

THE Blizzard

THE FOOTBALL QUARTERLY / ISSUE THIRTY-SIX



Below are extracts from each of the pieces featured.

↩ Federico Bassahún

The Quest for Happiness

Marcelo Bielsa's management has always examined his own soul

"Marcelo Bielsa is the best coach in the world," said Pep Guardiola in a press conference in February 2017, when the Argentinian was appointed by French side Lille. "I truly don't know how many titles he has won throughout his career, but that fact is not as important for me as his influence on the players he has worked with. My admiration for him is huge because he always improves his players."

↩ Joshua Law

São Paulo 1 Newell's Old Boys 0

The Libertadores final defeat that established the pattern of Bielsa near-misses

June 1992. Julio Zamora slumped down onto the tiles in the dressing room, put head into his hands and sobbed. It was more than the loss, more than the manner of it even; he knew that this was the end of an era. A photo of him, sitting there on the cold, hard floor of the Morumbi stadium in São Paulo, was published in the next issue of *El Gráfico*, the famous Argentinian football magazine. Above the picture, the headline: "The Night of a Thousand and One Tears." Underneath it, the words of the Newell's Old Boys president Walter Cattaneo: "I've seen a lot of dressing rooms... But like this, never. When I saw El Negro [Fernando Gamboa] cry like that – him, who is always above the good and the bad – I understood all of the emotion."

↩ Rob Bagchi

No Airs

How Bielsa's honesty and hard work re-energised Leeds United

In the winter of 1995, when Arsenal were four years into their glacial, functional period and seemingly lost in incoherence under Bruce Rioch, stranded in purgatory between

past and future, a cry of consolation would ripple from the North Bank to the Clock End at Highbury. It wasn't a song of commemoration for any specific deed or a chorus consisting solely of one man's name, merely a statement of bald fact. Over the next decade it would become a triumphant boast but for now it served as both comfort and stimulus. Above all, though, it spoke to Arsenal fans' sense of exceptionalism. "We've got Dennis Bergkamp," they sang. It said for all the shit we've been through, for all the shite we're in, we've got Dennis Bergkamp and, crucially, you haven't. He symbolised the essence of their idealised version of the club and their ambitions for it, a figure commensurate with their assessment of Arsenal's stature in the game. It wasn't about entitlement or gratitude, purely that they could identify with what his signing represented, that it was not only apt but just that a player of such class would adorn their club. Leeds United fans felt exactly the same when, in the summer of 2018, before the start of their 15th year of exile from the Premier League, the club appointed Marcelo Bielsa as head coach. At last, we thought: they, meaning the board, get it.

↻ Edd Norval

Odd Men Out

Intense, controversial and pathologically honest: a comparison of Bielsa and Lars von Trier

In January 2019, Marcelo Bielsa called a last-minute conference. Its unexpected urgency gave rise to many assuming the worst – his resignation. It was, in fact, far from that. Bielsa, in a characteristically enigmatic manner, doubled-down on his adherence to his own managerial code of ethics which were, at least at the time, completely at odds with an 'English Way' of doing things, at least as dictated by the press and Great British groupthink.

↻ Barley Nimmo

Rebirth

After a misguided merger and financial ruin, Sassari Torres Feminile are on their way back

Sardinia differs from mainland Italy in so many ways, their food, holidays and language are all dramatically different to those of their fellow countrymen. So much so that the character of Groundskeeper Willy in the Italian version of the Simpsons speaks in Sardinian. Despite technically being Italians, Sardinians are proud. Proud of their flag, their seemingly endless coastline and, more importantly, proud of their football.

⬅️ **Samindra Kunti**

The Other Side of Glory

Flamengo's success should not allow the disaster at their youth complex to be whitewashed

On the first Thursday of February 2019, Cristiano Esmerio slept uneasily. He switched on the TV and watched late-night shows. Intermittently, his wife Lais urged him to return to bed. Early next morning, Cristiano's phone rang. At the other end his brother enquired in a panic, "Where is my nephew?"

In 2015, Christian, Cristiano's middle son, had joined Flamengo, Brazil's most popular club, where the boy grew into a promising goalkeeper. "Father, I am going to honour the [Flamengo] shirt," Christian had often said. Due to his talent and consistency, the 15-year old was selected for Brazil's national youth team and sought out by European scouts.

⬅️ **Asker Hedegaard Boye**

Baku and the Game of Greed

How last season's Europa League final summed up modern football

Chelsea's 4-1 win over Arsenal in the 2019 Europa League final was, at first glance, a fairly ordinary football match. However, the final offered a powerful indication of the current state of international club football: a simmering cocktail of economic determinism, uniform internationalisation, orderly conditions in a shallow setting, star dust, elegant movements, a keen focus on the coach and the concentration of power and big politics.

⬅️ **Colin McPherson**

My Friend, the Neo-Nazi

How an away game in East Germany brought a Scotland fan into contact with the far-right

From the comfort of my sofa, I can watch live matches and highlights on demand. They come at all times of the day and night fed into my living room for endless consumption. I find myself watching teams which were in the past just names to me: Flamengo, Central Coast Mariners, Kaiser Chiefs, Union Berlin. This last club is familiar, as I have deep roots through family links with their home city. Nevertheless, the football scene in Germany's capital city is not something I follow with any great interest or involvement. I tune into one of the broadcasts with distracted disinterest: Union, who are based in what was

before 1989 East Berlin, appear to be like all other teams I see on screen these days: a diverse and multicultural assortment of players on the pitch, cheered or jeered by white faces, sitting in serried ranks in identikit stadia, fringed by electronic ads for global brands.

↔ Alex Hess

The Super Club from Nowhere

Was Anzhi Makachkala a vanity project, a political ploy or just a very bad idea?

When one of Russia's billionaire oligarchs buys a football club, they tend to choose one that comes with a certain level of glamour or ostentation. Roman Abramovich picked out Stamford Bridge while chartering his helicopter over the gleaming penthouses of west London. Alisher Usmanov invested in Arsenal, a few miles away in the capital's leafy north. Dmitry Rybolovlev ploughed his fortune into Monaco, its stadium tucked away amid the yachts and casinos of the French Riviera.

↔ Dominic Bliss

Goalkeeper

Reflecting on the England fast bowler's time in goal for Corinthian-Casuals

When the news of Bob Willis's death broke in December, cricket fans up and down the country cast their minds back to his heyday as a frighteningly quick, awkwardly angular fast bowler. He will be remembered as one of the finest bowlers his country has produced, the fourth-highest wicket-taker in England's Test history and one of the heroes of the famous 1981 Ashes Test at Headingley. He will also be recalled for his later career as a dry, outspoken pundit on Sky Sports, where he gained a reputation for his unfiltered, forthright views. And a handful of people, somewhere in south London, will call to mind his three-month spell as a non-league goalkeeper in the autumn of 1970.

↔ João Tomaz

Glorious Foundations

Otto Glória, the Brazilian behind the birth of the modern Benfica

Wembley, 1968. Manchester United had reached the European Cup final for the first time. Their opponents were Benfica, European champions in 1961 and 1962, and finalists in 1963 and 1965. The Benfica forward line was fearsome. Mario Coluna, the captain,

supported José Augusto, Jaime Graça, Antonio Simões, José Torres and Eusébio. These six players had helped Portugal to third place in the World Cup two years earlier, losing in the semi-final against England, also at Wembley. On the bench for Benfica, as he had been for Portugal, was the Brazilian coach Otto Glória.

↔ **Luke Alfred**

The Rhino in Glasgow

The Rangers and Sunderland forward Don Kichenbrand on leaving South Africa

When Don Kichenbrand arrived in Glasgow in the autumn of 1955, he brought with him a pair of old-fashioned ankle boots. His teammates in the Glasgow Rangers reserves took one look at the six-studded boots and howled with laughter: here was a country cousin from Africa's southern tip (his family came originally from the coal-mining country of Alsace-Lorraine) who clearly hadn't transitioned to something more supple and streamlined. They winked at each other and stepped back to enjoy the spectacle, hoping that at least the youngster in the prehistoric footwear could play.

↔ **Gunnar Persson**

The Nordahls

The brothers who redefined Swedish football after World War II

The Swedish striker Gunnar Nordahl scored lots of goals. He kept banging them in for more than 20 years. He won Olympic gold in London in 1948 as well as Allsvenskan four times and Serie A twice, helping his teams push for success by being the league's top scorer no fewer than nine times. When he retired he was behind only Silvio Piola in Serie A's all-time goalscoring chart and he remains the most prolific foreigner.

He may have been a natural, endowed with a physique reminiscent of the Everton legend Dixie Dean, legs made for running, and feet that could hit the ball from any angle inside the area in a way that the German Gerd Müller later refined. But behind every 'natural' who conquers the football world there is usually an equally remarkable coach. In Nordahl's case you could say there were three, all Hungarians: István Wampetits at Degerfors, Lajos Czeizler at IFK Norrköping and AC Milan, and Béla Guttmann at Milan. Wampetits made his career take off, Czeizler made him great, and Guttmann reignited him at Milan, when his career was entering its twilight.

↩ Dan Carney

The Final Fling

A drugs scandal and the death of their president couldn't prevent Bologna's last Scudetto

Summer 1961. Renato Dall'Ara is approaching his 69th birthday. A large, energetic character from humble origins who made his fortune from knitwear, he has resided in Bologna since the First World War. He is also entering his 28th year as president of Bologna FC 1909. Married but childless, he pours all his time and energy into the club, continuing – even with his health declining – to oversee every aspect of its administration. He has already delivered one glorious era: four Serie A titles between 1935 and 1941, two of them under the great Hungarian coach Árpád Weisz. Now, however, it has been over 20 years since the Rossoblù have won anything, and some are questioning whether Dall'Ara's thrift, in the face of rocketing prices and player salaries (Gazzetta dello Sport's Bruno Roghi describes him as "attached to the budget as the drawing pin to the surveyor's sheet"), is holding them back. Juventus, Milan and Inter have cemented themselves as the "big three" of Italian football, winning 11 of the previous 12 Scudetti. Helenio Herrera is preparing for his second season in charge at Inter, installing the discipline, meticulousness, and ruthlessness with which he will become synonymous.

↩ Rayco González

Innovation in Conservatism

Why Diego Simeone's philosophy had ramifications for beyond football

In the last decade a new term has appeared that has characterised Spanish and Latin American football: cholismo, the rugged, pragmatic football favoured by Diego Simeone. To understand it, it is worth asking ourselves about the sporting value of this style and what set of other cultural practices are explained today by establishing a relationship with this style. But where does this value criterion of football styles arise from? No one would now hesitate to say that it comes from the success of a style that has become known as "tiki-taka", a term that includes all those styles of play based on high possession of the ball and the precision of the short pass. The origin of the word is lost in the past, although it seems certain that it was used by some Spanish coaches during the eighties pejoratively to criticise that style of possession football without verticality. They all run for a back door. Sam can hear the sound of firecrackers, rapid bursts, clack clack clack, but he's confused, why are they running away from firecrackers, what's happening?

Featuring:

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