

THE Blizzard

THE FOOTBALL QUARTERLY / ISSUE FORTY



Below are extracts from each of the pieces featured.

← John Irving

The Years of Lead

Juventus, Torino and visiting Turin during Italy's decade of political violence

"The 1960s had been a barren time for the game in Turin. Juventus had won only two scudetti: the first in 1960-61 – the swan song of the team spearheaded by the contrasting attacking duo of John Charles, tall and powerful, and Omar Sivori, short and tricky – and the second in 1966-67, when they pipped Inter by a single point on the last day of the season (an Inter side still aching from the battering it had taken from Celtic in the European Cup Final in Lisbon the Wednesday before). Torino, on the other hand, had begun the decade in Serie B and, once back in Serie A, won nothing more than a Coppa Italia, in 1968. Perhaps the achievement Torino fans most cherish from that period was their 4-0 trouncing of Juventus in the derby on 22 October 1967, coming as it did a week after the death of their star player, winger Gigi Meroni, the 'Italian George Best', run over and killed by a car as he crossed Corso Re Umberto near his home. (The driver, Attilio 'Tilli' Romero, would later become club president)."

← Leonard Jägerskiöld Velander

The Green Giant

Sampdoria's Morten Thorsby and changing football's relationship with the environment

"Your Instagram bio says that you are a "football player and environmentalist", can you really be both?

"I think you can, yes. Many players think that you shouldn't mix football with politics but that is about to change. Just look at the United States where professional players, in every sport, protest against racism.

Football is no longer outside society because of the open mindsets of both players and clubs. With that said the environment is not a political standpoint; it is an apolitical point of view. Just like antiracism and equality."

↔ Ewan Flynn

The Rebels

The chaotic attempts to break sanctions and arrange a tour of South Africa in 1982

“Tuesday 13 July 1982, two days after Italy have beaten West Germany in the World Cup final, South African Airways Flight 221 from London Heathrow touches down at Jan Smuts International Airport, Johannesburg. Among the passengers is a group of rebel British footballers, lured to South Africa by the promise of a hefty cheque. They will participate in the South African Breweries International Soccer Tour and break the international sporting boycott of apartheid South Africa. Their identities have been kept a closely guarded secret, as has the fact that the tour is taking place.”

↔ Jarrod Kimber

The Conspiracy Club

The Australian NBA star's brother who ended up playing professionally for FLAT Earth FC in Spain

“This is about conspiracy theories. Two of them. One as big as the planet we’re on and another that only affected an NBA draft. There is an NBA player whose brother was just signed by a Spanish football club that promotes a conspiracy theory and a basketball who once suffered at the hands of one.”

↔ Ben Jacobs

The Secret Room

Afghanistan's women's national team and the difficulties of their fight for justice

“It’s midnight on 12 December 2018 and there is a flurry of mysterious activity outside the headquarters of the Afghan Football Federation (AFF) in the capital, Kabul. The AFF president Keramuudin Karim has hurriedly deployed three armed guards – led by his

head of security Ashraf Alam – to escort two carpenters inside the building to cover up a secret, windowless room he has denied exists. Floor plans, videos, photos and testimonies all show it did, and was the scene of a string of sickening sex crimes carried out against members of the Afghan Women’s National Team (AWNT) between 2013 and 2018.”

↩ **Igor Rabiner**

Tanks, Corruption, Death

The extraordinary story of the USSR’s first professional club and the collapse of Communism

“29 August 1991. Krasnaya Presnya, a small old stadium in the heart of Moscow with dilapidated wooden benches, is hosting a third Soviet division match between the local team Asmaral and Nart from the Caucasian town of Cherkessk. In front of 3,000 happy spectators the home side wins easily, 5-1. A week earlier, global politics had brushed up against the stadium wall, by the White House, the seat of the young Russian parliament, and could have shifted the history of the country and the entire planet in a completely different direction.”

↩ **James Bearsdworth**

The Warlord’s Toy

How a football club in Grozny became a token of Vladimir Putin’s power

“It is impossible to describe such decisions as anything other than stupid,” remarked Vyacheslav Koloskov. “What does the US State Department of Justice have to do with a football club that plays on the other side of the world?”

“In a way, the honorary president of the Russian Football Union was right. The US Treasury’s decision to add the football club Akhmat Grozny to their blacklist stood for little more than disapproving sentiment. The club has no possessions under the jurisdiction of the United States and the sanctions pose no real threat to Grozny’s future.

“Nonetheless, the message was clear: the US won’t tolerate human rights abusers, at least not these ones anyway.”

↔ Colin McPherson

The Covid Landscape

Hand sanitiser and social distancing: how the pandemic changed football

"In September 2020, the regulations around Covid-19 were loosened sufficiently to allow England's non-League clubs from the game's eighth tier downwards to admit limited numbers of spectators into fixtures. While the 'elite' clubs still had to play in front of deserted and silent stands, the opportunity to enjoy, observe and photograph live football with fans gave me the opportunity to visit venues familiar and new as the season finally got under way."

↔ Ned Boulting

Mit sexy Knien

How a novelty song about Karl-Heinz Rummenigge became an unlikely hit

"This is the story of a song I used to know. It came to mind recently quite by chance, when I was out for a run during lockdown. Thinking about the re-start of Bundesliga, I started to consider my long-lasting affection for German football. The fine name Karl Heinz Rummenigge returned, resplendently, to my consciousness. And with that, a certain song, which, once heard, cannot so easily be put to one side. It became a nightmarish ear worm."

↔ **Rob Hunt**

Game of Thônes

Aimé Jacquet, the reclusive pragmatist who won France the World Cup

“There are worse places to spend a lockdown.

“Thônes is a sleepy town of around 7000 people in the heart of the French Alps, primarily known for being the home of Reblochon cheese. Nestling picturesquely at the intersection of three valleys, it is not a holiday destination in its own right but serves as the gateway to two nearby ski resorts and several of the Tour de France’s most fearsome climbs.

“I have the good fortune to visit Thônes several times a year, since it is where my partner Marie grew up and where most of her family still live. I love it there. So when, during our latest stay, President Macron announced that France was going into lockdown, the thought of hurrying back to our first-floor flat in North London did not even cross my mind.

↔ **Chris Lepkowski**

The Whistle and the Book

The Welsh referee Clive Thomas looks back at a career defined by controversy

“The rasping, melodic Welsh accent is still strong. Clive Thomas remains inquisitive and authoritarian, and you can feel his eyes still burning into you as you ask the question – even when you’re on the other end of a phone.

“Nicknamed ‘The Book’, Thomas was a Football League referee during a time in which officials were known more for their professions off the pitch. There was Jack Taylor, the butcher from Wolverhampton, or the Stockton farmer Pat Partridge or the Harrow School housemaster David Elleray. But not Thomas. The Treorchy referee was an exception even to that. His was a career characterised by controversy and a determination to stick to the laws of the game and do everything by the book – hence his nickname. Thomas belonged to an era before red card and yellow card data was analysed and delivered in the style of league tables. And yet he was as famous – infamous, perhaps – as the players themselves.”

↔ Simone Pierotti

A Foot in Each Camp

An interview with Edgardo Castillo, the only man to play for the USA and Mexico

“Las Cruces is a city of under 100,000 inhabitants in southern New Mexico, in the United States. Nestled in the Mesilla Valley between the Doña Ana and the Organ Mountains, within the Chihuahuan Desert ecoregion, it is the second largest municipality in the state after Albuquerque and a place oozing history. Almost 200 years ago, the area still belonged to the Viceroyalty of New Spain, an integral territorial entity of the Spanish Empire. Mexico gained independence in 1821 and claimed ownership. So did the Republic of Texas. The dispute came to a conclusion only after the Mexican-American war, with the United States eventually taking the area and the city of Las Cruces being officially founded in 1849. Such conflict provides a suitable background for an international football rivalry as well as the personal story of one of Las Cruces’s most notable sons – the 34-year-old Atlanta United left-back Edgar Castillo, the second player to play at senior level for both Mexico and the US.”

↔ Matteo Marchello

A Season in the Sun

The brief golden age of the Foggia left-back Maurizio Codispoti

“1991-92 was the beginning of Serie A’s golden age. Sampdoria reached the European Cup final. There were global stars at every club. And little Foggia, playing stunning attacking football under Zdeněk Zeman, finished ninth, the greatest season in their history.”

↔ **Jonathon Rogers**

The New Gazza

Chris Holland remembers how his promising career was derailed by an attack in a nightclub

“Two decades on from his heyday, Chris Holland can reflect on a career that saw him play in the Premier League, represent his country, and name Alan Shearer, David Ginola, David Beckham, Paul Gascoigne and Robbie Fowler among his most illustrious teammates.

“For a journeyman footballer, that’s pretty good going, but Holland will always be left wondering what heights he could have hit had it not been for a fateful visit to a Tyneside nightclub that left not just a potentially glittering career but his quality of life in jeopardy.”

↔ **Ben Welch**

Left Fist Forward

How does confidence affect players and to what extent does it matter?

“Kepa Arrizabalaga is on his knees, hands on hips, watching Southampton’s Che Adams wheel away to an empty corner of Stamford Bridge. Celebratory screams echo around a vacant stadium haunted by a global pandemic. There are no comforting looks from Kepa’s teammates, no shouts of encouragement, just an awkward air of inevitability. It had happened again. The world’s most expensive goalkeeper had cost his team yet another goal.”

↔ **Great Lea**

Eight Bells

A selection of smash-and-grab raids in football history

1. Brazil 0-1 Argentina, World Cup round of 16 (1990)

“Unlike most other sports, in football superiority does not always lead to success. It is entirely possible to dominate territory, possession and every other meaningful metric yet come unstuck.”



AN UNMISSABLE HIGHLIGHTS PACKAGE

The Best of the First Five Years features 23 brilliant essays originally published between 2011 and 2016.

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