

MARK O'HAIRE'S CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

Championship 2026/27 Outright Preview

There is usually a fine line between identifying the best team in the Championship and finding the best bet. This season, that distinction matters more than ever.

West Ham are as short as 7/4 to win the title – the shortest-priced Championship favourites this century. The logic is obvious. They have Premier League quality, parachute payments and enormous financial clout. They may well be the best side in the division. But at 7/4, they really ought to be.

Recent history certainly supports the prospects of the relegated Premier League contingent. Parachute clubs have taken top honours in five of the last 10 Championship seasons, while 31% of all sides dropping into the second tier since 2000/01 have secured an immediate return to the Premier League.

That makes West Ham worthy favourites, but not necessarily a worthwhile bet at such prohibitive odds. Beneath the Irons sits a division loaded with well-funded former Premier League clubs and ambitious challengers, and there are some striking disparities in price towards the top of the market.

Wolves, for example, possess a squad that compares favourably with West Ham's yet can be backed at more than three times the price.

Wolves the value alternative to West Ham

West Ham deserve their place as market leaders. Nuno Espírito Santo has been retained despite failing to prevent relegation, Jarrod Bowen stayed and committed early, while around £150m of outgoing business – including Mateus Fernandes and Crysencio Summerville – has given the Hammers considerable financial muscle to reshape the squad.

They could easily prove a class apart. The problem is the price.

At 7/4, there is precious little margin for error across a notoriously unforgiving 46-game season, particularly when [Wolves are available at 13/2 \(boosted from 11/2\)](#) with a squad that looks more than capable of competing for top spot.

Indeed, my squad-strength model rates West Ham as the strongest group in the Championship but has Wolves second and only narrowly behind. There is still enough of a disparity in price to make Wolves the more appealing betting proposition.

Unlike their fellow relegated clubs, Wolves have barely dismantled last season's Premier League group. João Gomes' £38m switch to Aston Villa represents the only significant

departure, while Kieran Trippier and Raúl Jiménez have arrived to add proven pedigree alongside January recruit Adam Armstrong.

There were encouraging signs before relegation, too. Wolves beat Aston Villa and Liverpool and held Arsenal during the closing weeks of Rob Edwards' reign, while the attacking options now available look exceptional for Championship level.

Teenage prospect Mateus Mané and Fer López can provide the craft around Jiménez, while Ladislav Krejčí could conceivably be the division's outstanding centre-back if Wolves keep hold of him.

The obvious unknown is César Peixoto. The Portuguese coach is taking his first job outside his homeland following the surprise and sudden departure of Edwards. There is also some excess to trim from the squad before the window closes and a few positions still require filling.

Even so, recent history suggests relegated Premier League clubs with this level of depth rarely stay out of the promotion picture for long. In the past 10 second-tier seasons, 33% have bounced straight back to the Premier League with 63% posting a top-eight finish.

West Ham are the likeliest winners. At the prices, though, Wolves are the bet.

Saints and Boro ready for another assault

The Championship's decision to expand the play-offs from six to eight teams should open up the promotion picture considerably.

Norwich are particularly interesting after Philippe Clement transformed their fortunes last season, while Millwall should be capable of solidifying their position amongst the leading eight after finishing third and just a point shy of automatic promotion.

Nevertheless, two of last season's strongest Championship sides appeal most in the Promotion market.

Southampton start four points behind the pack following the fallout from 'Spygate', with Tonda Eckert's individual punishment still unresolved. Even so, Saints were arguably the best side not to go up last term.

Eckert engineered a remarkable turnaround, with Southampton unbeaten from mid-January onwards. They created more big chances per game than anybody in the division and improved from 1.35 points per game across their opening 23 fixtures to 2.13 thereafter.

Crucially, the squad has largely stayed together. Cyle Larin and Daniel Peretz have returned permanently, while Lewis Dobbin arrives following a productive campaign with Preston.

A four-point handicap is hardly ideal, but across a 46-game campaign it's far from terminal, particularly with eight teams now entering the play-off equation. [At 5/1 \(boosted from 4/1\),](#)

[promotion makes considerably more appeal than asking Saints to overcome their points deduction and win the division outright.](#)

Middlesbrough also warrant another chance after contriving to miss out last season.

Boro averaged more possession than anybody in the Championship, allowed fewer opposition shots than any other side and ranked first for overall shot ratio. At one stage they were seven points clear of third before an alarming late collapse eventually ended with play-off final defeat.

Hayden Hackney's £17m departure leaves a sizeable hole, but Kim Hellberg's side have attempted to address the two areas that undermined them most.

Radek Vitek arrives following an outstanding season with Bristol City to upgrade the goalkeeping department, while Will Lankshear supplies the penalty-box presence and finishing quality too often absent last term.

If Boro's process remains anything close to 2025/26 levels, they should be firmly involved again at [7/2 \(boosted from 5/2\) for promotion](#).

Blackburn could finally run out of road

Lincoln are understandably relegation favourites after losing title-winning boss Michael Skubala following their remarkable 103-point League One campaign, but I'm reluctant to take odds-on quotes about an immediate return.

Only 19% of clubs promoted from League One have suffered immediate relegation this century, while Lincoln's aggressive, energetic approach should make them awkward opposition, particularly at Sincil Bank.

Fellow newcomers Bolton and Cardiff could also find the transition troublesome, but established Championship pair Preston and Blackburn are equally difficult to trust.

Both look vulnerable after difficult campaigns last season, although [Blackburn make greater appeal at 11/2 \(boosted from 9/2\)](#).

Rovers have been circling danger for a while and survived in 20th last term. Michael O'Neill's decision to return full-time to Northern Ireland hardly screams confidence in the project, while Tony Mowbray begins an uncertain second spell at Ewood Park with precious little summer strengthening.

Blackburn scored only 42 goals last season – their lowest tally since 2010 – despite generating 55.4 Expected Goals, the biggest attacking underperformance in the Championship.

With rivals improving around them, their margin for error is narrowing.

Touré can challenge for Golden Boot honours

Finally, Norwich forward [Mohamed Touré is worth supporting at 20/1 \(boosted from 14/1\) in the Top Goalscorer market.](#)

The January arrival made an immediate impact last season, scoring nine times in only 11 Championship appearances. The sample is admittedly small, but the underlying output was exceptional.

Touré posted a divisional-best 1.06 Expected Goals per 90 and averaged more shots on target than anybody else, scoring at a rate of once every 65 minutes for the Canaries.

With Jovon Makama expected to miss the start of the campaign, Touré should get first crack at leading the line for a Norwich side that produced promotion-standard results following Clement's appointment.

If the Canaries carry that momentum into 2026/27, their first-choice centre-forward should receive plenty of opportunities to make 20/1 look generous.

Recommended Bets:

- [Wolves to win the Championship @ 13/2](#)
- [Southampton to be promoted @ 5/1](#)
- [Middlesbrough to be promoted @ 7/2](#)
- [Blackburn to be relegated @ 11/2](#)
- [Mohamed Touré to be Top Goalscorer @ 20/1](#)