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Best XI with special Valentine flavour

**Dreams Still Come True:
African Cup of Nations**

**Premier League Soccer
- A New Era**



Ludo Ergo Sum

GOALDEN TIMES



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First Whistle

February may be the month of love but we at **Goalden Times** started our season of love and longing early in January, thanks to the readers' response to our first edition of 2012. Words aren't adequate enough to express our gratitude.

The euphoria was carried onto the football field where Zambia scored a fairytale win in the African Cup of Nations against the Ivorian 'golden generation'. This should have an extremely positive impact on a nation that saw its players, coaches and the crew die when the plane carrying them to Senegal for a World Cup qualification game in 1993, crashed in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Gabon. That was a sad day not just for them, but for the entire world.

1st February, 2012 was another such day when fans invaded the pitch and 74 of them died in the Egyptian city of Port Said following a football match between top Cairo club Al-Ahly and the local side Al-Masry. The problems in Egypt are more deep-rooted and we hope they come out of it much like the way the Zambians came out of the pain with the lone survivor of that squad, Kalusha Bwalya (he had flown directly from the Netherlands to Dakar), leading an entirely new team to the final of the Africa Cup of Nations in Tunisia in 1994.

On the subject of leaders, the manager's post lies vacant as England coach Fabio Capello resigns. The popular choice for replacement is Harry Redknapp but he seems focused on his current job with Tottenham, sitting steady at number 3 right under the Manchester rivals on the Barclays Premier League table. The colour of the ribbons on the *La Liga* trophy looks certain to change after three years with the Madrid side taking their lead to double digits now. Juventus still remain unbeaten this season in all competitions and looks like good times are going to be back for the 'Old Lady'.

The winter transfer window closed without any major signing but the tale of two strikers, both extraordinarily talented, stood out. Filippo Inzaghi, supremely loyal that he is, chose to remain with Milan while Carlos Tevez's bohemian career failed to find a new anchor. **Goalden Times** looks at both the stories in detail. The Arsenal legend Thierry Henry came 'home' for a short spell on loan and finished it in style scoring another match-winning goal before heading back to Major League Soccer (MLS) in the US. Although MLS has been able to attract some big names in football, the game still has a long way to go in the country. A rip-off from MLS will now be seen in India with players of the calibre of Hernan Crespo, Fabio Cannavaro, Robert Pires, Robbie Fowler and Jay Jay Okocha joining the Premier League Soccer (PLS) in West Bengal, India. PLS will begin in March and we keenly wait to see how it impacts Indian football. We do hope that the players as well as the viewers love the 'new experience'.

As love is in the air and we believe football can create a stronger sense of bonding, we dedicate this edition of **Goalden Times** to the martyred saints of ancient Rome. We also take this opportunity to pay our humble tribute to the "Busby Babes" who had left us this month back in 1958 in the Munich air disaster.

Follow football, follow us!

Dreams Still Come True

*The African Cup of Nations was a true fairytale. **Debopam Roy** followed it along with **Ricardo Makivic** to bring out the details. Catch them on twitter on [@rossoneri](#) and [@makivic08](#)*

Fairy tales are not always found in books. Sometimes they unfold before our own eyes.

Such were the happenings at the 28th edition of the Africa Cup of Nations, (officially Orange CAN; with the sponsor being Orange and CAN being French for *Coupe d'Afrique des Nations*). Zambia won their first ever maiden international trophy beating the Ivory Coast in a sudden death shootout. *The Elephants* lost yet another opportunity to seal the moniker of 'golden generation', much like the Portuguese generation of Luis Figo and Rui Costa had failed to do so. But the *Chipolopolo*, who had once lost 18 of its own golden generation in 1994, in a tragic airline crash, scripted their own epic fairytale, only a few hundred metres from the crash site in Libreville, Gabon. It was no wonder that the victory was dedicated to those fallen heroes of Zambian football.

This edition of CAN was co-hosted by Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, the first time that either of them had hosted this tournament. But even without any prior experience, they made a good fist of it. Gabon alone spent about €600 mn according to their president and Equatorial Guinea did likewise. As a comparison, last host Angola had spent €700-800 mn in 2010. This edition of CAN though was better organized and didn't have the repetition of the [tragic attack on Togo footballers in 2010](#).



An Uncertain Qualification

The 2012 CAN qualifiers would be more remembered for those nations that failed to qualify as much as those that did. With joint hosts, there were only 14 spots left to occupy. Hence 44 nations were drawn into eleven groups, each containing 4 teams. Togo, who were banned by African Federation after the 2010 shooting incident, when they had refused to participate further in the tournament, were reinstated and was later added to Group K. The top team in each group qualified, as did the runner-up of Group K (which contained 5 teams) and the two best runners-up from the other groups. Teams that missed out on qualification included four-time winner Cameroon, two-time winners Nigeria and Congo Democratic Republic, and one-time winners Algeria, Congo and Ethiopia.

But the most epic 'cock-up' happened in Group G consisting of Niger, South Africa, Sierra Leone and three-time running champions Egypt. The first mishap was when Egypt managed only a single win in the group to finish with five points and was out of reckoning. However going into the final round of matches, all 3 other teams could qualify with Niger on nine points; away to winless Egypt and South Africa were at home to Sierra Leone with both on eight points. At half-time,

Egypt were leading Niger by a goal. The South African management then started playing for a draw as they saw that they would have a better goal differential than Niger and finished the match 0-0 (they ultimately had a +2 goal differential to Niger's -2). However, reminiscent of South African miscalculations in cricket World Cup of 2003 (when they misread the par score for win in rain-affected matches), the football team completely forgot that a draw would lead to a three-way tie with Niger and Sierra Leone. This would then mean, head-to-head between the three teams and only if no team could be identified here, would the goal differentials be taken into account. So the *Bafana Bafana*, who in their misguided state even went on a lap of honour after the final whistle, dancing in formation in front of cheering fans, were shocked when it was announced that Niger has qualified. Niger, who had a point more than South Africa and Sierra Leone in their tripartite head-to-head, thus qualified for the first time in the tournament proper.

There were also emotional qualifiers in Sudan who were the only East African nation to qualify. The team had seen the division of the country, with the creation of South Sudan, midway through the qualifying campaign and this was the final tournament where a unified Sudan team participated. There were also first-time qualifiers in Botswana and Libya who had only ever played the CAN when they had hosted it. Coming as it was, in the midst of the political turmoil in their country, the Libyan footballers did well to be one of the two lucky runners-up who qualified. Tournament hosts Equatorial Guinea, who were the lowest ranked team of the tournament (151 in FIFA rankings), were also making their debut.

Newcomers Make a Grand Start

With so many new teams coming in and most of the traditional heavyweights not present, the pre-tournament favourites were four-time winner *The Black Stars* of Ghana, and three teams which had the stars but not the recent success – *The Lions of Teranga* from Senegal, *The Elephants* of Ivory Coast and *The Eagles* of Mali. The hosts were supposed to provide some flourish but no one really expected much of them. 2004 champions Tunisia, fellow 2006 World Cup country Angola and the first African team to reach the second round in World Cup – Morocco, were supposed to be the other main contenders.



Venues for 2012 CAN

Libreville and Franceville were the venues in Gabon while Bata and Malabo were the venues in Equatorial Guinea. Malabo thus became the first island to host a CAN match. The official song was composed by musicians of five countries - Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ivory Coast. The hosts added their own colour to the tournament. The opening ceremony was a grand affair being held at the *Estadio de Bata* in Equatorial Guinea. In the opening match, the hosts Equatorial Guinea played against Libya. Teodorin Obiang, the playboy son of

Equatorial Guinea's president had promised the national team \$1 mn for a win against Libya and a further \$20,000 for every goal scored by the Nzalang Nacional (National Lightning), as the national team is fondly called. To this, Libya's Brazilian coach Marcos Paqueta had sneered, "They use money, I use mentality". In the end, the Nzalang Nacional pocketed that prize by winning 1-0 and Spanish born former Real Madrid midfielder, Javier Balboa pocketed the prize money as the goal scorer.

Groups Throw Up Surprise

Group A consisted of Zambia, hosts Equatorial Guinea, Libya and favourites Senegal. In probably keeping with the fairytale nature of the qualification, the favourites failed to win a single match. An attack line of Lille's Moussa Sow (who later transferred to Fenerbahce), Copenhagen's Dame N'Doye, Newcastle's strike duo Papiss Cisse and Demba Ba and captain and former Marseille player, Mamadou Niang managed only one goal in each match; conceding two in every one of them. Such a humiliating exit meant an immediate release of manager Amara Traore. Zambia stayed unbeaten with two wins and a draw against Libya to top the group while Equatorial Guinea beat both Libya and Senegal to proceed as runners.

Group B saw *The Elephants* of Ivory Coast ride roughshod over Sudan, Angola and Burkina Faso. Didier Drogba, Emmanuel Eboue, Salomon Kalou and Bakary Kone were all on the mark as *The Elephants* won all their matches without conceding a goal. Sudan and Angola both had a chance to qualify after drawing their match 2-2 in which Ahmed Bashir scored Sudan's first goal in CAN in 36 years. Earlier Angola had beaten Burkina Faso 2-1 while Sudan lost 1-0 to the Ivorians. In the final set of group matches played simultaneously, Sudan needed a win and an Angola loss as well as the goal differential to work in their favour. At half-time, with Sudan leading by a goal against Burkina Faso and Angola trailing by a goal to Ivory Coast, qualification was still in Angola's hand. However, Wilfried Bony of Ivory Coast scored a second goal against Angola while Mudather Careca scored his and Sudan's second goal to give decisive advantage to Sudan. Ultimately a late goal from Burkina Faso didn't matter. Sudan won 2-1 and qualified as runner-up on fewer goals conceded over Angola who had lost 2-0.

Group C had the other co-host Gabon, Tunisia, Morocco and Niger. After their epic qualification, Niger clearly felt the heat among the big boys and lost all their matches scoring only one goal. Hosts Gabon were fired by Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who was having a breakout tournament. The 22-year old Aubameyang, once of AC Milan youth system but who had moved to St. Etienne in French Ligue 1 in January, scored three goals and provided 2 assists (3 in the tournament) in the group stages. Based on his goals and assists, Gabon beat Niger 2-0, Tunisia 1-0 but played the match of the tournament against Morocco. In a pulsating match played in capital Libreville, Morocco took the lead from a fine individual goal by Fiorentina midfielder Houssain Kharja in the 24th minute. Try as they might, Gabon couldn't unlock the Moroccan goal till the 76th minute. And then the floodgates opened. First Aubameyang scored from a long throw-in nodded on by Glasgow Rangers' striker Daniel Cousin in the 77th minute. A minute later, Aubameyang returned the favour to Daniel Cousin, who showed trickery in the box and fired in a low shot that trickled in off the post to make it 2-1 to Gabon. Gabon could have made the game safe when Eric Mouloungui had the goal at his mercy but he blasted the ball over the bar. It seemed a fatal mistake as Morocco was awarded a penalty in the first minute of added on time for a handling offence and Kharja scored from the spot. But a reckless challenge from Udinese's Medhi Benatia in the seventh minute of injury time gave Gabon a free kick outside the box. Bruno Mbanangoye Zita scored from it, the last shot of the match, to seal a 3-2 win and a quarterfinal berth for the co-hosts with a match left to play. Morocco, who had earlier lost to Tunisia 1-2, was thus eliminated after two matches. Tunisia took the runner-up spot.

The *Black Stars* of Ghana were firm favourites in Group D, despite the absence of Milan midfielder, Kevin-Prince Boateng who had retired from international matches. They stayed unbeaten, beating Botswana 1-0 and Mali 2-0 and drawing with Guinea 1-1 to top the group. Like fellow newcomers Niger, Botswana too lost all their matches. Mali beat Guinea 1-0 in the pivotal match to secure second position.

Tragedy Strikes before Quarterfinals

In the time before the group stages ended and the quarterfinals began, football in Africa had been dealt a huge blow. 74 fans were killed and hundreds injured in Port Said in Egypt, following club side Al-Masry's unexpected win over Al-Ahly, Egypt's most famous and successful club. After the final whistle, surprisingly, the winning Al-Masry fans invaded the pitch, seeking to attack Al-Ahly players; after that, they charged into the Al-Ahly fans. Dozens of people were crushed to death, suffocated or fatally stabbed. The riots later spread into the cities and left even more dead and injured. Various conspiracy theories abounded but it was a football tragedy of great proportions.



Fans of Al-Masry Invaded the pitch in Egypt to attack players and fans of Al-Ahly(L). An Al-Ahly player with a bloodied face(R)

Continuing with the tournament, amidst this tragedy, was a decision that the organizers took and all quarterfinalists paid their respects to the departed before each match. Security was further beefed up.

The quarterfinals were held on 4th and 5th February and the two days witnessed contrasting set of matches. On 4th February, Zambia met lucky qualifier Sudan and hammered them 3-0 to reach their first CAN semifinals in 16 years. The score was matched by Ivory Coast who notched an identical 3-0 margin against plucky co-hosts Equatorial Guinea.

The next day featured quarterfinal matches between co-hosts Gabon and Mali and between Ghana and Tunisia. In the first match, Gabon took a lead when talisman Aubameyang was unable to keep up his run of a goal per match but provided the assist via a pull back for Eric Mouloungui to score from close range in the 55th minute. And they were five minutes from their first ever CAN semifinals but Mali snatched an equaliser in the 85th minute through the substitute Cheick Tidiane Diabaté to force extra time. The extra time didn't produce a result and the first tie-breaker of the tournament ensued. In a Greek tragedy, Aubameyang, who had earlier struck the upright in the 29th minute after beating the offside trap, was the only man to miss his kick as Seydou Keita converted the final penalty kick for Mali to seal a 5-4 victory in tie-breaker.



The last quarterfinal featured Ghana against Tunisia. Ghana took the lead after just nine minutes with Captain John Mensah heading home a corner. But Tunisia equalized through a Sabeur Khalifa header from a cross just before half-time. The match remained cagy and went to extra time. Tunisia had the ball in the net almost immediately in extra-time through Issam Jemaa, but he was adjudged just offside. And then in a catastrophic mistake, the Tunisian goalkeeper Aymen Mahtlouthi, who had been excellent all night, dropped the ball horribly from a harmless cross to the far post from Emmanuel Agyemang Badu, right in front of Andre Ayew, who tapped in gratefully. The North Africans tried in vain to equalize and a harsh red card to defender Aymen Abdennou left them with 10 men. Ghana closed out the match 2-1 to proceed to their fourth CAN semifinal in a row.

Tactical Semifinals

The semifinals and finals of major tournaments are mostly tactical and cagy affairs. Till the quarterfinals, teams are willing to play adventurous football, however, as the business end of the tournament nears, the reality dawns on them that one single match will give them a shot at immortality and hence semifinals across most big tournaments happen to be less spectacular. Both the semifinals were witness to this phenomenon.

To the neutrals, when one sees a semifinal line-up of Ivory Coast against Mali and Zambia against Ghana, one would automatically say that in a tournament ruled by the unheralded and the unknown, ultimately, the final would be a match between two giants in Ghana and Ivory Coast. But then that would not be a fairytale. And destiny had other plans.

In the first semifinal between Zambia and Ghana, the four-time champions started regally and were all over Zambia in the opening minutes with brothers Andre and Jordan Ayew in supreme form. The pressure bore fruit as in the eighth minute Davis Nkausu tripped Kwadwo Asamoah in the area to concede a penalty to Ghana. Ghana's poster boy, Asamoah Gyan stepped up, but in an eerie similarity to the 2010 World Cup quarterfinals against Uruguay, his penalty was saved. Zambia, who had started the tournament in a free flowing attacking style, stymied down for this match. Manager Herve Renard, who was causing quite a flutter in his white shirt on the sidelines, put out two banks of four to restrict the creativity of *The Black Stars*. They allowed Ghana possession but maintained tight defensive cover to prevent any damages. After thoroughly restricting them, Renard finally made his attacking substitutions and the *Chipolopolo* started pressing forward in their inimitable style. In the 78th minute, Ghana right back Samuel Inkoom faltered under pressure to give substitute Emmanuel Mayuka, the only Zambian to play in Europe, the chance to score and lead 1-0. Ghana then had Derek Boateng sent off for a second caution with six minutes to go as they tried hard to equalise but crashed out at the semi-final stage for the third consecutive CAN tournament. Zambia had qualified for the finals and were to move to Libreville, in Gabon, a place already tragically and inimitably etched in their football history.

The second semifinal saw Mali adopt similar strategy as the Zambians, and it needed an incredible bit of skill from Arsenal forward Gervinho to provide the goal for Ivory Coast. Flicking the ball past Malian defender Ousmane Berthe, Gervinho sprinted 30 metres into the area before coolly finishing past goalkeeper Samba Diakite. That was enough to seal a 1-0 win for Ivory Coast. The golden generation of *The Elephants* had probably the final shot at winning a major championship together.

The Spirits of '93

The early 90's were a time of immense promise for African football and long before the *Super Eagles* of Nigeria (94 World Cup) and the *Indomitable Lions* of Cameroon (90 World Cup), there was a bunch of Zambians who had served notice by thumping an Italian team consisting of Ciro Ferrara, Mauro Tassotti, Angelo Colombo and Gianluca Pagliuca among others in the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The star man that day was Kalusha Bwalya, scoring a hat-trick. Unarguably, the greatest Zambian footballer of all times, Bwalya, like contemporary Liberian George Weah, carried a team completely on his own shoulders. His efforts to take Zambia towards major honours, was coming to fruition as the *Chipolopolo* had qualified for the second group league in a bid to qualify for the 1994 World Cup. It was April 1993 and the Zambians had beaten the favourites Morocco in their first match and in a three-team group with a weak Senegal team, they were favoured now to qualify. However, as the 18-member team flew for their away match at Senegal, tragedy struck and the plane crashed killing everybody on board, just off the coast of Libreville in Gabon. Kalusha

survived, coming on a separate flight from his European club stint.



The 1990's Zambia team. Everybody perished in the '93 disaster except Kalusha Bwalya(2nd left, standing)

Zambian team, this time in the 1994 CAN. Zambia rode an avalanche of emotion and reached the finals. It was said that the spirits of '93 would sweep them to their first ever international win. But the *Super Eagles* of Nigeria were too much for them that night carving a 2-1 win. Two years later, in 1996, Zambia would again reach the semifinals of CAN but again lose out. That was to be the end of Zambia's exploits among the African elite. In 2008, a retired Kalusha took over as the President of the Zambian Football Association and started a new fight to keep the promise he had made back in 1993. So on 10th February 2012, three days before the final, Kalusha was confident, "We hope we will rise to the occasion on Sunday." He didn't mention the Spirits of '93 but the team gathered on the beach the next day, to lay wreaths in memory of the fallen heroes of '93. It was indeed destiny that despite reaching the finals, this was going to be the only match that Zambia would be playing at Libreville, having played all previous matches at other venues. The spirits would be watching over.

Despite a loss of a generation of players, Kalusha didn't lose heart and promised that the *Chipolopolo* will rise again. A new team was assembled to take on the rest of the matches. In the end, Zambia fell one point short of qualification, and that point and more was lost in that away match against Senegal, when in their first match with a completely new squad, the Zambians could only draw 0-0. Even a 4-0 thrashing of the same Senegal team at home was not enough as the *Chipolopolo* were beaten on the final day by Morocco, who qualified.

One year later, Kalusha led another

The Final

The final itself though was preceded by the most spectacular closing ceremony ever, in a CAN. Gabon president Ali Bongo's mother sang for fans and giant images of the tournament's football-playing gorilla mascot were projected onto the pitch in a high-tech closing ceremony. American singer Akon was also part of the show. FIFA president Sepp Blatter presented a pennant to both host countries' presidents.

The match, when it started, saw another tactical shift from the Zambian manager Herve Renard. Instead of sitting back, Zambia took the game to Ivory Coast and it was a very exciting first half between the teams. Ivory Coast sat back trying to absorb the pressure and hit on the counter. One such move in the second half bore fruit as Gervinho was brought down giving Ivory Coast a penalty. Captain Drogba came to take it and hit a horrendous penalty out. Twice in two matches, the *Chipolopolo* had conceded a penalty, only to see the most feared opposition striker muff it up. Some may call it luck for the *Chipolopolo*, while others talked about the spirits watching over. It was that kind of tournament.

The match thereafter remained an exciting battle but with no goals scored it went to the penalty shootout. Both teams though seemed extremely ready for the same. All the shots were converted, including the one from a very brave Drogba, who took the ninth kick and so it went to sudden death. Even in sudden death, the ball kept going in and the score stood at 7-7 when Gervinho refused to take the 15th kick. Kolo Toure stepped up; but his shot was saved. With history beckoning, Rainford Kalaba of Zambia took the 16th kick. But he hit it miles over. Gervinho finally came to take the 17th kick but his shot too went over. Stopila Sunzu, an unheralded centre back who plays for Congolese side TP Mazembe then stepped up to convert and send millions of Zambians and neutrals into raptures. Zambia had won a mammoth tie-breaker 8-7.

The celebrations were spontaneous and emotional. Kalusha was overwhelmed with emotion as the players converged. The next day *The Zambia Daily Mail* carried the headline, "Finally, Destiny Obeys Zambia". Zambian goalkeeper Kennedy Mweene said that the spirits of the dead footballers will now rest in peace. Efford Chabala, John Soko, Whiteson Changwe, Robert Watiyakeni, Eston Mulenga, Derby Makinka, Moses Chikwalakwala, Wisdom Mumba Chansa, Kelvin "Malaza" Mutale, Timothy Mwitwa, Numba Mwila, Richard Mwanza, Samuel Chomba, Moses Masuwa, Kenan Simambe, Godfrey Kangwa, Winter Mumba and Patrick "Bomber" Banda may only have been present in spirit but they too would have basked in the glory of the first ever international win for Zambia in such a poignant stadium.

Fairy tales are not always to be found in books....sometimes they do unfold before our very own eyes.



UEFA Champions League Knockout Stage Preview

*The business end of Champions League is about to begin. Get the lowdown on each team and each tie with **Debojyoti Chakraborty***

2011-12 has been a landmark year for the Champions League as it has probably taken a step to show it is no longer an elitist domain. With no fewer than nine countries being present at this stage, the UEFA President can boast of his *Spread the Game* campaign. One time undisputed superpower, Italy has the envious record of having at least three teams – and this time the only country to be so – for the seventh time in a row. Other giants in European football - England and Spain - are going through one of the worst seasons for years as they have only two representatives. That is the same number Russia have achieved this year, for the first time in their history, along with the usual attendees like Germany and France. Russia should not feel lonely as Eastern Europe has another representative in the form of knockout stage debutants APOEL Nicosia from Cyprus. Together with FC Basel of Switzerland, the other knockout stage debutants they have shocked quite a few with their strong showing in the group stages and it would be dangerous to demean their chances in the business end. Joining the league of debutants is the rejuvenated club from Italy, FC Napoli who are basking in Champions League glory for the first time ever. They could do well to emulate Real Madrid who is making a record 15th consecutive appearance at this stage of the competition, followed closely by Arsenal with 12th straight show down. Not surprisingly, Real also holds the record of winning the title for a record nine times. Milan is at second place with seven winners' medals to their name. Current champion and hot favourite Barcelona have won this competition four times, same number as that of Bayern Munich, another giant in European football. Following the pack are Inter (three titles), Benfica (two titles) and Marseille (one title). When the round of 16 draw was made in Nyon, Switzerland about two months back, everybody knew that the teams from same group or same country could not be drawn together, but very few would have anticipated such delectable ties.



APOEL FC vs. Olympique Lyonnais



14th February, 2012

Stade de Gerland, Lyon (FRA)

GSP Stadium, Nicosia (CYP)

7th March, 2012

Road to Knockouts

FC Zenit St Petersburg (H) 2-1

FC Shakhtar Donetsk (A) 1-1

FC Porto (A) 1-1

FC Porto (H) 2-1

FC Zenit St Petersburg (A) 0-0

FC Shakhtar Donetsk (H) 0-2

Road to Knockouts

AFC Ajax (A) 1-1

Real Madrid CF (H) 0-2

GNK Dinamo Zagreb (H) 2-0

AFC Ajax (H) 0-0

Real Madrid CF (A) 0-4

GNK Dinamo Zagreb (A) 7-1

Talking Point

Surprise package of the season. With a paltry annual team budget of €10 million – close to the amount Emmanuel Adebayor earns from Manchester City, and he is not even considered good enough for a substitute role – this small club created history by coming this far. They are the first team from Cyprus to reach the knockout stages of the Champions League. They are not favourites to win this tie but they were not tipped to top the group stages either.

Talking Point

Rode their luck to a great extent as two perfect results on the final matchday of the group stages saw them through to the knock out stages. But their second half display against Dinamo Zagreb on that day, when they unleashed six goals en route a 7-1 win, showed they meant business. A few were suspicious of this unlikely result, specifically with the second half showing, but that should not distract Lyon much. Hugo Lloris has been sensational for them under the bars with the most number (30) of saves in the competition so far. Except for the games against Real Madrid, he has conceded only once in four matches. Lyon faces an uncomfortable second leg away from home and hence should try to seal the tie in the first leg itself.



Bayer 04 Leverkusen vs. FC Barcelona



14th February, 2012

Bay-Arena, Leverkusen (GER)

Camp Nou, Barcelona (ESP)

14th February, 2012

Road to Knockouts

Chelsea FC (A) 0-2

Valencia FC (A) 1-3

KRC Genk (H) 2-0

Chelsea FC (H) 2-1

Valencia FC (H) 2-1

KRC Genk (A) 1-1

Road to Knockouts

AC Milan (H) 2-2

FC Bate Borisov (A) 5-0

FC Viktoria Plzen (H) 2-0

Chelsea FC (A) 0-2

KRC Genk (H) 2-0

Valencia FC (H) 2-1

Talking Point

Beating the best team in the world, or arguably the greatest club team ever to embrace the game of football, is not a cakewalk. But they have scalped one Spanish side in the group stages already and that should give them some hope. Still it would need much more than the famous German steel, the undying spirit of a certain Michael Ballack and a great bit of luck – and a Bengali in the form of Robin Dutt at the helm of things – to come out of Nou Camp with their heads held high.

Talking Point

Barcelona have not been beaten this season in the Champions League and it seems this record won't be broken any time soon. Leo Messi and company could have got a trickier tie but they would settle for this with the second leg at home. Their *La Liga* form is not spectacular, but it would take some doing for any team to beat them over a two-legged tie. Their midfield has not come to the party as yet in this competition but this should be the ideal stage to stamp their authority on Europe.



FC Zenit St Petersburg vs. SL Benfica



15th February, 2012

Stadion Petrovskiy, St Petersburg (RUS)

Estádio do Sport Lisboa e Benfica, Lisbon (POR)

6th March, 2012

Road to Knockouts

APOEL FC (A) 1-2	FC Shakhtar Donetsk (H) 1-0
FC Porto (H) 3-1	APOEL FC (H) 0-0
FC Shakhtar Donetsk (A) 2-2	FC Porto (A) 0-0

Road to Knockouts

Manchester United (H) 1-1	FC Basel 1893 (H) 1-1
FC Oțelul Galați (A) 1-0	Manchester United (A) 2-2
FC Basel 1893 (A) 2-0	FC Oțelul Galați (H) 1-0

Talking Point

This would be the home coming for the Portuguese duo Bruno Alves and Danny. Zenit would like to take the full advantage of the first leg at home under freezing Russian weather, but that's not their only talking point. They have two of the top defenders in the Champions League this season in Nicolas Lombaerts and Tomas Hubocan with most number of balls recovered so far. Besides the return of influential star striker Alexander Kerzhakov from injury would be a major boost for them. However, Zenit would severely lack match sharpness as their domestic season will start only days before the second leg match.

Talking Point

Topped the group which had Manchester United and thus were able to avoid other group toppers. They have also been fortunate not to be drawn against some strong runner up teams from the group stage like Milan or Lyon. A trip to Russia will not be a stroll in the park though a second leg at home might just suit them. Nicolas Gaitan has eclipsed his more illustrious contemporaries to become the most influential playmaker in the tournament with the most number of assists so far and Benfica would look upon him as an inspiration.



AC Milan vs. Arsenal FC



15th February, 2012

*Stadio Giuseppe Meazza,
Milan (ITA)*

*The Emirates Stadium, London
(ENG)*

6th March, 2012

Road to Knockouts

FC Barcelona (A) 2-2
FC Viktoria Plzen (H) 2-0
FC Bate Borisov (H) 2-0
FC Bate Borisov (A) 1-1
FC Barcelona (H) 2-3
FC Viktoria Plzen (A) 2-2

Road to Knockouts

Borussia Dortmund (A) 1-1
Olympiacos FC (H) 2-1
Olympique de Marseille (A) 0-1
Olympique de Marseille (H) 0-0
Borussia Dortmund (H) 2-1
Olympiacos FC (A) 1-3

Talking Point

A battle of experience vs. youthful exuberance, a tussle between composure and agility – this is a mouth-watering clash. Milan started the campaign brightly with a 2-2 draw at Nou Camp. But they faded off afterwards and managed only two points in the last three matches. That did not prevent them from qualifying for the next stage but they finished a good seven points behind the group winner, Barcelona. They have been presented a second leg away from home which may very well suit their counter-attack based football. Zlatan Ibrahimovic has scored in all the CL matches he has played so far and Milan will hope that this trend continues.

Talking Point

Arsenal have been historically drawn against tough oppositions quite early in the recent years of Champions League draw. This time too they feature in *The* match of the round like last year. Arsenal could enjoy a free flowing passage of play against Milan but they have to be careful of their defensive lapses which could well be exposed by the counter-attacking threat of Milan. It raises a few eyebrows if Robin van Persie does not feature in the score sheets. It will be good show down with Ibra, but can his young and inexperienced teammates see Arsenal through? The second leg at the Emirates could well be the decider.



PFC CSKA Moskva vs. Real Madrid



21st February, 2012

*Stadion Luzhniki, Moscow
(RUS)*

*Estadio Santiago Bernabéu,
Madrid (ESP)*

14th March, 2012

Road to Knockouts

LOSC Lille Métropole (A) 2-2 Trabzonspor AŞ (A) 0-0
 FC Internazionale Milano (H) 2-3 LOSC Lille Métropole (H) 0-2
 Trabzonspor AŞ (H) 3-0 FC Internazionale Milano (A)
 2-1

Road to Knockouts

GNK Dinamo Zagreb (A) 1-0 Olympique Lyonnais (A) 2-0
 AFC Ajax (H) 3-0 GNZK Dinamo Zagreb (H) 6-2
 Olympique Lyonnais (H) 4-0 AFC Ajax (A) 3-0

Talking Point

Beating Inter at their own backyard was not the only requirement; CSKA also needed a draw between Lille and Trabzonspor on the final matchday to secure a knockout stage berth. Fortunately CSKA got the result they wanted but their luck may run out against a rampant Real Madrid. They are a decent side who like to play open attacking football. Seydou Doumbia is one of the leading goal scorers in the tournament with five goals in five appearances and he would love to portray his skills in front of a wider audience. But even a star shot stopper in Igor Akinfeev could prove to be not much against Cristiano Ronaldo and company. Also they are handicapped by the same problem as that of Zenit – lack of match sharpness.

Talking Point

Real has been in superb form and their statistics prove that. They have scored nineteen goals in the group stages – only archrivals Barcelona have been able to better that by one goal – and have conceded two goals, the least by any team. Sergio Ramos Garcia has been a star performer as Real are yet to concede any goal in 400+ minutes with him on the pitch. Real have proved that they are much more than Cristiano Ronaldo alone as they have marched past the last two matches without their star striker. But Jose Mourinho should not take this Russian side lightly. They are favourites to progress and they should, unless complacency gets the better of them.



SSC Napoli vs. Chelsea



21st February, 2012

Stadio San Paolo, Naples (ITA)

Stamford Bridge, London (ENG)

14th March, 2012

Road to Knockouts

Manchester City FC (A) 1-1

FC Bayern Munchen (A) 2-3

Villarreal CF (H) 2-0

Manchester City FC (H) 2-1

FC Bayern Munchen (H) 1-1

Villarreal CF (A) 2-0

Road to Knockouts

Bayern 04 Leverkusen (H) 2-0

KRC Genk (A) 1-1

Valencia CF (A) 1-1

Bayern 04 Leverkusen (A) 1-2

KRC Genk (H) 5-0

Valencia CF (H) 3-0

Talking Point

Napoli had attracted quite a few eyeballs at the start of the season. They have done their reputation no harm by entering into the knock-out stages in their debut campaign at the expense of cash-rich Manchester City. They were in the *Group of Death* but their inexperience might just catch up with them here. Star forward Edinson Cavani could be in his last season at Napoli before the cash-rich clubs snatch him away and he could leave his mark before bowing out.

Talking Point

Chelsea are having a rocky season in the Premier League, but they have a very strong record at the knockout stages of the Champions League in this decade. Their new manager Andre Vilas Boas may be a newcomer to England, but he is no greenhorn in Europe having already won the UEFA Europa League with Porto last year. Chelsea are going through a transition phase, but getting a debutant team at this stage may just see them through.



Olympique de Marseille vs. FC Internazionale Milano



22nd February, 2012

*Stade Vélodrome, Marseille
(FRA)*

*Stadio Giuseppe Meazza,
Milan (ITA)*

13th March, 2012

Road to Knockouts

Olympiacos FC (A) 1-0

Arsenal FC (A) 0-0

Borussia Dortmund (H) 3-0

Olympiacos FC (H) 0-1

Arsenal FC (H) 0-1

Borussia Dortmund (A) 3-2

Road to Knockouts

Trabzonspor AŞ (H) 0-1

LOSC Lille Métropole (H) 2-1

PFC CSKA Moskva (A) 3-2

Trabzonspor AŞ (H) 1-1

LOSC Lille Métropole (A) 1-0

PFC CSKA Moskva (H) 1-2

Talking Point

Little known players from Marseille have caught the eyes of Europe. Surged by a strong defence, they have propelled through to the knockout stages of Champions League, but they will be underdogs going into this tie. Surely they preferred an easier opponent; at least a second leg advantage at home would have given them some hope.

Talking Point

Inter are peaking at the right time. After starting their campaign with a shock defeat to Trabzonspor at home, they bounced back to top the group. They are not likely to be overconfident against Marseille as they bowed out to Schalke FC last year under similar circumstances. And it might be time for Wesley Sneijder to settle in and start imposing his authority again.



FC Basel 1893 vs. FC Bayern Munchen



22nd February, 2012

St. Jakob-Park, Basel (SUI)

*Fußball Arena München,
Munich (GER)*

13th March, 2012

Road to Knockouts

FC Oțelul Galați (H) 2-1
Manchester United (A) 3-3
SL Benfica (H) 0-2

SL Benfica (A) 1-1
FC Oțelul Galați (A) 3-2
Manchester United (H) 2-1

Road to Knockouts

Trabzonspor AŞ (H) 0-1
PFC CSKA Moskva (A) 3-2
LOSC Lille Métropole (A) 1-0

LOSC Lille Métropole (H) 2-1
Trabzonspor AŞ (H) 1-1
PFC CSKA Moskva (H) 1-2

Talking Point

FC Basel's shot to fame was knocking out Manchester United from the group stages on the last matchday. This may end up being their high point in this year's campaign as they look to lock horns against Bayern Munich in their inaugural knockout stage appearance. Alexandar Frei & Marco Streller have both played in Bundesliga before but their influence may not be enough.

Talking Point

Bayern Munich, a heavyweight in Europe will be favourites against FC Basel. Sheer professionalism of the German team would be a bit too much for Basel. Bayern would have taken a major boost from the timely return of midfield lynchpin Bastian Schweinsteiger, but his return to field was short-lived as he suffered a torn ligament in the German Cup quarterfinals. His partnership with Mario Gomez, top scorer so far in this year's CL having scored 6 goals in less than 400 minutes in the pitch, should prove deadly going forward.

The Special One's Special Mission

Samuel Dieudonné explores the cult surrounding Jose Mourinho and his trials and tribulations as a Real Madrid manager. You may reach Sam on twitter @dieudonnesam

He may not be an out-of-the-world manager, but Jose Mourinho is a proven winner across leagues, sitting pretty at the very top of the European football world - the Champions League. To the men he interacts with at Real Madrid - players and coaching staff alike - the Portuguese boss is probably the epitome of managerial brilliance, controversial and unorthodox who through his cussed winning mentality has driven them along. Over the past year, since taking over from Manuel Pellegrini, Mourinho has emerged as a fatherly figure at the Estadio Santiago Bernabéu; protecting his players from the vicious attacks of the Spanish media through general pettiness rarely expected from an experienced boss his



Mission Impossible?

but the core of his team - Cristiano Ronaldo, Xabi Alonso, Kaka and Karim Benzema, for instance, were already at the club during his predecessors' time. These newly arrived stars, along with long-time club servants of the club like Raul and Guti, were expected to lead Real to unprecedented levels of success. Added to likes of Iker Casillas, Sergio Ramos, Gonzalo Higuain and, Marcelo Vieira, this squad was built to be feared for many years. However, instead of reposing faith in Pellegrini, who, to be fair, hadn't done a terrible job in his one year reign Florentino Perez eyed the man who'd just won an unprecedented treble as Inter manager in Italy, after knocking Barcelona out in the Champions League over two hotly contested semi-final legs. There was no stopping Real Madrid now with this man at the helm.

In the midst of such massive hoopla, Madrid and its supporters somehow left Barcelona out of the equation - a side led by Josep Guardiola, playing what may be branded as scintillating football, without a hint of embellishment, prejudice, or

age. At times his attitude has been hard to fathom. However we would be naive to believe that the task of overtaking a well drilled Barcelona side - arguably one of the best there ever has been - wouldn't come without its fair share of complications.

Having mused on that, I daringly pose the question: Is too much expected of Jose Mourinho at Real Madrid?

To say that Mourinho morphed Madrid into the feared side they are now from scratch would be flawed. Yes, they have improved under him

bias. Questions about the fair play standards and of referee favours have been raised; nevertheless, they have set the benchmark for a Mourinho-led Real Madrid to attain.

Upon arriving in the Spanish capital, Mourinho got to work right away. Club icons like Raul and Guti were considered past their prime and shown out. Others like Argentine defender Ezequiel Garay and Dutch playmaker Raphael van der Vaart were deemed not to be fitting in his plans and subsequently sold. In came the German wizard Mesut Ozil and Argentine sensation Angel Di Maria to offer added craft in midfield. Sami Khedira came in to provide steel in the centre of the park and help Xabi Alonso in spreading play wide from the deep. Mourinho came with a dream and demanded the players to believe in his dream. He was given unconditional decision-making powers - Jorge Valdano was shown the door and Zinedine Zidane appointed as the first team director. Though not related to on-field activities, this incident preceded an immediate improvement in the league performance. It seemed that the club could contend for and lift many trophies for the first time since Fabio Capello won the *La Liga* in 2007.

Little did Mourinho know though, that his worst nightmares were yet to come. Soon enough in the *Clasico* at Camp Nou he would be embarrassed like never before with a 5-0 thrashing. Barcelona had proven their vast superiority knocking Mourinho out of his comfort zone. For the first time in his managerial career, he had to contend with being the second best. The self-proclaimed *Special One* could not take it too well. How could such an experienced and illustrious manager allow this to happen? What hadn't gone right? It really seems that he has been trying to sort that out in every single game against Barcelona since. That defeat instilled fear in the Madrid camp as their attempts to be adventurous had left them cruelly exposed to a merciless score. This marked the beginning of Mourinho's over-reliance on an ultra-defensive system in every *Clasico* since then.

Not everything should be measured in terms of Real Madrid vs Barcelona though. Apart from consistent and downright infuriating failures against them, Real have, slowly but surely, made tremendous progress under Mourinho. Defeating the rest of the *Liga* sides and other power houses in Europe appeared to be second nature. Cristiano Ronaldo started scoring hat-tricks at will; Ozil and Di Maria provided assists just as proactively as Alonso anchored the midfield. Karim Benzema had been transformed from a tame mouse into a devouring lion. Make no mistake, Mourinho had definitely made his mark and built a fearsome team. Progress soon thereafter was to become constant and notable.

In Mourinho's first season, Real Madrid disappeared early from the domestic title race. They failed to reach the finals of the Champions League, again thwarted by Barcelona, but won the Copa del Rey to save Mourinho's job, beating the same foes. Though sharply contrasting in outcomes, neither performance was anything to rave about. But by winning a trophy - and more importantly beating Barcelona - Mourinho atleast kept the skeptics pleased whilst reminding them that if any manager could do it against this Barcelona, it was him. But once again he would display signs of frustration - lashing out against UEFA for decisions which went against his side, over the two Champions League ties. In truth, however, Madrid were outdone by the individual brilliance of Lionel Messi. Playing as defensively as they had over those two games hardly helped them either.



With his #1 weapon



The eye poke

Then in the Super Cup matches early this season, Barcelona came out on top despite a spirited effort from Real. To fans and neutral observers alike, it was clear that Mourinho's men were dominant over the two legs. However, once again the play of a certain Argentine maestro proved decisive when it mattered. Left fuming in frustration, Mourinho poked Barcelona assistant manager Tito Vilanova in the eye. It was an act sent viral, jokes are repeatedly made about it, videos compiled on YouTube and even some computer game, was made on it. For a Real Madrid supporter, however, such actions were simply depressing.

There were positives to garner from that particular display though. For the first time Madrid had actually shown some courage to fight Barcelona blow for blow

with an attacking approach. The *Special One* hadn't gone with 11 players behind the ball as showcased previously. Real were *not* embarrassed. In fact, mixed with the disappointment there was a sense of excitement for the season ahead and what it would bring. This time round, Mourinho felt that there was an increasing need for new squad players to improve the team. So, in came Fabio Coentrao, Hamit Altintop, Raphael Varane and Nuri Sahin to bolster the squad.

Madrid started brightly once again - in fact, exceptionally. Playing better than Barcelona was no more a fantasy. It appeared the gap has finally been closed. The team coasted through the Champions League group stages with a 100% winning record conceding the least number of goals; only one team had scored more goals than Real Madrid (no prizes for guessing who). Real started the next *Clasico*, in the domestic league, with a six point lead over their arch rivals. There was a chance to get a nine point cushion to dispel all the doubts. But Mourinho opted to go defensively once more and was taken apart by a rampant Barcelona side resulting in a 3-1 defeat at home. Suddenly talks of crisis began to arise. Hardly necessary as the team moved on from the loss and continued to perform.

As fate would have it, Madrid drew their arch enemies once again in the quarterfinals of the *Copa del Rey*. A tie to be played over two legs. Many think Barcelona can only be beaten in a one-off knockout type clash. So, it was another chance to showcase the progress this team has made and just how far it has come. But, seemingly having learned precious little from previous outings, Mourinho chose to go with an overly defensive setup once again in the first leg at Bernabéu. Pepe was used as a destroyer in the midfield, along with Xabi Alonso and Lassana Diarra in a three-man midfield. Real managed an early lead through Ronaldo. But Barcelona dominated the game with the lion's share of possession - over 70%. In the end, oddly enough, two defenders Eric Abidal and Carles Puyol, found the goals to take a deserved victory back to Camp Nou with them. The media and supporters did not take kindly to the proceedings of Madrid dominating on their own turf; they opted to play defensively and took nothing away. Boos drowned Mourinho chants during the subsequent league match against Athletic Bilbao. The *Special One's* stock had suddenly gone down.

Coincidentally enough, days before the return leg away to Nou Camp, prominent Madrid daily, *Marca* ran a story about internal rifts in the squad. Supposedly Mourinho and Sergio Ramos had gotten into a heated exchange; where the player called into question his managers' abilities and knowledge of the game. For the first time perhaps, a player had openly



challenged Mourinho, who is noted to be a great man-manager. When questioned, everyone remained adamant that the squad was united and would fight to advance into the next round. Underneath the cover up, one suspected players were fed up with playing defensively and wanted to take a more offensive approach. The sentiment had been voiced before. It was up to Mourinho to respond accordingly.

And respond accordingly he did. Madrid played the best I have seen them in the last five *Clasicos*. In came Kaka and Ozil supporting Ronaldo and Higuain up front. The midfield was more fluent which translated into more efficient play. Pepe dropped back into defense to partner Ramos and Barcelona hardly got a sniff at goal as a result of their spirited performance. I saw ten players out there running for each other, concerned with defending a precious crest and more importantly fighting to win as supporters had been promised before the game. That display filled *Madridistas* worldwide with pride. They had actually gone for it with no fear, attacking fluently but remaining compact at the back too. I have no idea what convinced Mourinho to throw caution to the wind for once, but I am so glad that he chose to. Hopefully he will have realised that having an attacking flair to the game is far more effective than playing 11 in behind the ball. It was a 2-2 draw that felt like a convincing victory owing to the manner in which the team played. You may argue that Barcelona was not at their best, which I shall begrudgingly concede but I prefer to feel that they had never faced Madrid at their finest either under Mourinho. After a long time, Barcelona finally experienced what it could be like to play a Madrid at the peak of its potential. It may never be a walk in the park again.

To answer the question I posed, I don't feel too much is demanded of Mourinho but the time frame in which he has been asked to achieve that what is necessary is too short. Fans and management alike must show more patience. Madrid continue to make giant strides; the titles will inevitably come. Bearing in mind that Barcelona are undoubtedly the strongest team in the world currently, toppling them is a momentous task that even a manager of Mourinho's calibre cannot guarantee within a set time frame.

A wise man once claimed: *"The power of a bull is not measured at home, but in a foreign field."* Madrid are working towards being a stronger bull at home, and away to Barcelona and to all other sides which ill-fatedly cross paths with them. The progress made under Jose Mourinho is obvious. Real are on a special mission with the *Special One* - to dethrone the greatest team of their generation. One would be a fool to bet against that Portuguese making good.

Scouting Network

Goalden Times brings you the stars of tomorrow – 20 years or under, promising players from across the world. Light up this Valentine's Day with The Pharaoh

Stephan El Shaarawy

Date of Birth: 27.10.1992

Place of Birth: Savona, Italy

Club: AC Milan

Height: 1.78 m

Weight: 72kg

Position: Forward

Nationality: Italy, Egypt

Market Value: €7m



There is a sense of destiny about Stephan El Shaarawy.

A particular [numerology site](#) actually lists him with having #9 associated to him and says "*He is the righter of wrongs*". For those who do not believe in the occult and would like to have much more concrete proof, check out these facts. El Shaarawy, nicknamed Il Faraone (The Pharaoh), given his Egyptian heritage (his father is Egyptian while his mother is Italian), is the fourth youngest player ever to play in Serie A. Starting in the Genoa youth system, he led the Primavera team to Primavera Cup, Primavera Super Cup in 2008-09 season and Primavera Scudetto in 2009-10. Realizing that he is destined for bigger things, Enrico Preziosi, the Genoa president loaned him out to Padova in Serie B. As an 18-year-old, he led Padova to the Serie A promotion play-offs against Novara. In that match, an unfortunate red card to Padova defender Cesar, led to El Shaarawy being sacrificed as the substitute for a new defender. Ultimately Padova would lose that play-off but El Shaarawy's [performance](#) over the 2010-11 season with Padova (9 goals and 2 assists in 30 matches) won him the year-end best player in Serie B award in the annual [Calcio Oscars](#). At the age of 19, he has played for every Italian team he has been eligible for - U16, U17, U18, U19, and now has debuted for the U-21. At every stage, he has scored at least one goal barring the U-21.

Tales of his talent were well known in the peninsula and Milan was especially aware of it, being the team that Genoa Primavera beat in the Super Coppa. Adriano Galliani, Milan's #2 man after President Silvio Berlusconi, had already made

an attempt to sign him in 2010 but Preziosi rebuffed him. Finally in 2011, on the back of his show for Padova, Milan coerced Preziosi to co-own Shaarawy. It was expected that he would be loaned out to gain first team experience. But somehow it didn't materialise. Milan had a debilitating injury crisis at the start of the season and The Pharaoh made his debut as a substitute, in a losing cause at Napoli. He would come on as a substitute 3 days later when Alex Pato was injured in the 29th minute against Udinese at home and Milan losing 1-0. That day, El Shaarawy would save the Milan blushes with his first ever Serie A goal. However, with the stars returning for Milan, the opportunities would dry up and further talks of move away from Milan in January transfer window would arise. But opportunity in a friendly match against Paris Saint-Germain in January showed once again what he offers. Further injuries to strikers would force Massimiliano Allegri to start El Shaarawi against his old nemesis Novara. Twice in a week, in a cup pre-quarter final and Serie A he would be instrumental in Milan's win against Novara. The defeat with Padova would be avenged. There would be further evidence of his growing reputation in the Cup quarter final win from behind against Lazio, especially his assist to Clarence Seedorf. Each subsequent match that he would play for Milan would only reinforce that reputation.

Padova's director of sport Rino Foschi is not surprised. *"El Shaarawy is a phenomenon, a special player. When Galliani called me before taking him, I said he is the strongest in his age group in all European leagues. He could be much more important in a few years than what Carlos Tevez (Milan's #1 transfer target in January) is"*.

Given how the Pharaoh is progressing, it wouldn't be long before Foschi's forecast turns out to be true.



A Quiet Winter

Debopam Roy looks at what unfolded across the globe in the January transfer window. You may reach him on Twitter @rossoneri

The January transfer window is much like cooking at home for your valentine after failing to reserve *that* table at your favourite restaurant. Most clubs go into the transfer window to mend minor defects with their ground positioning. It is a time for injury reinforcements rather than marquee signings as they believe it is difficult for a player coming in the middle of the season to settle into a team. Since the emergence of the petro-dollar clubs, the January window has seen some massive deals.

The 2010-11 season was a perfect example of this happening with just two transfers adding up to over €100mn from Messrs Fernando Torres and Andy Carroll. However, the 2011-12 season has seen a return to old habits. Even the English Premier League (EPL) spent just €84.5mn which is lower than what the Torres and Carroll deals had together generated. My hypothesis behind this apparent calm has been that Manchester City has not been scouring the market this January. Indeed their most pressing need was to sell [Carlos Tevez](#) and wash off the millions in wages they pay him along with the bonus he is due if City do manage to win their first ever Premiership. One of the clubs who almost clinched the Tevez deal from City was AC Milan and the Italian giants were in the market trying to procure a lot of replacements for their host of injuries. One player who did not leave Milan though was [Filippo Inzaghi](#) and it was a measure of his immense loyalty that he opted to stay on despite decreasing chances of play at Milan.

The Premiership

So, it was a quiet transfer window spiced up by some loan deals sealed by the struggling sides. One statistic to highlight this would be that six clubs ended with net transfer earnings while two (Arsenal & Sunderland) had the neat figure of zero expenditure or revenue. The six clubs with net positive cash flow included the two Manchester giants as also Tottenham Hotspur, another of the big spenders in the league. Chelsea remained the highest spenders and it was a modest €18.9mn which got them the top honours. That money was spent on only three players; two fell in the 'promising' category - Lucas Piazon and Kevin de Bruyne - while the third, was defender Gary Cahill who may be as error-prone as David Luiz (note the [three goals Chelsea conceded](#) when these two played as central defenders against Manchester United). The most active team in the window was Queens Park Rangers (QPR). Their transfer spend for the 2011-12 season is nearly four times the money spent in the previous season when they were in The Championship. If it allows *The Hoops* to extend their premiership stay, then it will be money well spent. Prominent additions included Taye Taiwo from Milan and Federico Macheda from Manchester United on loan. They also improved their firepower (or did they?) by buying Djibril Cisse from Lazio and Bobby Zamora from Fulham.

Another team, which decided to up their striking power was Newcastle United, swooping for Papiss Demba Cisse from Freiburg. Some of the money earned from the sale of Carroll last year was finally being utilised. They might have found the perfect strike partner for scoring sensation Demba Ba with his countryman Cisse who had nine goals from 17 matches in the Bundesliga in this season before his transfer. Another Bundesliga import who may turn out to be a major signing is Gylfi Sigurdsson, bought on a loan by Swansea from Hoffenheim. The 22-year old Icelandic attacking midfielder

had a single assist in Bundesliga from 7 matches but already in four appearances for The Swans, has got one goal and 3 assists to his name. Add the fact that he had 3.3 shots per game, 2.3 key passes, 26.8 average passes and 81.3 per cent pass completion rate and you have a definite star buy.

The formula, which had first been tried during the Zlatan Ibrahimovic purchase - loan with a deferred payment - is now the most popular method of payment. With the UEFA Financial Fair Play (FFP) coming into effect, most clubs prefer a deferred payment in an attempt to offset the accounting processes. One such signing was David Pizarro, brought on a free loan to Manchester City and a transfer that may have gone under the radar. Pizarro is one of the best passers of the game (21.5 passes attempted on average per match, 95.1 per cent pass completion rate for the season, 1.7 key passes per match) and Roberto Mancini may have found the final piece of the puzzle to give City their first ever Premier League title. That he came for free was the major surprise. Another player who came in for free was Louis Saha, released after 115 matches for Everton in which he had thirty-four goals. It was surprising though that, Tottenham, who have been having a great season, picked him up. Goal scoring has not exactly been their problem so far as they sit third in the table, having averaged almost two goals per game.



The return of the prodigal sons

The Premiership transfer talk cannot be over without highlighting the return of two prodigal sons. Thierry Henry returned to Arsenal on a two-month loan from NY Red Bulls and promptly showed that he had not lost it by scoring the winner on his return match. One day before this Henry goal, one of his long-time adversaries, Paul Scholes had decided to restart his Manchester United adventure by coming back from

retirement. His return appropriately was in a F.A. Cup Manchester derby, which United won 3-2. Scholes capped it up by scoring the winner in his premiership return against Bolton. Together, they underlined the adage - *Class is permanent*.

Serie A

Serie A mirrored the spending pattern across major leagues and actually posted the net positive revenue of € 5.7mn across 20 clubs. The 2010-11 season had seen a net expenditure of € 31.78mn. Genoa, who are known for their huge squad turnovers in every transfer window, had the highest net expenditure (€16mn) while surprisingly Inter Milan earned the highest net revenue (€10.2 mn). Genoa's huge expenditure largely depended on their capture of Alberto Gilardino from Fiorentina for €8 mn while Inter's major earnings were from selling Thiago Motta to oil-rich Paris Saint-Germain (PSG).

Almost all Italian teams managed to avoid any kind of cash flow and mostly dealt in loans, which could be redeemed later. This included Inter's capture of Fredy Guarin from Porto, Angelo Palombo from Sampdoria, Roma's capture of Marquinho, Napoli's capture of Eduardo Vargas and Milan's capture of Sulley Muntari from Inter. Milan also captured Maxi Lopez on loan from Catania after fellow Argentine striker Carlos Tevez failed to complete his proposed loan deal from Manchester City. One such loan move, which actually got redeemed, was for the promising Fabio Borini, who was permanently bought by Roma from Parma.

The undoubted kings of the market were Juventus and more for the personnel that they shipped out, than whom they brought in. The *Bianconeri* shipped out Vincenzo Iaquinta, Marco Motta, Luca Toni, Amauri and Michele Pazienza - problem children all and indeed the *Old Lady's* fans were more happy to see the back of Amauri et al than to see loan capture of Martin Caceres from Sevilla or Marco Borriello from Roma. Some of those Juventus discards can actually decide who will stay up in the league, with Iaquinta going to struggling Cesena. Amauri has the unenviable task of replacing Alberto Gilardino at Fiorentina.

La Liga

There were very few transfers in *La Liga* and this was another league, which ended up with net positive transfer revenue like Serie A. In reality, only two clubs ended up with net transfer expenditure - Sevilla and Granada. This tells us that most clubs either did not indulge in any kind of transfer activity and if they did, it was to sell than buy.

Sevilla brought back a prodigal son of their own as Jose Antonio Reyes returned to the Andalusian club after starting out in the youth sectors of Sevilla. Since then, Reyes has excelled at Arsenal, warmed the benches at Real Madrid, failed at Atletico Madrid and then regained some foothold with Benfica. A return to familiar setting might just be a last effort to rekindle a career, which had once promised so much. Granada spent their money mostly on highly rated left back Gabriel Silva from Palmeiras and then promptly loaned him out to Novara in Serie A.

Bundesliga

The German teams were very busy in January with transfer revenues of €31.5 mn and an expenditure of €56.1 mn. Of the net expenditure, more than half was done by Wolfsburg alone. With the team in the mid-table rut, the owners obviously wanted as many reinforcements as possible. So in came Petr Jiracek (€4mn), Slobodan Medojevic (€2.5 mn), Ferhan Hassani (€0.7mn), Vieirinha (€4.5mn), Giovanni Sio (€5.8mn), Ibrahim Sissoko (€1.5mn), Felipe (€2.5mn) and Ricardo Rodriguez (€8.5mn). The similarity in those eight signings is that they all come from outside the Bundesliga, are not well known and have an average age of 22.25 years. The youngest of the lot - Ricardo Rodriguez is also the most expensive. At 19, the left back has had a breakthrough year with FC Zurich, scoring one goal and 5 assists.

The other club, which happened to be most active in the market, were wooden spooners Freiburg SC who brought in nine players but none of them look to be of the calibre to prevent their drop from Bundesliga. The top two teams, Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich didn't have any buys but third placed Schalke 04 acquired Chinedu Obasi from Hoffenheim, a proven and sturdy Bundesliga performer. Bayer Leverkusen lying at sixth position in the Bundesliga bought Bernd Leno, Bundesliga's most promising goalkeeper from Stuttgart and then loaned him back; also got Vedran Corluka from Manchester City on loan.

Ligue 1

Ligue 1 were the ones to spend the third highest on players after EPL and Bundesliga, among major leagues worldwide. They had transfer revenues of €32.7mn and a net expenditure of €54.5mn. As expected, the Qatari royal family backed PSG, contributed the most by spending €20mn on Barcelona's Maxwell, Chelsea's Alex and Inter's Thiago Motta. They also shipped out striker Mevlut Erding to Rennes for €7.5mn. However, this was not the highest transfer amount within the league. Stade Brest sold 23-year old striker Nolan Roux to Lille for exactly €8mn.

Marseille let Lucho Gonzalez leave for Porto on a free transfer after the expiry of his contract. It may be noted that Marseille had signed him from Porto in 2009 for €19mn. So another transfer market killing for Porto. Saint-Etienne managed to permanently capture Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who was originally on loan there but owned by AC Milan. Given his performances for Gabon in the African Cup of Nations, one would have to question the Milan management's assessment of Aubameyang as they let him go for only €1.8mn.

Rest of Europe

In Portugal, Porto managed to carry out some smart deals, buying striker Marc Janko from Dutch side FC Twente for €3mn and loaning Danilo, the much sought after full back from South American champions, Santos. Strong rivals Benfica gave free signing Yannick Djalo a contract. Djalo was left out by the third force of Portuguese football - Sporting Lisbon. Lisbon themselves only made loan signings, of which Sebastian Ribas, the Uruguayan centre forward, who came from Genoa in Italy is noteworthy.

Turkish champions, Fenerbahce splashed the cash to capture Lille's goal-scoring sensation Moussa Sow for €10mn. Sow showed he hadn't missed a beat by scoring in his debut for Fenerbahce in the Super Lig. One country, which still has its transfer window open is Russia and you may still see some deals go through as the teams try to finalise before deadline day on 24th February. Anzhi may be the one who might tempt quite a few footballers to shift prior to the transfer window closure. Rivals Lokomotiv Moscow, has already made a move by signing Roman Pavlyuchenko from Tottenham Hotspurs.



Flavour of the month: Senegalese strikers Papiss Demba Cisse and Moussa Sow move to Newcastle and Fenerbahce respectively

Rest of the World

Santiago 'El Tanque' Silva, who was sold to Fiorentina by Velez Sarsfield amid much hype, proved to be a complete flop and was sold back to Boca Juniors for €1.4mn. Boca also brought back Pablo Ledesma, the ball playing midfielder of Catania, back to Argentina.

Another Argentine striker who had a much better time was Hernan Crespo. Along with Fabio Cannavaro, Robert Pires, Jay Jay Okocha and Robbie Fowler, Crespo was auctioned and ultimately bought by football franchises in India, where he would be playing in a new tournament, the Premier League Soccer, between March-May. Crespo, being the only active footballer among them, fetched the highest auction price of €840k.. Crespo had to rescind his Parma contract for this and he was not displeased about it either.

Conclusion

This transfer window was more a time for consolidation and managing with cheap alternatives. The time for lavish buys will probably be limited to the summer. Newcastle's Papiss Demba Cisse was the single biggest signing at €12mn, closely followed by PSG's Thiago Motta for €11mn. Most of the big teams didn't indulge in any transfer activity apart from trying to offload players. The traditional big spenders too stayed quiet. This was thought to be the effect of the FFP notices. One still has to wonder if these clubs will show similar restraint in the summer, especially with the European Championships coming up. The African Cup of Nations has been played and most top clubs had sent in their scouts to cover it. Although it has been a dry winter, expect a heavy market of transfers in the summer.

Best XI

Best XI is a compilation of interesting events or snippets from the football world across different locations that we share with you. Best XI will seek to be about topics you are interested in and want explored. You may mail your requests to editor@goaldentimes.org

Football has always had a romantic side to it with handsome men and beautiful women involved; there has never been a shortage of romantic alliances surrounding the players. So in honour of **St. Valentine**, we present to you our very own selection of **XI** footballers who can be your dream dates. In true equality of sexes, we have compiled a mixed **XI** including players of either gender. The two criteria we have taken for this inclusion are - looks and the 'availability' of the player to be your Valentine. The latter criterion is loosely interpreted, which is why we have only kept out players who are married or have been in long-term relationships. To maintain objectivity, and our sense of orientation, there was a mixed jury in the **Goalden Times** editorial team. We know **XI** is a very short number and we had to leave out quite a few names. We decided to balance out the sexes by appointing a manager - thus making it an even distribution.



~Be Thine Valentine~

Goalkeeper:

She is not just #1 in the US national team but we dare say, **Hope Solo** is one of the most recognizable faces after her performances in the 2011 FIFA World Cup. Though the US lost to Japan in an epic final, Solo won our hearts...literally. She was magnificent in the quarter final win against Brazil. Her story of growing up in a broken marriage and establishing herself as a goalkeeper and an athlete overall is a touching one. Put your dancing shoes on for Hope likes to waltz. While there may be rumours about a boyfriend, you could possibly join her for a session like this.

Communication Link: [@hopesolo](https://twitter.com/hopesolo) on Twitter



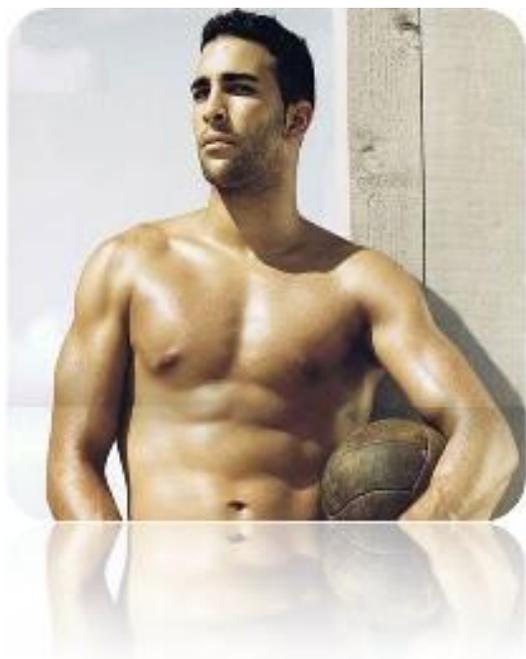


Defence:

Anouk Anna Hoogendijk is a 26-year-old who plays for Netherlands. She started really young and used to play with boys in the beginning before shifting to an all-girl squad. Hoogendijk came to prominence aged 12, as a contestant on the "Geef Nooit Op" (Never Give In) television programme. She honed her skills playing for FC Utrecht in the Dutch division. She is adept both as a defender and a midfielder and her role demands extreme fitness. Her playing career has taken her places - like the UK, but we believe she could carve a career in fashion as well.

Communication Link: [@Anoukhoogendijk](#) on Twitter

Eva Nadia González is the star defender and at 24 years, is also the captain of the Argentine national team. Playing in defence has not stopped her from scoring goals though; Eva has 3 goals in 18 matches. One of those goals was the opener in the 2006 South American championship in Argentina when the hosts surprised the defending champions Brazil to win 2-0. The victory qualified the *Albiceleste* for two tournaments simultaneously: the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup and the 2008 Olympics. She also scored a bending free kick against England in the 2007 FIFA World Cup.



The 26-year-old French-Moroccan old-school defender currently playing for Valencia CF is contemplating his return to France, courtesy Paris Saint-Germain. He had helped Lille to the Ligue 1 title in the previous season; later moving to Los Che followed by La Liga. Starting out very early at the mere age of nine, **Adil Rami** has come a long way, from playing as a hobby to support himself - he was even labelled a 'phantom student' by his teacher since he dodged school to manage several other jobs - to the extrovert, overtly optimistic and sparkling with sprightliness Rami of today who has this bubbling 'Bring 'em On' attitude towards world champion Barcelona.

Being the sex symbol that he is, maybe you could be Princess Fiona in Adil "Shrek" Rami's life. Non-stop entertainment guaranteed: in his own words, "I reckon I'm the most entertaining guy in our dressing room."

Communication Link: [@AdilRami4](#) on Twitter

The Kosovan-Albanian fighter playing for Italian Serie A club Lazio and captaining Albania at international level is a UNO ambassador for poverty. **Lorik Cana** has exhibited his skills as a devoted tackler playing for clubs like PSG, Marseille, Sunderland and Galatasaray in his career. He is not known as 'le destructeur' (The Assassin) for nothing.

Communication Link: [@LorikCana19](#) on Twitter



Midfielders:

Nayeli Rangel is the youngest member of this XI at only 19 but has already had 32 caps for the Mexican side and scored 3 goals. Being still a teenager though shows but she has shown responsibility in leading the Mexican U20 team with goals like this and assists like this. Her career has flourished so far and so has her fan following detailing her life.

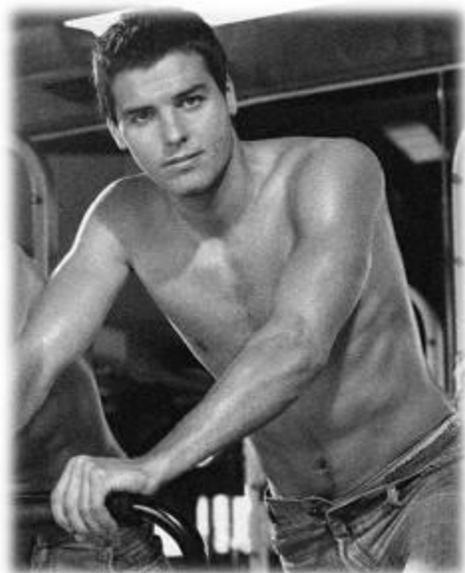
Communication Link: [@nayeRangel7](#) on Twitter

Laisa Andrioli is quite simply in the wrong profession, playing football for the Brazilian national team. Not because she lacks football skills. No, she doesn't, as this can prove. But photo shoots with various magazines which included not many clothes and one in particular with the referee's red card used in a pivotal manner, have propelled Laisa to the top of the charts for the tag of 'most coveted female footballer'. While she loves balls, the camera loves her and it's a match made in heaven.



Communication Link: <http://laisaandrioli.com/>

Dubbed as a "playmaker of real quality" and "an accomplished passer of the ball", Lyon's dynamic midfielder is one of the most talented players of his generation. He is capable of scoring spectacular goals too. In **Yoann Gourcuff**, France feel they have found their "Le successeur" aka heir apparent to the legend himself - Zinedine Zidane. He is a recipient to



several titles and honours, like the French Player of the Year award in 2008-09 and UNFP¹ awards in 2009, among many other accolades to boast of.

With his oh-so-charming looks and star performance on the field, he is quite "le phénomène".

Communication Link: [@yoann_gourcuff](#) on Twitter

The golden boy of Arsenal, **Francesc Fabregas**, finally moved to Barcelona after a prolonged heartburn for the English giants. But he has been a source of heartburn for ladies throughout Europe. Young,

dynamic, handsome and successful, Cesc epitomises the ultimate modern footballer. This might be a really good time to have Cesc as a valentine since only last year he split up with long-time sweetheart Carla Garcia.



Communication Link: [@cesc4official](#) on Twitter



Attackers:

Elodie Thomis is often talked about as the female equivalent of Thierry Henry and Sidney Govou for her pace. Scorching the turf for the *Les Bleues*, Thomis has scored 19 goals in 64 matches. She plays her club football for Olympic Lyon and is one of the best strikers ever to play for Lyon with 36 goals in 64 matches. She has been part of the team that has reached two successive UEFA Women's Champions League finals in 2009-10 and 2010-11 winning the latter one. Proud of her Martinique heritage, the early career training in athletics has shaped her well.

Thomis though is keen to increase the popularity of her sport and is willing to pose for it too.

Communication Link: <http://fr-fr.facebook.com/people/Elodie-Thomis/1008905565>

¹ National Union of Professional Footballers



FIFA World Player of the Year winner Lionel Messi says he is "*one of the most dangerous players I have ever played against*" while Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola feels "*you would need a pistol to stop him*", speaking of his lightning speed on the field. Catch him if you can, off the field that is. Arsenal's **Theo Walcott** has that boyish charm that can melt your heart. Can you keep up with his pace?

Communication Link: [@TheoWalcott14](#) on Twitter

Manager:

The man to manage this Special XI has to be special too and it was easy to choose the flavour of the moment - **Herve Renard** [for this job](#). Having won the African Cup of Nations with the unheralded Zambians,

he has already shown that he is a talented manager. But the 43-year old has created a flutter in many hearts with his all-action displays on the sideline in his trademark white shirt. He showed his humane side when he carried the injured Joseph Musonda after the final in a victory lap.



The Nowhere Man

*Carlos Tevez was the name on everyone's lips for the entire January winter transfer window. Here **Gino de Blasio** takes the slide rule to the issue to find out what the hoopla is all about. Catch Gino on twitter @ginodb*



All dressed up, nowhere to go

Remember high school? The social awkwardness, the struggle to make friends, the isolation that can encapsulate your dreams being burnt like a second year science class before a bunsen burner? Just like the ugly child who no one wants to take to the end of year dance, Carlos Tevez must have been feeling the same, come January 31st.

So how did one of football's greatest talents get himself into the social exclusion award of the year category, and will he ever make it out in time for his career to fully shine?

Munich - 27th September 2011

It was a cold autumn night and Manchester City were playing Bayern Munich in the Champions League group stage. Away from home and under the spotlight of Europe's footballing elite, Carlos Tevez was going to commit a cardinal football sin - disobey the manager.

In a sideline dispute with City boss Roberto Mancini, Tevez refused to enter the pitch for a substitution prompting an expletive-charged tantrum for the world to see. The Tevez camp had later claimed that it was all due to some miscommunication – Tevez's English speaking skills apparently to blame for the fiasco, however, that did not stand a chance. The cold Munich night lay witness to a calm Tevez while Mancini gesticulated wilder than any Italian since Nero saw Rome burning.



Tevez ignored Mancini



Tevez sat calmly as Mancini gesticulated wilder than any Italian since Nero saw Rome burning

Tevez didn't get up. Mancini sat down.

The team talk, the flight home, the interviews with the press - all of these constitute modern day football, a tasteful reminder that not only the player has some explaining to do, but the coach too. But it was to be a sombre Mancini, a man who looked destroyed by the whole episode; the stress taking its toll on his verbal capacity to talk, he nonetheless exclaimed, "Tevez will never play for this club again". To which a nonchalant Tevez expressed his desire to leave anyway as he is not happy to stay away from his family.

Like all great crimes since 1974, this became known as "Tevez-Gate".

A two-week ban, loss of wages, exclusion from followed by forced inclusion into training. Carlitos needed a new home; Manchester City had made it as much clear.

And so Began the Rat Race...

Who was going to take in "the Apache"? More known for his petulance than a history teacher's velvet elbow padding and more disliked by his manager than the school snitch, Tevez's saving grace is that when he plays, you forget all of the above.

His work rate is exceptional, his physical diminutiveness compensated by the terrier-like aggression he uses to win and protect the ball; blessed with a hawk-esque vision he can pick out passes from all over the pitch. Any club would find a position for him, even if it meant selling their prized possession to have him.

A Tale of One City, Two Clubs

Like an after-school detention featuring the misfortune of sitting and watching your teacher's marks, Tevez was totally powerless. It was to be the red and black half of Milan to make the first move, a proposition that would give Milan arguably the best attack in the world and bolster their domestic efforts by resting Zlatan Ibrahimovic for Champions League appearances. Milan agreed on personal terms with the player and the move seemed imminent, till City put the brakes on it by not allowing a free move on loan, preferring an outright sale.

When Milan failed on their first proposal to capture the Argentinian ace, it was set to start an inadvertent bidding war with local rivals Inter Milan. A move seen by many as one-upmanship due to the technical abilities which Tevez would bring, rather than the cure to the cold Inter had acquired; Tevez was a solution for Milan, not for Inter.

This was all taking place the week of the Milan derby; no longer was Tevez the ugly duckling, he was the one everyone wanted to take to the ball.



Italian sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport ran the story of how Tevez was a step away from Milan

Cometh the Sacrificial Lamb

When Milan's original proposal was rebuked by Manchester City, they knew the only thing that could win over the North West club was going to be an offer that they couldn't turn their nose at. Adriano Galliani played out a move worthy of *"hell hath no fury like a Brazilian scorned"*. Using the media, and relations with the new Paris Saint-Germain coach (former Milan manager Carlo Ancelotti) and sporting director (former Milan scout and manager Leonardo), a series of open contacts were made to Milan regarding the sale of Alexander Pato to PSG, a move that would bring in the capital required to purchase Tevez outright.

This seemed like the gamble of a century - selling the young, talented but injury-prone Brazilian for an older, temperamental and non-tested-in-Serie A Argentine. Add to that, Tevez hadn't played since September – whatever form he was in, it wasn't going to be match-ready.

It wasn't to be.



Young, injury-prone, loyal and promising or mature and proven but disharmonious - whom to pick?

Pato's sale was blocked at the last moment making Galliani come out of negotiations with Manchester City surrounding Tevez. So neither did Milan sell their star Brazilian nor did they buy the sidelined Argentinian. Nothing had changed, much to the dismay of the Twitter audiences around the globe proclaiming the sale of one, the purchase of another. Tevez was stranded. He was, yet again, the one the cool kids didn't want in their group.

And Then...

There were flutters, both from PSG and Inter (again) but nothing concrete. The media circle that had encapsulated the story and run wild across Europe never came to fruition. Milan were without their preferred striker from the market (a last ditch effort to get Maxi Lopez from Catania did happen), Inter and PSG re-enforced and sold in different departments.

The sad truth is, however, Tevez only has himself to blame for the debacle. And who knows if time will teach him a lesson in player-manager protocol; he won't be joining the diplomatic mission, that's a certainty.

Inzaghi and Milan: A Love Story at Crossroads

Eighteen-year old Modern Languages student Annalisa D'Antonio bleeds red and black. Moved by this Milanista's sacrifice to stay at Milan in the winter transfer window, she recounts better times when SuperPippo was the flavour of the club. Follow her on Twitter: @mrsgilardino. Forza Milan!

Waking up to news reports all but confirming that one of your favourite footballers is on the verge of signing a contract with another team is not the way you would want to start your day. "A legend should be untouchable and stay with his club forever" was the immediate thought that ran through my mind. But with the way this certain legend has been treated in recent months, should we really hold on to him or let him go, so he could show his true value elsewhere?



In case you were wondering, the player I'm talking about is Filippo 'Pippo' Inzaghi, goal scorer supreme, and scorned by opponents best illustrated by the "born in the offside position" comment from Sir Alex Ferguson. Pippo has made an art form out of playing on the shoulder of the opposing team's defensive line, always keeping them on their toes, waiting for the perfect moment to get onside and go for goal. Having grown up idolizing Paolo Rossi and Marco van Basten, no doubt that he puts his all in what he does best - score goals. You know he's a legend when at thirty-eight and a half years old, there's still a decent team (Siena, a Serie A outfit) out there that is willing to give him a year and a half contract with the guarantee that he would be playing as a regular first team member.

Inzaghi joined Milan in the summer of 2001, after having donned the Juventus jersey for four seasons and scoring 58 goals and winning a Scudetto, a Supercoppa Italiana and an Intertoto Cup. Since then, he's helped the Rossoneri win two Scudetti, a Coppa Italia, two Champions Leagues, a UEFA Supercup, FIFA Club World Cup and a Supercoppa Italiana. In this time, he has scored 72 times for the Rossoneri in domestic league. Not an ordinary feat, but nonetheless an attainable task for the third active highest goal scorer in Serie A history. Pippo holds the record for scoring the most hat tricks – 10 in total – in the Italian league in the past twenty-five years as well as in the Champions League where he is tied with Michael Owen with 3 hat tricks. But Pippo's greatest glories have always been in the Champions League and international club competitions. He is Milan's top International goal scorer in their history with 43 goals. Inzaghi was one of the most vital players in the 2007 Champions League final as he earned the "Man of the Match" award with his brace en route to Milan's victory. A couple of months later, he contributed to Milan's 4-2 victory over Boca Juniors in the FIFA Club World Cup final by scoring a brace.

Whether his team is playing against a small side or a big rival, in an important competition or a friendly match, Pippo gives it his all. When he scores, he can't contain himself from the excitement. His trademark celebration is usually running around, yelling with his mouth wide open and arms flailing – almost like he has just scored the winning goal in a World Cup final. His goals and his celebrations have long made him a wild fan favourite. This huge fan appreciation made it hard for him to leave Milan on such a short notice, as he stated "Milan is My Home".



The last one and half years have not been good for him. He started only one Serie A match in 2010-11, and indeed in that match, he saved Milan's blushes scoring the equalizer at home against Catania. Earlier in a season opening friendly, he had showed that an old dog could learn new tricks, with this supreme volleyed goal from outside the box against Barcelona. But his greatest act would come in November against Barcelona's great rivals. When Real Madrid came to play their return leg match of Champions League, they were on top of the group having beaten Milan at home. Manager Jose Mourinho took a sly dig at Milan's strike force of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Pato and Robinho by saying he 'feared Inzaghi the most'. Milan manager didn't start Pippo but brought him on with 30 minutes left and Milan trailing by a goal. And indeed, Mourinho's worst fears came true with Pippo scoring twice in true Pippo-esque fashion - first from a a Casillas howler which he somehow headed in and second from a suspiciously offside position with a neat finish. Milan would ultimately draw 2-2 but that point earned from two Inzaghi goals would take them to the next round. But Pippo would not be there as cruelly just a week after that Real match; Pippo would suffer a cruciate ligament injury going for a goal against Palermo in Serie A. With everybody pronouncing his career had ended, Pippo would fight back as only he can and make an emotional return to the team as Milan wrapped up the 18th scudetto.

Despite his age, Pippo still feels like he has a lot to offer. He feels physically fit and always up for the challenge to play a tough game and score more goals. Siena is well aware of his qualities and it is for this reason that they offered him a year and a half contract with all the trimmings to entice him to join their club. Although flattered, he found it extremely difficult to leave his teammates, his fans and the club behind. You could see that he's devoted to the Milan colours; not only is he a great player, he is also a phenomenal person. He put aside his own happiness, knowing he won't be playing, and yet still chose Milan because he felt that his history with the club and his fans were far more important. I'm positive that there will be many more instances where Massimiliano Allegri will make Inzaghi warm up and opt for another player at the last minute. Or he might even make him go on the pitch in the last couple of minutes of the game, but I'm hoping that Allegri will have a modicum of respect for this world-class striker in this final stretch of the season. The type of respect he has not shown since being at the helm of Milan, especially considering his recent slap in the face: his exclusion from the Champions League squad.

Allegri has recently announced the 25-man squad for the Champions League knockout stages. Some changes have been made to the squad; while some expected others not so much. Stephan El Shaarawy was added to the roster as well as recently acquired Djamel Mesbah and Maxi Lopez. The deletions that were a given for the upcoming rounds were Taye Taiwo who signed with Queens Park Rangers in the English Premier League as well as the injured Antonio Cassano and Gennaro Gattuso. But above all, there is one deletion from the CL roster that has come as a surprise to us all. Inzaghi has been left out of the squad, yet again. Milanisti were angry and shocked when Pippo, one of the greatest goal scorers in the Champions League history, didn't make the cut the first time round. Now that he hasn't made the list, Pippo definitely won't be able to break Raul's European record.



Inzaghi turned down a one and a half year contract with Siena because he couldn't imagine his eleven-year history with Milan ending without a proper and well-deserved goodbye. He knows that there are difficult months ahead of him, probably many of which will be spent on the bench or in the stands. All in all, he feels as though it was the right decision and it's worth living through the next three hard months. Now there are some who believe that due to the injury-prone front line of Milan there is a chance he might fight back onto the pitch and back into greatness. But with players due to be coming back from injury, as well as the signing of Maxi Lopez, the realization has hit us all that the chances of that are slim, and yet another reason why we are glad he has decided to fight throughout these last couple of months and stay. As he said in his exclusive interview with Milan Channel, he wouldn't trade the friends he's made or the special fans he has for anything. It's hard to erase it all in just two hours... this *campione* deserves a grand finale at the San Siro in May, in front of the Curva Sud².

² The Milan gallery in the San Siro is historically called the Curva Sud. Curva is a curved stand and Sud is south.

Journey to the ‘Theatre of Dreams’

Akshay Iyer goes on a journey of his lifetime to a place of his dreams and encounters the experience millions will never forget from the closest seat possible

I have been a Manchester United fan for close to 14 years, and like every Red Devil fanatic, my dream had been to watch at least one match at Old Trafford – also known quite aptly as the ‘Theatre of Dreams’.



The Manchester United Restaurant and Bar (MURB) in Bengaluru in southern India was organising a trip for fans to fly out to Manchester and watch the Red Devils take on Arsenal at Old Trafford. I was not aware of this initially but when I came to know about it through my sister, I just had to go to MURB and get more details of this trip. My plan for 2012 was to watch at least one match at Old Trafford, but when I chanced upon this unexpected opportunity, the decision to make the trip was a no-brainer.

I was part of a group of six who flew to Manchester from Bengaluru in the early hours of August 25, 2011. We reached Manchester the next afternoon, and the remainder of that day was largely spent going around the town centre.

The real action started on August 27, when we were scheduled to tour the home of Manchester United. There haven't been too many occasions when I have had goose bumps, but as we approached Old Trafford and walked down the Sir Matt Busby Way, I felt a myriad of emotions including excitement, happiness and unabashed pride.

Among the first sights one sees at the magnificent stadium is the clock which depicts the time of the Munich air crash as well as a mural honouring the players and officials who lost their lives in the tragic event. There are also two statues outside the stadium – one is of the United Trinity of Sir Bobby Charlton, Dennis Law and George Best, while the other is of the legendary Manchester United manager, the late Sir Matt Busby.

It was then time to take the tour of the stadium and the museum, which is housed inside Old Trafford itself. Apart from one of the veteran guides to take us around, we also had the pleasure of having the company of Bryan Robson, a former Manchester United captain and now a global ambassador of the club.

The real action started on August 27, when we were



The first stop on the tour was the North Stand, which is now called the Sir Alex Ferguson Stand, as we were given a quick walk through of the history of the stadium and the stand itself, from where one had a panoramic view of the ground. We also went to the lower tier of the East Stand, a part of which has been marked for the physically disabled and provides them easy access on match days.

Our experienced guide shared many interesting facts with us as we went around, and I also used the opportunity to pick Robson's brain about his playing days, the current Manchester United squad as well as his role as the global ambassador of the club.

'Captain Marvel' Robson said Phil Jones has a bright future, but was unsure if Tom Cleverly had it in him to take over the mantle from United legend Paul Scholes. Robson, though was optimistic that United would win their 20th league title this season, and said: "(Manchester) City certainly have a strong squad, but our experience of winning trophies and Sir Alex's ability to nurture youngsters and give them the confidence to do well, makes me feel we will be successful in defending the BPL title." Robson also touched upon his tenure as Thailand's manager and said though the players and people of that country are passionate about football, the lack of infrastructure has hindered their progress on the Asian and world stage.

Robson said the game has become faster and more competitive now than in his playing days, but said the basics of skill are still central to a footballer's success. He also mentioned that being at the receiving end of Ferguson's 'hairdryer' ire isn't a pleasant experience; however, he was all praise for his former manager and the winning mentality he has instilled in the club.



The tour also included a visit to the dressing rooms and I felt an adrenalin rush as we entered the home team's dressing room and saw the playing gear of United's squad as well as the screen that Ferguson uses for match tactics. I could feel the sense of history as we walked around different areas of the stadium, and this was one of those moments when I would have been glad had the walls of the hallowed stadium shared their experiences as well!





It was then time to take a walk down the Munich Tunnel and get a glimpse of the tragic days in the club's history. The tunnel had self-explanatory images that depicted the tragic event, its aftermath and effect on the city of Manchester, and finally the rise of United from the ashes. While these were nostalgic and emotional moments, I was also proud of being the fan of a club that overcame adversity of the worst kind with flying colours. The legacy of Sir Matt Busby and the determination of the players who survived the horrific event, including Sir Bobby Charlton, to make Manchester United a club to be reckoned with were nothing short of inspirational.

We then took advantage of the fact that Robson was with us and managed to take a walk down the tunnel that is used by the home and away players to enter Old Trafford's green field. While we obviously couldn't step on the playing surface as it was the day before the match against Arsenal, we went as close to the hallowed turf as possible. It was also an amazing

feeling to sit in the home team's dugout and soak in the vast expanse of Old Trafford from that point.

We bid adieu to Robson and our guide before embarking on a shopping spree at the Manchester United Megastore. The day didn't end there though as we were joined for lunch by former Manchester United captain Gary Neville at the Red Cafe. Once Neville came, eating was the last thing on our mind and we spent close to half an hour in his company. Neville was also confident that United would successfully defend their Premier League title this season and his respect and admiration for Ferguson was evident each time he mentioned his former manager's name. Talking about the time when his brother Phil moved on from Manchester United, Gary said it was part and parcel of the football business. When asked



about his snubbing of former United teammate Peter Schmeichel's offer for a handshake in the tunnel before the 2002 Manchester derby, Neville just offered a wry smile. Schmeichel left Manchester United in 1999 and after stints at Sporting CP and Aston Villa, the Danish goalkeeper joined City in 2002 and that earned him Neville's ire.

The next day – August 28, 2011 - was all about the big match between Manchester United and Arsenal. One could feel excitement in the air on the tram from our hotel to the stadium, which had a mix of fans from both the clubs, but as

could be expected, there were certainly a lot more Red Devils supporters than the Gunners. The excitement and expectations only grew as we walked from the Old Trafford Station to the Theatre of Dreams among a sea of people as well as the merchandise and food stalls. And, despite the large number of spectators in the different stands, there was no pushing or shoving to enter the stadium.

As we made our way to our seats in the top tier of the East Stand, which is the one opposite Stretford End, players from both clubs were warming up. I had always expected the atmosphere inside Old Trafford on a match day to be magical and electrifying, but to actually experience and be in the midst of it as United fans chanted and sang songs is a feeling that can't be put into words but suffice to say it's one of those moments that one can live over and over.

Manchester United would go on to subject Arsenal to a humiliating 8-2 defeat, which was the Gunners' worst loss since 1896. Six of the ten goals scored in the match were in front of the East Stand – five of those by Manchester United, which made the experience all the more memorable. The save that David de Gea made off Robin Van Persie's penalty kick was also in front of the East Stand as were the five goals that Manchester United scored in the second half.

The stadium celebrated each of the United goals and De Gea's penalty save in unison; while the two Arsenal goals were met with deathly silence. It was a festive atmosphere inside the stadium and Arsenal as well as their fans were taunted as the goals went in and whenever they lost the ball, with songs and chants.

All eight United goals were a joy to watch, but the pick of the lot were Rooney's two goals from free kicks and Young's curling finishes to the top corner. The picture of the match though was Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny going down on his haunches after Young had scored his second and Manchester United's eighth goal; and that was an apt reflection of the Red Devils' dominance in this match from start to finish.



We lingered outside Old Trafford for a while after the match and soaked in all that was possible of the post-match celebrations. Those two days were by far the most memorable of my life, and these are experiences that money just can't buy. I'll cherish these moments and experiences for the rest of my life and this trip to Manchester has only increased my resolve to watch as many live matches at Old Trafford that I possibly can.

Maximus Tacticus – Newcastle United

In this feature, Debojyoti Chakraborty analyzes the strategies of top EPL sides. This time it is Newcastle United.

Induction

Newcastle United have set themselves a target for this season – they want to make up for lost time. From playing in the qualification stages for Champions League in 2003 they had only gone backwards and even tasted the dogfight in the Championships. No more of *those* agony stories. They have a settled team, a cool manager at the helm, and as always, a passionate fan base. Europe does not seem too far away this time round.

New Era Beckons

The summer started with much of uncertainty for the Magpies. Known and established faces left the club and the manager refused to splash cash and bring in some star players. Alan Pardew opted for young starlets and his policy is now paying rich dividends. He may not have the strongest of squads at his disposal, he might be lacking a bit of depth in his squad, but Pardew certainly has put together a strong team who can give their opponents a run for their money.

The policy of trusting on youth has rarely been so effective than Tim Krul, the #1 goalkeeper for Newcastle this season. A little known 23-year old Dutch coming from a small club like Den Haag has caught everyone off guard with his command on the game. Krul is a typical English-like goalkeeper who can *hurl* the ball a long way. He has a good outing sense and likes to punch the ball away and thus initiates a counter attacking move. He may have to work on his reflexes but he is already a valued proposition and a possible transfer target for many big clubs.

Newcastle's captain this season has been a summer recruit who was no headline when he joined the club in August. But Fabricio Colocini has provided the much needed stability in the defence with his calm and composed demeanour. He is good with the ball and often comes out of the danger zone with the ball in his feet. With close to 85% passing accuracy, he can easily dictate the game from the back. Colocini's partner in crime in a silk-n-steel defensive pairing has been Steven Taylor. A perfect foil for a ball playing defender, he is a no-nonsense stopper who plays a primary blocker and clears the ball out of defence at the first opportunity – eight clearances in each game on an average. His strong physical presence is always an asset in set piece situations – both while defending and when attacking. The star man in defence, though, has been a little Taylor playing down the left flank – Ryan Taylor. On the right back position, Danny Simpson is given the license to venture forward in his marauding runs as Ryan Taylor sits back making it a compact 3-man defence.



Newcastle's attacking threat

he has formed a deadly partnership. Newcastle have missed the same threat from the other flank as Gabriel Obertan has been rarely impressive with his final balls. Another sore point for Pardew is the supporting striker/ attacking midfielder position. Hatem Ben Arfa has been inconsistent or sidelined due to injury for most of the time. Leon Best is not the typical #10; he can win some aerial duel but his overall awareness of the game as well as his work ethic quite often lets him down. Shola and Sammy – the Ameobi brothers seem not good enough to play at this level week in week out.

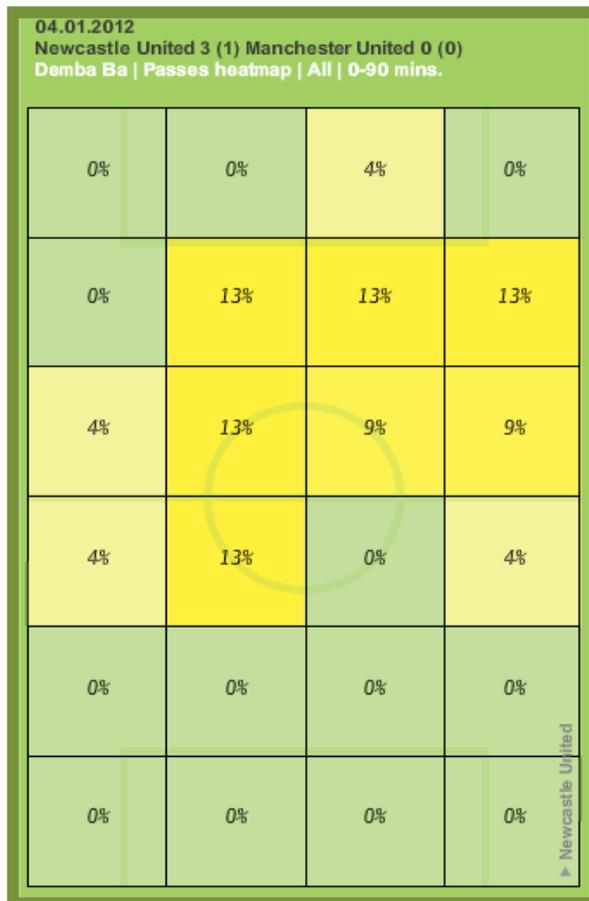
Having covered them all, we come to the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle and how well has he fit in! Demba Ba. It won't be wrong to say that he has single-handedly propelled Newcastle to the position they are right now. Worrying days await Pardew as others have failed to contribute except him. This might make Newcastle pay dearly in their charge towards Europe when Ba is unavailable owing to injuries or on international duties.

Pardew has opted for a traditional 4-4-1-1 formation in most of the matches. But he has been flexible enough to bring out the best in each of his players. That is why quite often his on-field strategies have revolved around a 3-man central midfield formation of 4-2-3-1. This is to be expected when two commanding midfielders are marshalling the centre of the field – Cheik Tioté and Yohan Cabaye. Both are quite similar in nature with strong physical presence and ability to marshal the midfield by quick ball interception and accurate passing. Cabaye in particular has been impressive with his leadership and ability to dictate the play. He is given a free roaming role at the heart of Newcastle's midfield and is entrusted with the responsibility of linking the flank with the strikers. Together with the tireless Tioté or Danny Guthrie – deployed as the defensive screen, Cabaye has ensured that Newcastle play to a high tempo, take a direct approach, press high up the pitch but flood the attacking third if the opportunity arrives.

Strong attacking flair is provided by Jonás Gutiérrez from the left flank. A nimble dribbler, he is equally adept at cutting inside, opening up the defence with short interchange of passes or delivering a telling cross. Coupled with Ryan Taylor,

Man to Watch (1) – Demba Ba

He is a perfect striker – good with the ball on his feet, strong physique to win headers and capable of displaying a thunderbolt of a shot to catch the opposition unaware from a distance. To add to that, Ba is playing the football of his life and have rejuvenated a side that was lacking a serious target up front with the departure of Andy Carroll. He is not easy to mark either as he can cut inside to shoot with his reverse leg or can cut through a defence with some slick touches. He has been in lethal form this season and has netted 15 goals averaging almost one goal per game. Playing for a team with limited ammunition going forward, it is a brilliant achievement. But to measure his influence with goals alone would be wrong – he drops back effortlessly drawing his marker along with him. This creates a vacuum in the opposition defence which his team mates can exploit. He is more than a poacher, sometimes even playing as a false nine where he lurks outside the penalty box for the right opportunity. This is evident from his movements in the 3-0 thrashing of Manchester United recently.



Movements aplenty in the Manchester

Man to Watch (2) – R Taylor

Ryan Taylor, the left back, has been sensational this season on both fronts – two goals, three assists to go along with seven clean sheets. Besides his delightful long balls towards the opponent’s penalty area, he is the stand-out free kick taker for Newcastle. Taylor is a right-footed left back who attacks like an inverted winger. This has made him a very unique player for the Magpies and a headache for the opponents. To summarize his influence let us have a look at his performance against Sunderland. He got a decent 70% accuracy in his passing but most importantly, he was spot on with the balls which mattered. Out of his 14 miss passes/ attempts, 3 each were free-kicks and throw-ins – cases where 50-50 balls are delivered more often than not to open up the defence and hence accuracies are naturally on the lower side.

Six of the remaining eight miss passes came along when Taylor was trying a long diagonal, proving he was quite smooth in his own half while defending. To top it up, he also scored the only goal of the match from a direct free kick. Not bad, Ryan Taylor, keep it up!



Taylor influence



Blue Line - Successful Pass
Red Line - Unsuccessful Pass
White Line - Assist / Goal

A Sneak Peek: Stars of UEFA Euro 2012 Group A

We continue our build-up to the Euro 2012 with the rising stars of Group A. *Kinshuk Biswas* profiles them

Goalden Times has started the countdown to Euro 2012 with the previews of groups A and B. In this feature, we bring you some of the players who have the potential to become stars in Poland and Ukraine. We begin with Group A:



Russia

Name: Alan Dzagoev

Age: 21 (17.06.1990)

Club: CSKA Moscow 2008-Present

Position: Attacking Midfielder / Right Winger

National Caps (goals): 17 (4)

Current Market Value: € 17,000,000-20,000,000



Alan Dzagoev is originally from North Ossetia. Ossetians are a fierce ethnic group proud of their culture. He was interested in football because of another Ossetian footballer, Valery Gazzaev who later became his coach at CSKA Moscow. Dzagoev has been one of the stars of the current CSKA team that qualified for the knockout stages of the UEFA Champions League this season.. Dzagoev plays as an attacking midfielder behind the forwards at his club but is also comfortable playing from the wing... He scored his first goal for his country in the crucial 3-2 win against Republic of Ireland at Dublin. Speedy and with lots of guile, Dzagoev is more like a two-footed Mesut Ozil and can be compared to a young Andres Iniesta. Being a 21-year-old, he still has some years ahead of him. Already in the sights of Manchester United and Arsenal in the Premier League, Euro 2012 could be his stage to greatness.



Czech Republic

Name: Petr Jiráček

Age: 25 (02.03.1986)

Club: VfL Wolfsburg 2012–Present

Position: Midfield / Defensive Midfield

National Caps (goals): 5 (1)

Current Market Value: € 4,000,000-4,500,000



Petr Jiráček has just signed a four-year contract with Wolfsburg. His transfer was after his performances for his former club Viktoria Plzeň with 12 goals and eight assists in all competition. A midfielder with a great work rate and engine, he scored for his national team in the away leg of their Euro 2012 play-off against Montenegro. Jiráček is a natural left footer who can play a decent right footed shot as well. He is not a very flashy player but a hard worker who will run himself to the ground. The Czech Republic team looked very ordinary in the early part of the Euro 2012 qualifying campaign, but the inclusion of Jiracek changed all that. His presence has released the pressure on the national captain Tomas Rosicky. He will be instrumental to the chances of the Czech team. He would do well to take inspiration from the way his last club stopped the might of AC Milan in the Champions League coming back from two goals down to draw 2-2.



Greece



Name: Sotiris Ninis

Age: 21 (03.04.1990)

Club: Panathinaikos 2006–Present

Position: Attacking Midfield / Midfield

National Caps (goals): 18 (2)

Current Market Value: € 8,000,000-9,500,000

Known as the 'Greek Messi', Sotiris Ninis is one of the best new prospects of Greek football. Born in Albania of Greek parents he declined an offer to play for the Albania under-17 youth teams to play for Greece. He has dazzling skills with

great pace, which make him a frightening prospect for opposition defenders. Starting at a young age has meant, Ninis has a host of playing records – youngest Greek to play in European club competition (at 16), youngest Greek to score (on his debut) and the youngest captain at a Greek top division club (at 18). He plays as an attacking mid-fielder behind the strikers but has also played as a striker and on the right wing. He was selected by Otto Reahhagel in 2008 for the national team but was not chosen for Euro 2008 as the manager felt he was too young (shades of 1978: Diego Maradona and Cesar Menotti). He played a substitute in the 2010 World Cup. He scored against Israel in the 2012 Euro qualifying tournament the goal, which assured Greece a place in the finals. The problem is that he has just recovered from a cruciate ligament rupture, which had kept him out of the game for four months. It is to be seen how match-fit he will be; he is competing against another young player, Giannis Fetfatzidis for a place on the team. However, he should be well rested and can make an impact on the tournament. AC Milan, Real Madrid, Manchester United and Arsenal who were all interested in him before his injury may come knocking again if he has a good tournament.



Name: Robert Lewandowski

Age: 21 (21.08.1988)

Club: Borussia Dortmund 2010–Present

Position: Striker / Centre Forward

National Caps (goals): 40 (13)

Current Market Value: € 12,000,000-14,500,000



Robert Lewandowski is a well known face in the Bundesliga. He was one of the pillars behind the success of Borussia Dortmund last season. This season he has scored 19 goals with nine assists in 31 matches in all competition He has a great first touch and always seems assured in his play. Like Miroslav Klose, Lewandowski is a strong aerial threat while also being a strong right footed player. He is the first choice striker in the national team and will expect to shine in front of his home supporters. Chelsea has already shown a keen interest in him and a good showing in the tournament may pave his way to Stamford Bridge. With misfiring Fernando Torres and an ageing Didier Drogba, he may just be the salvation Andre Villas Boas is looking for.

Did that Goal Hit the Stock Market?

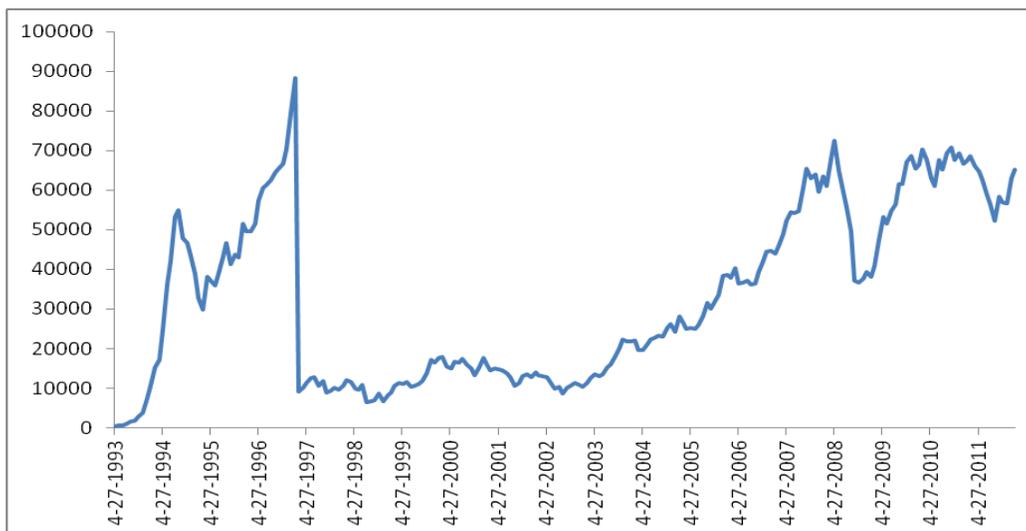
*Do Behavioural Finance and Football make a good cocktail? In a unique take on Brazil's economy, a hardcore stock trader, **Kaushik Saha** correlates the market movement in the football crazy South American nation with its performance on the field. You may reach him on Twitter: @kaushiksaha1982*

This article is meant to be written in humour, with some truth at some places maybe. Don't expect the editors to give it a go-ahead, but if you are reading this, the article is not exactly waste-paper basket stuff...

Behavioural finance and economics are fascinating aspects of the respective fields of study. Several economists including the likes of Adam Smith and Vilfredo Pareto have done seminal work in this domain. As a student, I was taught that stock markets are predominant examples of bandwagon effect and optimism bias, and are indicators of the mood of a significant section of a country's population.

So one day, bored with work I tried to engage in some mental jugglery and tried to correlate the beautiful game with the markets. The article could have dealt with cricket, or baseball, or rugby and the respective countries majorly associated with these sports. But this is about football, the game we hold so dear to our hearts. And the fact that it is the most viewed and followed game in the world, makes it the subject of a fascinating case study.

The first country that comes to mind is Brazil. Brazil, according to Goldman Sachs is one of the hot-shot emerging economies, part of so-called BRICS. BOVESPA is their index. It commenced in the financial year 1993-94, and this is the graph of BOVESPA closing values.



Now let me propose my "theory". Brazil is an economy populated by people who are very passionate about their sports. When their football team does well they sing, dance, celebrate and reach heights of happiness. The whole country is in a positive mood, and this reflects in the way they invest in the markets and the dealers go bullish on the asset classes. This leads to a surge in their stock market indices. Now, Brazil being an emerging market, its market movements are not just

guided by sentiments of domestic investors. The foreign investors have a big role to play and Brazil's economy is hurt by global negative sentiments like the 1997-1998 East Asian and the 2008 sub-prime crises.

But even in the bleak years when the market has seen sudden falls, there are days and weeks where there have been surges, the sentiments have been bullish and markets have ended on the green. A closer look at these bull-runs will see them coincide with the good or great results in football.

For example, take the great bull run of 1994 which peaked at around August 1994. What happened just a month back? Brazil won the 1994 FIFA World Cup after 24 years!! Even in early 1997, before the East Asian crisis struck, and took down the East Asian Tigers and South American countries like Brazil and Argentina, the bull-run came after a Copa America victory.

Then came the great crash, which nearly wiped out the Brazilian economy and the recovery was slow and painful. However, even in those bad times, the consistent rise in BOVESPA in the second half of 1999 leading to an annual appreciation of nearly 60 percent followed yet another Copa America win.



The 2000s have been good for Brazil football team

The 2000s have been a happy decade for Brazil football fans; 2002 World Cup win, 2004 and 2007 Copa America wins, 2005 and 2009 Confederation Cup wins have all been part of the consistent rise of the Brazilian economy. Yes, Jim O'Neill, the Goldman Sachs banker who coined the term in the first place did speak of BRICs and Brazil had all the fundamental factors in place to grow, just like Russia, India and China; but macro analysis of the above mentioned

years and tournaments will quite support the *theory*.

Brazil's economic growth story dealt another blow by the 2008-09 sub-prime crises, like most major and emerging economies. And it recovered too, like most others. But below par performances in 2010 World Cup and 2011 Copa America (both QF losses), haven't done anything to break away from the range-bound markets.

There are several other factors that affect stock market data, of course, and this is just a theory that I am proposing. But the underlying fact that cannot be taken away is that sports affect a majority of us in one way or the other, despite the fact that a few of us have never played any at a serious level. This was my humble way of paying tribute to the two things I hold dearest – my passion and my profession.

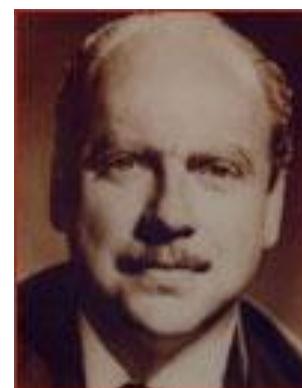
Flight of the Big Bird: Story of the 1962 World Cup

Kinshuk Biswas turns back the clock to witness the flight of the Big Bird



The 1962 World Cup logo

The 1962 World Cup started the modern trend of countries contesting for the right to host the tournament. The last time such a contest had ensued was in 1938. Chile became the surprise choice over nations like Argentina and West Germany to host the '62 World Cup. A relatively small country with a population of eight million, which had been devastated by an earthquake in 1960, raised many eyebrows after being selected as the host. The Chilean Football Association (FA) president Carlos Dittborn had pleaded with the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) using the famous words, "We have to get the World Cup because we have nothing." Chile only had



Carlos Dittborn

one stadium but eventually built three new stadia to accommodate the matches. Carlos Dittborn died a month before the start of the tournament and the new stadium at Arica was named after him.

The Brazilians were back and were the favourites with a 21-year old Pele and Garrincha at the height of his powers; Mario Zagallo, Didi and Vava were also back. The only concern was that, they had an ageing side with an average age of the players over 30. The Soviet Union had won the European Nations Cup in 1960 and had a very good team. They were considered to be the main challengers to Brazil. Yugoslavia had finally managed to win the Olympic gold in football after three consecutive losses in the final. They had a very good trio of forwards in Dragoslav Sekularac, Drazen Jerkovic and Milan Galic. They were coached by Ciric Milovan, one of the greatest man managers of those times. Uruguay was back and so were Argentina with a defensive-minded coach in Juan Carlos Lorenzo who believed in the physical aspect of the game.

Italy had loaded their team with South American imports like Omar Sivori and Humberto Maschio of Argentina and Jose Altafini of Brazil. Spain had similarly picked Jose Santamaria of Uruguay and the great Ferenc Puskas of Hungary. England was a team with some good players like Jimmy Greaves, Ray Wilson, Bobby Charlton and 21-year old Bobby Moore. The problem was that the only creative mid-fielder in their team was Johnny Haynes, the captain. Sweden, the runners-up of the last edition had not qualified and France had a good team but were defeated in qualifying by Bulgaria (shades of 1994), making their debut in the tournament with Columbia.

Eventually 16 teams were included with the hosts Chile and defending champions Brazil qualifying automatically. Again, there were no teams from Asia and Africa who had been eliminated in play-off matches against much superior European sides.

FIFA thankfully did not tinker too much with the format. The teams were divided into four groups with the top two teams qualifying for the quarterfinals. In case of teams being tied, average goals scored would determine the winner.

The days of the play-offs were over. Knockout matches would have extra time followed by a draw of lots to decide the winner. The final was an exception with the provision of a replay in case the match was drawn after extra-time. In any case, the draw of lots was not required for any match in the tournament. After the groups were drawn, four teams were seeded. The final groups were:

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Uruguay (seeded)	Chile (seeded)	Brazil (seeded)	Argentina (seeded)
Soviet Union	West Germany	Czechoslovakia	England
Yugoslavia	Italy	Spain	Hungary
Columbia	Switzerland	Mexico	Bulgaria

Group 1

The first match featured the debutants Columbia against the mighty Uruguayans. The debutants surprised their much fancied opponents by taking the lead through a Francisco Zuluaga penalty. The Uruguayans then grew frustrated and started making some dangerous tackles. Zuluaga was left with three broken ribs ending his international career. Eventually the equaliser came via a Luis Cubilla cross-cum-shot in the 57th minute. Normal service was restored when Uruguay scored the winning goal through Jose Sasia. The other match was a repeat of the 1960 European Nation Cup final between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The result was identical with the Soviets winning 2-0 with goals from Valentin Ivanov and Viktor Ponedelnik. Lev Yashin had made two brilliant saves in the first half to deny Sekularac and Galic.

The second round of matches featured Uruguay against Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union against Columbia. The Uruguayans started well and took the lead through Ruben Cabrera. After that Sekularac took control of the midfield, Jerkovic was fouled in the penalty area which was converted by Josip Skoblar. Galic scored before halftime and Jerkovic scored just after the start of the second half. The final score was 3-1 in favour of the Yugoslavians. The Soviet Union and Columbia match was a classic. The Soviets cruised to a 3-0 lead with two goals from Ivanov and one from Igor Chislenko by the 13th minute. German Aceros pulled one back but Ponedelnik scored a fourth Soviet goal in the 57th minute to restore the three-goal margin. The Columbians were revived by a freak goal directly from a corner by Marcos Coli which was strangely allowed to cross the line by the Soviet defender Givi Chokheli at the near post much to the indignation of Yashin. Antonio Rada and Marino Klinger both scored due to errors from the great Yashin. The match finally finished 4-4.

Going into the last round of matches all the four teams had a chance of progression. The Soviet Union match against Uruguay showed that the last match against Columbia was just a bad day at the office for the European champions. The Soviets dominated the match and led through a goal from Aleksei Mamikin. The Uruguayans equalised against the run of play resulting from a loose free kick taken on the edge of the box by Yashin. The Soviets laid siege to the Uruguay goal after the equaliser. Chislenko was awarded a goal by the referee in the 75th minute. The Soviet captain Igor Netto in

great gesture of sportsmanship informed the referee that the ball had actually entered the goal through a hole in the side netting and got the goal disallowed. However, in the 89th minute Ivanov scored using his pace to give the Soviet Union a deserved 2-1 victory and the top position in the group. In the other match Yugoslavia hammered Columbia 5-0 to claim the second position in the group.

Group 2

The first match featured the hosts against Switzerland. The Chileans were expected to win in front of a partisan home crowd. It were the Swiss who went into the lead with a goal from Rolf Wuthrich. After taking the lead, the Swiss sat back allowing the Chilean midfielders Jorge Toro and Eladio Rojas to control the game. Some display of hard tackling! Chile was lucky to get the equaliser off a deflected Leonel Sanchez shot wrong-footing the keeper. The crowd invaded the pitch and police had to be brought in to clear the playing area. Jaime Ramirez gave Chile the lead and Sanchez scored a second to give the hosts a 3-1. The home support was stupendous, almost like an extra player on the field for the



Giorgio Ferrini being removed by police after being sent off in the 'Battle of Santiago'

Chileans. The other match between Italy and West Germany was a 0-0 draw with Uwe Seeler and young 18-year old Gianni Rivera showing glimpses of their skill.

The next round featured a match, which would be remembered as one of the bloodiest and brutal encounters in a World Cup game - Chile versus Italy, better known as 'The Battle of Santiago'. Two Italian journalists, Antonio Ghirelli and Corrado Pizzinelli had enraged the locals by a

series of articles highlighting the poverty of Santiago and questioning the morals of the Chilean women. The journalists had gone back to Italy but the national team had to face the repercussions for their words.

Even while walking out it was claimed that the Chilean players were spitting at their opponents' faces. The referee Ken Aston of England tried to bring in some control in the match but it was far too explosive to contain. Italian Giorgio Ferrini and Leonel Sanchez were kicking each other instead of the ball. After that, Ferrini was sent off for retaliation to a kick from Honorino Landa. Ferrini refused to leave and play was stopped for eight minutes until police had to intervene and escort him off the field.

Mario David of Italy was flattened by a punch from Sanchez who was unhappy with the former's constant kicking without the ball. The referee did nothing, so David took matters in his own hand, rather foot by kicking Sanchez in the

neck. He was promptly sent-off by Aston. Later David and Sanchez played together at Milan and became great friends. Toro demonstrated a perfect rugby tackle on the Italian defender Bruno Mora and held him down on the ground. The referee had to separate them like a wrestling official, but no sending off.

The match was won 2-0 by Chile with goals from Ramirez and Toro, who should not have been on the field in the 74th and 88th minutes respectively. Aston did not officiate in another match in this tournament. The only positive from this ugly match was the fact that Ken Aston came up with the idea of red and yellow cards. Aston's refereeing on that day would make Graham Poll look like the best referee in the world. In the other match West Germany beat Switzerland 2-1 with goals from Seeler and Albert Brulls.

The last round of matches featured a 3-0 victory by Italy over Switzerland. The win was in vain as West Germany had defeated Chile 2-0 a day earlier to effectively decide the fate of the group. Italian goalkeeper Renzo Buffon who had not played against Chile yet is till date the only goalkeeper not to concede a goal in the World Cup playing more than one match. He was the cousin of the grandfather of Gigi Buffon, the current Italy and Juventus goalkeeping legend. West Germany topped the group followed by Chile.

Group 3

Brazil played Mexico in a repeat of their first group match in 1954. The result was the same as the last edition; however, the Mexicans finally had some sort of defensive strategy in place. They held the champions to a 0-0 till half-time. Pele then created a goal for Zagallo, winning a ball and providing a cross for a diving header. The second goal was Pele's own where he nutmegged a player on the right touchline, went past three more and shot left-footed in the bottom corner after getting into the penalty area. The 2-0 score was a triumph of sorts for the Mexicans as they had conceded five goals last time. The Brazilian coach Aymore Moreira was brother of Zeze Moreira, the coach of the team in 1954. They are the only siblings to have been coaches in the finals of the World Cup. The second match was between Spain and Czechoslovakia. Santamaria and Puskas were both much older and slower and were negated by the physical presence of the Czech half backs. Eventually Jozef Stribranyi scored for the East Europeans to give them a 1-0 victory.

In the second round of matches, Brazil played Czechoslovakia and Spain played Mexico. The first match was a 0-0 draw. Pele had a groin injury before the start of the tournament. He had hidden the true extent of his injury from his manager and team doctor.



Pele after his injury against Czechoslovakia in the group stage match



Jan Popluhar(L), the unstoppable Garrincha(C) and Jan Lala (R)

This injury got aggravated while attempting a shot. He spent the rest of the match helplessly standing and hobbling on the wing. Later, Pele would recall the actions of the Czech defenders Jan Popluhar and Jan Lala who refused to tackle him disobeying their coach.

He recalled the sporting spirit of the two individuals with the following words - "One of those things I shall always remember with emotion and one of the finest things that happened in my entire football career." Pele's tournament was over. In the second match Antonio Carbajal, the Mexican goalkeeper gave one of his finest performances but failed to hold on to a Francisco Gento shot, which allowed Joaquin Piero to score for Spain. The goal came in

the 89th minute and Carbajal was on his knees disconsolately weeping at the final whistle.

The last round of matches featured Brazil against Spain and Czechoslovakia being pitted against Mexico. The first match decided the fate of the group with Brazil winning 2-1 with two goals from Amarildo. Puskas had a great match creating the opening goal for Adelardo Rodriguez but it had to be the last appearance in the World Cup of an absolute legend. The last match was inconsequential as both Brazil and Czechoslovakia had qualified. The Czechs played a second string side. The match was won 3-1 by Mexico, their first win in the tournament at the 14th attempt. This match also featured the fastest goal ever in the tournament scored after 15 seconds by Vaclav Masek of Czechoslovakia which was not recognized by FIFA for over 40 years. Brazil topped the group with Czechoslovakia in second place.

Group 4

The opening match of the group was Argentina against debutants Bulgaria. The only goal in the match was scored by Hector Facundo of Argentina in the fourth minute. Silvio Marzolini showed why he was considered one of the greatest left backs of all time. After the bright start the Argentines showed a very cynical side to their game by continuously fouling the best players of the opposition. Ivan Kolev was the most frequent target. Christo Iliev and Todor Diev were out injured for the rest of the tournament. Their coach Juan Carlos Lorenzo was notorious for instilling the 'win at any cost even dirty' mentality in his teams. He was later the manager of a Lazio team whose players brawled in the street with their opponents Arsenal. Also at Atletico Madrid who had three players sent-off in a European match against Celtic (Jose Mourinho must have studied his methods). The team had a lot of skill but the scars of the 6-1 loss to Czechoslovakia in 1958 probably made them play in the cynical style. In the second match England were given a lesson in tactics by Hungary. The Hungarians used creative ball-playing half backs like Erno Solymosi against a pedestrian opposition. The final score of 2-1 in favour of the Hungarians was flattering to England as they could have easily conceded four or five goals. The Hungarians looked a very good side with Florian Albert and Lajos Tichy in attack. England had to improve a lot and they had players who could do so.

The second round featured the very first England-Argentina match in the World Cup, a match-up which has become a bitter rivalry comparable with any derby or *clasico*. England won the match 3-1 with Bobby Charlton having a brilliant

outing at the outside-left position. Walter Winterbottom had instructed his team to physically slug it out with the Argentines who after the opening 10 minutes stopped their cynical style against a physically superior side. In the other match the Hungarians established themselves as one of the favourites with a 6-1 thumping of Bulgaria with an Albert hat-trick, a brace from Tichy and a goal from Solymosi.

The last round of matches featured Argentina against Hungary. Hungary, who had virtually qualified played a reserve forward line and packed their defence and played out a 0-0 draw. The Argentines had to rely on Bulgaria beating England to progress. The England-Bulgaria match was described by Bobby Moore as the worst international match he had ever played. The final score was 0-0 giving the Bulgarians their first points of the World Cup. Hungary topped the group followed by England who progressed at Argentina's expense. Argentina became the first team to be eliminated by a goal average.

The quarterfinal matches had been decided thus: The Soviet Union playing Chile, West Germany playing the same opponents of this stage for the third time in succession - Yugoslavia, Brazil facing England and an east European clash between Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Quarterfinals

The Soviets were favourites against Chile but were undone by the performance by their legendary goalkeeper Lev Yashin, which he later described as the worst of his career. Sanchez beat Yashin with a free kick towards his right. The Soviets had not formed a wall but it was an easy shot, which should have been saved. Chislenko equalised only to see Yashin surprised by a low shot from Rojas. The Chileans set up a 10-man defensive wall and backed by a vociferous crowd won 2-1. A genuine upset, which meant the team that had been billed as the main opponents of Brazil were eliminated. Yugoslavia was third time lucky against the West Germans winning 1-0 through a Petar Radakovic goal in the

85th minute. It was the end of the road for the West German manager Sepp Herberger who was managing the team since 1938. The West German football federation as an aftermath to this loss started the Bundesliga.

The Brazil-England match was the cue for Garrincha to come alive. Early in the match he dribbled past three opponents to be tackled by Haynes. Then he showed a previously unseen skill by scoring with a powerful header off a Zagallo corner getting in front of his marker. England equalised through Gerry Hitchens. In the second half, the England goalkeeper Ron Springett scooped up a Garrincha free kick to Vava who promptly headed it into the goal. England and its World Cup goalkeepers!



Ron Springett drops the ball for Vava to score as Bobby Moore looks on



Then Garrincha put the exclamation mark on his performance by receiving a pass from Amarildo outside the box and curling a right foot shot from outside the D to the top corner past a helpless Springett. A woolly black dog had invaded the pitch, it managed to side-step past Garrincha – something the English players could not manage throughout the match. The dog was eventually cornered and caught by Jimmy Greaves; if only he had managed the same success against Garrincha. It seemed the only way England could do well in this tournament was to make major tactical changes and of course host the tournament. In the last quarter-final, Hungary were favourites but a patchy pitch thwarted their slick passing game. Czechoslovakia had no such problems and slick passing between Josef Masopust and Albert Scherer led to a goal in the 13th minute from the latter. After that it was a string of brilliant saves from Viliam Schroj, the Czech goalkeeper. Tichy hit the bar for Hungarians who were yet again eliminated by a utilitarian side 1-0.

Semifinals

The first semi-final between Chile and Brazil attracted the biggest crowd of the tournament – 76,594 as per the official records. The Brazilians were too experienced to be affected by a partisan crowd. Rojas hit the post early on but Brazil was in control. Zagallo hit a long cross in the ninth minute, Vava missed his overhead kick and the loose ball was thumped into the top corner by Garrincha's left foot from 20 yards. Then Garrincha pushed in a powerful header out of a Zagallo corner. Zagallo was constantly joining up in attack making the Brazilian 4-4-2 formation into a virtual 4-3-3. Toro raised the hopes of the hosts by scoring off a 25-yard free kick. Vava headed in a corner in the start of the second half. Zózimo gave away a penalty by handling the ball in the Brazilian box. Sanchez converted to give the Chileans a glimmer. It was extinguished by Vava headed in a Garrincha cross to make the final score 4-2 in favour of the defending champions. Landa was sent off for a kick on Zito, then Garrincha kicked Rojas and was sent off. On his way back to the dressing room, Garrincha was hit on the head by a missile from the crowd. The Brazilian management and federation immediately started negotiations to allow their best player to appear in the final.

The other semifinal between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was in contrast seen by only 5,890 people. The Czechs were the better side in balance of play but their goalkeeper Schroj had to make a good save against Galic. The Czechs scored early in the second half after Josef Kadraba headed in off a rebound. The Yugoslavs hit the post twice in succession in the 56th minute. The equaliser came in the 68th minute through a Jerkovic back header, which was achieved by beating the goalkeeper to a cross. The Yugoslavian defence let them down when Scherer scored being completely unmarked in the 80th minute. The Czechs made the match safe converting a penalty after a foolish handball in the Yugoslavia box. The final score was 3-1.

In the third place match Chile beat Yugoslavia 1-0 after a low shot by Rojas was deflected past the keeper.

Final

The final was a repeat of a group stage match, which finished goalless. Although the Brazilians were down to virtually 10 men for most of that match owing to Pele's injury, Garrincha was allowed to play by FIFA. He was immediately in action crossing for Vava who hit the near post. After that Garrincha was surprisingly contained by the Czech captain Ladislav Novak who marshalled him brilliantly. The Czechs took the lead in the 14th minute when Masopust scored off a low

first time shot from a clever pass from Tomas Pospichal (0-1). The Brazilians were level after two minutes. Amarildo received a throw-in, shrugged off a defender then beat Svatopluk Pluskal, the centre back near the left hand goal line and hit the target at the near post (1-1). Schrojf had left a gaping hole expecting a cross. The Czechs had a valid penalty claim turned down when Djalma Santos handled the ball in his own box. The news archive videos show the handball clearly but Nikolai Latyshev, the Soviet referee decided otherwise. The Czech wingers had been playing well, as was Masopust but they lacked a true finisher. Rudolf Kucera, their best striker was back home in Prague injured before the tournament. The score remained 1-1 at half-time.



Mauro (L) , Nikolai Latyshev (C)-Referee and Ladislav Novak (R)

The match continued in a similar pattern for much of the second half with Brazil, with a lot of possession attacking and the Czech wingers using their pace to launch counter-attacks only to see the Brazilian defenders deal with their crosses easily. Then in the 69th minute, Amarildo stamped his authority on the game. He was sent a pass on the left by Zito, which flummoxed the opposition defenders. Amarildo dummied to cross, then cut the ball back to his right foot and dinked a delightful ball over the goalkeeper to an unmarked Zito who had continued his run. Zito headed in his first goal for the national team in five years (2-1).

Schrojf made a few good saves as Brazil continued to attack. In the 78th minute, Brazil won a throw-in near the opposition penalty area. Djalma Santos came up, held off an opponent by turning his back. Then he spun and hit a hopeful cross into the opposition penalty box. Schrojf came out to gather and completely overran the ball as it was

coming out of the sun, he caught it behind him but the ball slipped out. It fell to Vava who slotted it in grinning like a Cheshire cat, becoming the first player to score in two different finals of the World Cup

(3-1). It was the end of the road for the Czechs who were a good team but too pedestrian for the ageing Brazilian team with a lot of class. The final whistle went and Brazil emulated Italy by winning the tournament twice in succession, a feat yet to be equalled till date.

The Brazilian captain Ramos de Oliveira better known as Mauro, was presented the trophy by Jules Rimet.



Vava celebrating after scoring his goal



Mauro lifting the Jules Rimet Cup

The average goal per match was 2.78; first time in the history of the tournament it fell below three. It has never crossed three since. It was the dawn of modern-day defensive strategies which made scoring difficult. The tournament was successful with a celebration for the hosts. Brazil were at the top of the world and it was difficult to see who could beat them in four years.

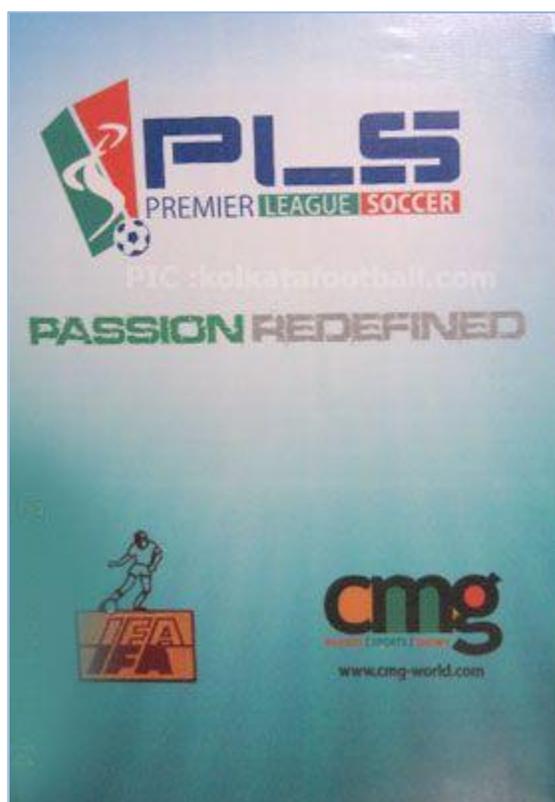


The Winning XI

A New Era

After a never seen before auction of Footballers, will the Premier League Soccer be a new chapter in the history of World Football? Debojyoti Chakraborty takes an in-depth look at the money churning Magnum Opus of Indian Football

There are debates over its inspiration and role model. Hugely popular Indian Premier League (IPL) is a close neighbour which revolutionised cricket few years back. Some are citing it as a direct rip-off from the Major League Soccer (MLS). No matter what, Premier League Soccer (PLS) has arrived in Indian football and how!



The Indian Football Association (IFA), the governing body of football in West Bengal - the state with a huge fan base for football - has struck a 30-year deal with Celebrity Management Group to launch the Premier League Soccer (PLS), due to begin on 24th March, 2012 with the final to be played on 6th May, 2012. The tournament started off with a bang through the auction of franchises on 30th January, this year at a luxury hotel in Kolkata; the city, which has been the spiritual capital of the game in India for decades. This kind of auction for footballers is unique not only in India, but also across the world. No wonder, it was covered widely in the European and Latin American media. Among others, agents of Robert Pires and Hernan Crespo were very enthusiastic about the whole thing: *“They (Pires and Crespo) are very excited about coming to India. They want to be a part of this new experience.”*

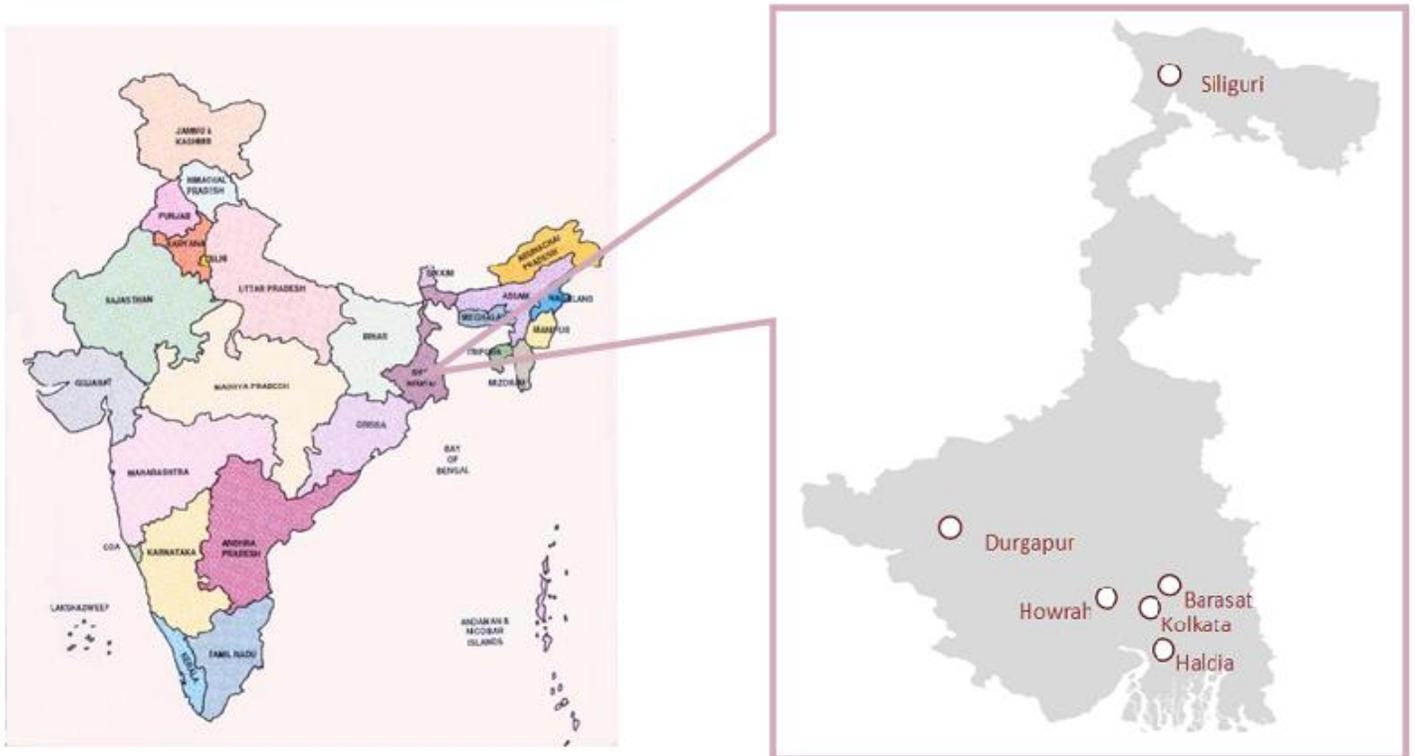
The base prices were set beforehand. Barasat, a northern suburb of Kolkata, sprung in a surprise as it attracted the highest bid of a little over \$ 5 million from the URO Infra Realty – a little known city-based infrastructure development company – after starting at a floor price of Rs. 8 million³. Kolkata, the pivot of football in India, was set a higher floor price of \$ 0.20 million but was sold for \$ 2.32 million only to the Kolkata-based conglomerate house Camellia group, which specializes in aviation, education and the health-care sector. Siliguri,

a hill station in the northern part of Bengal, also had its floor price at \$0.20 million. It was bought by Ajay Consultants, a consulting house offering services mainly to engineering projects, for \$3.63 million. One thing was prominent from this pattern – investors poured in funds heavily into infrastructure and the stadium facilities rather than traditional epicentres, which have failed to adapt themselves to the changing demands of the game. Barasat’s whopping price tag can be attributed to the stadium the city owns, easily the best one in this part of the country with international standard architecture, turf, drainage system, gallery and dressing rooms.

³ Rs = Indian Currency (INR); 1 USD = INR 49.61 as on Auction day - 30th January 2012

The other three franchises – Howrah, Durgapur and Haldia – were all put into the auction with a base price of \$0.16 million. While the first two were bought by Syncsys Infotech (a HR consultancy firm) and Tulip Infotech (a high-end technology service provider) for a massive \$1.81 million and \$1.53 million respectively, the Haldia franchise failed to attract any bidder. The sixth bidder did not have Haldia as one of his preferred three choices and when offered the franchise at the end of the auction, refused to own it. Later on, it was sold to the Kolkata-based Greymind Communications – a production house offering diverse television shows.

The teams have been bought for a decade and then will be offered a retention option. If the owners do not wish to renew the contract, the franchises will again be auctioned. The team owners will have to restrict their spending for the first season within the stiff bracket of \$2-2.5 million. This includes the cost of signing up an illustrious foreign coach, one *Icon* player (defined as an internationally renowned star player), one player of Asian origin, two players from overseas, six Indian players from the under 21 category, six *catchment area* (local) players and a pool (nine to fourteen) of Indian players. Already a chunk of this sum has been invested to buy the *Icon* players from the pool of six world class international footballers. The URO Infra Realty emerged triumphant here too, as they signed ex-Argentine striker Hernan Crespo for an unprecedented \$850k. Despite being 36 years old, his active playing status for Parma has surely helped him become the most expensive player in the auction. He was closely followed by the only World Cup winning international in the auction – that too, as Captain – the 39-year old Italian Fabio Cannavaro, who retired from competitive football last year. Cannavaro will be donning the Siliguri colours for \$840K. French international Robert Pires, who was at the heart of a dominant Arsenal team in the last decade, was snatched up by the Howrah franchise for \$810K. Following the pack are Jay Jay Okocha (joined Durgapur team for \$550K) and Liverpool’s own Robbie Fowler (to Kolkata for \$530K).



PLS Venues

The franchises seem to be heading in the right direction as they were going all out to get their preferred coaches. There has been a clear pattern – the franchises are going for a pair of *Icon* player and coach from the same nationality. Thus Durgapur lapped up Okocha as they had roped in the former Nigerian player and coach Samson Siasia at \$0.21 million. Kolkata too have the former Manchester City and Sunderland coach Peter Reid, at little less than \$0.20 million, to partner another Englishman Robbie Fowler. On the other hand, Barasat have signed Icelander Teitur Thordarson, whereas the Siliguri camp will be headed by possibly the greatest ever Bolivian ex-international Marco Etcheverry. Topping the chart, though, is Portuguese Fernando Couto who went to Howrah for \$0.24 million. It can be noted here that Pablo Sorin of Argentina and John Barnes of England – the latter attracted some interest from the Siliguri franchise but in vain – were reserved for Haldia and they got allocated to the franchise once the team found an owner.

Expert auctioneer Sairaj Madan was in charge of the auction and he was overwhelmed with the response: *“A few days back I was conducting an auction for cricket in Bangladesh but this is the first time ever for football.”*

Over and above the *Icon* player, each franchise will have one player of Asian origin and two foreign players who have represented their country at a senior level. They have already been auctioned as below:

Name	Country	Position	Franchise	Age	
Byung-Gyu Park	South Korea	Defender	Barasat	29	Asian Players
Bong-kyeom Kim	South Korea	Defender	Durgapur	27	
Yoon-Chul Byun	South Korea	Forward	Howrah	25	
Park Ji-Sung	South Korea	Midfielder	Kolkata	23	
Hwang Gyu-Hwan	South Korea	Midfielder	Siliguri	25	
Joaquin Botero	Bolivia	Forward	Barasat	34	Foreign Players
Christian Lara	Ecuador	Attacking Midfielder	Barasat	31	
Alonso Solis	Costa Rica	Attacking Midfielder / Forward	Durgapur	33	
Jose Carlos Castillo	Guatemala	Midfielder	Durgapur	19	
Gabriel Ríos	Bolivia	Forward	Howrah	24	
Diego Madrigal	Costa Rica	Forward	Howrah	22	
Robert Egbeto	Nigeria	Defender	Kolkata	22	
Daniel Varela	Costa Rica	Midfielder	Kolkata	21	
Limberg Gutierrez	Bolivia	Attacking Midfielder	Siliguri	34	
Santino Quaranta	USA	Forward	Siliguri	27	



It is evident that only South Korean, Latin American and players from the CONCACAF constitute this segment of players. One can really hope that after gaining more popularity and catching quite a few eyeballs, players across the globe will be taking part in this unique extravaganza. Some teams have picked up one foreign player to lead in attack, midfield and defence, whereas teams like Howrah are a bit lopsided having bolstered only their attacking front so far. It seems they have to rely on the Indian players to give the team a proper balance. Barasat, on the other hand, have gone for experience but it remains to be seen how their ageing stars can cope with the demands of regular 90 minutes of competitive football. Also, no goalkeepers were up for grabs and teams might regret this as the tournament reaches its finale.

Rest of the squad will be made up of Indians who would be auctioned later on. The league will be handicapped to a certain extent as top Indian players, who are a part of the ongoing Indian National League (I-League), are not allowed to participate in this event. That leaves us only with either relatively young greenhorns or some below average locals who could not even break into the top club sides or someone who is way beyond his peak. They were slated for auction on 12th February 2012 with a base price of \$4K to \$6K. Also top drawer players from European leagues cannot be approached as PLS is scheduled to kick start in late February – right in the middle of congested European fixtures. If PLS has to survive for coming years, the organizers have to address this issue and maybe shift the tournament to a suitable two-month window.

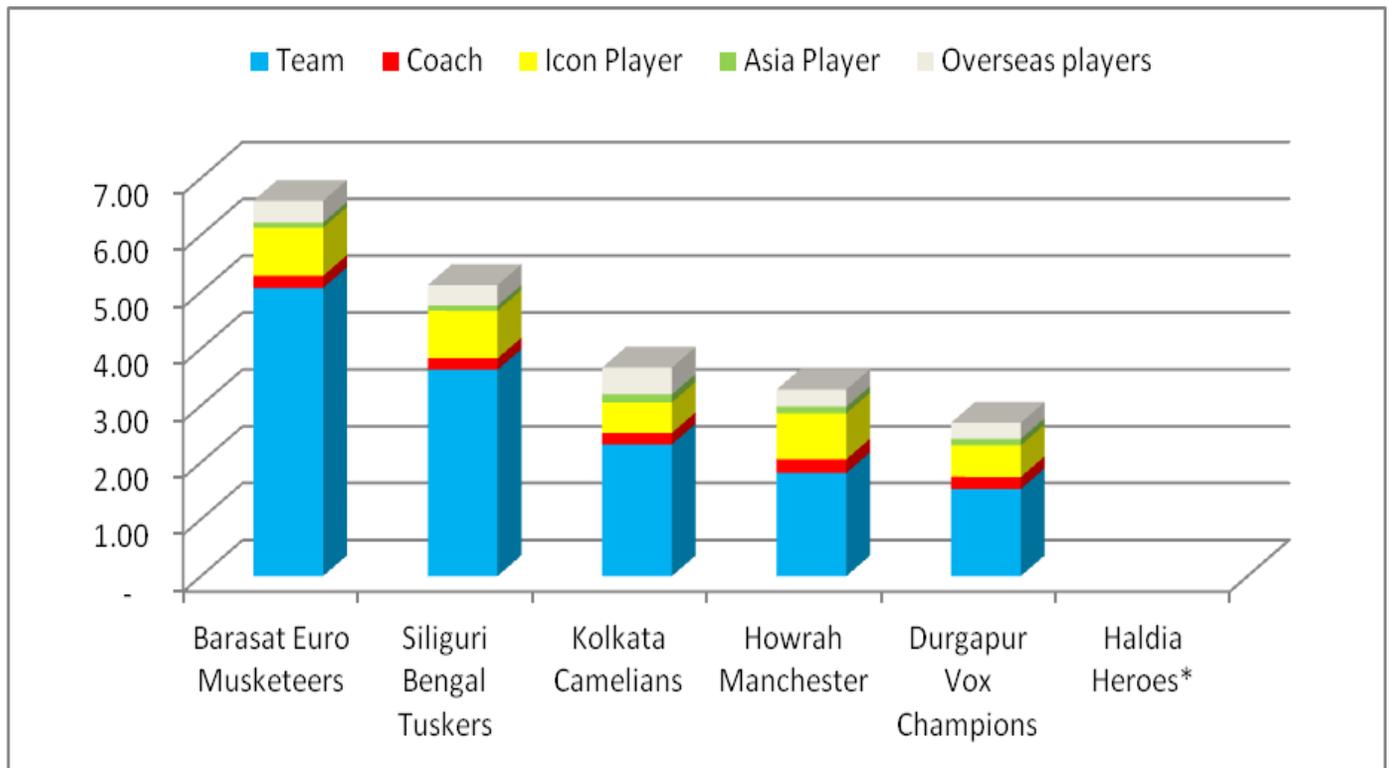
The auction itself has been a huge success. The franchises consulted a number of ex-footballers and event management groups to decide their strategy. Ex-Indian footballer and their most famous star till date, Baichung Bhutia has been involved with the big spending URO group and has been rumoured to even turn out for them. It is not limited to football only. But this won't be possible this time round as Bhutia has already played for United Sikkim in the second division of the I-League. The iconic and greatest ever sportsman from Kolkata, India's ex-cricket captain Sourav Ganguly has been roped in as the brand ambassador for the Kolkata franchise.

But the effort is not without its share of criticism. Will the fans turn up to see ageing, retired *l*icon players? Will the little known foreign players be able to catch the eye? Will there be a loyal fan base without any local marquee players? Will the league be able to generate enough eyeballs beyond West Bengal, where the event is due to be hosted? Will it stand any chance against the hugely popular Indian Premier League – a cricket extravaganza, India's favourite sporting event – which will be hosted simultaneously? Will the event be managed properly or will it fizzle out like the similarly hyped Premier Hockey League (PHL)?

Well, these questions will be answered shortly. But PLS is drawing controversies even before its launch. The governing body of football in India, All India Football Federation (AIFF), is at swords with the tournament and had recently asked FIFA to keep the foreign player transfers on hold. The argument put forward was that the franchises were not eligible to recruit any foreign player from the Transfer Matching System (TMS) – the mechanism used for PLS – as the teams are not registered. But IFA found a solution to this and have galvanized six local lower division clubs with the franchises and got them registered in due time. Hopefully there would not be any roadblock before the start of the campaign.

The country, in particular Kolkata, has given an astounding ovation to the greats of the game like Diego Maradona, Oliver Kahn on his farewell match, Lionel Messi with his Argentina team, Blackburn Rovers and Bayern Munich in the last couple of years; but this has to take the cake - PLS is said to be the future of Indian Football. The first cut has really been awe-inspiring. The first day advance booking is very encouraging. The international media rights have been booked by the Singapore based broadcaster MP & Silva, while broadcasters in South Asia are fighting it out. However, this conflict

may contribute to the range of \$6 million for Season One of PLS alone. Celebrity Management Group (CMG), IFA and the franchises are planning to start their promotional campaign soon. The total prize money for this tournament – featuring 35 matches in all with 5 of them being knockout ones – will be \$0.3 million with the champion team getting \$0.1 million. All it needs is a good show and PLS would surely score it big. And in the coming years, we could well see the event spreading all over the nation and becoming a landmark for football in India. Are you ready for the revolution?



Spending pattern for the Franchises (in million USD)⁴

⁴ Figures for Haldia franchise are not available

What's the Goalden Word?

*We football fanatics often come across terms and phrases that we start using without knowing its meaning. We hear them on television or read them in magazines wondering what the word is all about. **WTGW** will endeavour to focus on such terms and their usages helping us create our very own footballpedia. If you would like to know about any such word associated with the football world, do toss in a mail at editor@goaldentimes.org*

NADESHIKO: (na-de-shi-ko) (なでしこジャパン) : [Feminine-Noun-Plural]

The word *nadeshiko* in Japanese means the Dianthus superbis flowering plant also known as the large pink or frilled pink carnation. It is used in conjunction with Yamato, the ancient name for Japan for the floral metaphor Yamato Nadeshiko which is a term for an ideal Japanese woman. This term is presently used in Japan to describe the traits of traditional Japanese women of yesteryears that are rare in the current generation.



Pink or Frilled Pink Carnation

Women's World Cup. After upsetting hosts Germany & strong contenders Sweden in the quarterfinals and semi finals respectively, the Nadeshiko came up against the Americans in the finals. The Americans created more chances, hit the woodwork twice and twice took the lead. Both the times the Nadeshiko came back with an equalizer, with the 2nd equalizer in the 117th minute from captain Homare Sawa. The team believed that it was their destiny to win this tournament and goalkeeper Ayumi Kaihori saved two penalties in the shoot-out. Saki Kumagai converted her penalty to make Japan the first Asian team to win a senior football World Cup across genders. The Nadeshiko lived up to the various traits of their nickname - grit, tenacity, belief and undying spirit.



The triumph of the Nadeshiko



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