ISSUE FOUR RED

THE SQUALL

— BLIZZARD'S BREEZY BROTHER —

THE SQUALL

Matt Thacker

It's worth repeating here the reasons why we set up *The Squall* four months ago as a digital football magazine to give freelance writers a forum for their work. Not just so they can get paid to write, but so they have something to aim for, a sense of job satisfaction at a time when such satisfaction is in short supply.

The Blizzard has never been about the here and now, it's much more taken with the there and then. And although current events led to its emergence, we see *The Squall* as serving the same function, showcasing great football writing on subjects you are unlikely to read about anywhere else. We hope you enjoy this "Red" issue. As Jonathan mentions over there, despite the generous waiving of fees and donations to date, if *The Squall* is not to blow itself out, it will need further funding.

If you are happy to buy this issue, please do so by paying into our bank account with sort code 40-05-17 and account number 71515942, or you can pay via PayPal to paypal.me/thesquall. Any money paid into either of these accounts will be used for the sole purpose of producing future issues.

August 2020

We are very grateful to all of the people who have waived fees and donated to *The Squall* since we announced the project. Special thanks go to: Nick Ames, Philippe Auclair, John Brewin, Kieran Canning, James Corbett, John Cross, Martin da Cruz, Miguel Delaney, Andrew Downie, Peter Drury, Ken Early, Emmet Gates, Sasha Goryunov, John Harding, Simon Hart, Gary Hartley, Ian Hawkey, Frank Heinen, Tom Holland, Adam Hurrey, Elis James, Neil Jensen, Samindra Kunti, Jonathan Liew, Simon Mills, James Montague, David Owen, MM Owen, Simone Pierotti, Jack Pitt-Brooke, Gavin Ramjuan, Callum Rice-Coates, Philip Ross, Paul Simpson, Marcus Speller, Jon Spurling, Seb Stafford-Bloor, Ed Sugden, Jonathan Wilson, Suzy Wrack, and Shinobu Yamanaka. And huge thanks to Getty Images, for use of the photos.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Jonathan Wilson

As the 2019-20 season comes to its conclusion with the later stages of the Champions League in Lisbon, it becomes apparent just how long-term the impact of the virus may be.

The situation is fluid but at the time of writing, infection rates are beginning to rise across Europe. There are plans for fans to begin to return to Premier League grounds in October but there is no guarantee that will be possible. At least until a vaccine is found, and maybe after, there is no possibility of a return to life as it was before.

Meanwhile, the full economic impact of the crisis is beginning to be glimpsed. As losses mount for multi-nationals, sponsorship deals will inevitably shrink. Tottenham expect to make £200m less in this financial year than they would have done. Everybody is being squeezed. The *Guardian* has announced plans to reduce costs by 12%, with 20% of that to come in sport. Other papers and magazines will be forced into similar cuts.

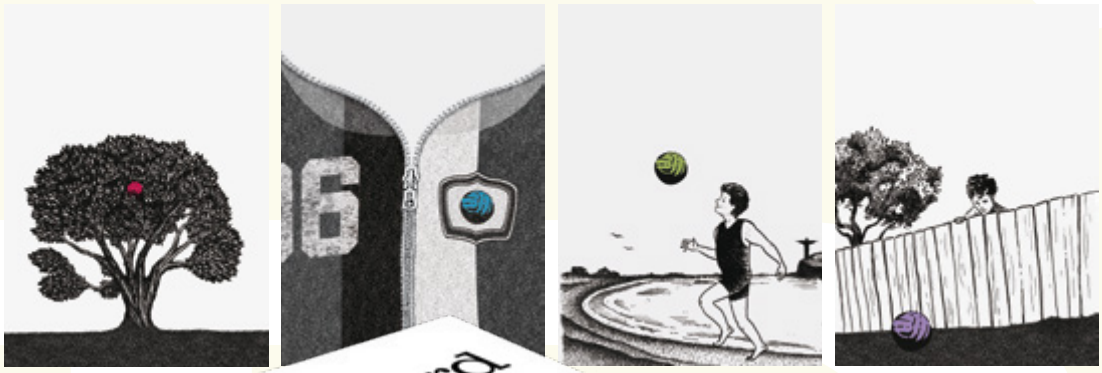
Even though matches are being played, few journalists are allowed in to games, several leagues have been cancelled and, with budgets limited, so too are opportunities. *The Squall* was established as a short-term measure to try to provide at least some work for at least some people and, perhaps more importantly, as a symbol that some opportunities do still exist, remains just as relevant now as it did when we launched. Which is to say that we will keep going for a little while longer – but we do need your support.

The magazine has been funded largely by writers for *The Blizzard* waiving their fees for last year, but also by kind donations from the public. In addition, all editorial and design staff are working for free. Such sacrifices to help the community of readers and writers suggests the initial spirit that fired *The Blizzard*'s launch a decade ago still burns.

But *The Squall* can't be a charity. It has to stand as a magazine in its own right. We needed the donations to launch, but now we need people to buy the product. Each issue will be available on a pay-what-you-want basis. We recommend £3, but if that's a stretch then pay what you can afford; conversely, if you can afford more, then every extra penny is welcome. And please do promote us however you can.

Hopefully we won't need to exist for too much longer. We're a temporary product to get us through the crisis and we urge you to support us on that basis.

August 2020



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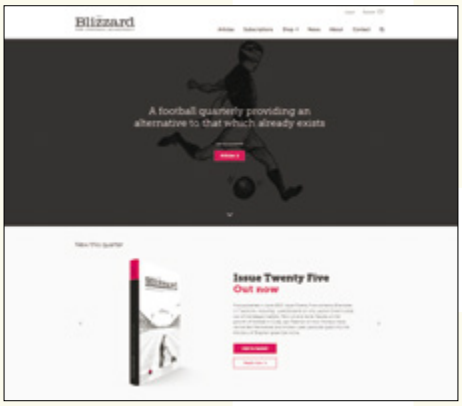

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THE SCIENCE OF THE RED MIST

WHAT HAPPENS PHYSIOLOGICALLY WHEN WE LOSE OUR RAG?

BY BEN WELCH

Zinedine Zidane walks off the Olympiastadion pitch after being sent off in the 2006 World Cup final


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FIFA

Marco Materazzi grabs Zinédine Zidane around the chest as another hopeful cross is repelled by Italy's rearguard. The France captain, drenched in sweat, turns back towards the defender and the pair exchange words.

"I prefer the whore that is your sister," says Inter's master of the dark arts. Zidane slams on the brakes, plants his right foot forward, dips his head like a bull preparing to charge and tries to put a hole through the Italian's chest with the full force of his shaven skull. There's a moment of confusion as ball-watching fans try to figure out what's happening. "You can't excuse that," exclaims the BBC commentator John Motson. Horacio Elizondo consults his assistants before showing Zidane the red card. One of the greatest footballers of all time trudges off the pitch, unwrapping the tape around his wrists as he walks past the World Cup trophy and into retirement. France went on to lose the 2006 World Cup final on penalties and the Player of the Tournament can't escape the blame.

This was meant to be the 34 year old's poetic goodbye, a beautiful climax to a magnificent career; instead it ended in a shroud of red mist. Rage consumed his brain and erased the iconic performances he delivered in the knockout stages.

Zidane knew what was a stake. As an elite player accustomed to devious opponents and malicious fans, he would have had similar insults thrown at him across a 17-year career. So, what was it about this moment that made him snap? Why did he sabotage his own glorious send-off? What came over him in the split second before he lashed out? The headbutt was on the biggest stage, prompting reams of analysis, but this kind of emotional detonation isn't exclusive to the elite where fans and pressure can incite acts of violence.

Players all the way down to grassroots level go berserk when subjected to enough stress. Then, once the waters have calmed, hindsight brings on feelings of regret and introspection knowing that their rush of blood cost the team.

So, why is it so difficult to suppress these murderous thoughts when the consequences outweigh the benefits? What bypasses the brain's handbrake and slams down on the accelerator in these moments of madness?

You don't have to spend too long consuming sports-related content to find an athlete, journalist or commentator using the phrase "red mist". It's the go-to term for describing a fit of rage. The dictionary defines it as a feeling of extreme anger that clouds one's judgment temporarily. Basically, turning into the Incredible Hulk, minus the green skin and tight purple shorts, before shrinking back into human form following a destructive rampage. Use of this phrase dates back to the 19th century and could stem from our ancestors, say researchers at the North Dakota State University. In a 2012 study, they found that angry people are more likely to see red in a series of images that were neither wholly red nor wholly blue.

To explain this connection, scientists point to hunter-gatherers linking the colour to danger, avoiding red-coloured plants and animals. They also reference facial flushing and how it can turn an aggrieved person's face red.

Had our ancestors caught sight of the former West Brom defender Paul Robinson charging towards them, they would have run back towards the sabre-toothed tiger prowling in the bush.

Robinson was sent off five times during a 22-year playing career. Bereft of pace, the 38-year-old full-back used aggression and mind games to level the playing field against tricky wingers. "I'd say I was like [Wayne] Rooney or [Roy] Keane – I needed to be pumped up to be at my maximum," he said.

"There's no mates during 90 minutes. I would try and intimidate the wingers I was up against with a tackle or a snidey one off the ball where I'd leave a little bit on them and just laugh at them or say things in their ear as they were walking past."

While Robinson admits to walking a disciplinary tightrope he insists he never set out to hurt anyone and believes he was singled out by referees who had a preconceived misconception of him. "I was in control of my passion, but referees would use me as a target because they knew what I was like as a player," he said.

"I knew they were going to book me after my first tackle rather than talk to me. I've been sent off for bad tackles that hurt players, but that was never intentional – it was just aggression and frustration. Sometimes I could feel my body temperature rising.

"I'd watch myself back and think, 'Why didn't you just walk away, you idiot?' I immediately felt frustrated with myself for letting the team and fans down."

Experience as a captain and now as Birmingham City's under-18s coach has helped Robinson to mellow as he tries to teach the next generation the importance of managing their emotions. Admitting he wanted to put a pacy tormentor into row Z sends out the wrong message, but most of us have had those thoughts at one time or another on the pitch.

However, Robinson is happy to cite one instance that pushed him over the edge and it wasn't triggered by an opponent. During the 2013-14 campaign, Birmingham hosted promotion-chasing Burnley at St. Andrew's in the Championship. The home side were 19th, with their toes dipped in the relegation quicksand. The score was 1-1 when the referee James Linington awarded Burnley a free-kick following a foul by Robinson. Kieran Trippier whipped a cross to the back post where Michael Duff rose to send a brilliant header into the net. Robinson claims Linington mocked him as they ran back to restart the game.

"He said something to the player [Duff] that suggested he was happy they scored because we deserved to concede," he recalls. "I was raging. It was a soft free-kick to give away, but I didn't like his chirpiness towards Burnley. I lost my head for about two or three minutes. He rubbed my nose in it and five or six of our players surrounded him. I ended up getting booked, but I was lucky I didn't get sent off.

"I just snapped, I thought, 'Oh my God I can't believe you just said that – we are fighting for our lives and you're doing things like this.'

"I lost all interest in the game, I just wanted to get into it with the referee. We were a big club near the bottom and we felt everything was against us.

"When you're in a niggly game like that where there's a lot at stake, the fans impact the tension of the game - they get you pumped up. Thankfully we came back and ended up drawing the game 3-3."

The clash with Linington was the tipping point, but Robinson's recollection reveals a number of forces that edged him that little bit closer to eruption. This is important when understanding what exactly happens when the 'red mist descends'. It's not a headhunt, like Roy Keane's attack on Alf-Inge Håland in 2001, or an overzealous tackle from a player urged on by the crowd.

It's an explosive switch from calm to crazy, fuelled by a set of antagonising circumstances. In Robinson's case, he references the pressure of a relegation battle, the persecution complex of a big club on a poor run of form, the niggly nature of the game and the frustration of conceding a free-kick that led to a goal. Birmingham's captain was in a state of hypervigilance, then Linington's alleged comment finally overwhelmed his brain and set off an emergency response.

This is what the psychologist Daniel Goleman termed an "amygdala hijack" in his book *Emotional Intelligence*. In this situation, the amygdala – the part of the brain responsible for emotion – pumps stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol into your system. This is when the brain decides to shut down the neural pathway to our prefrontal cortex so we lose our ability to think logically. Any learned behaviours that have helped us deal with stress previously hide in the depths of our internal hard drive.

Heart rate cranks up, sweat starts to seep through our pores, we're in prehistoric survival mode. "We assume all behaviour is conscious, but being overwhelmed and acting on it is not conscious. It's too fast. Players are in survival mode. They are unable to consider the consequences," explained Dr John Sullivan, a clinical sport psychologist who has worked with a number of Premier League clubs and the US military. "You're taking in sensory information – sight, sound, tactile stimulation, invasion of personal space – and the brain starts to build up to a breaking point.

"Once a line is crossed the individual has one of three reactions: fight, flight or shutdown. When players see the red mist they choose to fight. They lose all sense of perspective, zeroing in on the person or incident that sparked this perceived injustice."

Overriding an amygdala hijack and returning a player's fractured psyche from a mindless, destructive force, to a cool, calm, collected member of the team requires specialised training. For instance, Dr Sullivan challenges athletes to control their breathing like a sniper in environments that mimic conflict. "When we get our breath rate under six breaths per minute, the brain gets really calm and we're much more in the management state of being able to see, feel, do," said the author of *The Brain Always Wins*."Snipers and biathletes shoot between heartbeats, they know how to detect this feeling and act on it.

"When I work with younger athletes I get them to play video games with their siblings – they'll get frustrated, their siblings will rile them up and then they'll practise bringing their breath rate down. Now, transfer that into gameplay. Get to the point where it's subconscious."

The elite performance psychologist Tom Bates, who works with Team GB athletes and Premier League footballers, asks his clients to relive the moment and visualise a more constructive response. "We do pause and play sessions. We watch the incident right up to the moment before they lose their head and I'll pause the video and ask them, 'What was going through your head right there and then?'" he explained. "They usually say things like, 'Couldn't care less if we lost, I just want to kill them,' and I ask them to explain the consequences of this action.

"Once they admit it's negative, we go through internal self-talk before the next game – visualising moments of conflict and overcoming that situation. I get them in that frustrated state because neurologically they are forming the capacity to overcome it when it really happens.

"I've had a player write 'passion, energy, control' on his hand that he would read during breaks in play to keep him emotionally stable. You can also train the coach to look for signs that the player is starting to get heated and then they can give them a signal to play hard, but fair for the next five minutes. This resets their focus and gives them a window of opportunity to regain control."

The red mist is an outburst – a release of energy that usually results in action that has negative consequences. But anger should not be demonised. It's a perfectly normal human emotion that has evolved over millions of years into a protective mechanism hardwired in the nervous system.

Rather than suppress it, footballers should learn to channel it. "Anger is not a bad emotion, you just need to show people how to use it," said Sullivan. "It's a really important emotion for teaching us what we believe in, where our boundaries are and how we want to be treated.

"You wouldn't want angry surgeons, fighter pilots or snipers but we keep telling people this is the emotion we want in sport. Aggression is only effective if you know how to use it."

Tribal, combative, emotional – football by its very nature is an expression of war. Hostilities between rival clubs generate a sensory overload that works its combatants up into a frenzy.

Those who manage their emotions most effectively triumph. But even those who have won a World Cup and Ballon d'Or can be consumed by the red mist and when someone calls your sister a whore, a headbutt seems like the best course of action.

"The greats like Zidane are the greats because they don't allow antagonism to distract them," said Bates. "And at the highest level it's constant – fans, media, coaches, opposition – but players are human beings and everyone has a limit."

THE PREMIER LEAGUE IN RED CARDS

From Brian McAllister to Rafael da Silva, the sendings off that tell the story of the league

BY ALEX HESS

Rafael is sent off by Howard Webb against Chelsea


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FIFA

Brian McAllister, Tottenham v Wimbledon, May 1993

In the Premier League's inaugural season, the whiff of glamour was still very, very distant. The games were televised, and Gazza's tears had given the "slum sport" of the 80s a new voguishness, but the football itself left a bit to be desired. While the terraces were now largely free of bloodthirsty oafs inflicting head wounds on each other, the same could not said of the pitch.

No team better illustrated the Premier League's early years than Wimbledon, the small south London club who kept their head above water with a potent combination of grit, guts and route-one punts. The Premier League would eventually wave goodbye to Wimbledon as it morphed into a place of wealth and flair, but in its first season the Crazy Gang finished comfortably in mid-table, their bullish presence a sign of the sport's cheery unreconstructedness.

In more immediate need of reconstruction, however, was the forehead of Spurs midfielder Paul Allen after deciding to contest a 50/50 challenge with Wimbledon's Glaswegian defender Brian McAllister in an otherwise unremarkable 1-1 draw in May 1993. When an aimless clearance led to a game of head-tennis in midfield, McAllister leapt elbow-first towards a high ball, leaving his flattened opponent in need of six stitches. It was a brutal elbow, Thatcheresque in intent, and yet it sparked almost nothing in the way of drama. The referee issued the red immediately and McAllister left the field without complaint, closely followed by a dazed Allen, blood flowing from his brow. The other 20 players on the pitch took minimal interest in the incident, restarting play as soon as they could with no fuss or fallout. Such was the way in the Premier League's earliest incarnation.

Fabrizio Ravanelli, Middlesbrough v Sheffield Wednesday, January 1997

That no-frills Britishness would not last long. The Premier League had hints of internationalism from the start – Schmeichel, Cantona and Kanchelskis were all there when the curtains came up – but it took five years for the foreign influx to begin in earnest. The summer of 96 saw English football, hot off the back of hosting the Euros, welcome a sudden and glittering array of overseas talent to its shores. Bright young things like Patrick Berger and Karel Poborský arrived alongside established superstars like Gianluca Vialli. Players jetted in from Cagliari and Costa Rica.

Assimilation was not always seamless. Shortly after swapping Strasbourg for Chelsea, Frank Leboeuf pronounced, "In all my life I have never seen such horrible training conditions." West Ham's record signing, Florin Răducioiu, was accused by Harry Redknapp of shopping at Harvey Nichols when he should have been playing an FA Cup tie at Stockport.

Messy as it was, the Premier League melting pot had been fired up and few signings spoke to this new cosmopolitanism more than Middlesbrough's acquisition of Fabrizio Ravanelli, scorer in the Champions League final for Juventus only weeks before. His arrival on Teesside was a moment of thrilling grandeur, with all optimism confirmed by a dramatic hat-trick against Liverpool on the season's

opening day. His wife soon hotfooted it back to Rome with their son, citing the air pollution as unliveable, while Ravanelli remained in the village of Hutton Rudby, becoming a noted darts player in the Queen's Head pub.

But darts skills aside, Ravanelli was about as far from English as you could get. He was handsome, flaky and wildly talented. Most of all he was comically emotional, starting a fistfight with Neil Cox on the eve of the FA Cup final after his teammate left him out of a preferred XI in a newspaper interview.

The hot-blooded Italian's defining display came in January 1997 at Hillsborough. Having already won and converted a penalty in an eventual 4-2 victory, Ravanelli was flagged offside as he tapped home in the 70th minute and reacted by sprinting over to the linesman, hopping on the spot as he screamed in the assistant's face. Booking. Two minutes later, the same official's flag went up again and Ravanelli responded in much the same way, this time with added hand gestures. And that was the end of his day's work: one goal, two yellow cards, one sending off, three points and countless giddy spectators. English football could rest assured that its future was bright: the entertainers had arrived.

Nicky Butt, Arsenal v Manchester United, September 1998

The defining rivalry of the Premier League's formative years was already heating up before Alex Ferguson's side travelled to Highbury in what would become their treble season. Ian Wright and Peter Schmeichel had clashed violently in February the previous year and a wonderfully bitter war of words between Ferguson and Arsène Wenger had been simmering since – the Frenchman proving that he could walk the walk, too, as his side reeled in United en route to the double.

The Arsenal-United enmity would become a delicious spectacle, with the hatred and respect genuine on either side, and the highlights split evenly over the years between displays of great football and displays of great violence. Seven red cards were shown in matches from February 1997 to February 2005, including to Patrick Vieira for booting Ruud van Nistelrooy, Roy Keane for booting Marc Overmars, Frannie Jeffers for booting Phil Neville and even Wenger himself, for booting a pitch-side water bottle before his iconic Christ-the-Redeemer act at Old Trafford.

In that pantheon, then, Nicky Butt's sending off (his second in five days) in this 3-0 defeat was a rather low-key affair: a harsh decision by Graham Barber, albeit to punish a needless hack. But the red card set the tone for what was to come, hinting at the combination of brutality and pettiness that would come to define the Premier League's greatest rivalry.

Geremi, Chelsea v Leicester, August 2003

The single-minded genius of Ferguson and Wenger ensured that the title was a two-horse affair for nearly a decade. But no dynasty lasts forever, and in this case it was to be broken by the arrival of unprecedented wealth. In the summer of 2003, Roman Abramovich transformed English football, kickstarting a wave of takeovers by billionaire ego-trippers and asset-strippers; 17 years on, almost every club in the division has a new owner,

most of them billionaires and many of them based in another country entirely.

Although Abramovich signalled his intent from the start – no club had ever spent as much in a single window – the first iteration of Abramovich-era Chelsea was something of a mess, the summer's scattergun transfer policy having left a mish-mash squad of heavyweight cast-offs, exciting youngsters and expensive let-downs-in-waiting.

That sense of unplanned chaos would eventually spell the end of Chelsea's season, with a wretched capitulation at home to Monaco, and the end of Claudio Ranieri's employment. Little time was wasted between the Italian's departure and the hiring of José Mourinho, who brought focus, hunger and – most importantly – an absolute willingness to break every rule in the pursuit of victory. The mindset has endured; major silverware has since followed at a rate of just over one a year.

The Chelsea team that lined up for the first home game of the Abramovich era, featuring Adrian Mutu, Juan Verón and Mario Melchiot, was a far cry from the trophy-machine Mourinho would build. But Geremi's red card – for a take-no-prisoners tackle in the centre circle as his moneyed club swatted aside a lesser competitor – contained all the ingredients that would come to characterise the Premier League's nouveau riche.

Mark Viduka, Bolton v Leeds, May 2004
As Abramovich's Chelsea embarked on their rapid rise, they were passed on the downslope by a club that was in many ways their mirror image, one who spent lavishly to break into the elite … and hurtled off the edge of a cliff. Leeds had been flailing for some time when their relegation became a reality in spring 2004, but it was confirmed in fittingly slapstick style as they turned a 1-0 lead against Bolton into a clanging 4-1 defeat.

Their best player, Mark Viduka, slotted home a penalty to give his side the lead – and then collected two bookings before half-time, first kicking Emerson Thome, then flinging an arm in Bruno N'Gotty's face. Once the Australian was given his marching orders his side quickly self-immolated, conceding four goals in half an hour to condemn themselves to the gallows.

"Doing a Leeds" has since entered the lexicon as shorthand for reckless overspending, the club's fall from grace going down in lore as the ultimate example of Big Football's promethean potential, a moral fable about money's capacity to breed idiocy. Perhaps it's no surprise that this has become a story football likes to tell itself. In a sport in which all evidence suggests that you can buy your way to the top, Leeds' demise exists as a reassuring demonstration of the opposite: that money isn't everything, and that the decadent and irresponsible will get their comeuppance.

Either way, Viduka's 33 minutes on the pitch at the Reebok Stadium neatly encapsulated that pivotal half-decade in his club's history: a rapid early rise that took them tantalisingly close to the holy grail, followed by self-inflicted fall from which they never recovered.

Rafael da Silva, Chelsea v Manchester United, May 2013

Taking place as it does in front of a crowd of buoyant spectators who cheer and jeer the events before them, football has always contained a strong element of pantomime. But that component has grown dramatically in accordance with the Premier League's popularity. As English football has been beamed around the world by broadcasters willing to pay through the nose for the privilege, so the Premier League has become less a pure sporting event and more a made-for-TV soap opera replete with heroes, villains, long-running storylines and moments of combustible drama.

Bombast has been the order of the day, and the stars of the show have responded accordingly: the average Premier League player's skill set now includes theatrically feigned injuries, wildly embellished goal celebrations and a note-perfect expression of earnest innocence, best deployed after the most blatant instances of rule-breaking. This is showbiz, after all.

No red card captured the sport's newfound theatricality better than the one produced when David Luiz – the truest embodiment of this new unseriousness – lured Rafael da Silva into a rash lunge in a late-season trip to Old Trafford. Gently kicked, Luiz collapsed in the pantomime manner before lifting his head to deliver a covert and maniacal grin to nearby home fans, then quickly resumed his fallen-soldier act, glancing up once more to see his victim traipsing off the field.

"There may have been more outrageous cases of one professional conspiring in the dismissal of another from their workplace, but they were not so easy to recall," wrote the *Independent*'s James Lawton. "From now on it will be impossible to forget that Luiz can make the stomach crawl. This is football, a game increasingly bedevilled by full-blown fakery." His words were a reminder that the Premier League's Punch-and-Judy era has alienated as many as it has excited – and that it's not just the players who are guilty of absurd exaggeration.

GREEKS BEARING GIFTS

How Highlands Park rose with two Brazilians signed from Hellenic

BY LUKE ALFRED

The Brazilian former Highlands Park midfielder Jorge Santoro Hermann

On Easter Monday 1965, Johannesburg's Highlands Park (in red) hosted Cape Town's Hellenic (in blue). National Football League (NFL) football on a public holiday had a carnival feel to it. The upcountry café owners from which Hellenic traditionally drew their Highveld support shut up shop for the day, and fathers and sons clicked through the turnstiles before kick-off. The afternoon match took place in bright sunshine at the beginning of winter.

Hellenic were known to play fast and loose with their supporters' resolve, often promising more than they delivered, and on this Easter Monday they twisted their fans' hearts yet again, taking a late lead through Vasilis Mastrakoulis, for what promised to be a tasty away win. Shortly before the final whistle, though, Highlands equalised to make it 2-2, thus preserving their home record. The '65 league had only started the month before, but Highlands (so called because their home ground was in the suburb of Highlands North) were 1964 NFL champions, so they had a growing reputation to uphold.

For Hellenic it was an all-too familiar story: they had played enterprising football and taken the lead, although they couldn't hold it. They and their entourage flew back to the Cape in a strop.

Catching they eye for the 'Greek Gods' that day were two Brazilians, Jorge Santoro Hermann and Walter Da Silva. Mario Tuani, Hellenic's Chilean coach, had recruited four Brazilians during an off-season buying spree in South America, hoping they would bring the requisite killer instinct to a Hellenic side stranded perpetually on the cusp of better things.

The 1965 season was to prove no exception. Da Silva and Santoro – for ease of use, he dropped the Hermann – thrilled the home crowds at Hartleyvale through the year but by the end of winter Hellenic had nothing to show for it. They finished 11th out of 16 on 23 points, only two and three points above relegated Wanderers (21) and Brothers (20) respectively.

Hellenic's bosses wrung their hands; the fans muttered. That season the club had gambled on something better than Hellenic losing half of their league games. They were now financially over-extended and the Brazilians were put up for sale.

Despite flirting with relegation, Hellenic's Brazilians had shown enough during the season for South Africa's football community to be impressed. Here were two players clearly more imaginative than the doughty Englishmen, dour Scots and determined locals who scurried about in the league. Who, though, could afford Hellenic's hefty asking price? Perhaps Durban City, no strangers to ambition, would stump up the cash? Maybe Cape Town City, often the bane of Hellenic fans' lives in local derbies, would induce them to cross the floor? City finished second in the league behind Highlands that 1965 season, and losing the Brazilians to their more successful neighbours was just the kind of thing Hellenic's long-suffering fans had come to expect.

Rex Evans, the canny Highlands Park chairman, waited for the saga to unfold. It seemed as if the ambitious Norman Elliott down at Durban City wasn't tempted by the Brazilian bait and an offer from Hellenic's neighbours in the Cape

never materialised. Hellenic's asking price dropped through the off-season and eventually Evans pounced, grabbing the Brazilians for far less than had been originally asked. By the beginning of the 1966 NFL season the chain-smoking Santoro and his wing man, Da Silva, would be wearing the red of Highlands Park.

Highlands were captained that year by the redoubtable Malcolm Rufus, nominally a midfielder but capable of playing pretty much anywhere. Rufus was a Durbanite, having played at the amateur club Stella and Durban City before moving up from the coast to join Highlands in 1962. A lithographer by trade, Rufus was by then in the twilight of a long and illustrious career, and had seen pretty much everything South African football had to offer. Evans's recruitment of the two Brazilians was, he thought, just the thing, the finishing touch to a complete Highlands side that had been years in the making. "They added that flair," Rufus said. "Our soccer was pretty conventional at the time, very British. We played 5-3-2 and it could be predictable. Jorge and Walter just brought that skill."

Santoro had shown the Highlands players a thing or two that Easter Monday in 1965, as he and Da Silva brought the Balfour Park faithful and Greek café owners some South American sunshine. Legend has it that on one occasion, working back, a slide tackle had taken Santoro across the touchline where he ended up at the feet of Highlands seated reserves. Before he got up, they kicked him, snidely, slyly, before the referee could see. Although Highlands escaped with a draw, it was more difficult to wiggle away from humiliation, and the reserves knew they were witnessing just that. From that day on Santoro and Da Silva were players Evans had to have.

As Evans bade his time, the veteran soccer writer, Sy Lerman, covered the story for the *Rand Daily Mail* and the local Press Association, pointing out that Santoro had attracted attention from beyond South Africa's shores. Barcelona were interested, as were Juventus, but Santoro had enjoyed his time in Cape Town and had settled down. He found South Africa congenial. He was reminded of Rio, his home town, and, wherever he finally ended up in South Africa, he made up his mind to stay.

According to Ilan Hermann, Santoro's son, Jorge was an only child, the son of a Brazilian woman and an itinerant German musician who had once played in Rio's Philharmonic Orchestra. Brazil was not to Hermann senior's liking and it wasn't before long before Jorge's mother was raising the boy single-handed. He was sent to boarding school on the outskirts of Rio where he ran (and won) middle-distance races with ease, holding several records; he excelled at basketball. First played on the beach, football was his first love.

As a teenager he played for Botafogo reserves. A year or two later and he was knocking on the door of a first team place in what was probably the world's strongest domestic league. "Then he sustained a bad ankle injury," says his son. "It caused him to lose ground and, by the time he recovered, others and the immortal Gérson were keeping him out of the side. I'm not completely sure but that's when I think he decided to

come to Hellenic. He was impressed by Tuani, who could be very persuasive, and thought, 'What the hell?'"

The NFL was a cosmopolitan league in the 1960s, full of players from the British Isles (two of Highlands' stalwarts at the time were Charlie Gough, father of Scotland's Richard, and the terrier-like Joe Frickleton, whom Santoro used to torment at practice) as well as Greeks and Portuguese. The two Brazilians, however, took exoticism to the next level, representatives of the most famous football brand in the world. The papers were full of their exploits and Lerman fanned the fervour through the bellows of his daily writings. At one point, and with the move from Hellenic apparently in the balance, Lerman floated the possibility that Santoro and Da Silva might throw their lot in with other Brazilians making their way in numbers to play professionally in North America. It wasn't to be. Santoro was as good as his word: he and Da Silva duly caught a flight up to Jo'burg from Cape Town to join the 1964 and '65 league champions, then the most glamorous side in South Africa.

Glam they might have been but Highlands never neglected the basics. Under the martinet Jimmy Williams, a coach who had learned his trade as a British Army PT instructor, they were always a fit side, and Santoro, the athlete, never struggled to shuttle up and down the pitch. Now they had something extra – the very ingenuity and flair Tuani had hoped the Brazilians would bring to Hellenic. To Highlands, who were a better, more cohesive and more confident side than Hellenic had been in '65, they now brought best practice – combined with a certain off-the-cuff charm.

Once he was finally wearing Highlands red, Santoro, an inside-right, entered into a destructive partnership with Bobby Hume, a Scottish right-winger whom he regarded highly. The two of them tormented defences down the Highlands right, helping the club to 101 goals in 30 games while only conceding 26. Of their three consecutive league titles, the one in 1966 was by far the most freewheeling, the most romantic. The fans flocked through the turnstiles and the youngsters couldn't wait to get the Brazilians' signatures in their little books. "They thrilled the crowds and only lost twice," said Hermann, a Jo'burg rabbi. "One of those losses was when they already had the league title sewn up."

In later years Rufus was asked to compare Highlands with the dominant Durban City side of the early 1960s and found that Highlands were better-rounded. "I remember going along to their home matches at Balfour Park as a boy during the period," said Martin Cohen, himself a Highlands stalwart of the 1970s. "It wasn't a case of whether they were going to win, it was more a case of how much they were going to win by."

After winning both the league and the Castle Cup in '66, Highlands lost their league crown in 1967 to Port Elizabeth City, improbable champions. The Ford plant in Port Elizabeth was instrumental in recruiting a raft of journeymen from England and with one or two exceptional players they were forged into a formidable unit. Highlands were still banging them in but defensive re-alignment meant they leaked 48 goals in the season, too many.

As it was, they only surrendered the title to PE City by a point, but the stardust was falling no longer. Players retired and Santoro was badly injured in a freak hit-and-run accident while holidaying in Rio in December 1968. It wasn't until the 1970s – when the young Cohen was anchoring the Highlands midfield – that they would remind their fans of the easy joy of '66. Forgotten in Brazil, Santoro died in South Africa in 2011.

THE UNFULFILLED

An interview with Ruben de la Red, forced to retire far too soon

BY MICHAEL YOKHIN

Ruben de la Red lifts the European Championship trophy

"I feel lucky," Rubén de la Red told the *Squall*. It might be a bit strange to hear that almost a decade after the midfielder was forced to retire at the age of 25. Two years previously, in late 2008, the promising Real Madrid star fainted during a Copa del Rey fixture – and that turned out to be his last ever game. Heart problems didn't allow him to continue his meteoric rise, and football lost a very special talent.

De la Red is just 35 now, which means he could still have been playing. Sergio Ramos, David Silva, Borja Valero, Raúl Albiol and Roberto Soldado – all of them De la Red's teammates in the victorious Spain squad at the 2004 European Under-19 Championships – are still going strong. He could have become a legend at the Santiago Bernabéu. It wasn't to be, yet Rubén considers himself fortunate. "I achieved a lot in a very short time," he said.

It all started when De la Red joined the famous Real Madrid academy at the age of nine. "I fell in love with the club as a little kid," he remembers, but while one of his idols was Real's Argentinian maestro Fernando Redondo, the other – José Luis Caminero – was symbolic for the city rivals, having starred in Atlético's historic league and cup double in 1996.

"Redondo was supreme in defensive positioning, anticipation and ball distribution. Caminero excelled in timing his runs into the penalty area. His attacking contribution was remarkable," De la Red said. And that, in a nutshell, is the secret of his own success – he tried to combine the qualities of them both. Redondo was graceful, his game full of subtle touches and delicate passes. Caminero was forceful, energetic and robust, always looking to explore spaces in the opponents' rearguard. De la Red had all those qualities.

He was versatile in the extreme, able to perform as a classic defensive midfielder, a box-to-box runner and a playmaker. His path through the academy wasn't always smooth, but eventually his talent was recognised and by the 2004-05 season he was a key member of the Castilla (Real Madrid B) side who triumphantly returned to the second division after an eight-year absence. The last game in the play-offs took place in late June, with the first team already on vacation, and almost 60 thousand fans went to Santiago Bernabéu to support the reserve team. "It was an unforgettable experience, with all those supporters in the stands. Castilla was one of the best stages of my life," De la Red said.

The Real president Florentino Perez was in the stands as well. The man was responsible for the *"Zidanes y Pavones"* concept of building a squad of superstars and local academy graduates, and he admired the new generation that included Diego López, Álvaro Arbeloa and Javi García. "Our *cantera* is in good health," Perez announced that day, and for players like De la Red that was a very promising sign. "Francisco Pavón was the example we wanted to follow. He managed to become a starter alongside Fernando Hierro, and that was supposed to open the door to other Castilla players. I trained with the first squad for three years and improved to a good competitive level," De la Red said.

The midfielder remained optimistic but even under Fabio Capello, who trusted

him a little more than his predecessors, De la Red only enjoyed a handful of substitute appearances in the 2006-07 season – the last of those was in El Clásico against Barcelona, in which Leo Messi scored a hat-trick in a 3-3 draw. The fact that the Argentinian prodigy was two years younger than De la Red highlighted the problems faced by Castilla graduates.

"I was supposed to leave for Zaragoza in January 2007, but eventually stayed – and we won the championship. It was a tough year emotionally, but I learned a lot during it," said De la Red, who claims that Arsenal, Newcastle, Aston Villa, Valencia and Villarreal showed interest in signing him at the time. He chose to fight for his place at Madrid and extended his contract – only to be sold to Getafe against his wishes on the final day of the summer transfer window.

"I didn't think of leaving. I found myself signing a contract at Getafe at 11.30pm on August 31," De la Red remembers. There were some hard feelings, but the move turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Even though he missed all of pre-season, the midfielder immediately became a key player in Michael Laudrup's line-up. Given the number 10 shirt, De la Red was free to create wherever he wished, but also had a lot of defensive duties in a hard-working and ambitious young squad.

"Getafe are in a suburb of Madrid, so I didn't have to move to another place," he said. "I was still at home with my family, in my surroundings. There were a lot of young players who came with a lot of desire and were helped by the veterans. The feeling was sensational. We managed to fill the stadium every game and the club enjoyed its best season ever. We reached the Copa del Rey final and the Uefa Cup quarter-finals – and that was a just reward for our efforts."

His role was instrumental, and he was recognised as one of the best midfielders in La Liga. "Laudrup helped me a lot," De la Red said. "He is a brave coach who wants his team to have the ball all the time. He was bold enough to gamble on us and gave me a lot of advices."

One of his first big matches was the 2-1 win over Tottenham at White Hart Lane in October, and the team didn't look back. They easily eliminated AEK Athens and Benfica in the knockout stages before facing Bayern Munich in the last eight. De la Red was imperious in the 1-1 draw in the first leg in Germany, but had an unusual role to play in the return leg a week later. With the key centre-back Mario suspended, Laudrup asked him to perform in defence for a change.

"We were going step by step, but after winning against top clubs there was a feeling that we could achieve amazing history for the club if we beat Bayern," De la Red said. For himself, the match started disastrously, as he was controversially sent off for a foul on Miroslav Klose just six minutes into the game. "That was a debatable red card," De la Red said. "The referee thought that it was a professional foul, but I was not the last man." The ten men of Getafe nearly won it, but Franck Ribéry sent the game into extra-time with a very late equaliser. "Watching the drama from the stands was thrilling," said De la Red. Laudrup's team then incredibly took

a 3-1 lead, only for Luca Toni to score a late brace to make it 3-3 and take Bayern into the semi-final on away goals.

What would have happened if De la Red hadn't been sent off? "That was a great run for us," he said – and the year kept getting better. Just a few weeks later he was unexpectedly called up to the national team by Luis Aragonés, and went on to represent his nation at Euro 2008.

"The truth is that I didn't expect that at all," he said. "There were rumours that Luis was planning some surprises, and I turned out to be one of them. Even though I didn't play in the qualifiers, the coach chose the squad based on current form. When I found my name on the list, it took time to understand it fully. It was easy to find my feet in the squad, though. There were many teammates from Under-19 and Under-21 teams, and I felt at home."

Spain were considered eternal losers before the tournament and a glass ceiling had to be broken in order to win the trophy. Aragonés's team possessed the right mentality to do so. De la Red only played in the last fixture at the group stage, when Spain were already assured of their place in the quarter-finals, but he scored a magnificent goal. It turned out to be his only strike for the national team.

"After beating Italy in the quarter-finals, we felt that we are going to win it," he said. "To be a champion of Europe is something special. You are chosen and lucky, you write your name in history forever. I returned to Real Madrid as a champion."

It was a triumphant return indeed. Real fully understood the measure of their mistake and decided to exercise the buy-back clause from Getafe before the Euros. There, De la Red was again fortunate to work with a coach who had been a top central midfielder and Bernd Schuster fully appreciated his talents. The adventure started with a glorious long-range strike against Valencia in the Supercopa. He added another strike at Racing Santander, ran the show with two sublime assists in the demolition of Sporting Gijón and cemented his position in the starting line-up. The dream was about to be fulfilled, but that was when disaster struck.

Real Unión de Irún are a tiny club who rarely make headlines, and their Stadium Gal is arguably best known as the pitch where De la Red lost consciousness on 30 October 2008. He was rushed to hospital and while tests were inconclusive it was eventually decided that the midfielder should miss the rest of the season as a precaution. As it turned out, he never returned at all and tearfully announced his retirement in November 2010. With Sevilla's Antonio Puerta having died from a heart attack in 2007 and the Espanyol captain Dani Jarque suffering the same fate in 2009, it was only natural no risks should be taken.

"I had a syncope and it was strange, because I was never told anything special about my conditions," De la Red said. "There were two years of testing that led to no diagnosis. They couldn't say why that happened to me. I wanted to return and believed that would be possible, but the reality was different. The cases of Puerta and Jarque, and my story as well, highlighted the need to check footballers' health more seriously. Fortunately, I

am here to do this interview. I wish my colleagues could do the same."

The final diagnosis was only made in 2013. It turned out that a virus had affected his myocardium and left a scar that caused arrhythmia. The decision to retire proved to be correct and crucial. It was a desperately early and sad end to a highly promising career and Real Madrid fans were left to ponder what might have been had De la Red been fit to partner Xabi Alonso after the Basque star joined the club from Liverpool in 2009.

And yet, De la Red feels lucky. "I won the European Championships with the Under-19 team and the senior team," he said. "I played in the Champions League, in the Europa League and in the Copa del Rey final. I won the Supercopa. I shared the field with superstars like Raúl and Zinedine Zidane. I scored goals for Real Madrid. I lived in a dream."

BELFORT DUARTE

The rise and fall of a Brazilian icon of fair play

BY FELIPE ALMEIDA

A portrait of former Brazilian defender João Evangelista Belfort Duarte

João Evangelista Belfort Duarte was killed on 27 November 1918, his 35th birthday. He was shot in the back, following an argument with a neighbour over land issues. His daughter, Maria, said that at that moment he was wearing a red jersey, the red jersey of America, his beloved club.

Yet the man who died by violence became a symbol of sportsmanship, fair play and discipline for generations to come in Brazilian football to the point that an award named after him would be given to players who played for ten years and at least 200 matches without being sent off.

Belfort was born in 1883, in São Luís, capital of the state of Maranhão in the north east of Brazil; its flag is red and blue. His father was the first governor of the state and worked in the Brazilian embassy in London. Belfort was able to pursue higher education in a country in which social and economic inequality was even more pronounced than it is today. He moved to São Paulo, where he graduated in engineering from Mackenzie College. There, he was one of the founders of Mackenzie, the first football team in Brazil made up of only Brazilians - forget the English pioneers for a moment. The colour of the jersey? Red.

But Belfort's true love was for Rio de Janeiro. He moved there in 1907 to work for a Canadian company, the Rio de Janeiro Tramway, Light and Power, who provided electricity to the then-capital of an incipient republic – proclaimed eight years earlier. He befriended José Paranhos, Baron of Rio Branco, a hugely influential politician in Brazil whose high-society parties would be literally illuminated by Belfort's work.

An accomplished defender, Belfort wanted to play for Fluminense, the most successful team in Rio. But, convinced by his friend Gabriel de Carvalho, he ended up at America, a small club based in Tijuca, a neighbourhood in the north of Rio, far from the beauty of the famous beaches in the south of the city where most of the main sides were based.

At America, Belfort found something of a blank canvas to put in motion everything he imagined. He was soon appointed the team captain – at that time, an even more important task than nowadays, so much so that the captain was elected along with the board. His influence was evident from his arrival: he was far from only a player.

First, Belfort brought some of his friends from Mackenzie to play for America. He is also credited as the first to salute the supporters when going onto the pitch before kick-off. He started to campaign for the club to accept black players at a time when football in Rio de Janeiro was largely racist and elitist. That would only effectively change with Vasco da Gama in 1923. But there was another aspect of Mackenzie that he would bring to Rio: America played in a black and white jersey. With Belfort, that would change quickly. He made a suggestion that was promptly accepted: on 12 April 1908 America decided that from that moment on the team would play in red.

America's headquarters, for a while, was the house were Belfort lived, in the bohemian neighbourhood of Vila Isabel. From there, after bouncing around several buildings, the club moved to Campos Salles street, Tijuca, still its headquarters today. At that time Campos Salles also

became the pitch where America played. That was a hugely influential move. Before that the team had trouble securing a place to play. In 1908, Belfort even proposed to the authorities a project to build a "general stadium" in the north of the city, where all the clubs could play. The idea would only come to fruition 42 years later, with the construction of the Maracanã.

At the beginning of the 1910s Belfort would expand his influence from America to Rio de Janeiro football as a whole. At the club, he was player, captain, treasurer and director. He would even travel to other states to spread the America gospel and try to found new clubs. It is unclear how effective he was, but fact is that there were 19 clubs named America in Brazil – six of them founded in the 1910s.

Broadly, it was Belfort, with help of his wife, Aida, who translated the rules of football into Portuguese for the first time. He was a referee in the Rio State Championship and used to apply new rules established in England that were still unknown in Brazil – to the confusion of his rivals.

But who would argue with Belfort? He developed such a reputation that legend has it that when he committed a foul, he himself would raise his arm to flag up his infraction. In another version of the story, he owned up to a penalty he had conceded but the referee had missed. Not even his teammates would argue. Belfort was a gentleman but he was also a man who prized discipline. He demanded the same behaviour from his colleagues. He would be nicknamed 'Madame' for his authoritarian ethics.

Not even Gabriel de Carvalho, his closest friend and the man who had convinced Belfort to come to America, would be spared. "In a friendly, Belfort sent Gabriel off, because his friend, on a whim, tried a series of unnecessary dribbles," wrote Orlando Cunha and Fernando Valle in their book *Campos Salles 118* on the history of America.

Mario Filho, the famous journalist after whom the Maracanã would officially be named, wrote that, "He was always the first to begin training. He would only pardon Marcos de Mendonça, because he knew that the goalkeeper used to practise at home. Belfort also would lead by example, leaving everything on the field."

In 1913, America were playing in red and thriving. With Belfort as a cornerstone in defence and players like the goalkeeper Marcos Carneiro de Mendonça – who started for Brazil in their first international – and the Chilean striker Fernando Ojeda, the team won its first Rio state championship. But that campaign wasn't only a history of triumph on the pitch. It would also show how influential Belfort was at America – and how that began to be a problem for the club.

In the final game of the season, America faced São Cristóvão and needed only a draw to be crowned champions, but they were hit by a political crisis. The club president Alberto Carneiro de Mendonça had resigned in August amid complaints about Belfort's influence. When Guilherme Medina was elected in November, his victory provoked several associates and players to leave the club. That left America without eight first-teamers for their game against São Cristóvão.

They lost 1-0, which meant the top three – America, Botafogo and Flamengo – all

had the same number of points. Two days later, though, it was discovered that São Cristóvão had fielded a player who wasn't registered with the league. The authorities decided to scrap that match and schedule another one. To encourage the players to return, Belfort resigned. "It is being said that America will not play with a full squad because I'm still director. I declare that, when I walk on the pitch, I will no longer be a director if the full team plays the match today. That is my decision, based on my love for America."

Seven of the former players returned and America beat São Cristóvão 1-0 to lift the first of its seven Rio State titles. Belfort would no longer be a director, but stayed at the club. In April 1915, he suffered an injury in a friendly and could play only four matches that year. Unable to recover fully, he brought an end to his footballing career. But soon he became the coach of the team and guided America to a second title, in 1916.

Slowly, though, Belfort began to lose influence at America. Sensing the change, he began to distance himself from the club. But he never cut his ties completely: Belfort developed a habit of writing letters to the new captain with instructions for the players and eventually would attend some training sessions to check on the team.

In 1918, Belfort caught Spanish flu. He retreated to a house in the countryside to begin treatment. It was at that time that he was murdered. His lineage, though, remained at America. In 1972, his daughter Maria was appointed head of the women's department at the club. With her came Lucilia, Belfort's granddaughter. Today, Lucilia at 85 years old is a member of the board of directors.

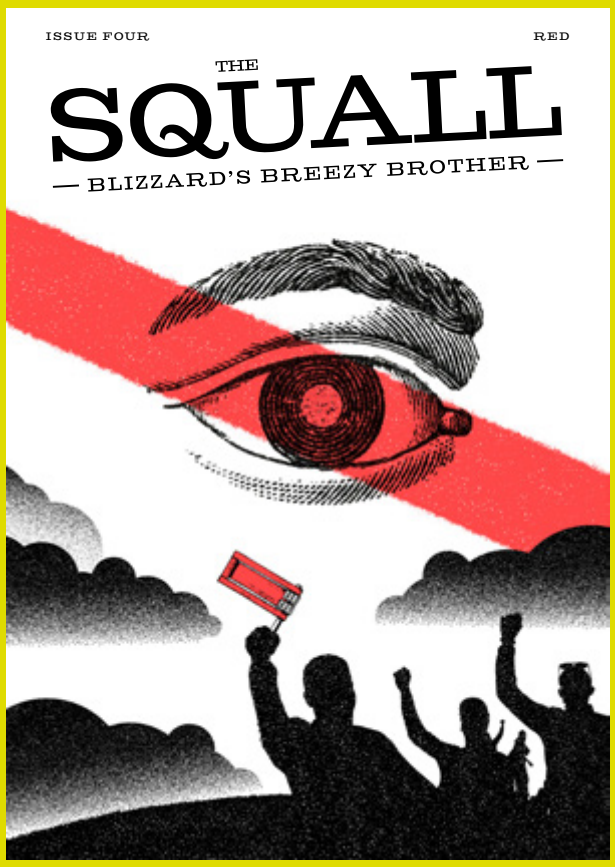
"America has been my life for as long as I can remember," she said. "When the president invited me onto the board, I asked him if he was sane. He told me that I was exactly who he wanted: me, with my history, my name and my discipline. Discipline runs in the veins of the family."

Maria and Lucilia lived in very different times for America. The club was still a challenger in Rio de Janeiro football until the 1980s, but its last State Championship came in 1960. In the Brazilian league of 1985, America reached the semi-finals. From there the path has been downhill.

Today, the club scrambles to remain in the elite of the Rio State Championship. Its fanbase has aged as America have failed to make new generations fall in love with it. The old stadium in Campos Salles was demolished in the 1960s. America now in Mesquita, a city on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, 33km away.

Belfort entered the gallery of early heroes of Brazilian football. In 1932, Coritiba, in Paraná, southern Brazil, inaugurated its stadium with a match against America and named it after Belfort. In 1945, the National Sports Council created the Belfort Duarte Award, to reward players known for fair play. The award was prestigious and players such as Evaristo de Macedo, Didi, Telê Santana and Vavá all won it.

In 1982, the award was discontinued. Rede Globo tried to resurrect it in the 2000s, but it didn't last long. After all, it seemed that there were no more players like Belfort. Players who could spent ten years playing without seeing red? It's rare. Players who would give everything for the red jersey of America? Rarer still.



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Thank you in advance for helping out.

THEY ONLY NEED SEVEN MEN

How Northampton failed to beat Hereford, even with a four-man advantage

BY TOM REED

Former Hereford player/manager Greg Downs during his days at Coventry City


GRANADA
BINGO

We're going down
We're going down
We're going down
To the kamikaze dive
(Bauhaus, 1980)

Nonconformist Northampton, dissenting to the Church of England and non-compliant to a winning style of football, even when four men to the good.

The Castle Hill congregation there dates back to 1692 and its nonconformist chapel, still standing on Doddridge Street, was rebuilt in 1695 after the great fire of Northampton, stubbornness another trait of the landlocked market town. The freemen shoemakers in the 19th century liked their Mondays off and re-elected their atheist Liberal MP Charles Bradlaugh every time he was censured for trying to affirm instead of taking the religious oath of allegiance.

Bradlaugh's statue stands with its finger pointing out over Abington Square as a sign of Northampton doggedness, even at the residents' own cost. Alan Moore will tell you all about it, the author of comics and a thousand-page book called *Jerusalem* which features Northampton at the centre of the earth. Moore is supposedly a hermit but he'll chat happily in the local BP station food court about local history. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Who watches the sausage rolls?

Northampton throws up genius, volcanically, here and there, such as Bauhaus, the influential goth-punk band, led by the superbly cheek-boned Peter Murphy, its discography like some retort to the Town's football team. *In the Flat Field* was Bauhaus's first album while the football club ploughed a furrow on the torn-up pitch that was used by the cricket club as a car park in summer.

Bauhaus were done by 1983 via an offshoot collaboration with Moore called the *Sinister Ducks* in which David J from the group read out extracts from the morning paper. The football team were pretty much done too by the 80s, nobbled by a rampant George Best in 1970 and the brunt of jokes from the town's new London overspill population.

By 1992 the Cobblers were on the bones of their arse and run into the ground by a man called Michael McRitchie. Deborah Marshall, who wrote the fanzine *What a Load of Cobblers* was roped in to do the club programme as well and found out about the background financial implosion when the printers said they weren't being paid. The week before she'd been paid in 50p pieces from the gate receipts.

Marshall got in touch with the late Brian Lomax, decried as "the Rugby man" by McRitchie – a reference not to the sport but the fact he hailed from a couple of stops up the train line. Lomax had worked for the Mayday Trust which helped people experiencing homelessness and suggested that Northampton fans should set up their own trust. It aimed to make fans partners in running the club to try to stop it going out of business.

At a home game against York City, Lomax was escorted out of the ground while doing a bucket collection. In the eyes of the fans, that was McRitchie done. Lomax went on to set up Supporters' Direct and a worldwide fan ownership movement

while McRitchie was shown the door. The newly formed Northampton Town Supporters' Trust appointed two reps to the club board in 1992, the year the Premier League began.

Administration got rid of McRitchie but also meant that nine players and the manager Theo Foley had to be dispensed with to lighten the wage bill. Foley, a Dubliner, had been assistant to George Graham when Arsenal won the league in 1988-89 as well as being the captain of Dave Bowen's Northampton side that spent the club's one and only season in the top flight in 1965-66. Sentiment would have kept him; financial reality could not.

Northampton went to Barnet after Foley's dismissal with an extremely inexperienced team and lost 3-0. But, at the final whistle the away team and the travelling fans at Underhill embraced, knowing that the result was largely irrelevant.

"I want to straighten out my finances" read an advertising hoarding for Prudential, outside the entrance for the Hotel End as beered-up stragglers left the County Tavern in 1992 not knowing what sort of team would take to the field from one game to the next.

The opening home game of the season at Northampton was always delayed until the cricket season had come to an end. In 1992-93, that match was against Hereford and was played on Sunday September 6. The day before, Northamptonshire County Cricket Club had won the NatWest Trophy, leading fans of the football team to serenade the empty adjacent cricket stands with chants of "There's only one Alan Fordham" in tribute to the batsman who had scored 91 at Lord's.

Little did the 2,668 supporters that turned up realise but they were about to witness a very different kind of history.

Northampton Town and Hereford United taking to the County Ground pitch at the County Ground to the refrain of "Simply The Best" by Tina Turner felt like a piss-take – although not as much as McRitchie and the Aldershot owner Trevor Gladwell to "Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life" a year earlier, shortly before Aldershot were liquidated. Hereford and Northampton were featherweight opponents. In those days the bulls were sponsored by the chicken processors Sun Valley, and this game soon turned into a cockfight.

Unusually, both managers were player-coaches with Northampton's Phil Chard a Division Four winner under Graham Carr in 1987. Hereford's Greg Downs, previously a Coventry regular under John Sillett, set the tone with an X-rated tackle on the gangly Kevin Wilkin in front of the children in the Family Enclosure. Downs was shown the yellow card by the referee, the Sheffield local government officer Brian Coddington; it wouldn't be their only tête-à-tête that afternoon.

There'd been some rain the night before and both sides struggled to get to grips with a hard pitch that had a loose surface. David Titterton, another ex-Coventry man, was next for a yellow, joining his boss Downs in the book. This time it was a two-footed scythe on the teenager Mark Parsons.

Andy Theodosiou, the former Spurs trainee then went one better with a combination of Downs' and Titterton's hacks with a two-footed lunge from behind. Theodosiou looked on in faux surprise pointing at an unknown issue in the distance as Coddington flipped another yellow.

Wilkin, Northampton's number 11 had clearly done something to rile Hereford, as Richard Jones took him out with a classic tread down the back of the heel. Terry Angus, the Northampton defender who went on to a career with Fulham, waved his arms in protest as Coddington, perfecting the unamused school master stance, began to worry his pencil lead with another name in the book.

A red card had become inevitable and it went to Theodosiou for nailing Chard off the ball, in the box. Downs responded to Coddington with choice words from two feet away leading to another red card. Northampton was not a happy hunting ground for Downs, who had been part of the Coventry side that had lost to the Cobblers in the FA Cup in 1990. Sillett had then gone on to Hereford before being replaced by Downs after just a season.

Hereford were down to nine and facing a penalty. Stuart Beavon converted. The video commentator described Beavon's goal as leaving "Hereford with a mountain to climb" but the nine men claimed an equaliser two minutes later with the ease of a Panzer negotiating a speed bump. A pair of Hereford thumps released an indignant Max Nicholson who surged forward to cross for Simon Brain to prod past Barry Richardson. Brain celebrated in front of the Northampton fans with double V signs while the away contingent chanted, "We only need nine men".

It turned out that they needed fewer than that. Titterton collected another yellow and so another red for time-wasting after kicking the ball away with five minutes to go. On the match video a Hereford fan can be seen trying to untie his St George's flag with the game in its final stages but stopping to remonstrate with the ref.

In the dying moments, Hereford's Richard Jones found space for a balletic flying ankle tap on poor Wilkin. Coddington flashed the yellow/red combination with aplomb as Jones stomped to the dugout.

It would be an untruth to say that Northampton pummelled Hereford for those few remaining minutes after a Football League record of four sendings off for their opponents. Instead, the drab game ground to a halt with Downs interviewed by Northamptonshire Police in the aftermath for allegedly inciting the crowd. Chard, meanwhile, limped heavily away from the ground refusing to speak to the press.

The *Telegraph*'s Glenn Moore was there to write a feature on Brian Lomax and was stunned at what unfolded. He had to wait to speak to Downs outside after Northampton police had spoken to the player-manager. "It wasn't a dirty game," Downs pleaded unconvincingly. "If I said what I wanted to they'd lock me up and throw away the key."

Moore retreated to a phone box to ring through his story while the Hereford fans chanted "we only need seven men" jamming too many syllables in to a

chant that could have been written for them. Northampton fans filtered out from the crammed home end and back into the County Tavern, letting out the familiar Northampton sigh, the club from the difficult town making life difficult for themselves. At least they had the supporters' trust.

Brian Coddington meanwhile, went on to achieve infamy at Manchester City in 1999 when Joe Royle accused him of showing Kevin Horlock a second yellow for "aggressive walking".

NO QUARTER GIVEN

The politics that led to Spain forfeiting a European Championship tie against the USSR

BY IAN HAWKEY

Gary Powers in Washington after he was traded by the USSR

In the late spring of 1960, a pair of spies from the West plotted reconnaissance trips to the Soviet Union. One of them, a pilot, secretive and anxious, planned to skirt over the radar, take some aerial photos and sneak out unnoticed.

The other, a high-flyer in his profession with theatrical tendencies, slipped into one of his several identities and selected what he felt was the most suitable passport for his mission. That was a handy thing about Helenio Herrera, born in Morocco, raised in Argentina, citizen of France and the son of Spaniards: nobody was ever quite sure exactly where he came from.

Herrera's trip to Moscow, via Brussels, travelling on a French passport, went well in that he gathered useful information about the menace of the USSR. He watched their national team wallop Poland 7-1, compiling detailed notes. He left Moscow confident that, with his intel, he could sufficiently prepare the squad he managed, Spain, to counter the USSR's strengths and command their forthcoming quarter-final in the inaugural European Nations Cup. Spain, or 'Club España', as Herrera had started to call them to cultivate a sense of fraternity, were quite the equals of the USSR, he believed.

The pilot, meanwhile, had a disastrous mission. The United States airman Gary Powers had taken off in his U-2 from Peshawar in Pakistan and, after some 2,000-odd miles heading north, his plane was shot down near Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg, as it is now). Powers wrestled with his ejector mechanism and freed himself from the plunging aircraft just in time to parachute to safety and into immediate custody. His Soviet captors knew Powers was spying, had all the proof they needed once they examined the wreckage of the U-2 and listened to the various fibs offered from Washington about what Powers was up to – he had been researching 'weather patterns', the US government spluttered, and strayed mistakenly into USSR airspace – with a weary derision. The CIA operation that had sent Powers on his mission was sloppy in several respects, not least in calculating that if the luckless pilot flew his U-2 above a certain altitude, Soviet radar would miss it.

The capture of Powers, red-handed, would become a defining episode in the Cold War, and among the many knock-on effects of the airman's capture would be collateral damage to Uefa's new project.

Up until May 1960, the Nations Cup, the first edition of what we now call the Euros, imagined it would not only galvanise international football as their European Champions Cup had redefined the club game, but that it could symbolise, even aid, political rapprochement, make its own small dent in the Iron Curtain.

Spain versus the USSR was always going to test that. In 1960, it looked just about as charged a fixture as any on the political map of Europe. The tournament's structure – two-legged home and away ties until the semi-finals, when the show would move to France, and matches in Marseille and Paris – meant there was a strong possibility of long-haul trips from the reactionary far West to the red East, from one ideological extreme to another.

Spain was Franco's Spain, fascism behind the thinnest of veils; the USSR was under an expansionist communist regime. The enmity wore no disguise: a Spaniard in that period would read in their passport the words, "This document is valid for all the countries of the world except Russia and its satellite countries."

But there are always back channels. Diplomats had made preparations for relatively frictionless travel for the players for the games in Moscow, where the first leg was scheduled for May 29, and in Madrid in early June.

Within Franco's cabinet there were some doves among the hawks, men who appreciated the power of sport to soften the image of a shunned nation. Among them was Fernando María Castiella, who served as foreign secretary, supported Real Madrid and described that club's glorious command of the European Champions Cup as "the best embassy we ever had". Perhaps never better than in May 1960, when Madrid took their brilliance to Glasgow and beat Eintracht Frankfurt 7-3 in the so-called Match of the Century to win their fifth European Cup on the trot.

Herrera, head coach of Spain, watched the USSR score seven against Poland in Moscow while Madrid were still celebrating that European Cup triumph. He already knew all he needed to know about Real and how he intended to harness their swagger in service of his Club España. He had it in mind to use half a dozen of the 1960 European Cup-winning squad in the national cause. The man-marking excellence of Pachín would be an asset in defence, as would the savvy of Marquitos. Herrera wanted Paco Gento's pace and was ready to use the winger, who operated wide on the left for Madrid, on either flank for Spain. He looked forward to having Luis del Sol at the apex of his midfield.

Above all, he had Alfredo Di Stéfano, totem of Madrid, and, as of 1955, a Spanish citizen; as of 1957, a Spain international. Di Stéfano had played for his native Argentina in the 1940s but that was in a distant past. At 33, he could see the 1960 European Nations Cup with his adopted country as perhaps his best and last opportunity to win an international trophy to go with all his club achievements. Herrera believed Di Stéfano, notoriously grouchy, had been won round by the Club España dynamic. On his scouting mission to Moscow he was left in no doubt that the USSR feared Di Stéfano more than anybody. "I was walking through Red Square, and people kept asking me, 'Is Di Stéfano coming?'" Herrera recalled in his memoir.

Yes, Di Stéfano was due to come. So was the 1960 Ballon D'Or-elect, Luis Suárez, principal representative of the large Barcelona contingent in Spain's squad. Herrera knew them intimately because he had combined the Spain job with coaching Barcelona, who won the Spanish league and the Fairs Cup in 1959-60. No wonder 'HH' was optimistic – "We will win the Nations Cup," he declared. He would be picking his Spain from the champions of the two main European club competitions, Real Madrid and Barcelona, plus assorted talents from Atlético Madrid, Athletic of Bilbao and Sevilla. Provided Suárez or Di Stéfano or Gento could find a way past

Lev Yashin, the USSR goalkeeper, HH felt Spain could go on to Paris in July with every confidence.

Unfortunately, in Paris, the Cold War was icing up. The downing of Powers and his U-2 blew a chill draft through a superpower summit in the French capital that May which, it had been hoped, would thaw relations between the USA and the USSR. Instead, the respective leaders Dwight Eisenhower and Nikita Khrushchev engaged in a series of very public spats over the fallout from the Powers affair. The summit effectively collapsed.

What had this to do with a European Nations Cup quarter-final? A great deal, according to records of the meetings Franco and his advisers held in the days that followed. Eisenhower had become a significant economic ally of a Spain with few friends and in the aftermath of the table-thumping and threats at the Paris summit Franco reminded his cabinet of that fact. This was not a good time to be shaking hands in public with Soviets, be they mere athletes or not. Nor – perish the thought – was it a time to have a flag with a hammer and sickle fluttering over a stadium in central Madrid.

A deep-seated fear of local rebellion also seems to have hardened the Franco government's suspicion of what a Spain-USSR match might carry in its wake. According to diaries kept by Franco's cousin, Francisco Franco Salgado-Araújo, a trusted general close to the discussions about the viability of Spain-USSR matches, there was concern that the arrival of the Soviet team could stir up every red in Iberia. Salgado-Araújo wrote that "a campaign on underground red radio about the massive welcome that would be given to the team from Moscow at the Bernabéu stadium to show the public's rejection of Franco" caused particular jitters.

Nine days before the first leg in Moscow was scheduled, Spanish newspapers and radio stations were sent an abrupt order not to report anything about the imminent Nations Cup quarter-final. Even Herrera, a man not easily silenced, was effectively censored. His Spain players had begun to gather in Madrid, as requested by the Spanish Federation, and, with scant explanation, told to wait. "It was total confusion," remembered Vicente Train, the goalkeeper.

The outside world learned before many Spaniards did that the matches were off, that Franco would not under any circumstances host a team from the USSR. In London, the *Times* fumed that Spain "had defied Olympic principles" and brought "the Cold War into sport". Uefa scrabbled about for a solution, suggesting a one-off match on neutral territory might save the day, to which the USSR responded with justifiable indignation. They were not the spoilsports.

What the USSR would soon be was European champions, the winners of the first ever final of the Euros, 2-1 victors in extra-time against Yugoslavia, in the Paris climax of a tournament that, from the seat of government in Madrid, would have looked alarmingly red. First place: USSR. Second place: Yugoslavia. Third, after a repechage against France: Czechoslovakia. Or, in the argot of Spain's Home Office, gold, silver and bronze to the Soviet Union and its satellites.

But what was peculiar is how quickly things moved on. Not so much Generalissimo Franco, who stayed in power until 1975, but his government's position on sporting contacts. That shifted considerably, turning a little less tin-eared to the possibilities of realpolitik. The world altered, too. By 1964, the Cuban missile crisis had given East-West relations its very sharp intake of breath. By 1964, the airman Gary Powers had left his Soviet incarceration and – in a moment retold vividly by Tom Hanks and Mark Rylance in the movie *Bridge of Spies* – returned to the US in a prisoner exchange deal. And in 1964 the second edition of Uefa's European Nations Cup was under way, having passed off with only one early-round refusenik (Greece took umbrage at having to play Albania).

And the final? Precisely the scenario that had caused such fright. Spain versus the USSR. The venue? The Bernabéu, where the Soviet Union flag was run up its mast, full hammer and sickle in central Madrid. The Soviet anthem was played. After some deliberation, Franco even chose to attend.

As he watched Spain, playing in blue shirts, win 2-1 thanks to a late Marcelino goal, he might have imagined that here was a national team with all the tools to go on and dominate international football. He would not have been alone for that. But it would be well into the next millennium before Spain reached a status comparable to its leading clubs. And in the 21st century it was truly a different Spain that produced its slick serial Euro winners and world champions and came to know them as '*La Roja*': reds to delight, not to dread.

THE DIRTY RED

An interview with Paolo Sollier, the Communist who spent a season in Serie A

BY JOHN IRVING

The former Italian forward Paolo Sollier

Paolo Sollier is remembered in Italy as the 'revolutionary footballer'. Despite only playing one full season in Serie A – for Perugia in 1975-76 – he has left an indelible mark on the national game. Not for his play ("Technically I was poor, tactically anarchical"), but for his politics. In the so-called 'years of lead', in which extremists from either end of the political spectrum engaged in the *lotta armata*, or armed struggle, and terrorism became an everyday part of Italian life, Sollier stood out from other footballers for his left-wing views.

He now lives in an apartment in the suburbs of Vercelli, in the rice-growing country between Turin and Milan. In his playing days, he sported a mane of black hair and a full beard, today he's bald with a salt-and-pepper goatee. He's also much leaner than he used to appear on the pitch and looks more like an ascetic than a revolutionary. One wall of his living room is occupied by a floor-to-ceiling collection of vinyls. His tastes are eclectic, ranging from folk music (I notice more than one anthology of Atlantic whaling shanties) to alternative Italian bands, such as Lo Stato Sociale. Their "*Io odio il capitalismo*" ("I Hate Capitalism") is one of his favourite songs. On another wall, beside a portrait of Che Guevara, photographs document excursions in the Alps, another passion.

It was in the mountains that Paolo Sollier was born, in 1948 in the village of Chiomonte in the Val di Susa, the valley that leads westwards from Turin to the French border. When his father, a wartime partisan, found work at the Turin municipal electricity corporation, the family moved to the city. "We joined the proletariat," is how Sollier puts it. As a teenager, he did volunteer work for radical Catholic groups but struggled to reconcile his religious beliefs with the suffering he witnessed. One night in the mountains, he looked up at the stars and said, "God, if you really do exist, give me a sign now, otherwise I won't believe in you any more." No sign arrived – "*naturalmente*" – and Sollier concluded that the world's inequalities are a political problem that can only be solved by political action.

In 1968 he dropped out of technical college and took on a blue-collar job at a Fiat engine factory. His time there coincided with the *autunno caldo*, or 'hot autumn', of 1969, a season of bitter industrial disputes.

He remembers taking part in a protest march in front of Mirafiori, the main Fiat plant in Turin, during which the police sprayed him and his fellow protesters with tear gas. "That was an important lesson because it taught me that the so-called defenders of legality were the first to violate it." At first he wasn't affiliated to any particular political group but eventually joined the extreme-left *Avanguardia operaia*, Workers' Vanguard, movement.

On Sundays, Sollier played football, which he regarded as part of his mission. "An event that involves millions of people, that sets whole cities against one another, that often acts as a drug, a pretext to forget and a safety valve – how can it not be political?"

As a teenager, he turned out for amateur teams in Turin and its environs, including the Cinzano vermouth company's works

side at Santa Vittorio d'Alba, where the Italy national team trained in 1982 in preparation for its victorious World Cup campaign in Spain. Sollier describes the pitch there as "the best I ever played on".

In 1969, when he signed for the semi-professional Serie D team Cossatese, he quit his job at Fiat but continued living with his *compagni*, comrades, in a commune in Turin. Then came a season in Serie C with Pro Vercelli, where he was spotted and snapped up by the Serie B side Perugia. His career had taken off and a year later, in 1974, it reached its pinnacle when the team, under the manager Ilario Castagner, was promoted to Serie A.

Today sportspersons take the knee, Paolo Sollier used to raise a clenched fist. He began making the gesture at Cossatese as a way of saluting fellow travellers in the crowd, but in Perugia, a traditionally communist stronghold, it assumed an overtly political significance.

I saw him make it in Turin when Perugia came to play Juventus on a wintry afternoon in February 1976. It was his way of reminding people of the need for a fairer society and the protection and extension of individual freedoms. "I will always be that clenched fist," he said.

At away matches in Serie A he was often greeted as "Dirty Red" or "Communist Bastard". But names never hurt him and the only stadium where he risked having his bones broken was the Olimpico in Rome. In an interview in the lead-up to Perugia's away match there against Lazio, a club with notoriously right-wing connections, he said, ill-advisedly, that, "On Sunday there'll be added pleasure in beating Mussolini's favourite team." The Lazio fans didn't take it kindly.

In a hostile atmosphere, Sollier's entrance was met by a barrage of whistles and when Castagner benched him in the second half, his exit was hailed by thousands of fascist salutes. The match, which Perugia lost, was followed by incidents inside and outside the ground. "My teammates told me to cut the political crap after that!"

Given his role as a well-paid footballer, Sollier was often accused of hypocrisy. "At Perugia I used to earn eight million lire a year. I wasn't rich but I felt privileged. I used the money to support the movement. It's not as if I was playing at being a revolutionary with a bank account in Lugano."

Only one of Perugia's 1976 line-up, Walter Sabatini, shared Sollier's political views. The two still keep in touch, though Sabatini has now passed to the other side of the barricade, overseeing multi-billion-euro transfer deals as director of football for the likes of Roma and Inter. "It's not my job to pass judgment on a job so remote from my own way of being," said Sollier.

He once gave Castagner a book of Cesare Pavese's verse for Christmas with the dedication, "There's more to life than football," but he still loves talking about the game and the opponents he most admired. Gianni Rivera he describes as "the best of them all: he knew what he was going to do with the ball even before he received it."

Then comes Gigi Riva: in one Perugia-Cagliari game, Sollier was marking the

great striker on the edge of his own box when a high cross came over. "I thought it was going out of play but Riva took off and connected, almost scoring with a bicycle kick." His eyes sparkled at the memory. "I wouldn't have reached that ball even with my head," he laughed.

The last in the list may come as a surprise: Mario Frustalupi, the former Inter and Lazio *regista*. "It was my first year in Serie B with Perugia and he was pulling the strings for Cesena. Castagner tasked me with marking him and told me to beat him to every ball. But Frustalupi was so skilful I never even saw the ball, never mind beat him to it!"

Sollier himself was a journeyman midfielder who ran a lot. He may have played with the number 9 shirt but it would be wrong to describe him as a *falso nueve*, a term that evokes a class he didn't possess.

At the end of his season in Serie A, Sollier wrote a book, *Calci e sputi e colpi di testa*, at once an account of his own experience and a critique of the world of professional football. The title is normally translated as *Kicks, Spits and Headers*, but it should be explained that it involves a play on words, since *colpi di testa* can also mean 'rash actions'. Reviewing the book, which sold 30,000 copies, the Neapolitan journalist Antonio Ghirelli described it as "the portrait of a generation" and praised Sollier's "pure, revolutionary vision of the world".

Ironically, Sollier fell victim to the system he was exposing, even before the book was published. "I remember staying up all night typing it out to meet the publisher's deadline. The next morning, I phoned Perugia and they told me I'd been sold to Rimini."

Back to Serie B.

"That's the way it was then. We footballers belonged to our clubs, who could dispose of us without even consulting us first."

When Helenio Herrera joined Rimini in 1979, he and Sollier – the millionaire '*Mago*', or wizard, and the '*Compagno*' – formed an unlikely partnership. HH, who was convalescing after a heart attack, was officially hired as a consultant but acted as de facto manager. Babbling in his own personal Franco-Italo-Spanish argot, he would psyche up his Serie B charges as if he was still at San Siro. Of Vorazzo, the centre-forward, he would ask, "What has Mazzola got that Vorazzo hasn't?"

Rumours still circulate about Herrera's use of drugs during his time at Inter. At Rimini, Sollier says he asked players to take a "miraculous potion" before games. "I only took it once. All it was, was an aspirin dissolved in an espresso!"

The pair got on so well ("We respected and admired each other") that when Sollier was planning a romantic weekend in Paris with his fiancée, Herrera offered him the use of his apartment there on the condition that he train every day. "In the end I didn't stay at his place but I did go to Paris, where I followed his instructions and persuaded some kids at the Luxembourg Gardens to let me join in their kickabouts. It's one of my fondest memories because that's exactly how I'd like football to be."

In Rimini, he helped found an alternative radio station, Radio Rosagiovanna, and attempted to set up a left-wing footballers' collective with Maurizio Montesi, then of Lazio. "I wrote to the AIC, the Italian Footballers' Association, asking them to take a political stand like other unions," but they replied that politics wasn't on their agenda.

Three seasons by the sea were eventually enough for Sollier who, unable resist the allure of his native land-locked Piedmont, played out his career at his old teams Pro Vercelli and Cossatese, with a spell at Biellese in between.

After hanging up his boots and a failed attempt to run a bookshop in Milan, he dabbled in coaching at local level but never rose above Serie C2. With hindsight, he believes he had enough knowledge of the game to be a good manager, but lacked the necessary passion.

One player who owes Sollier a debt of gratitude is the lanky Andrea Caracciolo, who played under him as a youngster with the Milanese amateurs Sancolombano. He was nominally a midfielder but, "the *mister* said that with my long shanks my natural position was centre-forward and that's where he picked me." Caracciolo was later nicknamed *l'Airone*, the Heron, and he went on to make two appearances as a central striker for Italy.

The coaching job Sollier most enjoyed was with the Osvaldo Soriano Football Club, the Italian writers' national team. "We used to play in the European Writers' League. We once had a match in Israel but I refused to travel. I'm a member of the Forum Palestina, which supports the Palestinian people, so it would have been out of place."

Sollier still cultivates his ideals of peace, justice and a better world, writing for left-wing journals and taking an active part in local politics. His latest battle is against TAV, the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway line under construction in the valley where he was born.

He regrets that the political debate degenerated into violence in the 1970s, but added that, "Those were the most fertile years in Italy's recent history and ours was the most fortunate generation. We were the first to live in a period of peace and relative wellbeing with freedom to travel, listen to music and hang out with our contemporaries."

He looks back at the causes he fought for – from abortion and divorce to feminism and workers' rights – with nostalgia. "Old age is a terrible thing," he said, "but I want to live mine in the spirit of the 70s."

BRING YOUR DINNER

John Sitton, the Rwandan genocide and the fabled Leyton Orient documentary

BY EWAN FLYNN

John Sitton (right) poses for a photo at Brisbane Road with Chris Turner.

Tuesday, 7 February 1995, half-time: Leyton Orient 0 Blackpool 1. Home Dressing Room.

"What did I say to you about good players wanting to be good players all the time? Do you not know how profound that is? Have you not examined the fucking words? Coz you've had two good performances, and you think I'm fucking Bertie Big Bollocks tonight and I'll play how I fucking like. But you won't play how you like… because if I'm going to take abuse from a bunch of cockroaches behind me, I'll take abuse by doing it my way. And that is fucking conformity, not fucking non-conformity. So you, you little cunt, when I tell you to do something and you, you big cunt, when I tell you to do something, do it. And if you come back at me, we'll have a right sort out in here. And you can pair up if you like… and you can bring your fucking dinner coz by the time I'm finished with you, you'll fucking need it. Do you fucking hear me or not?"

The Saint Crispin's Day speech from Henry V it is not, but the 34-year-old Orient co-manager John Sitton has just delivered what will become the gold standard of managerial meltdowns. Immediately before detonating this bomb, he'd sacked one of his starting XI. Terry Howard, a former teammate of Sitton's and a player soon eligible for a testimonial, received two weeks' notice before he'd even had the chance to change out of his sweaty kit.

The clip, from *Orient: Club For A Fiver*, broadcast on Channel 4 in October 1995, has been viewed on YouTube nearly 700,000 times. The film chronicles a catastrophic 1994-95 campaign in which Leyton Orient fell apart on the pitch and imploded off it.

The opening day of the season gave few clues of the horrors to come. A tanned Sitton, wearing gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses, sat on the sun-drenched Brisbane Road bench, alongside joint-manager Chris Turner as Orient dispatched highly-fancied Birmingham City 2-1. Birmingham would end the season promoted from League 2 (then the third tier of English football) as Champions; Orient would exit at the bottom, 24 points adrift, after just six wins and 32 losses. They went eight consecutive games without scoring, suffered the ignominy of going two years since their previous league away win and rounded off the season with nine straight defeats.

Almost unbelievably, the seeds of this footballing disaster were sown in an atrocity that unfolded 6,000 miles away in Rwanda.

Walthamstow boy Tony Wood watched his first Leyton Orient match in 1937. It was to be the start of a life-long passion. In 1968 Wood followed the path less travelled from East London to East Africa working for Rwandex Chillington. According to Wood, the firm traded in hosepipes, wheelbarrows and coffee.

Rwanda proved incredibly lucrative for Wood. Significantly, he once told the journalist Linda Melvern "if a handkerchief drops on the ground it's washed and laundered before you can turn around."

Wood lived in a sprawling compound in Kigali, where he hosted parties to celebrate the Queen's birthday and kept three grey parrots, trained to regale the visiting British ambassador Snodgrass with a chorus of "Snodgrass, Snodgrass, silly old arse". Tony Wood was awarded an OBE in 1985 in recognition of his work in Africa. Britain had no embassy in Rwanda, so Wood had also been appointed to the position of Honorary Consul, making him the Foreign Office's point man in the country. This would be highly significant for the bloodshed to come, which appeared to take Wood – and therefore, the British government of John Major – by surprise.

But Wood still followed Orient, travelling back to Brisbane Road a few times a season. By 1986 the club had slumped to the fourth tier for the first time in its history. Like many cash-starved clubs in the lower reaches of the English professional game, Orient faced an existential crisis. The manager Frank Clark, a former European Cup winner with Nottingham Forest, recalls having to operate on an annual budget of £20,000, with directors regularly making up the shortfall. Clark says the club was a week away from receivership, "when suddenly a guardian angel turned up. His name was Tony Wood." Wood gifted the chairman Neville Ovenden £10,000 to keep Orient afloat – but the club needed more, much more. In desperation, Ovenden begged Wood to buy a controlling stake and assume the role of Chairman. Wood agreed, on the condition that he could be an absentee owner. Frank Clark would oversee the day to day running of the club, while Wood picked up the bills.

Secured by this patronage, Orient's results improved. In January 1989, the Arsenal forward Kevin Campbell arrived on loan. Campbell's goals, combined with the sterling defending of the granite-jawed club captain John Sitton, lifted Orient to the play-offs. With a 2-1 aggregate victory over Wrexham in the final, the club was restored to Division 3.

There Orient remained in mid-table comfort for four seasons. Wood pitched in £200,000 a year. During the 1990-91 season, he appointed Clark as Orient's managing director, with Peter Eustace taking responsibility for the first team.

The Os appeared to be enjoying a rare period of stability. But it was to prove illusory.

Towards the end of a campaign that saw Orient finish 13th, Eustace fell out spectacularly with Sitton after a run of poor results. Ahead of their game against Huddersfield, Sitton, affording a glimpse of his own future management style, took to Leyton Orient's ClubCall – a premium rate phone service providing fans 'news' from their club – and let rip. Teammates were branded cowards, unfit to wear the shirt. In the days before performance departments and player analytics databases, ClubCall could provide useful insights for the opposition. The Huddersfield manager Eoin Hand had called the line to get the inside track on any Orient injuries. After hearing Sitton's broadside, he tipped off his counterpart Eustace that he should listen to the recording. Sitton was stripped of the captaincy and released by Orient soon thereafter.

More significantly, at the end of the inaugural Premier League campaign in 1993, relegated Nottingham Forest appointed Clark as Brian Clough's successor. Forest's gain was Orient and Tony Wood's loss. Wood was unwilling to dedicate more time to the club and in the power vacuum created by Clark's departure, Orient began to spiral.

Near the end of the 1993-94 season, Orient travelled to Cambridge in search of a first win in six. This run of form had sucked them into a relegation battle. According to Sitton, restored to Orient as the youth team coach, relations between Eustace and his players had reached breaking point. As Sitton recounts in his autobiography, at half-time of the Cambridge match an argument culminated with Eustace hitting the Orient defender Kevin Austin. Eustace quickly departed. Sitton and the veteran goalkeeper Chris Turner were asked to take charge of the five remaining fixtures.

From Rwanda, Tony Wood would telephone Orient's commercial director Frank Woolf during matches for score updates. Woolf recalls hearing gunfire down the line.

Three days before Sitton and Turner took charge of their first match, an aeroplane carrying the Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana was shot down as it approached Kigali. This was the trigger for the genocide of the Tutsi in which more than one million people were murdered. Tony Wood was forced to flee the country. As he explains in the documentary, "I lost three people who worked for me at my house out there for over 20 years... all killed." Contemporary reports of Wood's dramatic escape, with the help of French forces, focused on his work as a coffee trader and honorary consul. What they failed to pick up on was that Rwandex Chillington, the company through which Wood made a fortune enabling him to inject around £2million into Leyton Orient, also traded in machetes, the weapon of choice for the genocidal militia.

Back in League 2, Sitton/Turner secured one win and a draw. Orient avoided relegation by four points.

Jo Treharne, a Plymouth fan, was a regular attendee at Brisbane Road having completed a Media degree at the University of East London. Recognising the upcoming 1994-95 campaign would be a tumultuous one, the enterprising Treharne approached the club about making a documentary. A meeting was quickly arranged with Sitton and Turner. In the malaise around Brisbane Road, the duo had been asked to lead Orient into the new season. Sitton would remain on his existing youth-team coach contract and salary. After warning the 24-year-old Treharne that she might "hear some choice language", the pair gave their blessing.

As Treharne explained in an interview with the *Orientear* fanzine, hers was a one-woman operation, "It wasn't a film crew; it was just me."

Following the opening-day victory over Birmingham, Orient went on a run of just one win in 13. It became clear that Tony Wood could no longer prop up

the club, which was losing £10,000 a week and was reliant on the PFA paying the players' wages. A memorable scene from the documentary shows Sitton being informed that the local coach company Angel Motors will no longer transport the team to away matches without payment in advance. Even the milk bill went unpaid.

In this climate, Wood gave an interview to ClubCall explaining that things were so dire he'd sell Orient "for a fiver". Treharne had a name for her film.

A white knight briefly appeared on the scene in the shape of Phil Wallace, another boyhood fan-made-good as the managing director of an Essex food business. Before his proposed takeover, Wallace instructed Orient that costs must be slashed. Exactly how was unclear. The first-team squad consisted of just 16 players, some of whom were on week-to-week contracts.

Wallace's directive precipitated another of Sitton's 'inspirational' half-time team talks at 3-0 down to Brentford. "What this geezer wants [is any of] you who are on 35 grand a year – you've all got to go ... But who's gonna take you on that performance? He's thinking about offering you settlements and I'll hold my hands up – I'm beginning to think the geezer's right."

Wallace later thought better of buying Orient and pulled out of the deal. Then came the Blackpool fixture during which Sitton sacked Howard and uttered the immortal "bring your dinner" line. It would effectively make him a pariah in the professional game.

Before the end of the season, the snooker and boxing promoter Barry Hearn gave Tony Wood his fiver and became Leyton Orient's new chairman. With relegation confirmed, Sitton and Turner were out.

Orient: Club for a Fiver was broadcast at an inopportune time for Sitton. The day before its premiere, England produced a particularly turgid 0-0 draw against Norway. The national team's failure to qualify for the World Cup in the USA was still fresh in public memory and questions about what was wrong with the English game dominated football discourse. The very day after Channel 4 introduced Sitton to the nation, thumping his chest while screaming "fuck the tactical shit", the BBC aired a documentary called *Dreaming of Ajax*. Gary Lineker, in his new presenting career, explored what the 1995 Champions League winners, a team of youth academy products, were getting so right and England so wrong. Sitton seemed to personify all the ills of the English game.

In the *Observer*, Will Buckley commented, "There were eight year olds at Ajax who talked about the game more intelligently than John Sitton. There were eight year olds at Ajax more comfortable on the ball than players who have been awarded England caps." The *Daily Express*'s David Emery condemned Sitton as "a pitiable ogre".

It was to prove personally devastating. Sitton never got a second chance, even at youth team level; clubs feared that parents would remember the documentary and take their promising boys elsewhere. After a period of unemployment and battle with

depression, Sitton retrained as a taxi driver. Perhaps he'd been naive to allow cameras into the dressing room and more naive still to think his combustions would not become the documentary's headline attraction.

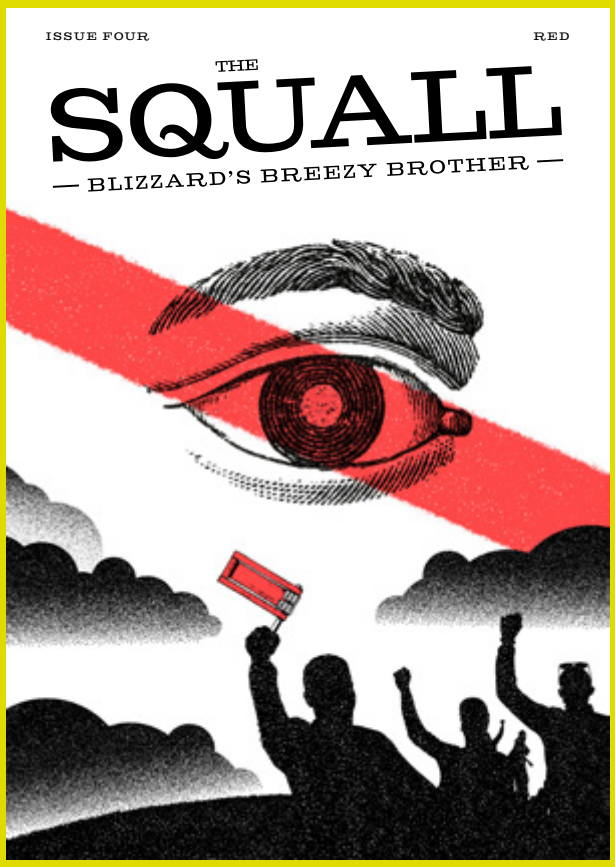
The Orient experience was scarring for Jo Treharne too, despite the critical acclaim and enduring popularity of *Orient: Club For A Fiver*. She is not keen to talk about the documentary and has not pursued a career in filmmaking. While rebuffing Sitton's accusations that the film was unbalanced, she acknowledges, "I badly overestimated the ability of some viewers to look past the swearing and shouting to examine the humanity and desperation of the situation."

Perhaps if the game's authorities had heeded the documentary's warnings about the hardships faced by clubs in the lower leagues, the gulf between the haves and have nots in English football would not have accelerated to the point of no return.

Where are they now? Terry Howard, sacked by Sitton at half-time, would quickly be signed by Wycombe. When he eventually retired from football, Howard took a job at Billingsgate fish market. The Blackpool manager that night, Sam Allardyce, would go on to manage England, albeit briefly.

Following the genocide, Tony Wood returned to live in Rwanda where he died in 2002.

During a near 20-year reign as chairman, Barry Hearn proved far more successful at promoting snooker and boxing than bringing success to a football club. He sold Leyton Orient to Francesco Becchetti in 2014. The Italian presided over relegation from the Football League, the first in the club's history, and saw Orient issued with a High Court winding-up order before a takeover headed up by a lifelong fan saved them.



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THE LAST POST

A trip to East Germany to see what turned out to be their last international

BY HUW RICHARDS

Matthias Sammer, who scored the winner for GDR against USSR, at the 1994 World Cup


16
16

You don't always see history coming. Some games – cup and play-off finals, first or last matches at a ground – are predestined for the annals, whether chapter or footnote. Others only gain significance in retrospect. Seeing the German Democratic Republic play the Soviet Union in what the match ticket proclaimed a *Fussball-Weltmeisterschafts-Qualifikationsspiel* at the Ernst Thälmann stadium in Karl-Marx-Stadt on 8 October 1989 certainly had a sense of the exotic. It was hipsterish, had we yet known the word. Two shades of political Redness clashing. But history?

I'd like to claim that visiting the country usually known as East Germany showed percipient awareness that a historic deluge would shortly render both nations obsolete. But in truth I should, but for a sudden, painful break-up, have been in France. Visiting somewhere characterised that year as "the Unloved Country" matched my state of mind.

Nor was the match part of the plan. It was tough in 1989 to get advance notice of fixtures anywhere outside Britain, least of all beyond the Iron Curtain. Two years later it took a call to a bemused but helpful German cultural attaché to find forthcoming Bundesliga fixtures.

I did hope to see football, but at Lokomotive Leipzig. I had made East German friends while reporting Leipzig Trade Fairs and Manfred, a university lecturer who interpreted for me, was a Lok fan. But as Manfred explained: "That's the weekend of state celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the GDR. There are no First Division games. But there is the World Cup qualifier against Russia. We could go to that."

Given the GDR's history, the game matched the anniversary. It was also a fitting end to a trip which said more about the GDR than those trade fair assignments which, while distinctive and memorable, were constrained by the priorities of the working journo. Would the Zeiss optics research director Wolfgang Nordwig, remembered from childhood as a pole-vaulter disappearing into the lights at RAF Cosford, grant an interview ? (He would not). Perhaps someone from the Machine Tool Association? (Ditto. Try the Electronics guy?)

Interviewing through translators is an intimate process, heavy on eye contact. Five years later in Budapest, interest in the opinions of Hungary's Minister for Higher Education gave way to intense curiosity about the plans for the evening – and possibly the rest of her life – of an interpreter with huge, liquid eyes. Nothing like that happened in Leipzig. It was an awkward reality that interpreters were also minders, probably required to report on you. But they were interesting, sophisticated people enjoying, as academic linguists, a connection with native speakers rarely otherwise permitted to GDR citizens. Enduring friendships formed.

East Germany was changing. Being able to buy Deutsche Reichsbahn's national rail timetable hinted that state paranoia might be retreating. DR passengers wanting to initiate conversations about politics was a spectacular break with the citizenry's previous, wholly justified, wariness of being observed chatting to

foreigners. Too bad my German extended little beyond "*Noch ein Bier, bitte*," but there were numerous English-speakers.

There was much to discuss. Monday night demonstrations in Leipzig were growing in numbers and confidence. From mid-August hordes of East Germans visiting Prague had, instead of returning home, besieged the West German consulate and asked for asylum. On October 4 several thousand were put on sealed trains to the West, crossing the GDR via Dresden. Stations en route were cleared and other traffic delayed, giving me an interminable wait at Riesa for a connection into Dresden.

Back in Riesa that evening, a casual twist of a radio dial suddenly located the BBC – not World Service or British Forces, but Radio Two – loud and clear. A growing sense of unreality was scarcely diminished by hearing Scarborough beat Chelsea in the League Cup.

Yet as it changed, the GDR remained constrained and controlled. A decision to cross the Berlin Wall East-West was soon regretted, exasperation setting in at form-filling, queues and searches: "Why am I doing this? I don't have to, and there'll be other chances. It'll be here for years." The sensory impact of that short trek justified the effort. Going from subdued Friedrichstraße to the ultra-garish Kurfürstendamm was like turning an old-style TV colour dial full circle, from dullest monochrome to eyeball-aching out-of-focus colour.

Expectations were still limited. My friends hoped for some lifting of travel restrictions. They wondered if the geriatric figurehead Erich Honecker might step down, but knew not to expect much, least of all imagination or initiative, from a sclerotic apparat conditioned to channel Moscow's wishes.

Hope seemed to come from Russia. Badges picturing the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had become, in an almost satirical turn, signifiers of dissent. Mikhail Gorbachev badges were common, and his name regularly chanted, at the Leipzig demos. But awareness of the large Soviet garrison in East Germany and memories of 1956, the last time new, liberalising leadership in Moscow had coincided with unrest in the GDR, were a hard check on optimism.

Local grumbles and Soviet occupiers were both evident when watching TSG Markkleeberg, a club based in a suburb of Leipzig, play Motor Suhl. There was history of a sort, TSG inaugurating their new stadium. This was not, in spite of promotion to Division Two, an expression of club ambition but down to typical GDR priorities. The old ground was now a lignite mine.

About 30 blokes with brutal haircuts and ill-fitting jackets stood on the far side. Guessing they were a down-at-heel hooligan firm was truer than I knew. They were Soviet squaddies. Other spectators seemed indifferent rather than fearful or hostile, the laughter more cheerful than venomous when a vehement clearance nearly beheaded one of them.

The local hero René Müller, until recently the GDR's best goalkeeper, performed the ceremonial kick-off. His reception was warm but hardly rousing, perhaps because

he was widely blamed for the home defeat by Turkey that had them playing catch-up in the World Cup qualifiers.

Not quite qualifying was standard GDR practice. They were usually in contention but, the memorable cameo in 1974 excepted, habitual absentees from World Cups and Euros. You could hardly expect more of a country of 16 million, particularly when so many of its athletic elite were identified young and directed into individual disciplines which, with the help of sophisticated quantitative analysis, merciless training regimes and systematic doping, delivered startling medal hauls at successive Olympic Games.

They'd not beaten the Soviet Union in 12 years. With two matches left, the unbeaten Soviets were close to qualifying. The GDR were fourth, needing to beat them and have other results go their way to pip Austria and Turkey to the second slot.

Karl-Marx-Stadt, and its fairly modest stadium, seemed an unlikely venue even if it was the ninth time East Germany had played there. But Berlin was fully occupied, with Gorbachev in town for the 40th Anniversary. The demos probably made Leipzig's huge Zentralstadion look too risky and Karl-Marx-Stadt's comparative remoteness was perhaps a plus. But it was happily only about 90 minutes from Leipzig in Manfred's Trabant, the GDR-made car whose dimensions and puttering two-stroke engine inspired unfavourable comparisons with sardine tins and sewing machines, but would later attain a certain radical chic. A largely rural route's main landmark was, at least to someone brought up on 1970s BBC TV dramas, the signpost to Colditz Castle.

At the ground long, stoically patient queues testified both to complicated ticketing and vast collective experience of waiting for things. Standing ticket no 14124 was secured for nine marks and 10 pfennigs. This was about £3 at official rates, pretty much what you paid to see Swansea lose away in Division Three. The Ernst-Thälmann-Stadion, honouring a pre-War Communist leader murdered by the Nazis, proved a basic, unpretentious venue. The pitch was circled by a running track, stands and terraces were largely uncovered and at one end an electronic scoreboard fronted a squat blockhouse-cum-gateway. Just under 16,000 squeezed in.

Each team wore lettered shirts – DDR for the Germans, CCCP for the visitors – which have also since acquired hipster cachet. While the Soviets wore red, GDR forsook their usual blue for white. This was probably not one of those marketing-led changes which blight the modern game, although hoardings from advertisers like Atari, Agfa and Bauhaus showed greater commercial drive than is generally attributed to the era.

While the squaddies at Markkleeberg were quiet, several thousand of their compatriots here were highly animated – flourishing red flags and sounding horns at the slightest pretext. Their hosts were quieter, out of either deference, courtesy or simply having little to cheer. The Wunderkind Andreas Thom was deeply anonymous and GDR hairdos were more noticeable than their play. The midfielder Matthias Sammer paraded a vivid orange barnet. The imposing defender Dirk Stahmann might in 2020 have been the answer to "Irksome Virtual Assistant, show me a brick outhouse with a beard."

The visitors were that bit classier and quicker in thought and movement, progressing calmly towards the draw needed to seal qualification. Then, 16 minutes from time, Oleh Protasov escaped on the right, cut in and chipped into the D. Struck as it landed by Hennadiy Litovchenko, the ball appeared instantaneously in the net behind the GDR keeper Dirk Heyne. It was a supreme exhibition of timing and technique, football's version of the effortlessly stroked cover-drive. Home fans divided between resignation and appreciation that a nondescript match had produced something authentically special.

Facing elimination, GDR responded. In the 80th minute the Soviet keeper Viktor Chanov charged out in pursuit of a corner. It looped back, off either his flailing fist or some part of the imposing Stahmann, towards the goal. Ulf Kirsten got up among three defenders standing near the line and his header was probably going in before Thom hooked it home from about four inches. Two minutes later Sammer rifled a low shot from 20m. Chanov seemed slow getting down and it rocketed between him and the left-hand post.

The decorous procession at last became the archetypal cup-tie, with much at stake and underdog hosts hanging on. The roar at the end could hardly have been greater or more heartfelt had everyone been offered free beer and an exit visa.

On the way back to Leipzig a mad dog nutted the car. It seemed oddly fitting. But as I boarded a train that night, cursing the flight home that made it impossible to join the following evening's demonstration, the match had no significance beyond the GDR's qualification hopes.

A draw would have sufficed in Vienna on November 15. That they lost 3-0 was by then academic. The Berlin Wall had been broken a week earlier. While I watched the festivities on TV, wished desperately I was there and pondered the sensory impact on first-time Wall crossers, the bigger picture was clear – the GDR's separate existence was doomed.

My hipsterish excursion took on a new light. Seen from a football world in which 'Red' and 'Leipzig' evoke very different associations, that day in Karl-Marx-Stadt looks the end of several eras. It was the GDR's last competitive home match. Reunification came less than a year later. By then Karl-Marx-Stadt's citizens had voted for their city to become Chemnitz again. The Soviet Union was dissolved in December 1991.

Some careers survived these changes. Oleh Kuznetsov, Oleksiy Mykhailychenko and Igor Dobrovolski played for the Confederation of Independent States against the unified Germany at the 1992 Euros. Thomas Doll started for Germany and he, Sammer and Thom all appeared in the final. Manfred wound up in California and translated for Germany at the 1994 World Cup.

That same weekend Gorbachev, in Berlin, withdrew the Soviet guarantee which underpinned the GDR, telling Honecker he would not back a suppression of the Leipzig demos. Those October days were more important than we knew.

THE LORD OF MISRULE

Sergio Ramos and the art of the red card

BY EMILE AVANESSIAN

Sergio Ramos is sent off in El Clasico in 2014.


Fly
Emirates
4

No defender has scored more often in La Liga than Sergio Ramos. He scored penalties, many of them Panenkas. He has scored in two Champions League finals. He got two in four minutes as Madrid cathartically hammered Pep Guardiola's Bayern Munich in the 2014 Champions League semi-final. As a captain and as a player who scores at vital times, he is one of the greatest legends of Real Madrid. And yet he is just as well known for his disciplinary record.

Ramos is not only the most cautioned player in the history of Real Madrid, La Liga, the Champions League and the Spain national team, but the leader in bookings across all major European leagues over the years spanning his career.

Most notable is the groundbreaking work he's done in the field of the sending-off, accumulating a spectacularly diverse catalogue of 26 red cards. He holds the record tallies for Real Madrid and La Liga, as well as the shared record for the Champions League. Despite a staggering 170 appearances and 24 bookings with the Spanish national team, Ramos has only ever been sent off while in a Madrid shirt.

These are often star-studded affairs, as he's walked for fouls against the former Atlético strikers Sergio Agüero and Fernando Torres, as well as La Liga notables Iván de la Peña, Aritz Aduriz and Xabi Prieto. He's seen red for infractions involving a pair of international teammates, Torres and Sergio Busquets. He's been sent off for fouls against each member of Barcelona's MSN, including twice for fouls against Lionel Messi, with whom Ramos remains engaged in a dozen-year (and counting) battle. One could convincingly argue, however, that the first of these shouldn't even have happened.

In November 2010 at the Camp Nou, Madrid's first Clásico with José Mourinho at the helm, Ramos could easily have seen red in the 73rd minute, for a brutal foul on another international teammate, David Villa, with Madrid trailing 4-0. 20 minutes later, seeking somehow to rain on the parade of Barça's 5-0 win, Ramos cynically chops down Messi from behind, earning Madrid's ninth yellow card of the night and his first Clásico expulsion. Not reflected in the official record but worth noting are the shoves to faces of *another* pair of international teammates, Carles Puyol and Xavi, on his way off the pitch. The incident is Ramos's second red card of the week, after first attempting to game the disciplinary system by intentionally earning a second yellow for time-wasting in the Champions League, in order to serve his one-match ban in a meaningless group game rather than in the knockout rounds.

Eight times his actions have been deemed worthy of immediate expulsion via straight red. He's been ordered off at least one in each month except June and July, including the Novembers of six different years. In his first season in Madrid, 2005-06, he saw red four times, including in his second league game (a "professional" shoulder into the chest of De la Peña) and via straight red in his home Champions League debut ten days later. There are four calendar years in which he's been sent off at least three times. He's been issued marching orders twice against crosstown rivals Atlético and five times against Barcelona.

This affinity for the red card clearly stems from something within the man himself. However, it's no doubt been reinforced by a preternatural gift for dodging repercussions. Consider: just two of his first 24 sendings-off – Clásicos in March 2014 and April 2017 – preceded a post-red deterioration in Madrid's position in the game. Even these lost battles didn't sting for long, as 2014's *Décima* cured all ills, while Madrid won their final six league games – and the title – in 2016-17. Conversely, on six occasions, the efforts of Zidane, Raúl Bravo, Júlio Baptista, Robinho, Gonzalo Higuaín, Pepe and Cristiano Ronaldo have actually powered Madrid to better results. Not much cause for remorse or self-evaluation.

Most impressive is his restraint in the aftermath of that initial Clásico sending off, as he accumulated just two yellow cards across eight Clásicos in 14 months (including *that* Supercopa contest, involving Mourinho and Tito Vilanova's eye), an incredible four (league, Copa del Rey final, two-legged Champions League semifinal) coming in 17 days in the spring of 2011. The rivalry awash in animosity born of shared contempt and forced confinement, and young Sergio, despite his own disdain for the Blaugrana, a general enthusiasm for the dark arts and Mourinho granting all the latitude he could desire, remained above the fray.

On 25 January 2012, amid Madrid's historic 100-point league-winning campaign, however, it's back to work. In the dying minutes of a Copa del Rey quarter-final in which Barcelona hold a 4-2 aggregate lead and the away-goals advantage, Ramos, already in the book for dissent, vents some frustration with an elbow at Sergio Busquets's head, offers a derisive handshake to the official and, with a now-familiar incredulous smile, makes for the door. His second Clásico sending-off is the tenth of his career, matching the Real Madrid record, held at the time by Fernando Hierro – in 264 fewer games with the club.

Elsewhere among his greatest hits is a performance that's, shockingly, thus far one-of-a-kind. In February 2013, a twelfth-minute header gives Madrid an early 2-0 lead against Rayo Vallecano. Five minutes later, he's booked for a foul. Less than one minute later, he's leaving the pitch, having been booked again for handball. The red card is admittedly harsh, but cosmically forgivable, as it delivers the first goal-plus-red performance of Ramos's career. That it's the result of two separate infractions in a one-minute span makes it all the better. That all three events unfolded in seven minutes, within 20 minutes of kickoff, is perfection.

It's tempting to look at this body of work and imply a lack of emotional control. The 'red mist'. It's true that few players are as fiery. Also true is that the striker that joined the Sevilla academy at age ten forever lives within him, frequently flouting positional discipline. And yet, on close examination, what's remarkable about the incidents for which Ramos has seen red is just how often he seems fully cognisant of what he's doing. By and large, Sergio Ramos doesn't do 'red mist'.

Some infractions are judged more harshly than expected, but there aren't a great many accidents.

He's often incredulous, never apologetic and seldom truly out of control. Whether strategic, professional or the venting of some frustration, it's tough to ignore the sense that he is aware of how things will (or very well could) go down and has made peace with a penance of an early shower, absence from the game and an extra weekend (or midweek evening) at home.

For better and for worse, the blueprint for the Sergio Ramos that's loved by many, hated by more and boring to none was essentially in place from the very beginning. He so effectively converted from attack to defence that he warranted not only call-ups to both Sevilla's senior side and the national team, but also (at the time) the largest-ever fee for a Spanish defender. He left his boyhood club a pariah, pulled on the shirt that once belonged to a Bernabéu legend and slid comfortably into the sport's most searing spotlight. All as a teenager.

On arrival he understood that adulation from *Madridistas* comes not through humble genuflection, but through amplification and imposition. It's the innate knowledge that, at the Bernabéu, respect is neither given nor earned – it's taken.

Now 34, a decade and a half and 13 managerial tenures in, Ramos – club captain, talisman, and the sport's most compelling character – is no longer at his "best" as a player, his swashbuckling more often resembling recklessness. At the same time, he remains, as ever, maniacally self-assured, endlessly entertaining, infuriatingly smug… and arguably as important to Real Madrid as he's ever been.

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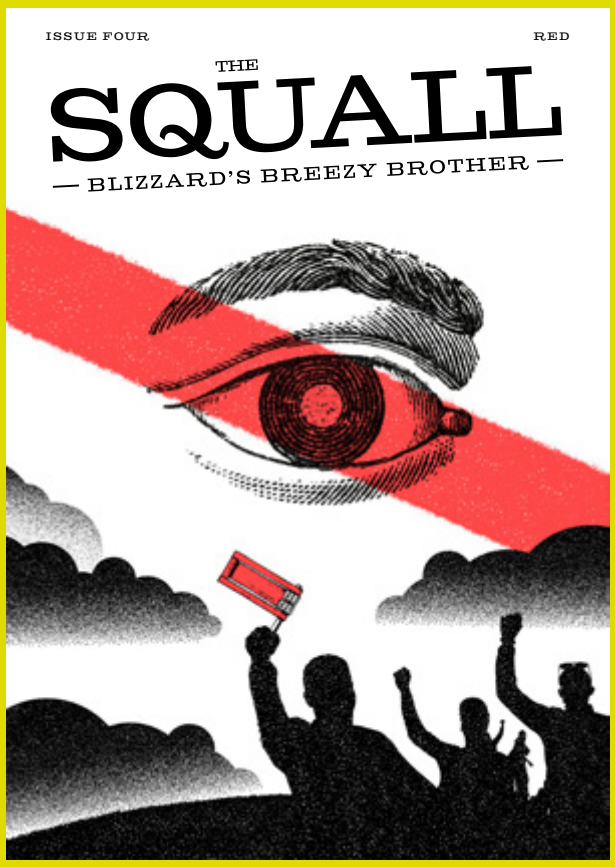

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THE SQUALL

— BLIZZARD'S BREEZY BROTHER —

Issue 4, August 2020, Red

Featuring: