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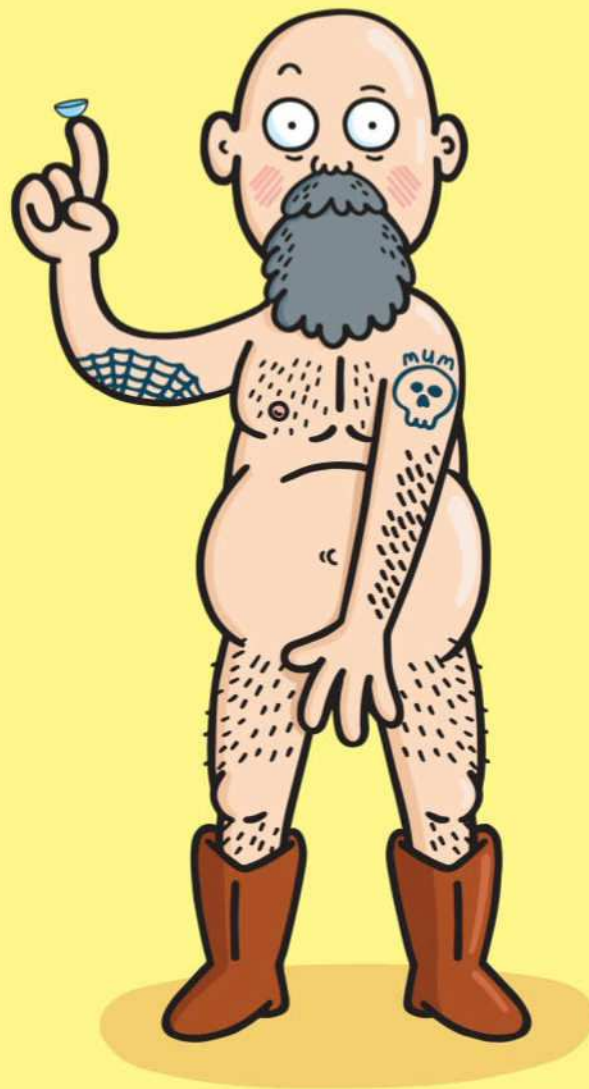


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EDITORIAL

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EDITOR'S LETTER



[@FourFourTwoEd](https://twitter.com/FourFourTwoEd)

My first World Cup was Italia 90 and my abiding memories of it are a hotchpotch of randomness: Cameroon's Benjamin Massing trying to kill Claudio Caniggia in the opening match (and losing a boot in the process); Ciao – the rubbish tricolour stick-figure mascot; Pavarotti bellowing beautifully over a montage of some truly awful matches. And of course there was England, with Gazza's tears, David Platt's volley and Chris Waddle's mullet and miss. It was around this time that I bought my first Panini World Cup sticker book, inspired by England's run to the semi-finals.

And that's why we kick off the first of three World Cup issues with a load of iconic footballers and stickers. As you will have noticed, this issue is bagged with the official Russia 2018 Panini sticker album, which must mean the build-up to the tournament is truly underway. Anyone want to swap a Jake Livermore for an Egyptian shiny?

As if that wasn't enough, our cover feature this month reflects on the players who have come to define our World Cup memories, from Pele and Maradona to Cannavaro and Zidane. We also visited Brazil legend Ronaldo at his house in Madrid to discuss coming back from the heartache of France 98 to score the winning goal in the final four years later. If you weren't excited for the World Cup, you will be now...

Hitesh Ratna
Editor

PLAYED A BLINDER



Ulisses Neto: FFT's videographer found Ronaldo in the mood to bare his soul. "Hearing O Fenomeno's story of redemption – from 1998 World Cup heartbreak and knee injury heartache to scoring the goals that won Brazil the 2002 World Cup – was inspirational."



Fernando Munoz: The Panini sticker aficionado let us loose on his World Cup archive. "I started in 1986, somehow getting Diego Maradona in a pack, but Italia 90 and our Colombian superstar Carlos Valderrama was the big one. I can't wait to start on the 2018 edition!"



Will Cornelius: The lensman snapped Arsenal's Armenian ace in north London. "Four of us were trying to figure out how to spell Mkhitarjan. He walks in and says, 'Most people just call me Micki'. He was an absolute gent and the most intelligent baller I have ever shot."

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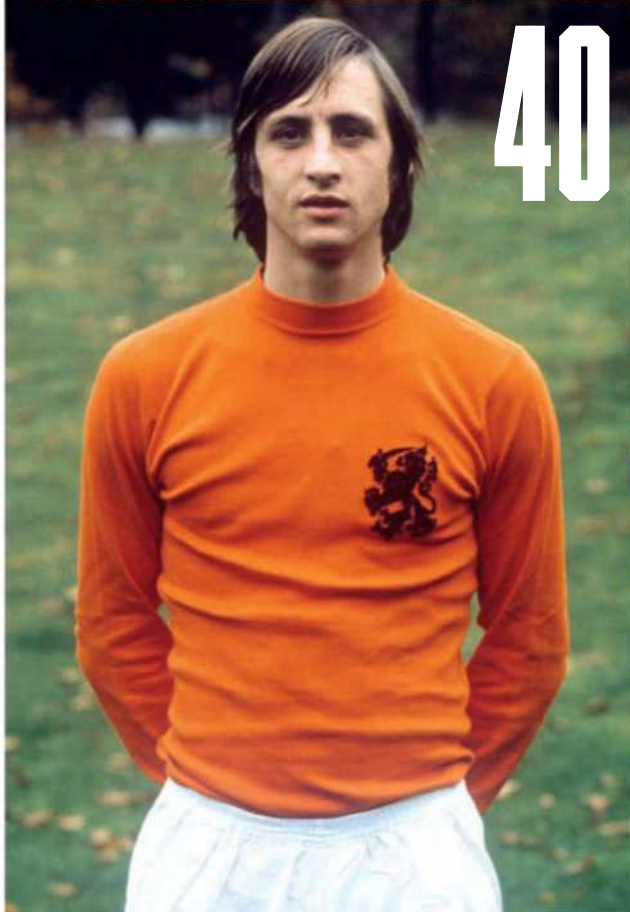
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THE BEAUTIFUL GAME





FLIPPING HECK, AUBA!

Not helped by Arsenal's faltering form and being cup-tied for the Europa League, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang may have endured a slow-burning start to his Gunners career, but the Gabonese forward certainly knows his way around a spectacular celebration. After rounding the goalkeeper to roll home the second in a 3-0 home win against Watford in March, the 28-year-old let fly with a trademark front flip. It's probably for the best Olivier Giroud never attempted it.

Picture Eddie Keogh/Reuters



“ER, I NEED THE TOILET...”

The worst thing about a hot tub – even if you’re in the Bahamas in mid-August – is having to brave the cold and get out. With temperatures hitting -10C as Hobro hosted FC Copenhagen, the mind boggles at quite how freezing these competition ‘winners’ were at full-time. Hopefully they were away fans, with Hobro losing the Danish Superliga showdown 2-0. As *FFT* found out to its cost recently, beware the silent hot tub assassin who seems to have handily developed an iron bladder...

Picture Lars Ronbog/FrontzoneSport/Getty



THE BEAUTIFUL GAME



DAVIDE ASTORI 1987-2018

For more than 700 years, Florence's Basilica of Santa Croce has hosted the canonisation of saints and the last goodbye for those who earned a place in the Tuscan city's heart. The funerals of Michelangelo, Galileo and Machiavelli were all held there. At 10am on Thursday March 8, 2018, Fiorentina captain Davide Astori joined them - four days after his tragic death from suspected heart failure, aged 31. Attended by calcio's great and the good, Astori's funeral brought Viola fans out in force to pay respects to their skipper. RIP Davide.

Picture Gianni Pasquini/IPA/PA





PULL THE UDDER ONE Queen of the South's goalkeeper Sam Henderson was laid low after being struck by a runaway cow while helping out on his father's farm, damaging his shoulder

UPFRONT



Snap up a Galaxy injury buggy **p23**

Silliness with Southend gaffer Chris Powell **p25**

Erwin is Schalke's all-action hero **p27**



ONE-ON-ONE

ARJEN ROBBEN

Interview Alec Fenn Photography Stefan Hobmaier

**WHY DIDN'T HE MOVE TO MANCHESTER UNITED?
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PEP AND JOSE?
IS HIS RIGHT LEG REALLY 'MADE OF CHOCOLATE'?**

It's the day after Arjen Robben's 34th birthday, but there's no sign of the Dutchman taking it easy as he walks briskly towards FourFourTwo like he's bearing down on a terrified Bundesliga full-back.

Fortunately for us, Robben resists the temptation to drop a shoulder and cut inside using his trademark move, opting instead to shake our hand before posing for the camera.

During his 18 years in football, the Bayern Munich wideman has been through the ecstasy of Champions League glory and crushing despair of World Cup final defeat, although he's not quite done with petrifying opposition defenders yet.

"I don't feel any slower than I was in my 20s, so I have still got a few years in me," he says with a wink.

The game has provided Robben with more than just a footballing education. His professional career has taken him from the Netherlands to Germany, via England and Spain, meaning he could have conducted this interview in any one of four languages.

And as he's matured, the speedster has also learned how to fine-tune his once injury-prone physique into what is now a smooth-running machine.

With his training session completed, Robben's ready to apply the brakes for a bit, lower his lean frame into a chair and answer your questions...

What's your earliest football memory? Did you like going in the 'cages' that are so popular with young people in the Netherlands?

Henk van der Voort, The Hague

I guess my earliest football memories are of playing in the street and also the little pitches at school. I joined the local football team in my village when I was small, but we would play only once or twice a week. I honed my skills just by playing for fun with friends after school.

Speed has always been one of your trademarks – were you any good at athletics as a kid?

Simon Christie, via Facebook

At school I did a bit of athletics and the pace was always there, although it was never something I really considered as a professional career path. It's strange because my parents were not that fast – my mum is quicker than my dad! It's been a great weapon for me, however, and a lucky one, too – you either have it or you don't.

You were still studying at school when you made your debut for Groningen – your mates must have been jealous!

Rudy Schmidt, Rotterdam

I remember my mum called me two or three times while I was in class. When I rang her back she told me Groningen had called and that I was in the squad that weekend. It came out of the blue and I was not expecting it. I had never even trained with the first team but the coach put me on the substitutes' bench. My friends were really happy for me. It

was also quite strange for them to see me playing on the television and then read about me in all the newspapers.

You suffered with numerous injuries early in your career. Did you fear you wouldn't fulfil your potential because of them?

Oliver Weinhardt, via Twitter

I never had problems with injuries as a kid or in the youth team. My injuries started at Chelsea, when I broke my foot during a pre-season game. That was just pure bad luck, but after that I had some muscular injuries too, so I had to get to know my body better. I tried to find out how to take care of it, to avoid breaking down all the time. Some players never have any injuries and others, like me, have to do more specific things to ensure they stay fit.

PSV's fans labelled you and Mateja Kezman 'Batman and Robben' due to your understanding on the pitch. What made your relationship with him special, and why didn't it work out at Chelsea?

Roland Smith, Worcester

We had a brilliant team at PSV at that time and my job was simply to set him up as much as possible. There was also Dennis Rommedahl on the right wing, who was very, very fast, so we created a lot of opportunities for Mateja and he scored a lot of goals. Unfortunately he didn't play too much when we were at Chelsea, so we weren't able to have the same success on the pitch together as we did at PSV. ▶



CLUBS

2000-02 Groningen

2002-04 PSV

2004-07 Chelsea

2007-09 Real Madrid

2009- Bayern Munich

COUNTRY

2003-17 Netherlands

"I'M A BIT LIKE A FORMULA ONE CAR -
IF THERE'S ONE LITTLE SCREW THAT'S
NOT SO GOOD, MY MOTOR WILL BLOW UP"



"I HAD ONE MEETING WITH CHELSEA AND IT WAS ALL DONE, BUT I WOULD HAVE JOINED UNITED IF FERGIE HAD OFFERED ME A DEAL OVER DINNER"

You've scored so many goals in your career by cutting inside on your left foot before bending the ball into the far corner. How did this become your most dangerous weapon?

Ryan Smith, Glasgow

In my youth-team days, I was always a left-winger who would stay close to the byline and put crosses in the box, so I could never cut inside and shoot. It was only when I joined Real Madrid and started playing in a more central position, and then on the right wing, that I suddenly realised I had a really dangerous weapon. I'd say the most important thing is always retaining an element of surprise, so I can carry on scoring goals like that.

Johan Cruyff once said about you: "He's got tremendous talent and a beautiful left foot, but his right leg is made of chocolate." Did you ever get to talk to him about that?

Simon Crown, Middlesbrough

Never – but he's not the only person who's said that! [Laughs]. I can't do anything with my right foot but I've made it to the top. Modern coaches want young players to work on both

feet, but I'm not so sure that is a good thing. Some players have got one very good foot, so you then have a question: Do you make that foot exceptional, or work on both and maybe just have two very good feet? Maybe players should focus on maximising the potential of their strongest foot?

You came close to leaving PSV (right) for Manchester United in 2004. What did Alex Ferguson say to you and why didn't you end up going there?

Jeremy Finch, Stockport

I had a very good conversation with him over dinner in Manchester and we spoke about football and life. I also went and had a good look around the training ground and everything was good, but after I went back to PSV nothing happened. There was no real contact and the deal didn't happen. PSV were



also negotiating with Chelsea at that time, so maybe they offered PSV more money? I don't really know. I spoke to Chelsea and I liked their plans. We had one meeting and everything was done pretty quickly. Had Manchester United offered me a deal straight after I met them, I would have signed there, but it didn't happen and I've got no regrets.

You joined Chelsea for £12 million in 2004 when you were just 20. What was it like playing under Jose Mourinho?

Julian Price, Cambridge

He was really demanding and intense, but at that age I think it was good for me and my football development. I am a student and someone who wants to improve and work hard, so I think our personalities were a good fit. I played a lot of football under Mourinho and he was a good man-manager.

He gave me a lot of confidence and I've got good memories of playing for him.

How difficult were your early months at Chelsea after breaking a metatarsal in pre-season?

James White, London

It was really difficult. I had to work my socks off to get fit again, but by the time I made my comeback I was in fantastic physical condition and had a great start at Chelsea. In my first three matches in the starting XI, we won 1-0 and I scored two of the goals. I felt fast and strong, which I realised I needed in England, so maybe my time out did me some good.

Once you were fit your form was just incredible. Did you feel untouchable, and what was the secret to adapting to the English game so fast?

Rory Cordell, London

When I moved to England I wanted to get better. The injury meant that I had the opportunity to focus on the physical side of my game. I had several months of intense work, so by the time I was fit again I was in fantastic condition. This gave me the confidence to show what I wanted to show in the Premier League.

I remember you getting kicked from pillar to post in a game at Blackburn in 2005 after scoring the winner. Was that the most physical game you ever played in? Would that have happened in Spain or Germany?

Tom Thatcher, via Twitter

I remember that match, but there was also another game where I was kicked for the full 90 minutes and got a really



Above Robben was given his first chance to shine with Groningen, winning player of the year in 2001
Top Arjen, Van Persie and Sneijder perfect the '90s boy band pose **Top right** His spot-kick was saved in Chelsea's Champions League semi-final loss to Liverpool in 2007
Left He joined Real soon after, where he began to do damage by cutting in from the wing

bad injury after a terrible tackle. But every game in England is intense and you've got to be physically ready and strong. You also have to be smart to protect yourself and prevent injuries.

Mourinho became pretty outspoken about your injuries at Chelsea. How frustrating was it to hear your own manager criticising your will?

Charles Scarrott, Stroud
 I didn't see any of the criticism, to be honest. For a manager, it's difficult if a player is injured because you can't count on him, so I could understand it a little bit. But it's worse for a player – you want to be playing and enjoying your football. Jose is a winner and he wants strong players. I felt so much confidence from him when I was fit, but injuries created a bit of a struggle.

You said nobody taught you more in England than John Terry. What did you learn from him?

Chris Spencer, Fulham
 He's one of the greatest captains I've ever played with. The way he behaved and conducted himself on a pitch set an example to everyone.

Why did you decide to leave Chelsea for Real Madrid in August 2007? Was it a tough decision to make?

Daniel Walsh, Newcastle

It was hard, although the system had changed a little bit at Chelsea. In my first two seasons we had been playing with wingers, and then Jose switched to a diamond with a physical midfielder and two forwards. I could have played as a striker but Andriy Shevchenko and Didier Drogba were first choice at the time. Real came in for me and it was difficult to say no, as it was a forward move for my career – I had to go for it.

Real supporters have been known to boo even their best players and wave white hankies. Were they a difficult crowd to satisfy?

Harry Rijk, Eindhoven

I always had a good relationship with them. In my first season, we won the league and beat Barcelona 4-1, which was an incredible night. In my second year, I think I played some of the best football of my career. That was when I started playing on the right wing and cutting inside, so I scored lots of goals. If you're scoring and winning trophies, the fans will always be happy with you.

You said you were forced to move on in 2009, despite playing some of the best football of your career. Did you feel betrayed by the club?

George Parks, Chester

It was a strange time. I played the best pre-season of my career, but Real had spent a lot of money to sign Cristiano Ronaldo, Xabi Alonso, Karim Benzema and Kaka. The board told me, Wesley Sneijder and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar that they had to sell players to make some of the money back. I had no problems with the manager, Manuel Pellegrini, ▶

and he told me that he didn't want me to leave, but the president – Florentino Perez – made the final decision. It was difficult but I decided to leave and sign for Bayern. It ended up being the best move of my career.

'Robben and Ribery' or 'Robbery' (top right) have defined Bayern for nearly a decade. Describe the bond you have both on and off the pitch.

Max Bauer, Munich

I feel that we have got very similar minds, and that has helped create an incredible connection on the pitch. First of all we love the game, but we specifically like one-v-one situations, as well as setting up goals and scoring them. We are very, very similar, and when we are together it's not really a surprise that we've had so much success.

Was missing the penalty in extra time of the 2012 Champions League Final against old club Chelsea the worst moment of your professional career? How did all of the Bayern players react to the loss in their own back yard?

Neil Cane, London

It was a huge low point for me and very disappointing for everyone. We were in our own stadium and went 1-0 up with seven minutes left. Unfortunately they equalised and then I missed a penalty. They were the first ones to miss in the shootout, too. When you miss a crucial penalty it's very, very hard, but you have to recover from that. We recovered very well the following year and proved that we were still a great team at Wembley.

Bayern lost Champions League finals in 2010 and 2012 – did you begin to think you were destined never to win the prestigious prize?

Rodrigo Sanchez, Madrid

Of course. Before the third final against Borussia Dortmund in 2013, there was incredible pressure. While my mindset was very positive and I was convinced

we would win it this time, at Wembley, I was also thinking, 'I can't play in three Champions League finals and lose all of them' – nobody wants that label on their career! Everyone would have said, 'He achieved a lot of things, but didn't win the Champions League'.

What emotions were going through your head when you scored the late winner in the final? That must have been a big weight off your shoulders...

Taylor Johnson, via Facebook

It was like the script for a film or a book. I missed a penalty against Chelsea the previous year, and then 12 months on I scored the winner. I believe it's a great example of the sort of character needed to achieve success in sport. If you have a massive setback, you always have to stand up and fight back, and I did that.

You won your first Netherlands cap at a time when Robin van Persie, Rafael van der Vaart and Wesley Sneijder were also coming through. How did the Oranje not win

a tournament with all that talent?

Tom Bearden, Nottingham

I think we had success for such a small country. In 2010 we were second and in 2014 we were third – that is not too bad, I would say. Of course you always want to win a trophy, but then we have a population of just 16 million people, so I think to come in second and third is pretty good and not something we have done regularly in previous years.

The Netherlands failed to qualify for Euro 2016 and this summer's World Cup. What's gone wrong with Dutch football recently?

Steve Peach, Norwich

We have always had a unique style of football, but the game develops and we have to adapt. You need your own identity but also have to learn things from others. Around 10-15 years ago, it was other countries coming into our kitchen to see how we did it. But now we need to be more open and look at other teams and countries ourselves, to learn about them and their tactics.



Below Celebrating 2010 World Cup quarter-final success over Brazil, but Casillas ruined Robben's chance to create history (right) **Far right** Finally grasping Ol' Big Ears at Wembley after misery in Munich against old boys Chelsea (bottom right)



You were labelled 'the man of glass' by the Dutch media because of your injury problems, but represented the national team for 14 years. Did that criticism hurt you?

Frank Schif, Amsterdam

It really did. When you're younger, you're a lot more sensitive.

Perhaps if those people had said it when I was older I wouldn't have cared so much, but I wanted to prove them all wrong. To me, 'the man of glass' sounds like they thought I was weak. It had nothing to do with me being weak – it was just that I had a sensitive body at that time. I thought

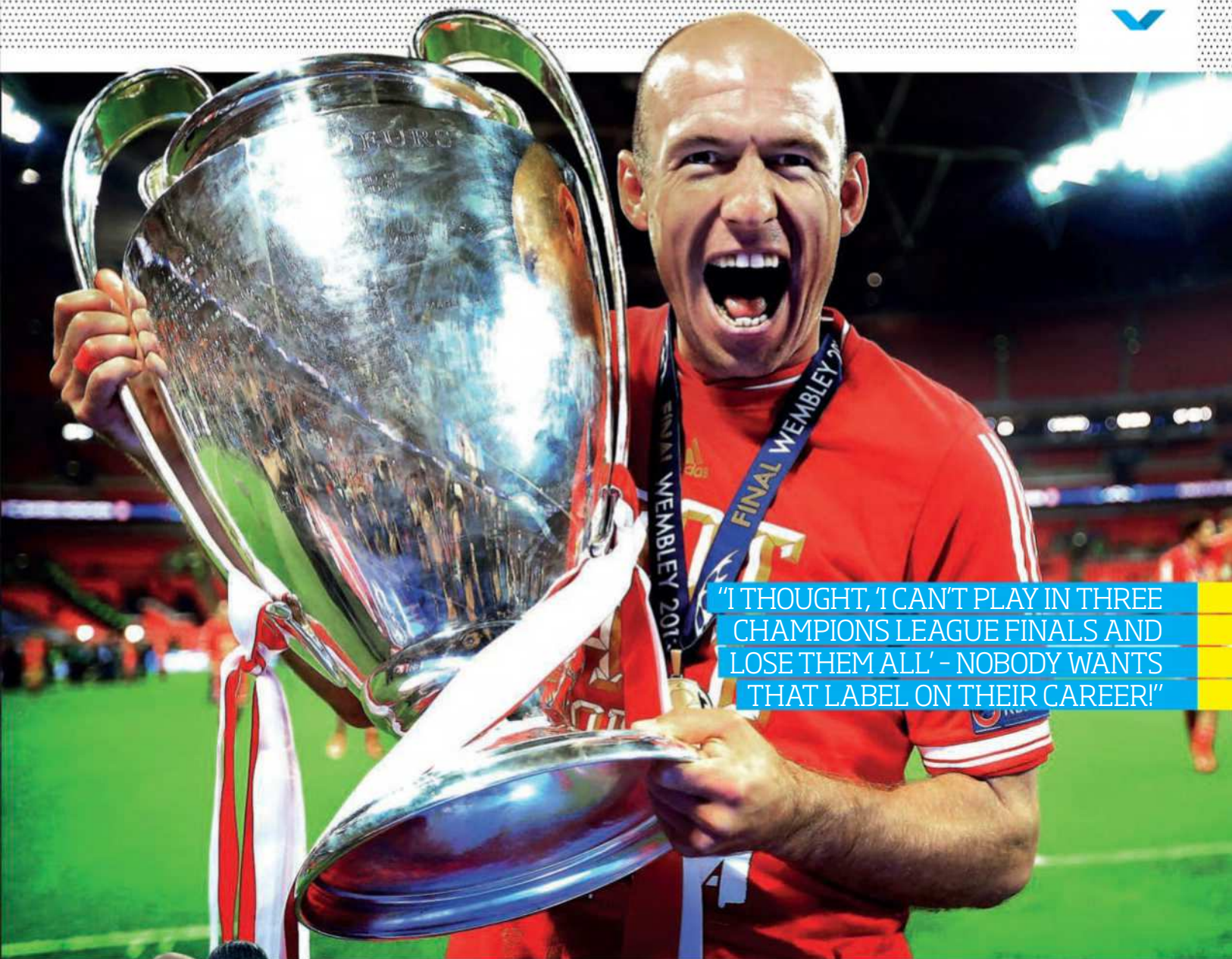
to myself, 'I don't break' and thankfully I proved them wrong in the end. Maybe I had the last laugh!

Iker Casillas' boot prevented you from scoring the winner in the 2010 World Cup Final (above). Does that moment still haunt you?

Thomas Reynolds, Kensington

Just like all of the trophies I have won, that disappointment will stay with me for the rest of my life. I had a big chance to win the World Cup when I was one-on-one with Iker Casillas, and if I had placed the ball three centimetres higher then it would have gone in. After the match, I thought maybe I should have gone round him, but when I saw it again, I felt I'd made the right decision.





"I THOUGHT, 'I CAN'T PLAY IN THREE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINALS AND LOSE THEM ALL' - NOBODY WANTS THAT LABEL ON THEIR CAREER!"



Casillas decided to go down to his left and then stuck his leg out, as he didn't think I was going to shoot. If I had the same opportunity again, I would still try to finish it the same way, except three centimetres higher!

You have worked under Louis van Gaal (far left) with Bayern Munich and the national team – how did you find him to play for?

Michael Haan, via Facebook

Louis is a great coach. It can be very intense working with him sometimes but he is very, very clear and good at improving individual players. I have learned so much from him over the years, and Louis was a big reason why I joined Bayern when I left Real Madrid. Luckily, I got the chance to play under him again with the national team and we had some success both times that we worked together.

You're one of just a handful of players to have worked under Jose Mourinho and Pep Guardiola, so how do the two coaches compare?

Eugene Chambers, Lincolnshire

Every manager has got their own style. As a player, you must learn from them and pick up the things you need. With Jose I was younger, but with Pep I was a lot older. They are both tremendous coaches and I learnt a great deal from both of them during my career.

Will you become a manager one day? I assume you'll use inverted wingers...

Jamie Berger, Luton

[Laughs] I'm not sure right now. I enjoy working with the younger players and helping them to develop. I already help out with my son's local team from time to time. I am in love with football, but I'm not sure if managing is what I see myself doing in the future.

You turned 34 this year but seem to have improved physically with age. How have you managed to do that?

John Mills, via Twitter

I started working with an osteopath in my final year at Real Madrid [2009]. He explained that everything in my body has to be in alignment, like blocks. I'm a bit like a Formula One car – if there's one little screw that's not so good, my motor will blow up. The muscles need to work as efficiently as possible, and thankfully they do now.

Describe your career in one word...

Phil Moore, via email

I'd say 'great'! I've had so many great moments and won lots of titles. There have been many hard moments and setbacks but I've bounced back. There have been more good moments than low moments, and hopefully I'll enjoy a few more good years before I retire. ●



HE DIDN'T MEAN IT In Ecuador, Independiente del Valle's Angelo Preciado was suspended after using a corner flag as a spear in a brawl. His coach insisted it was out of character

AROUND THE WORLD IN 12 STORIES

Tube train gymnastics, Bayern's award-winning cat and the latest instalment of 'Greek football is nuts' – it's been another eventful month all across the globe

1 **ARMANI: FASHION KING** Argentina Mendoza

Goalkeeper Franco Armani got a special treat after a man-of-the-match display in River Plate's Supercopa victory over bitter rivals Boca Juniors, a showdown played on neutral territory.

Not only was Armani given a Burger King crown as part of the award's new sponsorship deal, he even got to wear it live on television during a post-game interview. Next time he's in danger of winning the honour, it might be worth letting in a last-minute goal, to save a bit of embarrassment....

2 **"THIS IS YOUR FAULT, PEP!"** England London

So exciting has been Manchester City's football this season that they're peeling fans off the ceiling – literally.

One of their supporters got a little carried away when he boarded a Tube train ahead of the Citizens' clash with Arsenal, swinging from the handrails while a woman covered her eyes in horror after getting a rather unwanted close-up of his rear end.

It could have been worse: at least it wasn't a Blue moon.

3 **TOP CAT** Turkey Istanbul

When Bayern Munich launched a poll to decide the star player at Besiktas, there was a clear victor: Wagner 3%, Muller 6%, Thiago 6%, cat 85%.

The feline took the honours after invading the pitch during the second half, earning Besiktas a UEFA fine for 'insufficient organisation'. Die Roten swiftly mocked up a photograph of a six-foot cat scoring in the 3-1 win: the tabby clearly learned its skill set from Cristiano Ronaldo, so expect it to declare itself the best cat in history.

4 **DEBUCHY 1 FEKIR 0** France Lyon

Nabil Fekir kicked off a riot when he scored Lyon's fifth goal in November's 5-0 win at rivals Saint-Etienne – taking off his shirt and showing it to the home fans, who promptly stormed the pitch.

In tribute, Lyon fans created a giant tifo of a shirt-wielding Fekir for the return fixture, but this time he didn't score, and the hosts were denied by a late Mathieu Debuchy equaliser. Arsenal's fans hope to see a 50-foot Debuchy tifo next time the sides meet.

5 **SKID MARKS** Spain Madrid

It's been an odd few weeks for Sergio Ramos. First he turned up at Real Madrid training in full *Peaky Blinders* garb driving a classic Seat 600, an early birthday gift from his brother.

Days later, he had his own Gary Lineker moment against Eibar, briefly leaving the pitch after being caught short. "He s**t himself a bit, so went to the bathroom," Zinedine Zidane tactfully revealed. Cheers Zizou!

6 **RISE LIKE A FENIX (CHICKEN)** Uruguay Montevideo

Fenix have been banned from their home stadium for one match – after a director kicked a chicken at a game.

The Uruguayan outfit were hosting Racing when fans threw two chickens onto the pitch, painted in Racing's colours, in a dig at the visitors. The joke went wrong when unimpressed director Gaston Alegari strode onto the playing surface, booting one of the birds high into the air and off the playing surface. The incident sparked rage from animal rights groups: it was a needless fowl.

7 **A SPIKY AFFAIR** Turkey Istanbul

Fenerbahce-Galatasaray is notoriously feisty, and one Fener fan was taking no chances: painting his head blue and turning up at the match with spikes sticking out of his face.

Presumably the spikes were designed to ward off attacks from Galatasaray fans, although they also stopped birds from landing on his head: a perennial problem in Istanbul. Probably.

8 **DIJON ROBOT IS THE MUSTARD** France Dijon

How do you make Dijon against Caen more interesting? By letting a robot take the kick-off, of course.

It gets weirder: as part of 'Geek Day', the pre-match capers started when another machine trundled across the pitch, complete with a screen showing live images of a smiling fan sat at home, watching events on FaceTime.

Fan (still smiling, as if instructed at gunpoint) was given a close-up view as the robot kicked off before dabbing in celebration. Absolutely bizarre.

9 **HAT TRICK** England Bolton

Preston's fans wear bowler hats once a year, as part of the club's Gentry Day. This year it was for a match at Bolton, when striker Sean Maguire celebrated a goal by donning a bowler himself.

The tradition is all because of Alan Ball's dad, who described Preston fans as 'gentry' during a spell as the club's manager. If TV evidence is anything to go by, some take a day off from being gentry whenever they play Blackpool...

10 **GARFIELD SAYS NO** Germany Bremen

Garfield has always hated Mondays, and so do Werder Bremen supporters after the controversial introduction of Monday Night Football to the Bundesliga.

MNF may have been a thing for 26 years in England, but the Germans are having none of it, so Bremen fans unveiled a Garfield 'We Hate Mondays' banner before a match with Cologne.

German TV should just do what Sky did: introduce some half-time sumo wrestling, and Andy Gray wielding a VHS machine. They will soon be convinced.

11 **WARNING: MAY CONTAIN NUTS** Greece Thessaloniki

FFT was beginning to wonder if Greek football was still nuts: it had been quite a while since the league was suspended because of some mad/violent incident.

But in a three-way battle for the title, PAOK's encounter with Olympiakos was called off after visiting manager Oscar Garcia was hit by a toilet roll. PAOK then faced their other title rival, AEK, and the match was abandoned when PAOK's owner stormed the pitch while armed with a gun. Outcome: the league was suspended (again). Yep, still nuts.

12 **FOAL SCORER** Germany Freiburg

Thomas Muller knew who to thank after scoring for Bayern at Freiburg. "The first foal of the season was born last night," he said. "It fired me up."

Muller's wife is a former equestrian ace and recently claimed that the Raumdeuter was receiving top tips from horse Filou in a bid to get back among the goals. It worked, but team-mates wish he'd stop neighing now...

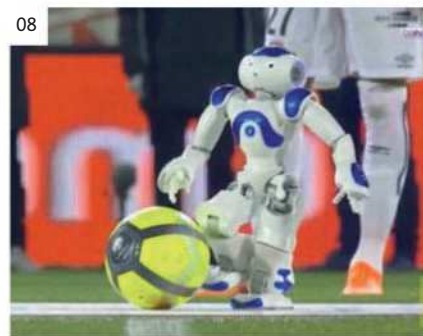
SIX OF THE BEST FIXTURES

Arsenal vs CSKA Moscow April 5
Europa League quarter-final first leg: can Wenger salvage his season and reputation?

Man City vs Man United April 7
A game that's been hyped for weeks. City fans see it as the chance to rub United's noses in it

Lincoln vs Shrewsbury April 8
Lincoln saved the Checkatrade Trophy final from controversy, beating Chelsea U21s in the semis

4 CRIS CROSS Santos Laguna striker Cris Martinez reacted angrily to a red card in a Mexican top-flight fixture with Toluca by punching a door, breaking four fingers. "I regret it," he admitted. No kidding...



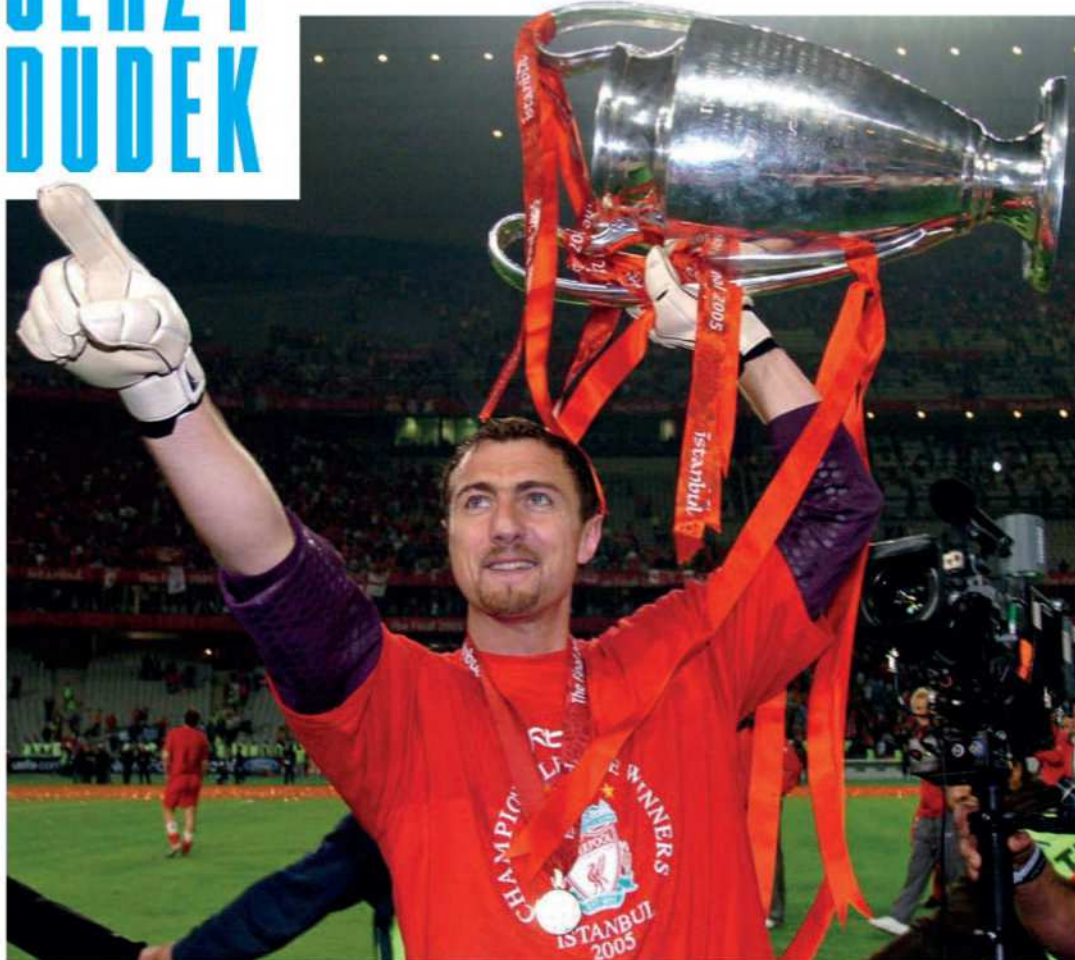
Man City vs Liverpool April 10
Champions League final second leg: who'll be the only English team in the semis?

Aston Villa vs Cardiff April 10
Cardiff sit second in the Championship table - Villa must secure victory to chase them down

Juventus vs Napoli April 22
The race for the Scudetto has been between these two heavyweights, and now they go head-to-head

GAMES THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

JERZY DUDEK



"THE 2005 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL WAS A LESSON OF FAITH, COURAGE AND NEVER GIVING UP - IT MADE US ALL IMMORTAL"

Feyenoord 2 Juventus 0

November 26, 1997 Champions League

"I'd just started my Feyenoord career so didn't have much experience, and we'd lost 5-1 away against a great Juventus team including Zinedine Zidane. No one gave us a chance but I redeemed myself in Rotterdam, making a few saves, and we won. It was a sign of great things to come for me in the Champions League."

France 1 Poland 0

February 23, 2000 Friendly

"One of my first games for Poland. We played the world champions, but only lost unluckily at the end from Zidane's free-kick and a ricochet. I had a good game and Arsene Wenger came up to me afterwards and congratulated me. After that Arsenal offered £10 million for me, but Feyenoord said no and six months later sold me to Liverpool. My career could have been very different!"

Milan 3 Liverpool 3 (2-3p)

May 25, 2005 Champions League Final

"Probably one of the most unbelievable games in the history of sport - a lesson of faith, courage and never giving up. In the first half they killed us, but then at half-time Liverpool fans started singing *You'll Never Walk Alone*. Steven Gerrard brought us together and said, 'Do you hear that, lads? Now let's go out there and give it our best.' And we did. That game in a sense made us all immortal."

Zaragoza 2 Real Madrid 2

May 11, 2008 La Liga

"I was backup for Iker Casillas at Real. We'd already won the league, so I got to play at Zaragoza. They had to win to stay up, but I hadn't played too often and didn't want to lose. In the second half I was in a trance and made some great saves. Their players were saying, 'What are you doing? Have mercy!' The Zaragoza fans are still upset about it..."

DO YOU REMEMBER?

TEARING OPEN A PACKET.
 FINDING A **SHINY**.
 THAT MISSING STICKER.
 LINING IT UP, STICKING IT IN.
 COMPLETING YOUR
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THAT FEELING WITH



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THIS REF'S GOT MOVES A Peruvian referee sent off Ayacucho's Victor Rossel for an 'obscene air-humping' goal celebration, then performed his own version of the dance to explain the decision

REQUIRED READING



Old Too Soon, Smart Too Late
Kieron Dyer
(Headline, £20)

Throughout much of this unflinchingly honest account, Dyer appears bewildered by much of what life threw at him.

The former Ipswich, Newcastle and West Ham midfielder was rarely in control of events: excesses off the pitch as well as underachievement on it epitomised the extravagant 'baby Bentley' generation of the Noughties.

There was the raft of injury issues that ended his England career at just 28, the fight with Newcastle colleague Lee Bowyer, a £120k Ferrari crash and alcohol-fuelled nights out in London and Aya Napa.

Dyer admits that he was often surly as a player, but the attitude which irked a host of bosses was shaped – at least in part – by the sexual abuse he'd suffered as a child.

Happily, he's now found fulfilment in his personal life, but it's hard not to read this without a sense of regret at what might have been.

ONE QUESTION QUIZ WHO'S THE WORLD CUP STAR?

Name the players blanked out from these iconic moments in the tournament's recent history



Answers 1) Giorgio Chiellini; 2) Neymar; Juan Zunigo; 3) Emmanuel Petit; Bixente Lizarazu; 4) Ahn Jung-Hwan; 5) Wayne Rooney; 6) Peter Crouch; Brent Sancho; 7) Josip Simunic; Graham Poll; 8) Xabi Alonso; Nigel de Jong; 9) Laurent Blanc; Fabien Barthez; 10) Paul Ince; Claudio Lopez; 11) David Beckham; David Seaman; Diego Simeone; Juan Sebastian Veron; Kim Milton Nielsen; Tony Adams; 11) Rivaldo; 12) Frank Lampard; Manuel Neuer



LONG WAY FOR A 0-0

Hull City midfielder Jackson Irvine is expected to make his World Cup finals debut for Australia on June 16 – and a relative is making an epic journey to see him in action.

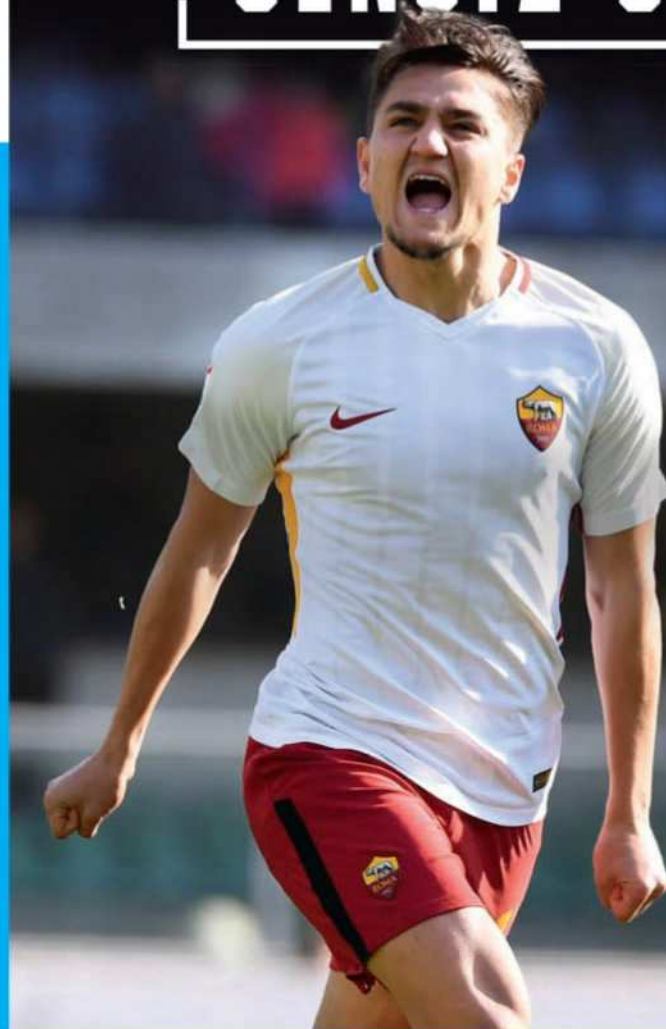
Russia is a pretty long way from Oz, so Irvine's cousin, Frazer McKinlay, is setting off already: flying to Tokyo with pals Bill Francis and Rory Pogson before cycling almost the entire 4,250 miles to Kazan for the Socceroots' opener against France. It's due to take two and a half months.

"We are all a bit nervous as we've never done a trip of this scale before, but we're going to play football matches with locals along the way," says Francis.

After a ferry from Osaka to Shanghai, they will cycle for 10 weeks. The journey will be broken up by matches in Beijing, Ulaanbaatar and Irkutsk. "We can't wait to get to that finish line in Kazan and watch Jackson play," adds Francis. No pressure Jackson, but after all of that, make sure you win...

The voyage is raising funds for Right To Play. Find more details at www.instagram.com/movingthegoalposts18

TALENTSPOTTER CENGIZ UNDER



COMPARED TO: His predecessor at Roma, Mo Salah – he has also been labelled 'the Turkish Dybala'. Will he be the next skilful left-footer to tear up Serie A?

LINKED WITH: Spurs, Manchester United and Manchester City were all interested last summer. Under's agent said City wanted to sign him and send him on loan to Freiburg, so he picked Roma instead. He is the latest project of Roma's former Sevilla director Monchi, who played a crucial role in the careers of Dani Alves, Sergio Ramos and Ivan Rakitic.

THE STORY SO FAR: Started out in Turkey's second tier with Altinordu before a move to top-flight Istanbul Basaksehir, becoming a sensation as they almost won the domestic title.

Roma recruited him for €13.4m and, after early language problems, Under scored six goals in six games from early February – becoming the youngest Turkish player to score in the Champions League when he netted against Shakhtar Donetsk.

THEY SAID: "He'll become a pillar of the new national team" – Turkey head coach Mircea Lucescu.

SOCIAL MEDIA: A selfie with the Roma icon Francesco Totti (above).

HE SAID: "Totti welcoming me to Roma was difficult to describe. He is a legend. I had no idea what he was saying, but it didn't matter."



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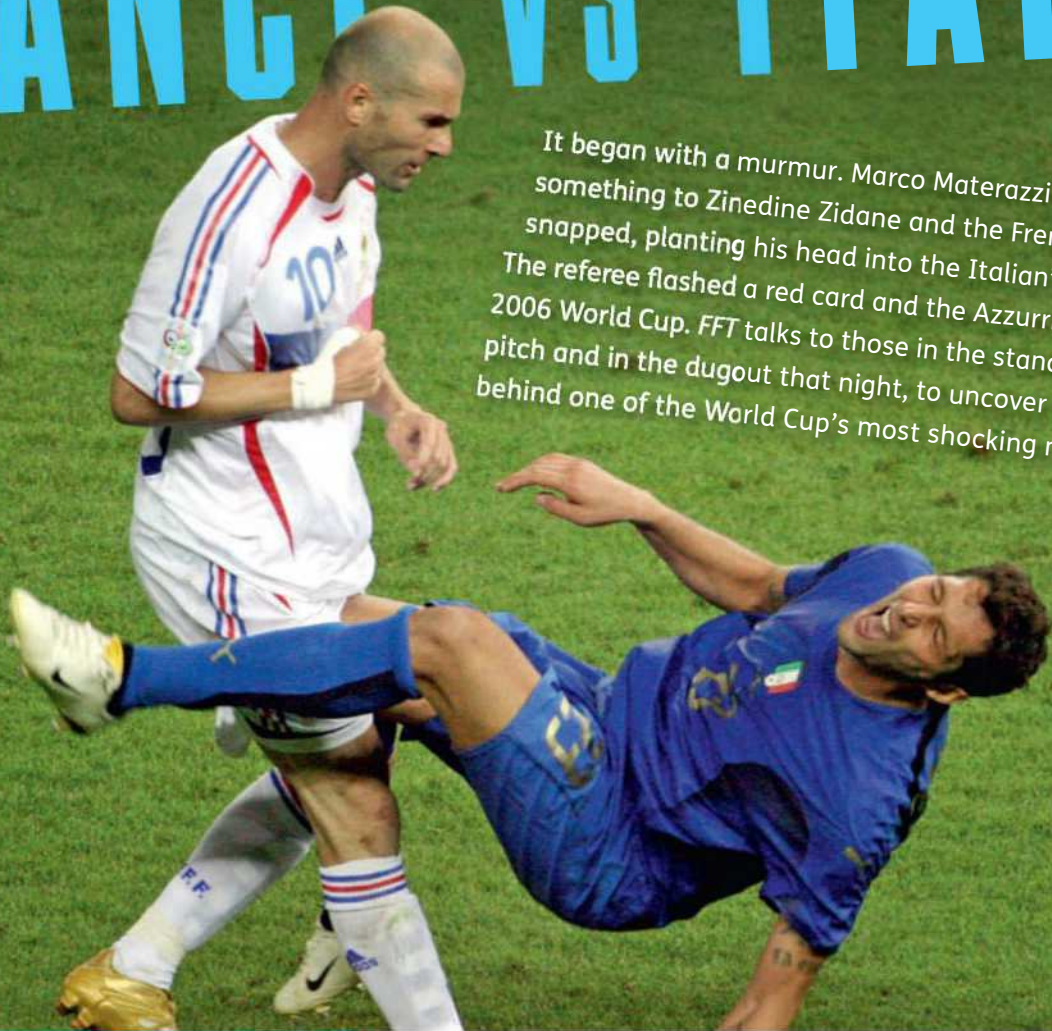
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FILMS

PRESENTS

THE WORLD CUP SERIES 2018

THE HEADBUTT FRANCE VS ITALY

It began with a murmur. Marco Materazzi uttered something to Zinedine Zidane and the Frenchman snapped, planting his head into the Italian's chest. The referee flashed a red card and the Azzurri won the 2006 World Cup. FFT talks to those in the stands, on the pitch and in the dugout that night, to uncover the truth behind one of the World Cup's most shocking moments



OUT ON APRIL 25

[YOUTUBE.COM/FOURFOURTWO](https://www.youtube.com/fourfourtwo)

ASK A SILLY QUESTION

CHRIS 'CHAFE' POWELL

Southend's boss is out to prove that nice guys don't finish last – and he'd happily thump Trump

Hi Chris. You're running the London Marathon for Prostate Cancer UK – will your competitive instinct kick in if some berk in a giant Mr Tickle outfit goes flying past you?

Ha. Yeah, I'm giving it a go. I've never done one before and I'll never do one again. I did a half-marathon recently and my body is still, er, adjusting. I'm hoping not too many people dressed up as rhinos sprint past me!

Remember to put Vaseline on your nipples. The chafing can be awful. It's not just the nipples I'm worried about with the chafing!

Indeed, Chris. Dreadful. Have you done any other kind of marathon? A TV marathon, maybe?

Yes. I'm as happy as Larry with a box set. *Game of Thrones*, *The Sopranos* – done in a matter of days. *The Wire* was my favourite. I think I did series two and three within five days. What a show. The bloke with the shotgun, Omar, was my favourite. Those days are gone now I'm a manager again.

Great taste. What about a sleeping marathon? Niall Quinn reckons he could do 14 hours straight.

In my early twenties, after playing on a Saturday and then having a night out, I think I surpassed Niall's record. Sunday was gone – it was ridiculous. Now I'm lucky to get five or six hours.

You're known as the nicest man in football – do you accept that?

It's not about 'nice' for me, but I was brought up to treat people the right way and I've got no time for anything else. I like people to be happy. So I'll take it. There are worse tags.

Are there any chinks, though? Have you ever kicked a cat?

I'd never kick a cat. I haven't got one. I've got a dog called Kenji. I'd never kick him either. He's a Eurasian – half German Spitz, half Keeshond.

Interview Nick Moore Illustration Bill McConkey



Exotic. Do you ever pretend not to see somebody on the street by looking at your phone?

No comment! Maybe the odd incident. **Have you ever sworn at an unsolicited telemarketing caller, Chris? They're just doing their job...**

I had a call from someone pretending to be David Moyes. I've met David, so I knew it wasn't him. He said, "This is David Moyes from West Ham United." He would never say that. This guy was enquiring about a player. I politely told him what he could do with his enquiry.

If you could have one free punch at anybody, who would you hit?

Donald Trump. Done. I just don't know what he is doing. Bang goes my invite to the White House.

Who do you think is the nicest person in football, then?

I think it would be tough to beat Chris Hughton. All Chrises are nice, see? He's a diamond of a man and would be the president of football's nice guy club. He is a very good manager, though. Don't underestimate nice managers.

We won't. Your name is an anagram of 'Chill Powers'. How would you rate your ability to chill?

I would say I have reasonable powers. It's important to de-stress when you're a manager. I'll switch off with a good book. I'm reading *Shoe Dog*, written by the man who created Nike.

You are also an anagram of 'Chisel prow!'. Have you ever roamed wildly with a tool in between unsuccessful bouts of DIY?

No. I'm too terrible at DIY to ever prow with a chisel. My wife is better than me, and if she can't do something, we get somebody in to help.

Finally, you've spent so much time in east London and Southend, you must be eating jellied eels on a daily basis?

I'm sorry, but I'm not. I can't eat any of that stuff. I don't mind the odd shrimp, but I won't go near a jellied eel. Sorry.

Thanks for chatting!

Cheers.

"I WOULD NEVER KICK A CAT. I'VE GOT A DOG CALLED KENJI, AND I WOULDN'T KICK HIM EITHER"

Sponsor Chris in the London Marathon at www.justgiving.com/Chris-Powell2018



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QUOTE OF THE MONTH "People are so judgmental when they hear the word warlock" – Independiente's head coach defends his decision to hire a sorcerer ahead of a key game



YOU WATT, MATE?

We've all probably said something to a referee we regret – but for Sanchez Watt, just giving his name was enough to earn a red card.

The ex-Arsenal frontman was in action for Hemel Hempstead when referee Dean Hulme attempted to book him for kicking the ball away.

"It was just mad," Watt laughs as he talks to FFT. "The ball went out of play for a corner, but the ref gave a goal-kick. As the ball came to me, I just touched it a bit.

"He came sprinting over towards me and asked for my name, so I replied, 'Watt'. I started to jog back into position and he asked me again, so I told him. He then shouted, 'I'll ask you one more time', and that's when he got out the red card."

Having mistakenly thought that Watt was saying "What?" in an act of dissent, the referee was soon informed of his faux pas and the red was changed to a yellow.

"He looked really embarrassed," says Watt. "He had to run over and tell the two managers, and you could see everyone was laughing their heads off!"

MASCOT OF THE MONTH

ERWIN

Schalke's all-action miner dug a hole for himself when he sent off a referee

When Schalke replaced Wuhli the Mole with a new mascot back in 1995, few could have foreseen the frolics that lay ahead. Into club folklore strolled the 2m-tall miner called Erwin, a tribute to their nickname, Die Knappen (The Miners). He arrived with size 57 feet, a big nose and a permanent gormless expression on his face, but no eyes.

Not that Erwin has ever let his lack of visual organs get in his way. Schalke post videos of his activities on YouTube, and he's been seen driving players around in a golf buggy (their insurance premiums must be through the roof), hard at work with an angle grinder,

riding a cow in Bavaria and waterskiing during Schalke's pre-season training camp in Austria. Inevitably, he lost his footing and fell into the lake – that suit must have taken months to dry.

But Erwin's finest hour came during the Revierderby against Borussia Dortmund last year, when he marched onto the field at full-time and spotted that the referee had dropped his red card, picking it up and brandishing it at him in disgust at a penalty decision. The official didn't see the funny side and there were calls for Erwin to be banned. In the end, the DFB decided to give him a warning. To be fair, it had been a miner infringement...



JOSE MOURINHO'S MONTH IN MUSIC

Seville
Pinback

God Damn
Avenged Sevenfold

Have We Lost?
Flyleaf

What Now
Rihanna

Campaign Speech
Eminem

Facts
Kanye West

European Football
Parry Gripp

Heritage
Opeth

We Are
Justin Bieber

Bad
Michael Jackson

So There
Ben Folds

It Wasn't Me
Shaggy

THE WORLD OF WEIRD BADGES

CHICKEN INN FC

The Zimbabwean side have incorporated their sponsor's logo into the club badge, even featuring the fast food firm's motto 'Luv Dat Chicken'. It's surely a matter of time until they're turned into a Nando's.

Chicken Inn FC

INTERVIEW

LANDON DONOVAN

The 36-year-old US legend talks Footy McFooty Face and coming out of retirement – once again!

You surprised everyone by resuming your career.

Why did you decide to join Mexican outfit Leon?

Because they reached out and expressed interest. I didn't really have any desire to go back to it, but sometimes there's an opportunity that is once in a lifetime, so I had to consider it. I'd followed the Mexican league for so many years and wanted to play there at some point. I took a few days, spoke to my wife and people at the club, and went for it.

You'd retired in 2016. Had you ever considered returning before Leon's interest?

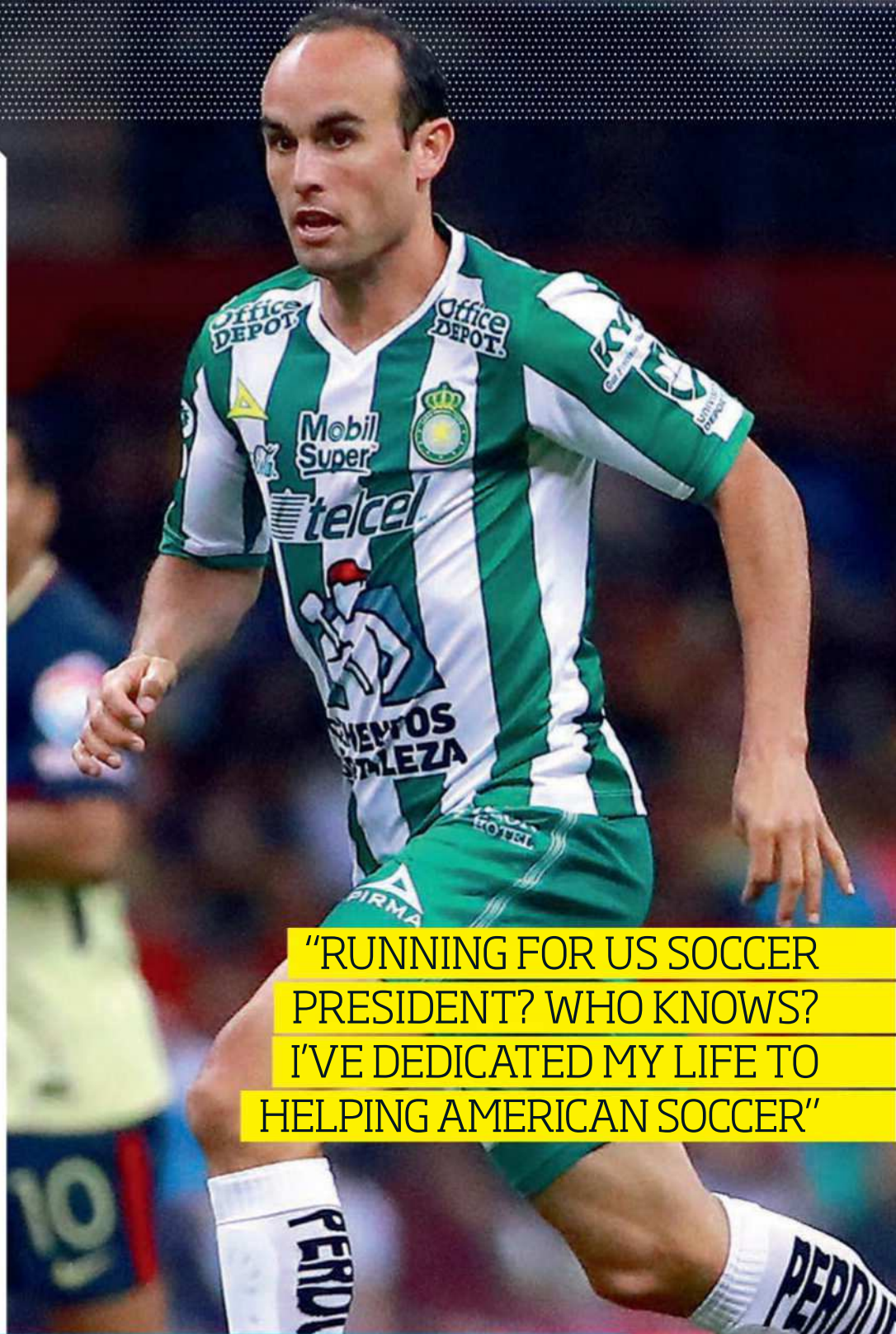
No, not at all. I was very happy at home with my family, but I always live with an open mind. I've learned to never say never again.

You have retired twice before, the first time at 32. Was it a mistake to retire so young?

No, I needed a break, and at that time I thought I was done for good. I wanted to travel and visit different parts of the world, and needed time off to do that – I'm happy I did. The first time I came back was completely different circumstances – it was with LA Galaxy, the team I had been with for years. They had some injuries so I wanted to help out for a few months.

What's it been like at Leon so far?

It's been fantastic, and very enjoyable every step of the way. Obviously, I've got to get back to top



"RUNNING FOR US SOCCER PRESIDENT? WHO KNOWS? I'VE DEDICATED MY LIFE TO HELPING AMERICAN SOCCER"

Interview: Martin Horasimowicz

3 CAREER HIGHLIGHTS



Star earns his stripes

Stars at the 2002 World Cup aged 20, scoring in USA's last-16 win over Mexico. His performances earn him the tournament's Best Young Player award.



LA Galactico

Bags the fourth of an incredible six career MLS Cups in 2011, as he nets the only goal for LA Galaxy in a 1-0 victory over Houston Dynamo.



Great day for USA

Grabs 91st-minute winner against Algeria to save the US from exiting 2010 World Cup in South Africa. Instead they bag top spot in the group for the time since 1930.

8 IS IT TOO LATE TO CHANGE OUR MINDS? Yannick Carrasco, Jose Fonte and Nicolas Gaitan had a debut to forget following their move to China: Dalian Yifang lost 8-0 to Shanghai SIPG

shape and be sharp again, but I am confident it's just a question of time. The first game for Leon brought a lot of excitement. The fans reacted very positively – now I just want to get to the best place I can as a footballer.

You scored some key goals against Mexico for the USA. Did you wonder what reception you might get when you first arrived?

[Laughs] We talked about it! It's part of history, and it will always come up with other Mexican players and the fans. We joked around a little bit and will continue to do so, but now we're all on the same page – it's all good!

Now you have returned, would you consider playing for the USA again?

Of course. It's my national team. I'm always ready to help, not only on the pitch, but not excluding that option. I'd be happy and honoured to do so.

How long will you play on for?

I've signed a one-year contract and we'll see how that goes. It depends how I feel and the way I contribute, but I could see myself playing on for longer than that.

Did you really consider running for US Soccer president after the team failed to qualify for the World Cup?

I gave it a short thought, but I soon realised that I wouldn't be qualified to do it at the moment. In the future, who knows? I've dedicated my life to making American soccer better and will continue to do so.

You have done some consultancy work for Swansea – how was that?

It was a great experience for me. As a club they have everything in place, but I wanted to contribute and help out in a few areas. I've got to say it was nerve-wracking watching their games and it brought some anxious moments, but I liked it.

You were involved in the potential San Diego MLS franchise. What did you think when it was announced that fans had voted to call the club Footy McFooty Face?!

That was such a big joke we played! [Laughs] I live in San Diego now and they used to have a team years ago. I went there at least once a month as a kid. It's very close to the border so there are Mexicans and Mexican foundations nearby, which is a great foundation for a fanbase. I'd love to see an MLS franchise there.



Oscar

vs Juventus, Champions League, 2012

Oscar will always remember his first start in a Chelsea shirt.

The Samba youngster had just moved to Europe from Internacional when Roberto Di Matteo threw him in for the Blues' opening Champions League group game against Juventus at Stamford Bridge. Chelsea were the European champions; Oscar a fresh-faced midfielder who had recently celebrated his 21st birthday.

"I was so, so happy when the manager let me know that I was in the starting line-up," Oscar tells *FFT*. "It was nothing more than a dream coming true. A Champions League night at home, against one of the biggest sides in Europe – I couldn't imagine things would become even better than that."

Juventus had gone 42 domestic games unbeaten, their XI including Gianluigi Buffon, Andrea Pirlo and the defensive triumvirate of Giorgio Chiellini, Andrea Barzagli and Leonardo Bonucci. Not

that Oscar was too concerned about that. He fired the west Londoners in front with a deflected shot, then smashed in a stunner only two minutes later. Collecting a pass from Ashley Cole with his back to goal, the Brazilian fended off Bonucci before a Bergkamp-esque first touch directed the ball around one side of Pirlo while he ran around the other. Oscar then swivelled and swerved his shot beyond Buffon from 25 yards.

"It's not just one of the greatest goals of my career, but perhaps it's also one of the most beautiful in Chelsea's history," he smiles, recalling the absolute belter that won him the Blues' Goal of the Season award.

"You don't deceive Andrea Pirlo every day and then beat Gigi Buffon with a great shot, do you?"

"These guys are my idols and I was lucky to do both things perfectly. The dribble was smart and the curling shot was unstoppable, even for the best keeper in the world. It was a few seasons ago now but Chelsea supporters still come up to me and say 'thank you' for that goal. I'll never forget it."



Words Felipe Rocha; Illustration German Aczel



DER KOLUMNIST

LOTHAR MATTHÄUS

FFT's columnist is undoubtedly a World Cup icon – he explains how he led Germany to victory in 1990 and why England probably would have lifted the trophy had they triumphed in that fateful penalty shootout

At December's World Cup draw, I met up with legends like Pele, Ronaldo and Diego Maradona – I see them often and it's always a pleasure. I met Gordon Banks for the first time, which made me very happy. It's especially nice to see the players from my era, like Diego and Gary Lineker. It's like a school reunion!

People often say that 2002 was the World Cup of Ronaldo and 1986 was the World Cup of Maradona. I'm proud when people say that 1990 was the World Cup of Lothar Matthäus – it's a nice compliment and it sounds good, but I didn't win that World Cup alone.

Sure, I scored some goals, I was the captain and maybe I was the face of the West Germany team. But I don't see myself as a hero. I didn't dominate like Maradona in 1986. We had a great team, not only in terms of quality, but mentality and team spirit.

The first match was very important. It was one of the best games I had for Germany. We beat Yugoslavia 4-1 and showed that, hey, if somebody wants to win the World Cup, first they have to beat us. It also gave us peace from the journalists, as they couldn't write s**t and disturb the atmosphere.

Our toughest game was England. It was one of the best games at that World Cup – both teams tried to attack. England didn't start the World Cup too well, but they'd been playing better and better. They had great players – Platt, Gascoigne, Lineker, Pearce, Shilton, Waddle. They had the quality to win that World Cup. They played very well against us, and I was a little bit surprised they played quite so well.

But we did a very good job, too. I remember Gascoigne's yellow card, because that was also my problem. I was on a yellow card as well – I had been booked against Holland. I thought, 'Please control yourself, Lothar – you've had a good World Cup, and if the team gets to the final, you will play in the final too'. Psychologically, it was a lot of stress. In one way, maybe it was good for Gascoigne that England didn't get to the final. Maybe he still wished his team-mates had got there, but you have to think about yourself, too – it was easier that he only missed the third place play-off.



“OUR TOUGHEST GAME WAS ENGLAND. AT THAT POINT, WE DIDN'T KNOW THEY COULDN'T TAKE PENALTIES. NOW WE KNOW, AFTER 28 YEARS!”

I wouldn't say I was happy the game went to penalties: I wanted to win in 90 minutes, or in extra time. At that point, we didn't know England couldn't take penalties. Now we know it, after 28 years! At the end of training every day we'd take penalties, not because we were preparing for England, but for fun – the loser had to bring the beer for their team-mates in the evening. There was always a bit of pressure on it. No one wanted to serve the beer!

I didn't feel any pressure during the shootout. I'd scored a penalty in the quarter-finals and felt so sure about myself. I never thought I could miss. When we won, I went to console Chris Waddle because I'd missed a penalty in the 1984 German Cup Final and knew how s**t it was. I felt for him.

The way England played against us, they would have gone into the final as favourites. I couldn't have been angry if they had beaten us. But if Argentina had beaten us in the final, that would have made me angry. They weren't interested in attacking.

When you look at the tournament from beginning to end, the best team won that World Cup. To get the cup in my hands was a special moment I'll never forget. There are so many things going on in your brain in the moments

after victory: the congratulations, the atmosphere, the stress of the past five weeks, the feeling. You're a World Cup winner.

I'm proud to hold the record of playing in five World Cups. When Italy didn't qualify this time, I was sad for them because I used to live there. Later, when people said to me, 'Buffon would have gone to six World Cups', I thought 'OK, maybe it wasn't bad for me!' But I'm sad for him, too. He's one of the best goalkeepers in the world.

I also have the record of playing in 25 World Cup matches – that's all down to the team, because we went to three finals and two quarter-finals. Actually I could have played 31 matches. I only played twice in 1982, when I was young. But what more do I want? I played in five World Cups, I won the World Cup, I have the record of 25 games. Everything is OK for me!

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★ STAR LETTER

A GRAND TOUR

As an avid Liverpool fan, I entered a competition to design the programme cover for the match with Manchester City. The pleasure I felt when my design won was really overwhelming. The prize was tickets to the match, but the club then gave me a tour of Anfield and Melwood, where I met Danny Ings [top]. It was a dream come true. It would be great to see all clubs make an effort with prizes that money can't buy, rather than a signed football.

Ben Marsden, aged 14



NO RUSH FOR SESSEGNON

After reading your fascinating article on Ryan Sessegnon [FFT 286], I really hope he stays at Fulham for at least another year before what seems his inevitable transfer to a big Premier League club. Biding his time might benefit a young footballer who would probably only be a squad player with one of the Premier League's top five teams anyway. Take Ross Barkley – he went to Chelsea to rejuvenate his somewhat fading career but wasn't playing much, even before his spell out with injury. I would like to see a promising player like Ryan at the top, but to get to that level as a young player, you have to show your worth.

Harvey Knott, via email

USE TV TO BAN PLAYERS

I think it's ludicrous in this day and age that there is currently nothing in place to retrospectively upgrade a yellow card to a red card, just because a referee has seen an incident but incorrectly ruled

on it. Take Joe Bennett's horror tackle on Leroy Sané in the FA Cup earlier this year, when Cardiff played Manchester City. At first it seemed nothing more than a yellow-card offence. However, on seeing the angle straight on, it was a definite red. With VAR looking set to be introduced even more in the coming years, it's mad that there is no way to upgrade a yellow when it's so obvious.

Mark Salkeld, via email

DON'T WASTE TALENT

Over the years, many players have not fulfilled their potential because of poor attitude or injuries. But what of those who aren't given a chance because of a manager's tactics? Marcus Rashford clearly has talent but doesn't always fit into a Jose Mourinho team. To succeed at Manchester United, will Rashford have to compromise like Joe Cole had to at Chelsea? Cole was a success, but did he really achieve his full potential?

James Viney, via email

TWEETS

@Paul_Gascoigne8

I'm so pleased with myself! I've just done a 23-piece jigsaw in three hours, as it says 3-5yrs on the box.

@LuisSuarez9

The gable of The Stadthuys in Melaka is believed to be the oldest surviving Dutch structure in the East. Next to it stands the Christ Church, built in 1753, making it the oldest Protestant church in Malaysia. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



@PogbesqueV3

Son scored on Mother's Day. Heung-Min Mom would be so proud.

@thehuwdavies

My one-year-old keeps shouting, "Baba!" at the television, no matter how many times I tell her that he's on loan at Schalke.

@benmendy23

I'm sorry but we are so good!

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WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND THIS MONTH?



FOCUS ON BOSSES

There must be more investment in young coaches, as we have few coming through after Eddie Howe.

Alan McKeown



IT'S ALL POLITICAL

Your Beitar Jerusalem vs Bnei Sakhnin article [FFT 286] highlighted how, in reality, football is more than just a simple game.

Katherine Batista



THE NEW SAINT

How will Stoke feel if Mark Hughes keeps Southampton up at their expense? They should have kept him.

Graham McGinn



A GERMAN GREAT

Can I just say how I'm enjoying the column by legend Lothar Matthaus. I like the Action Replay articles in FFT as well.

Colin Wickham



HUGHTON HEROICS

The job Chris Hughton has done at Brighton's been amazing, as they were bound for League One when he arrived.

Emma Sandman

★ **LAST MONTH'S SPINE LINE:** "114 for Parma, 3 for Italy" is the amount of appearances made by Gianluigi Buffon before Gianluigi Donnarumma was even born," says Sam Preston, entering via Twitter. You're absolutely right, Sam, and you've won a pair of Trusox! **Entering Spine Line via Twitter this month? Include #FFTSpineLine**

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WORLD CUP ICONS

From a one-armed Uruguayan to a German full-back's fitting farewell, via Hurst's hat-trick, Maradona's magic and Spain's dynamic duo, we honour the heroes and headline moments from all 20 World Cup finals



Words James Eastham, Alec Fenn, Uli Hesse, Martin Mazur, Steve Morgan, Andrew Murray, Gary Parkinson, Alison Ratcliffe, Paul Simpson





YOUR
**WORLD
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STARTS HERE

PELE

IN THE FIRST MUNDIAL TO BE SHOWN LIVE, HIS GENIUS WAS BEAMED AROUND THE WORLD

“Pele is obviously infantile. He lacks the necessary fighting spirit.”

That was Brazil team psychologist Joao Carvalhaes' stark verdict on the 17-year-old striker who, averaging a goal a game in his first full season at Santos, had forced his way onto the fringe of the Selecao's 1958 World Cup squad.

The verdict must have shaken Pele who was, in his own words, just a “skinny little black boy”, rigorously applying boiling hot towels to his injured right knee as he struggled to get fit. All his hopes now rested on coach Vicente Feola. Would he dare defy the psychologist?

Losing the 1950 World Cup on home soil to Uruguay had felt, Pele recalled, “like the end of a war, with Brazil the loser and many people dead”. The only way to erase the stain on Brazil's honour was to win the Jules Rimet Trophy in 1958, and the only way to do that – newly elected Brazilian FA president Joao Havelange determined – was to micromanage the squad.

Havelange's technical commission subjected players to a battery of physical and psychological tests. Almost every member had some intestinal parasites, and many suffered from long-term malnutrition, anemia or syphilis. More than 500 teeth were extracted from players, many of whom had never visited a dentist.

Carvalhaes then profiled Feola's squad. Convinced that fair-skinned players helped to make a team emotionally stable, he concluded that Garrincha, a tiny, mixed-race winger from the favelas, was mentally unfit to represent Brazil. Invited to draw the first thing that came to

mind, the player sketched a sphere with spokes emerging. Assuming this was the sun, assessors were nonplussed when Garrincha said he had drawn Botafogo team-mate Quarentinha.

As Brazil began their campaign with a 3-0 victory over Austria, Pele and Garrincha, two players who would epitomise Brazilian football's golden age, waited on the sidelines. A 0-0 draw against a well-drilled England left the Selecao needing to beat favourites USSR.

Depending on which story you believe, the players urged Feola to ignore Carvalhaes and select Garrincha and Pele, or Feola, confident that Pele had recovered, made the change himself. We do at least know that Feola told the psychologist: “You may be right. The thing is, you don't know anything about football.”

The match began with what French football legend Gabriel Hanot described as the “greatest three minutes in the history of football”. In the first minute, Garrincha bamboozled the Soviet defence before hitting the crossbar. In the second minute, Pele hit the crossbar too. In the third minute, Didi slid the ball past three opponents for Vava to shoot past Lev Yashin. It took 74 minutes for Vava to score again, but the outcome was never in doubt.

Brazil had found their winning formula. In Feola's variant of 4-2-4, Pele operated just behind centre-forward Vava, while Mario Zagallo was trusted to push forward or track back into midfield as required.

Despite being the youngest player to appear in a World Cup – and setting up Vava's second goal – Pele's performance was affected by his increasingly sore knee. He departed the celebratory dinner early, vowing to do better in the quarter-final.

In a tight game against Wales, Pele received the ball with his back to goal, chested it onto his right foot and prodded it into the corner. It was, he said, “perhaps the most unforgettable goal of my career”.

In the semi-final against France, Pele played with the audacity of a schoolboy and fighting spirit of a veteran. After Just Fontaine had equalised for France, Brazil's No.10 grabbed the ball, ran back to the centre circle and shouted at his team-mates, “Let's get started.” He scored a second half hat-trick that sealed a 5-2 victory.

The 1958 Mundial was the first to be screened live on television, so Pele's genius was beamed around the world. After his second goal in the 90th minute of the final – another 5-2 win, against Sweden – he blacked out and team-mates had to revive him. Brazil had won their first World Cup. Pele wept with joy – and disbelief. Seven years before, he'd stolen peanuts from a warehouse in a desperate, unsuccessful attempt to swap them for football boots.

HECTOR CASTRO 1930



When Uruguay striker Peregrino Anselmo was taken ill before the first World Cup final, the hosts did not worry. They just selected their one-armed forward Hector Castro to play instead.

El Manco Divino (The One-Armed God) headed an 89th-minute goal in Montevideo to clinch a 4-2 win against Argentina.

It was quite the tournament for Castro, who also scored Uruguay's first World Cup goal, against Peru, and reportedly snubbed a massive bribe before the final that secured his place in history.

Castro was a legendary figure in Uruguay. Aged 13, he accidentally amputated his right forearm while using an electric saw to chop some

wood, and would regularly use his stump to whack any defender who got in his way when challenging for a header.

A notorious womaniser, gambler and chain-smoker, Castro bagged 1928 Olympic gold with Uruguay in Amsterdam, and went on to lift eight league titles as Nacional as player and coach.



LUIS MONTI 1934



Argentina were winning 2-1 and cruising at half-time of the 1930 World Cup Final, yet their totemic midfielder Luis Monti was in tears.

"If you win," two shady-looking characters had told him as he left the pitch, "we will kill your mother and your sister."

Monti faded during the second half – some say because of a thigh

injury, not the death threats – and Uruguay recovered to triumph 4-2. Four years on, as a Juventus player who had been granted immediate Italian citizenship, Monti lined up for the Azzurri in the final against Czechoslovakia.

The hosts' 2-1 win brought Monti untold fame. The only footballer to appear in two World Cup finals for

different nations said: "After that match, by the decision of Il Duce [Mussolini], we were all allowed to ask for whatever we wanted: cars, houses, money, jewels, women..."

He later recalled of his differing World Cup final experiences: "In Uruguay they'd have killed me if we won, and in Italy they'd have killed me if I lost."



1966

HURST

“No one could imagine Jimmy Greaves not playing.” So wrote Geoff Hurst of his friend and fellow England striker, reflecting on the selection dilemma facing Alf Ramsey ahead of the 1966 World Cup Final. “No one admired him more than I did. But to be honest, I wasn’t going around saying, ‘Poor Jimmy’. I was thinking to myself, ‘Thank God I’ve got this chance.’”

The inescapable truth – one which lends sport such captivating poignancy – is that for every winner there is a loser; every fairytale strut on the grand stage masks a what-might-have-been weep in the wings. Has any footballer grabbed an opportunity with greater aplomb than Hurst, the man whose Wembley hat-trick in the final against West Germany made good on Ramsey’s winning pledge?

Hurst’s entrance, for the quarter-final showdown with Argentina, was only his sixth international appearance.

He had watched the group stage from the bench before replacing the stricken Greaves, injured in the third game, against France.

Although he had been banging in the goals freely at club level – inspiring West Ham United to FA Cup and Cup Winners’ Cup success in the previous two campaigns – the 24-year-old was by no means a shoo-in to keep his place, even after scoring the only goal in the ill-tempered last-eight tie with Argentina.

But the goal that propelled England to a semi-final meeting with Eusebio’s Portugal changed everything in the ever-whirring cogs of Ramsey’s perception.

Straight off the Hammers’ Chadwell Heath training ground, Martin Peters’ perfectly weighted cross was met at the near post by Hurst’s glancing header. The image is beautifully frozen on camera, Hurst’s gaze tracing the ball’s path as it arcs over the Argentine goalkeeper. “I knew where it would go,” he recalled. “I was running to meet it before the defence could react.”

GIUSEPPE MEAZZA 1938



“Win or die!” As motivational telegrams go, it’s quite a good one. Significantly, Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini’s famous note before the 1938 World Cup Final against Hungary was addressed to Italy’s Giuseppe Meazza.

Il Duce held the Azzurri captain in such high regard that he would turn a blind eye to his notorious

womanising. The Inter icon once said: “I have two loves: my mother and my goals. There’s no room for a third.”

A versatile attacker well known for his dipping *foglia morta* (dead leaf) shot, Meazza dropped deep during the 1938 finals to load the bullets for Silvio Piola. The Lazio frontman bludgeoned five goals

in France to secure a second title under coach Vittorio Pozzo.

Meazza’s sole tournament goal was no less memorable, after the elastic on his shorts snapped as he prepared to take a semi-final penalty against Brazil.

He held them up with one hand, with keeper Walter still chuckling as the ball hit the net.



Ironically, given the handwringing that had followed England's 6-3 Wembley savaging by Hungary 13 years earlier, this was a move the innovative West Ham gaffer – and future Three Lions manager – Ron Greenwood had half-inched off the Mighty Magyars. And it was also Greenwood who'd painstakingly converted Hurst from a left-half into the muscular, combative striker who, despite his relative greenhorn status, had become a serious contender for Greaves' starting place alongside Roger Hunt. Full-back George Cohen noted that Hurst was the perfect foil for Hunt.

"[Roger] was a terrific, marvellous player, and terribly brave in those days when defenders didn't think twice about kicking forwards from behind," he explained. "When Geoff came in it worked beautifully – they worked off each other. Two strong boys, bloody effective."

Ramsey had options: revert to the 4-3-3 with which he had begun the tournament, or proceed with the 4-4-2 'wingless wonders': Hurst and Hunt in front of Alan Ball and Peters, right and left respectively, with Nobby Stiles to sit and snarl in front of the backline and Bobby Charlton as the playmaker. Hurst duly retained his place for the 2-1 semi-final victory over Portugal – then the tournament favourites – and put in another solid performance, laying the ball off for Bobby Charlton's Howitzer second.

With Greaves restored to full health, the sweat was on as the clock ticked round to the eve of the game. "I remember wondering for two or three days whether I would be picked for the final," Hurst wrote in *1966 and All That*. "Jimmy was fit again, and having scored 43 goals in 54 matches for England had every right to expect a recall. I think most of my most team-mates that day thought I was the one most likely to be left out."

The rest, as we know, is history. Hurst got the nod ahead of Greaves. With England behind after 12 minutes, another West Ham move led

"I JUST WANTED TO GET THROUGH THE 90 MINUTES WITHOUT EMBARRASSING MYSELF"

to the equaliser. Captain Bobby Moore, instinctively knowing where his club-mate would be, took a quick free-kick, finding Hurst with pinpoint accuracy to nod past Hans Tilkowski. With Germany playing only one genuine central defender – full-back Horst-Dieter Hottges had to mark Hurst – the forward was certain that his and Hunt's physicality would cause plenty of problems.

Not only that, his intuitive awareness and movement – picked out by Jimmy Hill on *Match of the Day* two years earlier using a 15-minute montage of decoy runs, lay-offs and sprints – were a constant menace.

Hurst's father-in-law had told him before the game he would score a hat-trick. "Ridiculous, I thought," wrote the striker. "I'd scored two goals in my previous seven England games. A single goal would be an achievement but, essentially, I wanted to get through the 90 minutes without embarrassing myself. How different it turned out to be."

Hurst later recalled his first training session, at which Ramsey took him aside and said, "I've got no use for blushing violets – I've picked you for what I know you can do. It's now up to you."

Hurst completed his hat-trick in extra time, via that infamous shot off the underside of the bar and the smack-it-anywhere screamer as Kenneth Wolstenholme delivered English football's most fabled line of commentary. For a player who thought his World Cup was 'all over' before it had even begun, Hurst did pretty well.

RODOLFO VARELA 1950



It's impossible to think of Uruguay winning the 1950 World Cup without the broad shoulders of captain Rodolfo Varela, who simply refused to accept defeat.

On the morning of the final – the last group match, which happened to be the deciding fixture – against hosts Brazil,

Varela went to the hotel lobby for a newspaper. "These are the world champions," proclaimed the front page of *O Mundo*, above a shot of La Celeste's opponents.

Varela purchased all the copies, took them upstairs and ordered every player to urinate on them.

When Uruguay went 1-0 down, still Varela didn't flinch. Claiming

a non-existent offside – and asking for a translator to remonstrate with the officials – he silenced a baffled 200,000 fans in the Maracana as the game restarted, then shouted, "Now we're going to win!"

And win they did, Juan Schiaffino and Alcides Ghiggia inflicting a loss from which Brazilian football is still to recover – the Maracanazo.



FRITZ WALTER 1954



Olympic champions Hungary were unbeaten in 31 games before the 1954 World Cup Final, and when the Magical Magyars quickly went 2-0 up, as a storm raged, there was surely only one winner.

The more it rained, however, the better West Germany captain Fritz Walter played. So legendary was the 33-year-old's ability on sodden

pitches, in revolutionary screw-in studded boots, that Germans still call rainy conditions "Fritz Walter weather" today.

Inspired by their skipper, West Germany were soon level, before Helmut Rahn sealed the Miracle of Bern in the 84th minute.

That Fritz was playing at all was no less a miracle. The forward only

escaped the Gulag when a guard told Soviet forces liberating his Ukrainian prisoner-of-war camp at the end of the Second World War that he was from Saarland, not Germany, because the officer was a football fan who'd clocked Kaiserslautern's greatest player.

And that guard's nationality? Hungarian...

CRUYFF & BECKENBAUER

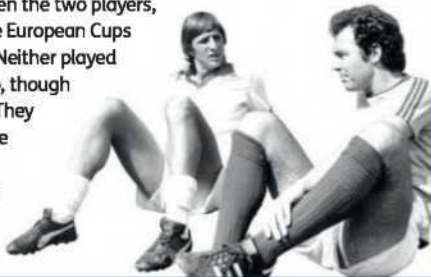
Of all the scenarios that could unfold in Russia later this summer, among the less likely is Argentina and Portugal meeting in the final. Not just because neither side are among the hot favourites, but also because it would mean Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi – the two best players of their generation – facing off for the game’s biggest trophy. And that almost never happens.

You could perhaps argue it did in 1998, when Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldo went toe-to-toe in the Stade de France showpiece, though the Frenchman blossomed into true world class only in the wake of that match. So you’d say the exception that proves the rule was the 1974 final – when the Kaiser met the King.

That Franz Beckenbauer and Johan Cruyff came up against each other on the grandest of all stages becomes even more improbable when you consider a surprising fact: these two giants of the game faced each other in only four competitive matches. One year before the World Cup final, they captained their sides in the first leg of the European Cup quarter-final between Ajax and Bayern Munich (Cruyff missed the return match through injury). And then there were two NASL clashes years later, in 1979 and ’80, which pitted Beckenbauer’s New York Cosmos team against Los Angeles Aztecs and Washington Diplomats sides starring the iconic Dutchman. That’s it.

Perhaps strangest of all is this: although West Germany’s victory in 1974 led to a simmering resentment in the Netherlands and was the starting point for one of the fiercest rivalries in world football, the two men who led these teams not only respected each other before and after that fateful day in Munich, but became good friends. When the Dutchman passed away in March 2016, Beckenbauer tweeted: “I am shocked – Johan Cruyff is dead. He was not only a very good friend, but also a brother to me.”

‘Brother’ is not a far-fetched word when you analyse the similarities between the two players, starting with the three European Cups they won on the trot. Neither played in the 1978 World Cup, though they were still active. They both left Europe for the United States before finishing their careers with their hometown



club’s arch rivals (Cruyff at Feyenoord and Beckenbauer at Hamburg). And they even went into coaching within just a few months of each other, in 1984-85.

Since neither man had bothered to acquire coaching badges, new titles were invented for them – Cruyff became technical director at Ajax, while Beckenbauer was the national side’s ‘team leader’. Their managerial careers were successful, but not especially long. Both last coached a club side in 1996 before concentrating on roles that can best be described as football’s guardians and admonishers.

Cruyff was known (and feared) for his scathing public comments, though his German counterpart wasn’t too far behind. In June 2000, Beckenbauer even mocked the German national team – who came bottom of their group at that summer’s European Championship – with an expression that has entered the game’s parlance as a term for lumbering play – “Rumpelfussball”.

The King and the Kaiser did in fact twice appear on the same team. Cruyff agreed to join the Cosmos once he left Barcelona and played two friendlies alongside Beckenbauer, against the World All-Stars in August 1978, and against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge a month later. In the end, he moved to Los Angeles because the NASL did not want all the big names in New York.

On Beckenbauer’s 70th birthday in 2015, Cruyff told the German magazine *11Freunde*: “I can’t say exactly when we became friends. But even when we were playing, we instinctively had a great respect for each other and that organically grew into a friendship. We often saw each other, because I always went skiing in Kitzbuhel, where he was living. We did sport together and, in the evenings, sat together. Over the years, the connection became stronger and stronger.”

Apart from maybe Pele and Diego Maradona, nobody could begin to imagine what it’s like to be Johan Cruyff or Franz Beckenbauer. As Cruyff put it: “We both know that life at the top is lonely.”

“EVEN AS PLAYERS, WE INSTINCTIVELY HAD GREAT RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER AND THAT ORGANICALLY GREW INTO A FRIENDSHIP”

FERENC PUSKAS 1954



Ferenc Puskas was the best player in the world in 1954, that summer’s World Cup his expected consecration.

He began the tournament in Switzerland with three goals in two group-stage wins against South Korea (9-0) and West Germany (8-3). In the latter, however, a hack from Werner

Liebrich with the score at 5-1 left the Galloping Major in a heap and nursing an ankle fracture.

Puskas sat out the quarter-final and semi-final against Brazil and Uruguay respectively, but insisted on his inclusion for the showpiece with a revenge-seeking Germany.

Barely half-fit, Ferenc opened the scoring after six minutes but could

only hobble around as the Mighty Magyars got stuck in the Bern mud.

Nevertheless, he thought he had equalised with the last kick of the game, but Welsh linesman Sandy Griffiths flagged for offside.

“I will never forgive him for that,” Puskas said in his autobiography. “We hung our heads. What could we do? We couldn’t beat him up.”

KEMPES

Playing a World Cup finals on home soil is generally seen as an advantage, but for some players it's proved more of a burden.

The seemingly ever-relaxed and affable Mario Kempes may not have given the impression he was feeling the pressure of being the poster boy for Argentina in 1978 – he finished the tournament as top goalscorer and with a winners' medal round his neck – but, as he confesses, the reality was rather different.

"The problem was not the pressure of the fans' expectations, but the pressure we put on ourselves – we felt that we *had* to win," he recalled. "After we lost to Italy in the first group stage at Estadio Monumental, it seemed that the expectations boiled over. We were shocked. We had to leave Buenos Aires, but in the end that proved to be a very good thing, because Rosario is one of the places where football is felt more intensely."

To help quell the nerves, Kempes admits he was smoking. "Not many, maybe 10-12 cigarettes per day. Many of us did. We would



JUST FONTAINE 1958



Sometimes, the stars align at a World Cup. Everything clicks. Right place, right time.

Just Fontaine appeared in only one finals tournament. In 1958 the France forward played in six matches and scored a scarcely credible 13 goals. And he did it all wearing boots borrowed off his team-mate, Stephane Bruy.

"My big advantage was that I'd had a knee operation in December 1957 and came back in February," Fontaine later said. "That gave me a little winter break which meant that I was fresh."

Both Fontaine and Reim's Rene Bliard were told they'd be starting for Les Bleus, but the latter's ankle injury gave the former his chance.

Just grabbed it, firing a hat-trick in a win over Paraguay, two more against Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland, one against Scotland and one in the semi-final loss to Brazil.

He needed a brace against West Germany in the third-place match to tie Sandor Kocsis' record haul of 11. He hit four...

Best of luck trying to beat that.

share, as a superstition, one cigarette with [third goalkeeper] Hector Baley at the back of the team bus on the way to the stadium.”

The then 23-year-old striker was plying his trade at Valencia at the time, making him the only member of the Albiceleste squad to play his club football overseas – and this was more than just a curiosity. Kempes was the last player to escape the transfer lockdown imposed by Argentina’s military junta at the request of national team coach Cesar Luis Menotti, who wanted to keep his squad close in the run-up to the tournament. From September 1, 1976, players under the age of 28 could not be transferred away without his authorisation. It was El Matador’s exit to Spain that prompted this law.

Therefore, in the eyes of the Argentine public, Kempes was almost obliged to be the saviour, given it was he who played in the stronger Spanish league week in, week out.

“I started every match knowing that this could be my day,” he said. “It’s like in life; you can have a bad business idea, but then you have a new one the next day and you just go for it. In one game I’d have defenders completely wiping me out, but three days later I’d have my chance to get revenge. What had happened a few days earlier would never affect my confidence.”

The tension from a de facto government that needed a World Cup victory to extend its cruel reign, which included torturing and killing citizens, will always be an issue players are reticent to discuss openly. ‘We didn’t know anything, we were locked down, we were the last to know about the disappeared,’ is the usual formulaic response.

Rumours that Argentina’s second-round win over Peru was fixed persist to this day, but even giving their South American rivals a 6-0 shellacking and securing their place in the final was not enough to adequately relax the host nation’s squad.

In fact, a small group found an unlikely way to unwind on the eve of the biggest match of their lives. “Not many people know this, but before the final, Hector Baley wanted to go fishing,” said El Matador. “I didn’t even like fishing, but he still sent me to ask Menotti for his permission. [Midfielder] Americo Gallego also came with us.

“In the end, it was a good way to lower the anxiety,” continued the striker. “We left in the middle of the night. Baley had managed to get some rods and pastries.”

The trio found an abandoned ship in the Parana River from where they fished for a couple of hours. “Nobody saw us,” said Kempes. “It was very cold because it was 5am in the middle of winter.

“We went back to the training camp with a handful of fish that we passed on to the cook. Our table had a special menu before the final. All the other players couldn’t believe it. It’s not something that could have happened today!”

It’s certainly hard to imagine Lionel Messi or Sergio Aguero nipping away from Argentina’s Russian base this summer for a bit of angling, that’s for sure.

Despite the unexpected seafood on offer, the tension among the players on the morning of the final was so great that, in his pre-final briefing, Menotti decided to broach the possibility of his side losing in an attempt to ease the self-imposed pressure.

AS EL MATADOR PLAYED IN SPAIN HE WAS, IN THE EYES OF THE ARGENTINE PUBLIC, ALMOST OBLIGED TO BE THE SAVIOUR

“It was the shortest talk ever,” said Kempes. “He said, ‘Whatever happens today, you have won the title for me. You’re all champions. Thank you’.

“We were all fired up after that. Whatever happens? After all this effort? No, we will win.”

After beating the Netherlands 3-1 the final, and scoring two more goals, Kempes returned to his hometown of Cordoba for a little rest and relaxation. His method? Fishing, of course.



GARRINCHA 1962



One day, Manuel Francisco dos Santos came home from school cradling a small bird.

“It’s just like you,” said his sister of a younger brother whose spine was so deformed and legs so bent that doctors said he would never walk unaided. “It flies around a lot but it’s no good for anything – it’s a Garrincha [little bird].”

She could not have been more wrong. Garrincha became Brazil’s “joy of the people”, beloved in his homeland more than Pele. This was the most flawed of geniuses, an alcoholic who reportedly lost his virginity to a goat.

Put a football at Garrincha’s feet, though, and ‘The Angel with Bent Legs’ entranced everyone.

Crucially, the Little Bird soared when his nation needed him the most. With Pele injured after the second game of the 1962 World Cup, Garrincha’s four strikes and incredible wing play was vital to Brazil defending their crown.

Sportswriter Eduardo Galeano wrote: “In the history of football, no one made more people happy.”

SOCRATES

Vincent van Gogh sold one painting in his lifetime. A few months after Belgian art collector Anna Boch paid 400 francs (about £700) for *The Red Vineyards near Arles*, Van Gogh shot himself in the chest and died a penniless alcoholic with only one ear. His impressionist masterpieces, however, would go on to fetch millions and inspired Picasso, Matisse and Munch to re-imagine what art would mean in the 20th century.

Chain-smoking, beer-loving Socrates never went beyond the last eight of a World Cup. The Brazil team he captained at Spain 82 did not even make it out of the second group stage after defeat to the Italians. Yet the indelible image of that finals is a rangy playmaker wearing impossibly tiny shorts, whose effortless grace, close control and vision were ethereal.

Socrates had three childhood heroes, none of them footballers. Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and John Lennon - revolutionaries who wanted to change the world. Magrao (the Big Skinny) took such iconoclasm and placed it at football's heart. Imagine Keith Richards obsessed with Hungary's Magical Magyars instead of Chuck Berry.

"I smoke, I drink, I think," is hardly the average football player's philosophy, but there was nothing average about Socrates, who became a left-wing agitator hell-bent on bringing democracy to a country ruled by military dictatorship.

The eldest son of a tax inspector, he turned professional only in 1974, aged 20, after finishing a medical degree, applying the same effort to his studies as he did on a pitch: almost none. Outrageous natural talent trumped effort.

"Anyone who runs doesn't think," he once said. "And anyone who thinks doesn't run."

The primary reason he chose football over medicine was to play at the World Cup. For the only time in his life, he gave up the fags and cut back on the booze that would ultimately take his life at the tragically early age of 57. Having put himself on a strict five-month fitness plan to turn fat into muscle, he shed nearly two stone.

The first day the squad assembled, Socrates' team-mates could not believe what they saw. He was the quickest, strongest and had the hardest shot of the lot.

"What's this? Magrao at the front of the group doing laps!" Zico shouted, to the sound of laughter from behind. "What's going on?"

"He always talked about how hard it was to look after himself and stay in shape," Zico said years later. "He trained and he set a really strong example. At that World Cup he was focused on being in top form. He proved that there was an athlete inside him."

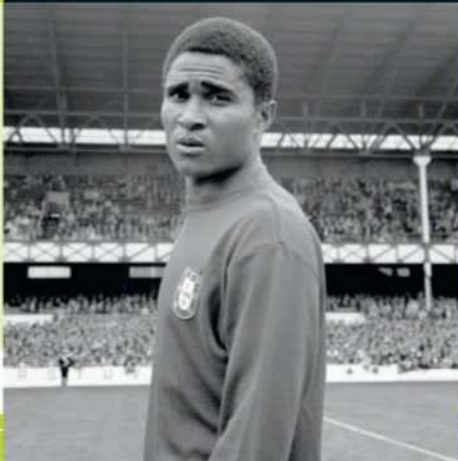
This was also the original incarnation of *jogo bonito*, in an almost position-less system which Socrates had dubbed "organised chaos", to clip the wings of Dutch Total Football.

"Everyone has the freedom to play how they wish as long as they perform certain basic functions," the skipper said shortly before the finals. "As amazing as that might seem, it works. I play on the wing, I'm a centre-forward, a sweeper, holding midfielder - it depends on how the game is going.

"Even if we don't win the title, we will have altered the traditional schemes of 4-2-4 and 4-3-3 and whatever else [the Netherlands] have invented."

It did not start well. With 15 minutes left of Brazil's opening game against the USSR, they were 1-0 down. The ball fell to Socrates on the edge of the area - "a wall of red shirts ready to spill their own blood

EUSEBIO 1966



Albert Einstein, Barack Obama, Vera Duckworth - you've got to be a big deal to be immortalised in wax at Madame Tussauds.

In 1966, there were few more famous footballers in Britain than a former truant, who had skipped school in Mozambique to play football barefoot with spheres made of stuffed socks.

Eusebio had already lifted the European Cup with Benfica, and was an all-in-one centre-forward before such a thing existed.

His nine goals in England that summer seemingly came from another galaxy. Three-nil down to North Korea in the last eight, the Black Pearl scored four in 32 minutes in a 5-3 comeback.

The 2-1 defeat to hosts England in the semi-finals was called *Jogo das Lagrimas*, Game of Tears, with Eusebio inconsolable at full-time. Portugal wouldn't play in another World Cup knockout clash for four decades, in 2006.

"For me, he'll always be the best player of all time," said the great Alfredo Di Stefano.

to stop me". He feinted to shoot, turned twice more and unleashed a ferocious shot into the top corner.

"And the scream came: 'Goooooal,'" he later said. "No, not a goal. An endless orgasm."

Socrates was no less brilliant against Scotland, New Zealand and Argentina. Then came Italy, a semi-final place on the line. For the third time in five matches, Brazil went behind, Socrates' 12th-minute equaliser a goal so perfect in its intricacy of passes with Zico it deserves its own ballet. Yet Brazil lost 3-2. Looking back, the Selecao's defensive slackness – two of the Azzurri's goals came from individual errors – remains jaw-dropping.

It was the day many believe football lost its soul. The day the immovable object killed the irresistible force – dead.

Paolo Rossi, who scored a hat-trick in Barcelona that day, was the 'killer' Brazil did not possess. Yet nor did they want him.

"To win is not the most important thing," stated Socrates. "Football's an art and should be showing creativity. If Vincent van Gogh and Edgar Degas had known when they were doing their work the level of recognition that they were going to have, they would not have done them the same. You have to enjoy doing the art and not think, 'Will I win?'"

The words of a serial loser. Just like that painter with one ear.



**"I SMOKE, I DRINK,
I THINK... ANYONE WHO RUNS
DOESN'T THINK, AND ANYONE
WHO THINKS DOESN'T RUN"**

BOBBY MOORE 1966



"Uncapped, pedestrian, not up to much in the air, suspect stamina," wrote Ken Jones in the *Daily Mirror* while questioning the inclusion of a 21-year-old West Ham defender in England's 1962 World Cup squad.

Four summers later, Bobby Moore held the Jules Rimet Trophy aloft – his country's only national honour – as captain.

Bobby Charlton was England's Ballon d'Or-winning best player in '66 and Geoff Hurst's hat-trick provided the most memorable moment, but Bobby Moore was the team's beating heart.

"My captain, my leader, my right-hand man," said manager Alf Ramsey. "A cool, calculating footballer I'd trust with my life."

Ramsey relied on his captain's ability. England reached the last four on defensive solidity, with Eusebio's goal the first they had leaked in more than 700 minutes.

"There should be a law against him," Celtic and Scotland gaffer Jock Stein once remarked, "as he can see what's going to happen 20 minutes before everyone else."



GERD MULLER 1970



“And what,” enquired Bayern Munich coach Tschik Cajkovski when presented with his new recruit in 1964, “am I supposed to do with this weightlifter?”

Short, squat and with tree trunks for thighs, 19-year-old Gerd Müller didn't have a typical footballer's build. Nor did he particularly have the skill set.

The only thing Müller could do on a football pitch was score goals. He fired 564 for Bayern and a scarcely credible 68 in 62 matches for West Germany, including 10 at the 1970 World Cup to bag the Golden Boot.

Only Poul Nielsen (52 goals in 38 games for Denmark from 1910-25) has a better international scoring rate than Müller's 1.10 per game.

His midair volley in the 1970 win over England was typical of Müller's instinct, sensing indecision from the Three Lions' stand-in shot-stopper Peter Bonetti. Right place and right time. Always.

“That tournament was even more important for me than 1974,” the striker later recalled.

Der Bomber had arrived.

MARADONA

In Argentina, 'Maradona' is no longer a surname. It's a quality, an adjective. Maradonear has also become a verb: on the pitch, it means to dribble mazily past opponents; in wider life, it means to have a knack for dodging whatever obstacles cross your path.

Naturally, these neologisms took root after Mexico 86. Before the World Cup he single-handedly secured for Argentina, those terms would not have made much sense to the man on the street.

True, Diego had made his debut for first club Argentinos Juniors nearly 10 years earlier, in October 1976, but when you think about Maradona the icon and folk hero, his displays for La Albiceleste at the 1986 World Cup were the big bang.

His reputation as a wonderkid had long preceded him, but in the first decade of his professional career, Maradona managed to win only one league title: in 1981 with Boca Juniors, where he was not even the best player on the team. In Spain, with Barcelona, he had been able to celebrate only domestic cup glory, too little for a man of his quality. With Argentina he'd lifted the 1979 Under-20 World Cup in Japan, but had been overlooked for the 1978 World Cup and was more of an embarrassment than a hero at the 1982 finals in Spain. He received a red card in Argentina's final match against Brazil following a lacklustre tournament in which his only highlight was a brace against Hungary.

When Carlos Bilardo was appointed Argentina manager in 1983, one of his first decisions was to name Maradona as captain. This quickly aroused the attention of his critics, many of whom thought Diego would be unable to handle the pressure of being the team's leader, unlike the existing "great captain" Daniel Passarella. It certainly wouldn't be the last time that Bilardo and Maradona went into battle alongside one another.

Perhaps surprisingly, it wasn't Diego who provided the key moment for Argentina in a difficult qualifying campaign, but rather Ricardo Gareca. The striker, who caused uproar in his homeland in 1985 by moving from Boca Juniors to

continually defending his star pupil while the international media continued to overlook him.

When the World Cup started, Maradona channelled the criticisms and lack of faith into a deadly mix of rage and positive energy.

Against South Korea in the group stage and Uruguay in the last 16, Diego suffered man-marking as restrictive as that he had endured against Peru in qualifying, yet this time he couldn't be stopped.

There were still a few lingering questions about his weight, but in the summer of 1986, Bilardo was actively encouraging him (as well as all of his team-mates) to scoff chocolates and knock back fizzy pop. "I wanted them to be two or three kilos overweight," he said. "It had been proven that every match at noon in Mexico would see you lose at least three kilos."

Then, with Maradona's blessing, Argentina's kit man was assigned an important task ahead of the now infamous quarter-final against England: to buy new blue Le Coq Sportif jerseys, as the ones they'd worn against Uruguay retained too much sweat. "After the game, each kit weighed about a kilo," Bilardo later revealed. "We needed to do something. We needed lighter cloth and V-necks."

The new shirts, found in a Mexico City sports shop, were enhanced with the crest of the Argentine FA thanks to the needlework of volunteers from local outfit Club America. All that was missing was shirt numbers. The only ones they could find were meant for American Football tops, and as such were large – and silver. "I really like them, with those numbers we will beat England," Maradona told Bilardo the night before the match that would mark his career forever. As you've probably heard, he had a big hand in ensuring that prediction came true.

DIEGO CHANNELLED THE CRITICISMS AND LACK OF FAITH INTO A DEADLY MIX OF RAGE AND POSITIVE ENERGY



GRZEGORZ LATO 1974



Not many people turn down Pele, but when O Rei insisted Grzegorz Lato sign for his New York Cosmos side in 1982, the Pole plumped for Mexican club Atlante instead. As you do.

A speedy winger with a scoring touch, Lato's seven goals to land the Golden Boot in '74 – ahead of the Netherlands' Johan Neeskens

and compatriot Andrzej Szarmach – were a refreshing change to the same sides dominating the world's best football tournament.

Only a barely playable pitch in the de facto semi-final with hosts West Germany – the kick-off was delayed and some standing water removed – bogged down the 24-year-old's frightening acceleration.

His match-winner against Brazil in the third-place play-off was the perfect distillation of Lato's talents. Picking the ball up inside his own half, the follicly challenged flanker tore past full-back Alfredo and slid coolly underneath keeper Leao, in the same ground where he'd been an unused substitute in the final of the 1972 Munich Olympics.

GAZZA



Paul Gascoigne's professional career lasted from 1985 to 2005, but he will always be remembered for one month in mid-1990.

By Italia 90 he was already 23, but had not started a competitive international. A central midfielder with Glenn Hoddle's eye for a pass and Bryan Robson's love of a tackle, Gascoigne could be inconsistent and positionally suspect. But England manager Bobby Robson could not ignore his fellow Geordie's gifts and took a punt on a swaggering player who possessed "a sort of impudence" and "great confidence" according to Gary Lineker. "You could see he played completely for the love of the game."

Full of love and devoid of fear. Against the Dutch, winners of the European Championship two years earlier, he tugged Ruud Gullit's dreadlocks and even Cruyff-turned Ronald Koeman. To Pete Davies, author of the seminal Italia 90 account *All Played Out*, the new man on the scene represented "the joy of playing football, what we all dream football can be".

Gascoigne was no smoke-and-mirrors showboater: his creativity was crucial in deciding deadlocked matches. He had floated in the free-kick for Mark Wright's group-game winner against Egypt, then did it again for David Platt's against Belgium in the last 16 – after drawing the foul. In the quarter-final struggle against Cameroon, he slalomed through the middle of the park to set up Lineker, who was duly tripped for the decisive penalty.

This playful love of the game struck a chord which swelled to an operatic crescendo, perfectly matched by the BBC's use of *Nessun Dorma* as the theme tune, with his emotional reaction to being booked in the semi-final against West Germany. Realising he will miss the final, Gascoigne was in tears. So were England's fans at home and in Turin's Stadio Delle Alpi, where they serenaded him, trying to soothe the crying man-child they'd taken to their bosom.

TEOFILO CUBILLAS 1978



Latin Americans love strutting their stuff at the World Cup, but few players have lit up the finals with a moment of genius quite like the Peru icon.

Teofil Cubillas hit five goals at Argentina '78 – only one shy of the tournament's top scorer, the hosts' Mario Kempes – and his first of the competition is

right up there as a contender for the best ever.

In Peru's 3-1 first-round victory against Scotland in Cordoba, the midfielder lined up a free-kick to the left of the penalty area.

The set-piece appeared perfect for a curler around the right-hand side of the Scots' defensive wall, but Teofil had other ideas...

After wideman Juan Munantes had made a dummy run, Cubillas stepped up and caressed the ball into the top-left corner using the outside of his right foot.

The mesmeric shot bamboozled goalkeeper Alan Rough, broke the hearts of Scotland fans and etched the 29-year-old's name into World Cup history. Great kit, too.

“Weep,” Salman Rushdie wrote about the incident, “and the world weeps with you.”

As the shootout loomed he was comforted by Bobby Robson and senior players. Clearly too distraught to take a penalty, he watched on as his friend-come-minder Chris Waddle stepped up and missed, and England went out. Gascoigne didn't know it, but he would never play at the World Cup again.

His career continued, but not at the same trajectory: how could it? Never the same after the 1991 FA Cup Final, he peaked before his 24th birthday. Injury-enforced time away only increased the off-field problems: domestic violence, alcoholism, mental struggles, fodder for tabloid muck-raking. Euro 96 proved his final England triumph: Hoddle decided he didn't need him for France 98.

And so Gascoigne the icon is remembered as a young man, forever frozen in the infinite potential of beautiful youth. As with rock music's '27 Club' – Hendrix, Joplin, Cobain, Winehouse – the question is, what might have been achieved?

The 1990-model Gascoigne is as close as the English ever got to the sort of bravura brilliance by which Diego Maradona had dragged the Albiceleste to World Cup glory four years earlier. As Brian Glanville put it, the Geordie displayed “a flair, a superlative technique, a tactical sophistication, seldom matched by an England player since the war”.

There are cultural reasons for this distrust of the anarchist, or what Henry Winter has called “the institutionalised suspicion of flair in this country”. In the Academy era, many fans see footballers as soulless robots, highly polished media-trained charisma vacuums. To Stuart Pearce, “the modern game is so sanitised and exposed to the media that it almost suppresses personality”.

That couldn't happen to the irrepressible Gascoigne – a man of the people. Although the tabloids hounded him, they could never quite destroy his popularity. Can you imagine the reaction if Dele Alli told Norway to ‘f**k off, just as Gascoigne did when asked to ‘say hello to Norway’ by a reporter in 1992?

That typically unguarded episode revealed the hyperreal cartoon personality: not Gascoigne, but Gazza, the clown prince with the painted smile. Look, there he is, stealing and driving a London bus. Here he comes, bringing an ostrich along to training. Now he's yellow-carding the referee. He's even got a yet more cartoonish sidekick, Jimmy Five Bellies, as if he'd stepped off the pages of Viz.



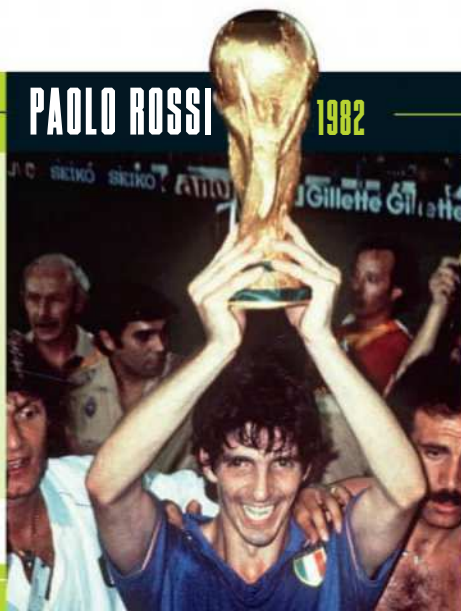
Gascoigne's inner adrenaline-seeker was always destined to be in trouble after football. Those who are most successful in recovery from addiction come to an accord with life: they don't replace the highs, which are definitively irreplaceable, whether their origins lie in chemistry or circumstance. What they find is a lower-level but lasting contentment with the ordinary run of life. It's difficult but millions have managed it, and hopefully Paul – not Gazza, but Paul – can do so too.

He will always be wished well. A flawed human, like the rest of us, he played with an infectious adoration of the game, and memories of Italia 90 will outlive him even if he makes it to his 100th birthday.

As Philip Larkin wrote in *An Arundel Tomb*, describing a memorial six centuries old: “What will survive of us is love”.

Gascoigne loved football, and for that, football fans love him.

1990 GASCOIGNE IS AS CLOSE AS ENGLAND EVER GOT TO THE BRAVURA BRILLIANCE OF DIEGO MARADONA FOUR YEARS EARLIER



PAOLO ROSSI 1982

The Italian media were furious when Paolo Rossi was selected in Italy's 1982 World Cup squad, having spent two years sat on the sidelines over his involvement in a betting scandal.

In his opening three games of the tournament, Rossi's displays justified their rage, as he ambled around the pitch.

But something suddenly clicked. Italy faced a Brazil outfit strongly fancied to win the competition in their decisive second group stage clash, and the Juventus frontman hit a stunning treble.

His first was a bullet header, the second a rifled finish one-on-one with the keeper and the hat-trick strike a close-range finish from six

yards out, sealing a famous 3-2 victory in Barcelona.

Rossi didn't look back, bagging both Azzurri goals in the last-four success over Poland.

West Germany awaited in the final but couldn't deny Rossi his fairytale ending – he netted the opener in a 3-1 win to clinch the cup and Golden Boot.

BAGGIO

Less than three weeks after his infamous penalty miss in the final of USA 94, Roberto Baggio was asked about the incident that should be seen as the defining moment of the competition. “The murder of the Colombian player was the most upsetting thing during that time,” he said of the assassination of Andres Escobar. “An incredible, chilling incident, which unfortunately will mark the tournament forever. And all for an own goal... Shocking, to die like that.”

By way of surreal coincidence, it was among guns that Baggio had been seeking refuge from the whole ghastly post-final brouhaha. With a yearning to indulge his childhood passion for hunting, he headed to his newly acquired 900-acre ranch in La Pampa, one of Argentina’s most sparsely populated provinces, deep in the heart of the country’s vast empty grasslands.

Suddenly, La Chiquita ranch sprouted a scourge of cameras and spotlights. Baggio was reduced to returning from hunting parties via a side entrance, two hours after his father and friends, to dodge the press. Not to mention the class of primary school kids whose teacher thought a trip to the Baggio residence would be educational.

Then there were the Jesuits and animal rights activists. An Italian Catholic magazine insisted Baggio be excommunicated for taking up Buddhism, while Italy’s Anti-Vivisection League demanded to know what a Buddhist was doing shooting ducks.

Answering rumours that he had shot at journalists, Baggio replied to the “great fat lie” by quipping, “I’m a good shot. If I had [shot at them], the journalists I took aim at wouldn’t be doing so well.”

Who knows why Baggio thought he’d fare any better at his home in the upper-class Tuscan tourist destination of Forte dei Marmi, with its regiments of beach umbrellas. Besieged by fans at the thermal baths, the restaurant, and under his windows, he bundled his family into his blue Mercedes and fled south to Maremma, where the rich go to be low key amid the vineyards and cattle pasture. Depending on where the family filled up, they would have been greeted by Baggio’s own

face plastered on some of the petrol pumps – the Divine Ponytail still beaming with pre-tournament anticipation.

As Italy awoke to its grinding disappointment each morning, every conversation sooner or later turned to the forward. “It’s as if we never switched off after the World Cup,” he said in September, seemingly surprised that a country which can cogitate on a Serie A incident for days should still be preoccupied by losing the first penalty shootout in a World Cup final.

Baggio was already succumbing to his first injuries of a new season, following those that dogged his World Cup and his early career, and preceding those that dogged the remainder of his career. There was a perception that they were almost psychosomatic.

In September 1994, Italian daily *La Repubblica* penned: “Around Roberto Baggio there is the tinkle of crystal shattering. Inside Roberto Baggio, there is still something cracking – it could be the dream of winning a cup, or the tired shiver of a missed penalty. Perhaps even a muscle... And so old and new weaknesses return – the physical and psychological limits of a young man used as a totem and a talisman, of a champion of whom too much has to be asked, and if it’s not all, it’s nothing... Every cure, now, seems like a palliative, an aspirin given to a dying man.”

In his autobiography, the attacker described his battle to overcome self-pity. He frequently points out that with Italy pair Franco Baresi and Daniele Massaro having both missed their penalties, Brazil would still have won the World Cup if their last spot-kick was scored, even if Baggio had converted his. “They had to choose one image from the finals and they chose my mistake,” he wrote, seemingly unconscious of the irresistible dramatic tragedy he had served up.

“It’s the same sense of bitterness as in 1994,” he said last year. “It hasn’t diminished and I don’t think it will ever go away.” When he sat down to record a video interview with *FourFourTwo*, he referred to the miss repeatedly, despite our efforts to steer him elsewhere.

If, like a lucky Argentine duck, Baggio had dodged that bullet, how would we remember him? Might he share a pedestal with Maradona and Pele? Surely he wouldn’t have been left out of Euro 96, or drifted to Bologna. But then, Baggio has often seemed happier away from the glare. He scored a goal every other game during the twilight of his career at Brescia. When asked about the best team he’d played in, he used to say, “The Vicenza youth team. On the left wing we had Gianni Bonfante, who was much better than me.”

Bonfante never made it above Serie C. The old pals were reunited as a surprise for Bonfante’s 50th birthday. Asked about his unfulfilled potential, Bonfante sighed deeply. “I can’t deny it. I have my regrets.” He might not be the only one.

“IT’S THE SAME BITTERNESS NOW AS IN ‘94, AND I DON’T THINK IT’LL EVER GO AWAY”

GARY LINEKER 1986



England suffered a frustrating quarter-final exit at the 1986 World Cup thanks to the genius, and cunning, of Diego Maradona. But it was still a tournament to savour for Gary Lineker.

Long before he was flogging bags of crisps, Gary was filling onion bags, scoring six goals to win the Golden Boot in Mexico.

His hat-trick in a 3-0 group-stage win over Poland ensured the Three Lions’ progression to the knockout phase of the competition, finishing second behind Morocco.

Paraguay were the opposition in the last 16, and Los Guaranies had no answer to Lineker’s goalscoring savvy as he netted twice – either side of a Peter Beardsley strike – to

send Bobby Robson’s side through to the quarter-finals.

The Argentines stood in the way of a semi-final berth, but Lineker’s second-half goal – his sixth of the event – could not deny Maradona one of his finest hours. After *that* handball, Diego’s iconic individual strike sealed a 2-1 win which sent England and Lineker packing.



TOTO SCHILLACI 1990



Italian strikers have a habit of starting major tournaments in a haze of controversy and Totto Schillaci was no different, after being attacked by a 3,000-strong mob as he arrived at the Azzurri's pre-World Cup camp.

It wasn't the Juventus forward's fault, mind. He was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

A riot had kicked off after Roberto Baggio's controversial decision to swap Fiorentina for Juve.

Thankfully, Toto was unharmed and proceeded to show no mercy to opposition defences. At 25, the competition was his first taste of international football on the back of his debut season in Serie A. But it didn't show.

Schillaci was only a substitute in Italy's opening two games, but still scored five times to help the hosts reach the semis, where they were beaten on penalties by Argentina.

He didn't depart empty-handed, though. A penalty against England in the third-place play-off procured the Golden Boot in addition to the Golden Ball as best overall player.

ZIDANE

Late on the evening of July 12, 1998, a million people poured onto the Champs-Élysées in Paris. The world's most famous avenue was a flurry of tricolore flags, the sound of car horns and cheers of fans revelling in sporting glory filling the night sky.

As the throngs partied, an image of Zinedine Zidane was projected onto the Arc de Triomphe, along with two words: 'Merci Zizou'. The masses roared in appreciation and, in that moment, Zidane's status as the foremost cultural icon of his generation in France was sealed.

A couple of hours earlier, the then 26-year-old Juventus playmaker had scored two headers in the 3-0 win over Brazil that meant France were crowned world champions for the first time. He'd had a mixed tournament, and not even been France's best player – that was Lilian Thuram – yet those two goals in the final meant he emerged as the post-tournament face of the team.

Use of his image was about a lot more than football. It was about cultural identity, race, ethnicity and immigration – all massive talking points in host nation France before, during and after the finals.

During Euro 96, far-right National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen had sparked outrage when he criticised the multiracial nature of the squad, describing France as a team of foreigners. To anybody with even a passing knowledge of Les Bleus' history, his comments were ignorant and bizarre. The best-known members of the France team

who reached the 1958 World Cup semi-finals were Raymond Kopa, the son of Polish immigrants, and 13-goal tournament top scorer Just Fontaine, born in Marrakech to a Spanish mother. 1980s legend Michel Platini had an Italian father. Defender Marius Tresor was born in Guadeloupe. Midfield lieutenants Jean Tigana and Luis Fernandez were born in Mali and Spain respectively.

Le Pen was a powerful figure who had turned the National Front from a fringe party into a major political force. His remarks threw open a debate about what it meant to be French at the end of the 20th century. The '98 squad included several players born outside metropolitan France (Bernard Lama, Christian Karembeu); others, such as Zidane, Youri Djorkaeff and Marcel Desailly, were children of a parent or parents who'd emigrated to France. The team were known as 'Black, Blanc, Beur' (Black, White, Arab) – a wordplay on the red, white and blue colours of the French flag – and victory was seen as the perfect riposte to Le Pen.

At the centre of it all was Zidane, not only a fantastic footballer but a hugely popular figure. Several times in subsequent years he was voted France's best-loved personality. As the star player, and a boy born into a working-class family in Marseille to parents who had moved to southern France from Algeria, he came to stand for everything that Le Pen opposed.

HRISTO STOICHKOV 1994



Heading into the 1994 World Cup, Bulgaria had never won a match in the history of the competition.

But that was all about to change, largely thanks to the brilliance of Hristo Stoichkov.

After a nightmare opening game, in which they were walloped 3-0 by Nigeria, Bulgaria bounced back with a thumping 4-0 victory over Greece.

Stoichkov was the architect of the success, converting two penalties, and The Dagger repeated his magic by notching in their next contest – a staggering 2-0 defeat of a Diego Maradona-less Argentina.

They were on a roll, and knocked Mexico out on penalties after the Barcelona star had netted in a 1-1 draw. And Stoichkov wasn't done,

despatching a free-kick during a 2-1 quarter-final upset over defending champions Germany.

The Lions were one match away from the Rose Bowl final, only for Roberto Baggio's brace to end their unlikely run.

Still, Stoichkov headed home as joint top-scorer, with Oleg Salenko, and had inked his name in history.



On wider matters, however, Zidane had virtually nothing to say. He sidestepped questions about identity and immigration as deftly as he did ill-timed tackles from off-balance defenders. The old adage about letting his football do the talking had never been more apt. He wasn't so much a reluctant figurehead as a silent one.

Cynics argue there was something calculating about Zidane keeping his counsel: by being disengaged with more important topics, Zidane was then able to cash in on the many advertising opportunities that came his way. In a similar manner to future Real Madrid team-mate David Beckham in England, Zidane was the one player whom brands clamoured to be associated with, a blank canvas who was capable of enhancing any product.

And yet perhaps there was a simpler truth behind Zidane choosing to hold his tongue. He seemed to realise from the outset that he was just a football player, and that lending his voice to broader issues was fraught with danger. He also appeared to grasp that the supposedly positive impact of the 1998 World Cup-winning side on French society as a whole would be fleeting or even illusory.

Whatever hesitations Zidane may have had proved well-founded. For several years there was talk of the country unifying around the 'Black, Blanc, Beur' generation, but life carried on as normal. In 2011, then-France manager Laurent Blanc was caught up in scandal when he was secretly taped criticising dual-nationality players who opted to represent countries other than France. In 2017, Le Pen's estranged daughter Marine outstripped her dad's achievements when she took 34 per cent of votes in the final round of the presidential election.

For the French, Zidane and 1998 will always be about much more than football. Twenty years on, however, that period has taught us that football may reflect society, but cannot change society quite as much as we would like.

USE OF ZIZOU'S IMAGE WAS ABOUT MORE THAN FOOTBALL. IT WAS ABOUT CULTURAL IDENTITY, RACE, ETHNICITY, IMMIGRATION

DAVOR SUKER 1998



There's nothing like an underdog story to help warm your cockles, and the 1998 World Cup found the perfect protagonists in Croatia and their talisman Davor Suker.

The forward smashed six goals to collect the Golden Boot, as the seven-year-old nation upset the odds with an astonishing charge to the semi-finals.

Suker wasn't exactly an unknown quantity, having scored 10 league goals for Real Madrid in the run-up to the tournament, but that didn't stop him filling his boots.

The pick of Suker's super six was a stunning effort against Germany in the quarter-finals. The frontman latched onto a diagonal ball from Aljosa Asanovic, flicked the ball up

over the helpless Ulf Kirsten, cut inside to beat Jorg Heinrich and fired through the legs of keeper Andreas Kopke.

The 85th-minute strike set the seal on an emphatic 3-0 Croatia win, before hosts France ousted the Vatreni in the last four.

Suker then bagged the clincher in the third-place play-off.

CANNAVARO



OLIVER KHAN 2002



It's not often that a goalkeeper steals the headlines at a major tournament but that's exactly what Oliver Kahn did at the 2002 World Cup, staged in South Korea and Japan.

The competition might be best remembered for the mercurial trio of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo weaving their magic for

winner Brazil, but the displays of the Bayern Munich stalwart in the Germany goal meant he became the first gloveman ever to win the Golden Ball – the prize awarded to the tournament's top player.

The 33-year-old had conceded just one goal en route to the final in Yokohama, when Robbie Keane's last-minute strike for the Republic

of Ireland earned them an unlikely group-stage point.

The four-time Bundesliga winner went on to produce a string of fine saves in 1-0 wins against Paraguay, the USA and co-hosts South Korea, but a rare fumble allowed Ronaldo to open the scoring in the final as Rudi Völler's Mannschaft came up short against the Selecao.

The press, crammed into the amphitheatre of Coverciano's lecture hall, had one thing they wished to discuss with Fabio Cannavaro.

The 2006 World Cup was a fortnight away, but Italy's hopes were not what was on their minds.

The media had finally stumbled across the labyrinthine threads of a nefarious web of influence, spun by the Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi through the 400-odd phone calls he made every day. Into this s***tstorm, Cannavaro dumped some dismayingly ill-judged remarks. "I think the methods exposed by the phone-taps concern everyone, the whole of [Italian] football," he claimed. "Only Moggi's phone was under surveillance... other clubs were not tapped."

This was regarded as the classic retort of the red-handed culprit. Cannavaro failed to condemn Moggi, and made vaguely supportive comments about his boss.

Italy's financial police had searched Cannavaro's house earlier in May, but come away empty-handed. Fabio now declared: "I won't give up the captain's armband. Why should I?"

The Italian FA unfurled its fire hoses. The day after the disastrous press conference, the official World Cup photography session was in full swing, replete with blue Dolce & Gabbana suits, and the World Cup song by veteran rockers Pooh was being presented. In the midst of it all, the Juventus defender was shoved back out in front of the media in an attempt to atone.

Six days earlier, an even more senior head had been on the block. Italy coach Marcello Lippi was cleared by magistrates of bowing to Moggi's requests to make sure fewer Juve players were selected for the World Cup in Germany, so that they might remain wrapped up in cotton wool over the summer.

With the entire Italy squad playing for Italian clubs, the atmosphere was febrile. For Gianluigi Buffon, yet to be cleared of illegally placing sporting bets, it must have been toxic.

After a brief respite, playing in Italy's final warm-up game against Ukraine in Lausanne, Cannavaro went to Rome to be questioned as a witness in the Moggi affair. Then on June 7, he travelled with the team to their grandiose lakeside hotel in Duisberg, but the rapturous welcoming fans turned angry when the players avoided them. Lippi wouldn't make the mistake of hiding again. "The official programme required that two of our players attend a press conference every day," he later wrote. "Before presenting themselves in the press room in front of the TV cameras and notebooks, every one of them asked me, 'But Mister, do we have to go?'"

Lippi would respond: "Certainly, you have to go. Let's front up, at all times, above all because we have nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of."

Halfway through a press conference the day after Italy had beaten Australia 1-0 in the last 16, a press officer told Cannavaro the news that Gianluca Pessotto, newly appointed Juve sporting director, had fallen from a fourth-floor window at the club's headquarters in an apparent suicide bid (Pessotto was not involved in Calciopoli, but had been suffering from depression).

A shaken Cannavaro quickly excused himself from the room, saying: "I'm stunned. Pessottino is the best man in the world." Pessotto had played alongside Cannavaro for Italy and Juve, and had been in the stands for Italy's final group game against the Czech Republic.

Alessandro Del Piero and Gianluca Zambrotta flew straight to his Turin hospital bedside while Buffon, in his blog the next day, wrote: "It's difficult, almost impossible at the moment to talk about football, about matches and about the emotions of a World Cup."

Two days later, he kept a clean sheet as Italy dispatched Ukraine 3-0 in the last eight, with Zambrotta scoring a sixth-minute opener in Hamburg. After the match, Cannavaro and the Juve contingent paraded an Italian flag painted with the message "Pessottino, we are with you" (he eventually made a full recovery from his injuries).

Perhaps noting how well the Azzurri played after every twist of the knife, the Italian FA's prosecutor Stefano Palazzi recommended his punishments for the clubs involved in Calciopoli on the day of Italy's semi-final against Germany. Juve, Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio were to be relegated (all but Juve would be reprieved) and the Old Lady stripped of their 2005 and 2006 titles – the only two Cannavaro won.

The defender has always denied Italy won the World Cup because they were inspired by adversity, preferring to dwell on Lippi's careful construction project. "Barely a month after the final, the media had stopped talking about that historic victory," Cannavaro complained.

But he wasn't forgotten. The football family awarded him the 2006 Ballon d'Or and FIFA World Player of the Year, while the Italian postal service put him on a stamp. A fitting tribute for Italy's captain, who delivered when his country truly needed him.



IN THE MIDST OF CALCIOPOLI, HE WAS TOLD JUVE'S SPORTING DIRECTOR HAD FALLEN FROM A FOURTH-FLOOR WINDOW

MIROSLAV KLOSE 2006



Prior to his retirement in 2016, there were few more certain things in life than a World Cup goal from Miroslav Klose.

The former Germany forward is the tournament's greatest ever goal-getter having fired 16 across four competitions, with five of them coming at the 2006 finals on home soil.

A six-yard box specialist – rather than a scorer of stunning strikes – the Werder Bremen marksman powered the hosts into the semis thanks to doubles in group-stage wins over Costa Rica and Ecuador, before finding the net in the last eight with a late equaliser against Argentina. Germany prevailed on penalties, obviously.

Italy lay in wait in the semis, but dramatic efforts from Fabio Grosso and Alessandro Del Piero near the end of extra time thwarted Jurgen Klinsmann's men in their bid to go all the way.

Still, it didn't stop Miroslav from bagging the Golden Boot, and he went on to hoist the trophy at the grand old age of 36 in 2014.

XAVI & INIESTA



LUIS SUAREZ 2010



Type 'Luis Suarez 2010 World Cup' into Google and you will find around 750,000 articles about his infamous handball, denying Ghana a certain goal in extra time and historic spot in the semi-finals.

But before the controversy, the Uruguayan forward had helped fire La Celeste into the

latter stages. Suarez first found the back of the net in a 1-0 group win against Mexico, although it was in the knockout phase where he truly announced himself.

Two goals, including a delightful curler into the top corner, secured a 2-1 win over South Korea.

However, the hero turned villain in the quarter-finals when Suarez

flung himself at Dominic Adiyiah's close-range header at the end of extra time, punching the ball clear.

The striker saw red but couldn't contain his delight when Asamoah Gyan hit the subsequent spot-kick against the bar.

Uruguay advanced on penalties, but got their comeuppance in the semis by losing 3-2 to the Dutch.

Neither Xavi nor Andres Iniesta slept a wink on June 16, 2010.

World Cup favourites Spain had just lost 1-0 to Switzerland in their opening group game. The latter was distraught. It was happening to him again. A year earlier, Iniesta had played injured in the 2009 Champions League Final against Manchester United. Advised not to shoot, he knew he was doing more damage to his right thigh.

He'd spent much of the 2009-10 season recovering not just from that – coach Vicente del Bosque had waited until the last moment for Iniesta to prove even the remotest fitness – but also the death of his close friend, Espanyol captain Dani Jarque, during pre-season. "It was," he wrote in his autobiography, "like nothing was right."

Now, 77 minutes into the World Cup, his thigh had broken down again. Spain's physios attempted to console Iniesta, lying to him that the prognosis was not bad and that the 26-year-old would be ready for La Roja's next game, against Honduras.

Defeat to the willing but limited Swiss and their best player now on the sidelines – things could hardly have looked more bleak.

On the other side of Spain's Potchefstroom training base, around an hour from downtown Johannesburg, Xavi sat upright in his room. "I watched the whole game on repeat that night," the vice-captain later told *FourFourTwo*. "I couldn't sleep. We had played really well. Seriously. All of the ball, and great chances. They wanted a goalless draw and somehow won 1-0."

At dawn – an emotionally exhausted Iniesta having succumbed to slumber – Xavi, captain Iker Casillas and sporting director Fernando Hierro met in Del Bosque's room.

"He looked at me and said, 'I've watched the game over and over and don't think we should change a thing'. I was so happy because I was thinking the same thing. 'Boss,' I said, 'it's incredible we lost that game. It's pure f**king chance they won.'

"Every game meant death. We carried on the same road, knowing we'd be criticised."

'Tiki-taka', first coined as an insult, had reverted to its original interpretation amid mistrust in the Spanish media, but the endless "carousel" which had so dizzied Alex Ferguson's United the year before would remain.

Del Bosque not only trusted the system, but the two players who could best deliver it. The two players whose nicknames within the squad were instructive: Xavi was Maki, short for *maquina*, or machine; Iniesta was Cerebro, the brain.

The first time Xavi and Iniesta had shared a pitch was the latter's maiden training session with the *Barcelona*

first team a decade earlier, as an impossibly shy 16-year-old. Iniesta was so nervous that he'd got lost en route to the dressing room and Luis Enrique was sent to find him.

"You might retire me," Pep Guardiola whispered to his heir apparent Xavi that day, "but this lad will retire us all."

Iniesta started the group-stage decider against Chile as a narrow left midfielder, beginning and finishing the move that secured a 2-1 win. Like the Euro 2008 triumph that had given the squad such belief, confidence was restored. Maki and Cerebro provided the staccato soundtrack to calm all nerves.

Belief, too. After Carles Puyol scored the semi-final winner against Germany, the squad gathered for a meal, many congratulating the perma-permed defender for heading home the most important goal in Spanish football history.

"Let's hope only until Sunday," laughed Puyol.

"Relax, Carles," said Iniesta. "I'll take care of that. Don't you worry."

The whole room fell silent. The man who had been running laps of the hotel corridors at 4am to prove to himself that he had recovered from injury believed in destiny.

He had his friend with him on the pitch. "Dani Jarque, *siempre con nosotros*," read Iniesta's handwritten undershirt, which he revealed after coming good on his promise to Puyol in extra time against the Netherlands. Dani Jarque, always with us.

Xavi was among the first to congratulate his long-time team-mate.

"They have a special relationship, they always have," said Giovanni van Bronckhorst, a former Barça team-mate of both and the Dutch captain that night. "They just seem to know where the other one is. They have got absolutely everything – technique, the ability to score goals and play the killer pass. They are just complete midfielders – they never lose the ball."

Ultimately, the pair just love playing football. "If I didn't have training, I'd go and play five-a-side with my mates day or night," Xavi tells *FFT*. "If we were playing now, and you had the ball, I would suffer because I want to drive, not be the passenger. I'm a football romantic. I'm not quick or strong. All I've got is the pass."

A simple doctrine, adopted by his great partner in crime. Iniesta recently overtook Xavi as the most decorated player in Spanish football history. "What I do in the stadium, I did on the school playground," says Barcelona's current captain. "What I did at 12, I still do now."

It just so happens that it won a World Cup.



"THEY JUST SEEM TO KNOW WHERE THE OTHER ONE IS. THEY ARE THE COMPLETE MIDFIELDERS. THEY NEVER LOSE THE BALL"

PHILIPP LAHM 2014



As Hollywood endings go, few footballers will top the manner in which Philipp Lahm brought the curtain down on his glittering international career.

Germany's skipper kicked off the 2014 tournament in central midfield, having thrived in that role the previous season under Pep Guardiola at Bayern Munich.

Lahm was key to group-stage wins over Portugal and the USA, plus the last-16 defeat of Algeria, as Die Mannschaft progressed to the quarter-finals.

But his ability to switch from midfield to defence during the knockout phase gave Joachim Löw's side another dimension. Lahm slotted into a full-back

position for the last-eight game against France with ease, making the team a more cohesive unit.

A Mats Hummels header gave them victory, before Brazil were demolished 7-1 in the semis and Argentina beaten 1-0 in the final. At 30, Lahm lifted the World Cup as captain, before hanging up his Germany boots for good.

BETWEEN
THE LINES



“ I WAS TOLD I’D
NEVER WALK
AGAIN AND HERE
I WAS,
SCORING THE
WINNING
GOAL IN THE
WORLD
CUP
FINAL ”

A seizure denied Ronaldo the 1998 World Cup winner’s medal he and many others felt he deserved. Then a string of career-threatening injuries left him facing a long and painful battle against his own body for a shot at redemption



vividly remember waking up in my hotel room and realising I was surrounded by lots of players and our team doctor, Lidio Toledo. They wouldn't tell me what was happening or why they were there. I asked them to go and have their discussions somewhere else. I just wanted to go back to sleep.

Instead, I was taken for a walk through the gardens of the hotel. I was told I had been unconscious for two minutes, and for that reason wouldn't play in the World Cup final against France that night. I wouldn't accept it. I had a duty to my nation and didn't want to let anybody down. I thought I could still help the team, so didn't give the coach any option. I had to play in that match.

Even now, 18 years later, I can't cope watching the scenes from the first leg of the Coppa Italia final against Lazio. Every time I know it's about to be shown on television, I make sure I look away. When I see those images, it's like the pain is running through me all over again.

Funnily enough, that moment probably shaped my character and made me a better man more than any other. Everything I had been through in order to get back on the pitch was a test I knew I would have to battle to pass.

It was my first game back after spending the previous six months recovering from minor surgery, and the last thing I was expecting was to get injured again so soon. But in April 2000 I was forced to have more complicated surgery, and the recovery process was far more lengthy. During that moment, it felt like my whole world was falling apart. I couldn't believe it.

The World Cup in South Korea and Japan was still a couple of years away, so it had only really been something that was at the back of my mind. But suddenly I started to feel like my chances of being fit for the tournament were at risk.

There was no guarantee that my recovery would be successful, let alone quick enough. There had been no similar cases in the past, so we didn't know how well or how quickly it would heal. There was no



Above The Brazilian No.9 gets wiped out by Fabien Barthez during the France 98 final – only hours after suffering convulsions **Top** Ronaldo wrecked his knee in a 2000 Coppa Italia tie for Inter and feared he'd never play football again

Yet I never, ever thought about giving up. At that stage, the only thing I knew for certain was that if I didn't give all I had in order to get fit, I would never play football again. The only guarantee I had was that if I failed, I would have to retire. I was ready to put the work in. Even though the pain was sometimes extreme, the thought of not being able to play football again hurt even more.

So I tried not to think about it. I had tunnel vision. I could only see my daily recovery sessions, my treatment schedule, the physiotherapy, the exercises, all of those repetitions – every element of this masterplan to save my career.

Eight months after the first injury, I decided it made sense to hear some different opinions from doctors all around the world. Could they explain why my knee was bending so little? I travelled to the United States, and a well-known specialist said there was no chance that I'd play football again. The best he could recommend was trying a new surgery that would 'unblock' my knee and hopefully allow me to bend it that extra 30 degrees once again.

history for me to analyse to reassure myself. I was facing an injury that no one in football had suffered before.

To be honest, that just meant we were all more patient – there was no set timeframe, and no rush. We had to respect that the healing process would take time, and that it may be quite a long time.

Eventually we started the physical exercises. I can remember that eight months through the recovery, I still could not bend my knee back over 90 degrees. It was a huge barrier to doing any exercise.

That was the most difficult period of my life. We were halfway through the recovery process and I couldn't even bend my knee to 100 degrees. There was no flex in my knee. That was such a horrible realisation. I felt depressed. I was shocked. The only option I had was to keep working, even though I had no idea if I'd ever see the results I desperately wanted.

I never questioned my own will or desire to get fit again as soon as possible. I never doubted I would be able to do what was necessary to come back. Not for one moment. The thing I doubted was science. I wasn't sure if there were actually treatments available that could help me to play again.

I am not a doctor. I am not a physiotherapist. I haven't studied any of these complicated things. So I learned a lot from all of my injuries. The reality was that this kind of scarring – after so many screws and stitches – didn't really match the image you'd expect of a footballer. In some ways it was practically a miracle that I made it back again. Perhaps it was a reward for my hard work.

Quite a lot was said and written about me during this time. People judged me and that always made me really upset. Especially when there were misconceptions not based on any medical information or science. My injury was previously unheard of, and I had to listen to so many doctors in Brazil, and across the globe, telling me I wouldn't be able to play again. One even told me there was a chance I wouldn't be able to walk again.

I was always in a bad mood because I wasn't able to play football. I couldn't think of anything other than getting fit again. It was a long, long period of sacrifice.

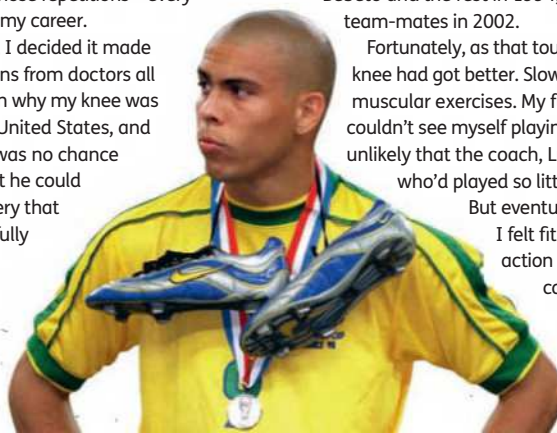
Eventually, I could see some slow progress. I could see the World Cup coming around the corner, though I still couldn't picture myself holding the trophy. I was still weighed down by fear and doubt. My recovery had taken so long that I was uncertain about what would happen. I almost felt haunted by it.

I've always loved the World Cup finals because not only is it the most important sporting event in the world, it is also a unique festival of different cultures.

Everyone who has won the World Cup for Brazil is a hero of mine: Pele and all of those who were in Sweden in 1958, then Garrincha and the team of '62, Rivelino, Gerson and Tostao in 1970, Romario, Bebeto and the rest in 1994, and then Rivaldo, Ronaldinho and my team-mates in 2002.

Fortunately, as that tournament came around, little by little my knee had got better. Slowly, I was able to start some physical and muscular exercises. My future was still very uncertain, and I still couldn't see myself playing at the World Cup. After all, it was very unlikely that the coach, Luiz Felipe Scolari, would call up a player who'd played so little in the past couple of seasons.

But eventually, after almost two years of struggle, I felt fit again. I slowly and steadily returned to action with Inter. Then, in March 2002, Big Phil called me into the squad for a friendly at ▶



Anti-clockwise from below Big Phil backed his man despite a lack of game time in 2002; Ronaldo's redemption was complete thanks to a double in the final; savouring Brazil's fifth World Cup victory with Gilberto Silva and (top) Rivaldo, who'd set up Ronnie's opening goal of the finals – against Turkey – in South Korea

home to Yugoslavia in Fortaleza. I only played 45 minutes – my first Brazil appearance in nearly three years – but it was enough to secure my spot at the World Cup.

This was a historical moment for me, because looking back to the time when I first got injured, it seemed like there was no hope of me going to this tournament. The only thing that kept me going was the immense love I feel for football. That was what helped me overcome the difficulties I had faced. It transformed me as a person.

I'm so grateful for the confidence that Big Phil showed in me. The easy option would have been to call up another striker who had been playing regularly over the course of the season, and a player in better shape, but he placed his faith in me. I told him at the time that I'd do whatever it took to be in his team. I'd do whatever was necessary to get fit and repay him during the World Cup. It made me even more motivated than before.

Our first match of the tournament, against Turkey, was particularly important for me in terms of rediscovering some of the confidence I'd lost, and things didn't look particularly good when, in the very last minute of the first half, Turkey took the lead. There was great tension. Then, five minutes into the second half, Rivaldo received the ball on the left wing and crossed it with speed into the penalty area.

I knew the only chance I had to score was by throwing myself at the ball. So that's what I did. I threw myself at that ball, got the crucial touch with the very tip of my right boot, and scored the equaliser. It wasn't the most beautiful goal I have ever scored, but it didn't matter. It was a goal, and a goal for my country at the World Cup.

During that game, I didn't feel pain and was able to play almost the entire match. But the day after was agony. I was in so much pain, because I had not played a full match for such a long time. I felt confident again, especially because Turkey were a physical and aggressive team. They had been pretty rough with me throughout the game, but I'd come through it.



We ended up facing them again in the semi-final, and by that stage I had also scored against China, Costa Rica and Belgium. Once again, we started slowly – in fact, we weren't playing well at all.

I had a small muscular injury in my right thigh, and that's probably the reason why I scored the winning goal with a toe-poke. I was in pain and didn't feel my muscles could cope with me hitting the ball hard with the laces or inside of my foot. When you do a toe-poke, the power comes more from the hips, so I could spare my thigh a little by kicking the ball in this way.

This kind of technique is used in futsal, which I played a lot during my childhood. I actually took quite a few tricks from that time into my professional career, but this one was definitely the most famous. It was a World Cup semi-final, after all.

In the moments after the final whistle, when we had secured our spot in the final, I felt a mixture of joy and relief. But soon I was hit by a feeling of insecurity, because of everything that had happened in the hours before the final four years earlier. Suddenly, everything that happened in the hotel in France came back to me.

On that occasion I'd decided to get some rest after our team lunch. The last thing I remember is getting into bed. That's when I suffered the convulsions that ended up affecting pretty much every member of the team before the France game.

I was told I couldn't play, but I wouldn't surrender. I went to talk to the doctors and to our coach, Mario Zagallo. I talked to anyone and everyone because I wanted to hear an alternative answer. I wanted

to be told that I could play. I knew I deserved to be playing in that final. I convinced the medical team that we should do some fitness tests to guarantee my wellbeing. I did the tests, and none of them showed anything abnormal. It was like nothing had happened. Still, as we prepared to travel to the stadium, the message from Zagallo was loud and clear – I wouldn't be playing.

I was holding the results of all those tests in my hand and I had Dr Toledo giving me the green light. So I approached Zagallo at the stadium and said: 'I'm fine. Here are the results of the tests – they show I am fine. I want to play.'

I played, but perhaps everything that had happened had affected the whole team, because those convulsions must have been a very scary thing to witness. It's not something you see everyday, and the whole experience was traumatic for all involved.

This time around, because of those bad memories, I was actually afraid of going to sleep after our team lunch on the day of the final. I purposefully avoided it, and didn't get any rest at all. I tried to find some of my team-mates to talk to, but everyone was in the habit of getting some sleep after lunch, especially before such a big game.

Eventually I discovered that our substitute goalkeeper, Dida, was awake, and we ended up chatting for an hour or so. He was really kind to me. He distracted me, because he knew every time I thought back to the 1998 final, I would remember the convulsions. The idea of that happening again was my biggest fear.

When we got on the coach to travel to the stadium, I was finally able to focus on the game. I left all of those things behind and could play the final with freedom.

And what a wonderful final it was for us. We faced a very strong German side, but thankfully I was able to score twice to secure the title, and bury traumas of the previous four years once and for all.

Everything that I'd been through was running through my mind before the final whistle had even gone. I was substituted about five minutes before the end, and when I got back to the bench I hugged Rodrigo Paiva, Brazil's media officer, who had always been by my side during that long journey back. I started to cry and kept saying, 'We did it. It was so hard but we won it.'

I almost collapsed, overpowered by the emotion. You could say I was the happiest man on earth. We were playing so well that the referee could have added 100 minutes of injury time and Germany wouldn't have been able to stop us. I was intently watching those final minutes with tears in my eyes at the thought of not only Brazil winning another title, but also my own personal victory.

In that moment, I felt complete. I hadn't just won the World Cup, I'd also won a battle with my body that lasted more than two years. That was the biggest victory of my career, and of my life.

Now, if I stand still I don't feel pain. I think my body was desperately begging for a rest after so many years playing football, so I had to give it that rest. These days I do get the chance to enjoy some other sports. I go to the gym, and also play a bit of tennis.

But the fact is that whenever I play football, I still feel pain. Getting my body ready for football is far more complex than it is with other sports. Football demands speed, sudden movement and explosive acceleration. All of these things put different kinds of pressures on different parts of your body. When I go out onto the pitch, my mind wants to do one thing, but my body can't keep up with it anymore.

I always say football was my university. I didn't have time to go to college but football taught me more than any masters or doctorate. No course could ever have offered me what I've got from my life as a footballer. I'll always be grateful to football and all it gave me to become the person I am today. Being in a collective sport teaches you how to deal with people and to always give everything you've got for your collective cause, every single day.

Perhaps the biggest thing football has taught me is exactly how strong I am. Until I suffered those injuries, I had no idea. I won a lot in my career, and scored a lot of goals, but I can honestly say that football gave me so much more than I gave football. ❁

❁ ❁

I STARTED TO CRY AND KEPT SAYING:
'WE DID IT. IT WAS SO HARD BUT WE
WON IT.' I ALMOST COLLAPSED,
OVERPOWERED BY THE EMOTION



“I COULDN'T DO THIS

With their club a mess, 1860 Munich fans have been forced to watch their side in a dilapidated old ground – not the plush arena they once shared with rivals Bayern. And they are loving it...



AT THE

ALLIANZ ARENA

Words Chris Flanagan Photography Sebastian Widmann

COULD I, LADS?

LADS...?!"





he dream had turned into a nightmare. This was a club who had played in the 1965 European Cup Winners' Cup Final at Wembley, a contest that featured Bobby Moore, Martin Peters and Geoff Hurst.

They had moved into an impressive new stadium. They had targeted the Champions League. And yet here they were, battling relegation and on course for a humiliating home defeat. As supporters' frustrations spilled over, the match had to be halted. Fans were furious. Furious at the owner, furious at the stadium, furious at everything.

This could easily be a description of the recent scenes at West Ham United's London Stadium, but it isn't. Instead, this was 1860 Munich, the Hammers' 1965 Cup Winners' Cup Final opponents, and things were far worse than a home loss to Burnley.

"It was one of the saddest days of my entire life," explains veteran fan Franz Hell, his surname all too appropriate for the circumstances in which his beloved football club found themselves on that day last May, when riot police had to stop missile-wielding supporters from storming the pitch.

That month at the Allianz Arena, rivals Bayern Munich had hoisted the Bundesliga trophy for the fifth year in a row. Ten days later, 1860 Munich hosted a relegation play-off in the same stadium, attempting to avoid falling out of the second tier. Things had looked good after a 1-1 draw in the first leg, at third-division side Jahn Regensburg. But in front of 62,000 fans, they lost the second leg 2-0. "They scored two quick goals in the first half and you knew that that was that," says Rainer Kmeth. "The crowd went nuts, and you just hoped the match would end. I travelled home without any feelings. I just felt empty."

Things would get worse still for 1860. They would not be dropping one division, they would be dropping to the fourth tier – the regional amateur league – following an internal dispute involving the club's Jordanian majority shareholder, Hasan Ismaik, who refused to pay an €11 million licence fee for the third division. It was all a mess.

Yet out of it all came the one thing 1860 Munich fans had always wanted. The club held talks with Bayern, and left the Allianz Arena. They were going back to the Grunwalder Stadion, which supporters have regarded as the real home of Sechzig (Sixty) since 1911. Unlike West Ham's Boleyn Ground, knocked down in 2016, the Grunwalder was still standing. Just.

“THE TWO TEAMS I CARE ABOUT ARE 1860 AND BAYERN’S OPPONENTS. WHEN THEY LOST THE FINAL AGAINST CHELSEA, I GRINNED FOR THREE DAYS”

WELCOME HOME... AGAIN

FFT isn't expecting luxury as we arrive at the Grunwalder for a Friday night game against SV Seligenporten, a little-known side from a tiny Bavarian municipality, population 5,000. There'll be no padded seats here, nor is the stadium's exterior glowing an impressive blue, as the Allianz Arena used to do when 1860 were at home. There is not even a roof at the two ends, where open terraces are separated from the pitch by high perimeter fences, harking back to the 1980s.

“For s**t weather, the Arena is the best, but for football, it's here,” fan Walter Michel tells FFT, holding a can of the German equivalent of Special Brew. With few teeth left, he looks like a man who's seen it all. “My first match was in 1981 – that was at the Olympiastadion. Then we were here, then the Arena, now we're here again.”

Indeed, Die Löwen's existence has been nomadic. The Grunwalder had been their home when they were Bundesliga champions in 1966 but in '72, two months after providing the location for Monty Python's Philosophers' Football Match, the venue was damaged by a hurricane and the club had to leave. A year earlier, the main stand had burned down. In 1943, the Grunwalder had been bombed by the RAF. But no matter what, the ground survived. After a spell at the Olympiastadion, 1860 returned to their spiritual home in the early-80s, when financial problems meant the club suffered relegation to the amateur leagues. Sounds pretty familiar...

Their rise back to the top tier saw them exit for the Olympiastadion again in 1995. But when they dropped back into the second division in 2004, they briefly returned to their old home for what was planned to be a farewell season, before moving to the 75,000-capacity Allianz Arena. As much as they loved all of its foibles, the Grunwalder was no longer fit for purpose. This was the final goodbye.

The groundshare with rivals Bayern was controversial, and probably doomed to fail. This was not the San Siro, where Milan and Inter hold more or less equal status. Bayern are clearly the bigger club, and by 2006 had bought out Sechzig's 50 per cent share in the stadium for €11m, to bail the second-division side out of financial problems. Not only were Die Löwen the smaller club, now they were tenants.

“The Allianz Arena was Bayern's home, it wasn't ours,” explains fan Matthias Rostan. “It was in the middle of nowhere, too. Here we're in the city and you can drink beer beforehand. It's just a better feeling.”

“The big arena was never a home to us,” continues Kmeth, a lifelong 1860 fan who now works for the club. “It was always much too big for us. In the first few seasons we had 40,000 or 50,000, and later 66,000 for a cup match against Dortmund. But if it wasn't full, it was quiet. It wasn't like here – it's loud and crazy here. This isn't the Arena, but they say home is where the heart is. This is the place.”

For Franz Hell, it has been like rediscovering his childhood. “My first game here was on my 10th birthday. It was August 1963, the day the Bundesliga started. I stood with my father under the big clock behind the goal and was so impressed by the atmosphere. I've been to nearly every home match since.” That inaugural Bundesliga campaign was only permitted to feature one Munich side and 1860 got the nod over Bayern, who joined the league two years later and have won 26 titles since Sechzig's only triumph in 1966.

“BAYERN FANS TAKE PITY ON US – WE DON'T LIKE THAT”

Die Löwen have had their moments since then: they competed in the Champions League qualifying rounds in 2000-01, losing to eventual semi-finalists Leeds. But now they face the humiliation of being in the same league as Bayern Munich's reserve team. “We had to play their second team, and we lost,” sighs Kmeth. “That was the craziest thing you've ever seen – to play with our first team against boys of 17, 18 and 19, and to lose. It was heartbreaking.”

Bayern fans enjoyed that, but the city rivalry has taken on a dynamic that makes Hell uncomfortable. “Normally there's a very strong hatred between Bayern and us. There are only two teams in the world I care about – one is 1860 Munich and the other is the opponent of Bayern in every match. When they lost the 2012 Champions League Final at home to Chelsea, I grinned for three days. But it's better for them to hate us too, rather than say, ‘We'd like you to get back to the second or third division’. We don't want them to pity us. I don't like that.”

Top spot was always the main target this season, and Sechzig lead the regional league by six points going into tonight's game. Bayern's reserves are second, providing 1860 with even more incentive. Finish top of the table and they'll go into a six-team promotion play-off with the other regional champions, likely to include another ex-Bundesliga club in Energie Cottbus.

Sechzig have long seen themselves as the true club of Munich, the club of the working class. “Bayern fans come from around the region, the city is blue,” explains Kmeth. That bears some similarities with the perception of Manchester City and Manchester United. But while City have flourished under Middle Eastern ownership, 1860's issues have worsened since Ismaik purchased a 60 per cent share in the operating company in 2011, when they were in danger of insolvency. He came with big ambitions. “He said we'd go to the Champions League,” says Rostan. “He said that in 2021 we would be as good as Barcelona, but now look where we are.”

Part of the problem was that although Ismaik owns 60 per cent of the shares, he has only 49 per cent of the club's voting rights because of German football's ‘50+1’ rule, stipulating that the club's members must always have the majority say. When 1860's members disagreed with Ismaik's plans for the club, things hit deadlock. He had the cash, but they had the power. Ian Ayre surprisingly left Liverpool last year to become 1860's managing director, but resigned inside two months after realising internal strife made it impossible to get anything done.

Ismaik suggested making a legal challenge against the 50+1 rule, which didn't go down well with many fans, who see the regulation as fundamental to football culture in Germany. When he failed to get his own way, he decided not to pay the third division licence fee, but still he retains his majority shareholding.

“I think we are one of the craziest clubs in Europe,” admits Kmeth. “Whenever you think everything's all right, the next problem comes – and it's not a small problem, it's a big problem.”

While RB Leipzig catapulted themselves into the Champions League with external funding, 1860's problems are seen as a symbol of why many in Germany are still hugely wary of foreign investors. “We have 50+1 in Germany and we want it to stay,” insists Rostan. “Ismaik has only made wrong decisions. We want him to go, but I don't think he will. There have been protests at almost every game.” ▶

Above left Despite its foibles, 1860 fans are glad to be back at the Grunwalder this term
Below Keeper Marco Hiller turns his hand to selfies
Below right Franz Hell saw his first match at the stadium on his 10th birthday in 1963, during the first Bundesliga campaign





Above right “Sechzig! Sechzig!” 1860’s ultras have helped make the Grunwalder a fortress
Below right President Robert Reisinger says the current ground is a short-term solution

Rostan is part of the club’s youthful hardcore support, who stand on the Westkurve terrace. At 65, Franz Hell is more conciliatory. “If we don’t find common ground with Ismaik, we will always be in the same situation,” he says. “The club is far too strong to be destroyed from the outside, but we’re very weak on the inside. There are two groups and they don’t work together. Ismaik wants to have a small say about what to do with his money – he’s spent about €70m, yet we play in the fourth division.”

Sechzig had one of the largest budgets in the second tier last term. But they have also had 12 changes of manager in the past six years, although former 1860 winger Daniel Bierofka has impressed since Portuguese boss Vitor Pereira left in the summer. Almost the entire squad departed too, so a new team has been moulded, largely with players from the reserve side. The club have got a strong record of developing youngsters – Borussia Dortmund midfielder Julian Weigl is among those who have come through their system.

“In the last 10 years, 20-25 players have gone from our academy to the Bundesliga,” reveals Gunther Gorenzel, a former 1860 youth coach who recently returned as sporting director. “The strength of this club is the fanbase, the big tradition we have and a very strong academy. It will always have a future because of those things.” He’s tasked with using those strengths to help move Die Löwen forward again, after a nightmare 2016-17 when not only were the first team relegated, but the under-19s and under-17s too.

We speak to Gorenzel in a corridor – the club apologetically explain that there simply aren’t any rooms inside the Grunwalder in which to chat. There are no executive boxes either, limiting the club’s ability to generate income, with tickets for tonight’s match costing as little as €14. Press facilities are basic, too. “In a way I like it here, but for the internet and view of the pitch, it’s much better at the Allianz Arena,” admits Matthias Eicher, who reports for the *Abendzeitung Munchen* newspaper. “A renovation would be good, right?!”

“IT’S BECAUSE OF THE FANS THAT THIS CLUB IS ALIVE”

We take our seat away from the press box and among the fans in the main stand. Rock music and club songs blare out from the speakers ahead of kick-off, which the club officially say is at 18.60 – that’s 7pm to you. A senior citizen twirls an old-school rattle as the sides emerge from the tunnel – *FFT* is already beginning to feel like we have entered a time warp. Ultras wave giant flags and let off smoke bombs, having decked the Westkurve out with banners. “Einmal Lowe, immer Lowe (Once a Lion, always a Lion),” says one, referring to their nickname. “50+1 muss bleiben (50+1 must stay),” says another.

The Grunwalder’s record attendance is 58,560, but capacity is now 12,500 for safety reasons, with a section of the Westkurve shut off. The stadium is sold out tonight, as it has been all season. There is no sign of Seligenporten fans, bar three people with red scarves.

The pillars in the main stand lead to many a restricted view. *FFT* find a good spot, but when latecomers, beers in hand, ask everyone in the row to move along a couple of seats, we discover that pillars are now blocking our view of not only one goal, but both. Grounds like this just don’t exist in England these days following the wave of regeneration post-Taylor Report. The Grunwalder has been preserved due to the fact it was owned by the city’s authorities, and remained a home to both 1860 and Bayern’s second teams.

The lack of a roof at either end is not affecting the atmosphere, with the ultras orchestrated by a bloke perched on the perimeter fencing with a megaphone, and a drummer. “Sechzig! Sechzig!” fans scream. In terms of noise, this doesn’t feel like a fourth-division match. An old chap gets to his feet in the main stand and starts playing a harmonica, making *FFT* briefly wonder whether we’ve suddenly been transported to a speakeasy in the Great Depression. His tune complete, he receives a round of applause and sits back down.

Soon everyone in the ground is on their feet, as Markus Ziereis heads 1860 in front. Cue rock music, and the stadium announcer bellowing “Toooooo fur 1800...” to begin a well-honed call and answer routine. “Sechzig!” the crowd respond.

“Nummer 24, Markus...”

“Ziereis!”

“Markus!”

“Ziereis!”

“MARKUS!!”

“ZIEREIS!!”

The rather basic scoreboard is quickly adapted to ‘Heim 1 Gaste 0’ (Home 1 Visitors 0), and there’s time for another quick tune from the mouth organist before the referee blows for half-time.

At that point, we leave our seat to speak to club president Robert Reisinger in another random interview location: with music booming out, the quietest spot to talk is in the home dugout. “This is the right stadium for us in this league,” he says. “If you’re playing in the fourth division, you must play in a small stadium and not a great big arena. It was an economic decision but we also have a story to tell now, as we’ve come back to our home.”

The club have permission to increase capacity to 15,000 for next season, but the Grunwalder is a short-term fix. There’s no option to return to the Allianz, and 1860 would be unlikely to receive approval to stage home matches at the Grunwalder if they got as high as the second division again, where different stadium regulations apply.

Renovations would be needed, but the money would have to come from the stadium’s owners, the city authorities. The city location is also likely to make expansion impractical. “This ground is enough for the third and fourth divisions,” says Reisinger. “For now, we will try to stay here. We must take it step by step, then we’ll see what the city says and decide. It’s difficult – it’s always a question of money. We have got a lot of fans, but not so much money.”

With the dugout ready to be occupied for the second half, we head back to our seat and watch as Seligenporten come close to levelling.

THE TEAM CELEBRATE IN FRONT OF THE ULTRAS AT THE FINAL WHISTLE. THIS IS A CLUB WHO HAVE REDISCOVERED THEIR SOUL AT THE GRUNWALDER



Rain starts to fall on the terraces as anxiety levels increase, but with 13 minutes left Ziereis races onto a through-ball, pokes it around the onrushing goalkeeper and finds the empty net. All the anxiety clears and, just like that, the rain stops. The mouth organist is off again, and a fan at the front leads a one-man campaign to start a Mexican wave. He tries around 15 times – getting no further than one block on each occasion – and looks around, arms outstretched in disappointment. Philipp Steinhart converts a late free-kick to round off a 3-0 victory, putting 1860 nine points clear at the top of the table.

The entire team celebrate in front of the ultras at the final whistle. After years of troubles, this looks like a football club who have found happiness again; a football club who have rediscovered their soul at the Grunwalder. They have won 12 of 14 home games in the league this season. “You see that the atmosphere in this ground is fantastic,” coach Bierofka tells *FFT* afterwards. “There’s a great spirit in our club.”

“It’s very cool to be playing here,” says defender Jan Mauersberger, one of the few still around from last season. “I doubt we would have had the same atmosphere at the Allianz. It’s because of the fans that this club is still alive. We hope to give them something back.”

Given the general sense of cheerfulness around the place tonight, we ask supporter Jonas Kaufmann a question. Given a choice, which would he prefer: being in the second division at the Allianz Arena, or staying in the fourth tier at the Grunwalder? “Of course this division,” he says. “This is the home of our club.”

That answer tells you everything about being a football supporter. Huge stadiums and impressive facilities are nice, but most important of all is a sense of identity, a sense of belonging. In the vast majority of cases, fans just want to feel at home. 🍷



YOU TAKING THE

MICKY

Words Ben Welch Photography Will Cornileus

Henrikh Mkhitaryan arrived in England with a big reputation, but Jose Mourinho never let him off the leash at Old Trafford. Now he's got the chance to turn Arsenal's fortunes on their head and write his name in Gunners history



A

bright blue sky, so clear and inviting it looks like the work of a master painter, stretches up to infinity from the north London horizon. The glorious sunshine masks the biting cold at The Hive, home of Barnet.

Henrikh Mkhitaryan walks into a conference room while breathing some warm air into his cupped hands. Arsenal's latest midfield maestro needs to thaw out, after spending half an hour firing free-kicks into the net on a neighbouring Sunday League pitch.

Offered a chain-store cup of coffee with his name scribbled on it, he quickly notices the barista has spelt his name incorrectly, and a smirk breaks across his face as he slowly

shakes his head. "This happened to me a lot in Manchester," he tells *FFT* with a chuckle. "Now I just say my name is Micki."

Mkhitaryan speaks without malice – even the televisual prodigies of *Child Genius* would think twice before spelling the Armenian's name – but the undertone of his wisecrack is clear: despite flashes of magic, he was never able to fully make a name for himself at Old Trafford.

In January, after 18 months of hokey cokey in and out of the United first team, Henrikh was happy to swap Jose Mourinho's pragmatists for Arsene Wenger's gung-ho Gunners.

"When I heard I could swap Manchester United for Arsenal, I said, 'Yes, I want to do that', I didn't think twice," he reveals. "It's important for me to play in an offensive team."

But if the Emirates Stadium was meant to be a brave new world, he has found himself trying to survive the decline and fall of the Wenger empire, with a raging fanbase and merciless press pack tearing down the final bricks of Arsene's crumbling citadel.

Mkhitaryan has played through the crisis, absorbing all the criticism and fighting back with assists and goals – most significantly against Milan at the San Siro, when he scored the opener in a 2-0 win.

"I'm very demanding of myself and I wouldn't be where I am today if I stopped every time I went through a difficult period," he says with stony-faced defiance. "Every player and every club has ups and downs. It's not a football life without them."

Henrikh's football life has certainly been an unorthodox one, taking in Armenia, France, Brazil, Ukraine and Germany on his way to north London. This cultural tour has shaped a playmaking hybrid who knows how to adapt to survive.

"When I wasn't playing at Manchester United I was just waiting for my next opportunity, because I knew that one day it would come," he says. And it has. He puts down his coffee and prepares to tell *FFT* why he's ready to take it.

ARMENIA TO DORTMUND... VIA SAO PAULO

Mkhitaryan's football education began at home. His father, Hamlet, was a striker in the old Soviet Higher League before moving to ASOA Valence in France's second division. However, young Henrikh's career was not preordained.

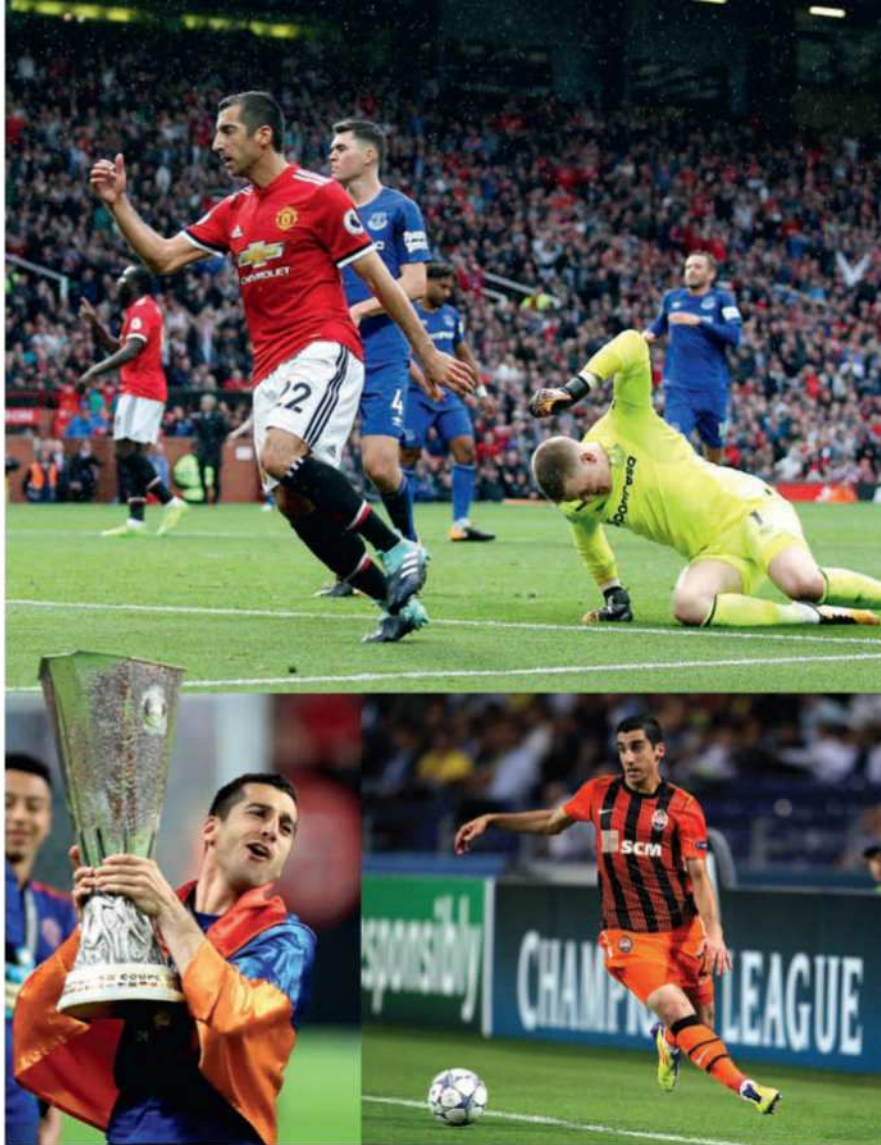
"My father never pushed me to become a football player," says the 29-year-old. "He said that the most important thing was to be a good man rather than what I was going to do as a job."

This approach awoke Mkhitaryan's intrinsic motivation and taught him a valuable lesson: always bet on yourself.

"Seeing my father play inspired me to become a footballer, so it's because of him that I am where I am," he explains, before quickly adding "but I have also had a big influence on my career – I trusted myself to become a great player, I had the drive to get here and I'm very happy for that."

Alas, Hamlet would never see his son's success. When Henrikh was only six years old, his father was diagnosed with a brain tumour, and within a year he had passed away. He was 33.

That didn't stop Mkhitaryan from studying his old man. He watched videotapes of him scoring goals in France, logging all his movements, finishes and link-up play.



"We cannot compare the football of the 1990s to the modern game because football is a lot faster now, but of course I learned something from watching those tapes – they inspired me," he reveals. "It wasn't until after my father died that I realised what a hero he was to me – he was a great player and a great person."

Desperate to emulate his dad, Mkhitaryan immersed himself in the game – taking a holistic approach to honing his skills. If he wasn't on the training pitch, his head was buried in a football book or he was in front of the TV, feasting on the artistry of his favourite players.

"I was a big fan of Roberto Baggio and then Thierry Henry, Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldinho and Kaka," he admits, smiling as he remembers their highlights reels. "Zidane was an artist, making the hardest things look simple, and Ronaldinho – he just danced with the ball. I enjoyed the way they treated the ball and helped their team-mates by taking charge of the side in difficult moments."

Mkhitaryan was encouraged by both his mother and his sister, who followed Hamlet's ethos by challenging him and trusting him to take responsibility. Even if that meant sending him to Brazil for four months when he was 13 years old.

His club in Armenia, Pyunik, had set up a player-exchange scheme with Sao Paulo and, chaperoned by a coach, he and three team-mates travelled 7,500 miles to learn *joga bonito*.

Changing continents to learn a new language, a new culture, a new game and a new way of life would test a seasoned veteran. But young Mkhitaryan practised Portuguese for a couple of months beforehand and refused to give in to homesickness.

"It was hard," he says. "I was far away from home, far away from my family, but I tried not think about it. If you want to be a footballer, you have to handle it."

Any strain was eased by the sheer joy he was experiencing in Brazil – football's spiritual home, where the will to win is welded to a desire to play with style. "It was really interesting comparing the Armenian

Clockwise from above

Henrikh made his name at Shakhtar, scoring 25 league goals in 2012-13; he played a vital role as Manchester United won the Europa League last season; netting his final Premier League goal for the club against Everton; Micki and Aubameyang formed a deadly duo in Dortmund, and are now reunited at the Emirates



SWAPPING MAN UNITED FOR ARSENAL? I DIDN'T THINK TWICE. IT'S IMPORTANT FOR ME TO PLAY IN AN OFFENSIVE TEAM

football culture to the Brazilian football culture – it's so different," he says. "Some days the coach would say, 'Today you can only use your left foot or only your right' or 'Today we just do shooting or dribbling.'

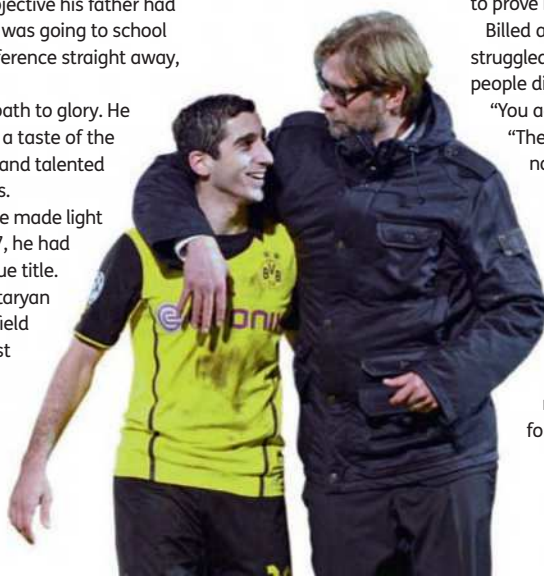
"I learned so much from my team-mates who were more skilful than me. I became good friends with Hernanes, who played for Lazio, Inter and Juventus. He was equally good with both feet and did incredible things with the ball. I would say, 'How the hell can you do that?' But then I would say to myself, 'Actually, I can do that too', and I'd go off and practise for hours."

His game was not the only aspect of life he was enriching. Henrikh was growing as a person and as a man – the objective his father had set him. "I learned a lot from Brazil," he says. "I was going to school and studying a new language. I didn't see a difference straight away, but year by year I could feel myself growing."

Mkhitaryan's Sao Paulo sojourn set him on a path to glory. He returned to Yerevan a much better player, with a taste of the opportunities that awaited someone dedicated and talented enough to graduate from the Armenian leagues.

Armed with his newly acquired Samba skills, he made light work of the Armenian top tier. By 2006, aged 17, he had played for Pyunik's first team and won the league title.

Three consecutive crowns followed, with Mkhitaryan scoring 30 goals in 70 appearances from a midfield role – more than enough for him to gain his first Armenia cap in a 2007 friendly against Panama. He was now on the international stage, and would soon be globetrotting once again.



"YOUR NAME'S TOO LONG, WE'LL CALL YOU MICKI..."

The Ukrainian Premier League has long been seen as a shop window for clubs from Europe's major leagues. Players arrive from Africa and South America hoping to springboard west. It's less of a long haul from Armenia – 850 miles or so up the eastern coast of the Black Sea – but it's still something of a leap for a 21-year-old.

But Henrikh Mkhitaryan wasn't your average 21-year-old. Metalurh Donetsk made him captain – the youngest skipper in the club's history – yet he was soon spirited across the city to their illustrious rivals, and Champions League regulars, Shakhtar.

Mkhitaryan joined a team who played to a distinctive Brazilian beat, with Douglas Costa, Willian, Fernandinho and Luiz Adriano welcoming him into their clique. The rhythm learned in Sao Paulo came flooding back to the schemer's feet.

Shakhtar boss Mircea Lucescu, acknowledging the evident chemistry between his South American contingent and their adopted Armenian, deployed Mkhitaryan just behind the frontmen in a 4-2-4 formation, and reaped the rewards.

Mkhitaryan picked up the 2012 Ukrainian Player of the Year trophy and followed that by scoring 25 goals in 2012-13, the best total in the league's 20-year history. In three seasons at Shakhtar, he won three consecutive doubles and the Ukrainian Super Cup.

Typically, Mkhitaryan plays down his own contribution and promotes his colleagues. "The team played very offensively so it was very easy to play alongside them [the Brazilians] and understand the way they play," he explains. "The only thing I needed to do was get in the right position at the right time and put the ball in the net."

He did, and Europe's elite took notice. Borussia Dortmund, who had just finished runners-up to Bayern Munich in both the Bundesliga and Champions League, shelled out €27.5 million – a substantial amount for a player who was still relatively unknown. It was time for Henrikh to prove himself again, but this time it would be tougher.

Billed as a replacement for departing hero Mario Götze, Mkhitaryan struggled initially at the Westfalenstadion, almost as much as German people did with his name.

"You actually pronounce my name 'Mack-Hit-Taryan,'" he tells FFT.

"The Germans couldn't say it, so Jurgen Klopp [left] told me, 'Your name is too long, let's call you Micki.' I replied, 'OK, no problem.'

"It was hard for me in the beginning because I didn't know the culture and didn't understand the language. It was very different from anywhere else I had been, but I managed to learn the language on my own, which was very important to the German people."

No longer a prospect, Mkhitaryan was expected to be a star, and even he began to question the size of fee he had commanded. "At the time €27.5 million was too much money and everyone kept saying, 'We've paid a lot of money for him,'" he explains. ▶

Clockwise from below right While he did enjoy several stellar moments at United, Henrikh never quite fitted the bill for his boss Jose Mourinho; the midfielder has seized his second chance to shine in England as a Gunner, marking his home debut by setting up a couple of goals for Aaron Ramsey

"I put a lot of pressure on myself, but realised that wasn't the best way. I had to forget about the numbers: I didn't decide the price tag, the clubs did, so I had to focus on the football."

It took time. His first two seasons were underwhelming, especially the second, when he suffered injuries. For the first time in his career, he couldn't resolve a problem on his own. He needed help.

It came ahead of the 2015-16 campaign, when a change of coach restored his shattered confidence. "Under Jurgen Klopp I played good football, but my second year was difficult because the team struggled as well," says Mkhitarayan. "Thomas Tuchel came in and gave me the same confidence I had at the beginning with Klopp. He convinced me to believe in myself and my strengths. Thanks to him, I progressed to the next level of my football career."

That next level saw Mkhitarayan lead the Bundesliga in assists, with 15, and scoop the league's Players' Player of the Season award. Aged 27 and at the peak of his powers, Henrikh had proved himself in one of Europe's top leagues. It was time to switch to the biggest of them all.

"It was my dream to play in the Premier League," he admits. "I knew it was a very difficult league, but I was ready. I had risked everything in Ukraine and Germany, so wanted a new challenge."

Manchester United boss Jose Mourinho, overhauling an unimpressive roster at Old Trafford, required a playmaker to crack "teams with a very defensive profile".

Mkhitarayan was identified, scouted and bought for £26.3 million in July 2016, arming Jose with "a real team player with great skill and vision, who also has a good eye for goal. I believe he'll make an impact on the team very quickly, as his style of play is suited to the Premier League."

In the event, it seemed it was Mourinho's team who had a very defensive profile and Mkhitarayan stagnated on the periphery. His new manager wanted him to balance his creative tendencies with destructive duties – tracking, harrying and snapping away at opponents. But try as he might, Mkhitarayan was not wired for this type of work and Mourinho accused him of "disappearing" during several matches.

While he produced bursts of brilliance during his 18-month spell at Old Trafford, playing a key

role in the Red Devils' 2017 Europa League triumph by scoring four of the team's nine goals in their last seven knockout games, Mkhitarayan never earned his manager's trust.

"It was difficult at the beginning," he reflects. "But then I settled and gave some good performances, and when I wasn't picked or playing well, I never complained or gave excuses. It's part of life."

Henrikh's defiant words can't quite hide his disappointment. There's a vulnerability in his voice that betrays his true feelings: failing to make the desired impact at Old Trafford hurt him. Whether he was unable to adapt or Mourinho couldn't find the appropriate words or system to galvanise the Armenian, he was lost and needed a way out.

Meanwhile, in north London, frustrated Chilean Alexis Sanchez was searching for an Emirates exit strategy. The solution was obvious and Mkhitarayan's agent, Mino Raiola, seized upon it, brokering a swap deal at the beginning of the year.

This time the playmaker's post-transfer test was slightly different – proving himself in a league he'd already been in.

"I WANT TO WRITE MY NAME INTO ARSENAL'S HISTORY"

As talk turns to his arrival in N5, Mkhitarayan sits up in his seat, looks directly at *FTT* and speaks with renewed purpose. He's no longer just answering questions, he's delivering a mission statement.

And he wants to make it very clear that he was not simply a clause in a transfer involving another player.

"Everyone needs to understand that I wasn't just part of a deal for Alexis Sanchez," he stresses. "If I hadn't chosen to come to Arsenal, he would still be here until the summer. His contract was running out and everything was up to me."

The deal was a straight swap, but Arsenal were keen to recruit the Armenian regardless of the Chilean's movements.

"I joined Arsenal because Arsene Wenger wanted me, not because he wanted to replace Sanchez. We are different players and different characters, with different abilities and skills, so I will try my best to do everything for the club."

On the surface, it looked as though Manchester United were getting the better deal: Mourinho was acquiring Arsenal's dynamic talisman, while Wenger was being sent an apparent Old Trafford outcast, albeit a very talented one.



Revitalised by his fresh surroundings, Mkhitarian set about burying that misconception. On his home debut, the skills he'd showcased at Dortmund came to the fore, with his defence-shredding vision and devastating turn of pace helping him to register three assists in a 5-1 demolition of Everton.

"I couldn't have imagined a better start," he gushes. "I had missed playing offensively, it's very important for me. I'm happy that I could assist [Pierre-Emerick] Aubameyang again and could find our old connection."

And that was another way he endeared himself to his new admirers – setting up Arsenal's record signing Aubameyang, who also arrived in January for £56m. They formed a devastating double act at Dortmund, with Mkhitarian's passing picking out Aubameyang's high-speed runs. In 2015-16, they produced 36 goals and 20 assists between them in the Bundesliga alone.

Mkhitarian was eager to rekindle this connection, so he got straight on the phone and planted a seed in the mind of BVB's wantaway striker.

He explains: "We were texting and he said, 'What's your situation?' I said, 'I don't know, but there's interest from Arsenal.' I asked him the same question and he replied, 'I want to leave, but I don't know where to go.'

"When I was transferred to Arsenal, I said, 'The first step is done, so now it's your turn'. He said, 'I will try my best to join you' and finally we're together again."

Convincing victories against Everton and Watford aside, the reunion hasn't been filled with as many goal-celebration hugs as they would have hoped. Arsenal's chances of qualifying for the Champions League next season have diminished as the top four disappear into the distance. Their best bet of participating in Europe's premier club competition next term is to lift the Europa League this season, having reached the last eight after a comprehensive 5-1 aggregate win over Italian giants Milan.

A humiliating 3-0 loss to Manchester City in the League Cup final left Gary Neville castigating their calamitous rearguard, and questioning the signing of Mkhitarian over more defensive players.

Neville's right and wrong in equal measure. The Gunners have got to strengthen their midfield and defence but, as the pundit pointed out, they are no longer even playing the high-speed, incisive football that is also Mkhitarian's trademark.

What the Armenian needs is a jolt like the one provided by Tuchel at Dortmund. Whether or not the eternally under-siege Wenger is the man to provide it remains to be seen, but regardless, Mkhitarian is optimistic about his own future.

"Whether you're playing well or playing badly, you will get criticised – it's normal," he says. "It's important to not pay attention to it, as you can always find a dog barking. You have to see positives in everything."

"Happiness is in here," adds the playmaker, patting his chest.

Even his family have been weighing in on Arsenal's struggles. "Yes, everyone has got an opinion," he chuckles. "My mother works for the Armenian FA and my sister for UEFA, so they like trying to tell me how I should be playing."

But, as his father told him, football is not everything. "Every day, you have to learn. It doesn't matter whether it's on the pitch, off the pitch or in life, you have to study something new. It's important not just to progress as a player, but as a person as well."

Henrikh Mkhitarian is a fighter and Arsenal's woe weighs heavily on his shoulders, but given the experiences he's endured on and off the pitch, he has the character to cope and is desperate to leave his mark.

"I want to write my name into Arsenal's history and have my name as a legend here," he insists. "I want to score goals, make assists and win trophies to make the fans happy."

Achieve that, and he will definitely etch his name into the Arsenal history books – even spelt correctly this time. ●

6699
MY MOTHER WORKS FOR THE
ARMENIAN FA AND MY SISTER
FOR UEFA, SO THEY LIKE
TRYING TO TELL ME HOW
I SHOULD BE PLAYING

THE TOP

Profiles and interviews Mike Holden, George Elek, Alec Fenn, Chris Flanagan, Ulisses Neto, Andrew Murray and James Maw

AS VOTED BY
THE FANS

FOOTBALL LEAGUE PLAYERS

It's that time of year once again! From Aston Villa to Yeovil Town, fans of each and every Football League club rank the very best players the 72 has to offer

49 CHARLIE WYKE

BRADFORD
POSITION FORWARD AGE 25



While it has been an underwhelming season for the Bantams, Wyke has built on the early promise he showed following his switch from Carlisle in January 2017 to attract interest from several second-tier clubs. A forward who can operate in a variety of formations without losing his goal threat, he should score his 50th league goal across three campaigns by the time this season concludes.

48 JARROD BOWEN

HULL
POSITION FORWARD AGE 21



A breakthrough season nobody saw coming. Bowen was the main beneficiary from an unwanted summer exodus in East Yorkshire that coincided with the arrival of Leonid Slutsky. The Russian could barely scrape a team together in late July and the former Hereford kid just kept impressing. By the end of September, he had scored seven goals in 11 appearances and was simply undroppable.

47 LIAM MOORE

READING
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 25



One of the few players at the Madejski to kick on following the bitter disappointment of May's play-off final defeat, the once 'top heavy' centre-back gave up his beloved chocolate digestives and is now reaping the rewards. A number of top-flight sides were believed to be considering a January bid, and Liam's brute strength and ability to hit a sweet diagonal pass wouldn't look out of place.

46 MATT TAYLOR

SWINDON
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 36

The ex-Premier League midfielder remains a key asset in the fourth tier due to boundless enthusiasm and an unrelenting ability to whip in devilish corners and free-kicks. The 36-year-old still approaches each game like it's his debut and is now embracing the opportunity to pick up valuable experience as a player-coach under Phil Brown, following a stint as caretaker boss when David Flitcroft surprisingly moved to Mansfield.



HOW DID WE DO IT?

Here at *FFT* we have always championed you, the fans. That's why we give you a voice when it comes to picking the best players in the Football League.

We've polled supporters of every Football League club, from League Two relegation-scrappers to Championship title-challengers, to scientifically (ish) identify the 50 men most deserving of a place in our annual list.

You selected your top five players in your club's division based on their performances during 2017-18. Points were then allocated according to each supporter's vote – five points for 1st, down to one point for 5th – which gave us the completed list. Enjoy the Top 50, and tell us why you agree or, more likely, disagree with it on Twitter...

#FLTOP50

50 DANNY ROSE

MANSFIELD
POSITION FORWARD AGE 24



The diminutive forward was shunted around in his early years, playing on the wing or further back, often due to the mismatch with robust defenders. But then-Mansfield boss Steve Evans believed in him as a striker, and Rose has repaid that faith through sheer desire to consistently get in front of his opponent. His technique when converting crosses with a single touch on either foot is superb.

45 JAMES COLLINS

LUTON
POSITION FORWARD AGE 27



A powerful goal-getter with a bit of everything in his locker, the Luton man looks set to secure a fourth promotion from League Two after two successes at Shrewsbury and one at Northampton. He springs to life around the periphery of the 18-yard box and consistently hits the target with long-range shots, but has an instinct for playing his team-mates in if it seems like the better option.

44 LUKE FREEMAN

QPR
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 26



The former Arsenal and Bristol City wideman is thriving in a central role at Loftus Road, having his most productive season to date as the most advanced midfielder in Ian Holloway's 3-5-2 system. A keen technician with a fine left peg, he kicked off the season in blistering form for the Hoops, serving up an endless procession of measured through-balls and floated crosses to bag eight assists by Christmas.

43 TOM BROADBENT

BRISTOL ROVERS
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 26

You have impressed in your first season in the Football League. How does it feel to make the breakthrough in your mid-20s?

It feels great. I only expected to be a fringe player after signing my first pro contract last summer, but I've played a much bigger part this season than I thought I would. I feel like I've progressed a lot.

You almost became a pro as a teenager – what did you do after that?

Bournemouth wanted to sign me, but they went into administration and could only take one player on, which was Danny Ings. After that I worked at Sainsbury's and did some labouring. At 19, I joined the Army.

In 2014 you were stationed in Afghanistan. What was that like?

I enjoyed it. I didn't want to leave the Army without serving anywhere, but also it was, 'F**king hell, this is real'. It was a reality check that, 'S**t, I'm kind of in danger here'. You have to keep your wits about

you, and we were shot at over there. I didn't tell my family about that at the time. I'd say, 'Yeah, everything's fine'. They were worried about me going there.

Did you play football in the Army?

I used to play in the county league with my mates when I came home at the weekends. A few years ago I played non-league football for Farnborough, and then Hayes and Yeading. I had a good couple of seasons, and realised five years into my time with the Army that I didn't want a full career there. I wanted to give football a proper go.

How did the move to Rovers happen?

I took a big gamble. You've got to give a year's notice to leave the Army, although you can get early release after six months if you've sorted a new job. I handed in my notice last February so that I would be six months into my notice by the start of pre-season. You're allowed days away from the Army to do courses, and I used all of mine for a trial at Bristol Rovers. Luckily the gamble paid off, or I'd have been stuck!



WHERE THE HECK IS OTIS KHAN?!

You may have twigged that 72 into 50 just won't go, so here are the best players at clubs who didn't quite make the main list

JACK TAYLOR

BARNET
MIDFIELDER AGE 19



The teen playmaker made his Bees debut only last season, but he has already established himself as a vital figure at The Hive.

LIAM LINDSAY

BARNESLEY
DEFENDER AGE 22



The 6ft 3in defender has stood out at Oakwell since moving south from Partick Thistle, after turning down an offer from Oxford.

SAM GALLAGHER

BIRMINGHAM
FORWARD AGE 22



The striker has been the pick of the bunch in a tough season for the Blues, scoring half a dozen goals while on loan from Southampton.

CURTIS TILT

BLACKPOOL
DEFENDER AGE 26



Curtis has risen from National League North to the third tier in no time – and manager Gary Bowyer says he will keep getting better.

SAMMY AMEObI

BOLTON
FORWARD AGE 25



Recruited over the summer after a successful loan spell last term, the rangy wideman has been Bolton's key creative outlet.

LUCAS AKINS

BURTON
FORWARD AGE 29



He admits to being a lover of dancing, which has perhaps helped him bedazzle opposition defenders during his Brewers career.

GREG LEIGH

BURY
DEFENDER AGE 23



The left-back, who spent 10 years with Man City's academy until 2014, has battled away for the Shakers at the foot of League One.



42 BRETT PITMAN

PORTSMOUTH
POSITION FORWARD AGE 30

Pompey have adapted fairly well to the third tier, but would probably be challenging for promotion if they had two Brett Pitmans. The veteran frontman has alternated between the No.9 and No.10 roles this term, leaving manager Kenny Jackett craving one more forward with Pitman's game intelligence. Always switched on, two-thirds of his goals this season have arrived after the 70th minute.

41 GARY HOOPER

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY
POSITION FORWARD AGE 30



It's been a campaign to forget for Wednesday and their overcrowded treatment room, and Hooper will be cursing fate more than anyone. With eight goals on the board by October, the former Celtic forward harboured genuine top goalscorer hopes before the Carlos Carvalho era unravelled. "Gary is absolutely clinical in the box," said colleague Ross Wallace. "One on one, there is only one outcome."

40 JORGE GRANT

NOTTS COUNTY
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 23



This Forest youngster is loving life on loan from across the Trent, netting 16 goals from a wide-left position in the opening half of the season. With fine close control, he tempts full-backs into making some naive challenges and also boasts a nice stash of reverse passes. However, Grant's supreme match-winning attribute is his knack of sneaking in at the back stick to tuck away those loose balls.

39 BEN PEARSON

PRESTON
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 23



A tenacious midfielder who has been essential for Preston in executing Alex Neil's intense pressing game. So difficult to beat in one-on-one situations, Pearson offers superb cover behind the initial press and patrols acres in the middle of the park. He's made the second-most number of tackles of any midfield player in the Championship. Less surprisingly, he's also picked up the most yellow cards.



38 MOHAMED EISA

CHELTENHAM
POSITION FORWARD AGE 23

The Sudanese striker's goal-laden spell with non-league Greenwich Borough captured the attention of several professional clubs. A total of 57 goals in 100 Boro matches persuaded the Robins to take the plunge, although his initial splash after joining came in a pre-season swim session. Luckily a lifeguard came to his rescue and he's fared much better since, hitting the net 20 times for Town during his first League Two season.

37 BARTOSZ BIALKOWSKI

IPSWICH
POSITION GOALKEEPER AGE 30



The Polish shot-stopper is twice a winner of the Portman Road player of the year award, and top-tier clubs are reportedly keeping close tabs on the keeper as he enjoys one of his most consistent campaigns so far. A late developer who did not play regular football until he was 24, Bialkowski turned 30 last July but has still got time on his side to earn at least one lengthy Premier League contract.

UCHE IKPEAZU

CAMBRIDGE
FORWARD AGE 23



With pace, power and a keen eye for goal, it's no real surprise to see that Ikpeazu has become a popular figure at the Abbey Stadium.

JAMIE DEVITT

CARLISLE
MIDFIELDER AGE 27



The Irish winger has improved as the campaign has worn on. Was named League Two Player of the Month for his efforts in February.

KRISTIAN DENNIS

CHESTERFIELD
FORWARD AGE 28



His fine form in front of goal for the League Two side is believed to have caught the eye of second-tier strugglers Burton.

SAMMIE SZMODICS

COLCHESTER
MIDFIELDER AGE 22



After an injury-hit 2016-17 season, the local lad has been back to his best this term - he had scored a dozen goals by mid-March.

MARC McNULTY

COVENTRY
FORWARD AGE 25



The Scot's goals are the Sky Blues' best hope of finally ending their staggering 48-year wait for a top-six finish in a division.

GLENN MORRIS

CRAWLEY
GOALKEEPER AGE 34



Red Devils boss Harry Kewell is clearly a big fan of his keeper: "Glenn's dedication has really shone through from the day I started."

CHRIS PORTER

CREWE
FORWARD AGE 34



The former Derby and Sheffield United goal-getter has brought guile and experience to the Railwaymen's attack in 2017-18.

36 JUNIOR HOILETT

CARDIFF
POSITION FORWARD AGE 27



Sparkling young player at Blackburn who then lost his way during four tumultuous campaigns with QPR, the wideman is precisely the type of wayward talent that Bluebirds boss Neil Warnock loves to revive. Still only 27, Hoilett has matured into a modern-day forward who's able to surge down either flank or drift inside, leaving Championship defenders for dead with his pace and trickery.

35 DANNY HYLTON

LUTON
POSITION FORWARD AGE 29



The high-flying Hatters had set an electric pace at the top of the fourth tier by Christmas time, and were on course to post 100 points until recurring hamstring woe deprived them of their talisman's presence. It wasn't just eight league points that eluded Luton in the six-week period that followed, but also the aura of invincibility that had kept so many opponents pegged back in their own half.



CHARLTON
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 20

33

There was talk of Brighton making an £8m move for you in January, and you've been linked with Liverpool, Everton, Man United and Man City. How flattering is that?

It's really flattering, but I haven't let it go to my head. I didn't move anywhere in January but it's not the end of the world. I'm focusing on trying to get promotion with Charlton and then hopefully we'll see what happens in the summer. The plan is to play in the Premier League one day. Hopefully, if I keep working hard, I'll get there.

You were a boyhood Tottenham supporter. Would that be a dream move?

Of course. Tottenham are now a heavyweight team so I'd love to go there – why not?

You played for Senrab, like John Terry, Sol Campbell and Ledley King. You also came through at Charlton with Joe Gomez and Ademola Lookman. Does that inspire you?

Yes, I know Joe and Ademola well – I speak to Ademola on a daily basis. They're playing at higher levels, and I get some advice from them. They both came through the Charlton ranks, so everything is possible.

EZRI KONGSA

34 GEORGE SAVILLE

MILLWALL
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 24



The former Chelsea and Wolves man has shone between both boxes in a Lions shirt this term. Capable of solid distribution under pressure, he is the key cog in a high-octane and aggressive Millwall team that aim to regain possession quickly. Eligible for Northern Ireland duty through a grandmother, Michael O'Neill didn't hang around, adding Saville to his squad in September after making the discovery.

After lifting the Under-20 World Cup with England last year, you have impressed at Charlton this term, mainly at centre-back. Are you pleased with your form?

I've been very pleased. I'm playing week in, week out, and I've got to thank the gaffer for that. I've also played right-back, so I'm learning a lot playing in different positions.

Lee Bowyer, Charlton assistant, compared you to Rio Ferdinand. How did that feel?

I'm really happy. He played with Rio and he sees something in me that he spotted in Rio. I looked up to Rio Ferdinand, and I'd like to say there are similarities in our style. He was composed on the ball, I'm composed on the ball, he was a bit of a leader, and although I wouldn't say I'm a leader at the moment because I'm still young, I'm growing into it.

JAMES COPPINGER

DONCASTER
MIDFIELDER AGE 37



He may be a veteran now, but the midfielder's still going strong. James hit 550 outings for the Yorkshire outfit in November 2017.

JAYDEN STOCKLEY

EXETER
FORWARD AGE 24



The lanky frontman looks well settled at St James Park – he'd been out on nine loans during his career with first club Bournemouth.

KYLE DEMPSEY

FLEETWOOD
MIDFIELDER AGE 22



Impressed so much during last season's loan move from Huddersfield that the Cod Army moved heaven and earth to keep him.

CHRISTIAN DOIDGE

FOREST GREEN
FORWARD AGE 25



Played big part in the club's rise to the EFL last term. Doidge is a product of the Southampton youth academy and a real goal threat.

TOMAS HOLY

GILLINGHAM
GOALKEEPER AGE 26



With that name and a 6ft 9in frame, Gillingham's Czech keeper was always destined to stand out. A very steady performer.

SIRIKI DEMBELE

GRIMSBY
FORWARD AGE 21



The Ivorian wideman started his football career up in Scotland. He scored thrice in October to secure Young Player of the Month award.

ALEX WOODYARD

LINCOLN
MIDFIELDER AGE 24



The former Southend man has returned to League Two after four years in non-league. Has made that transition more than smoothly.

32 JON NOLAN

SHREWSBURY
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 25



One of the key sources of creativity in a largely industrious Shrewsbury team, others may claim the goals and assists but it's usually Nolan who sets the move in motion with his ingenuity. The ex-Grimsby and Chesterfield midfielder has been likened to Paul Scholes by Shrews boss Paul Hurst. Whenever there is a change of system, getting Jon on the ball is often the manager's number one priority.

31 ERHUN OZTUMER

WALSALL
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 26



'Turkish Messi' Oztumer has admitted to feeling added pressure to pull off moments of magic whenever the Saddlers are in a bit of bother. However, rather than shying away from the responsibility, he puts his faith in hard work. Then-manager Jon Whitney revealed that Erhun is literally going the extra mile, as his average distance covered has gone up this term from 10km per game to 11.5km.

30 BILLY SHARP

SHEFFIELD UNITED
POSITION FORWARD AGE 32



Sharp found the net 30 times last season to fire United into the second tier, but 2017-18 has been mixed for the 32-year-old. He sacrificed some of his scoring prowess to be the foil for in-form frontman Leon Clarke, as the club rode the crest of their promotion wave until late November. And when the results did tail off, Billy led by example to lift them back up, bagging braces against Leeds and Reading.

29 ADAMA TRAORE

MIDDLESBROUGH
POSITION FORWARD AGE 22



Faster than a speeding bullet, with great upper body strength and low centre of gravity, the ex-Barcelona and Aston Villa winger is proving a show-stopper on social media, for routinely doing more dribbles than entire clubs combined. He's been egged on by his new gaffer, Tony Pulis, who fully appreciates the value of a man who can help his team turn defence into attack in a matter of seconds.

28

NOTTINGHAM FOREST
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 20

KIERAN DOWELL

The success of England's youth teams last summer thrust a clique of academy players onto the radar of EFL teams, all looking to borrow the nation's most exciting talent.

Kieran Dowell had tasted first-team action before, with a substitute appearance followed by a Premier League start for Everton in the final game of 2015-16.

Fellow graduates Tom Davies and Jonjoe Kenny built upon this early exposure, but Dowell did not feature in the top flight last term. He only returned to the consciousness of many with his displays in England's World Cup-winning Under-20 team, for whom he started in the final.

Nottingham Forest were quick to pounce for a loan deal, and although they have endured a difficult season, Dowell has impressed with his goalscoring instincts and eye for a pass.

He is part of a young and talented squad at the City Ground, with Matty Cash and Ben Brereton seemingly destined for great things. But Dowell isn't just a player with potential – he's influencing Championship games now.

Ten goals by mid-March is a fine return for his first full season, especially as Forest have been far from prolific.



LEE NICHOLLS

MK DONS
GOALKEEPER AGE 25



Former England Under-19 keeper Nicholls has established himself as the first-choice No.1, after signing from Wigan in 2016.

SAM LAVELLE

MORECAMBE
DEFENDER AGE 21



Having regularly played for Blackburn and Bolton Under-23s, the youngster has secured first-team action as a Shrimp.

PADRAIG AMOND

NEWPORT
FORWARD AGE 29



Few would argue that the most memorable moment of the Irish forward's campaign was his header in an FA Cup draw against Spurs.

CHRIS LONG

NORTHAMPTON
FORWARD AGE 23



Signed on loan from top-flight Burnley, striker Long is certainly doing his bit as the Cobblers battle against the drop to League Two.

EWIN DOYLE

OLDHAM
FORWARD AGE 30



Just when it looked like Doyle would never recreate the old magic of his Chesterfield career, a loan at Oldham has sparked goals.

RYAN LEDSON

OXFORD
MIDFIELDER AGE 20



Played for Everton in Europe in 2014 but was forced to leave in search of regular action. Has found it at Oxford and is flourishing.

TOM POPE

PORT VALE
FORWARD AGE 32



Back with Vale after a mixed two years with Bury, the towering striker is back among the goals and had hit 16 by early-March.

27 GRAHAM CAREY

PLYMOUTH
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 28



The Irish playmaker has predictably proved the catalyst for Plymouth's meteoric mid-season surge from bottom of League One to play-off reckoning. His raking passes and ability to breeze past a man have been just as effective at a higher level, after the Pilgrims' promotion last season. Having posted double figures for league assists, he is set to do the same with goals for the third campaign running.

26 JOSH MORRIS

SCUNTHORPE
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 26



The wide schemer has not quite hit the same heights as his previous season – at least not in terms of goals and assists – although the underlying data remains of equal standard. Whenever Scunthorpe are floundering in a match, he is still the player most likely to step up with a moment of inspiration. Three of his first four goals of the season sealed wins over Oxford, Bury and Peterborough.



ADEBAYO AKINFENWA

25

WYCOMBE
POSITION FORWARD AGE 35

Why, at 35 years of age, have you managed to score so many goals this season?

I know I'm nearing the end of my career, but I'm really comfortable with knowing what I'm about. The earlier you understand your game, the better you'll become. I now know what I'm good at and what I'm not so good at, such as pressing or tracking back. All my strike partners allow me to focus on scoring goals and doing what I do best. As long as I feel fit and healthy, and enjoy my football, I'll keep going.

You have never scored more than 18 goals before this season. Is beating that a target?

I'd love it. I equalled it last season – to beat my career record at 35 would be brilliant. That said, I'd take not scoring again if Wycombe went up, ideally automatically as that'll give me three extra weeks off! To get another promotion on the CV would be one of my best achievements.

Your strength is legendary. Are some team's centre-backs beaten before they face you?

[Laughs] Oh yeah. I can tell if they don't fancy the fight within the first five minutes.

Is it true that Panama's centre-back Roman Torres has now pipped you as the strongest player on FIFA?

I've heard that, though I've not seen the latest update. If he wants to go toe-to-toe, I'll be up for it, you know what I mean? This Torres guy, listen, I'm ready for a strength battle.

Do any chants follow you around?

I was offside at Portsmouth, and the whole of Fratton Park sung, "Your tits are offside". I burst out laughing. Every time I'm offside now, that chant comes out!

What do you think you'll do after football?

I've done a bit of acting and I'm playing myself in a film called *Are We Dead Yet*, out this year. I'm going to apply for *Fast and Furious 10*, and I would definitely be a Marvel character. People talk about obvious ones like Beast from *X-Men* or Juggernaut, but I'd like to play an unknown one – maybe Blade. Watch this space!

IAN HENDERSON

ROCHDALE
FORWARD AGE 33



Still going strong at the grand age of 33. Found the net against Bromley, Slough, Millwall and Spurs in the club's thrilling FA Cup run.

RICHIE TOWELL

ROTHERHAM
MIDFIELDER AGE 26



Joined the Millers on loan deal from Brighton, for whom he has made one league outing after arriving from Dundalk in 2015.

MARK OXLEY

SOUTHEND
GOALKEEPER AGE 27



Had big gloves to fill when recruited to replace Dan Bentley as the club's No.1 in 2016, but has gradually made role his own.

AIDEN McGEADY

SUNDERLAND
FORWARD AGE 32



A very rare bright spot in another torrid season for the Black Cats. Has done more than most to provide joy to those long-suffering fans.

MARK McKEE

STEVENAGE
MIDFIELDER AGE 19



A nimble playmaker who broke into the team at the end of last season. Has quickly become a fans' favourite at Broadhall Way.

GEORGE LONG

WIMBLEDON
GOALKEEPER AGE 24



Has done a sterling job for the Dons since moving south from Sheffield United on loan, after losing the No.1 spot to Simon Moore.

OTIS KHAN

YEOVIL
MIDFIELDER AGE 22



Made the headlines when he missed the Glovers' FA Cup tie with Man United after shoving a ref. Otis appealed, and it was rejected...

24 SAM JOHNSTONE

ASTON VILLA
POSITION GOALKEEPER AGE 25



Manchester United are reported to have placed a £6.5m price tag on the highly-rated shot-stopper, having activated a one-year extension to his contract. And there's no doubt Villa manager Steve Bruce would like to complete a deal, no matter what division the club are in next season. The on-loan keeper is not as prominent now the team have got their act together, though he remains just as dependable.

23 JOE BRYAN

BRISTOL CITY
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 24



A local lad who shot to fame during the Robins' epic League Cup run to the semi-finals, Bryan is lightning quick and can operate anywhere on the left. A Champions League player "without question" says his manager Lee Johnson, due to the level of technique he has already mastered. A slave to repetition on the training ground, Joe is adding extra elements to his armoury as each season passes.

"HAVING TIME OFF TO DEAL WITH MY DEPRESSION MADE ME TAKE A STEP BACK AND REALISE HOW LUCKY I AM"

22



ACCRINGTON
POSITION FORWARD AGE 27



BEST IN
LEAGUE TWO

BILLY KEE

Congratulations Billy – you've been chosen as the best player in League Two.

Oh that's nice, cheers!

You reached 20 goals by mid-February to top the goal charts. Have you played even better than you expected?

I've always wanted to hit 20 goals in a season, and I never have done before this year. I think I've been on top of my game for much of this season but it's down to the players I'm playing with, because they're all on top of their game. Plus I think I've scored around eight penalties. If the lads keep winning pennos, hopefully I'll score some more! [Laughs]

Do you always feel confident of scoring?

I see myself as a natural finisher, and I'm a big believer that it's something you can't teach. If you get me a yard out, where I normally score goals from, I'll be tapping them away! I'm not the quickest, but when the ball lands in the box I seem to be there. You've got to back yourself to score goals if you're a striker.

You have bounced back after taking a month off last season to deal with depression. How grateful are you to Accrington?

That's why I signed a four-year deal here – the club have been so good to me, letting me deal with my issues, so I hope I can repay them on the pitch. They're keeping me happy on and off the field – they're a special club to me.

Had you stopped enjoying the game before having that break?

I got to the point where I just didn't turn up – I stayed in bed. The manager [John Coleman] phoned me one day and said, "Bill, go and see the chairman," and the chairman said, "Have some time off, mate." Just before that we got two penalties in an away game at Cambridge and I refused to take both of them. I was the penalty-taker and had taken them all my life, so I knew something must be wrong. I didn't know what was happening to me, though. I'd had it since I was about 16, but 10 years went by before I started to realise something wasn't right. When I knew it was depression, it made me realise I had an illness, and I've had a lot of help from people since then.

How did you regain your love for the game?

Having some time off made me realise I could go into another job and it would be exactly the same, as it doesn't matter what job you're in. It made me take a step back and realise how lucky I am. I did some work with my father on a building site for three or four weeks, and was soon missing football, the lads and the banter. Things have turned around at the minute and I'm enjoying it – I'm just taking everything day by day. As the gaffer says, you won't have any depression if you keep scoring goals. If I keep scoring, I'll be happy. We're in a great position in the league and pushing towards promotion. Fingers crossed we'll get over the line.

21 CHARLIE MULGREW

BLACKBURN
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 32



Cultured defender who hit nine league goals in a 12-match spree from late November to early February. The ex-Celtic and Aberdeen man persistently causes panic with his wicked deliveries from in-swinging set-pieces. Defensively, Mulgrew is prepared to put his body on the line, but his ability to play through the first press is also essential to the Tony Mowbray mantra at the League One high-fliers.



19 JACK MARRIOTT

PETERBOROUGH
POSITION FORWARD AGE 23

A pacy goalscorer with an appreciation of the bigger picture, the former Ipswich and Luton man fully understands the connection between the quality of his work outside the 18-yard box and the quantity of chances that arrive in it. The Posh turned down a £4m offer for his services in January and reckon he's better than both Dwight Gayle and Britt Assombalonga, for whom United received over £7m each.

18 BRADLEY DACK

BLACKBURN
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 24



The Londoner's sublime displays for Gillingham and eye for goal meant he was linked with Championship and even Premier League outfits, so it was something of a surprise to see him remain in League One with newly relegated Rovers. The playmaker has steadily improved as the campaign has progressed, scoring 15 times by early-March, and will be key to the Ewood Park club's promotion hopes.

20

SAMUEL SAIZ

Director of football Victor Orta's arrival at Leeds last summer sparked a recruitment drive targeting talented European players, with Ezgjan Alioski, Mateusz Klich, Jay-Roy Grot and Ouasim Bouy among the imports.

As the campaign progressed, Orta's transfer strategy appeared haphazard at best. A good start made way for a slump in form that cost gaffer Thomas Christiansen his job, although Orta remains at Elland Road.

With Paul Heckingbottom now at the helm, his initial task is to clear the dead wood that was brought in and build a squad capable of launching a promotion push next term.

One player Leeds fans will hope survives the inevitable clear-out is Samuel Saiz. Signed on a four-year deal from Spanish side Huesca for €3.5m, the 27-year-old has shown himself to be the diamond in a rough summer.

There were, however, some question marks surrounding his arrival. With Pablo Hernandez and Kemar Roofe both occupying the No.10 role, Saiz appeared to be a player Leeds didn't need. Yet they spent a chunk of the budget in a move symptomatic of the strategy, or lack of one, that has defined Leeds since Orta was put in charge of signings.

Having progressed through the youth ranks at Real Madrid, there was no doubting Saiz's expertise, and his all-action style of play soon endeared him to Leeds supporters.

His direct dribbling ability and penchant for the spectacular have really helped him make his mark on the Championship – not that he's always made headlines for the right reasons. Saiz was sent off for spitting at an opponent in an FA Cup tie and suspended for six games, of which Leeds won just one.

The Yorkshire club will now have to convince the Spaniard not to look for a summer switch, with suitors sure to register an interest come the end of the season.



LEEDS
POSITION FORWARD AGE 27

17 OLLIE WATKINS

BRENTFORD
POSITION FORWARD AGE 22



Brentford don't spend £1.8m lightly, so when their analytical models identified Exeter hotshot Watkins as a solid purchase for that fee, it was almost a given that he would prove a success in the second tier. The only surprise is how easy he's made the jump from League Two to the Championship since joining last summer, recording the most shots in the division and also the third-most key passes.

16 RICHARD KEOGH

DERBY
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 31

A mainstay of the County line-up through the trials and tribulations of the past six years, the Republic of Ireland man is only improving with age and going from strength to strength into his thirties. Keogh has been an invaluable sounding board for gaffer Gary Rowett and reliable link to the dressing room. He portrays the desired values so well that the Rams have tied him down to a new deal running until the summer of 2021.

BEST IN
LEAGUE ONE



WIGAN
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 24

NICK POWELL

A player who embodies this Wigan team – Powell is just too good for League One and he plays with a swagger that suggests he’s well aware of the fact.

His natural ability has never been in doubt. Manchester United simply do not invest time and money bringing in other teams’ starlets unless there’s a genuine chance they could reach the very top. Why would they, given the swathes of academy talent they stockpile for each year group?

But Powell’s time at Old Trafford is becoming a footnote of his career rather than a defining failure, as he proves the talisman in Wigan’s attempt to return to the Championship at the first time of asking.

Twelve league goals by mid-March tell only part of the story; Powell is a gifted No.10 who can dictate matches with his silky touch and creative abilities.

Paul Cook’s Latics haven’t been outside the top six all season, and were last out of the top three at the end of September. Victories such as the 7-0 rout at Oxford United, which came a week after a 4-0 triumph at AFC Wimbledon, confirmed what fans already knew; that Dan Burn, Will Grigg, Michael Jacobs & Co. were all quality players at this level. However, Powell has remained the standout performer.

Unlike some other burgeoning talents in the Football League, Powell’s ability was no secret from clubs up the pyramid and some began to

circle in January. Brighton had offers rejected and Aston Villa were thought to be keen, but it was reported Powell would snub any move should the Wigan board accept an offer.

At 18, Powell had swapped the red of Crewe for Manchester, and he appears in no rush to move again. At 24, Powell is still a frightening talent who surely has a Premier League future, but he’s in no rush to get there. He’s a player who seemingly thrives on being the big fish in a small pond.

Wigan look set to tackle the Championship again next season and will be better equipped with Cook at the helm. Powell, like Wigan, will want to get back to the top and Latics addicts hope it’s him who drags them there.

POWELL’S TIME AT OLD TRAFFORD IS BECOMING A FOOTNOTE INSTEAD OF A DEFINING FAILURE AS HE PROPELS THE LATICS

15 BARRY DOUGLAS

WOLVES
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 28



Little was known of the Scottish defender when he arrived from Turkish side Konyaspor in July, but Barry’s stamina and game intelligence at wing-back have enabled manager Nuno to implement an expansive 3-4-3. A modest senior career has hidden bags of technical ability. In a team crammed with talent, the ex-Dundee United man has a wicked set-piece delivery and contributed double-figure assists.



JOHN TERRY

13

Chelsea's 'Captain, Leader, Legend' earned enough in his 19 years at Stamford Bridge to spend the rest of his days living on easy street, but his trademark will win draw him to the West Midlands, and threw him into the midst of a promotion battle.

"I don't think I would ever want to go into a season where I'd go, 'I'm happy if we stay up, or I'm happy if we finish halfway up or do better than we did last year,'" he said at his unveiling last summer. "I think that would be really unambitious. That's a big reason why I signed. I wanted to be winning more times than losing."

Those who hoped he'd live to regret those words – and there are plenty in that category – have been disappointed. After a few early wobbles, Terry's been an imposing presence in the heart of Villa's defence as they look to return to the top flight.

"John is a natural leader of men on and off the pitch," enthused Villa gaffer Steve Bruce, a childhood hero of the ex-England captain. "He's a wonderful footballer, but what he's brought to the dressing room is even more important. He knows what it's like to play at the top level – all of the youngsters here can learn from him."

Not that Terry's been flanked by wet-eared pups in Villa's backline. His regular defensive partners are James Chester (29), Neil Taylor (29), Ahmed Elmohamady (30), Alan Hutton (33) and Chris Samba (34) – all with Premier League experience.

Whether he stays at Aston Villa next term remains to be seen – after all, if they go back up, they **won't be winning so often...**



ASTON VILLA
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 37

12 BOBBY REID

BRISTOL CITY
POSITION FORWARD AGE 25



The biggest surprise of the Championship this season has been Reid's phenomenal transition from busy midfielder to prolific goal-getter. Swotting up on videos of Romario, Ian Wright and Gary Lineker was a key part of the process, reveals manager Lee Johnson. Fears that his exceptional early-season form would tail off once centre-backs had sussed him out have proved wide of the mark.

11 JACK GREALISH

ASTON VILLA
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 22



Villa gaffer Steve Bruce has put the midfielder's excellent performances down to "becoming a man" in the course of conquering his off-pitch troubles, including a freak kidney problem picked up in pre-season. "He is bigger and stronger and he looks a man now – with a dodgy haircut," chuckled Bruce, who has managed to get a tune out of the local lad who hasn't always lived up to his billing.

10 ROBERT SNOGCRASS

ASTON VILLA
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 30



The former West Ham, Hull and Norwich man delivered a succession of impressive displays around the turn of the year, receiving man of the match plaudits in away wins at Middlesbrough, Nott'm Forest and both of the Sheffield outfits. Snodgrass' directness in the final third causes untold panic but he has also added devilment to his game, happy to take on the role of pantomime villain.

9 IVAN CAVALEIRO

WOLVES
POSITION FORWARD AGE 24



"He never gives the ball away" cry the Molineux masses to the strains of Earth, Wind & Fire, but Portuguese forward Cavaleiro offers so much more than just ball retention. The former Monaco player is a box of tricks, a dynamic winger who likes taking lots of risks. In 2016-17, his cutting-edge quality was evident only in glimpses, but under Nuno he's thriving in a more fluid setup and producing consistently.

8 SEAN MORRISON

CARDIFF
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 27

The towering defender is drawing comparisons with former captain Mark Hudson as the Bluebirds bid to reach the top tier for a second time. His fine reading of the game and formidable presence in both boxes have made him invaluable to manager Neil Warnock. When Morrison was sidelined for three weeks over the Christmas period, the side lost four league matches on the spin.



6 JAMES MADDISON

NORWICH
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 21



Selling Alex Pritchard to Huddersfield for £11m was a no-brainer for the **Canaries**, considering Maddison's graduation to game-changer. The former **Coventry** kid has drawn comparisons with Dele Alli for his muck and nettles apprenticeship. Already in double figures for goals thanks to a hat-trick against Hull, he has also created more chances than anyone in the Championship – admirable at 21.

5 TOM CAIRNEY

FULHAM
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 27



Injuries have hampered the Cottagers' Scotland international this term, but his incredible 91 per cent pass completion rate since returning in mid-October laid the foundations for a blistering promotion charge. West Ham had £15m and £18m bids turned down in January and Tom stayed put, saying his dream is to captain the west Londoners at the top level. Time will tell, but he's heading there either way.



BRISTOL CITY
POSITION DEFENDER AGE 28

How happy have you been with the season?

It's been great – we are improving every year. The cup runs have been incredible, too. I don't think anyone would have believed at the start of the season that we'd reach the semi-finals of the League Cup, beating Manchester United – especially for a boyhood Red – before giving Manchester City a run for their money.

The Robins' goal celebration gifs have gone viral, with weird scenes such as Bobby Reid pouring two bottles of milk over himself and Jamie Paterson having an egg smashed on his head. Where do these ideas come from?

We think of them ourselves. The media team do a great job finding the props.

You have found the back of the net regularly from defence. Your first goal of the season, away at Reading, was marked with a bizarre dancing gif. Were they your Saturday night dance moves?

[Laughs] I hope not, as there'd be a 10-metre radius around me if I attempted anything like that! There's a few different videos we've got ready to go, so after the match it's straight to your phone to see which one the social media team have gone for.

After netting the winner at home to Cardiff, your gif had you DJing, spinning paper plates instead of records...

The day before that game, I was told I would be doing BBC Radio Bristol on the Monday, so we were laughing that it would be the perfect time to score and put that gif out. It was Sod's law I got the winner. The timing couldn't have been better, really.

“WE’VE ALL GOT A FEW GIFS READY TO GO, SO IT’S STRAIGHT TO THE PHONES AFTER A GAME”

What was the thinking behind the next one – brushing your teeth, and your face?

[Laughs] I have no idea! That was for Sheffield United. I just thought I'd brush my teeth and go mad with it. My gums and face were pretty sore after that so it's not one I'd recommend, especially on the face.

For your Manchester City goal gif, you put on a horse's head. Where did that come from?

That's actually mine! It's part of a fancy dress outfit that I once wore – I saw it at home and brought it in. The fact it was against Man City, and the magnitude of the match [the second leg of the League Cup semi-final], meant that one went viral.

And, finally, eating a banana at speed after scoring in February's dramatic 3-3 draw at home to Sunderland. The world record time to peel and eat a banana is 6.78 seconds, so do you fancy a crack at it?

Not really, as it wasn't particularly pleasant the first time around... Why did I do it? I'd run out of ideas by then!



4 MATEJ VYDRA

DERBY
POSITION FORWARD AGE 25

The Czech goal-getter started the season as an irked onlooker, but has flourished in a withdrawn role under manager Gary Rowett. His goalscoring ability with either foot has never been in any doubt, but a greater tactical awareness and willingness to close down spaces has led his gaffer to call him “the best No.10 in the Championship”. With 18 goals by mid-March, he's still a finisher, first and foremost.

ADEN FLINT

WOLVES
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 21

RUBEN NEVES



WOLVES
POSITION FORWARD AGE 21

DIOGO JOTA

FFT: You have both played a star role in steering Wolves towards the Premier League – you must be satisfied with the way things have gone since arriving in the summer?

Neves (left): It's been great. The Championship is a really hard league so we can't relax yet, but things have worked out well.

Jota: It's been a great season so far. We started it with a different way of playing and tried some innovative tactics. I think we maybe took a few of our opponents by surprise.

FFT: Ruben, you joined Wolves for £15.8m from Porto – a Football League record. Did you feel any pressure?

Neves: Honestly, I don't care about that kind of thing. Last season at Porto was not as good as expected from a personal perspective – I didn't play as much as I wanted, so when this chance appeared I didn't think twice. I knew I'd be able to develop myself here, and I feel a completely different player. I love the atmosphere inside the stadium – the supporters are mental about the club, so every match is special.

FFT: Diogo, you're on loan from Atletico Madrid. Was it a hard decision to swap the Spanish top flight for the Championship?

Jota: Last year I was fighting for the title on loan at Porto, so it was different adapting to English football and the fierce competition at the club. But I thought it was a good decision aiming for the Premier League – the dream for every player.

FFT: You played together at Porto, and there are several Portuguese speakers at Wolves. Has that helped you both?

Neves: It's a huge help, especially for me since this is my first experience abroad. We have got a fantastic group here and everyone, no matter the nationality, gave us a warm welcome.

FFT: Do the Portuguese-speaking players spend a lot of time together?

Jota: For sure! We have a small community here and we're all very close.

FFT: Are there any good Portuguese restaurants in the Midlands?

Jota: To be honest, we haven't found many.

Neves: Indeed. We can't find as many options as in London, unfortunately.

Jota: We've been to some Brazilian restaurants, though, and a Portuguese cafe too. They help us to get traditional dishes that we can't find here.

FFT: What else do you do?

Neves: We like to play video games together and went off to do paintball the other day. We'll play snooker pretty often as well.

FFT: Who wins?

Neves: It depends. If it's FIFA, Diogo's the best – he's addicted to it!

Jota: That's true, though Ruben's better at pool.

FFT: You've both played in the Champions League for Porto – was that good experience?

Jota: Definitely. You only take great experiences from playing at that level.

Neves: You can't deny that. Players learn from it in different ways, but it's something very positive.

FFT: Given that experience, do you feel you would both do well in the Premier League?

Neves: It's too early to think about that. We have to think about securing promotion first, and then assess our chances in the Premier League.

Jota: It's difficult to say because we understand the Championship is different from the Premier League. I'm on loan but the board has expressed their intentions of keeping me, and I want to play in the Premier League. We must remain focused, because automatic promotion isn't guaranteed. But it's been so far, so good.

RYAN SESSON

FourFourTwo
TOP 50
WINNER

FULHAM
POSITION MIDFIELDER AGE 17

Congratulations Ryan – you’ve been voted the No.1 player in the Football League this term. You’re only 17 but have scored more than a dozen goals for Fulham – were you expecting to make such a big impact in the Championship so soon?

Thanks. No, I didn’t expect to impact games and score as many goals as I have done. It’s given me a lot of confidence and I now know that I can perform at this level.

You’ve made a big impression on the wing in recent times, but you started the season with Fulham playing at left-back. Had you always been a defender before?

Up until I was 15 I didn’t really have a fixed position. I played in defence, midfield and as a striker, too. But when I turned 15, left-back became my regular position. Now I’m in the first team I’ve played further forward, so it’s changing again!

You were named as left-back in last term’s PFA Championship Team of the Year. What did that honour mean to you?

I was incredibly proud to be talked about in the same company as so many experienced pros. I was surprised to be picked in that side at such a young age but it’s motivated me to achieve more and more in the many years to come.

How has your manager, Slavisa Jokanovic, got the best out of you so far?

I think the main thing is that he just lets me play. He doesn’t say much to me individually. Having freedom gives me confidence and he wants me to play my natural game. There is no pressure on me, so I just play.

What are your targets now?

I want to help Fulham seal promotion to the Premier League – that is the big goal. Ideally we will finish in the top two positions and go up automatically, but we will take promotion any way it comes. If it’s through the play-offs, then so be it.

“I DID NOT EXPECT TO IMPACT MATCHES AND SCORE AS MANY GOALS AS I HAVE DONE – IT’S GIVEN ME CONFIDENCE”



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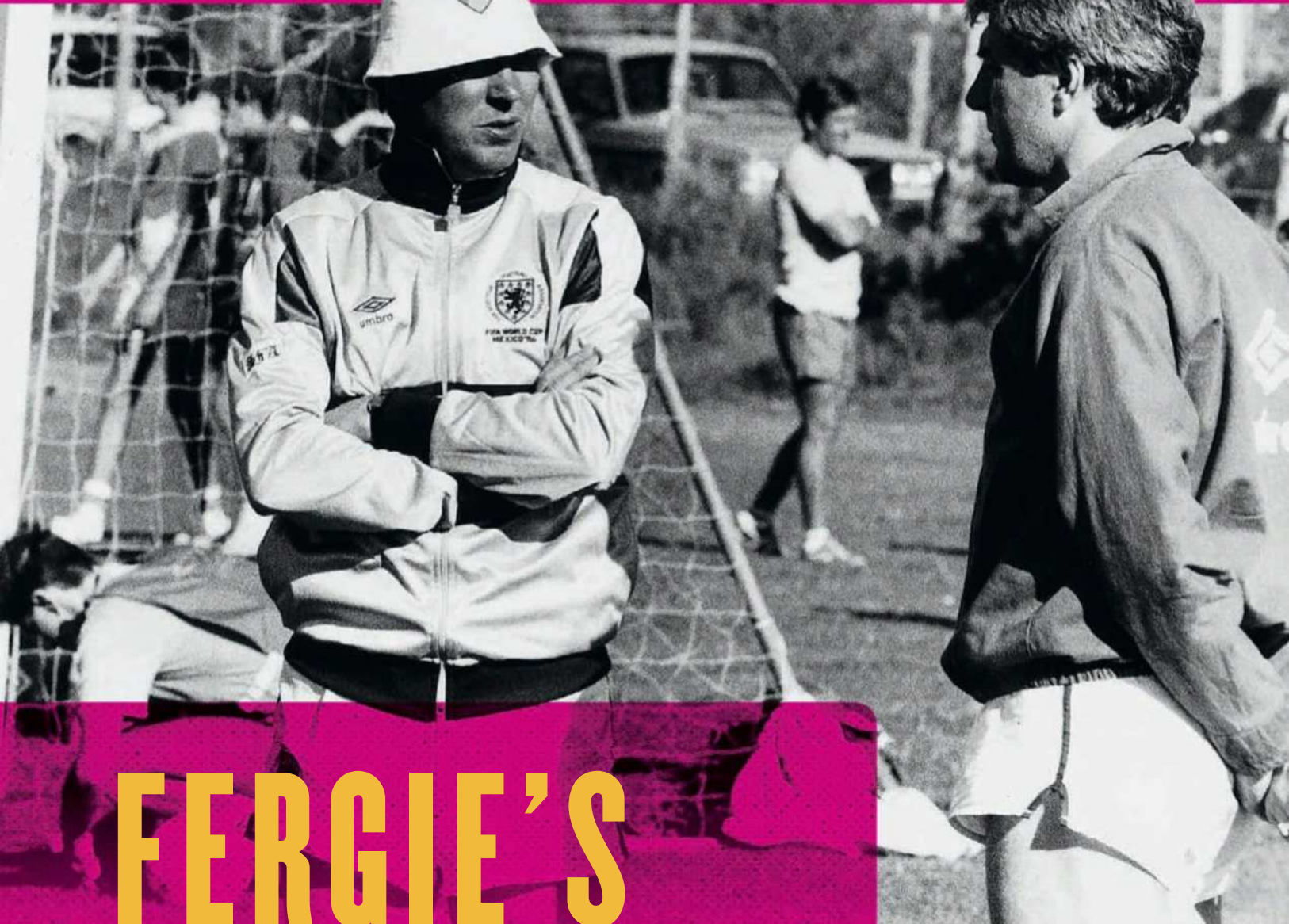
7 of the best: World Cup build-up disasters **p100**

THE STORY
BEHIND
THE SHOT

THE (MILKY) RULE OF LAW

Bill Shankly probably didn't know the effect he was going to have on Denis Law when he put Huddersfield Town's teenage talent on a 'steak and milk' diet, hoping to beef up the Scot after giving him his first-team debut aged just 16. So began a lifetime's love of the white stuff, in which Law – and Albert Quixall (left) – was drenched by the Manchester United squad ahead of the 1963 FA Cup Final. It worked: Denis scored in a 3-1 victory over Leicester. Bottoms up!





FERGIE'S BIG TRIP TO MEXICO

In 1986, Alex Ferguson led Scotland to a World Cup with what many believed was their best-ever side. Things didn't quite go to plan, and the global game got its first blast of the hairdryer

It's almost a footnote on the CV of Alex Ferguson. An often-forgotten, 'Did that really happen?' passage, spanning his final days converting Aberdeen from Old Firm upsetters into Real Madrid vanquishers and the border-crossing to Manchester United, to create an empire as powerful as any the English game has known. Wedged in between, Fergie took Scotland to the 1986 World Cup finals.

That summer's front and back pages may have been dominated by a certain Diego Maradona and his 'Hand of God', but Mexico was also where an English football audience got their first close-up of the man who would be king.

The previous year, at the 1985 FA Cup Final between Manchester United and Everton where he had been a guest of United's ex-Aberdeen stalwart Gordon Strachan, Ferguson was politely asked if he was Strachan's dad. Such was his profile down south.

However, few were left in any doubt about who he was following Scotland's eventful World Cup campaign. Fergie's remarkable rant in the aftermath of an X-rated showdown with Uruguay, and the Tartan Army's elimination, provided spectators with an intriguing snapshot of the future.

It was grimly ironic, given the tragic events surrounding the Scots' passage to Mexico, that the draw placed them in a 'Group of Death' with West Germany, Copa America champions Uruguay and dark horses Denmark; a youthful blend of fine, fluid attacking talent.

The death of Jock Stein, who suffered a heart attack after the tense 1-1 draw with Wales at Ninian Park that clinched a play-off spot, opened the door for his part-time assistant Ferguson. Such was Stein's value as a mentor, the younger man called him a "one-man university".

Stein's feats, winning the Scottish Cup with an unfancied Dunfermline in 1961 before tasting 1967 European Cup glory as Celtic boss, matched Ferguson's own hopes and dreams.

It had been Stein, invited to travel to the 1983 European Cup Winners' Cup Final with Aberdeen, who encouraged Ferguson to take a gift for Real Madrid manager Alfredo Di Stefano. "Give him a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label as soon as you get to the ground - he'll not expect it," he advised. A sharp bit of psychology, Stein believed it would charm and ultimately disarm Fergie's opposite number in Sweden.

Aberdeen triumphed 2-1 after extra time thanks to substitute John Hewitt. "Di Stefano was taken aback," recalled Ferguson. "It gave me gravitas, having worked with him [Stein]."

To Ferguson fell the harrowing job of informing Scotland's players and Stein's family that his predecessor had passed away in Cardiff.

While continuing to work at Aberdeen as co-manager with Archie Knox, Fergie steered Scotland through their play-off against Australia, winning 2-0.

His squad for the finals was met with raised eyebrows. Missing was Liverpool defender Alan Hansen, whose frequent absence from friendlies and last-minute withdrawal from the Wales match had led Stein to question his commitment.

Fergie's favoured pairing of Aberdeen defenders Willie Miller and Alex McLeish, coupled with the imagined reaction of Hansen at only being third-choice, was enough to exclude him.

Also absent was Kenny Dalglish, who is popularly thought to have pulled out after taking umbrage at the axing of his Liverpool ally, although the 35-year-old actually required knee surgery.

Those who made the cut were much vaunted. Skipper Graeme Souness had said it was the "best-prepared" squad the Scots had ever sent to a World Cup, and a look through the list - Strachan, Charlie Nicholas, Richard Gough, Steve Archibald and Frank McAvennie among them - reveals no shortage of talent at Ferguson's disposal.

Andy Roxburgh, Craig Brown, Walter Smith and Knox - three of whom would subsequently manage the side - made up Fergie's coaching staff. The mood in the camp was good. Ferguson took part in the squad's official World Cup song, *Big Trip to Mexico*, and the players were even confident enough to put cling film over the toilet seat in Ferguson's cabin - a jape appreciated as such.

Scotland, billeted in the shanty town of Nezahualcoyotl, began their Group E campaign with a narrow 1-0 defeat to Denmark. Preben Elkjaer's shot crept in off a post after Willie Miller was unable to clear. Strachan, the pick of the bunch against the Danes, put the Scots ahead against West Germany, but Rudi Völler quickly equalised in Queretaro and they went down once again, 2-1.

Despite two defeats, qualification for the second phase was still on if Scotland could beat Uruguay. With the Germans and Danes through, the Group of Death had now become a case of who blinked first. The South Americans had already shown aggression aplenty.

Lucky to escape with only a couple of bookings in a draw with West Germany,

after which they were given a warning from FIFA, Uruguay were reduced to 10 men against Denmark in a 6-1 mauling.

Ferguson, rarely seen without his sun hat (left), opted not to play 33-year-old captain Souness. He feared that his age and weight-loss - he had shed a stone in the heat and humidity before a ball was kicked - could spell trouble. Souey didn't even make the bench.

The game began with a bang. Just 48 seconds in, Strachan was upended from behind by Jose Batista's ugly challenge. French referee Joel Quiniou wasted no time in whipping out his red card - the 56-second dismissal is still the quickest at a World Cup finals.

"I wouldn't have a clue what that guy looked like to this day," said Strachan. "I've never seen his face, at any point in the game, and by the time I'd got back up, he'd been sent off."

The tone soon set, what followed was a masterclass of cynicism and technical efficacy from Uruguay.

"If there was a corner, they would be pulling your hair," said goalkeeper Jim Leighton. "Pulling your privates and that kind of stuff. Spitting on you."

The Scots huffed and puffed but were unable to break the Uruguayans down. The save of the game even came from Leighton, fisting away Wilmar Cabrera's close-range header. A 0-0 draw meant Scotland were out.

Ferguson, who had spoken about the dignity needed on the night of Stein's death, could not contain his fury after

the game. With echoes of Alf Ramsey's "animals" tirade after England's 1966 quarter-final clash with Argentina (see *FFT* 286), he used his post-match press conference to slam La Celeste.

"It's a shambles," raged Fergie. "It is not just a part of football, it's the whole bloody attitude of the nation. They've got no respect for people's dignity. It's a disgrace what they did, and turns the game into a complete farce."

He continued: "You'd never think that in a competition such as the World Cup, with all that talk of a FIFA clampdown [on ill discipline], that one team would be able to overpower the whole system."

And he still wasn't done. Perhaps with a nod to Stein's passing and the Heysel tragedy of '85, the Glaswegian warmed to his theme.

"After what happened today, and the traumas that have happened to world football in the last year - I tell you, I'm glad to go home, believe me, because it's no part of football, as we have been accepting it for years and years."

His parting shot? "It's not my problem any longer. It's FIFA's problem. It will be Argentina's problem on Monday."

FIFA hit Uruguay with a 25,000 Swiss franc fine and sent coach Omar Borrás to the stands for the last-16 showdown with Argentina, after he labelled referee Quiniou "a murderer".

Where the truth actually lay between Scotland's toothlessness - one goal and just seven shots on target across three games - and Uruguay's spoiling tactics is a matter for debate.

Brian Glanville, veteran scribe of many a World Cup, called the Scots "dubiously reconstructed, technically maladroit and tactically inept in comparison".

While Strachan, ever the philosopher, and now Scotland's most-recent former manager, plumped for honesty.

"We were just not good enough - has anybody ever thought about that?" he wondered. "Everybody goes looking for answers but sometimes you're just s**t."

Viewed from three decades' distance, perhaps one of the most significant and historical aspects of Mexico 86 was the introduction of Fergie to a wider world. This was the first sighting on the grand stage of a gaffer able to dodge criticism by turning the heat onto his opponents. A manager whose cast-iron self-belief instead made someone else the story, his capacity for brutally withering barbs and, let's face it, sustained passionate brilliance, changing English football.

Scotland made no waves in Mexico but the tide soon turned for Alex Ferguson. By November 1986, he was Manchester United manager. And we all know how that panned out.

FERGIE'S REMARKABLE RANT AFTER THE X-RATED BATTLE WITH URUGUAY PROVED AN INTRIGUING SNAPSHOT OF THE FUTURE



MYTH BUSTER

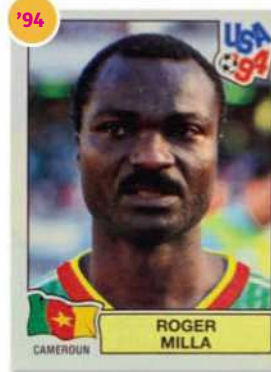
Alex Stepney played for three teams in a week
 He played for Millwall, Chelsea and Manchester United in the same year (1966), but not in a seven-day period



GET YER...STICKERS!

PANINI ALBUMS

Sticker fanatic Fernando Munoz opens his collection to reveal the good, bad and hairy history of plonking players in a book



WHAT
HAPPENED
TO...Neil
Webb

Who?

Top-class midfielder who cost Manchester United £1.5 million in 1989 after four years working under Brian Clough at Nottingham Forest. He returned to the City Ground in 1992 after lifting four trophies with the Red Devils. Webb played 26 times for England and scored four goals.

Then what?

He was forced to seek work despite earning £5,000 a week in his United days. "I knew there would have to be something else," Webb once revealed. "There was no way I could afford not to work after 35." Neil became a postman, reportedly earning as little as £220 a week.

Is he ready to hang up his satchel now?

Webb isn't delivering parcels these days, maybe because he didn't fancy the early wake-up calls. "You never get used to the 4.15 alarm," he said. He has done a bit of punditry and appears on TalkSport, having been a correspondent for 'Score' in Canada. He currently works for a transport company.

GHOST
GROUNDS

MANOR GROUND

OXFORD, ENGLAND

Say what you like about the ramshackle Manor Ground – home of Oxford United for 76 years – but at least it had all four sides, which is more than can be said of the Kassam Stadium.

It wasn't so long ago that the U's were in the top tier, and they won the 1986 League Cup with a line-up led by John Aldridge and Ray Houghton – not that their headquarters was the most welcoming.

It was a ground of its time, originally built by the fans, and even one or two players, in 1925. U's supporters used to swing from the beams which kept the stands upright, and if

the ball smacked the roof of the Osler Road stand, falling rust was a frequent addition to the Oxford viewing experience. Much like the underground toilets with which visiting fans had to contend...

The 9,500-capacity venue also had what was intended to be the country's first video tower – on the Cuckoo Lane terrace – in '87. It broke after three days.

And the quirks didn't stop there. The pitch sloped from end to end, which usually had a psychological effect on away teams.

"We had a run of matches where we were attacking downhill in the second half, so we

knew that if we got to half-time at 0-0 we'd win," says Peter Rhoades-Brown, who joined the U's from Chelsea in 1984. "The stadium was so tight, you could have a chat with the fans in the front row whenever the ball was out of play.

"When we fought back from 2-0 down to beat Leeds 5-2, their fans started throwing anything and everything on the pitch to get the game called off!"

The Taylor Report signalled the end for the dilapidated site. Oxford finally moved out in 2001 with the land sold for £12 million and later turned into a private hospital.

FOOTBALL'S
INVENTORS

KEEPER GLOVES



Please give a big hand to a lover of wool, Spanish fashionista Ricardo Zamora and Germany legend and pioneer Sepp Maier

EEL-Y DOES IT

Heiner Stuhlfauth, who played 606 games for Nuremberg from 1916 to 1933, first enjoyed the benefit of gloves, made out of wool, in wet conditions. "I knew you can't hold an eel with bare hands," he later said. "You grip him using a piece of cloth."

FASHION VICTIM

When not puffing on one of his 65 cigarettes a day, legendary Catalan keeper Ricardo Zamora (above right) wore mitts along with a V-neck jumper and black turtleneck. The stopper sported them in 1931 against England. Spain lost 7-1...

MAN IN BLACK

The only goalkeeper to win the Ballon d'Or, Lev Yashin matched black leather gloves to his shirt for a stylish look. Legend has it the Black Panther handed a pair to Yugoslavia's Peta Radenkovic after the Soviet Union won gold at the 1956 Olympics.

SEPP CHANGE

Bayern Munich No.1 Sepp Maier linked up with Gebhard Reusch, whose dad founded a ski glove firm. In 1973, Reusch released their Maier-endorsed oversized gloves. "Within a year," stated Arsenal goalkeeper Bob Wilson, "everyone was wearing them."

GIANNI RIVERA

IL GOLDEN BOY

He had to share a starting spot with Sandro Mazzola at the 1970 World Cup, but that didn't stop Italy fans taking the Little Abbot to their hearts



At 8pm on a warm June evening in Mexico City, Brian Glanville of *The Sunday Times* and Gianni Melidoni, the football writer for Rome newspaper *Il Messaggero*, leave the Azteca Stadium. The year is 1970, and they've just filed their copy from what would soon be described as the "Game of the Century".

Melidoni turns to Glanville, a look of exhausted disbelief still etched on his brow, and simply says: "Pallacanestro." Basketball. The Italian scribe is alluding to the end-to-end madness of Italy vs West Germany, and more specifically extra time of a game that had swung both ways like no other at a World Cup.

The Azzurri had eventually come out on top, winning 4-3 to reach the final against Brazil. But their performance was far from what the world had come to expect from a country supposedly hell-bent on ultra-defensive catenaccio pragmatism. This was bonkers football, a ding-dong match that saw six goals scored in 20 minutes.

What stood out most was the player who slotted in the winner. Gianni Rivera was an assured, calming playmaker; the very antithesis of the chaos happening all around him.

"I first came across him at the Rome Olympics in 1960," says Glanville. "I had managed to get an interview with him as he was part of Italy's football squad. Although Rivera was only 16 then, what struck me the most was how mature he was, and what a wise old head he had on such callow shoulders."

Rivera's level-headedness earned him a 1959 Serie A debut – aged 15 – for his local team Alessandria, at a time when the national side, having missed out on the 1958 World Cup, were in a state of flux. Such disappointment meant youth got its chance. When Milan swooped in the summer of 1960, few fans batted an eyelid given Rivera's obvious calibre.

By his second season, the young man was flourishing in Milan's midfield and handed the No.10 shirt. Rivera's eye for a pass and creative excellence meant he shone alongside Rossoneri stalwarts such as Cesare Maldini and Jose Altafini in an outfit that would secure the Serie A title in 1961-62.

Rivera's form hadn't gone unnoticed, the teenager's temperament alerting national team selectors sufficiently to make his Azzurri bow, against Belgium in May 1962. He went to Chile for that summer's World Cup and played in the 0-0 draw against West Germany. Some though, were less than impressed with the prodigy's contribution.

Outspoken sportswriter Gianni Brera nicknamed him *l'Abatino* (Little Abbot)



ALF RAMSEY WAS ASKED WHO WERE ITALY'S BEST FOUR PLAYERS. "RIVERA, RIVERA, RIVERA, RIVERA," HE REPLIED

due to what he deemed a polite way of playing – a luxury, not willing to do the rough stuff on the pitch.

Brera, then, would have been pleased that Rivera sat out Italy's second group game, against Chile. More a brawl than a match, the 'Battle of Santiago' was "the most stupid, appalling, disgusting and disgraceful exhibition of football," according to the BBC's David Coleman.

A 2-0 defeat to the host nation, amid all the fighting, meant Rivera and Italy returned home early. But for the young star, further domestic success was just around the corner – and the kind that creates legends.

Milan had long cast an envious eye at Real Madrid and Benfica, who had won the first seven editions of the European Cup. But in 1962-63 – having ousted Alf Ramsey's Ipswich Town side en route – they beat Eusebio's Eagles in the final. An inspired Rivera set up both goals for Altafini in a 2-1 Wembley win.

Gianni was the talk of Europe. Aged only 19, he came second to Lev Yashin in the Ballon d'Or standings, his ability to float and find angles others missed earning admiring glances. Milan's arch rivals Inter would go on to wrestle the ascendancy at home and in Europe by boring teams to catenaccio tears, but for Rivera, the Little Abbot moniker had now become *Il Golden Boy*.

He was the face of magazines, inviting them into his stylishly appointed home adorned with chandeliers, candelabras and, er, grey telephones.

Fortunes swung back the Rossoneri's way during the late-60s. Rivera proved the lynchpin of Coppa Italia, European Cup Winners' Cup and Serie A triumphs, before another European Cup in 1969. The latter witnessed a famous 4-1 win over an up-and-coming Ajax team, and a Rivera masterclass in midfield devilry that schooled even his opposite number – one Johan Cruyff. Under the Bernabeu lights, it was a night that would secure the Ballon d'Or. Rivera – like the team he captained to victory in Madrid – was the best in Europe.

Italy travelled to the following year's World Cup finals among the favourites after winning Euro 68 – their first major international honour in 30 years. Even Gianni Brera, the scathing critic of 1962, conceded that Rivera was the Azzurri's greatest post-war footballer. Surely the Milan playmaker would be his country's prize asset in Mexico.

This, though, is Italian football and nothing goes smoothly. Coach Ferruccio Valcareggi and Rivera didn't get on, the latter at one point threatening to pull out of the squad. What further muddied the waters was the presence of Inter's midfielder Sandro Mazzola, and the big debate about whether the two star men could work together.

Think Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard but on a grander scale.

Press and pundits took their sides, but the manager sat on the fence, selecting Mazzola in the first half of matches and bringing Rivera on for the second. It was called *Staffetta*, or 'relay'. A big cop-out perhaps, though it took Italy all the way to the final against Brazil. Losing to the most sumptuous display in the history of the game is no crime.

Those in Rivera's camp felt vindicated (Pele later said he feared Rivera coming on) as their man played only the last six minutes, despite his semi-final heroics.

The Italy squad arrived back in Rome to jeers. However, cries of "Viva Rivera" cemented the 26-year-old's reputation as the nation's Golden Boy.

In 1973, Ramsey was asked who were Italy's best four players after they beat England 1-0 at Wembley. "Rivera, Rivera, Rivera, Rivera," came the reply, and the player's skill and creativity never waned until 1979, when he bagged yet another Serie A crown before retiring and joining Milan's administrative team.

Such a cerebral footballer might have been tipped to manage, but Rivera was too outspoken – he once got suspended for suggesting that referees were biased towards Juventus and Inter.

When media mogul Silvio Berlusconi became Milan owner, dyed-in-the-wool socialist Rivera declared his disapproval, got demoted and resigned.

A career in politics soon beckoned. He helped to set up the Italian Footballers' Association in 1968, before serving four consecutive terms in parliament for the centre-left coalition and also as an MEP.

But to those who saw Gianni Rivera in the Milan Rossoneri or Azzurri blue, it is the image of the diminutive playmaker weaving his magic within the white lines of a football pitch, not the corridors of political power, that will live longest in the mind's eye.

Golden memories, and none more so than that cool sidefoot from the penalty spot on a warm Mexico evening.





RAMALLETS DROPS BARÇA IN IT

Disaster strikes for Antoni Ramallets in late May, as the Barcelona goalkeeper drops the ball into his net during a 3-2 European Cup final defeat to Benfica. Barça hit the woodwork five times, with the Wankdorf Stadium's square goal frame becoming infamous for Blaugrana fans. "They scored three goals and we gave them two - one was my fault," said Ramallets, who only became a keeper as "I was a bit fat and hated to run as a kid".

THIS YEAR IN

1961

Double delight, a keeper calamity and goal that got its own plaque - the '60s began with a bang



GOLDEN EUSEBIO

"It's gold, it's gold!" shouts Benfica boss Bela Guttmann, midway through a new recruit's first training session in May. The coach had initially heard of Eusebio while having his hair cut on a scouting mission the previous December in Mozambique, then a Portuguese colony. Eager to seal the deal ahead of rivals Sporting and Sao Paulo, Guttmann whisked the prodigious 19-year-old off to the Algarve, the Eagles referring to him in their correspondence as Ruth Malosso to avoid any suspicion.

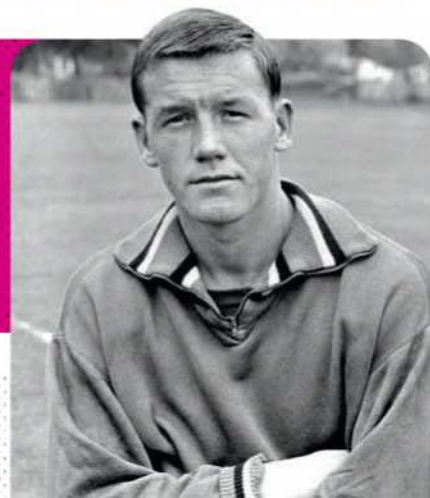


HAYNES IN THE MONEY

The Football League caves to pressure from PFA chairman Jimmy Hill, bookmakers and the public in January, ending football's £20 maximum weekly wage and averting a nationwide strike. Fulham's chairman Tommy Trinder is the biggest loser, having said he'd pay Johnny Haynes £100 a week if he could. "Poor Tom was lumbered," Haynes later said, "but he stood by it and paid me £100 a week."

PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES

Gillingham endure travel hell heading to Barrow for October's Division Four clash. The Gills miss the train at Euston after their coach gets stuck in traffic, so charter a plane to Blackpool. Next is a two-hour drive to floodlight-less Holker Street, assisted by police escort, arriving 15 minutes late for the 5.15pm kick-off. After 76 minutes, the referee abandons the game in darkness with Barrow 7-0 up. The Football League say the result should stand, as Charlie Livesey (right) and team-mates return to Kent.





BIG BILL'S STYLE

Tottenham become the first club in the 20th century to do the Double, beating Leicester 2-0 in May's FA Cup final. The game opens up when Foxes full-back Len Chalmers gets injured only 20 minutes in. With no substitutes allowed, Spurs turn the screw in the second half thanks to goals by Bobby Smith and Terry Dyson. "It is better to fail aiming high than to succeed aiming low," Lilywhites boss Bill Nicholson once said, though some say it was his skipper, Danny Blanchflower (with trophy).

PELE'S PLAQUE-WORTHY GOAL

Forty minutes into Santos' March trip to Fluminense, the ball falls to Pele on the edge of his own penalty area. O Rei runs the length of the pitch, beating five Flu players in the process, to score a goal so good it prompts a two-minute standing ovation. Journalist Joelmir Beting asks his paper *O Esporte* to produce a commemorative plaque and, a few days later, the bronze inscription is unveiled. It marks "The finest goal in the history of the Maracana" and *gol de placa* enters Brazilian lexicon as an especially wonderful strike.



TAXI FOR CAREY!

Backed by the Littlewoods Pools magnate John Moores and later known as 'The Bank of England', Everton's fifth-place finish is not enough to save manager Johnny Carey (above) from the sack. In mid-April, three matches before the end of the campaign, Moores informs the Toffees' boss of his fate in the back of a London cab. Fans adopt it as the ideal mode of transport to scream at gaffers on the brink of getting the bullet.

WHAT ELSE HAPPENED IN 1961?



DANISH DELIGHT

Audrey Hepburn wasn't a fan of pastries, making the opening scene in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* particularly problematic.

FIRSTS

JANUARY

The Avengers TV series airs

FEBRUARY

The Beatles play at the Cavern

SEPTEMBER

Mothercare store opens doors

OCTOBER

Magazine *Private Eye* launches

DECEMBER

Contraceptive pill available on NHS



The population of South Atlantic British territory Tristan da Cunha is evacuated to an old RAF base near Southampton, after Queen Mary's Peak volcano erupts in October. They remain for two years.



DID YOU KNOW? England's former HQ Bisham Abbey is thought to be haunted by the ghost of Lady Elizabeth Hoby, who died in 1609 and appears from her portrait

THE CLASSICS

Diamond Lights

Hodde and Waddle's infamous 1987 ditty stormed *Top of the Pops* and delivered an epic sleeve photo shoot for the ages. Synth-pop heaven. All together now: "Darling, I love you!"



East Germany kit – 1974

Living in a notorious Stasi state may have had its downsides, but the DDR's shirt for their sole World Cup is pure kit porn.



Rosettes

Decades-old shots of crucial FA Cup ties are nothing without a humble, homemade rose in club colours. Someone please bring them back.



7 OF THE BEST WORLD CUP PREPARATIONS GONE WRONG



1 SOMETHING FISHY 1970

England's players were distraught when their Findus frozen food shipment was impounded at the Mexican docks. With all of the sausages and burgers burned, Alf Ramsey's squad had to survive on fish fingers for a fortnight. Tasty.

2 WARNING SIGN 1974

"Concentrate on the football," warned Pele as midfield playboy Paulo Cezar Lima negotiated a lucrative move to Marseille from Brazil's camp in West Germany. O Rei's advice fell on deaf ears, and Lima joined l'OM a day after his team were denied a place in the final by the Dutch.

3 FASCIST PROBLEMS 1938

French police unsuccessfully begged the army to step in and put a stop to several anti-fascist protests, and things only got worse when Germany and defending champions Italy rocked up in Paris.

4 URUGUAY: RUBBISH ANYWAY 1934

"It's their loss," said a miffed Benito Mussolini upon hearing that holders Uruguay were going to boycott the World Cup in Italy. It was revenge for the fact that only four European sides had gone to the inaugural event in Montevideo.

5 DRIVEN MAD 1930

Amateur player Lucien Laurent threatened to pull out of the France squad after learning he wouldn't be paid by his employer, Peugeot, during the tournament. The forward scored the first ever World Cup goal, but still never got paid. *Incredible!*

6 ON ME 'EAD, SON 1950

Striker Rajko Mitic cut his head on an exposed iron girder before Yugoslavia's clash with Brazil at the brand new Maracana. The stadium had not been finished in time for the World Cup due to pay disputes with builders. Ouch.

7 KEEP OFF THE (DEAD) GRASS 1978

Buenos Aires' Mar del Plata pitch was wrecked when seawater was accidentally pumped into the sprinklers. The turf was hastily relaid, at great expense, ahead of the Italy vs France group game.



The Professional Season Opens

New York World
October 7, 1894

"Philadelphia, Oct 6 – The championship season of American League Professional Football opened here this afternoon on the Philadelphia baseball grounds, with a game between Philadelphia and New York's clubs.

The visitors won by a score of 5 to 0. Two halves of 45 minutes were played.

After 40 minutes of play in the first half, Connolly of New York kicked the first goal.

In the second half, the home players did not back each other up properly, and New York had little trouble in making four more. Gavin scored two and Lupton scored two.

There was a good crowd present, and the liveliest interest was manifested. The New York XI showed excellent teamwork, and the coaching of their captain Trainor had a good effect.

The sporting public in this vicinity are not going to die of heart disease caused from over-enthusiasm for professional football.

Still, it seems to be gaining in popularity. It is an open question whether football can succeed baseball."

A real article on the opener of the ALPF, the first pro league held outside Britain

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MASTERCLASS

FERNANDINHO

Man City's midfield dynamo on playing under Pep, keeping it simple and idolising Kleberson as a kid

Which central midfielders did you admire when you were growing up?

As a kid I played for a side called PSTC (Parana Soccer Technical Center) from Londrina, and in those days we didn't have a professional team, just a youth team. So the primary objective of that club was to develop talented players. One of the main players who left and became successful was Kleberson. He won the 2002 World Cup and played for Manchester United, so he became an example for every young player at the club to follow. Back then, he was the guy that inspired me, and he was a big reason why I decided to become a central midfielder. I was also lucky enough to play in the same team as him for Atletico Paranaense.

Have you always been deployed as a defensive midfielder?

Not always. I played in more attacking positions at the beginning of my career. I spent a bit of time as a second striker and even a winger, too, because I was younger and faster. As time passed by, I started to move back down the pitch, especially when I went to Ukraine with Shakhtar Donetsk. The manager played me as a second midfielder, as we say in Brazil, in the box-to-box role. When I joined Man City I played even deeper, really close to the central defenders, as the first man in the midfield. My history of playing in different areas began long before I even became a professional, to be honest. The only position I've never played in is goalkeeper!

Does a top holding midfielder need to have an unselfish streak?

I think so, yes. It's great to score a goal or set one up occasionally, but I believe that my main function in the team is to provide balance between attacking and defending. When I first started playing football, my managers always told me that the midfielders were the heart and lungs of the team, and I needed to feed the other sectors of the field. That was something I always took with me, and even now I try to do that when I'm out on the pitch.

How important is positioning if you are playing this role?

It's a huge part of a holding midfielder's game. Our most basic function is to get closer to the opposition and reduce the amount of space they've got to play in. Today, football's a lot more compact. It is different compared to when I started out back in Brazil. In the modern game, defensive midfielders end up playing in a distance that's no greater than, let's say, 20 metres from the defensive line to the attacking line, where the striker is. It's such a short space, with all of the players close together, so this makes it easier for me to cover plenty of ground and close people down.

"A lot of people think Pep must ask extraordinary things of players, but he doesn't – he wants to see the game played simply and fast"

Have your responsibilities under Pep Guardiola (below) changed compared to previous managers?

I've learned exceptional things from the manager about my position, specifically about when to take the ball forward and the importance of respecting the space of my team-mates. A lot of the time, the opposing side will try to press us using three attacking players. That means I have to find the right time and space to get the ball back and quickly give it to one of the midfielders in front of me. Obviously you

analyse the opponent before the game, but things can change very quickly once you are on the field. Guardiola teaches his players in such a way that they are able to adapt to any changes instantly and independently.

Can it be quite difficult to understand his style of football?

No, not at all. A lot of people think that, because of the way his teams played at Barcelona, Bayern Munich and now City, he must ask some extraordinary things of his players – but he doesn't. Pep just wants the game to be played as simply as possible. Our game is based on two touches. All you need to understand is that he doesn't want his players to run 15 or 20 metres – he wants us to move three or four metres. Then we can open up a space and find some passing lines to receive the ball, play a quick one-two and speed up the game. In Brazil, and other European countries, players end up touching the ball many times before making their pass, but at City we try to touch it as little as possible so that the ball moves around fast.

You've played as a centre-back a few times under Guardiola – what does he demand of his defenders?

I think being a defender in a Guardiola team is one of the toughest things you can do in football. You've got to be able to see openings, have excellent passing ability and act fast, as there's a massive space behind you that allows the other team to score on the break if you make a mistake. It's been very cool watching our defenders participating in offensive plays, creating chances and starting off team attacks from our penalty area. But it's very important that we all remember our defensive duties at the same time. It's tough being a defender under Guardiola, so our defenders deserve to be congratulated this season!

THE DETAILS

The Samba star reveals his selfless superpower and F1 icon



Worst habit
Using my smartphone too much

Favourite film
Gladiator

Childhood hero
Ayrton Senna (top)

Dream dinner guest
Denzel Washington

Favourite sports
F1, volleyball, basketball and American football

Favourite band
Revelacao

Phone wallpaper
A photo of me with my wife and kids

If you could have a secret power...
I'd end all of the hunger in the world

Favourite TV show
The news

Signature dish
Lasagne



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SIS | SCIENCE IN SPORT

Charlton Athletic's first team sport scientist, Josh Hornby, casts his expert eye over pro footballers' workout routines

1 Darren Bent @jamie_velocity
 "Battle ropes are used by players as part of metabolic conditioning sessions, to increase caloric burn and maintain lean muscle," says Hornby.

2 Jermain Defoe @iamjermaindefoe
 "Pilates boosts muscle elasticity and range of motion. Improving flexibility also aids injury prevention."

3 Eden Hazard @chelseafc
 "He's doing suspension training – it's great for developing balance, strength and coordination using body weight and gravity as the resistance."

4 Mesut Özil @shkodranmustafi
 "A half-kneeling single-arm press with a kettlebell is a superb move for unilateral upper body strength. It engages the core at the same time."

5 Adrien Rabiot @psg
 "Single-leg deadlifts are ideal for hamstring and glute activation – add two dumbbells for deeper range."

6 Renato Sanches @swansofficial
 "Side planks help to enhance core stability, which is key for twisting, turning and holding off your marker. Don't allow your hips to sag, though!"

7 Cristiano Ronaldo @cristiano
 "Ronaldo's fierce shot is powered by countless leg extension drills, which isolate the quadriceps muscle."

8 Theo Walcott @everton
 "Chin-ups can be used to improve and preserve upper body strength. Not quite up to a full one? An assisted pull-up machine will build up brawn."



1 | 2
 3 | 4



5 | 6
 7 | 8





▲ **Carlos Carvalho**
The Portuguese boss has worked wonders at Swansea and also delivered a series of delightful anecdotes.

▲ **Woking**

Fans of the National League outfit raised £5,000 in three days for Damon Lathrope. Their midfielder was forced to retire at 28 following a leg break.

▲ **Marcus McGuane**

The teenager became the first Englishman to play for Barcelona since Gary Lineker in 1989 with his cameo in the Catalan Super Cup against Espanyol.

HERO TO ZERO

▼ **VAR**

Video technology has resulted in confusion rather than clarity in a host of FA Cup ties.

▼ **Arsene Wenger**

Calls for the Gunners' gaffer to go are louder than ever before. The 2-1 defeat at Brighton was Arsenal's fourth consecutive loss in all competitions for the first time since 2002.

▼ **Sunderland**

Chris Coleman hasn't revived the Black Cats and they are staring at another relegation.



T R I E D A N D T E S T E D

DRONE

Could a miniature aircraft give you a tactical advantage? *FFT* takes to the skies



What is it?

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, a drone is an unmanned aerial vehicle, which is being adopted by football clubs across Europe to record training sessions and help coaches provide tactical pointers. They must be flown no lower than 50 metres off the floor but cannot go any higher than 400 feet. Drones are also banned at venues that can hold more than 1,000 people.

How does it work?

The aircraft is steered by someone on the ground using a control pad, which has a screen to display the view from the onboard camera. All of the footage is stored on a memory card – this can then be easily downloaded and edited into short clips focusing on formations, positioning and patterns of play.

Who uses it?

Charlton Athletic were among the first English clubs to make drones a crucial

part of training after one of the academy coaches, David Powderly, became a licensed drone pilot. He has since visited a variety of teams, including Spurs and Espanyol, to highlight the benefits of capturing drills with the device.

Why are they using it?

Many sides have erected gantries at their training grounds, so they can view sessions from an elevated position. But advances in drone tech mean coaches can now record their practice routines from every angle, in high definition, to get a crystal-clear perspective.

How much does it cost?

A top-of-the-range drone will set you back thousands of pounds, but budget



models can be picked up in high street shops such as Argos for just £50. You will also be glad to hear that if you're only using it for recreational purposes – like filming your Sunday League side in the park – you won't need a licence to do so. Chocks away!



YOU ASK

I'm a striker. How can I lose my marker inside the box?
Will Ryan
 via Twitter

HE ANSWERS



Craig Reid

Elite Striker Training

"Your first touch is important if you want to lose your opponent in the penalty area. Put your body between the defender and the ball – side on, so they can't see it – and use the pace of the pass to spin towards the target. A swift turn will set you free and allow you to shoot. Make sure you don't try to flick the ball as it could send you too wide of goal, so just turn in one easy movement."

Is this football's fittest goalkeeper?

Preston custodian Chris Maxwell reveals how calisthenics training is helping him to keep clean sheets

Goalkeepers aren't exactly known for their muscle-bound physiques, but FFT may have found football's fittest shot-stopper.

Preston North End's No.1 Chris Maxwell has turned himself into a lean, mean goal-saving machine after adding calisthenics training to his off-pitch programme.

The discipline is designed to build strength through the mastery of various bodyweight exercises, such as handstands, pull-ups and even hanging from walls.

"I wanted to try different strength training and came across The School of Calisthenics on Instagram," says Maxwell.

"Exercises like handstands help to build up your shoulder stability. When you dive at full length and save with one arm fully extended, you need to be strong in that area."

Maxwell is so powerful he can now perform an exercise known as a flag, an elite move in which the body is held statically by the arms on a pole or wall.

The 27-year-old's gym skills are paying off on the pitch, with the Deepdale side pushing for a Championship play-off place in 2017-18. And Maxwell, who won promotion to League One with Fleetwood Town in 2014, believes it has given him an edge.

"We talk a lot about marginal gains in sport and goalkeeping's all about marginal gains," he says. "One save can make the difference between winning and losing so it's important I do what I can to make a difference."

Reid interview and Maxwell words Alec Fern

YOU NEED TO FOLLOW

Upgrade your game by introducing this trio to your Twitter timeline



MIKE PHELAN

Former Man United assistant

Brilliant coaching insight and colourful anecdotes from Fergie's former No.2 will take your game to the next level.

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MIKE STAROPOLI

Doctor of physical therapy

If you're looking to get fitter and sleep better, Dr Mike provides tips that aid performance and prevent injuries.

Twitter: @MikeStaropoli



RUBEN TABARES

Elite trainer

The former athlete trains sportsmen and actors all over the world – if he can't get you in shape, no one can.

Twitter: @rubentabares

HOW TO...

LOOSEN UP YOUR LIMBS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

SIS | SCIENCE IN SPORT

Activate your muscles before a game by mastering this resistance band routine from Brentford's strength and conditioning coach, Tom Perryman

1

Leg lower

We've seen enough players crippled by chocolate hamstrings and don't want you to be next. "This exercise mimics the running and striking motions that you produce over and over in games," says Perryman. "One hip is flexed and the other is loose. You should also feel a nice abdominal contraction if you do it slowly."


ALL EXERCISES
 3 SETS
 5-10 REPS

2

Romanian deadlift

If you've got hips stiffer than a rusty car door, you won't be able to change direction. "This is an excellent hip-hinge movement and will loosen the posterior chain – the muscles on the rear of your lower body. It's great for improving balance and preparing you for single-leg moves in a match."



3

Glute band squat

Prepare to leap off the ground and dominate the skies with this glute-burning routine. "Keep your legs wide and resist the pressure of the band, which tries to pull your knees back in. Go as deep as you possibly can while maintaining a good form. Avoid bending over too far and arching your back."



4

Single leg push-out

To ensure your whole lower body is switched on and ready for action, you can't neglect your calves. "Wrap the band around the top part of your foot and push against it. The resistance targets your calves and prepares them to be stable and strong when pushing against the grass."



5

Glute band walks

Don't run before you can walk with a resistance band wrapped around your ankles. You might pull a muscle, and we don't want that. "Side-to-side movements will activate your hips and abductors. Try moving around in a square to mimic your movements out on the pitch."



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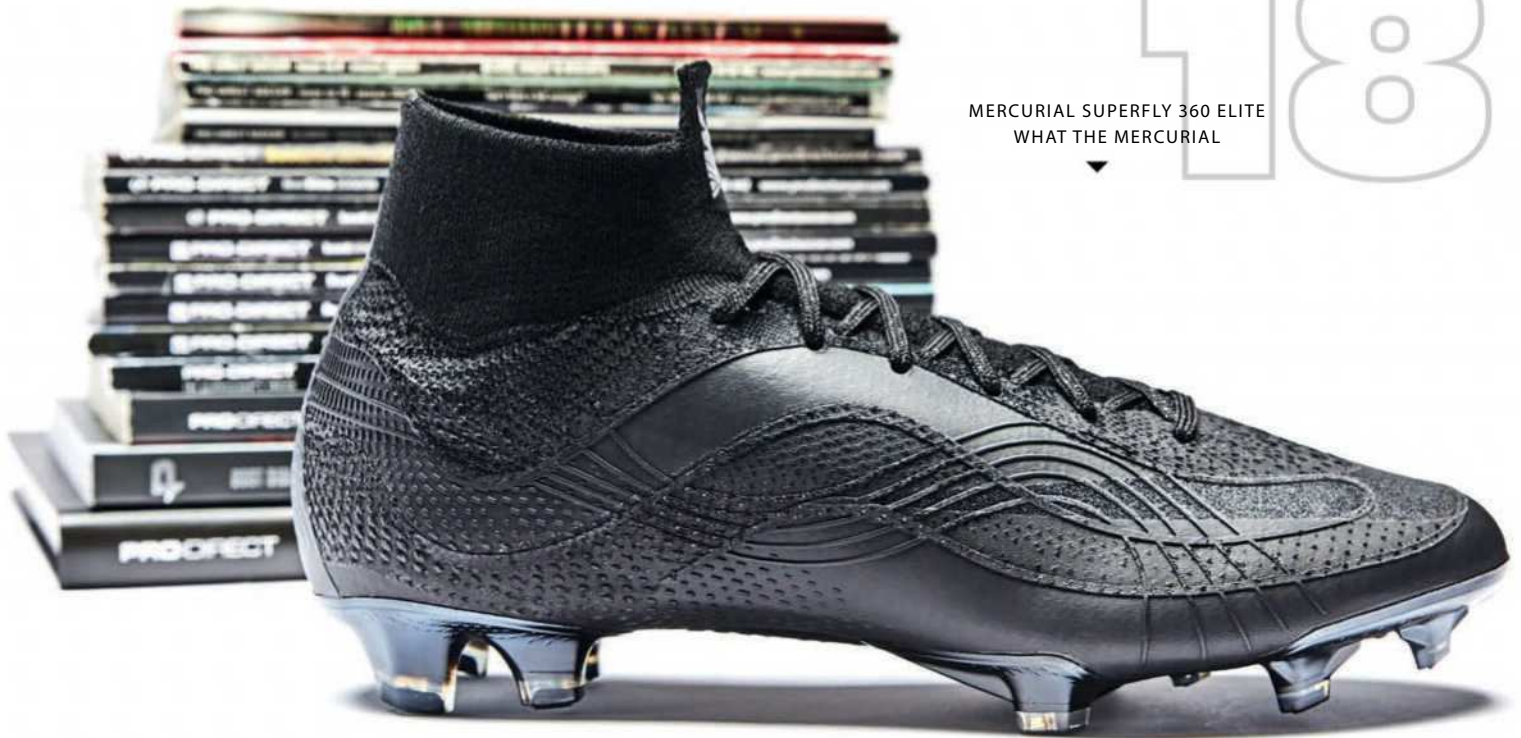
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WHAT THE MERC?

Spanning 20 years of iconic Mercurial design, the second incarnation of the "What The Mercurial" features nine distinctive elements combined into one premium release.

From the distinctive pattern of the original Mercurial made famous by Ronaldo, to the shimmering Swoosh seen on the Superfly IV Black Gala, two decades of pure speed are immortalised in this limited edition release, with only 1,998 pairs worldwide.

Check the timeline below for a closer look at some of the most significant moments and our journey alongside the Mercurial from then to now.



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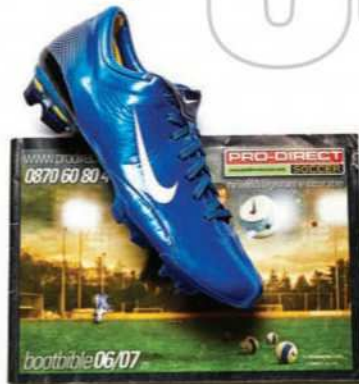
WHEN THE MERC?



MERCURIAL VAPOR

02

MERCURIAL VAPOR III



06



MERCURIAL VAPOR

08

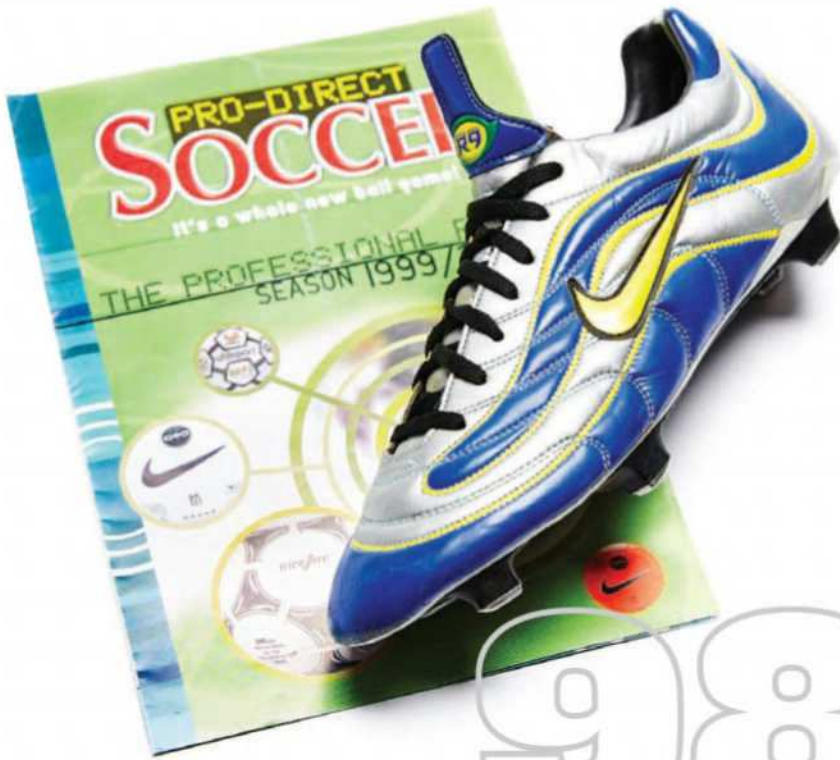
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20 YEARS TOGETHER

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WHY THE **MERCUR**?



MERCURIAL R9

Since 1998 the quest for speed has seen the Mercurial defy expectation, and at Pro:Direct Soccer, we have been there every step of the way.

From Ronaldo to Ronaldo, Rio to Russia – the Mercurial collection has become one of football's mainstays and boasts strong visual features that are instantly recognisable.

WHO THE **MERCUR**?

1998 - R9 ARRIVES

Bursting onto the scene in bold fashion, the Mercurial makes its World Cup debut along with its poster boy. Bright and brash in colour, these boots rebuffed black boot purists and became a pioneer for many of the daring colourways seen

2002 - REDEMPTION

Perhaps the match Ronaldo is most famous for, the Brazilian's brace against Germany secured his nation's fifth World Cup title. Despite not playing a single qualifying game due to injury, he ended the tournament with eight goals and the Golden

2006 - RECORD BREAKER

His final win at a disappointing World Cup for Brazil, this goal against Ghana made Ronaldo the tournament's all-time leading record goal scorer with 15 goals. This record was broken in 2014 by another Mercurial wearer, Miroslav Klose.



MERCURIAL VAPOR SUPERFLY II ELITE



MERCURIAL VAPOR VIII

WHAT THE MERCURIAL



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QR: 170466 - £170

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Nike Mercurial Superfly VI Elite Ronaldo FG
QR: 173870 - £255



adidas Predator 18.1 FG
QR: 170344 - £180



PUMA Future 18.1 Netfit hyFG
QR: 171758 - £170



Under Armour Magnetico Pro FG
QR: 172272 - £180



Mizuno Morelia Neo II Japan MD
QR: 166193 - £260



ONLY AT
Concave Volt+ FG
QR: 167433 - £150



ONLY AT
Nike Premier 2.0 FG
QR: 173978 - £90



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adidas Copa Gloro 17 FG
QR: 170126 - £90

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Precision Infinite Heat
GK Gloves
QR: 183062 - £52



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Ice Roll Finger
QR: 184496 - £50



adidas Germany 2018 Home Shirt
QR: 169774 - £70



adidas Spain 2018 Home Shirt
QR: 169850 - £70



PUMA Uruguay Home Jersey
QR: 173569 - £70



PUMA Switzerland Home Jersey
QR: 173558 - £70

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The definitive shopping guide for the football fan

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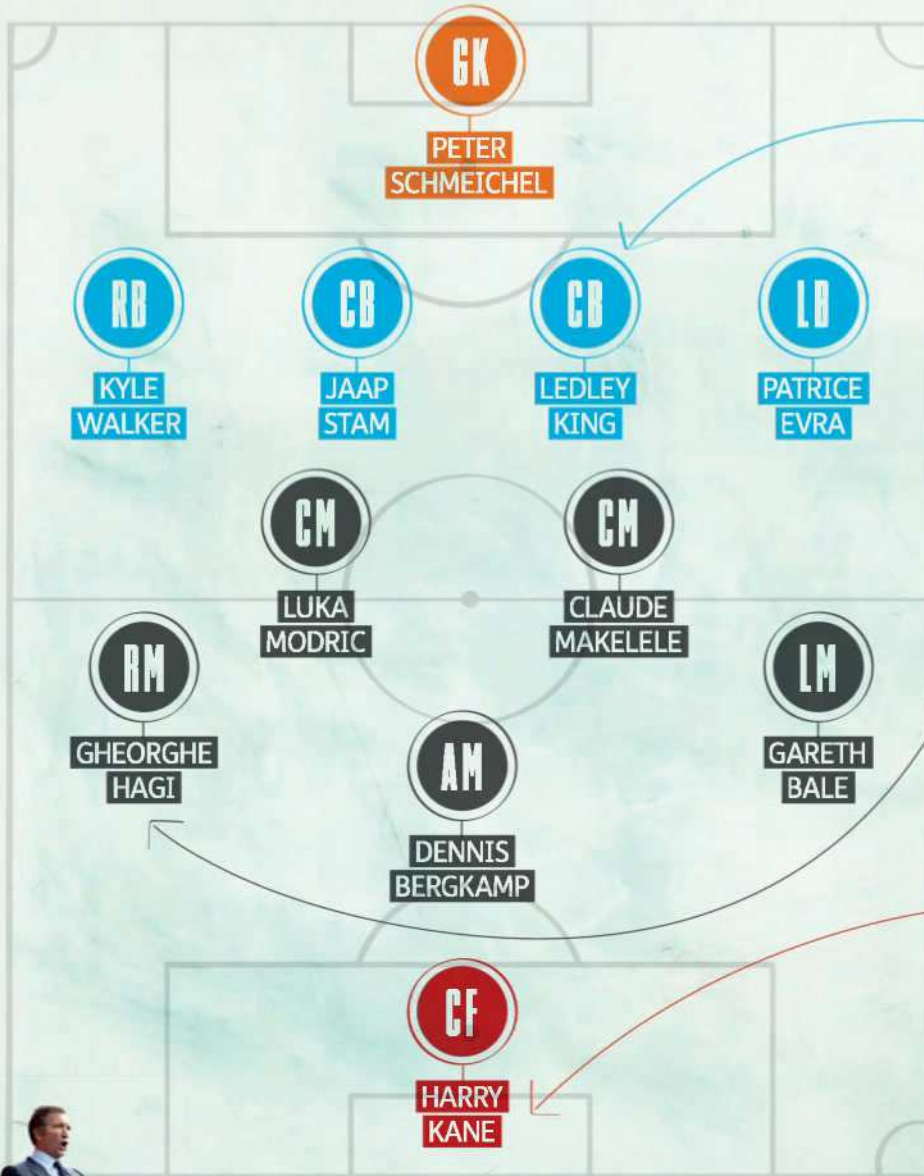
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MY PERFECT XI

BRAD FRIEDEL

The former Blackburn, Spurs and USA shot-stopper selects the best he played with and against during a career spanning two decades



LEDLEY KING

"I only got to play one full season with him at Spurs, as he had awful problems with his knee that cut his career short. He was a phenomenon. He'd hardly do any training during the week, spending most of the time in the fitness room or riding a bike. But on the Saturday he'd play like he'd trained for months. Ledley was a pretty quiet guy yet his on-field demeanour was massive. He had a big impact on the team. It's such a shame he couldn't stay fit - he was one of the finest defenders England has ever had."



GHEORGHE HAGI

"We were team-mates at Galatasaray in 1996. I was on the bench when the US played Romania at the 1994 World Cup and Hagi caused us so many problems. He was superb in that tournament and was one of the best left-footed players of all time. His technique was amazing, especially striking the ball. He could see three pictures ahead of anyone else on the pitch - a true general on the field."



HARRY KANE

"I've known Harry since he was very young, and seen him develop into the man he is today. He's extremely determined and has worked hard to reach this level. Harry has always been a strong finisher, but he's improved other aspects of his game hugely. Scoring 50 goals in 2017 is a true testament to his greatness. If he can avoid serious injuries, he will be a world-class striker for years. Plus, he's a team player and a good guy. Despite all of the success, he remains humble."

Interview: Martin Hargrave



THE GAFFER

GRAEME SOUNESS

"He gave me a chance when there was no US pro league, so I'm eternally grateful. He took me to Galatasaray and Blackburn, and tried to sign me for Liverpool and Benfica."

THE SUBS

01

THIERRY HENRY

02

GIANFRANCO ZOLA

03

ALAN SHEARER

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