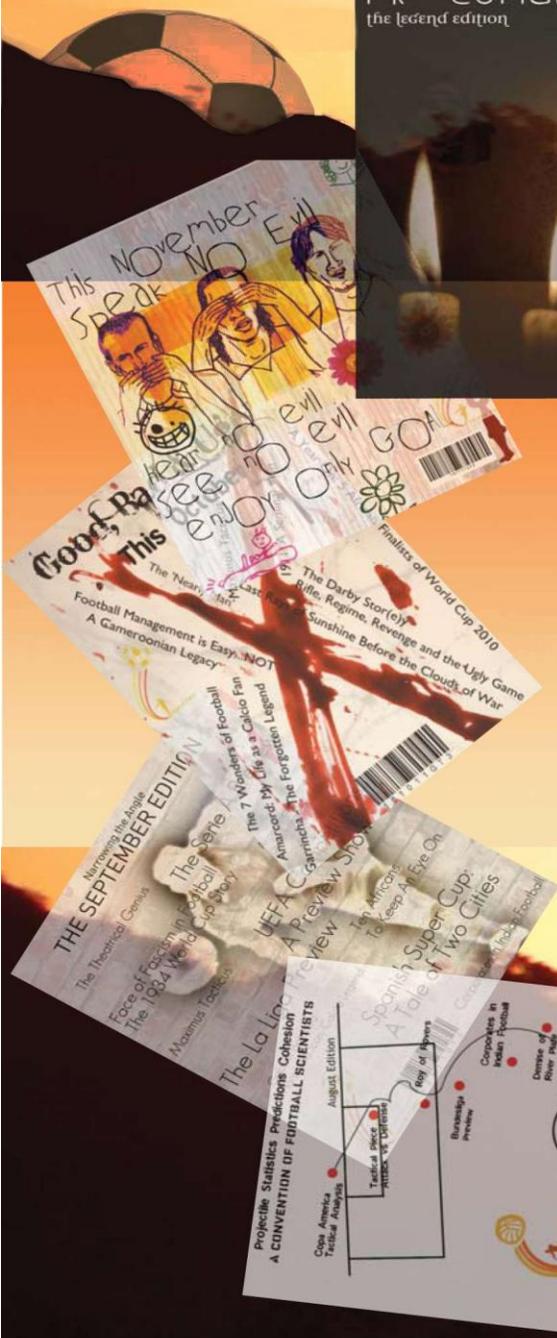


Memories of 2011

When Romance Returned to Football



Welcomed at the Gates of Hell

What's the Golden Word

Winter Transfers

Time for New Heroes: 1958 World Cup

Scouting Network

Mid Season Reviews

Euro 2012 Group B Preview

Maximus Tacticus: Swansea City

And Other Stories

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Ludo Ergo Sum

GOALDEN TIMES



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Goalden Times

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First Whistle

Goalden Times wishes its readers a wonderful 2012. Hope football brings in golden times in our lives throughout the year.

We have witnessed some amazing football in the year gone by - especially with the return to glory for some of the greatest and oldest institutions of the game. It had ended though, with two shocking losses for Football 'upon which it is difficult to speak, and impossible to be silent'.

Another significant event of 2011 has been the launch of Goalden Times. Our efforts on the website were recognized by *top20footballblogs.com*. Such acknowledgement made us feel good but in the longer run it's your love for the game that will keep us going and help in widening the fraternity.

The beginning of 2012 saw the Argentine international, Lionel Messi winning his third successive Ballon d'Or, thus equalling Michel Platini - the only other player to have won the award three times in a row. The award was open to Europeans only, when Platini had won it from 1983 to 1985; thereby making Messi's achievement even more astounding.

Baichung Bhutia, India's most accomplished footballer bid farewell to football as a player, with an exhibition match where the Indian national team played against FC Bayern Munich. Although the Munich side made it look too easy in the 4-0 triumph, it was a grand and emotional end for Baichung. When he left the pitch on the 85th minute, 30,000 fans at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium gave him a standing ovation. Players from both the sides shook hands with him as he walked his way to the bench for the last time.

With the Africa Cup of Nations in a few days, the UEFA Champions League back in action in February and the domestic leagues moving into critical stages, football looks to get more exciting in the days to come. Some clubs are making some meaningful adjustments in their squad using the winter transfer window and we are sure to watch more drama on the last few days of January. At Goalden Times, we introduce some exciting new features, while continuing with the ones you have liked. Keep helping us spread the love for the game.

Follow football, follow us!

Welcomed at the Gates of Hell

Football derbies are often more important than winning the championship, they often ruin friendship and even blood relationships, but they are always intensely exciting..

Indranath Mukherjee provides an account of one of the most (in)famous of football derbies

“How can you do this to us, Indra!” was how Didem had reacted on seeing me browsing through the official website of Fenerbahçe. She, like most of the other project team members, was a diehard Galatasaray fan. During my 20 days stint in the fascinating city, I was planning to visit the Fenerbahçe Stadium as I had read that it is the best stadium in Turkey for design and acoustics. Didem protested again: “Our new stadium is better”. Galatasaray had moved to the Ali Sami Yen Sports Complex Türk Telecom Arena recently, a new stadium with increased capacity recently.

As luck would have it, the Kıtalar Arası Derbi was scheduled on December 7, my last week in the project at Istanbul. “How do I get hold of a ticket?” was my immediate concern. Just so my team members don’t feel they have a novice amongst them when it comes to football, I narrated some stories of watching the game in England and Spain, over lunch. “The experience here will be very different from watching football anywhere else in Europe”, they retorted. And must I say, true to their word, it was...and how!

With a stadium capacity of a little over 50,000 and seats filling fast, getting tickets to the match would have been impossible, had Didem not gone the extra mile to ask her brother a favour - to use his Galatasaray card to book tickets for us. She had used her own to buy tickets for herself and her dad. Her husband being a Fenerbahçe fan had to stay at home, since by law, no Fenerbahçe supporter can go to the Galatasaray stadium for the derby game and vice-versa. The games between the two clubs had often caused mass uprisings in the past and last season’s match-fixing scandal had only added to the tension among fans. The Fenerbahçe president, Aziz Yıldırım is still in prison on charges of bribery. As many as 92 club officials and football players are still suspect and the trial will begin on February 14, 2012.

Having experienced the madness among Turkish football fans on my first day at Istanbul when Besiktas, the other city rival, had hosted Galatasaray, I was preparing myself for another emotionally charged night of football. But the reality was nothing compared to my imagination. Anticipating heavy traffic on

the street, we decided to take the metro and by the time we reached Taksim, I knew it was going to be an unforgettable experience. Thousands of fans singing together in support of their club weren't new to me, but the intensity was clearly manifold higher. It was a rainy evening in Istanbul but that couldn't dampen the spirit of the Gala fans.

Some of the singing and chanting was clearly targeted at two Fenerbahçe footballers. One of them being Volkan Demirel, the Fenerbahçe goalkeeper, who went on record saying he will not shave his beard until the club president comes out of prison. Didem had said about him: "He always plays against us". The other was Emre Belözoglu, the 31-year-old midfielder who was one amongst 125 best living footballers in the FIFA 100 chosen by Pelé. He had left Galatasaray to join Internazionale in Italy and then spent three years in Newcastle United in England before moving back to Istanbul to join



The Ali Sami Yen Sports Complex TT Arena

Fenerbahçe. Gala fans had greeted him with a garland made of money when he first came back to play there. That night, he was being remembered with the choicest of words again.

The Ali Sami Yen Sports Complex TT Arena, the newly built home of Galatasaray, was absolutely packed with fans. Coming into the game, Fenerbahçe was at the top of the Spor Toto Super League with 28 points from 13 games while Gala at number two with 25 points from equal number of games.

Galatasaray started the game strongly but Volkan made three very good saves which reminded me what Didem had said about him always playing well against the Galas. Fenerbahçe played some good passing game but failed to penetrate in the final third. Felipe Melo of Brazil did a good job of holding for Gala while Johan Elmander gave the Fenerbahçe defence a really tough time. The former Liverpool man Milan Baroš missed a sitter for Gala before the ex-Arsenal man Emmanuel Eboué danced them into the

lead in the 32nd minute from an assist by Elmander. Eight minutes later, Elmander grabbed the ball from Bilica (Fabio Alves Da Silva) and netted a goal, thanks to a poor piece of goalkeeping from Volkan.

Fenerbahçe started the second half with a little more composure. Alex de Souza, their Brazilian captain started showing more initiative but Tomáš Ujfaluši was rock solid at the Gala defence. Fenerbahçe had more possession of the ball during this half of the game but they failed to create clear chances for goals. In the 66th minute, the Fenerbahçe defenders were caught sleeping when Melo got a free header to score the third for the Yellow-Reds from a corner from Selçuk İnan. Alex scored a consolation for Fener in the last minute of the game.



Fenerbahçe left too much space for Felipe Melo to score from a free header to make it 3-0 for Galatasaray

With the 3-1 win, Galatasaray moved up to the top in the league standings with superior goal difference. A dejected

Aykut Kocaman, the Fener manager revealed after the game: "We are truly very upset. We had to have dominance over Galatasaray and we were supposed to direct the game. However, we failed in meeting our expectations and we did not perform at our utmost in the first half of the game. In the second half, we seemed to play better but that did not help us win the necessary points at the end. Now we have to focus on the upcoming game against Bursaspor."

In terms of overall quality of football, the game might not have scored enough to be topmost in my memory but the sheer intensity and energy among the Gala fans before, during and after the game sure have. It's hard to describe the atmosphere in words; superlatives like 'most electrifying' may also seem understated. They all sang for Cim Bom on their way back home. Even the most helpless of Gala fans hadn't quite expected the score they saw. Little wonder that the score was discussed the next day; it will continue to be discussed in offices, bars and bedrooms until the two fiercest of rivals meet again.

The Curious Case of *Il Gioiello di Bari Vecchia*¹

Antonio Cassano has divided opinion like no other modern day Italian footballer. Gino de Blasio goes under the skin of the man to find what makes him tick and why we should pray to see 'Peter Pan' again

1982, was a year *calcio* will never forget. It had taken 12 years for the Italian team to reach the World Cup final, and on July 11, Enzo Beardzot's team, captained by the legendary Dino Zoff lifted the golden chalice after 44 years. A nation had been re-united under one footballing faith.

As providence would have it, 12 July 1982 was to be the start of another footballing beginning for Italy - the birth of Antonio Cassano.

Humble beginnings

"In school, I would get 2 out of 10 in every subject. A great result if you think about it, obtained through constant hard work. I have been held back six times, between primary and high school"

Born in Bari and raised by his mother, Cassano has proven to be a controversial figure of *calcio*. Fabio Capello used to call his tantrums and subsequent reactions "Cassanate" (literally translated as "doing a Cassano"); not as a modest term of endearment though.

He has played for his home town, Roma, Real Madrid, Sampdoria and now resides in the bosom of Milan. He has been surrounded by some of the greatest in the game, played with those who have achieved the highest of footballing honours; so why hasn't the boy from Bari been more recognised?

¹ The Jewel of Old Bari - a nickname of Antonio Cassano

That match against Inter

It was a 30 yard pass, a pass which an 18-year-old Cassano, in his debut season in 99-00 with Bari, saw and swooped on; the ball bounced; he controlled with the outside of his boot; it bobbed in front of him. Laurent Blanc cuts across, but to no avail, Antonio sweeps between two Inter defenders before taking aim and firing the shot home.

*“If it wasn’t for that game against Inter I would have become a thief, or worse, either way, a delinquent. A lot of people that I know have become involved in that life. That game my talent shone, and it took me away from a future of potential s**t”*

It would be fair to say, that match against Inter put Antonio squarely on the map of calcio. Being a prodigious talent from a humble background, the media frenzy it would cause and the subsequent future it would provide him, must now be a distant memory.

Roma calling

It would be with a move to Roma that Cassano would begin to make his name, and stake his claim of being one of the best talents in Europe. But it would be under the guidance of Fabio Capello, and friendship of Francesco Totti that Cassano would go through the highs and lows of top flight football.

With Totti, there would be a telepathic link between the two. When one moved into space, another would feed the ball, it would be some of the best attacking football that you could witness, although blighted by some performances that you wish you hadn’t seen.

But it was to be his relationship with Capello that would be the beginning of the end for his time at Roma. On more than one occasion, (approximately 20 times), he told him to f**k off. He missed training sessions and even incurred the wrath of club president, Rossella Sensi for reasons unknown.

And then there was Real Madrid...

“I used to play between market stalls, everyone wanted me in their team and I would bet 10, 15, 20 thousand lire on the team that I would play on. I wasn’t cocky, I wasn’t stupid: I wanted the money, I had to give myself the best odds.”

His move away from the eternal city came as a shock to many, but a surprise to few. His temperament had gotten to the likes of Capello and other team mates including his closest friend Totti with apparent training ground bust-ups. His lack of conformity annoyed the echelons at the top. Real came calling and he succumbed, being the second ever Italian player to sign for them after former Roma teammate, Christian Panucci.

But his time was to be fraught with injury, poor performances and famously gaining weight leading to subsequent fines for every kilo over his established playing weight. And then Real appointed Fabio Capello, as their manager. He was yet to meet his old coach, and in an infamous youtube moment, Cassano was caught mimicking Capello, leading to the slippery path of exclusion, suspension and contract release...

Sampdoria, no really, he went to Sampdoria

Well, where else could he go? Cassano was derided by the press and his lack of playing time at the end of his Real Madrid days were detrimental to securing a top tier team; no offence Sampdoria fans.

His time though was to be fruitful. He quickly became a local legend. His displays of the Cassano of old was lauded by everyone, even if his temper at points got him carded and a shirt throwing incident landed him a five match ban. But his first year provided the highest point for Sampdoria since winning the *scudetto* in the early 90s, a return to European competition was awaited.

His second season was more of the same. Sterling performances with co-striker Pazzini saw him produce some of his best displays, leading many to compare the partnership to that of Mancini and Vialli. Sampdoria finished fourth, a Champions League playoff followed, only to end in disappointment for the *blucerchiati*.

It was to be his third season that the good old Antonio showed the attitude that had left him out of the national team. Following a heated debate with the club president, Cassano had his contract terminated, and subsequently a sporting tribunal saw that Antonio couldn't play until January 2011 when....Milan came calling.

Buongiorno² Milano!

“I was poor, I want to be precise, in my whole life I have not worked a single day. I don’t know how to do anything. Up to today I’ve spent 17 years being a scoundrel and spent 9 being a millionaire. I still have 8 years to balance up the books.”

Antonio moved from Sampdoria to Milan in the January transfer window of 2010, for a fee yet to be understood by NASA scientists! The complexity ensured Milan paid little, very little for the jewel of Bari, but it was a risk. Could he guarantee the talent without the tantrum? Could Milan manager Max Allegri and co. keep him away from straying?

It was to be the case. Cassano was instrumental in the second half for Milan in the 2011 season. Providing movement and goals at the front, he eased the burden on Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Pato, linking brilliantly with anyone he played with. His talent was at the forefront, with Milan’s environment of highly decorated former players and staff, keeping him out of trouble.

A temporary set back

And so it was to be the start of a second season that “Fant’Antonio” was to begin displaying the best his abilities could provide. Recalled to the Italy squad under Cesare Prandelli, and providing a flux of assists for club and country, it seemed we were all being treated to the Cassano we knew he could always be.

But it was to be a return from an away match against Roma that saw the Italian football world stunned. Cassano suffered an ischemic-based stroke. His life momentarily threatened, his career was instantly put on the back burner, for club and ultimately country. Whilst the prognosis remains a minimum six month absence from the pitch, it has only recently emerged that Antonio was seen back in training with the Milan squad, only three months after prognosis.

“The football gods have decided that this is to be a temporary setback” said one Milan fan on twitter. But now, with the prospect of Cassano back on the pitch sooner rather than later, if football miracles can happen, please dear universe, let this be one of them.

² Good Morning!

Taking Stock – The Serie A Mid-Season Review

*A seminal year for Serie A with corruption raising its head, European adventures and the return of a giant - **Debopam Roy** reviews the season so far in Italy*

Prior to the start of the 2011-2012 Serie A season, Goalden Times had done a preview where we had looked at the prospects of each of the 20 participating teams and touched upon some of the most discussed issues of the league. With almost half the season gone (16 of the 38 rounds) and the teams in a richly deserved winter break, it is the perfect opportunity to look back at the past 5 months, and take stock.

The European Coefficient

In our preview, we had discussed how the Italian teams needed to spruce up their act in the continental competitions. We had seen how Serie A had been overtaken by the Bundesliga after consistent performances in both the European competitions and had consigned Serie A to only three Champions League slots. The 2011-12 season is the final season of Serie A, hopefully for a short duration only, with 4 Champions League teams as next season onwards, that privilege would be taken over by Bundesliga. Indeed the total points earned in the half season too show Serie A to be off its rivals.

Country	07-08 coefficients earned	08-09 coefficients earned	09-10 coefficients earned	10-11 coefficients earned	11-12 coefficients earned	Total coefficients earned	Teams that earned it/Total teams in Europe
England	17.875	15.000	17.928	18.357	12.375	81.535	8/8
Spain	13.875	13.312	17.928	18.214	11.285	74.614	5/7
Germany	13.500	12.687	18.083	15.666	10.750	70.686	4/6
Italy	10.250	11.375	15.428	11.571	9.500	58.124	5/7
France	6.928	11.000	15.000	10.750	9.666	53.344	4/6

Table 1: Year wise European Country Coefficients

So we see that only five (Milan, Inter, Napoli, Udinese, Lazio) of the seven teams that were in Europe actually contributed. (Palermo & Roma were ousted in the first qualification match in Europa League). The net points earned for 2011-12 (9.5) is also well below the other 4 nations in the top 5. This is because either more teams earned the points (as in England's case) or the teams that entered, finished top of their group (Spain) thus accumulating more points.

In several previous seasons, individual Serie A teams have performed brilliantly in Europe, even winning the Champions League but there has been a collective effort lacking in both the tournaments. It was thus heartening to see the 5 Italian teams that qualified for group level in both the tournaments, actually making the knockout rounds. This 100% record is unmatched across Europe.

Country	No. of Teams in Europe	No. of Teams in Group Stages of European Competition	No. of teams in knockout rounds of European Competitions
England	8	8	5
Spain	7	6	5
Germany	6	5	4
Italy	7	5	5
France	6	5	2

Table 2: Performance of Teams Entering European Competitions in 2011-12

So one can say it was only Serie A which had a 100% record of the teams that actually qualified for the group stages of the European competitions. This is a surprisingly welcome cumulative effort from the peninsular teams and they now have an opportunity to earn more coefficient points in the knockout rounds, which are much higher than the group stage. Another point worth noting is that of all the leagues, Serie A has the maximum teams (three) in the knockout rounds of the Champions League. It is a credible achievement and needs to be lauded. But as we saw in table 1, the gap between Serie A and Bundesliga is more than twice the gap between Serie A and French Ligue 1 (which is below Serie A). Hence such consistent cumulative performances have to be continued for some years as well as get more teams to earn points in the knockout rounds to make an impact.

The Calcioscomesse³

The season had started with a massive shock of the *Calcioscomesse* where police had charged and arrested 16 people including Lazio and Italy striker Giuseppe Signori but of the active players, the most high-profile capture was Atalanta captain Cristiano Doni. On 9th August, Cristiano Doni was sentenced to three years and six months ban from Italian football though he was released on bail. That effectively ended the career of this 38-year-old. Signori was also banned for five years from *calcio*. Doni was re-arrested in December and even spent five days in solitary confinement before being released on house arrest. In his interrogations, Doni accepted that he had influenced matches unjustly, though he was adamant in confirming that all his efforts were directed towards the improvement of Atalanta and never had he conspired against his team. Further questioning awaits Doni on 18th January when the Italian National Arbitration Court for Sport will quiz him in Rome. One can rest assured that there may be more skeletons waiting to come out of the closet, in this matter.

The Season So Far

In many ways this was a throwback to the past for the behemoth that is Juventus finally found its range under a former iconic player who was managing on the big stage for the first time - Antonio Conte. Conte had led two teams from Serie B to promotion but this was the first time he was appointed for a big Serie A team (his other Serie A experience was with Atalanta). Tempering the 4-2-4 that he used in most of his earlier teams, and with the need to include Andrea Pirlo in the midfield, Conte tried 4-3-3 or 4-3-2-1 and managed to end the half-season as the only team unbeaten, not just in Italy but in all the big leagues of Europe. The strikers were not too prolific though, with the exception of Alessandro Matri, but Claudio Marchisio was having the season of his life, already scoring six goals from the midfield.

But their impressive showing was not enough to go to the top alone, as defending champions Milan themselves bounced back from a start of 5 points in 5 matches (the 5th of which was a 2-0 loss to Juventus) to go on an unbeaten streak of their own which included 29 points in 11 matches with 30 goals scored and 8 conceded and 7 clean sheets. Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored in six consecutive matches, tying the club record of Andrei Shevchenko and at the winter break, Milan were tied for the top spot with Juventus but ahead on goal difference. A welcome feature of the season was the goals that Milan

³ Illegal betting on football

midfielders managed: Kevin-Prince Boateng had a hat-trick in a memorable 4-3 comeback win away at Lecce while Antonio Nocerino is having his best season, scoring six goals including a hat-trick in a 4-1 win against Parma.

The challenge for the top two came from the unlikely source of Udinese, who had sold their most promising striker (Alexis Sanchez), their best midfielder (Gokhan Inler) and their best defender (Cristian Zapata) and still had ended with an almost 100% win record at home (only broken by the 0-0 Juventus managed on the last round of matches before the break). Lazio too had bought well in the summer and Miroslav Klose was a revelation scoring goals and leading the line.

All these 4 teams should provide the backdrop for the *scudetto* fight though Juventus have a definite advantage with no European distractions and a fit team. Milan has probably the best squad of them and Ibrahimovic, who has not lost a league title in the last eight years, but Champions League foray might eat into their title challenge. Udinese are the surprise and the neutral's favourite for *scudetto*. They too are in Europe though as are Lazio and with thinner squads than either Milan or Juventus, they might drop off from the top four.

The three big teams that struggled to establish a consistent set of performances were Napoli, Inter and Roma and each had their own reason. All of them should qualify for Europe, though it is to be seen whether Champions League or Europa League beckons them. The identity of the top seven teams as of now should remain same at the end of May; the only thing to note is whether any of them can challenge Milan, Juventus and Udinese for the title.

Napoli had qualified for the Champions League and making a good fist of that chance but the strain of fighting on multiple fronts was taking its toll on the team. Coach Walter Mazzarri tried rotating his team, something that the fans had long clamoured for, but even then they were inconsistent in the league. There were brilliant wins against both Milan giants, a 6-1 thumping of Genoa and a 3-3 tie with Juventus in a match they led 3-1 with 18 minutes to go. But they also lost to Catania, Parma and Chievo, and drew with Cagliari and Fiorentina among others. The names show a pattern - wins against the big guns but loss of focus against the lesser lights.

Roma had spent big on promising youth players like Eric Lamela, Miralem Pjanic, Bojan and Fabio Borini but with an inexperienced manager and too many new players playing to a new system would have inevitably required time to gel. Seventh spot at the winter break is the best that they could manage. But with the team gelling better with time, this team can actually improve.

Inter Milan had a horror start to the season where after 9 matches they were in the relegation zone with five losses (including losses to Novara, Palermo and Catania). The team had not scored in their home ground till the seventh match and had their manager Gian Piero Gasperini sacked after five matches. The old hand, Claudio Ranieri was brought in to stabilise the ship and there was improvement as Inter picked up 18 points in the next 7 matches. Considering only top three teams will qualify for the Champions League, there is still some way off for the *nerazzurri* to work.

The most interesting and surprising team has been Atalanta. Hit with a six point penalty due to the *Calcioscommesse*, they knuckled down to win key games and remained unbeaten at home throughout. But for the points penalty, they would have been in the sixth position. German Denis led the surge with 12 goals in 16 matches and the top scorer award at the winter break. Memorable performances also came from Maxi Moralez, the diminutive Argentine bought from Velez Sarsfield as he contributed 4 goals and 3 assists.

Each of Catania, Fiorentina and Cagliari had their moments but largely struggled to get out of the mid table ruts. Palermo, who had a rollicking start and had a 100% record at home (including an opening day win versus Inter) were totally derailed from the 13th round onward. In their last four matches they picked only two points scoring in only one of those matches.

Down the table, the three teams who risk relegation the most are Cesena, Lecce and Novara. Lecce were exceptionally poor managing only a single point from all of their home matches - a draw with Novara. They lie bottom with nine points. Novara, who returned after 55 years to Serie A managed a fine win against Inter but managed only one other win to have 12 points, a tally that was matched by Cesena. Both Cesena and Novara were also matched in that they both had the only two artificial pitches in Serie A. Along with these three, both Siena and Bologna too may get embroiled if they do not improve in the second half of the season. The relegation dogfight should be confined between these five teams.

Team	Matches	Wins	Draws	Loss	Goals For	Goals Conc	Points
Milan	16	10	4	2	35	16	34
Juventus	16	9	7	0	27	11	34
Udinese	16	9	5	2	20	9	32
Lazio	16	8	6	2	24	13	30
Inter	16	8	2	6	22	19	26
Napoli	16	6	6	4	29	18	24

Team	Matches	Wins	Draws	Loss	Goals For	Goals Conc	Points
Roma	16	7	3	6	21	19	24
Catania	16	5	7	4	20	23	22
Palermo	16	6	3	7	18	20	21
Genoa	16	6	3	7	19	24	21
Atalanta (-6pts)	16	6	8	2	23	19	20
Chievo	16	5	5	6	13	18	20
Parma	16	5	4	7	21	26	19
Fiorentina	16	4	6	6	15	15	18
Cagliari	16	4	6	6	12	17	18
Siena	16	3	6	7	14	16	15
Bologna	16	4	3	9	14	24	15
Novara	16	2	6	8	17	29	12
Cesena	16	3	3	10	8	20	12
Lecce	16	2	3	11	17	33	9



Top Goalscorers

German Denis (Atalanta): **12 goals**

Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan): **11 goals**

Antonio di Natale (Udinese): **10 goals**

Edinson Cavani (Napoli), Miroslav Klose (Lazio): **9 goals**

Stevan Jovetic (Fiorentina), Sebastian Giovinco (Parma), Pablo Osvaldo (Roma): **7 goals**



Scouting Network

Goalden Times brings you the stars of tomorrow. 20 years or under, promising players from across the world are highlighted in this section



Manolo Gabbiadini

Date of Birth: 26.11.1991

Height: 1.86 m

Position: Striker, Centre Forward

Market Value: €3m



Manolo Gabbiadini is an up and coming Italian striker who plays for Atalanta. Manolo is the younger brother of Melanie Gabbiadini who is an Italian international and has won 3 Scudetti, 3 Italian Super Cups, and 2 Italian Cups. When asked to comment on her brother's potential, she said, "He's a very good striker. He's tall, he's quick and he has a great left foot." If you were transported 15 years back and somebody said the same thing about a striker who plays for Atalanta, you would immediately utter the name of Christian Vieri. The resemblance becomes clearer when you note that Vieri did come to play a season with Atalanta in 2008-09 and young Manolo may have come in close contact with him as he was in the Atalanta youth system at the time.

He made his Serie A debut at the age of 18 for Atalanta in 2010. That season though Atalanta would be relegated to Serie B and Manolo would move to Cittadella on loan. The 2010-11 season would be one of apprenticeship in Serie B and Manolo would play 29 times for Cittadella, notching up 5 goals and 4 assists. His exposure would hold him good as Atalanta, who had gained promotion to the top division, would recall Manolo to the team.

In the 2011-12 season though, Manolo has struggled to hold on to a regular spot in the Atalanta first XI. He has played 9 times in the league and once in the Coppa with his sole goal coming in the Coppa. German Denis is the joint top scorer of the league and he has been ably supported by Maxi Moralez and Guido Marilungo, leaving Manolo to bit-part roles.

But his real progress has been evident in Ciro Ferrara's Azzurrini (Italy U21) team. In 4 matches of the U21 European qualification, Manolo has scored 6 times with 2 assists to boot. This included a hat-trick against Liechtenstein and 2 goals against Hungary. He also provided both the assists in the top of the table clash with Turkey. Powered by his performances, the Azzurrini have a 100% record. Overall in 13 matches for the Azzurrini, Manolo has scored 10 times - a very handsome ratio by any standards and he became only the 9th Italian ever to reach double figures while playing for the Azzurrini and some of those names have gone on to become legends of Italian football - Andrea Pirlo, Christian Vieri (that man again), Gianluca Vialli among them. Manolo though has his head about him. There have been transfer rumours of reported interest from Juventus but seeing how he is struggling to hold on a place in Atalanta, he would rather fight it out at Bergamo than look for a move to Turin. If Denis continues his scoring spree for Atalanta, Manolo might be well served to have a loan season tucked in to keep his good form for the Azzurrini reflected in the league too. A move down to Serie B would not harm either.

In effect, Manolo is one of the archetypical Italian bombers who have the feet and the head to engage the defence on his own and score goals. A bit more tactical awareness and off-the-ball movement along with some much needed playing time would boost him up to realising some of the potential that he has shown and get him towards matching his sister's medals tally.

EPL Mid-Season Review

*Last August, we had presented a season preview. Come New Year, **Debojyoti Chakraborty** is back to review his predictions and update the prophecies*

Prelude

Happy New Year! English football enters a new year with the hope of establishing itself as the football powerhouse of Europe, especially after the lacklustre performance in the 2011-2012 UEFA Champions League. At the start of the competition, the clubs from Manchester looked like strong bids – one for their (recent) history, and another for their new found cash injection. Surprisingly, they have to trade their horses with the poor-man’s-Continental-Cup – the Europa League. Back home though, they have not disappointed the books and are tied at the top spot to set up a fascinating second half for the 2011-2012 Barclays Premier League. Earlier in the season, we had come up with a [season preview](#) and now look to review our own stance – how far have we got it right and where our predictions have gone awry.

League Table

POS	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Manchester City	19	14	3	2	53	16	37	45
2	Manchester United	19	14	3	2	49	17	32	45
3	Tottenham Hotspur	19	13	3	3	37	20	17	42
4	Arsenal	19	11	3	5	35	26	9	36
5	Chelsea	19	10	4	5	37	24	13	34
6	Liverpool	19	9	7	3	24	15	9	34
7	Newcastle United	19	8	6	5	26	25	1	30
8	Stoke City	19	7	5	7	20	30	-10	26
9	Everton	19	7	3	9	19	22	-3	24

POS	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
10	Aston Villa	19	5	8	6	22	24	-2	23
11	Norwich City	19	5	7	7	28	34	-6	22
12	West Bromwich Albion	19	6	4	9	19	27	-8	22
13	Sunderland	19	5	6	8	23	22	1	21
14	Fulham	19	4	8	7	20	25	-5	20
15	Swansea City	19	4	8	7	18	23	-5	20
16	Wolverhampton Wanderers	19	4	5	10	21	34	-13	17
17	Queens Park Rangers	19	4	5	10	18	33	-15	17
18	Wigan Athletic	19	3	6	10	17	37	-20	15
19	Blackburn Rovers	19	3	5	11	28	41	-13	14
20	Bolton Wanderers	19	4	1	14	23	42	-19	13

Arsenal FC

The season started in the worst possible manner for Arsene Wenger. He could not hold on to his star players; there were no big signings to assure fans; one hell of an injury crisis – particularly in the defensive ranks – culminating in a brutal assault by one of their arch rivals. But things have changed for the better since then. Arsenal changed their recruitment policy and brought in some established players rather than looking for greenhorns. Thomas Vermaelen came back from injury and provided some much needed solidity to the otherwise fragile defence. Mikel Arteta grabbed his last chance of playing for one of the elites of modern European clubs and orchestrated a till-now-shaky midfield. He was ably supported by Alex Song, who rose to the occasion in the absence of long-term injured Jack Wilshere. The enthusiasm of new recruit Gervinho helped matters too. To top it all, a certain Robin van Persie thought that it was not a bad time to surpass the club record of Thierry Henry by scoring the maximum number of goals in a calendar year. Still, Wenger is not in a good mood, come this new year. Over-reliance on RVP, especially considering his injury-prone history, and imminent departure of players for African Cup of Nations, are worth a concern. Calling back an ageing Henry as a cover is showing signs of panic in management. It remains to be seen how Arsenal deal with these issues while the likes of Chelsea and

Liverpool breathe down their necks. I am sticking to the pre-season prediction of missing out on a Champions League place (and may be, RVP!).

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 5th

Final Prediction: 5th

Aston Villa

After the summer exodus of a lot of regular first team players, Villa was sure to get a rocky start to the season. But Gabriel Agbonlahor has struck gold this season as a senior member in the team. Not only is he the highest scorer for the Villans, he has played a perfect ten to his striking partner Darren Bent. Along with Stiliyan Petrov, he looks set for his best season for the club this time round. But lack of experience in the midfield has limited penetration in the attacking third. Mediocrity has embraced the club and the same is expected to prevail in May.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 10th

Final Prediction: 10th

Blackburn Rovers

A change of ownership; fans demanding the head of the current manager and even carrying banners to get the former incumbent back in charge, team rooted to relegation throughout the season – this has been a forgettable league campaign for the Rovers. The only highlight has been the star forward, Yakubu Ayegbeni with 12 goals in the campaign – he is among the top five goal scorers this season. Christopher Samba seems the sole warrior in a fragile defence that has leaked more than two goals per game. It is not clear why Steve Kean is still at the helm of things, but it seems Blackburn can only survive if teams above them encounter a freefall. Tough times ahead!

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 15th

Final Prediction: 18th

Bolton Wanderers

Manager Owen Coyle changed the way Bolton used to play last season. The results were encouraging, with Bolton fighting for the European spots last season this time. But they have hurtled on a downhill journey since, without any road blocker. Things could get even worse with the imminent departure of defence stalwart, Garry Cahill in the transfer window. For a team with the worst defensive record in the league, this will be a massive blow. When going forward, they have been much better though. The midfield trio of Chris Eagles, Nigel Reo-Coker and Martin Petrov are doing quite well for themselves but not so much for the team – they seldom give out a collective performance. Up front, Kevin Davies has been the target man as usual, with strike partner Ivan Klasnic, enjoying his best season for the club. But Bolton needs to have something extra to survive in the top flight. January would be a crucial time for them with some loan signings in the form of Romelu Lukaku and Josh McEachran expected to join in. I am betting on Owen Coyle to make Bolton stay on in the Premier League.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 16th

Final Prediction: 16th

Chelsea

It is a rocky time. Star players are ageing, and they have warmed the bench this season with high profile signings proving a major flop. It is a new side with a new manager in charge, but time is running out fast. Consistently inconsistent – this should sum up the season for Chelsea. Petr Cech is underperforming regularly and some costly howlers this season has meant he has kept only four clean sheets thus far – not enough for a top class goalkeeper. Chelsea have played six matches last month and have kept a clean sheet only once, conceding seven in the process. This vulnerability may be somewhat explained by the new high pressing style adopted by Andre Villas Boas, but not the individual mistakes by the defenders, like Terry slipping against Arsenal! A new look midfield has performed well for Chelsea though AVB has, at times, been indecisive on where to deploy Juan Mata, their most creative player. A free roaming role like that of David Silva of Manchester City seems to suit him well rather than a wide forward in a three-man attack. Daniel Sturridge has been superb in that role and Chelsea would have done well had they found a central striker, netting goals regularly. Yet, seeing the form and depth in squad of Liverpool and Arsenal respectively, Chelsea should get a Champions League berth.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 2nd

Final Prediction: 4th

Everton

David Moyes has done wonders for Everton working on a shoe-string budget. This season is no different. Nothing spectacular about them - they have secured points where everyone expected, and dropped points where no eyebrows were raised. Leighton Baines has been excellent in a well drilled unit, which has one of the best defensive records in the league. They have had to struggle going forward though. Lack of creativity in the midfield and regular injuries to star striker Louis Saha have seen them creating very few chances and converting even fewer. Earlier, we had predicted a seventh spot finish for the Toffees, but then the midfield lynchpin Mikel Arteta left for Arsenal. So we are modifying our predictions and now see them just holding onto a top-half finish.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 7th

Final Prediction: 9th

Fulham

Fulham has underperformed thus far. Defenders have failed to maintain a clean sheet, forwards have failed to find the net. Midfield has been the only bright spot with the duo of Clint Dempsey and Danny Murphy pulling the strings. Dempsey is the highest scorer for the team with six goals. Apart from a 6-0 drubbing of Queens Park Rangers, they have failed to score more than two goals in any of their remaining 18 matches. Bobby Zamora has failed to deliver time and again. The defence is not doing its job properly. The experienced pair of John Arne Riise and Brede Hangeland has failed to pull its weight into the team. The team still has enough experience and it would be unwise to predict that their poor run will continue for the rest of the season. So, I am going with a mid-table finish.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 11th

Final Prediction: 13th

Liverpool

Cagy! A word that describes Liverpool under Kenny Dalglish. They are a fine team playing against stronger teams as they can sit back, wait for opportunities to come by and exploit them in the counter attack. But against less ambitious teams, where the Reds are expected to drive home the advantage, they fail to do so adopting the same approach. Hence, in spite of conceding the least number of goals this season, they have a high percentage of draws. This shows the lack of influence their midfielders

have on the game. In spite of big summer signings, absence of lion-hearted captain Steven Gerrard, Charlie Adams, Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing have resulted in a lacklustre performance. Besides, Dirk Kyut and Lucas Leiva – the main players to orchestrate Liverpool's comeback last season – have got limited playing time in a crowded midfield and thus have hampered their rhythm. Add to that the ban on Luis Suarez and we don't see them improving much in the later stages of the league unless any new signing strikes gold. I am predicting a seventh place for the Reds, i.e. no European spot next season.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 3rd

Final Prediction: 7th

Manchester City

With the squad they have, Manchester City may have got more Google hits this season than the cumulative hits of the last decade. And with the historic 6-1 mauling of Manchester United, Roberto Mancini showed that they have surely arrived. Joe Hart has cemented his place as the best goalkeeper in England with eight clean sheets; the defence looks solid under Vincent Kompany, Micah Richards and company. David Silva has masterminded the midfield with some skilful and towering work force around. The forward line is led by a certain Sergio Agüero, and in case he has a bad day in office, Edin Dzeko and Mario Balotelli have ensured that a certain Carlos Tevez remains in oblivion. So what does that leave us with? Most number of goals, most number of clean sheets and second best defensive record, maximum number of assists made by any player in the league – what more can one ask for? On a cautious note, in recent encounters they have failed to score against West Bromwich Albion for the first time in the season and have been handed their first defeat of the season in the hands of Sunderland. Yet, they look good money to win the league and create history.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 4th

Final Prediction: 1st

Manchester United

By his own admission, this has been the most difficult time Sir Alex Ferguson has faced in Manchester United for a long time. With the departure of Edwin Van der Sar, a void was created under the bar, which is yet to be attended to. The once dominant pair of Rio Ferdinand-Nemanja Vidic is now weary

and not getting two games in a row. Injuries have taken their toll throughout the squad. But the biggest problem has been lack of creativity in the central midfield area. All their goal mouth actions have originated from the flanks supplied by Antonio Valencia and Nani. Tom Cleverley had shown glimpses of genius but it remains to be seen how many games he can play at a stretch without getting injured. Phil Jones has used his adaptability well to be slotted across the pitch with Wayne Rooney leading the charge up front. This might not be enough though, to retain their crown.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: **1st**

Final Prediction: **2nd**

Newcastle United

Alan Pardew should be hailed both by the club management and the fans. He has kept a healthy book and has been producing fair results from his limited options on the pitch. With the departure of Andy Carroll, it became difficult to figure out where the goals would come from. In comes Demba Ba who manages to hog the limelight with one of the leading scores of the league, thus far. Similarly, Yohan Cabaye has filled the boots of Kevin Nolan and added a breath of fresh air in the central midfield. Newcastle have a well organized defence. Tim Krul has kept seven clean sheets and is in the running for being Dutch number one in Euro 2012. Ryan Taylor has excelled at the right back position and added a much needed composure in the back line. They are a good side and I am predicting them to leapfrog Liverpool with Suarez being unavailable.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: **13th**

Final Prediction: **6th**

Norwich City

They were cautioned for engaging in a dogfight but they have taken our breath away with their attacking flair. Their transition from championship football has been rather smooth and rarely have they looked out of place. Norwich have failed to keep a clean sheet throughout the first half of the league but they have been competitive in most of the matches they have played in – only in the hands of Manchester City have they suffered a defeat in excess of a two-goal margin. Not too bad with the going forward either - only thrice have they failed to enter the score sheet. They lie in the sixth spot in goals scored this season. Anthony Pilkington has done well in the right side of midfield, specifically from free

kicks. But a bit more consistency would do a world of good for him and his team. Up front, Grant Holt and Steven Morison have been good and Norwich should be enjoying more goals in the rest of the season. They find themselves just outside the top half of the table this time. They should finish around mid-table if they maintain their composure for the rest of the season.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 19th

Final Prediction: 14th

Queens Park Rangers

With only four wins to their name, QPR find themselves just above the drop zone. Start to the season looked promising for the Hoops as they found themselves in the top half of the table after 12 games. That was it though as QPR had notched up all of their four wins during this period. Thereafter, they have been able to get only two points out of a possible twenty-one. QPR have certainly lacked goals and their defending has not helped them at all this season, especially during the barren spell, as they have conceded 35 goals and scored just 19. Only Wigan have scored fewer goals (18) than them. Heider Helguson leads the pack with seven goals but all of them have come in a cluster of 10 matches. It means lack of supply from the midfield on a regular basis. Joey Barton is their most creative player and the most unpredictable too. Adel Taarabt seems to have been mentally disturbed by Barton's arrival and imminent handing over of captancy – he is a shadow of his last season's form. Shaun Wright-Phillips is on a downhill slope and may be past his prime. QPR's defence has been their strength but Neil Warnock has found it difficult to cope with the high standards of EPL. It will be a rough ride from here.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 14th

Final Prediction: 19th

Stoke City

Stoke had a very successful season last year, and there was speculation on whether they would be able to improve on that. They surely have. Stoke have not got a very good goal difference, and their defence is not leak-proof either. But they have managed to obtain results, which matter. They have been hammered a few times, particularly away from home, but have managed to hold on to their one goal advantage, quite a few times. Ryan Shawcross has been a true leader and a stalwart in defence, with six clean sheets. Much of the attacking threats for Stoke came from the midfield in the forms of Jonathon

Walters and Matthew Etherington – together they have notched up seven goals and nineteen assists out of a team total of twenty. Up front, Peter Crouch has been isolated too often and that remains a worry for Tony Pulis. Nevertheless, fellow mid-table dwellers, like Everton and Aston Villa, among others look to be struggling and Stoke City can make a fortune out of their misery.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 12th

Final Prediction: 11th

Sunderland

Steve Bruce has become the first managerial casualty of the season. This was not on the cards at the start of the season, but an outcome of two wins in the first thirteen matches was too much to take for the club. Things did get complicated for Sunderland as they were playing with virtually a new set of team members; it took a while, may be a bit more, to set the right combinations and an understanding among the players. Under Martin O'Neill, they have been on a comeback trail, picking up ten points in the following six matches, and in the process becoming the first team to beat Manchester City in the league this season. Defence has been a worry for Sunderland throughout, with some of the big club rejects forming the core of it. But Sebastian Larsson and Stephane Sessegnon have formed a solid midfield foundation, ably supported by Kieran Richardson. With reportedly some transfer kitty being made available to O'Neill, Sunderland can surely hope to get their good form going and climb up the ladder through a crowded mid-table. A strong finish is on the cards.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 6th

Final Prediction: 8th

Swansea City

Led by a strong showing under the bars by Michel Vorm - which saw him become the best goalkeeper in the league - Swansea City have performed exceedingly well in the first half of the league. Only Chelsea and Manchester City, both at home, have been able to beat the Swans by a margin of three goals or higher. They have some solid foundation at the back while a rejuvenated Scott Sinclair leads the hard working midfield. Only if they can get some goals from the January transfer window, can they make a

very respectable mid-table finish. For the time being, I am considering a high mid-table finish.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 18th

Final Prediction: 15th

Tottenham Hotspurs

Team of the season till now! Spurs started the season with the Luka Modric saga, and looked set to get distracted by these off-the-pitch affairs but kudos to Harry Redknapp for getting us to witness some true spirited performance from its players. They had two back-to-back losses at the start of the season against the Manchester clubs but have lost only once since then. Brad Friedel has been a stalwart under the bar and has kept seven clean sheets. Kyle Walker and Benoit Assou-Ekotto have been dominant as fullbacks, both in defence and as an attacking threat. Gareth Bale has continued his last season's form as a tormentor down the left flank. Rafael Van der Vaart has been superb too, playing as an ideal number 10. Bale and VDV have netted 14 times over and above having 10 assists to their credit. Another midfield marshal has been Scott Parker, the summer signing from West Ham, who has been instrumental in providing much needed stability to the side. Up front, another summer recruit, Emmanuel Adebayor has been striking gold with nine goals and seven assists to his name. Things look good and a return to Champions League seems imminent.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 9th

Final Prediction: 3rd

West Bromwich Albanion

Summer recruit Shane Long started the season brightly as he scored against both Manchester United and Chelsea in the opening two games of the season. But the Baggies lost their first three games and this has been a stop-start season for them. Keeping a clean sheet against Manchester City has been a high point for their otherwise fragile defence. Their midfield and attack have both been quite unimaginative and have thus resulted in one of the worst returns in the Premier League. Without any good summer signing, they will struggle for the rest of the season but Roy Hodgson may just see them through.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 8th

Final Prediction: 12th

Wigan Athletic

We predicted a wooden spoon for the Latics and are not surprised by their position mid-way through the season. They are poor in defence, midfield and attack – they are poor all over the pitch. They have the least number of goals scored in the season and have won the least number of matches. Any team would fancy their chances against this Roberto Martinez side. It is time to bid adieu to Premier League.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 20th

Final Prediction: 20th

Wolverhampton Wanderers

Like Wigan, there is nothing much to write about Wolves. Traditionally, 40 points have been thought as an entry to safe zone. This time round, 35 points seem good enough. With their poor defence, lacklustre attack and no real leader in the field, even getting to that point will be a tough task. Mick McCarthy has to dig deep to find some crucial points in the second leg of the season. Just as he has done before, McCarthy, the shrewd tactician, might target some specific matches to get maximum points and field weaker sides against teams contesting for the European spots. Knowing his prudence makes me give them an outside chance of survival.

Season Prediction in EPL preview: 17th

Final Prediction: 17th

Maximus Tacticus – Swansea City

In this feature, Debojyoti Chakraborty tries to analyze the strategies of top EPL sides

Induction

Swansea City is the first side from Wales to play in English football's top-flight since the inception of the English Premier League. Ranked 15th following the first half of the season, they look to be good value for money to remain in the top-drawer in their inaugural season. They have had a remarkable progress – notching up two promotions in the last four years, and do not look remotely out of place against the big boys of English football.

Beautiful Game

Swansea City's strength lies in their defence. They have made the Liberty Stadium their fortress, conceding only four goals in the first half of home matches. Star shot stopper Dorus de Vries left the club last summer; however, Michel Vorm has been a more than able replacement. We have read "Attack Wins Games, Defence Wins Titles" in the inaugural edition of Goalden Times, in August 2011. Swansea had a solid defence last season in the Championship and they have just taken that form into the Premier League. The Swansea centre back pairing of Garry Monk and Ashley Williams complement each other well. While Williams is a good reader of the game and often comes up with crucial interceptions, Monk, on the other hand, is a very good passer and has completed 92% of his passes - which is quite impressive considering he has been in and out of the team. Angel Rangel, the right back has formed a good partnership with Vorm - more often than not, the Swans start their attack after Vorm releases the ball wide to an overlapping Rangel. The full back converted more passes this season than some of his more glamorous contemporaries, like Ashley Cole and Luis Enrique. Besides, with eight telling crosses into the attacking area, he is a definite threat when he is going forward – an embodiment of a modern day full back. He has a good grasp of the tactics and very alert on the field, often cutting inside skilfully to create space for other wide players to run through the flank.

No matter what their style of play is, it would be inappropriate to mark Swans as a conservative team. What sets them apart from other recently promoted teams is their approach towards the game. Their

manager, Brendan Rodgers for instance, has not changed his swashbuckling style and sets out his team to win, regardless of the opposition or the venue. Swansea City does not usually crowd its own penalty box and look to play on the counter. The Swans earned a well deserved draw against Tottenham Hotspurs and Harry Redknapp was not frustrated with the result. Respect, if anything, was his immediate sentiment: “They are a good team, you have to accept that”. No small compliment from a team with a realistic chance of challenging the Manchester clubs for the coveted title.

Swansea’s playing style revolves around keeping the ball. Leon Britton works as the engine of the team by sitting in front of the back four. The other two central midfielders, Mark Gower and Wayne Routledge (or, Joe Allen) enjoy more freedom. Their close passing dictates the pace of the game. When not in position, they drop deep and wide to cover for the opponent full backs. Rodgers keeps it simple and epitomizes the philosophy: “If they do not have the ball, they are not going to score”. Unlike most of the English teams who indulge in long balls, Swans have adopted a refreshing passing style - keep the ball, move it around with excellent third man runs and off-the-ball movements, culminating in a through pass to unlock the opposition defence. This passing game has caught most of the clubs unawares as they are used to more cagey strategies by newly promoted sides.

Their 86% pass completion rate makes Swansea one of the most attractive teams in the league. But they lack a focal point of attack up front. Danny Graham is their top scorer with only six goals to his credit, so far. Not only have they scored very few goals in the league – 18 in 19 matches, averaging less than one goal per match – they have only managed three shots on target, per game. Unfortunately, most of Swansea’s goals have resulted from an opponent’s mistake rather than a neat finish off a well-structured move. No wonder Swansea failed to beat teams despite having one of the best defensive

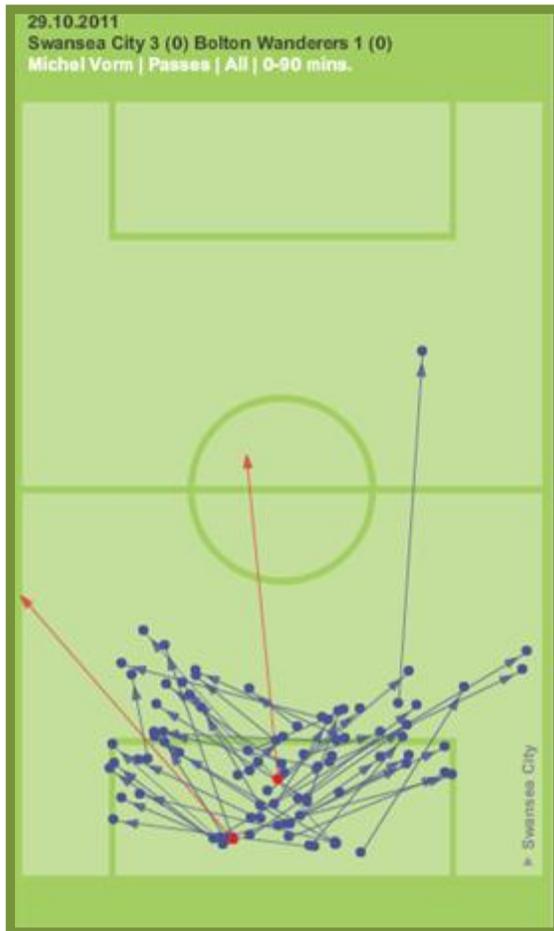


Compact Midfield of Swansea

records at home. And that's quite a disappointment for a team that cherishes a free flowing game of football.

Man to Watch (1) – Michel Vorm

Michel Vorm has been by some distance regarded by the EPL pundits as the best goalkeeper of the season. Some achievement indeed, playing for a team which has conceded more than one goal on an



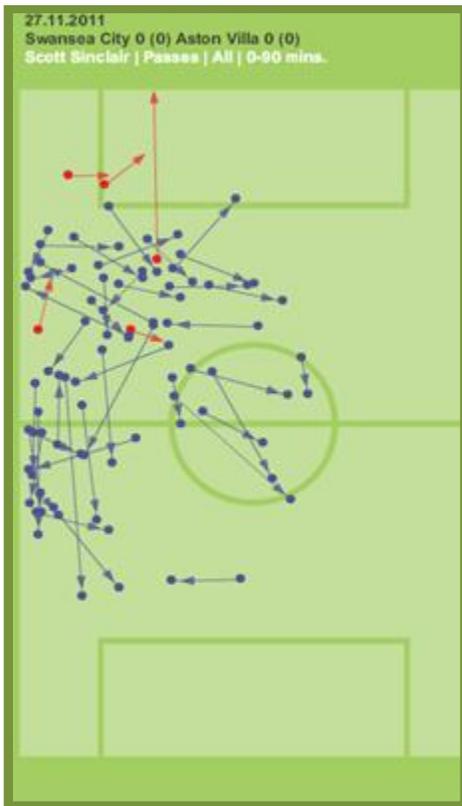
Building from the Back

average in the first half of the league campaign. 9 clean sheets along with 65 saves have made him one of the top shot stoppers in the game. As he is pretty comfortable with the ball at his feet, Vorm fits into the club hand in glove. Swansea likes to build the game from behind, so it is imperative that the goalkeeper is comfortable with his feet. As shown in the illustration, Vorm can use more short passes to initiate an attack for Swansea City. Not sure if he had the same distribution playing for Stoke City, especially with a certain Peter Crouch up front. Vorm is also equipped to marshal the game well from behind and help in setting up the game from the back. Nicknamed 'The Penalty Killer', this super athlete is gifted with exceptional penalty saving abilities. Add to that his agile moves and we can see glimpses of his fellow countryman, Edwin van der Sar.

Man to Watch (2) – Scott Sinclair

Ex-Chelsea player Scott Sinclair took a big gamble when he decided to play for a Championship club in the quest for regular first team football. He was pivotal in the Welsh club earning them a promotion to top flight English football last year. He has been instrumental this year too, contributing the most number of assists for Swansea City. Things have changed for the better after Rodgers changed Sinclair from an out-and-out forward to a wing wizard.

With his blistering pace down the left flank, Sinclair has shone in a wide forward role. As is evident below, his passing has been superb in this position. But due to lack of depth in the squad, sometimes Sinclair has been deployed in a more central position where he has failed to dictate the game so much. Another criticism for Sinclair has been that he often switches off from the game. Nevertheless, he was in his true colours against Tottenham Hotspur lately. If he can continue his showing as the most creative player for the Swans, no doubt they will hold their heads high by the end of the season.



Shining in a wide role



Not so effective centrally

Blue Line - Successful Pass

Red Line - Unsuccessful Pass

The Year That Was - When Romance Returned to Football

*As the football season resumes in earnest again, **Debopam Roy** takes you through the year that just went by - a year when romance returned to football. So grab some popcorn and read on*

Year 2011 has been one of romance and glory for football. We witnessed celebrated victories of AC Milan in Serie A (ending a five year dominance of rivals Inter), of Lille in the French Ligue 1 (after a 56-year wait), of Borussia Dortmund in Germany (after a decade) of Uruguay in the Copa America (their 15th win overall, but one that came after 15 years). But the one thing that has been a permanent fixture is the dominance of Barcelona in the Spanish and international club scene. A Jose Mourinho-inspired Real managed to prise Copa del Rey away in April but otherwise the blaugrana have been ruling the roost pretty well - that Copa del Rey loss being the only blemish in all the competitions they participated in. The peak probably came when Barcelona ruthlessly exposed the shortcomings of a Manchester United club, which had attained its holy grail of 19 league championships, overtaking Liverpool's long standing record. The Red Devils would then reach dizzy heights including THAT 8-2 but would also see the troughs of 6-1 shellacking at home in the derby and end up without Champions League knockout stage qualification for only the third time in the history of the Champions League. The city of Manchester was united in that disappointment as Manchester City too bowed out of Europe on the same day but 2011 was a seminal year otherwise for them, and City won their first ever title in close to 40 years by winning the FA Cup. They followed that up with a solid showing in the Premier League, which has seen them march past most of their opponents for much of the 2011-12 season. The year had many such vignettes and we try to capture some of them here

Return of the Prodigal Son

Honourable Mention II: Barcelona finally managed to sign Cesc Fabregas after ...well, since the day he was let go. A couple of years of 'will he, won't he' and the prank Barcelona jersey put on him by Gerard Pique and Andres Iniesta during the 2010 World Cup celebrations, Fabregas finally made the jump in

2011, after seven years with Arsenal and has proved that it was much more than a bench role, by scoring nine times in thirteen games, for the Catalan giants.

Honourable Mention I: Twice FIFA World Player of the Year, feted for his skills in leading Barcelona to their first Champions League win in 15 years, Ronaldinho was supposedly dumped for a pre-retirement jaunt by Milan, at the beginning of 2011. He was back in Brazil playing for Flamengo and with 21 goals and eight assists in the 52 matches thereafter, he had made up for lost time. He inspired the team to the Taça Guanabara, Taça Rio and Campeonato Carioca and had worked his way into the Brazilian team. This was no mean feat, as he had been ostracised from the national team since 2008.



And the 2011 "Return of the Prodigal Son" is Kenny Dalglish aka King Kenny.

Back in the club of his greatest adventure and at a time when they were looking at the real spectre of relegation dogfight, King Kenny rallied Liverpool to a sixth place finish. On another day that would have been sufficient for European action but with Fulham, Stoke City and Birmingham City all qualifying from either cup competitions or fair play leagues, Liverpool

endured their first season out of Europe in over a decade. Still Kenny Dalglish deserves praise for rallying around a team of misfiring, disjointed players who had been in decline for some time.

The Oil League

Honourable Mention II: Anzhi Makhachkala is owned by Suleyman Kerimov, a man listed as #118 on the Forbes list of the World's Billionaires. Anzhi sprung the most unlikely coup by luring Samuel Eto'o from Inter Milan for €28 mn and in the process making him the richest salaried football player (or even athlete if you believe some reports) at €20.5 mn. Anzhi though just about managed to qualify for second stage in the revamped Russian Premier League. This second stage involves the top eight teams from the regular season, which has 30 matches home and away and plays another double-legged league. Anzhi finished eighth to qualify for this but doesn't look like winning the championship anytime soon.

Honourable Mention I: Malaga CF was reportedly bought for €36mn by Sheikh Al Thani, a member of the Qatari Royal family. Unlike the other oil rich clubs, Malaga has been looking at older marquee players rather than buying top notch players for astronomical fees. Hence players like Julio Baptista, Martin Demichelis, Ruud van Nistelrooy and Joris Mathijsen have found favour. The managerial reins are with Manuel Pellegrini who had taken over the club while being in the relegation zone and led them to an 11th place finish. The 2011-12 season has been even better so far with Malaga sitting in sixth place and in a La Liga sharply polarised between the top two and the rest of the eighteen teams, stands a bright chance to qualify for Europe next year.

But the Oil League's top dogs have been the cousins of the Qatari Royal family who controlled Paris St.Germain (PSG) and Manchester City. They spent €86 mn and €93 mn in the summer transfer window. This money can be considered well spent though, as apart from buying some of the biggest names of world football - Sergio Aguero, Javier Pastore, Samir Nasri - both the teams managed to finish 2011 at the top of their leagues. There was continental disappointment though as PSG crashed out of Europa League and City crashed out of Champions League.

Underdog Story of the Year

Honourable Mention II: The 2011 Copa America was supposed to be the crowning glory for an Argentinian team led by Leo Messi. Hosting the tournament with Messi, widely recognized as the best player in the planet and comparisons with all time greats a common occurrence; it was almost granted that Messi would lead the hugely talented Argentine attacking line to the title. The challenge was supposed to come from a Brazilian national team, which boasted new stars on the block - Neymar and Ganso. What transpired instead was elimination at the quarter final stage and it was Uruguay continuing the resurgence under Oscar Tabarez. The semi-final appearance that Uruguay had managed in the 2010 World Cup was not a fluke was reiterated once more as Uruguay defeated Argentina on its way to a title, which made them the team with the highest number of Copa titles and also their first title in 15 years. A new generation has come up in the national team embodied by Edinson Cavani and this team is primed for even more glories.

Honourable Mention I: To properly understand what Apeol FC has managed, one needs to maybe look at what it means for the country's European co-efficients. After the 2010-11 season, Cyprus lay at the 20th position in the European coefficient rankings but six months of 2011-12 has seen them rising to 16th,

over teams like Czech Republic and Croatia among others. A major part of this dramatic rise is owing to the exploits of Apoel F.C. in Europe. Rank outsiders and in only their second foray in the marquee league, Apoel stunned all to top their group, which contained Porto, Shakhtar and Zenit. In the process, they confined last season's Europa champions, Porto out of the Champions league. This achievement becomes even more creditable when you consider that Apoel had to overcome three opponents in the qualifying tournament just to get into the Champions League group stages. A second round match against Lyon will not daunt them and Cyprus may look out for a further boost to their rankings.

The French Ligue 1 has been dominated in the 21st century by Lyon and finally Bordeaux has managed to break that stranglehold. However, **little Lille stunned everyone to win both the league and the Coupe de France in 2011 scoring a league-leading 72 goals and winning the league with rounds to spare.** Lille have managed to do it with a string of homegrown players, the leader of that pack being Eden Hazard and to this mix, players like Moussa Sow and Rio Mavuba have been added. Sow especially was hugely impressive scoring 25 goals including three hat-tricks, the final of which came on the last day of the season. Sow has carried on that form into the 2011-12 season as well as leading the scoring charts for this richly talented Lille side. The oil money of PSG (read above) notwithstanding, Lille would be fighting for further glory this year, and another domestic double is not out of reach.

Heartwarming Victories

Forget the fact that he was ridiculed as a fashion accessory and on his way to retirement when he left Real Madrid for the lucrative confines of Major League Soccer; **David Beckham** is honest and diligent in his efforts. It might have taken him four years but he has finally managed to win a trophy with the Los Angeles Galaxy. The Los Galacticos are one of the heavyweights of the MLS but have remained empty-handed since 2005. Since his move in 2007, Beckham had been hardly inspiring for the team with his spate of injuries and multiple loan spells to Milan. 2011 though would change that and Galaxy would win the MLS Cup and the MLS Supporter's Shield. Beckham became the most influential player, scoring 2 goals and providing 13 assists in the 27 matches he played in. To put it into perspective, that count of 13 assists is the highest that Beckham has ever managed in his professional career in a single season.

Japan had been devastated in 2011 in a Tsunami, which had rendered a threat of nuclear pollution in the entire Asian region but within months, **the Nadeshiko went on an amazing winning spree, to claim the first ever Football World Cup at the senior level for Asia.** In the process, Japan became only the fourth ever winner of the Women's World Cup. They had already beaten the hosts and two-time reigning

champions Germany in the quarter final 1-0 after extra time and then easily disposed of the Swedes in the semis. Another two-time champion and heavyweights of the women's game, the US awaited them in the final. Twice, the US took the lead; twice Japan equalised. The first was in the 81st minute and the second in the 117th minute. Ultimately, they would win 3-1 in the penalty shoot out to claim the first Asian World Cup. In addition, Japan won the FIFA Fair Play trophy too while ace forward, Homare Sawa won both the Golden Ball and the Golden Boot. It was a magical night when all the stories that you have heard of David slaying Goliath came true.

Year of the Minnows

Honourable Mention II: A 30-year-old Romanian computer programmer, Eduard Ranghiuc spotted something which brought into focus the whole procedure in which teams are ranked by FIFA. Normally FIFA ranks and awards points in whole numbers and as per that ranking system, Wales was ahead of Faroe Island. However, with Mr. Ranghiuc spotting an error in FIFA's calculation, he claimed the Faroese should have got 0.7 points more and that would push them beyond the Wales. The Faroe Association lobbied hard and Wales suffered the ignominy of being in the last pot of UEFA for the Qualifying draw. It may not matter ultimately as the Faroese have drawn Germany, Sweden, Irish Republic, Austria and Kazakhstan, and the Kazakhs are possibly their best chance to earn some points. The Welsh drew Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Belgium and fellow British side, Scotland.

Honourable Mention I: Back in Asia, it was a remarkable achievement when Afghanistan reached the finals of the South Asian Cup. Ravaged by war and ranked a lowly 178, the Afghans surprised everyone, including themselves by drawing with hosts and firm favourites, India in the lung opener. However, they then exceeded that performance by beating Sri Lanka and Bhutan in the group stages and then defeating the formidable Nepal (nearly 30 places ahead of them in FIFA rankings) in the semi finals. Their opponent in the final was India again. It was a tough match; the scores were tied till the Afghan goalkeeper was shown red and a penalty was awarded to India. After this incident, the Afghan resistance wilted and they lost the match 4-0.

They had last won a match in 1983 when neither they nor their opponent were part of FIFA. They have the world record for conceding the highest number of goals (31-0 shellacking at the hands of the Aussies). **But 2011 must be remembered as a watershed for little American Samoa.** That 1983 win was their only win in the international front till November 23, 2011, when a long ranger from Ramin Ott and

a chipped finish by Shalom Luani led them to a 2-1 win over Tonga in the Oceania World Cup qualifiers. Coached by Thomas Rongen who played in the legendary Ajax side of the 70s, American Samoa would draw their next match with Cook Islands but a loss to Samoa put paid to their hopes of qualification.

The Thing About 18

Worldwide, 18 is considered the age when we attain maturity and are given the rights to drive a car or to vote. The target of 18 is thus the holy grail for many a teenager who would like to enjoy life to their fullest in a legal manner. 2011 strangely can be entwined around 18 with some of the best clubs entwined together at that number.

The Scudetto has been won an astounding 63 times out of 107 by three clubs - Juventus and the two Milan giants, Milan and Internazionale. Juventus have won 27 and Inter had raced to 18 on the back of 5 straight Scudetti since 2005-6, the first of which was awarded to them after the Calciopoli scandal. The 2005-06 Scudetto was won by Juventus who were stripped of the title, and runner-up Milan was handed points penalty and Inter was thus handed the Scudetto by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC). The then Juventus Director of Sport, Luciano Moggi was implicated and handed a life ban. Moggi has kept on fighting the same in the courts and finally in 2011, new evidence was unearthed which showed that the phone calls, which were taken as evidence in 2011 did not include the whole set, which incidentally also showed calls made by the Inter President Giachento Fachetti. The obvious implications were that Inter were no less guilty of influencing referees than the other teams that were penalised in 2006. There was a huge uproar of taking that scudetto back from Inter or Inter voluntarily renouncing it. The club, however, were not ready to do that. Legally too there was no way to punish them as the events were more than five years old and under Italian law, they could not be prosecuted.

Meanwhile, city rivals Milan, who were stuck on 17 since 2003-04, surged ahead to win a 'legitimate' 18th Scudetto. For star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, whose transfer from Barcelona was the force behind Milan's title push in 7 years, it was his 18th title playing for Ajax, Juventus, Inter, Barcelona and Milan.

At England though, Manchester United and Liverpool were already tied on 18 titles. (Notably, Liverpool's 18th title had come when Kenny Dalglish was last in charge). The charge to 19 has eluded Liverpool for over two decades and 2011 marked the year when they were no longer the 'winningest club in the top division of England'. Manchester United swept to #19 in effortless style, thus attaining the holy grail of breaking the long standing hoodoo of 18.

Incidentally, the World Club Cup that Barcelona won at the end of 2011 thrashing Santos, was their 18th title in the 21st century, or to be precise their 18th title since 2004-05 season. Well what's so special about 2004-05? A barely 18 (17 years and 114 days to be precise) Lionel Messi made his debut for Barcelona in the league and life in Catalonia or world football community has not been the same again.

The Era Continues

While 18 is an enticing age for many, 25 is when probably we are slowly rising to the peak of our powers. But to stay for 25 years in the peak is indeed a very rare achievement. Two men achieved that in 2011 and in their own way, they have made their clubs the talking point for the past 25 years.

1986 was the year when Silvio Berlusconi, then a media magnate, bought Milan, saving it from bankruptcy and appointed a promising manager, Arrigo Sacchi at the helm. In a year, three Dutch players - Marco Van Basten, Frank Rijkaard and Ruud Gullit was bought and Italian and European football was never the same again. For a team, which had been relegated twice in the last eight years before Silvio stepped in, Milan since 1986 went on to win eight Scudetti, one Coppa Italia, five Supercoppa Italiana, five Champions League trophies, five UEFA Super Cups, two Intercontinental Cups and one FIFA Club World Cup. Milan still remains the last club to win consecutive Champions League/European Cup.

Mirroring that rise of Milan and Berlusconi has been that of Sir Alex Ferguson and Manchester United. A relatively unknown Alex Ferguson was brought in to take over a Manchester United team, which was flirting with relegation in 1986 under Ron Atkinson and Ferguson led them to an 11th finish. There was not an immediate impact like Milan had done but once Ferguson had built up his team, there was no stopping him or his club. The twenty-five years have brought in twelve Premier League titles, five FA Cups, four League cups, ten Community Shields, two Champions leagues, one Cup Winners Cup, one UEFA Super Cup, one Intercontinental Cup and one Club World Cup.

Both Berlusconi and Ferguson achieved distinctions outside the game, which were related directly or indirectly to their team's performance. Berlusconi led his Forza Italia party to two terms as the Prime Minister of Italy and Ferguson was knighted for his services to the game.

Ironically, they both ended 2011 on a low. Berlusconi had to resign in the wake of the economic crisis gripping Italy and Sir Alex had to endure only the third ever elimination from the group stages of

Champions League and a 6-1 thrashing in the Manchester derby - his worst ever defeat. One hopes they both survive these and such events turn out to be mere scares than watershed points of their reign.

Transfer Deal of the Year

Every year there are millions of transfers and it is very difficult to pick three that proved extremely valuable and the players in question played at a sufficiently high level to warrant discussion. Here, we discuss three men who came for free or next to nothing and had a huge impact in their club's showing.

Honourable Mention II: What do you say when an absolute legend of the club, after a decade of winning every trophy and honour there is to win, chooses to walk away and join the biggest league rivals? Some feel betrayed but most are eager to wait and see what a 32-year-old legend discarded as too slow and on the downward slide, does to show there is still some fight left. Most Milan fans had that reaction when watching Andrea Pirlo in the black and white of Juventus after he opted not to renew his contract and moved on for free. In 16 matches, Pirlo didn't score any goal and only contributed four assists, but his overall impact and gameplay was responsible for Juventus jointly topping the league ironically with Pirlo's former club - Milan.

Honourable Mention I: That Milan push for the league was founded on an incredible 11 match unbeaten streak of which they drew only 2. Antonio Nocerino, former Juventus youth product, who was brought in the last hours before the summer transfer window closed, for 0.5mn and co-ownership of a youth player. This, for an Italy international is really pittance. Nocerino though, took the opportunity to really burst through and establish himself as one of the starting members of the Milan midfield. In 15 matches, he scored 6 goals including a stunning hat trick against Parma. This, in itself was more than he had ever managed in any season. Milan had found a true successor to Rino Gattuso.

But the transfer deal of the year is Demba Ba, a French born Senegalese footballer who joined Newcastle in the summer after joining West Ham in the end of the winter transfer window in 2011. Less than half the season with the Hammers was enough to prove his worth as he scored 7 goals in 13 appearances. But it was not enough and when the Hammers were relegated, Ba invoked a release clause and became a free agent. Newcastle snapped him up for the 2011-12 season and in 21 appearances for the Magpies, he scored 15 goals, easily becoming the principal reason for his team being in European slots after half the matches are over.

Transfer Deal of the Year (Not)

Life throws us opportunities at different times: what we do with them shows how good a strategist we are. Coincidentally, all three players chosen here can yet have a wonderful ending to the 2011-12 season but the huge amount of money spent on them by clubs bore little fruit.

Honorable Mention II: Young Jordan Henderson was plucked by Liverpool for €18 m and was touted as the best thing to have happened to Liverpool midfield since one Steven Gerrard burst through. Playing in 20 games though, he has only managed one goal and one assist. If the promise that he had shown at Sunderland is not evident, then one wonders if he would be discarded after a couple of seasons as an expensive mistake.

Honorable Mention I: Henderson though, can say that as a midfielder he is not supposed to score too many goals. That cannot be true for the other big signing that Liverpool made - Andy Carroll. As many as 31 matches for Liverpool fetched just 6 goals and no assists. A 22-year-old young striker settling down in his first big club may be a possible excuse but when you consider that he was bought for a transfer fee of €41mn, then you ought to check who was in charge of Liverpool negotiations.

That Liverpool was bidding in that range was a domino effect instigated by the mega deal that Chelsea had offered them for Fernando Torres. A club favourite, Torres antagonised the Red supporters when he turned hostile and asked to be transferred to Chelsea. In the end it was €58.5 that managed to prise open Liverpool's grasp. Thought to be a new lease of life in the troubled striker's career, he managed 5 goals and 8 assists in 39 matches. It also included [this](#) miss which really defined his season and made him a subject of ridicule.

Memorable Comebacks

Comebacks are always exciting, and the ones especially achieved on the road are particularly so. The Japanese women came back twice to level in the Women's World Cup before winning it on penalties. However, we have picked three league matches where the trailing team showed extraordinary fighting spirit to come back and win, or level from a hopeless cause.

Honourable Mention II: [Newcastle 4 Arsenal 4](#). Arsenal were leading by 4 goals to nil till the 68th minute when Laurent Koscielny brought down Leon Best for a penalty, which Joey Barton converted. Then Best

had a goal incorrectly disallowed for offside before making it 4-2 from a Jose Enrique cross. Newcastle was on a roll and soon Koscielny succumbed again, fouling Mike Williamson to concede the second penalty, which Barton converted again. The 4th goal was a blistering long ranger from Chiek Tiote in the 87th minute.

Honourable Mention I: Lecce 3 Milan 4. Milan had travelled to Lecce with just two wins in seven matches. However, they were caught unaware as Lecce scored 3 goals in 37 minutes and Milan were looking at a despondent loss. Manager Max Allegri threw in the cavalry during half time with Alberto Aquilani and Kevin-Prince Boateng replacing Massimo Ambrosini and Robinho. The impact was stunning. Boateng started connecting with laser- guided missiles, which found the back of the Lecce net. 16 minutes after the restart, he had tied the scores at 3-3, scoring a 14-minute hat-trick in the process. The final winning goal would come from the oldest man on the field - Mario Yepes, heading home an Antonio Cassano cross. Milan's miracle was complete.

The most memorable comeback though was Santos 4 Flamengo 5. It was built up as the clash between age and youth - of Ronaldinho's Flamengo and Neymar's Santos. Santos had begun the match on a fire and were up by 3 goals within 25 minutes but Flamengo tied-up the match by scoring 3 goals of their own. In between, Elano of Santos missed a penalty but Neymar restored the lead at the start of the second half. But the last laugh was to be Dinho's who scored twice to complete his hat-trick and an epic come-from-behind win at the home ground of the South American and Brazilian champion club.

I Can't Believe This Happened

Honourable mention II: Manchester United failed to reach the Champions League knockout rounds for only the third time since the two-legged group structure had started. A team which had reached three of the last four Champions League finals, winning one and only losing out to the collective brilliance of Barcelona, managed to defeat the Romanian debutants Otelul Galati in the group stages. Losses to Basel and draws with Benfica sealed their fate, and the fact that Manchester City too were dumped out of the knockout rounds by a brilliant Napoli team, was scant consolation.

Honourable Mention I: 2011 is the first time since Juventus and Liverpool are both missing out on any European action since....the 1962-63 season. The previous season (61-62), Juventus had finished 12th while Liverpool were champions in the Second Division, thus gaining promotion to the First Division. Together, these two behemoths of European competition have won seven Champions

Leagues/European Cups, six UEFA Cups, five UEFA Super Cups, one Cup Winners Cup, one Intertoto Cup and two Intercontinental Cups. So when they both spend a season completely out of Europe, you pinch yourself to believe it.

The most unlikely event of 2011 was River Plate getting demoted. Goalden Times have already covered this story in detail but one statistic alone would show the magnitude of the shock. Since the professional league started in Argentina in 1931, River has won 33 titles in 80 years. They are easily the most decorated and venerated club of the nation and a season without El Clasico with Boca Juniors is something fans of both clubs would never have imagined.

Celebrations

Honorable Mention II: Mario Balotelli is no stranger to controversy. His recent antics include throwing darts during training and the incident of the training bib. But he seemingly outdid that when prior to the Manchester derby, a firework was set off in his flat's bathroom, which subsequently burnt the house down. A quite unfazed Balotelli opened the scoring in the derby though in what would turn out to be a 6-1 thrashing. What made that goal celebration even more epic was Super Mario's shirt display.

Honorable Mention I: If Mario was cheeky, with his celebrations, then Gerard Pique and his Barcelona teammates were positively barmy. After winning their fourth Champions League, the Barcelona players were looking to take some Wembley mementos back home. But Gerard Pique had 'bigger' ideas and he managed to pry off the entire nets from the goal posts. Apparently, he was following a tradition established by the basketball side of Barcelona, who cut the net as a memento when they win a trophy. But not since Madonna's 'Human Nature' has someone been seen with so much rope and net....for all one knows, Shakira may have a new rope trick.





The most whacky celebrations though happened in Italian football at the end of the 2010-11 season in Serie A and Serie B. In the post-Scudetto winning revelry, with most players in their shorts and fully inebriated, Massimo Oddo tried an Olympic run. But in Serie B, an even more eccentric man was celebrating an even more momentous occasion. Novara had won the Serie B play-offs and were returning to Serie A after 55 long years and Jimmy Fontana was not really sure how best to celebrate it.

Best Football Performances

Honourable Mention II: Robin van Persie has been the single most in-form player of 2011 outside of anyone who does not play in Madrid or Barcelona. 35 Premier League goals in 2011, the 2nd highest in a calendar year since Alan Shearer struck 36 in 1995 and already 17 Premier League goals this season in 20 games marks 2011 as a truly phenomenal year for the Dutchman.

Honourable Mention I: Zlatan Ibrahimovic courts more controversy than goals but his record of winning eight consecutive league championships is simply unmatched. He is the talisman that can lead any club to a league win. These eight wins were achieved with Ajax, Juventus, Inter, Barcelona and Milan. But for the Barcelona win, every other club that actually won the league with Ibra broke a streak of some other club. He is that kind of a player - someone who can pull his team through in the big home games or tough away fixtures. Now if only he could score in the Champions League.

However, **the best football achievement was the tango that Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo unfurled in La Liga**. It was a personal war within the two-team battle that Barcelona and Real Madrid have made La Liga. Messi scored 51 goals in the 2010-11 season and Ronaldo managed 53. While Messi won the La Liga and the Champions League, Ronaldo won the Copa del Rey. In the 2011-12 season, it is no different.

Ronaldo has 26 goals in 25 matches for Madrid while Messi has 31 goals in 30 matches for Barcelona. They are the two best players of their generation and it is fitting they go head-to-head in the same league.

Best Performance by a Footballer

This is one of a kind and deserves its own space. We end this look back at the year that went by with **this performance** by Kevin-Prince Boateng. That he could manage that, do **this** and **this** and **this** and of course **this** makes him a complete entertainer.

Keep watching football and enjoy a **Goalden 2012!**

This Month That Year

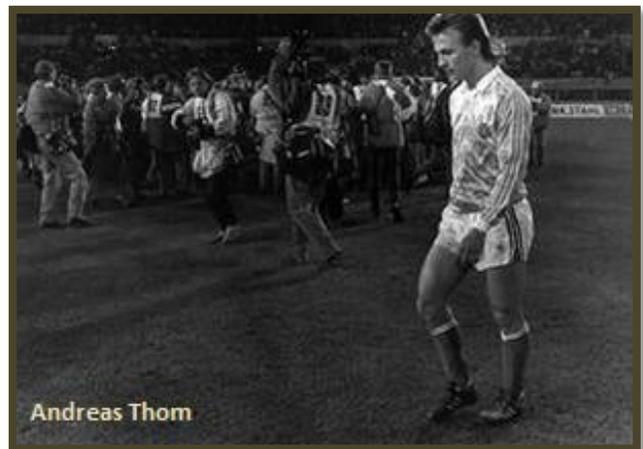
Revisiting interesting events of the month, in the history of football

January 01, 1990 - Andreas Thom Crosses the Divide

On 1st January 1990, Andreas Thom became the first East German Oberliga player to sign freely for a West German club.

When Germany was divided after World War II, a group of West German clubs re-established the pre-war German football association, the DFB. Meanwhile, East Germany established its own association, the DDR-Oberliga. Barring the occasional meeting between the East and West German national teams in international competitions, the two were kept largely separate until November 1989, when growing support for reunification led both associations to allow unrestricted competition across the two leagues.

Towards the end of 1989, Thom received permission from the DDR-Oberliga to move across the border, the first East German player to do so (though there had been defections, including three footballers from the East German national team earlier that year). He struck a deal with Bayer Leverkusen and joined them on this day.



January 02, 1921 - The Birth of Cruzeiro

On 2nd January 1921, a group of Italian immigrants in Brazil founded the Sociedade Esportiva Palestra Itália in Belo Horizonte. Now known as Cruzeiro, it has since become one of Brazil's most successful clubs.



The club identified strongly with Italy, originally open only to Italians and even adopting their colours from the Italian flag. But after Brazil entered World War II in 1942, the government prohibited club names from including references to the Axis nations. So, after a couple of interim iterations, Palestra Itália became Cruzeiro Esporte Clube, using

the Spanish name for the Southern Cross constellation. They also abandoned the Italian tricolour for blue and white.

January 04, 1909 - Bienvenido⁴, España



On 4 January 1909, representatives of several clubs met in Madrid to form the Spanish football federation. The meeting was held at the offices of Real Madrid, with club president Adolfo Meléndez serving as the federation's first secretary.

Originally named the *Federación Española de Clubs de Football*, the new organization followed the model of England's FA, with the express purpose of creating a Spanish national team. After 11 years, they finally accomplished that mission when Spain played their first full international, a 1-0 win over Denmark in the 1920 Summer Olympics, where they took the silver medal.

⁴ Welcome

January 08, 2010 - Togo Attacked

On 8th January 2010, gunmen fired upon two Togo team buses, killing 3 people and wounding 7 others.

The buses - one containing the national team and the other holding their luggage - were travelling through the Angolan province of Cabinda, where Togo were scheduled to begin their Africa Cup of Nations campaign three days later. Although part of Angola, Cabinda is an exclave, separated by the rest of the nation by the Republic of the Congo. Shortly after the team crossed the border separating the two, a group of Cabindan separatists ambushed the travelling party in a machine gun attack that lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Two different rebel groups later claimed responsibility for the attack, though one claimed that it was not directed at Togo, but instead at the Angolan security forces guarding them. The gunmen fired multiple shots into both buses, however, killing three people - assistant coach Amelete Abalo, press officer Stan Ocloo, and driver Mário Adjoua. The list of wounded included 5 players as well as the team doctor and physiotherapist.



Emmanuel Adebayor after the attack

January 18, 1961- Sky's the Limit

On 18th January 1961, England finally lifted the wage restriction for footballers that had previously capped their earnings at £20 per week (£17 in the close season).

The wage limit was one of two concerns for players of the time. The other was the retain-and-transfer system, which gave the clubs complete authority regarding player movement from one club to another.



Jimmy Hill (on the left)

Together, the two matters nearly prompted a player strike in January 1961, backed by the Professional Footballers' Association and their chairman, Jimmy Hill.

Hill, who played for Brentford from 1949-52, then for Fulham from 1952-61, became the PFA chairman in 1957 and continued the organization's longstanding opposition to the wage restriction. The Football Association and the Football League, however, argued that the £20 weekly wage was a fair one, being 25% higher than the average industrial wage at the time. But at a PFA meeting earlier that January, Bolton's Tommy Banks generated support for a challenge, pointing out that anyone could take a crack at being a miner, but few miners could play football in front of 30,000 spectators every week.

The threat of the impending strike forced the authorities to capitulate and lift the wage. While many players saw their wages doubled as a result, Hill's Fulham teammate Johnny Haynes was the greatest beneficiary, becoming England's first £100-a-week player.

January 25, 1995 - Kung Fu Cantona



On 25th January 1995, Manchester United drew 1-1 with hosts Crystal Palace in a match that proved to be very costly for United and their star French forward, Eric Cantona.

Since arriving at Old Trafford from Leeds in November 1992, Cantona had become a United favourite, helping them to the League title in his first two seasons, as well as being named the 1994 PFA Footballer of the Year. Unfortunately, he had also displayed a quick temper, once receiving two red cards in two successive matches.

In that match against Palace, both teams were scoreless early in the second half when Cantona was sent off in the 48th minute for kicking Palace defender Richard Shaw. As he was being escorted off the pitch, he suddenly turned and launched himself feet-first over the advertising hoardings into Palace supporter Matthew Simmons, who had been heaping verbal abuse on the Frenchman. Down to 10 men, United

managed to take a 1-0 lead six minutes later, but could not prevent Palace from equalizing in the 79th minute to earn the draw.

Cantona was suspended for the rest of the season, sentenced to 120 hours of community service, and fined £10,000. Without him, United fell just short of winning another title, finishing one point behind League champions Blackburn Rovers.

January 26, 1884 - The Great British Tradition

On 26th January 1884, Ireland hosted the very first British Home Championship match, losing 0-5 to eventual winners Scotland.

The previous year, the football associations of the four British Home Nations -England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales - agreed to formalize their regular internationals in an annual tournament. They decided that each of the four members would play single matches against the other three, earning two points for a win and one point for a draw, with the champions being the team with the most points at the end.



La Liga – Mid-Season Review

*With Barcelona trailing by five points behind Madrid, Villareal struggling to stay afloat and the miracle of Levante, a lot of changes are taking place in Spanish football. **Sumit Sarkar** reviews the primera división of La Liga so far*

La liga kicked off on the last weekend of August this season, and if the kick-off did not get delayed by a week due to players' strike, twenty clubs would have played each other once by the time this review reaches the editorial desk. The first round of matches got rescheduled on the third weekend of January, and as of now, each club has played 17 games. We reviewed the primera división of *la liga* in our September issue of Goalden Times and with only two rounds of the first leg remaining, it is a good time to take stock of the happenings so far. After seventeen rounds, the league table looks as follows, with Real Madrid CF on top, five points clear of FC Barcelona, despite being beaten handsomely in the *El clásico*.

Club	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	GF	GA	Points
Real Madrid	17	14	1	2	61	16	43
Barcelona	17	11	5	1	51	9	38
Valencia	17	10	4	3	28	18	34
Levante	17	9	3	5	21	19	30
Osasuna	17	6	8	3	21	28	26
Málaga	17	7	4	6	20	22	25
Sevilla	17	6	6	5	19	19	24
Espanyol	17	7	3	7	18	21	24
Athletic Bilbao	17	5	8	4	23	19	23
Betis	17	7	1	9	19	22	22
Atlético Madrid	17	5	5	7	23	27	20

Club	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	GF	GA	Points
Getafe	17	5	5	7	17	23	20
Mallorca	17	4	7	6	15	22	19
Rayo Vallecano	17	5	4	8	19	26	19
Granada	17	5	4	8	11	21	19
Real Sociedad	17	4	6	7	16	23	18
Racing Santander	17	3	8	6	12	21	17
Villarreal	17	3	7	7	15	25	16
Sporting Gijón	17	4	3	10	16	29	15
Zaragoza	17	2	4	11	13	32	10

Green - Champions League; Blue - Europa League; Red - Relegation Zone

The Title Contenders – the Usual Suspects Tangoing

Given the state of affairs in *la liga* over the last 6 years, it is no surprise that Madrid garnered a staggering 43 points from 17 games, losing only 2 and drawing only 1. Barcelona, the defending champions who have drawn six and lost only two games in the entire league last season, already have drawn five and lost one. In Spanish general elections held in November, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero lost the Prime Minister's office to Mariano Rajoy. With power shifting from the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party to the Partido Popular - with whom the Blancos always enjoyed a harmonic relation - it is being said that the Barcelona era in Spanish football is nearing its end. Incidentally, on the last weekend of November, two weeks before the *clásico*, Barcelona lost to Getafe. Since the *clásico* of December 10, the talk about shift of power in Spanish football from Camp Nou to Bernabéu was shelved for the time being, but as the *liga* resumed on the second weekend of January, the whispers returned with the draw at the Barcelona derby.

Real Madrid is in an even better position than they were, at this stage, when they last won the title in 2007-8. Between 24th September and 10th December they had a winning streak of 10 games. They scored 61 goals in 17 games, averaging 3.6 per game. Cristiano Ronaldo scored 21 in 17 appearances, Gonzalo Higuaín 13 in 16 appearances and Karim Benzema 10 in 15. Ángel di María and Mesut Özil produced 13 and 8 assists respectively. Real Madrid is indeed playing awesome football, and to a plan.

Beating everyone else in *la liga* and beating Barcelona, though are two entirely different propositions. It's been long since Madrid came to a *clásico* as favourites and they took the lead before the ball reached their half even once. In spite of the slip-up, which led to Madrid's first goal 23 seconds into the match, Barcelona kept playing the ball to Valdes, and Valdes continued to play the short passes as confidently as ever. Barcelona not only defeated Madrid, but established the superiority of the brand of football they play. Barcelona completed 681 passes against Madrid's 427. Barcelona's brand of football is characterized by passing and possession. No team other than the Ajax of 1971-72 possibly has played this brand of football so consistently and so efficiently. Real Madrid is playing wonderful football this season, but the Barcelona era is far from its end. Barcelona, however, is not playing as well as they played last year. Their average possession has gone up by 2-3% this season. Since the Copa del Rey final in April 2011, they remained undefeated in 24 competitive games before their shock defeat to Getafe in November. During that period they defeated Manchester United, AC Milan and Real Madrid. But they have drawn away not only against Valencia, Athletic Bilbao and Espanyol, but also against Real Sociedad. They drew against Sevilla too at home. In the absence of Pedro Rodriguez and Alexis Sanchez, the Barcelona attack has lost its width. Injuries to Puyol and Pique left the centre of Barcelona defence soft. If either of Javier Mascherano and Sergio Busquets play centre back instead of their holding midfielder role, it doesn't help the team. Pep Guardiola tried playing only three at the back, and it gave width in the midfield through Thiago Alcântara, and at times through Cesc Fàbregas. Nevertheless, the 3-4-3 formation is risky and leaves a hole in the defence. The absence of Andrés Iniesta is restricting the variety of Barcelona's game plan. The dazzling form of Leo Messi is covering up a lot, but the problems exist.

European Contenders – Some Radical Shift

Valencia are at the third spot with 34 points after 17 rounds – 4 points less than Barcelona and 9 less than Madrid. While it may not sound surprising, let us not forget they were financially in troubled waters, and in spite of losing Juan Mata at the start of the season they are playing better football than they did last year. But some remarkable changes are taking place in Spanish football and that is reflected in positions 4 through 6 in the table. Villarreal, who finished fourth last year are struggling to stay outside the relegation zone. Sevilla finished fifth last year and are hanging out there at seventh spot. Athletic Bilbao and Atlético Madrid, who finished the last season at sixth and seventh spots respectively, are now at the ninth and eleventh spots.

The Levante Miracle

Who did Madrid lose to other than Barcelona? It was Levante Unión Deportiva – a club whose entire football budget for a season cannot pay Cristiano Ronaldo for more than half a season. The club that came up from *segunda division* and barely survived relegation last season, shot up to the top of the table on the eighth week of this season, and remained there for two weeks. Levante apparently defies all logic, but their achievement cannot be disregarded as fluke. A club in administration and a team with average age of thirty-two, they are at number four at half way through the season only because they played rationally. Being a team of mature players, they know their limitations and are well organized. Their new coach, Juan Ignacio Martínez applies a simple strategy – no pretences. They don't try to hold the ball, they have a well-organized defence and they are swift on the counter attack. 36 year old Sergio Ballesteros, their captain, who on a few occasions outsprinted Ronaldo in the Madrid game, has been the inspiration for the team. After seventeen rounds they are at number four, ahead of Athletic Bilbao, Atlético Madrid and even high spending Malaga.

Osasuna

The club that brought Levante down from the top on the tenth round is now at the fifth spot – Osasuna, a club that finished ninth last season. They have drawn against Atlético Madrid, Sevilla and Malaga, and defeated Espanyol and Villarreal.

Project Malaga Paying Off

Malaga finished eleventh last year. They are a European contender this season and are at the sixth spot now. Their spending of €58 million in the summer will pay dividends if they qualify at least for the Europa league. Though they lost to Sevilla and Valencia, and Real Madrid, among the bigger clubs of *la liga*, they defeated Athletic Bilbao, Espanyol and Villarreal. Giving a 3-year contract to the ex-Real Madrid coach, Manuel Pellegrini looks like one of the best moves of Malaga boss Seikh Al Thani.

Newly Promoted Clubs

Real Betis moved up from *segunda división* this season and won their first four games, and was on top of the table in September. They played some good attacking football but lost their composure. They are

presently at the tenth spot with 22 points. Rayo Vallecano, who returned to the *primera división* of *la liga* after eight seasons and Granada, the club that returned to the top flight after 35 years are placed fourteenth and fifteenth respectively. Both of them scored 19 points each through 5 wins and 4 draws, but are separated on goal difference.

Relegation Zone

After seventeen rounds, the three teams in the relegation zone are Villarreal, Sporting Gijón and Real Zaragoza. With only 10 points from 2 wins and 4 draws, Real Zaragoza, S.A.D., another *la liga* team in administration, are at a sad state and are at the bottom of the table with little chance of survival. Sporting Gijón lost 5 and drew 2 of their first 7 games. After seventeen rounds they are at the nineteenth spot with only 4 wins, but they can still survive.

Villarreal – from European Contender to Relegation Zone

On the third week of the season, when Madrid lost to Levante in one of the biggest upsets of the season so far, Villarreal lost to newly promoted Granada in another major upset of that round. With only 3 wins against Mallorca, Rayo and Betis, they are at the eighteenth spot with 16 points. Villarreal more or less retained their team from the last season with the exception of Santi Cazorla, but they are nowhere near their last season's performance. They crashed out of UEFA Champions League by finishing at the bottom of their group without earning a single point! If Giuseppe Rossi had not been injured, things could have been better for the Yellow Submarines. Nevertheless, with only 4 points separating 8 teams from the eleventh position through eighteenth, Villarreal should be able to avoid relegation.

Two Spectacular Games

La liga may not be the most competitive league around, but surely throws up some incomparable games of football. Barcelona thrashed Villarreal and Atlético Madrid, but drew 2-2 with both Valencia and Athletic Bilbao and goalless with Sevilla. The game at Bilbao, when Athletic Club hosted Barcelona in the eleventh week, was *un canto al fútbol* (an ode to football) according to Pep Guardiola. In a spectacular display of fast end-to-end football, Marcelo Bielsa's boys went up twice leaving it for Leo Messi to show his prowess on a waterlogged pitch to save the day for Barcelona at injury time. After Bilbao took the

lead for the first time, Fàbregas headed in a cross from Eric Abidal to level the score. Then a Mascherano back pass went out of play and Bilbao scored from the corner as it landed on Abidal's feet, and then deflecting against Pique, crossed the goal line. Already inside the injury time, Iniesta failed to hold on a pass from Messi. Bilbao keeper, Gorka Iraizoz also slipped. Messi finally slotted in the deflection. The game had it all – tactical twists, brilliant goals, awful misses, great saves, fouls and cards. Athletic Bilbao was intensely attacking, which is a signature of Bielsa.

Another extremely competitive game was played at the Mestalla between Valencia and Madrid. Madrid were up 1-0 at the half time, but they slackened in the second half. At 71 minutes, Ramos slotted in a header to put Madrid up 2-0. Then came the most dramatic 20 minutes of *la liga* so far. Roberto Soldado made it 2-1 but a Valencia corner was hoofed back to their half that Diego Alves tried to clear coming out of his box, missed, and Ronaldo scored from a difficult spot. Soldado scored another, which was the fourth goal in 11 minutes. In between, Mourinho had some heated exchange with Jordi Alba. At injury time, Valencia got a free-kick near the Madrid goal line. Tino Costa took it as the entire Valencia team was up there in Madrid's box. Artiz Aduriz and Higuain collided and Higuain fell on the ground. The ball banged on the bar and rebounded to Soldado, and was rolling towards the goal when Higuain put his shoulder on its way. Valencia was robbed of a penalty and possibly a point. Had the referee given a penalty instead of a corner, the top of the table would have looked a lot more competitive at the winter break.

Predictions

After the winter break, the league commenced with the Barcelona derby and the Valencia derby on the second weekend of January. Both the games ended in draws. Madrid easily defeated Granada and will play Mallorca and Athletic Bilbao in their remaining games in the first leg. Barcelona plays Betis and Malaga in their last two games of the first leg. Anything can happen and the league is wide open between Madrid and Barcelona. However, it is advantage Madrid at the moment. Valencia has an outside chance, but in *la liga* it has been next to impossible to cover a deficit of 9 points in 21 games. It will be good to see Levante playing in the Champions League – even if they play only the qualifiers. Between Osasuna, Malaga, Sevilla and Bilbao any two may qualify for Europa league. Villareal will survive, but apart from Zaragoza, any two among Sporting, Racing, Granada and Rayo will get relegated.

World Cup 1958 – Time for New Heroes

Kinshuk Biswas turns back the clock, to that year in the history of the FIFA World Cup, when the young Brazilians had the world at their feet

The World Cup host country for the year 1958 had been chosen as early as June 1950, during the FIFA Congress in Brazil held in conjunction with the World Cup finals. Sweden, Argentina, Chile and Mexico had shown interest in hosting the tournament. However, aggressive lobbying by the Swedes ensured that they ended up as the unanimous choice.

This was possibly the first tournament since 1934 without a clear favourite. The world had changed a lot in the four years since the last tournament. The all conquering Hungarian team had been left desecrated by the Soviet crackdown on the Hungarian revolution of 1956, prompting mass defection by the best players such as Ferenc Puskas, Sandor Kocsis and Zoltan Czibor. Nandor Hidegkuti and Jozsef Bozsik remained but were already past their best.

The defending champions West Germany still had Helmut Rahn and Hans Schafer and a dynamic young centre forward named Uwe Seeler. They lacked a creative playmaker in the midfield and so 37-year-old Fritz Walter was persuaded to come out of semi-retirement by the manager Sepp Herberger. The hosts, Sweden had credentials to match any of the top teams. Nils Liedholm and Gunnar Gren of AC Milan had been chosen although both were over 35 years of age. They had the famous English strategist George Raynor as manager but were an ageing team. Argentina was back after a 24-year absence and had both tremendous flair and pedigree, being the defending Copa America champions.

Unfortunately the three member forward line - Omar Sivori, Antonio Valentín Angelillo and Humberto Maschio had been poached by Italian clubs. Uruguay and Italy, the most successful nations in the World Cup till then had both failed to qualify after being defeated by Paraguay and Northern Ireland respectively.

Incidentally, all the four home nations of Britain - England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales had qualified; a feat yet to be repeated till date. All the teams had been hit by the Munich air disaster. Brazil was bringing a youthful team who had an unsuccessful tour of Europe in 1956. They were using a 4-4-2

formation which was still a work in progress. Soviet Union, the defending Olympic champions were making their debut with charismatic Lev Yashin in the goal. There were 16 teams in the final tournament and they had been divided into groups, and a draw was used on the basis of geographical location of the nations. There were four pots: Western Europe, Eastern Europe, British teams and the American continent. No Asian and African team participated. After the draw the four groups were:

<u>Group 1</u>	<u>Group 2</u>	<u>Group 3</u>	<u>Group 4</u>
West Germany	France	Sweden	Austria
Czechoslovakia	Yugoslavia	Hungary	Soviet Union
Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England
Argentina	Paraguay	Mexico	Brazil

The format was tinkered with yet again, with all teams playing each other in the group stage with play-off matches to decide progress in case the teams placed second were found to be tied on points. If the two top teams had tied, a draw of lots would decide the group champion. Some teams complained about fatigue due to play-off matches and FIFA decided to use goal averages of the teams to decide the positions. The Swedish FA rejected this proposal stating that the original format could not be changed. Of course, the extra revenue from the play-off matches was the main motivation behind the reluctance to accept the goal average system because the Swedish manager was the most vocal critic of the play-off system. However the goal average system was implemented in case the top two teams in a group had tied. All the rounds of group matches were played on the same dates, June 8, June 11 and June 15, with the exception of the Hungary versus Sweden match, which was played on June 12 instead of June 11.

GROUP 1

The first match featured the match-up between the defending champions West Germany against the South American champions, Argentina. The Latin Americans started with an early goal by Oresto Corbetta in the third minute. After that, the non-existent marking of the Argentines made the match a Helmut Rahn show. Rahn had been persuaded by the manager to lose some weight by reducing his consumption of beer. He scored 2 goals with either foot from 25 yards out. Uwe Seeler added a third to give the champions a 3-1 victory. The second match was a major surprise with Northern Ireland

defeating the Czechoslovakian team 1-0 with a headed goal from Wilbur Cush. In the second round of matches, Argentina played to their potential and whipped Northern Ireland 3-1.

It was a brilliant performance of skill and flair with the Latin Americans resorting to party trick dribbling and passing. The other match featured a typical comeback by the West Germans who fell behind by two goals to the Czechs only to claw back and earn a 2-2 draw. Although, it was with a controversial goal by Hans Schafer who was accused of barging into the Czech goalkeeper, Bretislav Dolejsi over the line in the 78th minute. Going into the last round of matches, all teams had an equal chance of qualification and danger of elimination. West Germany was the favourite going into the game against the Irish.

The Irish played their best game of the tournament and Harry Gregg, their goalkeeper made a string of outstanding saves even while hobbling and being unable to take kicks. The match ended 2-2. In the last match, Argentina was expected to overcome the dour Czechoslovakians. However, the match was the worst ever performance by their goalkeeper, Amadeo Carrizo - an all-time great.

The Europeans used their pace and superior movement to annihilate the Argentines 6-1; a result that eliminated the South Americans. The West Germans had topped the group but Northern Ireland and Czechoslovakia had to go to a play-off. The match finished 1-1 in regulation time and eventually Peter McParland scored the winner in the 97th minute to send the Irish into the quarter finals.

Group 2

The first match of the group was a goal-fest featuring France and Paraguay. The Paraguayans led 3-2 after the 50th minute. The French had a lot of quality in Raymond Kopa and Just Fontaine who went on to create five goals to give them a 7-3 victory. The other match featured Yugoslavia against Scotland, which was a hard fought 1-1 draw. The second round featured Paraguay against Scotland which was a thriller and ended in a 3-2 victory for the South Americans. The Yugoslavia-France match was an entertaining one of high quality football played by both sides. Fontaine scored two more goals for France but the East Europeans were a better organised side with some flair.

The Yugoslavians eventually overcame the French to register a 3-2 victory. In the last round of matches, the French required a victory against Scotland, and Paraguay required the same result against Yugoslavia. The Paraguayans played exciting football but were let down by poor defending to draw 3-3 with the Yugoslavians. In the France-Scotland match, the British team played their best of the tournament but ended losing by two goals scored by the unstoppable Fontaine. France and Yugoslavia

advanced to the quarter finals with Paraguay ruing their missed opportunities and poor defensive display. France topped the group on goal average.

Group 3

The hosts played against the Mexicans in their opening match. The Swedes slowed down the pace of the play to suit their ageing side but still had enough quality to score three goals. With two from Agne Simonsson and a penalty converted by Liedholm, they emerged 3-0 victors. Hungary and Wales played out a 1-1 draw; a magnificently headed equaliser from John Charles in reply to an early goal by Jozsef Bozsik.

The Welsh goalkeeper, Jack Kelsey pulled off some great saves to deny the Hungarians. In the second round, the Mexicans avoided defeat for the first time in the tournament -a feat, which took them 9 matches and 28 years to achieve. They played out a 1-1 draw against Wales equalising in the 89th minute. The celebrations after the match were as if they had won the Cup itself. In the other match, Sweden defeated Hungary 2-1 with both ageing sides playing a slow tempo game, with both hosts' goals coming through defensive lapses of the opposition. In the last round of matches, Sweden fielded a team of reserves against the Welsh to the indignation of the Hungarians. Eventually the match ended in a 0-0 draw, although Wales were lucky as the Swedes had some glaring misses. The Hungarians eventually made their presence felt with Hidegkuti having a great match against the Mexicans and easily winning 4-0.

Sweden qualified as group champions and a play-off was required between Hungary and Wales. The Hungarians mercilessly fouled John Charles, the best Welsh player. The match was played under a shadow of political tension as Imre Nagy, the leader of Hungarian uprising had been executed the day before. There were Hungarian immigrants and defectors in the stand chanting for a free Hungary with banners and posters. Amidst all this, the Welsh won 2-1 coming back from a goal down to reach the quarter-finals.

Group 4

England played Soviet Union, against whom they had drawn a friendly in Moscow a few months back. In this match, the English were clearly second best against a side, with great fitness and good tactical acumen. Nikita Simonian and Valentin Ivanov put the Soviets 2-0 up.

However, England were given a lifeline by a freak Derek Kevan goal, which deflected off his head and wrong-footed the great Lev Yashin. The equaliser was a Tom Finney penalty after a contentious decision



Garrincha

from the referee. A Bobby Robson goal was wrongly disallowed but at the end the English were relieved to have salvaged a point. The other match featured Brazil against Austria and defeated them 3-0 without much effort. Two goals were scored by Jose Altafini who was nicknamed Mazzola after the great Italian, Valentino Mazzola who died in the Turin air crash. The other goal was scored by Nilton Santos. The Brazilian coach, Vicente Feola however was not happy with his forwards, especially 19-year-old Mazzola, who he thought was weighed by his impending transfer to Italy.

The second round of matches featured a goalless draw between England and Brazil. Walter Winterbottom, the manager for England, put Bill Slater to man mark Didi,

the focal point of Brazilian attacks. The English were lucky as Mazzola and Vava both hit the woodwork. In the other match, Austria dominated the Soviets for an hour and then Yashin saved a penalty. The Soviets started attacking the Austrian defence through the wings and Valentin and Aleksandr Ivanov (no relation) scored a goal each to set up a 2-0 victory. In the last round of matches, England were expected to easily defeat the Austrians but were pegged back to a 2-2 draw where they had to come from behind, twice. The Brazilian coach had brought a psychiatrist and asked him if he could play two new young players. The psychiatrist replied that one was too immature and infantile and the other so unsophisticated that his inclusion would be an absolute disaster for the team. Thankfully, Feola had very little faith in the doctor and played both the individuals: Pele, the infantile one and Garrincha, the unsophisticated one. The result was magical and they ripped a good Soviet team to shreds, setting up two goals for Vava in a 2-0 win. Brazil had topped the group but England had to play the Soviets in a play-off. The Soviets controlled the game and won by a 69th minute goal from Anatoly Ilyin.

Quarter Finals

FIFA had got their quarter-final draw correct this time, featuring matches between group winners and runners up. Sweden played Soviet Union, France faced Northern Ireland, Brazil met Wales and West

Germany was against Yugoslavia. In the match against the Soviets, the Swedish manager - George Raynor used a superb piece of tactics.

He knew that the opposition would mark his playmaker Liedholm. Hence, he made Gunnar Gren the playmaker for this match and Liedholm would draw away the marker. By the time the Soviets figured this out they were a goal down. They conceded another goal, late to give the hosts a 2-0 victory. France was too good for the Irish, defeating them 4-0 with Fontaine scoring another two goals. To be fair, the Irish were a team of walking wounded which was compounded by their team management making travel arrangements by bus instead of train, which entailed 12 hours of travel. The Brazil-Wales match was a very close affair. The Welsh were missing their best player, John Charles who was finally



Just Fontaine(L) - the highest scorer

sidelined with all the incessant fouling of opponents getting the better of him. Jack Kelsey gave another magnificent account of his abilities and was beaten because Pele's shot had been deflected off Stuart Williams. The Brazilians later admitted this was the toughest match they had in this tournament where they had scraped through 1-0. In the last quarter-final, West Germany beat Yugoslavia in a very dull affair with a spectacular goal scored by Rahn after dribbling past three defenders on the right wing.

Semi Finals

The hosts, Sweden played the defending champions, West Germany in a high voltage match. The West Germans took the lead through Schafer. The Swedes were lucky to equalise, as in the build up, the ball was clearly controlled by the hand of Liedholm. The match changed when Fritz Walter went off after a crunching tackle from Sigvard Parling. Immediately, Gunnar Gren freed from the clutches of Walter, scored in the 80th minute to give Sweden a 2-1 lead. West Germans went a man down when Erich Juscowiak was sent off. Kurt Hamrin scored the third Swedish goal to take the hosts to the final. In the second semi-final between Brazil and France, goals were inevitable with the attacking prowess of both sides. Vava put the Brazilians ahead in the second minute only to have Fontaine equalise in the ninth.

After that, it was all Brazil with a goal from Didi and a Pele hat-trick in the second half. France pulled one goal back but the Brazilians were an emphatic 5-2 winners. In the third place match, France defeated West Germany with four goals from Just Fontaine, all being created by the talented Raymond Kopa. The final score was 6-3. Fontaine finished with 13 goals in the tournament- a record yet to be equalled.

Final

The final match was played between the oldest (Sweden) and the youngest (Brazil) sides of the tournament. George Raynor, the Swedish coach had predicted that Brazil would panic if they could be made to concede an early goal. He got his wish as Simonsson received the ball from the defence, wide on the right in the fourth minute. His square pass found Liedholm, who went past the opposition



Bellini (L), Maurice Guigue (C) - Referee and Nils Liedholm (R)

defenders Orlando and Hilderaldo Bellini and beat Gilmar, the goalkeeper with a low grounder past his right hand (0-1). Instead of panicking, the Brazilians were eager to restart the game, which gave a feeling to Raynor that his pre-emption about the opposition may not be accurate and that his ageing stars could face problems.

He was proved correct in the ninth minute when Garrincha went past his marker and tapped in a cross from the

right which was lunged in by Vava (1-1). The repeat of the same move - a higher cross from Garrincha in the 32nd minute - beat the goalkeeper rushing out and was turned into the back of the net by Vava (2-1). The age of the Swedes was showing. Gunnar Gren was 20 years older than Pele which was evident and very painfully so! Pele hit the post from 20 yards in the 40th minute.



Pele celebrating after his first goal in the final

The second half brought no respite for the Swedes. Pele scored a great goal in the 55th minute when from a Nilton Santos cross he went past defender Sigge Parling with a chest trap, and flipped the ball over the goalkeeper, Karl Svensson volleying it into the net (3-1). Mario Zagallo scored

from a header in the 68th minute, beating his marker (4-1). Liedholm managed to create a goal for Simonsson, to reduce the margin (4-2). The final word in the match was written by Pele who back-heeled a ball to Zagallo on the left and moved forward between the defenders and hit a looping header over the goalkeeper into the net (5-2).

It was the exclamation point of an excellent tournament, which was won by the best side playing the best football. The Brazilians did a lap of honour around the stadium with the Swedish flag, as the crowd cheered equally loudly for them in spite of having the home team as opponents. It was a spectacular tournament with high-quality football and the ushering in of two young stars in the modern age of football.



Brazilians with the Swedish flag after the final



Bellini lifting the trophy

What's the Goalden Word?

We football fanatics often use terms and phrases without understanding its meaning. We hear them on television or read them in magazines and then wonder what the word really is all about. We shall focus on such terms and their usages and create our own footballpedia. If you would like to know all about any particular word, you can email us on editor@goaldentimes.org

CANTERA: (can·te·ra): [Feminine - Noun - Singular]

The word *cantera* is of Spanish origin and literally means a pit or a quarry. In ancient times, it would refer to the area where stone carvings would be carried out. And just as the carvings would produce wonderful sculptures, so do canteras of modern day produce footballers. In football parlance, the cantera refers to the youth academies and nursery clubs where future football stars are nurtured and their skills honed. Notable canteras include those of Athletic Bilbao, Real Sociedad, FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Atlético Madrid, RCD Espanyol and Sporting de Gijón.

The most famous cantera is Barcelona's *La Masia* (pictured below), which served as the residential house for young academy players from outside Barcelona from 1979 till the middle of 2011.



The Most Famous Cantera of them all - La Masia de Can Planes which was closed on 30 June 2011

Some of the most illustrious names in football have come through those gates including Leo Messi, Xavi, Andres Iniesta, Cesc Fabregas, Victor Valdes, Gerard Pique, Sergio Busquets and the current Barcelona manager - Pep Guardiola. The cantera policy has served Barcelona well, building trust and understanding between the young players coming in and is the real secret behind "the Barcelona way" of playing football.

The other famous cantera is the Athletic Bilbao one who had imposed a strict Basque-only policy for recruiting new players. Their motto is *Con cantera y afición, no hace falta importación* (With home-grown teams and supporters, there is no need for imports). Some of the legends of Spanish football who have come from Bilbao's cantera include Rafael Moreno Aranzadi aka Pichichi - after whom the top goalscorer trophy is given in La Liga, Zarra - the all-time top goalscorer in La Liga, José Ángel Iribar - who made a record 466 La Liga appearances and was a member of the Spain team when they won the European Championship in 1964 and Andoni Zubizarreta the most capped Spanish international to date.

Real Madrid too have their own cantera in the *Real Madrid Castilla* and have produced players like Iker Casillas, Raul, Guti and Juan Mata. When Madrid won the 1966 European Cup, they were the first team to win it with 11 home-grown (Spanish) players and a home-grown manager.

The canteras, however, face a real problem in the poaching of wealthy clubs who would have a readymade source of good quality footballers at a cheap price (Think Arsene Wenger recruiting Fabregas at 16). There are occasions when the canteras of the big clubs poach on those of the smaller clubs. In some cases, the players themselves prefer to move on, unable to establish themselves in the main team (like Gerard Pique, a product of Barça's cantera, at one point of time, had moved to Manchester United).

One thing is certain though, with the UEFA FFP coming in, more and more clubs need to produce their own stars of the future and adopting a cantera policy will help them achieve it.



Group B Preview

Continuing our coverage of the groups of 2012 UEFA European Football Championship, we preview Group B - the group of death

Moving ahead with our series of Euro 2012 group previews, we now preview the group billed as the 'group of death' in this year's tournament - Group B. This group contains four teams with big names and reputation and pedigree in the tournament. There are three former champions which are similar to [Group A](#) but this group have teams which are regarded as the 'big' ones of Europe. Germany, who have lifted the trophy on three occasions and are the most successful team in the history of the tournament; Netherlands, the runners up from the previous World Cup who were champions in 1988 and Denmark, the surprising champions from 1992. Also in the group are Portugal who haven't yet managed to win the tournament, but were beaten finalists in 2004. There is a history between all the teams in the group, especially Germany and Netherlands with World Cup 1974, Euro 1988, World Cup 1990, Euro 1992 and Euro 2004 matches. The teams even played in a friendly recently, with Germany running out 3-0 victors. Portugal and Denmark were in the same Euro 2012 qualifying group with the Danes coming out on top and relegating Portugal to a play-off match to qualify. All in all, the stage is set for an intriguing tussle.



KNVB Netherlands

Resume: Champions 1988. Semi Finals 1976, 1992, 2000 and 2004. Quarter Finals 1996 and 2008

Road to the finals: Qualifying Group E Winner. P-10 W-9 D-0 L-1 GF-37 GA-8 GD+29

The Dutch have been very impressive in their qualifying matches, with an all win record till the last game against Sweden. After the World Cup final defeat to Spain the team have made some adjustments in the defence but have retained the attacking flair that they always possessed. The retention of Bert Van

Marwijk as manager has been a good sign for a team which used to change managers quite often. Van Merwijk generally plays with the 4-2-3-1 formation. The first choice goalkeeper, Maarten Stekelenburg of Roma has been in decent form for his club in Serie A. Van Merwijk will have a pleasant excess of riches in naming the reserve goalkeeper as both Michel Vorm of Swansea City and Tim Krul of Newcastle United have been outstanding for their respective clubs. The centre of defence has a settled look with Joris Mathijsen of Malaga and John Heitinga of Everton, with Hedwig Maduro of Valencia as cover. Gregory van der Wiel of Ajax and Khalid Boulahrouz of VfB Stuttgart will be vying for the left back position. Erik Pieters of PSV and Vurnon Anita of Ajax are the choices for right back but both are a bit inexperienced. The midfield is very strong with Nigel de Jong of Manchester City and the team captain Mark Van Bommel of Milan doing the anchoring job in front of the defence. The creative midfielder in the middle will be Wesley Sneijder of Inter who was one of the best players in the last World Cup. Arjen Robben of Bayern Munich is now back to full fitness and will start on the right wing and switch to the left when required. Dirk Kuyt of Liverpool has also played on the right wing but would probably be played as a substitute. The left side midfielder is likely to be Rafael Van der Vaart of Tottenham with Ibrahim Afellay of Barcelona as second choice. Robin Van Persie of Arsenal, who has been in outstanding form last year, has also played on the left wing although it is likely that he will start as the forward. The team has an able substitute in Klaas Jan-Huntelaar of Schalke, for the forward position.

The Dutch are a strong team and one of the favourites with the strength and depth of their squad. Their only concern is that they are in the toughest group which will test their credentials to the fullest. The mid-field and frontline are very strong. The defence is a bit lacking in pace at the centre. They start their Euro campaign against Denmark, which will be a difficult match. All their matches are at Kharkov which should help them. The second match against archrivals Germany will be the key to their fortunes in the tournament. Portugal has been a bogey team for the Dutch in the recent times and they would like to change that. Van Marwijk has to carry the burden of an expectant nation who will not be satisfied unless their team lifts the trophy. They should progress even after being placed in the group of death.

Head to Head

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	GF	GA	GD
Germany	38	10	14	14	63	75	-12
Portugal	10	1	3	6	5	12	-7
Denmark	28	12	10	6	57	36	+21



Germany

Resume: Champions 1972, 1980 & 1996 Runner Up: 1976, 1992 & 2008 Semi Finals: 1988

Road to the finals: Qualifying Group A Winner. P-10 W-10 D-0 L-0 GF-34 GA-7 GD-+27

The most successful team in the history of Euro with three championship wins and three runner up finishes qualified with a 100% all win record and was very impressive in all their matches. Joachim Löw, who took over after 2006, has moulded a great team which has a blend of experience and youth. They are termed as favourites with Spain with the bookmakers predicting a repeat of the last final. Löw uses the 4-2-3-1 formation. In goal they have Manuel Neuer of Bayern Munich with Rene Adler of Leverkusen, and Tim Wiese of Bremen as backup. The centre of defence has been a bit of a problem in recent years, with the poor form of Per Mertesacker for Arsenal. Holger Badstuber of Bayern and Arne Friedrich would have been first choice in the centre of defence but a long term injury to the latter has meant the inclusion of Mats Hummels of Dortmund and Benedikt Höwedes of Schalke as backup. Captain Philipp Lahm is one of the best full backs in the world and he has played both on the left and right back positions. He should play on the left back with Jerome Boateng of Bayern Munich in the right back. Christian Träsch of Wolfsburg was sensational in the left back position against Brazil in a friendly earlier this year, so there is adequate back up. The midfield is pretty strong with Bastien Schweinsteiger of Bayern and Sammy Khedira of Real Madrid in the anchoring role. A broken collar bone to Schweinsteiger had kept him out of the game for two months and Toni Kroos had ably shouldered his responsibility for the Bayern team and can do so for the national team as well. The creative midfielder role of Germany has many good players with Mesut Özil of Real Madrid as the first choice. However there are good replacements in Mario Götze of Dortmund - the German Messi, and Marco Reus of Monchengladbach. In the wings, Thomas Muller of Bayern on the right and Lukas Podolski of Koln on the left should be the starters. They have an able replacement in André Schürrle of Leverkusen who has been in outstanding form last year. The forward line again has two options in Mario Gomez of Bayern and Miroslav Klose of Lazio who have both been in great form for their clubs. Cacau of Stuttgart can fill in the substitute's role.

The German team is very strong with a pedigree of performances in big tournaments. The first match against Portugal will be a good test for the Germans but the match against the Dutch will be the key. The good thing about this team is that they have more than one player in each position and a lot of the

players are from the same club, Bayern Munich so their mutual understanding is very good. The only problem is that their central defenders are a bit inexperienced and may be put under pressure as was the case in the last World Cup semi-final against Spain. The midfield which was also outplayed in that match has gained a lot of experience and will definitely be stronger. They should be favourites to progress out of this group and reach the final, as anything less would mean a failure for them.

Head to Head

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	GF	GA	GD
Netherlands	38	14	14	10	75	63	+12
Portugal	16	8	5	3	24	16	+8
Denmark	25	14	3	8	51	35	+16



Portugal

Resume: Runner Up: 2004. Semi Finals: 1984 and 2000. Quarter Finals: 1996 and 2008

Road to the finals: Qualifying Group H Runner Up. P-6 W-5 D-1 L-2 GF-21 GA-12 GD-+9

Playoff vs Bosnia Herzegovina 6-2 Aggregate (0-0, 6-2)

Portugal had to qualify for the finals through a play-off match against Bosnia Herzegovina which was not decided till the second leg. They lost the group leader's position after a loss against Denmark. Portugal has flattered to deceive in the major tournaments in recent years. The golden generation is gone and the new stars are yet to make the same impact. The Portuguese manager Paolo Bento usually uses a 4-3-3 formation with the variation of 4-1-2-3 in some away matches. Rui Patricio of Sporting Lisbon is the first choice goalkeeper with Eduardo of Benfica as an able replacement. In the centre of defence, Pepe of Real Madrid should start with Bruno Alves of Zenit. They will miss Ricardo Carvalho who has announced his retirement from international football after problems with the manager. Fábio Coentrão of Real Madrid has been in great form and should start as left back. João Pariera of Sporting Lisbon and José Bosingwa of Chelsea will be vying for the right back position. The three midfield positions are pretty much sealed with Raul Meireles of Liverpool in the central position; João Moutinho of Porto to play on the right side and Miguel Veloso of Genoa on the left side. The front line has also been very regular

under Bento with Nani of Manchester United on the right wing and Cristiano Ronaldo, the captain of the side on the left wing. They will also switch wings from time to time. Hélder Postiga of Real Zaragoza will start as the centre forward and Nuno Gomes of Braga will come on as a substitute in that position.

Portugal is a good team but they don't have the quality all over the park in all positions to challenge the big guns of the group, Netherlands and Germany. They have one of the best players in the world in Cristiano Ronaldo but can he lift his team to punch above their weight- that remains the question. The first match against Germany will be crucial for their chances and if they can manage a draw they could upset the apple cart.

Head to Head

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	GF	GA	GD
Netherlands	10	6	3	1	12	5	+7
Germany	16	3	5	8	16	24	-8
Denmark	12	7	2	3	26	16	+10



Denmark

Resume: Winner: 1992. Semi Finals: 1964 and 1984. Quarter Finals: 2004

Road to the finals: Qualifying Group H Winner. P-8 W-6 D-1 L-1 GF-15 GA-6 GD-+9

Denmark is the lowest ranked team in this group of death. However, this does not imply that they are the weakest. In fact they fared better than Portugal in the qualifying stage, topping their group. Morten Olsen, one of the members of the great Danish team of the 1980s, is the manager. He always employs the 4-2-3-1 formation. In goal, the Danes have two excellent goalkeepers in Anders Lindegaard of Manchester United and Thomas Sorensen of Stoke City. In defence, the captain Daniel Agger of Liverpool will partner Simon Kjær of Roma. Lars Jacobsen of København will be the right back and Simon Poulsen of AZ Alkmaar the left back. In the midfield, Christian Poulsen of Evian and Niki Zimling of Brugges will be in the anchoring role. In the attacking midfield role they will have Christian Eriksen of Ajax with the experienced Martin Jorgensen of AGF Aarhus as backup. The very experienced Dennis Rommedahl of Brondby will play on the left wing. He may have lost the blistering pace he had a few

years back but he still is a handful down the left side. Michael Krohn-Dehli of Brondby will play on the right side. Nicklas Bendtner of Sunderland will be the main striker up front. He has always performed better for his national side than his club sides.

Denmark is a well organised side and they will give a good account of themselves in this difficult group. The first match against the Dutch will be the key to their chances of progression. They will be difficult to beat but the spark of creative play in the central areas of the midfield seems to be absent. If they manage to get through from this group, the tournament will be a success for them.

Head to Head

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	GF	GA	GD
Netherlands	28	6	10	12	36	57	-21
Germany	25	8	3	14	35	51	-16
Portugal	12	3	2	7	16	26	-10

Final Verdict

The final verdict has four categories of teams: 1) Sure-shot which means that the team is the favourite to progress from the group. 2) Likely is the team who is not the total favourite but is the second favourite to qualify. 3) Dark Horse is a team which can reach the quarter-finals but has to overcome similar teams or favourites to do so. 4) Upset means that the team reaching the quarter-finals will be a major surprise. In groups, there might be more than a single team in each category or there might as well occur none in a category.

Sure-shot: Germany

Likely: Netherlands

Dark Horse: Portugal

Upset: Denmark

Triviela – Beyond Trivia

The *Trivela* is a Portuguese term to denote the art of kicking the football with the outside of one's foot. It is used to hide one's weaker foot and also to suddenly fool the opposition with a wickedly swerving ball from a difficult angle. In Triviela, we will attempt to find some football feats/facts which would make you sit up and take note, like it happens when you see Ricardo Quaresma try these

Of Lions and Lambs

What is the connection between a martyred third century child saint and football?

Let us first learn about this martyr. St. Mammes of Caesarea was born in prison to parents who were incarcerated for being Christian, which was considered to be a crime in the Roman Empire at the time. Caesarea is presently known as Kaysari and is located in central Anatolia in Turkey. His parents were executed and he was brought up by a widow named Ammia who died when he was 15. Mammes endured innumerable trials and tribulations, but his undaunted faith in Christianity was unwavering. He was tortured by the Roman governor of Caesarea and then sent before Aurelian, the emperor of Rome. He was further tortured but is believed to have been liberated by an angel who showed him the way to a nearby mountain cave, where he hid.

Legend has it that Mammes was captured and thrown to the lions. He supposedly made the animals docile by preaching to them. So much so that one of the lions remained with him as a companion. The most famous images of him are astride a lion, holding a lamb on his left arm while his right hand holds a shepherd's stick. Although held captive by soldiers for evading tax, he had



St. Mammes of Caesarea with his lamb, seated atop a lion

escaped them to save this lamb from being attacked by the lion. This show of valour earned him exemption from taxation. He was eventually executed though, by being struck in the stomach by a trident. Stories of him spread to various countries like Cyprus, Lebanon, Greece, Italy and Spain. It is believed that parts of his body were brought back to Spain by pilgrims to Compostela, as relics. These relics are presently located in Bilbao and Zaragoza which later became convents.

Now coming to its connection with the beautiful game called football - the stadium of Athletic Bilbao is named San Mames after the Saint Mammes cathedral which is located next to the ground. This ground is nicknamed "the football cathedral" and not the *nou camp* or *bernabeu*, which would be the first choice for most football fans in Spain. The Athletic team is also nicknamed 'Los Leones' or the lions, as a tribute to the lions which refused to kill Saint Mammes.

Parting Shot

Athletic Bilbao was originally founded by migrant British port workers in Bilbao and children of Basque noble families who went to England for education. The club had to change its name in 1941 to Athletic



Estadio San Mames

Bilbao to adhere to Francisco Franco's policy of banning non-Castilian Spanish languages. Franco had decreed that Castilian was the official Spanish language and all other languages like Basque and Catalan were banned in the country. Even the names of newborn babies in those periods were changed to placate the dictator. A lot of children who were named Jordi after the patron saint of Catalunya changed to Jorge because of this rule. The change of name was bitterly opposed by the supporters and the general public of Bilbao as it was perceived as a direct threat to their heritage and culture. The policy was relaxed much later in late 1960's when the club went back to its old name.

They are one of the four professional clubs in Spain - others being Real Madrid, Barcelona and Osasuna. in that it is not a sports corporation but is run and owned by associates making it a professional club.



Best XI

Football is a beautiful game and the excitement that a 90-minute match can pack in, is not comparable with too many sports across the world. We see brilliant teams with sublime individuals creating magic on the field but... football's magic is sometimes tarnished with some not-so sublime moments of 'play-acting' on the pitch. While acts like diving, faking injuries et al can be annoying on the one hand; they can be quite funny to watch, on the other. This month we have put together XI somewhat upsetting yet hilarious moments on the pitch which had 'purists' tearing their hair out!

- Brazilian great Rivaldo is known to many for his sublime left foot. But you can watch him displaying some additional skills too! This was one bizarre incident of the 2002 World Cup that I recall. An innocuous corner kick turned into a farce by Rivaldo during the semi-final match between Brazil and Turkey.
- Juergen Klinsmann is a German great but some Albiceleste fans might not welcome him with open arms. Most English football fans who have seen Klinsmann in action for Tottenham Hotspur will concur that despite his brilliance with the ball and sublime skills, he had this habit of falling over a bit too easily. Hell, he at times even celebrated his goals by mocking his diving skills!
- This was Ecuador against Chile: Bryan Carrasco grabs the arm of Edson Montaño and strikes himself to create another 'sublime' moment in South American football!
- In my opinion, Alberto Gilardino here was shot by an unknown sniper, so please leave the kid alone! Even in real-time it was clearly a dive and the referee promptly produced a yellow card. Now, isn't that hilarious?

- One moment David Villa was writhing in pain and the next, he was ready to participate in a brawl! Amazing healing powers, must be in the DNA.
- Robert Pires is one of the best footballers to grace the shores of Great Britain but didn't really cover himself with glory in this case. Pires came to English Football with Portsmouth but it seems he came back with lot more than some of the sublime skills that he displayed at Arsenal.
- Emmanuel Eboué showing his not so perfect skills off- the ball! There are a lot more Eboué moments but this one was surely one of the most desperate tries by him.
- Taking only one incident from Cristiano Ronaldo's compilation is an injustice to his 'talent' but we have to give others some space too!
- Captain Fantastic's not so 'fantastic' moment on the pitch! Steven Gerrard represents everything good about Liverpool - talent, passion and guts, but this incident might even have 'The Kop' cringing in disbelief.
- Dynamo Kiev's Olexandr Aliyev showing his own set of healing powers in Champions League game against Arsenal. Amazing stuff!
- We will end with some of the modern day masters of the 'art'. Mind you, this is 'more than a simulation'! Barcelona is considered the epitome of club football, right now. Players like Xavi, Andres Iniesta and Lionel Messi create poetry on the football pitch. Sometimes players like Javier Mascherano, Pedro and Sergio Busquets, create some jarring notes on the football pitch that has fans gasping for fresh air.

Winter Transfer Activity

The winter transfer window is upon us and *GoalDen Times* presents you a list of the major transfers that have taken place. Here we have captured only the actual sale and purchase and some marquee loan moves. The chart below showcases the top 5 European leagues' transfer activity, updated till January 12, 2012

<u>Bundesliga</u>	Arrivals			Departures		
Team	Player	From	For (or)	Player	To	For (or)
Bayer Leverkusen	Bernd Leno	VFB Stuttgart	7.5m €	Hanno Baltisch	FC Nuremberg	Free transfer
				Bernd Leno	VFB Stuttgart	On loan
FC Nuremberg	Adam Hlousek	Jablonec	1m €			
	Hanno Baltisch	Bayer Leverkusen	Free transfer			
FC Kaiserslautern	Jakub Swierczok	Polonia Bytom	420,000 €			
SC Freiburg	Fallou Diagné	FC Metz	500,000 €			
TSG 1899 Hoffenheim	Sandro Wieser	FC Basel	1m €	Chinedu Obasi	Schalke 04	On loan
	Stefan Thesker	FC Twente	100,000 €	Gylfi Sigurdsson	Swansea	On loan
	Wellington	Goias	On loan			
VFB Stuttgart	Gotoku Sakai	Albirex	0.5m €	Bernd Leno	Bayer Leverkusen	7.5 m €
	Bernd Leno	Bayer Leverkusen	On loan	Ermin Bicakcic	E. Braunschweig	0.1 m €

FC Schalke	Chinedu Obasi	1899 Hoffenheim	On loan	Jan Moravek	FC Augsburg	On loan
VfL Wolfsburg	Petr Jiracek	Viktoria Plzeň	4 m €	Aleksandr Hleb	Barcelona	On loan
	Slobodan Medojevic	FK Vojvodina	2.5 m €	Tolga Cigerci	Borussia Mönchengladbach	0.35 m €
	Ferhan Hasani	Skendija Tetovo	0.7 m €	Thomas Kahlenberg	Evian	Free transfer
	Vieirinha	PAOK FC	4.5 m €			
	Giovanni Sio	FC Sion	5.8 m €			
	Ibrahim Sissoko	Académica Coimbra	1.5 m €			
	Felipe Lopes	CD Nacional	2.5 m €			
	Ricardo Rodríguez	FC Zürich	8.5 m €			
Borussia Mönchengladbach	Tolga Cigerci	VfL Wolfsburg	350,000 €	Joshua King	Man United reserves	On loan
	Alexander Ring	HJK Helsinki	200,000 €	Logan Bailly	KRC Genk	On loan
	Logan Bailly	Neuchâtel	-			
FC Augsburg	Jan Moravek	Schalke	-	Uwe Möhrle	E Cottbus	200,000 €

EPL		Arrivals		Departures		
Team	Player	From	For (or	Player	To	For (or
Wolverhampton Wanderers	Eggert Gunnthor	Hearts	300,000 €			
	Emmanuel Frimpong	Arsenal	On loan			
Manchester United				Federico Macheda	QPR	On Loan
Chelsea	Lucas Piazon	Sao Paolo	7.5 m €	Nicolas Anelka	Shenhua	Free transfer
	Patrick van Aarnholt	Wigan	From loan	Rhys Taylor	Rotherham	Free transfer
	Conor Clifford	Yeovil	From loan	Gael Kukuta	Dijon	Free Transfer
	Rhys Taylor	Rotherham	From loan			
	Gael Kukuta	Bolton	From Loan			
Arsenal	Thierry Henry	NY Red Bulls	On loan	Vito Mannone	Hull	Free transfer
				Emanuel Frimpong	Wolves	Free Transfer
Liverpool	Jonjo Shelvey	Blackpool	From loan	Danny Wilson	Blackpool	On loan
Everton	Jose Baxter	Tranmere	From Loan			
	Landon Donovan	LA Galaxy	On Loan			
Aston Villa	Enda Stevens	Shamrock Rovers	285,000 €			
	Robbie Keane	LA Galaxy	On loan			

West Bromwich Albion	Scott Alan	Dundee United	480,000 €			
QPR	Federico Macheda	Man United	On Loan			

La Liga	Arrivals			Departures		
Team	Player	From	For (or	Player	To	For (or
Barcelona	Aleksander Hleb	Wolfsburg	From Loan	Maxwell	PSG	3.5 m €
	Keirrisson	Cruzeiro	From Loan			
Atletico Madrid				Jose Antonio Reyes	Sevilla	3.5 m €
Sevilla	Jose Antonio Reyes	Atletico Madrid	3.5 m €			

Ligue 1	Arrivals			Departures		
Team	Player	From	For (or	Player	To	For (or
Nice				Larrys Mabila	Karabukspor	0.5 m €
PSG	Maxwell	Barcelona	3.5 m €			
St. Etienne	Pierre Emerick Aubameyang	AC Milan	1.8 m €	Gelson Fernandes	Udinese	On Loan
	Gelson Fernandes	Leicester	From Loan			
Bordeaux	Mariano	Fluminense	3 m €			
	Ludovic Obraniak	Lille	1 m €			
Dijon	Bennard Yao Kumordzi	Panionios	0.3 m €			

	Koro Koné	Spartak Trnava	0.25 m			
	Zie Diabaté	Dinamo Bucuresti	0.5 m			
	Gaël Kakuta	Chelsea	On Loan			
Lille	John Jairo Ruiz	Sapriisa	1.2 m €	Ludovic Obraniak	Bordeaux	1 m €
Valenciennes	Dusan Djuric	FC Zurich	0.5 m €			

Serie A	Arrivals			Departures		
Team	Player	From	For (or	Player	To	For (or
AC Milan				Pierre-Emeric Aubameyang	St. Etienne	1.8 m €
Napoli	Eduardo Vargas	Universidad de Chile	-	Giuseppe Mascara	Novara	-
				Leandro Rinaudo	Novara	On loan
Novara	Giuseppe Mascara	Napoli	-			
	Leandro Rinaudo	Napoli	On loan			
	Daniel Jensen	Unemployed				
	Andrea Caracciolo	Genoa	On Loan			
Palermo	Franco Vazquez	Belgrano	4.5 m €			
	Agon Mehmeti	Malmo	Free Transfer			

Roma	Nicolas Lopez	Montevideo	788,200 €	Marco Borriello	Juventus	0.5 m € on loan
Lazio	Emiliano Alfaro	Liverpool FC, Montevideo	3.2 m €			
Juventus	Marco Borriello	Roma	0.5 m € on loan			
Fiorentina				Alberto Gilardino	Genoa	8 m €
Genoa	Alberto	Fiorentna	8 m €			
Udinese	Stole Dimitrievski	Rabotnicki	0.6 m €			
	Gabriel Silva	Palmeiras	4 m €			
	Gelson Fernandes	St. Etienne	On loan			

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