qualify for Europe for the first time. But there's such a good feel around that place.

“They have got a lot of players there, similar to Liverpool in a way, they have got a lot of players there who have been through all the trials and tribulations at Bournemouth, a lot of the backroom stuff. I just think as a club, it's just a beautiful place to be at the moment.

“So am I surprised? Yes, of course. But there's part of me that said I shouldn't have been because it was always an upward trajectory. And yeah, they have got a ground, they are expanding the stadium. They have got big plans, a new training facility, which is absolutely amazing. I mean, they are doing everything right at the club, building the right way.

“Whether or not they can qualify for Europe again, I mean, they could obviously win a European trophy next season, which would be utterly amazing. But yeah, fantastic, fantastic story, that one.”

Q: They have a conveyor belt of talent they have had coming through, with Kroupi and Alex Scott grabbing most of the headlines. Do you think that it's going to be difficult to hang on to them with Iraola now gone?

David James: “I was actually at Bournemouth towards the end of the season, and what I'm interested in is how they approach Europe. Again, going back to the model, if you bring players in saying, "Play well, you'll move on." I don't think that's what they say when they sign a contract, but I think everyone knows when they sign a contract, if they play well, they can get moved on.

“That's a great model for staying in the Premier League. First of all, it gives you a lot of funding for the transfer fees, for the sell-ons. But it always gives you the opportunity to bring in quality to be able to sustain Premier League existence.

“Now you're in Europe, do they plan to have a European tour with some success at the end of it, which could be detrimental to the Premier League? Or do they just look at it and say, "We do what we do, which is bring in players and move them on. We also have a European tour, but in fact, whatever happens, happens, but focus on the Premier League.”

“I'd like to think it's the latter because we have seen too many examples of teams who have tried to stretch, start doing both, the model changes and ultimately they end up in

trouble one way or another. So it's a fairy tale in one sense, but I think they have to keep to what has given them success and hopefully for them maybe qualify again through the Premier League rather than concentrating on trying to win European trophies.”

Q: What about Marco Rose’s appointment, do you think he’ll do well?

David James: “I think the environment of Bournemouth will give him everything that he needs. Yes, he is a different manager to Iraola, but Iraola is a very different manager to Eddie Howe.

“So, I just think environment will be the key there to give him the best opportunities to get the best out of them. As I said, they have proved that they are good enough to qualify through the league, and I think that should be the target again for them this season.”