

LONDON, ENGLAND – SEPTEMBER 21: Rafael Benitez manager of Everton prior the Carabao Cup Third Round ... [+] match between Queens Park Rangers and Everton at Loftus Road on September 21, 2021 in London, England. (Photo by Marc Atkins/Getty Images)

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If the EFL Cup is a test of squad depth, then it's no surprise Everton were knocked out early doors in this season's tournament.

It was maybe more of a surprise they were knocked out by Championship opposition. A narrow 2-1 win against Huddersfield Town in the previous round was followed up by an even narrower defeat on penalties against Queens Park Rangers in West London.

It was a defeat nevertheless, and the quality of Everton's performance at times highlighted the problems they still have with their squad, some of which have existed for some time.

Everton having appointed five different managers in the past six seasons doesn't help with recruitment, especially when many of these managers appear to have had the authority to identify and sign players themselves.

This wouldn't be so unusual if the club didn't have a director of football, which they do in Marcel Brands.

This kind of figure at the club is supposed to offer some sort of continuity, but each manager Everton have appointed in recent years has their own ideas as to which players they want to sign. This has especially been the case with the last two managers — Carlo Ancelotti and current boss Rafael Benitez.

While back and forth and give and take between manager and recruitment team is important, a high turnover of managers, such as that experienced by Everton, can lead to a muddled transfer policy.

Everton have generally signed well in the last few windows but are still paying the price for a fairly disjointed (and expensive) overall transfer policy in recent years.

This summer they added Demarai Gray and Andros Townsend. The latter joined on a free transfer and the former cost \$2.3 million—almost a nominal fee in modern football terms.

The low outlay led to the idea the pair would be backup players, adding good depth to the squad before other players came in prior to the transfer window closing.

But there were no new arrivals, bar extra depth in the centre-forward position in the shape of Benitez favourite Salomon Rondon, who is leading the line earlier than expected due to injuries to Richarlison and Dominic Calvert-Lewin.

LONDON, ENGLAND – SEPTEMBER 21: Solomon Rondon of Everton during the Carabao Cup Third Round match ... [+] between Queens Park Rangers and Everton at Loftus Road on September 21, 2021 in London, England. (Photo by Tony McArdle/Everton FC via Getty Images)

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To be fair to Gray and Townsend, they have both started the season brilliantly and look like some of the shrewdest business Everton have done in recent years.

But take one of them out of the lineup and Everton suddenly look light on quality and experience once again. This is where the idea of these players being part of a squad, rather than the sole solution, comes into play.

20-year-old winger Anthony Gordon came in for Gray and was actually one of Everton's more impressive performers against QPR, but he entered what felt like a patchwork XI of players, rather than there being any type of plan to build on the first-choice eleven's good start in the league.

It's a similar story in midfield, and the below-par performances of Andre Gomes and Tom Davies in the centre against QPR will have come as no surprise to Everton fans.

Both can be good players on their day, but as a pair they have rarely worked, whether that be under Marco Silva, Ancelotti, or now Benitez.

As is the case this season with Gray and Townsend on the wings, last season Allan and Abdoulaye Doucoure came into the midfield and immediately looked like quality signings. But take one or both out of the team and Everton suddenly look back to square one.

And there has been no change in midfield going into the 2021-22 campaign. Gomes and Davies were overrun in the first half by a QPR midfield of Dominic Ball, Andre Dozzell and Ilias Chair, who were impressive for the hosts.

LONDON, ENGLAND – SEPTEMBER 21: Seny Dieng, Chris Willock and Ilias Chair of QPR celebrate the win ... [+] during the Carabao Cup Third Round match between Queens Park Rangers and Everton at Loftus Road on September 21, 2021 in London, England. (Photo by Marc Atkins/Getty Images)

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Doucoure came on in the second half and straight away looked a level above his teammates in that area, but Everton couldn't do enough to win the game in normal time and ended up exiting on penalties.

Other areas of the team can also be pointed to as lacking depth, especially the full-back position where

Niels Nkounkou's loan to Standard Liege means there is simply no backup to Lucas Digne, while at right-back there doesn't seem confidence that Jonjoe Kenny is a long-term replacement for Seamus Coleman.

Almost 3,000 Everton fans travelled down to London for this EFL Cup game to witness a movie they have seen before.

[This game](#) went down to the lottery of a penalty shootout, but Everton's real gamble this season has been the lack of depth in the squad.

It's something [Benitez and Brands](#) should be looking to put right at the earliest opportunity, and with James Rodriguez on his way out they should have some budget to work with in January.

Source: [Everton's Lack Of Depth Laid Bare In EFL Cup With Key Players Missing](#)