

THE Blizzard

THE FOOTBALL QUARTERLY / ISSUE FORTY-FOUR



Below are extracts from each of the pieces featured.

↔ Jonathan Wilson

Of Lions and Donkeys

Senegal celebrated their first Cup of Nations win, but this was a grim event stained by tragedy

We were in Bafoussam when the disaster happened. We'd covered Gambia's win over Guinea, then went back into town and watched Cameroon's win over Comoros over dinner in a hotel. That seemed, at the time, good knockabout fun, albeit tainted by some absurd decision-making by Caf.

↔ Nick Ames

The Day of the Scorpions

A critical mass of players in Italy means Gambian football is beginning to be taken seriously

Tom Saintfiet walks past during an interview with two of his players, Omar Colley and Ebrima Darboe, and is asked how Gambia are handling a fraught set of conditions in Cameroon. "We are coping," he laughs, ruffling Colley on the head. "We have a fantastic team so we can cope with anything."

↔ Maher Mazahi

Feet of Clay

Algeria were Cup of Nations favourites but went out in the group. What went wrong?

The Algeria national team's premature exit from the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon has generated a list of critical questions ahead of their all-or-nothing World Cup play-off double-header versus Cameroon. For most Algerians, it is almost unthinkable that the Fennec Foxes find themselves in this predicament.

↔ Njie Enow

Remembering Marco

The inspirational life, tragic death and legacy of Marc-Vivian Foé

"Even if it means someone has to die, we have to win this game," Marc-Vivien Foé said to his teammate Eric Djemba-Djemba as the Cameroon team bus made its way to the Stade Gérard for the 2003 Confederations Cup against Colombia.

↔ John Foot

Even the Thieves are Watching TV

Argentina v Italy at Italia 90 and what it said about Naples's relationship with the rest of the country

O mama mama mama, O mama mama mama, Sai perchè mi batte il Corazon, Ho visto Maradona, Ho visto Maradona, O mama innamorato sono...

Oh mother mother mother, O mother mother mother, do you know why my heart beats so strongly. I have seen Maradona, I have seen Maradona, oh, mother, I am in love...

↔ Nicholas Hogg

Gazza

On a chance meeting with the former England midfielder at a pub in Leicester

I never planned to write a poem
about England's greatest ever footballer
absolutely wrecked
in Leicester Market

← Andrew Wilson

Hayes Maker

The dramatic emergence of a young Cyrille Regis in the Isthmian League

Ian Wright described him as “an icon to me, an absolute hero.” Dion Dublin revealed “if it wasn’t for him, I would never have been a professional footballer.” Among black pioneers in the Football League, one name stands out in terms of the impact on subsequent generations: Cyrille Regis.

← Peter Speetjens

The Master of the Dry Leaf

Pelé was the star, but the creative hub of Brazil’s 1958 World Cup winners was Didi

“I was the kind of player of whom people would say ‘he’s a bit slow,’” Didi said with a smile. “But I didn’t have to run. The ball had to do the running. If I could give a pass over 40m, why would I run 35m to give a pass over 5m?”

← Sean Cole

Chosen Ones

Joe Cole, Michael Carrick and the rest of West Ham’s Youth Cup-winning squad of 1998-99

Demand outstripped supply at Upton Park. Tickets for the second leg of the 1999 FA Youth Cup final between West Ham United and Coventry City were selling so fast that another stand had to be opened up, delaying kick off. Everyone wanted to catch a glimpse of the boys who were about to make history.

↔ Alasdair Howorth

End of the Road

Binga, the Malian second-division side who reached the play-off round of the CAF Confederation Cup

900km into the bus journey from Mali to Liberia, the Binga FC squad were devastated to hear that they could go no further. Just outside the village where they had stopped for a break, they were told that the road ahead had eroded and they would not be able to get past. 3-0 up after the first leg at home against Liberian side MC Breweries, the miracle continental run of the second division side looked like it was dead before it even started.

↔ Ben Welch

Edge of Gold

Stewart Downing on childhood loss, Boro glee, leaving Liverpool and the 2006 World Cup

Stewart Downing's house echoes with the silence of retirement. "I miss the buzz of the games, especially now the crowds are back," said the former England player as he took a sip of tea. "Now it's all school runs and taking the kids to gymnastics and swimming." Eight months have passed since Downing called it a day on his playing career and life has changed dramatically.

↔ Colin McPherson

Light in the Darkness

A visit to Arbroath, where the traditional spirit of Scottish football burns bright

I first attended a game at Arbroath's Gayfield Park almost exactly 40 years ago, a Scottish Cup tie between the home side and the team I supported, Meadowbank Thistle. It was a freezing cold December afternoon, billowing breath dissipating into the winter chill, scalding hot Bovril a necessity to warm hands, hearts and mouths. The ground was football perfection, a squat wooden stand, layered lovingly in thick maroon paint, offering small degrees of seated comfort to those who preferred not to brave the open terracing on the three remaining sides. Sheds at either end and along the far touchline

offered some protection from the ominous presence of the North Sea, hissing and boiling just yards beyond the park's perimeter. Four decades on from my first visit and I discover that Gayfield has barely changed, except this season Arbroath finally discontinued the tradition of allowing opposing supporters to change ends at half-time to be in close proximity when their favourites attacked the goal.

↔ **James Corbett**

The Man who Brought Down Fifa

A tribute to Andrew Jennings, who exposed the dark heart of global sports administration

It was an inauspicious way for a friendship to begin.

It was early 2010 and I was European correspondent for an unlamented and long-forgotten football business website. It was my first proper reporting job and one that I took very seriously. I had a supportive editor and, coming in the midst on the notorious 2018/22 World Cup bid race, plenty of access and stories.

↔ **Scott Oliver**

Basquocracy

After Franco's death, Real Sociedad and Athletic dominated la Liga

On 5 December 1976, little more than a year after the death of General Francisco Franco had brought an end to his 36-year dictatorship of Spain, Inaxio Kortabarria and José Ángel Iribar, the respective captains of Real Sociedad and Athletic Club of Bilbao, walked out side by side at the Atotxa stadium in Donostia-San Sebastián ahead of the Basque derby, the third since the *Caudillo's* death, and were presented with a small cloth *ikurrina* – their stateless nation's red, white and green flag, still illegal in Spain at the time – which the pair carried to the centre circle and placed ceremonially down. It was one of the first politically subversive acts of the post-Franco era.

↔ Jo Araf

The Bestial Nature of Man

The village that provided the basis for the first China national side

It was not a successful squad. Actually it was, but only at national and continental level, and it's precisely because of this it has never reaped great popularity. However, the China national team between the early 20th century and the years preceding World War Two was in many ways unique: a selection almost entirely composed of players born and raised in a small village, Tai Hang.

↔ Shubi Arun

West Block Blues

The rise of Bengaluru FC and the reinvention of Indian fan culture

It was a night Rakesh Haridas will never forget. After the game ended, he cried and carried five people on his shoulder. "I'm a big guy," he explained. A collective shock enveloped the Kanteerava Stadium in Bangalore as the home fans came to terms with what they had just witnessed. Their team, Bengaluru FC, had been a few minutes away from winning the league title before it was crushingly snatched away.

↔ Dan Billingham

The Match of Myth

In 1941 Rapid Vienna beat Schake 04 to win the German title, but was it fixed?

Few football matches have as much cause for intrigue as the 1941 German championship final. It featured a staggering comeback, took place under a most monstrous regime and had a winner from Austria – Rapid Vienna. Several myths about the match circulated widely in the decades that followed under the belief the Nazis pulled strings to concoct the outcome – or failed to get the result they planned.

↩ Cameron Ponsonby

The Edge of Failure

Goalkeeping is a specialised position, so why isn't it subject to specialised punditry?

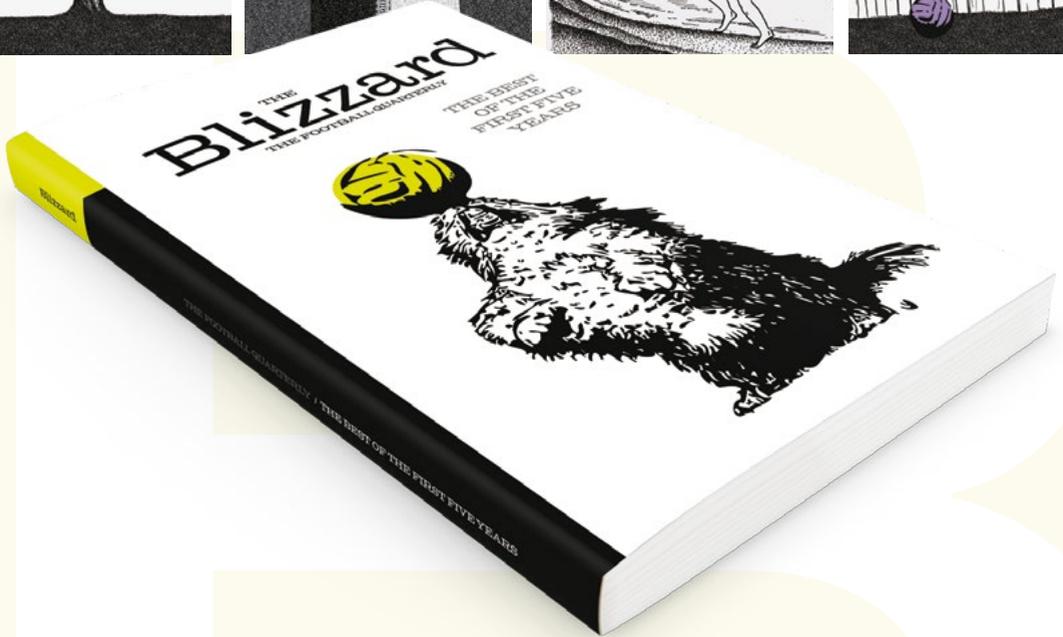
We're told all the time that goalkeepers are different. A position that's the domain of the eccentric and therefore not to be understood by the masses. As a starting point it explains why our knowledge of the keeper's role is so poor, and why to some extent we seem so reluctant even to try to understand it. After all, eccentric is as eccentric does.

↩ Andi Thomas

Game's Gone

Untrammelled capitalism and the eternal quest for lost Edens

In August 2019, in the Independent, Miguel Delaney published a furious broadside against the general state of football. First he outlined and then he condemned the failure of Britain's authorities to protect football clubs from untrammelled market forces. "How have they just been left open to the highest bidder, whoever that may be?" He pointed to a historic lack of interest from government in clubs as cultural and social institutions, as well as the failure of various forms of protective legislation, most notably the fit and proper persons test, which was designed to protect clubs from 'improper' owners and has proved laughably inadequate for the task. According to the headline, this was "The fight for football's soul".



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