

ISSUE ONE

THE RIGHT-BACK

THE SQUALL

— BLIZZARD'S BREEZY BROTHER —



THE SQUALL

Matt Thacker

When realisation dawned a month or two ago that there was unlikely to be any sport, let alone any football, to write about for quite some time, I approached Jonathan with the seemingly counter-intuitive idea of creating a little brother for *The Blizzard*, a digital football magazine to give freelance writers a forum for their work. Not just so they could get paid to write, but so they would have something to aim for, a sense of job satisfaction at a time when such satisfaction is in short supply.

Jonathan readily agreed and we then asked *Blizzard* writers who were due a percentage of profits from previous issues if they would consider waiving these fees in order to start this venture, allowing us to put money into the freelance 'pot'. Led by Jonathan and Philippe Auclair, who has done so much to spread the word, many of them did so. Knowing we had the necessary to embark on *The Squall*, we took a deep breath and off we went. And the support from *Blizzard* readers and supporters, as well as the response from freelance writers, has been truly heartening.

The Blizzard has never been about the here and now, it's much more taken with the there and then. And we see *The Squall* as serving the same function, showcasing great football writing on subjects you are unlikely to read about anywhere else. We like to think of every piece written for either publication as the one thing that writer simply had to write, that nobody else could do quite as well.

We hope the articles in this launch issue of *The Squall* fit the bill and that you enjoy the read. 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](https://www.paypal.me/thesquall).*** Any money paid into either of these accounts will be used for the sole purpose of producing future issues.

Finally, as a taster for this first issue, we put together this ridiculous right-back-based video – youtu.be/ikcbbH6TUh8. Words courtesy of Adam Burnett, music by Billy Joel!

May 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, James Corbett, Martin da Cruz, Miguel Delaney, Andrew Downie, Ken Early, Emmet Gates, John Harding, Simon Hart, Gary Hartley, Frank Heinen, Neil Jensen, Samindra Kunti, Simon Mills, James Montague, David Owen, MM Owen, Simone Pierotti, Jack Pitt-Brooke, Callum Rice-Coates, Philip Ross, Paul Simpson, Jon Spurling, Seb Stafford-Bloor, Ed Sugden, Jonathan Wilson and Suzy Wrack. And huge thanks to Getty Images, for use of the photos.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Jonathan Wilson

It's an odd thing to launch a magazine when you really wish it didn't have to exist and when you hope it can close down as soon as possible.

But that's the reality. The Squall has been launched as a response to the Coronavirus crisis. With live sport impossible and sports departments at newspapers squeezed, there has been an understandable and unavoidable downturn for freelancers. If there's no sport to report on, you don't need sports reporters.

Those journalists, though, still have lives. They still have mortgages or rent to pay, families to feed. They hope in a couple of months to be back on the beat. So The Squall is something. It's a place that is still commissioning, that offers at least some opportunity to some people to earn a (little) bit of money, to do their jobs.

Hopefully live sport will return sooner rather than later. Hopefully the economic downturn will not be too crippling or too long. Hopefully the advertising market will recover and people will start making and spending money again. But until then, here is The Squall. It's a monthly magazine, each issue centred around one theme. It's been funded largely by writers for The Blizzard waiving their share of the profit for last year, but also by kind donations from the public. In addition, all editorial and design staff are working for free. To everybody who has given money and time, a huge thank you.

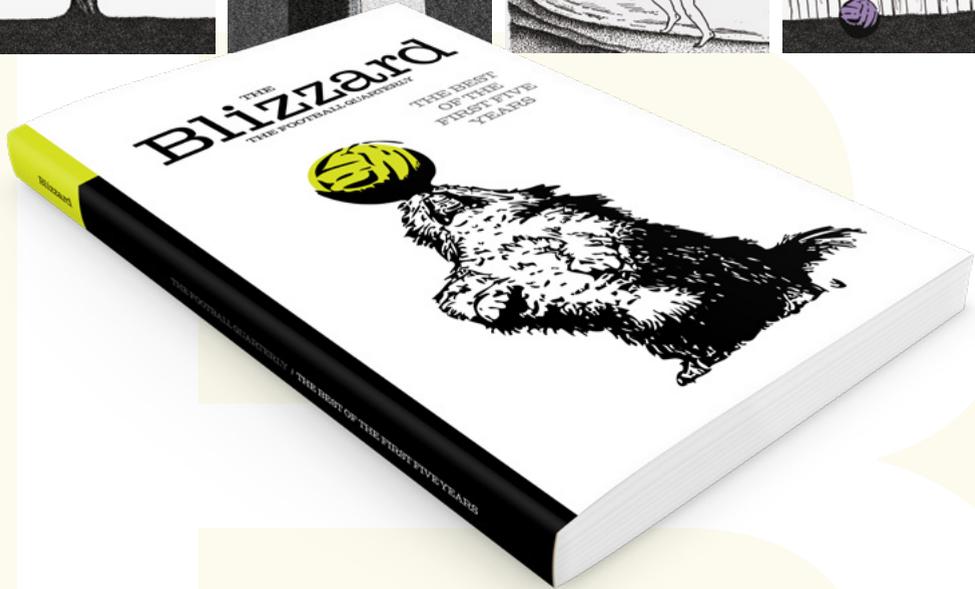
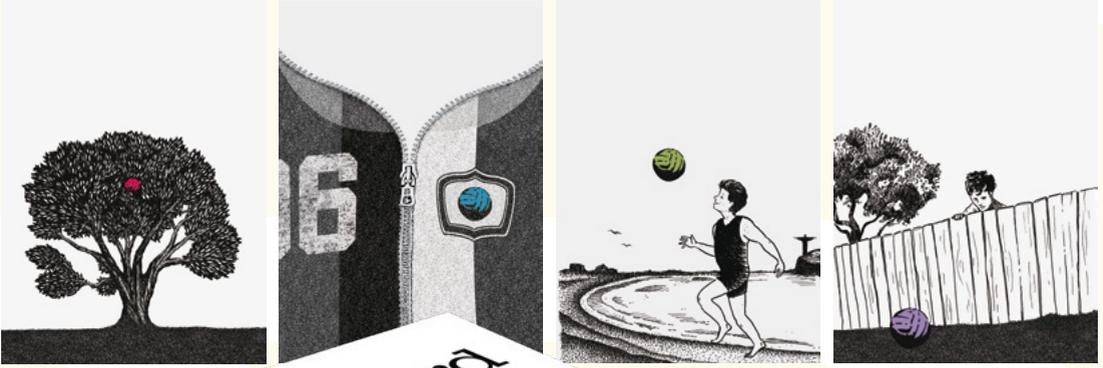
The initial impetus to launch The Blizzard was to serve the football-writing and football-reading community, to sidestep the middle-managers and advertising wonks who so often seemed to stand in the way of what seemed worthwhile, in thrall to SEO to pursue only the lowest common denominator. The generosity of our readers and writers alike at a time of crisis to make sacrifices to help that community suggests the initial spirit that fired us still burns strong.

But at the same time, if it's to achieve its objective, 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. We've gone back to our roots and 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.

It's possible this will be a huge success. Perhaps in time we won't be reliant on donations and people working for free. But for now, we're a temporary product to get us through the crisis and we urge you to support us on that basis.

Hopefully soon, we won't have to exist any more.

May 2020



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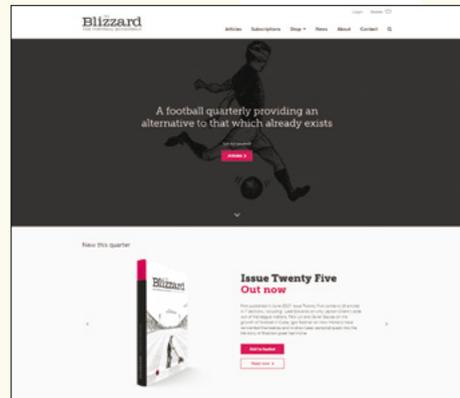
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THE JOSIMAR FORTNIGHT

Mexico 86 and the brief
glory of an unheralded
Botafago right-back

BY DAVID SQUIRES

YOU CAN'T HAVE A SERIOUS CONVERSATION ABOUT RIGHT-BACKS WITHOUT PAYING RESPECT TO THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME*

JOSIMAR

* - 12-21 JUNE 1966.



IN THE PRE-INTERNET AGE, JOSIMAR WAS VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN OUTSIDE SOUTH AMERICA BEFORE THE 1966 WORLD CUP. HE WASN'T EVEN INCLUDED IN THE PANINI STICKER ALBUM.



Jesper Olsen...

Jean-Marie D'Aff...

Chg Bum Kun and Oh Yun Kyo...

Irag shiny...

Pietro Vierchowod...

Christ, even Kerry Dixon's got one. Give me another pack.

You gonna pay for these, Naestro?

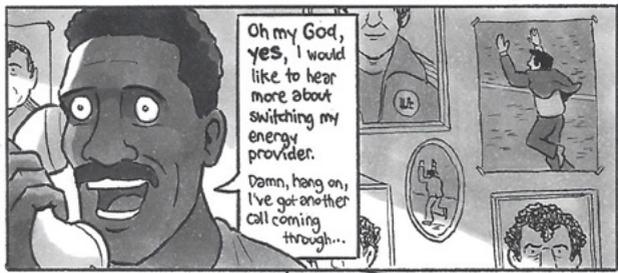
... BUT HE SOON BECAME THE DARING OF THE MID-EIGHTIES PLAYGROUND SCENE WITH A 35-YARD SCREAMER AGAINST NORTHERN IRELAND. THE BALL DIPPED AND SWERVED PAST A FLUMMOXED PAT JENNINGS AS IF IT WERE A 99p FLOATER BOUGHT FROM A GUADALAJARA GARAGE FORECOURT.



THE GOAL WAS ALMOST AS MEMORABLE FOR THE ARM-WAVING, DAVID-PLEAT-ESQUE CELEBRATION THAT FOLLOWED IT. JOSIMAR SEEMED AS SURPRISED AS EVERYONE ELSE. AFTER ALL, IT WAS THE 43RD MINUTE OF HIS INTERNATIONAL DEBUT, HE WAS THIRD-CHOICE AT BEST, AND HE'D BEEN RELAXING AT HOME WHEN HE RECEIVED THE CALL TELLING HIM TO PACK FOR MEXICO.

IT WAS JENNINGS' 119TH AND FINAL CAP, AND THE GOAL RUINED HIS 41ST BIRTHDAY.

Big Pat did not shampoo his ear flaps for this.



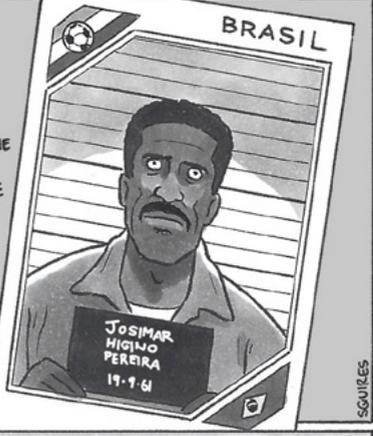
Oh my God, yes, I would like to hear more about switching my energy provider.

Damn, hang on, I've got another call coming through...

JOSIMAR SHOWED HE WAS NO ONE-HIT WONDER WITH AN EVEN BETTER FOLLOW-UP GOAL IN HIS NEXT MATCH, AGAINST POLAND - SKIPPING AROUND THREE DEFENDERS AND SPANNING A SHOT PAST JÓZEF MLYNARCZYK FROM AN ANGLE TIGHTER THAN HIS 1960s SHORTS. COULD ANYONE STOP THIS GOAL MACHINE?



YES, FRANCE IN THE NEXT ROUND. HOWEVER, HE WAS NAMED IN THE TEAM OF THE TOURNAMENT. SADLY, AS THE CLASSIC NARRATIVE ARC DICTATES, HIS NEWFOUND FAME PROVED TO BE A CURSE. HE NEVER AGAIN MATCHED THE HEIGHTS OF HIS MEXICAN SUMMER AND DEVELOPED A SERIOUS DRINKING PROBLEM. HE WAS EVEN ARRESTED FOR GETTING IN A FIGHT WITH A SEX WORKER AFTER TRYING TO NEGOTIATE A DISCOUNTED PRICE FOR AN ORGY THAT HAD ALREADY TAKEN PLACE.

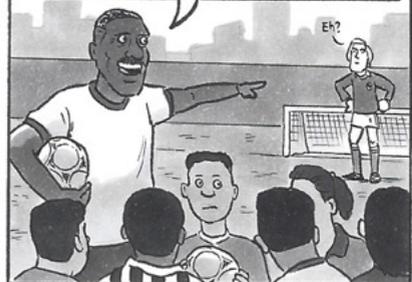


HIS OFF-FIELD TROUBLES WERE PUNCTUATED BY THE ODD SUCCESS - A ROUS CUP WIN IN 1987 AND AN EXCELLENT VIEW FROM THE BENCH OF BRAZIL'S TRIUMPHANT COPA AMERICA CAMPAIGN IN 1989. HIS REPUTATION REMAINED SUFFICIENTLY HIGH IN EUROPE TO ENABLE A SHORT SPELL WITH SEVILLA IN 1988. BEFORE SIGNING, HE WAS ALSO OFFERED TO DUNDEE UNITED, WHOSE MANAGER JIM McLEAN WAS FAMED FOR HIS BRAZILIAN SAMBA PARTY PERSONALITY.



THANKFULLY, THERE IS A HAPPY ENDING TO JOSIMAR'S STORY. JUST WHEN HE'D HIT ROCK BOTTOM, HIS OLD FRIEND AND FELLOW RIGHT-BACK JORGINHO, GAVE HIM A JOB AT HIS FOOTBALL SCHOOL ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF RIO. THERE, HE WAS ABLE TO FIND SOME PEACE, IMPARTING HIS WISDOM TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF FOOTBALL SUPERSTARS.

...and that is why you should always agree the financial terms before you undertake a business transaction. Now, wag these balls past that old duffer and wave your arms about like Radi Antic has just stunned Maine Road.



SOURCES

THE BRAZILIAN TRADITION

The evolution of the
attacking right-back as a
feature of football in Brazil

BY FELIPE ALMEIDA



You've seen the footage a hundred times. It's one of the most famous goals of all time. It's 1970, and a scorching sun makes everybody take their time on the Azteca pitch. After 86 minutes and with the game almost settled, Carlos Alberto Torres still found the energy to burst forward one more time. On this occasion, appearing on the right wing like a ghost, he took a pass from Pelé and hammered the ball past Enrico Albertosi into the net.

The goal encompasses one of defining characteristics of the Brazilian game. A position that would quickly become a trademark of the way the country plays football: that flamboyant full-back who is more an attacker than a defender, despite what the team sheet may say.

Torres's goal just paved the road: in the World Cups to come, other right-backs would mesmerise audiences with amazing goals: think of Nelinho against Italy in 1978; of Josimar, almost unknown outside of Brazil before the tournament, stealing the spotlight in 1986; of Maicon racing through the North Korean defence in 2010. Is it a coincidence? What makes the Brazilian right-back different to his counterparts in other countries?

We can't dissociate the environment. Brazilians often learn the game far from an official pitch: there are beaches, narrow streets in favelas, futsal courts, short spaces that facilitate the development of a range of skills. For example, it was in a wasteland in Olaria, a working-class neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro, that Nelinho perfected his long-distance shooting. "When I was a kid, I would play on the streets," he said.

"I'd dribble and shoot from distance. It was my hobby as a kid: we would often come to a place to play doubles, as there were never enough people. We would be shooting from long-range, as the ball would rebound from the walls."

A lot of highly-skilled would-be players created a glut of supply for clubs. Most of these promising talents preferred to play in midfield or attack. Some of them, seeing the competition was so stiff, would revert to right- – or left- – back. "I'd like to dribble," said Nelinho. "When I arrived at my first club, I was a midfielder. When I signed for Cruzeiro, there was no room for me up front. So I became a right-back."

This kind of resilience is frequent in other famous right-backs in Brazil: Cafu, Dani Alves and Jorginho didn't start as full backs. Fabinho, now again a midfielder at Liverpool, would also switch between the right side of the pitch and the centre in his younger days. "I started as a centre-back," said Jorginho, a starter at the 1994 World Cup. "I was good at defending, but I was short. My first coach, at America, turned me into a right-back. Cafu started as a striker."

After retiring, Jorginho became a coach himself and was Dunga's assistant in 2010 World Cup. At that time, Brazil had two world-class right-backs in Dani Alves and Maicon. On many occasions, the coaches went back to Alves's roots and put him in midfield.

Tactical development also offers some explanation to the way right-backs play in Brazil. It goes back to the 4-2-4 developed in the 1950s, a shift from the days of W-M that became the template

with which Brazil won two World Cups, and encouraged the full-backs to move forward. Some time before, foreigners would also marvel at how Brazilian full-backs seamlessly joined the attack – Arsenal, who toured in Brazil in 1949, were one of the early victims.

The right-back reputed to be the first adventurous enough to show off attacking skills on Brazilian soil is Djalma Santos. He played in four World Cups and was named in the All-Star Team in three of them (1954, 1958 – despite playing only the final match – and 1962).

A strong defender, Djalma would play until he was 42. Often praised for his fitness, he could pass as accurately as a top midfielder – that’s where he started his career – and had a particular weapon that today could be described as Stoke-like. But, for Nelson Rodrigues, a Rio de Janeiro chronicler, Djalma’s throw-ins were more sacred: “I would like to say that Brazil is in the throw-in of Djalma Santos,” Rodrigues wrote. “He seems to be suspending a piano. He raises the ball, shakes his body. His throw-in is solemn, strong, heroic – like a goal kick. It’s a bomb. He puts in his throw-in all the passion of a black Christ.”

Djalma was the trailblazer, but Carlos Alberto Torres was the first to really capture the eye of wider audiences. He captained Brazil in Mexico in 1970 – hence his nickname, “*Capita*” (a shortened form of *capitão*, captain in English), and would leave a mark on many of his successors in the position.

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Carlos Alberto started at Fluminense, then moved to

Santos, where he played with Pelé. From the beginning, he was renowned for his dribbling and passing, as well as his defensive capabilities. “In my opinion, from those that I saw playing, Carlos Alberto was the best, alongside Leandro,” said Gerson, a teammate of Carlos Alberto in 1970. “He would often join the attack. There was no mystery: if you could attack, then you would attack. There would be someone to cover you. Simple as that.”

Carlos Alberto is cited by Nelinho as his role model coming up through the ranks of Brazilian football. “I learned a lot of details with Carlos Alberto,” Nelinho said. “The main one: to keep it simple. That’s a key for a full-back.”

An offensive-minded right-back himself, Nelinho was the successor of Carlos Alberto in the Brazil national team. But, in 1974, he had to fight against his own way of playing. He could never establish himself as a starter, competing with the defensive Zé Maria for the place, because the coach Mario Zagallo didn’t want him playing so high. “Zagallo wouldn’t want me to attack,” Nelinho said. “We had Marinho Chagas at left-back, who was also super-offensive. With Zagallo, I couldn’t make a mistake. I had to finish the play. I had to cross the ball and then go back, to give a pass and then go back. But I would attack.”

The full-backs were always a puzzle to coaches. Whoever was capable of solving this question would be best equipped to win matches and gain the favour of the supporters. While Zagallo struggled with his very attacking players in 1974, by the start of the 80s they had become integral to Brazil’s success.

The much-lauded Brazil national team at the 1982 World Cup had no wingers. At home, Telê Santana received criticism for this. In his TV programme, the comedian Jô Soares created a character who would immortalise the phrase “*Bota ponta, Telê*” (“Play with wingers, Telê”), such was the desire of fans for the coach to abandon his idea of putting together playmakers like Zico, Sócrates and Falcão. With a narrow structure, it was up to full-backs Leandro, on the right, and Junior, on the left, to provide width. With acres of room to move forward, they were crucial at that side. At Flamengo, his boyhood club, Leandro would mesmerise Brazilian fans with an endless barrage of technical skills: dribbling, shooting, crossing, everything. “Leandro was the best, hands down,” said Jorginho, who succeeded him at Flamengo. “He was the most complete right-back that I ever saw, the most technically gifted.”

Until the 1980s, football in Brazil was mostly a local affair, becoming international only when the countries gathered to play the World Cup. As the markets in world football became more open, the best players in Brazil were soon poached by richer European clubs. And this phenomenon created a sort of production line.

With most Brazilian clubs in bad financial shape, selling a player to Europe was always the easiest way keep the numbers tolerable. So, they had to meet the demand. Towards the end of 1980s, a great number of teams in Europe chose 3-5-2 as a tactical template. Until then, being a right-back in most of these squads was more akin to being a defender than

an attacker. But with the new system the players on the wings had to be offensive. Brazilian clubs took note. They too had started to use the system. So, in the youth ranks, the pattern became clear: bring up very physical and offensive right-backs – think of Maicon, who would go on to win the Champions League with Inter.

The process was no longer a simple result of technical skills and the competition in advanced positions: now, it was a market-centred option. “Brazil adopted the system to try to sell players to Europe,” said Erasmo Damiani, head of youth development at Internacional and a director of the Brazil team that won gold at the 2016 Olympics. “Tall, strong and quick players. When European countries went back to a four-man defence, we continued at 3-5-2. The right-back tailored to play in a four-man defence was forgotten. Now, we are trying to produce more players like these, but it’s a process.”

Brazilian clubs were attached to 3-5-2 until the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Before this era ended, though, it yielded Brazil’s last World Cup. The main reasoning behind Luiz Felipe Scolari’s use of a three-man defence was precisely the full-backs at his disposal. Cafu and Roberto Carlos were among the top players in the world and the coach wanted to unleash their full potential in attack. Cafu, especially, was well-adapted to playing in a 3-5-2 in Europe and was often criticised in Brazil because of his lack of defensive skills. In 2002, he became a major weapon providing width to a team that relied on three world-class strikers in Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo.

Brazil is now in an off-season for right-backs. The first choice for the national team is still the 36-year-old Dani Alves. There's no consensus on his successor: Danilo, despite playing for major clubs in Europe, has never really convinced, and Éder Militão is increasingly becoming a centre-back.

At club level, the 34-year-old Rafinha is the starter at Flamengo, the most successful team in the past year. Dani Alves moved into midfield in São Paulo, with the Spanish veteran Juanfran at right-back.

Jorginho, who worked as a coach at clubs like Flamengo, Vasco da Gama and Coritiba, is concerned by the new generation. "I always say to my right-back: he is, firstly, a defender," he said. "There's an impetus for them to attack. I see a lot of them who have offensive skills, but lack

marking and positioning, and don't know how to head a ball properly. I had right-backs who couldn't cross a ball."

There's one kid, though, who has caught Jorginho's eye. That's Yan Couto, a 17 year old who worked with him at Coritiba and was part of the Brazil Under-17 team that won the World Cup last year. In March 2020, Yan signed a five-year contract with Manchester City. Coritiba are thought to be receiving a sum of £5 million. "He's a very good player," said Jorginho. "He's not that tall, but he has great technical capability."

On Yan, therefore, lies the hope of continuing the lineage of his country's right-backs. It's a history that started on narrow streets and beaches long before football was globalised. The world can change in many ways but, after 60 years, Brazilian right-backs will keep coming. 



FASCIST, GAY, DOUBLE WORLD CUP WINNER

The many lives of the Italian
right-back Eraldo Monzeglio

BY JOHN IRVING

Monzeglio is pictured front row, center



A successful football player and a not-so-successful football manager in peacetime, a soldier on the Eastern Front in wartime, a confidant of Mussolini in both – the life story of Eraldo Monzeglio reads like a picaresque novel in which, seemingly, there was never a dull moment. For better and for worse.

A *terzino destro*, or right-back, Monzeglio was discovered in the early 1920s by a *terzino sinistro*, or left-back, Umberto Caligaris, in his native village of Vignale Monferrato in the wine hills of the province of Alessandria, in Piedmont, playing not football but the typical local pelota-like sport of *pallone elastico*. At one point in the game, Monzeglio stopped the small hard ball with one foot and volleyed it back into his opponents' court with the other. In *pallone elastico*, you're only supposed to use your bare hands, so it must have been something of a William Webb Ellis moment: anathema to *aficionados* but an eye-opener for Caligaris, who persuaded Monzeglio to sign for the nearby Casale Foot-ball Club, where he himself was a regular. Monzeglio made his first team debut in 1923 at the age of 17 and the two soon established a solid partnership.

Casale, Alessandria, Vercelli and Novara formed the so-called *Quadrilatero* of Piedmontese provincial towns whose teams dominated Italian football in its pioneering years – far more than Juventus and Torino in Turin, the region's capital. The area was a breeding ground for full-backs in particular: not just Monzeglio and Caligaris but also Virginio Rosetta (Vercelli) and Pietro Rava (Alessandria), while another, Luigi Allemandi, hailed from Cuneo, not far

away. All went on to be World Cup winners with Italy in the 1930s, though Monzeglio was the only one to appear in both 1934 and 1938.

After the Viareggio Charter had legalised professionalism in Italian football in 1926, the *Quadrilatero* struggled to compete with the richer teams in the large cities. Monzeglio signed for Bologna, where he happened to be doing his military service, while Caligaris teamed up with his international colleague Rosetta at Juventus. Monzeglio always felt he owed a debt of gratitude to his mentor. When Caligaris died prematurely of a heart attack in 1940, he attended his funeral in Casale cemetery and purchased the next tomb along. The two now rest side by side.

In 1929 Monzeglio won the scudetto with Bologna, nicknamed 'the team that makes the world tremble', and caught the eye of the Italy manager Vittorio Pozzo. He made his international debut in the final of the Central European International Cup against Hungary in Budapest on 11 May 1930 when the ageing Rosetta had to pull out with a knee injury. Italy sailed to a 5-0 victory and Monzeglio laid down his credentials for a regular place in the side.

In the 1934 World Cup in Italy he only the missed the first game, a 7-1 trouncing of the USA, and in November that year played in the epic 'Battle of Highbury', regarded by Italians as a triumph, even though they lost 3-2.

A year later, after the Roma president Renato Sacerdoti had made him an offer he couldn't refuse, Monzeglio moved to the capital. There he looked forward to visiting Mussolini's sons,

Vittorio and Bruno, whom he had met in the early 1930s on the beach in Riccione, the Adriatic resort where *Il Duce* used to spend his summer holidays at the unimaginatively named Villa Mussolini (villas are a leitmotif of the Monzeglio story).

Vittorio and Bruno Monzeglio were Lazio fans and Monzeglio was worried they would be annoyed with him for signing for city rivals Roma. To clarify his position, he called the Ministry of the Interior and asked to be put through to Villa Torlonia, Mussolini's private residence in Rome. As he recalled in a rare interview, he found himself talking to *Il Duce* in person.

"Hello, who's speaking?"

"Mussolini."

"No, that's impossible."

"Mussolini, yes. Who are you?"

"Monzeglio."

"Ah! What's the matter?"

"I just wanted to know if Bruno and Vittorio are unhappy about me going to Rome and not to Lazio."

"They were talking about it at the table just now. Wait and I'll call them [*shouting*] Bruno, Monzeglio on the phone! Vittorio, Monzeglio on the phone!"

After Monzeglio had explained himself, the brothers' response was, "As long as you come to Rome, we're not bothered if you play for Roma or for Lazio!"

In Rome, Monzeglio was a frequent visitor to Villa Torlonia, where he became *il tennista del Duce*, Mussolini's personal tennis coach, pandering to his ego by letting him win. Mussolini's lover Claretta Petacci recorded in her diary how *il Duce* would boast that, "This kid just can't beat me, no way. I run as much as he does, if not more."

At Roma, Monzeglio joined up with his fellow *Piemontesi* Allemandi, who had just signed from Ambrosiana-Inter, and the manager Luigi Barbesino, captain of the Casale league-winning team in 1914. But the person he hit it off with most was the captain, the Roman-born-and-bred Fulvio Bernardini. On one occasion, in the heavy Roman traffic, Bernardini crashed his car into the back of a large Astura. Little did he know it contained Mussolini, on his way to the Termini station to welcome the French premier Pierre Laval. When his driving licence was confiscated, Bernardini turned to Monzeglio for help. According to one version, Monzeglio arranged a tennis match between Mussolini and Bernardini in which the latter lost on purpose, after which the licence was duly returned. The tried-and-tested ruse had worked again.

In his history of the Italian national team, *Un secolo azzurro* (2013), the Sicilian journalist Alfio Caruso, who knew Monzeglio personally, reveals an aspect of the player's private life that had previously only been alluded to: "He was a homosexual, though given the mounting severity of fascism, he never came out." Unlike in Germany, where Heinrich Himmler set up the Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality, and homosexuals were among those

destined for concentration camps, in Italy – somewhat absurdly – an amendment to the relevant Rocco Code specified, “The envisaging of this crime is by no means necessary insofar as, much to the fortune and pride of Italy, the abominable vice that occasions it is not so widespread as to justify the legislator’s intervention.” In other words, homosexuality didn’t and couldn’t exist. In December 1934 the Juventus manager Carlo Carcano, four times a scudetto winner and easily the most respected club manager in Italy, had left his job under a cloud. The facts were hushed up but it has since emerged that the reason was precisely his homosexuality. Carcano might have been discreetly ostracised by the regime and subsequently forced to work in relative obscurity, but Monzeglio, a national hero and an intimate of *Il Duce’s*, was allowed to continue his career untroubled.

It was apparently under pressure from Mussolini and his entourage that Vittorio Pozzo called the veteran Monzeglio up for the 1938 World Cup in France, though he only played in the first match, a 2-1 victory over Norway. According to the president of the Italian Football Federation General Franco Vaccaro, when asked why he had picked the ageing Monzeglio rather than the up-and-coming Alfredo Foni, the *commissario tecnico* spilled the beans. At which Vaccaro told him to stick to his own beliefs and promised to back him. Just as Rosetta had made way for Monzeglio, so Monzeglio had to do likewise for Foni.

How good a player was Monzeglio? Contemporary accounts are mostly Italian, hence generally hagiographic, and epithets like “*formidabile*”, “*elegante*”

and “*tecnico*” abound. Bruno Roghi, the editor of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, wrote that, “For Monzeglio, emotion is like dust on marble: a puff of air and it blows away.” Wiry and with a light gait, Monzeglio played in Pozzo’s quasi-WM *metodo* as a right-sided *terzino di posizione*, the full-back who had the job of patrolling the area and going to the aid of teammates in distress, a job he did so well that Bernardini was later prompted to suggest that he would have made a perfect modern libero.

Doubts are sometimes expressed, however, about Monzeglio’s man-marking abilities and, in his *Storia critica del calcio italiano*, Gianni Brera points out how he had to rely on his positional sense towards the end of his career, though in that last match against Norway his lack of pace still allowed the left winger Arne Brustad to dribble past him at will. There is also evidence that Monzeglio wasn’t the saint he was often depicted as. In one stormy Torino-Bologna match in 1934, he assaulted a linesman, while in a Rome derby in 1937 he almost started a riot when he punched Silvio Piola off the ball. The fact that he escaped punishment in both cases is again put down to his being a favourite son of the fascist regime.

After hanging up his boots in 1941, Monzeglio worked as *direttore tecnico* at Roma for a year before volunteering for the ill-fated Russian campaign. He seems to have spent more time playing football behind the lines in Donetsk than fighting at the front. The 21 February 1942 edition of the military newspaper *Dovunque* wrote that, “It will be a pleasure for sports fans in the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia to learn that here among

us, in uniform, is Eraldo Monzeglio." On June 6, the same paper reported on a match between the Italian Engineer Corps, "with Corporal Monzeglio as player-manager", and the German 1st Panzer Army. The Italians won 1-0 through a penalty.

Monzeglio was back in his villa in Velletri, south of Rome, within the year but, since the town was directly in the path of the Allies advancing from Anzio to occupy the capital, he was soon forced to flee northward. His destination was Villa Feltrinelli, the Mussolini family residence on Lake Garda, where, following the armistice of 8 September 1943 stipulating Italy's surrender to the Allies, *Il Duce* had established the Republic of Salò with Nazi backing.

Many things happened in and around Villa Feltrinelli in the final months of the war: "Monzeglio, Eraldo" was cited in minutes of official audiences there as "assistant to *Il Duce's* Personal Secretariat with Special Duties", duties that included driving to buy oil and butter in nearby Verona; Monzeglio was a conspirator in a failed plot to free Mussolini's son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano when the latter was condemned to death for treason; Monzeglio's revolver was stolen in a burglary; Monzeglio, like Mussolini, was captured by partisans and sentenced to death by firing squad, then released when he was recognised by football fans who argued that though he was a fascist, he "never harmed anyone"; Monzeglio offered Mussolini's widow, Donna Rachele, financial support.

Many things undoubtedly happened but much of what we know about them is

based on anecdote and hearsay, and it's hard to separate the fact from the fiction. What's certain is that Monzeglio never ever spoke about the period, at least in public.

In the post-war years, Italy was loath to come to terms with its fascist past, widely passed off as a fleeting aberration. During the transition from dictatorship to democracy, many of those who had operated and prospered under the regime – bureaucrats, university professors, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, sportspersons and more – changed skin from one day to the next.

This was the case with Monzeglio, notwithstanding his singular Mussolini connection. After the war, his first important job was as manager of Napoli in Serie B. In Naples he made friends with the socialist journalist Antonio Ghirelli, author of the seminal *Storia del calcio in Italia*, who wrote that, "If he was never a fascist in an activist, political sense, Eraldo can certainly be considered fascist from a psychological point of view. He always had the cult of authority, hence of the leader." It was this, Ghirelli argued, that explained Monzeglio's subservience to the volcanic Napoli president Achille Lauro, who was constantly interfering in team selection and tactics, though on one occasion he did pluck up the courage to expel him from the dressing room for smoking.

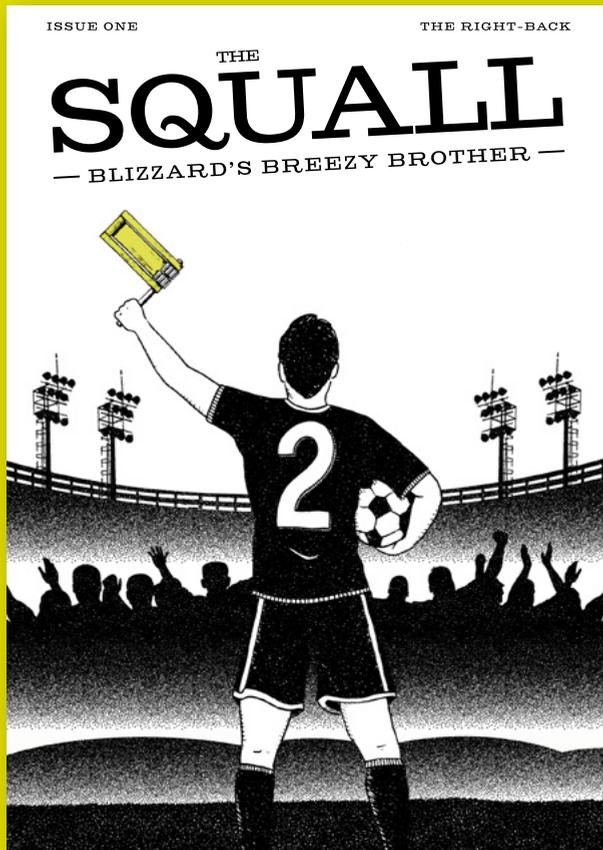
Monzeglio seems to have had similarly passive relationships with star players: from Hans Jeppson, whom Lauro signed from Atalanta for a then world record fee of 105 million lire, to Omar Sivori at Juventus, where he briefly replaced

the Brazilian disciplinarian Paulo Amaral in 1964, apparently losing the dressing room in the process. "Monzeglio never said a word about Sívori's excesses," wrote the Juventus historian Renato Tavella, "and remained in a state of perpetual subjection."

Ghirelli spoke of Monzeglio's "unquestionable gentlemanliness" and Tavella of his "meekness of character", while Brera described him in his later years as "a delicate old soul, full of dignity and good manners" – all euphemistic ways of saying that he

lacked the stuff football managers are made of. No wonder his only achievement in his 30-year career on the bench was promotion to Serie A in his first year at Napoli in 1949.

Bestowed with the title of *Commendatore della Repubblica* in 1971, Eraldo Monzeglio died in Turin in 1981. In 2013 he was posthumously inducted into the Italian Football Hall of Fame and in 2015 a street was named after him in Casale Monferrato, the town in Piedmont where his peripatetic career in football began. 🗨️



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FOUR DAYS OF MISERY

Right-backs, own-goals and
the misfortune of Brian Laws

BY DAVID MARPLES



Playing at right-back used to be much simpler: stop the cross, pump the ball down the line, tackle the left-winger – preferably hard in a ‘let him know you’re around and dump him into the lap of a fan in the stand’ type of way – and score the odd goal. Not these days though. It’s now a complicated business. You’re either tasked with overlapping the inverted winger to whip in pinpoint crosses or you’re in the process of being converted into a defensive yet playmaking midfielder. And regardless of how well you perform either role, you will be judged for the cardinal sin of leaving space behind you.

You are even expected to weigh in with a scientifically measured number of goals calculated by boffins with laptops – preferably in the opposition’s net as opposed to your own. The world went and got itself in a big damn hurry.

We all know about the time when Lee Dixon overcomplicated the simple business of being a right-back. Adhering to the early nineties dictum of ‘giving your keeper an early feel of the ball’, Dixon spirited up David Seaman’s personal Marley who forewarned of visits by ghosts of goals yet to come by the name of Nayim and Ronaldinho in the opening minutes of a home game against Coventry City in September 1991.

But that’s not the only worthy entry in the rather niche category of ‘best own goal scored by a right-back’. As prescient and sublime as Dixon’s effort was, there was another, sparking off a chain of events that added up to a pretty miserable seven days in the life of Brian Laws between 3 and 10 May 1989.

Forest are at home to Millwall and already one goal up from a fierce strike from Tommy Gaynor. Millwall, though, are enjoying their first season in the top flight and are no pushovers, comfortably holding their own in mid-table. They aren’t taking this lying down. A ball is swung over from the right after good work from Jimmy Carter. It bounces off Teddy Sheringham’s head towards Tony Cascarino but because of Des Walker’s jump, he can’t get any purchase on his header. The ball drops to Laws’s right foot eight yards out. In goal, Steve Sutton is only four yards off his line; the delicate cushioned back pass is very much on.

It defies belief how one could execute a perfect bell curve shape with the trajectory of a football over only eight yards above a bearlike goalkeeper. But Laws dismisses the laws of physics with a beautiful stroke of his boot. Dixon had 25 yards; Laws only had eight. Ergo: Laws’s effort was better, or at least, more aesthetically pleasing.

Although Forest eventually romped to a 4-1 win, the FA Cup semi-final abandoned amid the tragedy of Hillsborough was replayed at Old Trafford four days later. It was a sombre, eerie occasion. Football was meaningless but the game was somehow meaningful.

Liverpool took the lead after only three minutes. John Aldridge made an awkward header look easy after Sutton parried a stinging John Barnes shot. Neil Webb equalised with a shot from distance that Bruce Grobbelaar really should have done better with. In the second half, Aldridge put Liverpool further ahead with a close-

range header. The stage was set for Laws's week to get significantly worse.

Liverpool's win was sealed when Peter Beardsley threaded an inviting ball across the face of the goal that Laws turned into his own net. If he hadn't, Barnes would have scored anyway. Barnes celebrated by simply walking away, as if he felt Laws's pain and didn't wish to exacerbate it. In contrast, Aldridge went out of his way and delivered the notorious hair ruffle. It's a gesture that is equal parts unnecessary and just plain mean.

In his autobiography, *Laws of the Jungle*, Laws says, "at first I did not know it was him. But when I looked up and saw Aldridge, I also saw the expression on the faces of my Forest teammates. They were furious with him."

In terms of own goals, this was a very different beast to the comedic one four days earlier against Millwall. But we're not quite finished yet; there is more to wring from this narrative. Laws picks up the story: "Just three days later we travelled to Anfield in a league game. When the team coach arrived Aldridge was actually waiting to attempt an apology to me. But I was having none of that. I told him, 'Fuck off. You've done the damage, I'll see you on the park.' So the stage was set for a battle.

Moreover, Laws had carte blanche: "Nobody was a greater upholder of fair play than Brian Clough. Yet feelings were running so high that before kick-off Cloughie told me that it would not bother him if I got sent off." The problem for Laws though was that, "Aldo rode all my tackles and challenges and I simply couldn't get to him."

Aldridge's version of the offer of an olive branch is more PG than 18 in its language. In his autobiography, *Alright Aldo – Sound as a Pound*, he says that Laws "would not even look at me," and rejected his offer of friendship with "damn you".

The feud rumbled on. "During the game, Brian and I chased the ball as it rolled towards the corner flag. I got there first and though he tried to kick me, I managed to jump out of the way. He was on the floor so I ran up to him and rubbed his head for the second time in less than a week. This time I was pleased with my intervention. I meant to be patronising and, for his failure to accept my apology, Brian deserved it."

Forest held Liverpool at 0-0 until the 81st minute when Franz Carr felled David Burrows in the area. Aldridge stepped up to take the resulting penalty and just about squeezed it past Sutton's palms.

This was the first of four consecutive league wins for Liverpool – Aldridge scored in every game – extending an unbeaten run which stretched back to January 1 and precipitated that final waltz with Arsenal on May 26 to decide who walked away as champions. You know the rest. Aldridge didn't score in that game. The story goes that Tony Adams ran over at the final whistle and ruffled Aldridge's hair, accompanied by the words, "That's for Brian Laws, you cunt."

It would be grossly unfair to remember Laws as a clumsy own goal machine. He was a neat and tidy defender who played for Brian Clough's vibrant late eighties side that lifted the League Cup in consecutive seasons, made more trips

to Wembley than a 206 Routemaster and posted consecutive third place league finishes. As a manager he notched up 700 games, achieved a historic double over Sheffield United as manager of Sheffield Wednesday and oversaw two promotions at Scunthorpe United.

That miserable May week in the life of Brian was eventually resolved in classic football fashion as Laws and Aldridge bumped into each other on holiday, had a chat and got over it. As Laws puts it – in typical Brian Clough style – “we kissed and made up.” 🤝

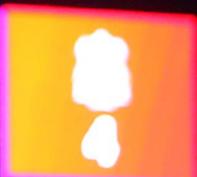


SIX STEPS TO MODERNITY

The right-backs whose
careers trace the recent
development of the position

BY MARVIN SORDELL

ING POWER
STADIUM



7988



The right side of defence was once reserved for the worst player of our Sunday teams, seen as the position that anyone could play, but now right-back has become one of the most significant positions in any starting XI. The constant technical, physical and, most crucially, tactical reinvention of one of the game's least acknowledged positions has coincided with the rise of some of the best football teams of the past 20 years.



Gary Neville

Manchester United & England

The Overlapper

Without Gary Neville galloping down the right beyond him, David Beckham would have had a very different career at Old Trafford. Although he wasn't as blessed with the skill and pace of a certain future number 7, all Beckham needed was a couple of yards to get his inch-perfect crosses into the box. More often than not, this priceless space would be provided by Gary Neville.

As the ball would shift across the midfield from left to right, Neville would already be on his way, charging up his channel,

leaving his tracking winger in his wake. The opposing full-back marking Beckham would be left two v one, in a position of indecision whether or not to drop to follow the runner in Neville, which then gave Beckham his opportunity. Beckham to Andy Cole, to Teddy Sheringham, to Ole Gunnar Solskjær, to Dwight Yorke – and goal! We saw it time and time again. Beckham would almost always get the plaudits, but these were goals and a formula in part made by Gary Neville. That was a highly successful partnership for many years, and one which was at the heart of Manchester United's domination.

Paulo Ferreira

Porto/Chelsea & Portugal

The Unspectacular Rock

When José Mourinho made the switch from Porto in 2004, he wasted no time in going back to recruit two of his most trusted players. Not many would have guessed, though, that Mourinho was going to spend £13million on the right back who helped him conquer Europe in the previous two years. Paulo Ferreira, who is possibly the easiest to ignore on this list of players, was a hugely important part of the foundation that helped Mourinho build his glorious career.

During Mourinho's first season at Stamford Bridge in particular, Chelsea were the epitome of solidity. Ferreira, who started 29 league games that season, was a huge part of that. Conceding only 15 goals on the way to winning the club's first Premier League title, Mourinho's pragmatic approach was summed up in his right-back's professional yet unspectacular

playing style. He was part of unit that kept a record 25 clean sheets. His importance as part of that wall allowed their attack to focus on scoring goals.



Dani Alves

Barcelona & Brazil

The Skilful Attacker

Between 2008 and 2012, Barcelona were one of the most extraordinary football teams the world has ever seen. Their success was to a significant degree based on the formidable partnership between one of the world's greatest ever players in Lionel Messi and one of the world's greatest ever right-backs in Dani Alves.

His ultra-attacking mentality matched with his positional understanding created a nightmare for every team Barcelona faced. When Messi went inside, Dani Alves went outside. When Messi went outside, Dani Alves went inside. They played one-twos, probably more so than any two players in history, and when Messi was double-marked, which happened often, it allowed Dani Alves to run riot. With the technical grace to match any winger, he created chance after chance. In that golden four-year spell, he averaged 12 assists a season in la Liga while his runs off the ball to create space led to countless other opportunities.





Philipp Lahm

Bayern Munich & Germany
The Extra Midfielder

Lahm was described by Pep Guardiola as “perhaps the most intelligent player I have ever coached in my career”. His ability and eye for a team-splitting pass, his ball retention skills, and his unmatched understanding of the game allowed him to lead Bayern Munich to the Champions League in 2013 and then Germany to the World Cup in 2014.

The standout performance from the latter tournament, of course, was the 7-1 mauling of Brazil in the semi-final. When analysing that match in particular, you quickly see why Lahm’s right-back-cum-extra-midfielder role was so key for both club and national sides at that time. Lahm’s ability to play

inside when his team were attacking was highlighted when Guardiola took over at Bayern. His previous experience of playing as a defensive midfielder no doubt helped, but his understanding and sense of timing of when to float from his defensive slot allowed the likes of Bastian Schweinsteiger and Toni Kroos for Germany, and Schweinsteiger and Thomas Müller for Bayern, to push further forward and play higher up the pitch. From these advanced positions, they were able to utilise their own magnificent passing and shooting qualities to damage the opposition. Kroos, Müller, Mesut Özil and Schweinsteiger took most of the plaudits in those teams, but the real key was the humble right-back.

Kyle Walker

Manchester City & England
The Athlete

Kyle Walker played a huge part in Tottenham’s rise to Premier League runners-up in the 2016-17 season, but it was after his move to Manchester City that he really took his favoured position to a new destination.

One of Pep Guardiola’s first acts on becoming City manager was to invest in full-backs, one of which was Walker for £45 million. A lot of questions were raised, but his value became clear once Guardiola’s plans came to fruition. He wanted his full-backs to be able to create and utilise space, which is something that Walker did exceptionally. With the physical prowess to be able to play the entire right side of the pitch pretty much on his own, this allowed City often to have their winger

play inside as either an extra forward or an extra midfielder, giving them another body to be able to dominate the ball and create an overload centrally. While this happened, Walker was often camped in the final two-thirds and because of his athleticism he never had to be too worried about the space he was leaving behind him. Having this extra player so far forward forced opposition teams to drop deeper and deeper, encouraging wave after wave of City attacks.

Especially in Walker's first year there, this tactic was key in making City practically unstoppable domestically as they racked up 32 wins, scored 106 goals and collected 100 points in 2016-17.



Trent Alexander-Arnold

Liverpool & England

The Creator

Liverpool reached the Europa League final and finished eighth in the league in 2015-16. The following season they finished fourth. At the time it seemed legitimate to wonder whether they could get any better. That they have is to a large part down to the emergence of Trent Alexander-Arnold.

The purpose with which Alexander-Arnold gets forward and then creates opportunities is a major reason that Mohammed Salah can get into the box to score the goals that have won him back to back Premier League golden boots. Alexander-Arnold's most dangerous weapon is the supreme quality he possesses in his right foot. His delivery of passes, and his crossing into the box from both wide and deep, allow Liverpool to flood the box with confidence that the ball in will be dangerous.

The position that he mostly takes up during games, similar to that of Andy Robertson on the left, is ingenious. Practically being used as a traditional right-sided midfielder, Alexander-Arnold gets support from Jordan Henderson, which pushes Salah closer to Roberto Firmino, getting more bodies into the box but without losing the protection outside of it. That enables Liverpool continuously to recycle the ball to their danger man. For two seasons now, Alexander-Arnold has been recognised as one of the danger-men in a side that has claim to be one of the greatest in Premier League history. The evolution of the right-back has been rapid, and he now stands at the forefront. 📧

NO LIMITS

How Dani Alves emerged
at Sevilla to revolutionise
expectations of right-backs

BY COLIN MILLAR



BRASIL vs PERÚ
07 JUNIO 2019
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BRASIL

13

25 August 2007. Sevilla were preparing for their opening game of the Spanish Primera División against Getafe. The Andalusian club had enjoyed the greatest 12 months in their history. Holders of the Uefa Cup (won in successive seasons), Copa del Rey, Uefa Super Cup and Spanish Supercopa – which they had claimed earlier that month, convincingly defeating Real Madrid 6-3 over two legs. They could, and possibly should, have won La Liga too. Had they won their final two matches, Sevilla would have landed only the second league title in their history and first in six decades. But stumbles against Real Mallorca and Villarreal, partly a result of their exhausting campaign spanning 63 matches – a whopping 13 more than the eventual champions Real Madrid – cost them Spanish football’s ultimate prize.

Yet as is so often the case in football, successes deliver new challenges and the build-up to Sevilla’s opening league game had not centred around their trophies, but the future of Dani Alves. The Brazilian, who was blossoming into one of world football’s greatest full-backs, had received two offers from Chelsea which had been knocked back by Sevilla. Alves claimed he “could not turn down” such an opportunity and publicly spoke of his dismay at how the Sevilla president José María del Nido had handled the situation. Indeed, just ten days earlier Alves was not included in the club’s vital Champions League qualifier against AEK Athens with the Sevilla coach Juande Ramos saying he “could not handcuff anyone nor force them to play.”

Having sold José Antonio Reyes, Júlio Baptista and Sergio Ramos for significant

profits in recent years, Del Nido had been desperate to hold on to Alves. He knew not only that the Brazilian was his greatest asset but that his market value was significantly underestimated due to his position. The typical right-back was a reliable and dependable member of the support cast, but never one of the team’s genuine standout performers. Transfer budgets were prioritised for the signings of forward players, wingers and creative midfielders. Alves redefined the role and expectations of the right-back and, in part, played a significant part in the tactical evolution of football. He had arrived at the Spanish club from Bahia in the summer of 2002, initially on loan before the move was made permanent; the entire operation totalled just over €1m.

Joaquín Caparrós, who had preceded Ramos as Sevilla coach, deployed a straightforward 4-4-2 formation and immediately recognised the attacking talents of Alves and insisted he would best be utilised as a right-winger. Alves disagreed: “The full-back (at that time) couldn’t go beyond halfway. I said: ‘Why not?’” the Brazilian later recalled in an interview with the *Guardian*. “Football is defend-attack, defend-attack ... or attack-defend, attack-defend. Football has no limits, no rules.” Aged 21 at the time, it was an early indication of the player’s natural leadership and disregard for conventions. At the behest of his father, Alves had played his entire career on the right side of defence but had never let it curtail his natural desire to attack and he was unwilling to compromise.

At international level, too, it took time for Alves to be fully appreciated – he had been capped just once before 2007.

Often an understudy to Inter's Maicon, his style of play had drawn comparisons to his compatriot Roberto Carlos but the difference – that frequently went unnoticed – was that Alves was a much better defender. His opportunity for Brazil arrived in the 2007 Copa América final against Argentina, when – with Brazil leading 1-0 – he replaced the injured playmaker Elano in the 34th minute. Six minutes later, it was a cross-cum-shot from Alves which Roberto Ayala deflected into his own net. In the second half, Alves provided a powerful but precise finish into the far corner to make it 3-0. In a star-studded match, Alves had played a key part in both the goals scored while he was on the pitch.

A year earlier, Liverpool saw an initial bid of £7m rejected for the player and Del Nido reportedly told Alves that he would sell him for his "true value" if a suitable offer were received. But this presented a serious dilemma when Chelsea believed they had agreed a £21.5m deal for Alves, who even began telling close friends and teammates he would be playing at Stamford Bridge that season, having agreed personal terms in a landmark deal worth a reported £4.5m a year. The situation began to unravel with Del Nido – primarily responsible for transfer negotiations – insisting publicly that he had rejected all offers for the player while Sevilla's high-profile director José María Cruz – responsible for concluding the finer details after negotiations were concluded – simultaneously met with Chelsea representatives in Madrid to complete the details.

To save face, Del Nido privately hiked his valuation of the player to £30m

while Alves went on international duty with Brazil. It was widely expected by everyone – including Alves himself – that negotiations would reach a positive conclusion, but Chelsea had grown frustrated and pulled the plug, instead signing Juliano Belletti from Barcelona. On the day that deal was announced, an infuriated Alves returned to Seville airport – telling assembled journalists, "I have nothing to say" – before hurrying into the car of his teammate Pablo Alfaro. Alves felt he had been betrayed and misled by the club, even if the Sevilla fans – unaware of the negotiations – did not agree. Before kick-off of the match against Getafe, two days later, a banner from the club's Biris Norte ultras read: "Alves, you came here as a child, you'll leave as a mercenary."

His future in Andalusia had appeared to have gone past the point of no return and his options were running out, although the breakdown of his move to London had appeared to open a path to Real Madrid. Alves frequently flirted with the idea of going to the Spanish champions. Months earlier, Sevilla's Copa del Rey final triumph had been secured in Madrid's Santiago Bernabéu stadium and Alves described the club's dressing rooms as "the best in the world", describing a hypothetical move to los Blancos as a "wonderful reward". But Madrid had already signed two defenders that summer, Pepe and Christoph Metzelder, and instead of landing Alves they opted for the Chelsea winger Arjen Robben. Madrid did not want to sign Alves, just as Liverpool had not wanted to sign him enough and Chelsea did not want to pay for him. Football had not yet come to the realisation that lavish resources could be directed towards a mere right-back.

Yet full-backs at Sevilla were not what they were elsewhere, and Alves embodied these qualities. Juande Ramos had tweaked the intense nature of play developed under his predecessor Caparrós into a slightly more restrained and nuanced style. He retained the 4-4-2 formation and prioritised utilising the full width of the pitch, focusing on overlapping full-backs and a high tempo. This was the organised chaos of encouraging full-backs to push forward and the realisation that, of all the outfield positions, it was they who were afforded the greatest time in possession. By exploiting this and adding extra and often unmarked attacking options, Sevilla refined the significance of both full-back positions. It was an idea that carried an element of risk and placed greater emphasis on their physical conditioning. Marcos Álvarez, the club's fitness coach, was something of a pioneer in diet and conditioning – although his rigorous methods proved less successful when he became part of the backroom team under Ramos at Tottenham.

With Sevilla, these players were not just full-backs but wingers, defenders, midfielders and occasionally even strikers – Alves being briefly deployed in such an advanced role against Zenit Saint Petersburg in a European clash, where he won a penalty and provided an assist. Throughout games they were everywhere and sometimes appeared to be in several positions all at once. Describing them as full-backs did not come close to doing their roles justice. On the left-flank there was Adriano – another high-energy, relentless Brazilian who would eventually also join Barcelona – and Antonio Puerta, a local kid who grew up in the city's

Nervión district, a stone's throw from the club's Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán stadium. Capped by Spain aged 21, Puerta was often deployed at left-back despite having qualities which were more customarily associated with a wide midfielder. Puerta – who had courted attention from Manchester United, Arsenal and Madrid – had collapsed on the pitch during the league opener against Getafe and was rushed to hospital.

That was a moment that changed the future of Alves. Two days later, he was the only player not to arrive at the city's San Pablo airport to travel to Athens for the second leg of their Champions League qualifier against AEK. Del Nido accused him of "complete disrespect towards his teammates and this club", before adding, "We are the club who pay him but he has refused to travel, which illustrates his professionalism." Sevilla – minus Alves – flew to Athens for a game that did not take place. The day after they arrived, the news was confirmed that Puerta, aged 22, had passed away in hospital. It emerged that he possessed a hereditary and incurable heart disease which brought on prolonged heart attacks, resulting in multiple organ failure and irreversible brain damage.

The rancour between Alves and Sevilla was swiftly forgotten and a deeply unsavoury departure was avoided, albeit as a result of tragedy. Such resentment had not reflected the player's time at the club with the two appearing as kindred spirits. Alves may have been born in the Brazilian city of Juazeiro but he was a *sevillano* at heart; he embodied the spirit of the Andalusian capital and even dressed as a bullfighter for the city's April fair.

The adoration of Alves was partly fuelled by a prominent concept in Seville: *guasa*, having a sense of humour – being deliberately silly and trying to have a laugh, often with a dash of wickedness. Alves was known for being the heart and soul of the dressing room, typically making himself the centre of attention by singing out of tune, “I like to feel happiness and when people try to destroy that, it winds me up.” The outspoken Manuel Ruiz de Lopera was president of Real Betis at the time and, never shy of taunting the red-and-white half of the city, he called Alves a “clown” for his bullfighter outfit. In April 2006, Alves packed the outfit to wear during the post-match celebrations only to see the side lose. But often, Alves was a winner.

Alves had another peculiar tradition of having a haircut before every big game but the flaw in this ritual was exposed as Sevilla’s success meant important, season-defining matches became increasingly frequent. His solution was to cut his hair off in stages before each game and this left him with just the sides shaved for a crucial league clash at home to Barcelona in March 2007. It was a performance which defined his time in southern Spain not just in terms of his outrageous talent but his belief and leadership. The away side entered the game as league leaders and when Ronaldinho gave them a lead followed by the dismissal of the Sevilla defender Aitor Ocio within the opening half hour, a Barça win looked a formality.

But Ronaldinho’s resulting penalty was saved by Andrés Palop and then Alves took centre stage. He was influential in Sevilla’s equaliser before the break:

Frédéric Kanouté dropped deep and picked out the Brazilian who had made a typical darting run from inside his own half deep into Barcelona territory on the wing before dribbling directly at three retreating opponents and picking out Aleksandr Kerzhakov in the area to equalise. On the hour, Alves scored from a pinpoint free-kick to put the ten men ahead. A minute later he dispossessed Ludovic Giuly who was shown a straight red for grabbing him. Throughout the game, Alves appeared a man possessed and a bundle of energy – four minutes into added time he once again tore into Barça’s area but his rasping drive rattled the woodwork. No matter, Sevilla won and went top of the league that night.

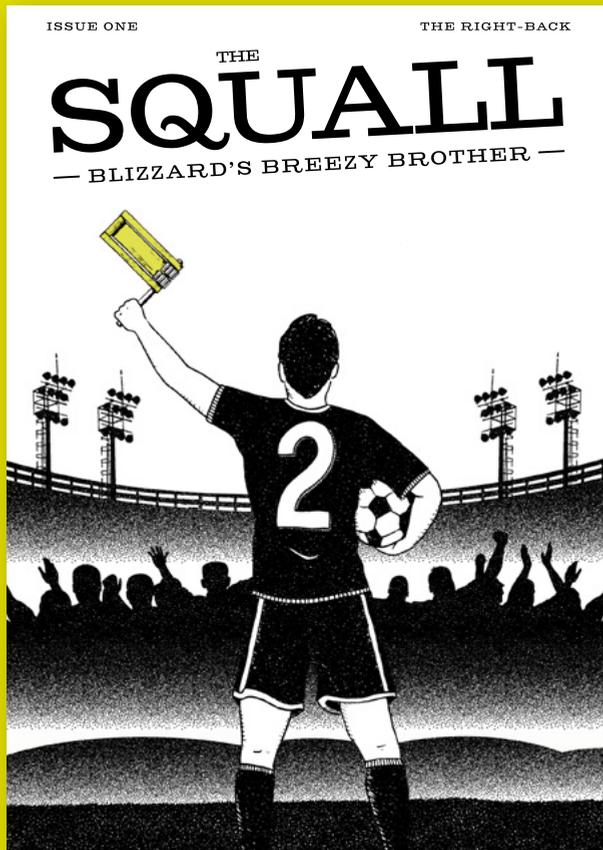
That season, Alves provided 11 direct assists in La Liga, second only to David Villa. In 2007-08, that tally rose to 14. He was a box of tricks and skills, showing off his supreme ability and self-confidence, everything built on a relentless work ethic. Alves was a blend of natural talent and diligence and tenacity. No player worked harder than him and nobody could match his consistency as the architect of team goals. Yet his game was far from refined: no La Liga player picked up more than his 66 yellow cards during his time in Seville and in two separate seasons he picked up 16 yellow cards, while he was sent off three times in 2007-08 campaign, his last at Sevilla. Del Nido eventually relented and sanctioned his sale for a reported €40m to Barcelona. Alves was no longer angry but was overcome by emotion. “I am what I am thanks to Sevilla,” the tearful Brazilian said at his farewell press conference. “I arrived here as a child and I leave a man. It will be impossible to live this happiness anywhere else.”

Pep Guardiola, more influential than any other coach this century in terms of tactical evolution, was the one person outside of Sevilla who truly valued Alves and the significance of a great right-back. The miraculous league title proved agonisingly out of reach in Andalusia but, after two years of failure, Alves and Gerard Piqué were Barça's only signings in the summer of 2008 as a stunning revival was launched. The full-back starred across eight seasons at the Camp Nou, winning 23 trophies including six league titles and three Champions League crowns. When leaving Barcelona in 2016, he had made more La Liga appearances than any other non-Spaniard ever and provided more than 100 assists, more than any player over the same period apart from Lionel Messi. More than Andrés Iniesta. More than Xavi. All from right-back.

Alves then won league titles with Juventus and Paris Saint-Germain,

continually adding to his trophy haul. He was inspirational in Juve's run to the 2017 Champions League final, playing a supreme defensive role – a side of his game that has been habitually under-appreciated – in the quarter-final triumph over Barcelona as he marked his close friend Neymar out of both matches. Alves became the first professional footballer to win 40 trophies and captained Brazil to the 2019 Copa América crown where, aged 36, he was named the tournament's star player.

In attempting to define his role on the pitch, Alves said, "I play as a creative midfielder from the back." His vision, technique and engine created a hybrid that played a large role in reinventing the role of the right-back. He was handed the number 10 shirt upon signing for his boyhood club São Paulo in 2019 and on his debut, against Ceará, scored the only goal of the game. 📺



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THE MAKESHIFTS

The Champions League
finals that demonstrate
how right-back was
seen as a fill-in

BY RICHARD JOLLY



Go back a couple of decades and successive Chelsea managers provided unflattering definitions of the first two names – numerically, anyway – on the team sheet. Ruud Gullit said that “a goalkeeper is a goalkeeper because he can’t play football.” Gianluca Vialli argued a right-back was a right-back because he was the worst outfield player in the team, arguing a better defender would be used in the middle and a superior technical footballer in the midfield and that, given the relative scarcity of left-footers, a gifted leftie was likelier to become a full-back. That left the right-back, the runt of the footballing litter. As Jamie Carragher put it, “Nobody wants to grow up to be a Gary Neville.”

But perhaps there is a counter-argument: that everyone could be a right-back, that they could be a Gary Neville. Perhaps the right-back is having a renaissance now, with England spewing out specialists to such an extent that Kyle Walker and Kieran Trippier played together in the 2018 World Cup and Trent Alexander-Arnold pioneering the playmaker full-back, but a theme of the last two decades has been the makeshift right-back.

Equip a fine footballer with the skills to operate elsewhere, it seemed, and he could play right-back. If the argument was that a right-back was either a frustrated centre-back, a frustrated central midfielder or a frustrated right winger, then why not use someone from those three other positions at right-back? The skillset they possessed, it appeared, would compensate for any positional unfamiliarity. They were so good they could play right-back.

The joy of the makeshift right-back lies in part in the way they multiplied. Some of the most distinguished and decorated managers – Sir Alex Ferguson, Pep Guardiola, Carlo Ancelotti, Didier Deschamps, Rafa Benitez – have eschewed the need for a professional and turned to men with a marked preference for operating elsewhere on the highest of stages. They have often been rewarded. Perhaps that willingness to trust an amateur was disrespectful to those with a PhD in right-backery (or, indeed, in right-Bacary Sagna), but a broader education in the game has served the part-timers well.

Consider the Champions League finals of the 2000s. They were notable for auxiliary right-backs; often as a consequence of injuries, but instead of specialists nonetheless. In 2003, the career centre-back Alessandro Costacurta was the ageing centre-back as right-back, pottering around Old Trafford in the manner of a pensioner doing nothing very much in his garden; had pitch maps existed then, his would have been one of the least populated ever, devoid of dots in the Juventus half.

By 2005, Liverpool’s wing-backs for the last 75 minutes, which they won 3-0, were first Vladimír Šmicer, the winger given some of the right-back’s role, and then Steven Gerrard, an all-action central midfielder sent to the flank to stop the rampaging Serginho (Gerrard’s occasional cameos at right-back, including for England against Ukraine and Argentina, suggested a Scouser could have been the world’s best long before his protégé Alexander-Arnold, but he had about five other positions he would rather play).

Come 2008 and Michael Essien was the latest example of the central midfielder turned right-back; as Chelsea had four irresistible choices – along with Michael Ballack, Frank Lampard and Claude Makélélé – for three positions, they used the vacancy on the right of defence to dodge a decision. But the school of thought was also instructive: Essien had a fine game against Cristiano Ronaldo but it suggested a high-calibre footballer was preferable to an actual right-back (Juliano Belletti was on the bench, but only came on after 120 minutes).

The opposite right-back that Moscow night was Wes Brown, a centre-back by

preference but a man whose best season for United came on the right. Twelve months later, the same statement applied to John O'Shea. The 2009 Champions League final is remembered more for Lionel Messi's capacity to baffle United as a false nine and even for Yaya Touré operating as an auxiliary centre-back but it was also a game of no right-backs: not by trade, anyway. O'Shea and Carles Puyol were deployed there instead.

There is a case for arguing that Maicon and Philipp Lahm, the 2010 duo, were the first actual right-backs to play in a Champions League final for three years, though that raises the question of precisely who qualifies



as a makeshift. There are players who have served lengthy apprenticeships at right-back, Sergio Ramos or Joshua Kimmich for example; it is hard to call them a stand-in right-back but there was nevertheless an inescapable sense their future lay in more central roles. They were too good to be omitted, better than many a supposed expert; it was a way of crowbarring an all-round footballer into the team.

In the days before the right-back was a one-man right flank (perhaps excluding Brazilians who often were), the strongest case for the specialist may have come in a superbly drilled unit: Mauro Tassotti for Arrigo Sacchi's AC Milan or Lee Dixon for George Graham's Arsenal. Yet as laws were loosened to favour the attacker, the scope for the makeshift right-back grew. Maybe Graham Taylor was an unwitting pioneer: his three right-backs at Euro 92, when Dixon spearheaded the list of injured right-backs, were Keith Curle, Martin Keown and David Batty.

From Mike Phelan through Owen Hargreaves to Phil Jones, Chris Smalling and Antonio Valencia, Ferguson used midfielders, centre-backs and wingers there at times; in Ashley Young, his successors carried on that policy. Guardiola has selected Fernandinho and Jesus Navas at right-back ahead of regulars. Martin O'Neill kept buying full-backs for Aston Villa and then sidelining

them for midfielders like Nigel Reo-Coker and James Milner.

When Gareth Southgate named three right-backs for the 2018 World Cup, it was arguably the first time England had selected more than one since Gary Stevens and Paul Parker went to Italy in 1990. Those filling in in 2006 included Carragher, who had transitioned to a centre-back after being Liverpool's reluctant but regular right-back, and David Beckham. The idea of a crosser at right-back had some merit long before Alexander-Arnold.

The World Cup may represent the highest stage but it has been frequented by makeshift right-backs. Perhaps it reflects the unequal distribution of talent that countries with too many players in certain positions help find their best 11 footballers a spot by using someone at right-back, but the 2014 knockout stages featured Martín Cáceres, Shkodran Mustafi and Toby Alderweireld as right-backs and Dirk Kuyt as a right wing-back.

Come 2018 and the World Cup winners had one out-and-out right-back in their squad. Djibril Sidibé was a back-up, however, to VfB Stuttgart's centre-back Benjamin Pavard. Officially the premier right-back in the world was not really a right-back. The makeshifts had conquered the planet. 



THE WORST FOUL IN HISTORY?

Wycombe's Jason Cousins and a lunge that encapsulates the brutal past of the position

BY IAN BAKER



Jason Cousins does not have the status of Dani Alves, Philipp Lahm, Cafu and Kyle Walker but the former Wycombe Wanderers right-back gained a measure of fame in September 1993 for what might be the worst foul of all time.

Cousins was the captain of Wycombe, in just their second month as a league club, when he launched a flying eight-yard leap three feet off the ground into the midriff of the Doncaster Rovers midfielder David Moss. It's probably just as well for Cousins that he was playing in an age before social media but the foul has become a belated online sensation with a YouTube clip generating more than 80,000 views.

Ian St John said in his role as an ITV pundit that Cousins deserved to face criminal charges. That matters were not taken further was largely due to the fact that Moss suffered no serious injury, climbing to his feet after the incident. Cousins didn't even receive a straight red card, although he was shown a second yellow by the referee Mick Pierce.

Cousins's teammate and brother-in-law Keith Scott tried to convince Pierce not to show a red card. "I went over to the ref," he said, "and because the player had got up straight away, I told him it's not as bad as it looks and appealed for leniency." Steve Thompson, another teammate who was providing co-commentary, also tried to defend the indefensible.

But the Wycombe manager Martin O'Neill was furious and the cost for Cousins could have been considerable. Cousins had been a stalwart with Wycombe in their non-league days after signing from Brentford in 1991. A fan favourite, he had climbed

the fences at Wembley earlier in the year to celebrate scoring in the FA Trophy final against Runcorn. But none of that mattered to O'Neill. Outraged at not only a second dismissal in as many weeks but the manner of it, O'Neill stormed into the dressing room at half-time and launched a showering Cousins into the corridor, naked.

In addition to a four-match FA ban, Cousins was immediately suspended by his club, fined, stripped of the captaincy and lucky not to be sacked. But a couple of weeks later, O'Neill had calmed down. "It was sickeningly brutal, needless and completely incomprehensible," he wrote in his programme notes. "The girls in our office told me that a few supporters came in after the match to say that they wouldn't be watching us any more because of that challenge.

"I cannot prevent anyone from taking whatever action they see fit, but I can, as manager of this football club, tell you that I will not tolerate such behaviour from my players and that if Jason does it again he won't need to be told to leave the club. He has been fined and suspended and the captaincy will be taken away from him.

"But when judgment is passed on him please take last February's game with Bromsgrove Rovers in the FA Trophy into consideration. Jason Cousins was stretchered off unconscious when, while still lying on the ground, he put his head in front of an opponent's boot to prevent a goal being scored. We eventually triumphed 2-0 in that game and went on to enjoy another memorable day out at Wembley. Jason Cousins lay unconscious for over four hours in Wycombe General Hospital for the cause of this football club.

“He will no doubt have to live with his actions for quite some time. Perhaps you are still not in the forgiving mood but Jason Cousins will get one more chance by this manager to prove himself all over again. I hope he, for his family’s sake, succeeds.”

And Cousins did. On returning to the side he scored a free-kick as Wycombe nearly knocked Coventry City, then a Premier League side, out of the Coca-Cola Cup. He went on to help the club to promotion to the third tier of English football that season and stayed at Adams Park for a

further eight years, making nearly 500 appearances in total.

In one of his final acts as a Wycombe player, Cousins played in the 2001 FA Cup semi-final against Liverpool, grabbing a young Michael Owen by the neck after he attempted to win a penalty. He now collects passengers rather than cards as a chauffeur on the outskirts of London. His type of player has vanished almost entirely.

But whatever else he did it is that early autumn day in September 1993 for which Cousins will always be remembered. 🗣️



TAXI FOR MAICON

The night Gareth Bale gave
one of the best right-backs
in the world a chasing

BY CALLUM RICE-COATES



His legs felt heavy, weighing him down as he tried desperately to keep up. He was tired, almost exhausted, willing it to be over. But there was no respite. His opponent simply kept coming, never slowing down, never tiring. By the end, it felt like an assault.

For Maicon, this was an entirely new experience. He had been at the very top of European football for years, a right-back capable of matching the game's most gifted wide players. But he did not account for Gareth Bale.

It was a mismatch of athleticism; a night that confirmed the arrival of one player and the decline of another. It was 2 November 2010, an evening at White Hart Lane that came to define Maicon's career.

Until this point, the Brazilian had, without question, been among the best full-backs in the world. He was a key part of a team that won four successive Serie A titles, from 2006 to 2010, and lifted the Champions League under José Mourinho. He had been named in the Uefa Team of the Year, starred at World Cups and Copa Américas.

But he was dismantled, his reputation tarnished, over two Champions League group games against Tottenham. It is what many now think of when they hear his name. Not the trophies, not the trademark bursts down the right flank, not the powerful, authoritative right-back who performed so consistently at the highest level for years.

Against Bale, a fresh-faced 21 year old with a seemingly limitless reserve of energy, Maicon was humiliated. He was made to look old, though he was not

yet 30. He strained every sinew, pushed himself as far as possible, but couldn't get close. He was, time after time, left in Bale's dust, a forlorn figure in the background. "He was impossible to control," Maicon later said.

The newspapers were unforgiving. *Gazzetta dello Sport* described him as a "punch-drunk boxer". Bale, they wrote, made "asphalt of Maicon, who is not exactly the worst full-back in the world". *La Repubblica*, meanwhile, observed that Inter's right-back was "literally trampled upon".

Outside of Italy, the media were no less damning. "Bale devoured Maicon," wrote *L'Équipe*. "Bale simply hit the ball outside Maicon and ran past him," read the report in the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*. "Time and time again, despite the fact that Maicon knew what was coming. And in the end Bale was so superior that he just hit the ball 20 metres and ran."

The reaction might have seemed hyperbolic, but this was undoubtedly a turning point in Maicon's career. There was a noticeable decline in the years that followed. At Manchester City and later Roma he was a shadow of his former self, by then well into his 30s.

It may simply have been that Maicon passed his peak earlier than most. Up against Bale, he looked weary, worn by experience, not mellowed by it. There was something almost arthritic about his performance. The Spurs fans sang "taxi for Maicon", mocking a player Bale himself later described as "the best right-back in the world". "He plays for Brazil ahead of Dani Alves so that says it all," Bale said. "I just got the better of him that night."

But this was not an ordinary night for either player. For Maicon, it was humbling: there was a realisation, almost an acceptance, that he would not be the best for much longer.

It was a night that highlighted the nature of his position, too. It is rare that a right-back gets the plaudits, rare that they are lauded above others in a successful team. And when defending against a quick, powerful wide player, there is nowhere to hide. Maicon was alone, his only salvation the final whistle.

In the ten years since that game, the position has perhaps become a little more valued. Perhaps in Brazil, in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, young boys playing football on the streets taunt those friends who have chosen to be right-backs. "No-one wants to grow up and be a Maicon," they perhaps laugh, disdainful and mocking.

Why would anyone want that? Be a Ronaldinho, a Ronaldo, a Rivaldo. Even be a Gilberto Silva, or a Dida. But a Maicon? Somebody, though, had to be a Maicon. Somebody had to fill that role against Bale that night, graciously accepting that his opponent was too good, reading the vitriolic comments in the press the morning after, trying to put it behind him while the media, the fans, constantly brought it back up.

Maicon's decline has continued, his career mired in disciplinary issues and ending with disappointing spells at Avai and Criciúma, small clubs in Brazil's south. Even so, Maicon, for the most part, had an exceptional career. That is not in doubt. That he is remembered by so many for one very bad night, though, says more about the challenges of being a high-profile right-back than it does about the player himself. 📺



THE BRONZE AGE

A goal against Norway
announced the arrival
of the best right-back
in the women's game

BY RICHARD LAVERTY



There are sliding doors moments in any great footballer's career. A moment which could have gone either way. A shot which went agonisingly wide of the post instead of nestling in the top corner or a dramatic clearance off the line which in fact just crept in between the sticks.

On 22 June 2015 came Lucy Bronze's. The Berwick-upon-Tweed-born full-back had yet to become the global star of the women's game she is today, despite being well-known domestically for her defensive prowess and two FA Women's Super League titles. Like many modern-day full-backs, it was a goal rather than a superb sliding tackle which finally sent Bronze on the pathway to stardom. With England's 2015 Women's World Cup second round match against Norway in the balance at 1-1 with 15 minutes to go, Bronze, who rarely shot from distance, unleashed an unstoppable first-time effort into the top corner of Ingrid Hjelmseth's net to seal a quarter-final berth against the hosts, Canada.

Suddenly everyone was talking about Bronze and five years on little has changed. Curiously, like many breakout moments, such as Steph Houghton's surprising run of goals at the 2012 London Olympics, Bronze followed up just her second international goal with another in the quarter-final victory just days later, only emphasising the growing aura around the right-back.

Bronze's journey to 2015, and indeed beyond, was by no means a simple one. The humble genius, who constantly refutes the claim from England's head coach Phil Neville that she is the

best player in the world, had to fight, consciously or sub-consciously, for the respect she has now gained within the wider football world.

Her story of toil is similar to many in the women's game. No silver spoon, Bronze was the only girl on her boys' team at school until she was told she could no longer play with them at the age of 12, the first of several moments that threatened to curtail her career, moments when it looked as though the stars would never align for a girl who was only too happy to spend her time slide-tackling her older brother down the park.

Her start to life with England at Under-19 level though brought her greatest challenge, and was perhaps when she came closest to quitting football. Bronze seriously injured her knee in her first training session with the team and, after the injury became infected, endured a further three surgeries to correct the damage, with stitches running all the way down her kneecap.

Through spirit and determination, Bronze did recover and her career went from strength to strength. Her performances for Everton led to her being part of a Liverpool mega-rebuild in 2013, with the new manager Matt Beard employed by a club determined to end Arsenal's domestic dominance and armed with the finances to build a multi-national squad.

Two years later and Bronze had two FA WSL titles to her name and a move to Manchester City, who were moving in the opposition direction as Liverpool's interest dwindled after back-to-back

title successes, so much so that Bronze moved to Manchester for less than £20,000.

While domestic matters were taking care of themselves, the breakthrough against Norway – just six months away – seemed no closer. In a humbling 3-0 defeat at home to Germany at Wembley leading into the tournament, Bronze was once again a centre-back with Alex Scott preferred by Sampson at right-back.

Indeed, Bronze wasn't even a regular for England heading into the tournament in Canada and there was no sense that the head coach Mark Sampson knew what to do with her. Bronze suffered because of her athleticism, which many believe to be her greatest trait, because it made her versatile and therefore useful to a coach who thrived on using players who showed such attributes.

But behind the scenes there was a specific plan in place for Bronze to replace Scott in the long-term, and indeed Sampson knew exactly what his strategy for Bronze was heading to Canada.

"Everyone was on the same page about Lucy's potential," says David Gough, who was England's opposition analyst under Sampson. "Some were calling for her to be a centre-back but Mark has to take a lot of the credit because we knew she could be the best right-back in the world, mainly down to her running power, that's what it came down to.

"In 2014 I used to go to Widnes to watch her and I'll never forget how she could pick the ball up on the edge of the box and carry it 60 yards. She was the only

player who could do that and she had this ability to actually get stronger as she carried the ball."

At high school in Northumberland, Bronze played as a midfielder in football, a defender in hockey and a centre in netball, while also playing tennis and taking part in regular cross-country events, perhaps shaping her to become the marauding full-back she is today, armed with a range of attributes which have seen her used in various positions on the pitch.

Just 13 days before the Norway game, to the surprise of everyone, Sampson deployed her on the left-side of midfield in the opener against France, but once again it was part of a plan. With England not yet one of the top teams worldwide, Sampson often set up to contain rather than control and Bronze's role in supporting left-back Claire Rafferty was key to any hope the Lionesses had of a result.

"We got slaughtered for that, by the way, absolutely hammered by the media," said Gough. "We started to look at teams about 12 months before the tournament. We had a list of nine teams we thought we were likely to get and France was one of them.

"They had Élodie Thomis on the right who was probably the fastest player in the world, so I put the plan to Mark. When she was running in behind she was hurting teams, and we had some great full-backs, so I said, 'Why don't we just play with two?' Thomis went off after 70 minutes and that plan worked but unfortunately we didn't manage to stop Eugénie Le Sommer scoring from 25 yards."

The coaches had decided there were certain traits in four or five key players they had to utilise, and Bronze's ability to get up and down the pitch with the ball was one of them. Bronze, though, was carrying a minor knock throughout the tournament, so after returning to right-back against Mexico, she was an unused substitute for the final group game against Colombia.

In the second round against Norway, the game which would change Bronze's career, she once again lined up at right-back. Her coaches had set her the challenge of shooting more from range and Scott, a mentor, often urged her to be more selfish from distance, but her decision to let others take the limelight was very much in character with her persona off the pitch. Bronze had received individual coaching during the tournament on her crossing and her ability to influence the game in the final third; that late winner was the fruit.

In the quarter-final, in front of a 60,000-strong partisan crowd in Vancouver, Jodie Taylor's 11th minute strike gave England the perfect start and it took just three minutes for Bronze to rise highest from a free-kick to nod home the second. "That was very scripted," said Gough. "That credit has to go to Lee Kendall, our goalkeeper coach. He believed we could use Lucy more from set pieces and he constructed that in the days before the game. He watched the film and he fancied we'd get Lucy up against Allysha Chapman, who is only just over five feet tall, and luckily enough Lucy took advantage of it and we were 2-0 up inside 15 minutes."

The Lionesses became household names back home, Bronze foremost among them. But she could not impose herself in the semi-final against Japan. Unwell and struggling, she lasted 75 minutes before being brought off, so exhausted she was physically sick on the bench, worn down by the hot and humid conditions in Edmonton.

But such was her drive and determination, Bronze picked herself up to play a third-place play-off in the same stadium against Germany less than three days later. Although not at her peak, Bronze lasted 120 minutes as the Lionesses came home with a bronze medal thanks to a Fara Williams penalty. "There was never a question she wouldn't play," says Gough. "Mark said it was a look. He looked at her, she looked at him. Right, she's playing, no problem!"

What makes Bronze special is her capacity for self-improvement. "She always wanted to know why," Gough said. "Tell me why this is important, why this is better, and once you gave her that knowledge she used it. She was a coach's dream. She couldn't get enough of the why and she used that better than anyone I've ever seen.

"She wasn't vocal. It was always a humble sort of, 'I'm here to work because I haven't won anything yet' and you don't see that sort of attitude in many players. It wasn't about her, it was about how the team could be the best and she would always allow the light to shine on others, that's just who she was and that's a really special trait."

Pre-Norway, Bronze had just two senior England goals to her name, now she has

nine, the most recent of which also came against Norway, in similarly spectacular fashion four years on in Le Havre. For City, Bronze added another FA WSL title to her CV in 2016 and found the net at big moments, the standout being her FA Cup final goal at Wembley against Birmingham City in 2017. It was no surprise then when Lyon, the dominant force in the women's game, came calling. She scored

another stunning volley, this time against her former City side, in the Champions League semi-final.

A player for whom stardom never looked likely and wasn't necessarily wanted, Bronze is now one of the stars of the women's game, the best right-back in the world. Everything changed with that goal against Norway in 2015. 📸



THE ARSENAL SUCCESSION

How Arsène Wenger's
changing philosophy was
mapped in his right-backs

BY ERYK DELINGER



The Invincibles season was extraordinary, and yet it could be argued that it wasn't the greatest feat of Arsène Wenger's tenure at Arsenal. But whether it was the reshaping of English football's landscape, claiming the double in his first full season, keeping the Gunners amongst the elite despite heavy financial constraints in the early days at the Emirates, or indeed the unbeaten run – none of these would've been possible if not for Wenger's famous eye for talent. And nothing epitomises Le Professeur's recruitment philosophy better than the list of Lee Dixon's successors at right-back.

Replacing the famous back four was a monumental challenge and the way Wenger approached it – particularly when it comes to Dixon – is a prime example of what made him a visionary manager. The full-back's future replacement was brought in early – in the summer of 2000, two years before Dixon's retirement. In later years, Wenger would be ridiculed for his habit of stockpiling central midfielders, but to sign one as a replacement for an old-fashioned, natural-born defender was unorthodox even by his standards.

Lauren established himself as a right-sided midfielder at Mallorca, but before that he had learned his trade as a number 8 or even a number 10. Upon arrival at Arsenal, he disliked the idea of becoming a defender so much he pleaded with the boss to give him a chance in his former central role. But in the 2007 documentary *Arsène's Eleven*, Wenger reiterated he was never going to listen: "I signed him as right-back," he said. "He just didn't know it." The manager used to cite Lauren's character, strength and pace as the traits that made him a perfect Arsenal full-

back, but the idea of improving the side's technical quality and distribution from the back with an additional midfielder had a part to play as well.

Whatever way you look at it, signing a Cameroon-born Spaniard, whose mother had fled Equatorial Guinea while pregnant with him, from a mid-table La Liga side and moulding him into one of the world's best in a position he'd never played in before sounds an extremely Wenger thing to do.

Before Lauren made the right-back spot his own, for a brief period he had to fend off competition from another of Wenger's trademark signings, Kolo Touré. There's one box the Cameroon international didn't tick as an archetypal Wenger move – the price. Brought in for £8million, a decade later Lauren would still make it into top 10 of Wenger's most expensive buys. Touré, on the other hand, was an exemplary value-for-money acquisition and Wenger's personal point of pride for years to come. The £250,000 signing's career as a makeshift right-back and defensive midfielder was obviously short-lived, as in the summer of 2003 the boss moved the Ivorian into central defence – consciously trialling the new setup in a friendly against Beşiktaş, as he sought their manager Mircea Lucescu's opinion on the idea – and never looked back.

Lauren and Touré became invincible while playing side by side, but in the end the former was displaced by another prodigy from Touré's hometown, Abidjan.

Emmanuel Eboué's story turned out to be one of a tragic downfall, remembered largely for its grim ending when, having

come off the bench, he tackled a teammate against Wigan and was himself substituted to deafening boos, but for a time he was brilliant, particularly in Arsenal's 2006 Champions League run. When the £1.5m signing from Beveren forced himself into the Champions League team of the tournament with a series of menacing displays against Europe's top sides, it looked as though Wenger had pulled off another transfer miracle. It seemed all the more spectacular given that, until Lauren's injury in early 2006, Eboué barely got a look in, playing fewer than 180 minutes of Premier League and European football in the space of a year.

Curiously, in January 2005 the manager had introduced the newly-signed Eboué as a "centre-back, [who] can play right-back or midfield". However, unsurprisingly to anyone who's ever seen the Ivorian play, his one and only centre-half outing in the red-and-white shirt took place 13 years later, in an Arsenal Legends friendly.

Eboué's excellent spell as the Gunners' starting right-back turned out to be fairly short-lived, as in 2007 Wenger unleashed another one of his specialties. At that point, 11 years into his regime, the Frenchman had signed at least one of his compatriots for every outfield position. Except for right-back. Enter Bacary Sagna – another familiar-sounding type of player: a Ligue 1 mid-table side's standout performer. However, at the time the move seemed rather odd. In 2008, Arsenal were arguably in their most difficult financial period – one in which most big-money signings were made to compensate for outgoing. At that stage it was unusual to see them sign an expensive player just for the sake of an upgrade – let alone in a position that was thought to be well-covered by Eboué. The new arrival marked the beginning of the end for the latter, as Sagna quickly became undroppable and the once-exciting Ivorian full-back had to be utilised as a mediocre wide midfielder.



Although initially his £8m price-tag seemed high, it proved a bargain. Throughout his eight seasons at the club Sagna was one of the most stable, reliable performers – no mean achievement when Arsenal's defence as a whole began to be known for pretty much the opposite. His introduction into the line-up perhaps marked another slight shift in philosophy – as the Gunners' frontline got younger, Sagna's consistency and defensive nous became more valuable than the explosiveness and excitement his predecessors brought to the table. The way he left Emirates tells a story of its own – at a time when departing players usually left the fans angered or at least bitterly disappointed, Sagna's decision to join Manchester City on a free was met with understanding and wishes of good luck. Wenger's most conventional right-back signing turned out to be the most trustworthy – in the Frenchman's 22-year reign only two defenders, Touré and Laurent Koscielny, racked up more appearances for Arsenal than Sagna.

The trusted solidier's exit pushed the manager to look for solutions outside of his comfort zone. And so, two rather un-Wengerish deals saw the 29-year-old Mathieu Debuchy and the 19-year-old Calum Chambers arrive for a combined fee of £30m. Neither really worked out – Chambers' best performances have come at centre-back, while Debuchy's promising start was undone by a string

of injuries. In his absence, Wenger had already found a new long-term solution for the right-back slot – and it was another bargain.

Arsenal probably wouldn't have made it through that period without Wenger's knack for discovering and developing the best youth players from around Europe. Foreign talents poached away and raised as Arsenal's own were common – and Héctor Bellerín is the last of these success stories. The club's current right-back is another case of a player slowly moulded into the position. Having arrived from Barcelona as a winger, Bellerín learned the basics of his new role under Steve Bould's tutelage for two years, before making his first-team debut in the League Cup in 2013, coming on for current Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta. Like Eboué before him, Bellerín eventually took advantage of others' misfortunes and claimed the starting spot for himself – and now he's just one year short of equalling Sagna's time as Arsenal first-teamer.

Bellerín's story completes the set of Wenger's right-backs as examples of the transfer magic that kept Arsenal competitive for the best part of 22 years. A player brilliantly reinvented, an obscure signing discovered through connections, an underrated Frenchman and finally a starlet developed from scratch... in his right-backs lie the story of his magic. 



THE DEPENDABLE TRACTOR

Javier Zanetti – versatile,
consistent and the model of
the old-school right-back

BY NICKY BANDINI



Javier Zanetti never dreamed of being a right-back. As a kid, his idol was Lothar Matthäus, West Germany's all-action midfielder. "His hunger for a scrap used to thrill me," said the Argentinian during one interview back in 2010. "But when I grow up, I would like to be Roberto Baggio."

Although he was already 36, Zanetti was only half-joking. Baggio is a close friend, and the reference here was as much to the contentment that his former teammate seems to have found in life after football as to anything he achieved on the pitch. Yet Zanetti would not have been fazed by the idea of playing up front. As he observed at the time, "The only position I haven't tried is goalkeeper."

It is a bit of a thorny question whether Zanetti truly belongs in an issue devoted exclusively to right-backs. He played whole seasons on the opposite flank, and often in more advanced positions, too. At times he was called into the middle of defence as a makeshift stopper. On many occasions, including the defining game of his career, the 2010 Champions League final triumph over Bayern Munich, he started in central midfield.

Yet right-back was where it all began. Zanetti might have imagined himself as the next Matthäus, but the evidence of a 5ft9in German dominating the centre of the pitch for Bayern Munich and then Inter was not enough to convince coaches that such a role would suit a skinny little kid in Buenos Aires. Indeed, there came a point where nobody seemed to believe he could make it in professional football at all.

Zanetti had been accepted early into the academy at Independiente – one of the five *grandes* of Argentinian football – but they cut him loose at 15. He took a job delivering milk to local supermarkets with his cousin. It is a chapter that reveals much about his character. Working days started at 4am, but Zanetti still found the energy to help his father, a bricklayer, to build walls after he finished his rounds.

"I liked my dad's work," Zanetti would later recall. "But above all I liked the idea of doing something concrete and useful. Building a house is a metaphor that I like, it's at the core of my life philosophy: starting from the bottom and reaching the top."

He was out of competitive football for more than a year before attending a trial at Talleres, then playing in Argentina's second division. There had been opportunities to join sooner, with his older brother Sergio on the books, but the younger Zanetti was said to have been worried about other people thinking that he was getting a free ride.

When he finally did arrive, coaches tried him out in a variety of positions. But right-back was the role he found himself in when he broke through to the first team in 1993.

It suited him. Zanetti had all the technical traits you could want at the position: pace and confidence on the ball to drive the team forward in possession, and a level-headedness and balance that made him hard to beat when it was lost. He had continued to grow through his teenage years too. He now stood an inch taller than Matthäus, with muscles earned through manual labour.

Most impressive of all, though, was his work ethic. Zanetti just kept going and going. His relentless engine would later see him christened by the TV commentator Victor Hugo Morales as *'el Tractor'*. To a degree that is uncommon even among professional footballers, he truly did just love to run. His autobiography, *Giocare da uomo*, is stuffed with anecdotes about the lengths he has gone through, at different moments of his life, to squeeze a workout in.

On his wedding day – which had to be arranged during the football season's winter break – Zanetti produced a pair of trainers from a bag as soon as the ceremony was over. "My love, there's a bit of time now," he told his wife, Paula. "We've exchanged rings, our guests aren't here yet for the reception ... I'm just going to go for a run."

In another chapter, Paula recalls booking a summer holiday in Tunisia but forgetting to check whether their hotel had a gym. It turned out that there was not even one nearby. Zanetti feigned indifference when he found out, but at dinner he casually asked her how much she weighed.

The next morning, while Paula was still asleep, he snuck out to nearby shops and found a pair of five-kilogram dumbbells. He also gathered all the books that he and his wife had brought with them on holiday, and took them down to the hotel's kitchen, where he talked the chef into weighing them on a set of cooking scales.

On the beach, later that day, he gathered the books into a backpack, then asked

Paula to take a dumbbell in each hand and climb onto his shoulders. He had tallied up their combined weight to reach the figure that he was supposed to be squatting as part of his offseason workout regime. "Somewhere out there," said Paula, "a European, Japanese or American tourist has a photo of the footballer Zanetti, with wife, weights and backpack, doing squats on the sand."

He was no longer a teenager by this point, but the captain of Inter whom he had joined, after a brief stint at Banfield, in 1995. Massimo Moratti had just taken over the Milanese club, with aspirations to restore the glory days it experienced under his father's ownership in the 1950s and 60s. One of the first scouting tapes he received came from an under-20s game in Argentina.

"They sent it to me so I could look at [Ariel] Ortega, who didn't excite me," recalled Moratti during an interview in 2013. "Instead, the strangest thing, I was enchanted by a full-back who did things I'd never seen. We took him and he's still with us today. I found out that he comes from the planet Krypton [Superman's home planet]."

Moratti's enthusiasm was not matched by supporters. Inter needed a centre-forward, not a right-back. Their previous season's top scorer, Ruben Sosa, had scraped together a meagre eight goals and was on his way out of the club – along with Dennis Bergkamp – that summer.

Inter presented Zanetti to the Italian media alongside Sebastián Rambert, a 21-year-old striker signed from

Independiente. Both had been capped already by Argentina, but there was no question about which of the two was expected to have the greater impact.

With football's Bosman ruling yet to come into effect, Serie A clubs were limited to a maximum of three foreign players in their match-day squads. Paul Ince and Roberto Carlos also joined that same summer, leading many outside the club to assume that Zanetti would be the odd man out.

Instead it was Rambert, who arrived with a niggling knee injury and failed to impress when he did make it onto the pitch, who was packed off on loan to Real Zaragoza at the start of 1996. Zanetti had jumped straight in as a right wing-back in Ottavio Bianchi's 3-5-2, but the manager lasted just four games before being sacked and later replaced by Roy Hodgson.

The Englishman preferred a 4-4-2, meaning Zanetti wound up either in midfield or on the wing. Inter would go through a further 15 managers (caretakers included) over the player's 19 seasons at the club, each with their own different ideas about how to use him best.

So why does he belong in this issue? We could make a case by volume alone. Zanetti went on to play more than 1,100 games in his professional career – remaining a first-team regular at Inter all the way into his early 40s. Even if you subtracted every game he played in another position, you would still have a full career worth of appearances at right-back.

We could likewise argue that it was his best position. Ryan Giggs rated him as the

toughest defender he had ever come up against in 151 Champions League games. "I faced him for the first time in 1999, in the Champions League quarter-final," recalled the Welshman in an interview with *Gazzetta dello Sport* in 2012. "He was at right-back and I was on the left-wing. I was struck by all his qualities: rapid, powerful, intelligent, clever. I played against him twice more, and he was the most difficult opponent I encountered, in absolute terms. A complete champion."

Even beyond those considerations, though, there is something more to it with Zanetti. Yes, he could adapt to just about any role on the pitch, but right-back somehow always just felt like his natural home.

He would become one of European football's iconic players, pairing extraordinary longevity with rare success on the pitch. Zanetti retired at 41 as a five-time Scudetto winner, but more importantly the captain of the only side ever to win a treble of Serie A, the Coppa Italia and the Champions League. Inter honoured such achievements by retiring his No.4 shirt. (That is, incidentally, the number traditionally associated with right-backs in Argentina – equivalent to Europe's No2.)

And yet, Zanetti never had the aura of a superstar. This is a man who has not changed his haircut in four decades, a player for whom you did not need to bother finding a new Panini sticker to complete your album each year because the one from last season looked exactly the same. Zanetti was discreet, reliable, consistent and selfless: always at the service of the team.

If you were constructing the perfect right-back, what character traits would you seek before these?

Zanetti dreamt of being someone different: a Matthäus or Baggio, but over

22 seasons as a professional footballer, he showed us instead who he actually is. And that is why a generation of right-backs grew up wanting to be him. 🙏



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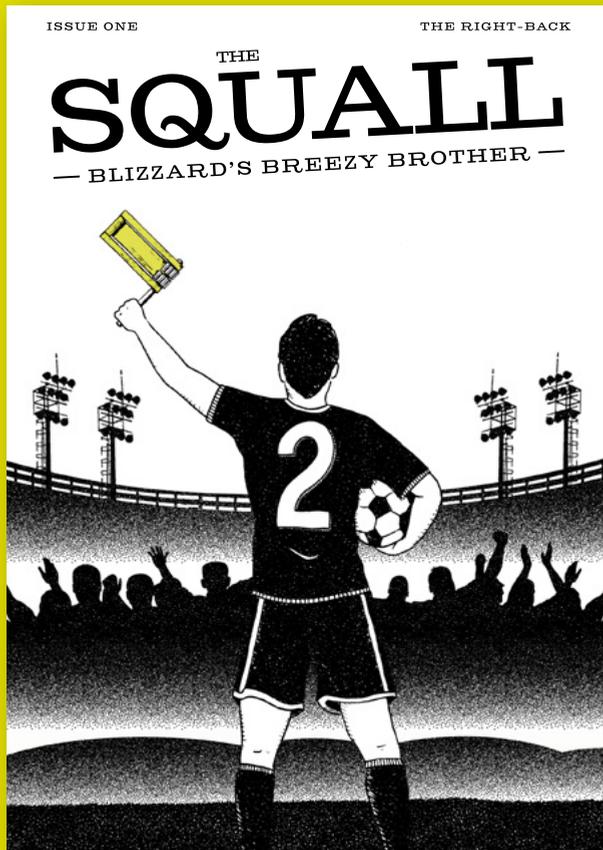
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The idea of *The Squall* is to help out freelance writers during the Covid-19 crisis. For it to survive and thrive, we are asking readers to pay what they can and we suggest a minimum donation of £3.

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THE SQUALL

— BLIZZARD'S BREEZY BROTHER —

Issue 1, May 2020, The Right-Back

Featuring:

David Squires, The Josimar Fortnight

Felipe Almeida, The Brazilian Tradition

John Irving, Fascist, Gay, Double World Cup Winner

David Marples, Four Days of Misery

Marvin Sordell, Six Steps to Modernity

Colin Millar, No Limits

Richard Jolly, The Makeshifts

Ian Baker, The Worst Foul in History?

Callum Rice-Coates, Taxi for Maicon

Richard Laverty, The Bronze Age

Eryk Delinger, The Arsenal Succession

Nicky Bandini, The Dependable Tractor

