

# THE Blizzard

THE FOOTBALL QUARTERLY / ISSUE FORTY-FIVE



*Below are extracts from each of the pieces featured.*

🔍 **James Corbett**

## **The Building Legacy**

*With the World Cup less than six months away, where does Qatar stand?*

In the arrivals hall of Hamad International Airport, a middle-aged man, thick dark hair oiled back and a mobile phone clutched to his ear, wept. It was a constant sobbing that seemed, even as scores of passengers milled around, to fill the vast construction, interspersed every 30 or 40 seconds with an agonising wail of grief, before the low steady timbre of his weeping resumed.

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🔍 **Ben Gilbert**

## **The Sustainability Myth**

*Can the 2022 World Cup really be the carbon-neutral model the organisers claim?*

Regime bounce arrived just in time at St James' Park. It would seem that anything, including murdering journalists, is better than Mike Ashley. The Saudi-led purchase of relegation-threatened Newcastle United prompted a five-game winning run in the Premier League that was only halted by the team's fairly understandable 1-0 defeat against Liverpool on April 30. At around the hour mark, BT Sport cameras zeroed in on the current England manager sitting alongside the club's new co-owner.

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 Gunnar Persson

## Flight of the Cunning Swede

*The rise of Kurt Hamrin, the winger whose goals inspired AC Milan and Padova*

Kurt Hamrin was top-scorer in Sweden at age 21 and instrumental in the success of Nereo Rocco's Padova in 1957-58. His performance at the World Cup that summer led to further opportunities with Fiorentina. Nine years later the captain of *I Gigliati* left for a short but notable reunion with Rocco at Milan. In all he spent 15 seasons in Serie A, played 400 games and scored 190 goals. He was loved in Florence but never anything short of loathed in Germany.

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 Aleksandar Djurić with Vladimir Novak

## Sweet-stealer, Soldier, Striker

*How a Bosnian kayaker survived the war to play football for Singapore*

I grew up in Lipac, a village near Dobož in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and from my early childhood I loved football. I guess I inherited it from my father who always followed broadcasts of matches of the Yugoslav league on his transistor radio. I started playing football at the age of seven, with friends in our village and in school. We even organised six-a-side tournaments with several teams.

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 Jo Araf

## Odd Man Out

*The emergence and exile of Alejandro de los Santos, Argentina's only black footballer*

Alejandro de los Santos was a child when his parents died. They had fled the slave traders who terrorised Angola, settling in the city of Paraná in the Entre Ríos region of Argentina. Alone and more used to speaking Portuguese than Spanish, De los Santos moved to Boedo, a *barrio* of Buenos Aires. From those difficult beginnings, he grew to hold a unique place in Argentina's football history.

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🔴 Sean Cole

## Part-time Passion

*Edgar Davids and the contradictions of his turbulent spell as manager of Barnet*

After 11 games of the 2012-13 season, Barnet were rock bottom of the Football League and still searching for their first win. They'd picked up just three points and looked on course for relegation under rookie manager Mark Robson. Something, anything, had to change, but what came next was completely unexpected, almost absurdly so. Edgar Davids, formerly of Ajax, Juventus and Barcelona, arrived at Underhill.

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🔴 Jon Spurling

## Men in Black

*How referees became celebrities in the changing media world of the 70s*

In the early 70s, football referees appeared to be an endangered species. Some of English football's most infamous televised flashpoints rendered them helpless, as the sport's most notorious gunslingers traded punches, kung-fu kicks and X-rated language. "When things got rough, refs were like bystanders in a saloon shootout," Jack Charlton told me. Yet, remarkably, an eclectic bunch of amateur referees – including the Lancashire headmaster Gordon Hill and the Treorchy-born businessman Clive Thomas – emerged from the shadows and became unlikely media personalities in their own right, as football entered the colour TV era.

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 **Ned Boulting**

## **The Deliberate Man**

*Long after his retirement, Brian Clough remained a master of media*

Towards the end of March 2004, with Derby County were locked in a relegation struggle that also included Nottingham Forest, there was a possibility that one or other, or both, of these two venerable clubs that had won titles both domestically and in Europe, might be relegated to the third tier of English football. This clearly represented an unthinkable outcome for their legion fans (32,000 turned up to watch the 'A52 derby' on March 24), but an even more shocking prospect for the man who had marshalled them both to their respective, unforgettable high tides in the 1970s – Brian Clough.

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 **Adam Bushby**

## **Hot Stuff**

*Nigel Pepper, York City, the burst balls and the mysteries of memory*

In his memoir, **A Moveable Feast**, Ernest Hemingway said that it was the writer's job to tell the truth. You can sit there, he knew, for hours and hours, and nothing. The mind can blank and remain blanked. It can be tortuous. But as he would gaze over the Parisian roofs, he would soothe himself with memories of past triumphs. "You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know."

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🔍 **Javier Sauras and Felix Lill**

## **Leg to Stand On**

*The resilience and on-going struggles of Sierra Leone's amputee footballers*

On 24 October 2021, while Elon Musk was tweeting about Dogecoin, the Earth orbited around a football. This bizarre rearrangement of celestial bodies pulled millions of eyes all around the planet towards their closest screens. That boisterous Sunday, Liverpool recorded their biggest-ever away victory at Old Trafford, as Paul Pogba was sent off and Manchester United conceded five goals; Real Madrid beat Barcelona at Camp Nou in the first *clásico* since Messi's departure; *la pulga* couldn't score with his new club, PSG, and neither did his teammates against a rocky Marseille; and Inter fans suffered yet another Juventus comeback after a VAR-induced penalty snatched away a draw in the last minute of regulation.

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🔍 **Emile Avanesian**

## **The Greatest**

*How Barcelona Femení rose to become the most dominant side in the world*

A few minutes before 2pm on Sunday, 23 January 2022, a whistle sounded, bringing to an end the final of the 2021-22 Supercopa de España Femenina, between FC Barcelona Femení and Atlético de Madrid Femenino. It marked Barça Femení's second Supercopa triumph in the three years since the competition's 2019 reinstatement (it had a four-year run from 1997-2000).

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 Ewan Flynn

## **In Jock Stein's Shoes**

*Alex Ferguson's adventures with Scotland at the 1986 World Cup*

Just as he has done countless times before, Jock Stein pensively lays out his grey suit for this evening's match next to his lucky green and white shorts on the hotel bed. Despite his stellar achievements with Celtic - nine league titles in a row and the European Cup - never before has he felt pressure as viscerally as this. Defeat in Cardiff will snuff out Scotland's hopes of qualifying for the 1986 World Cup. Aged 62 and in increasingly poor health, he knows calls for him to step down as manager will surely follow. For the first time in the near three decades since the professional game enabled him to escape Lanarkshire's coal mines, the terrifyingly oppressive prospect of life without football stalks him. Nothing must be allowed to distract from the task at hand. The bottle containing Stein's prescribed diuretic pills - that come with their unwelcome side effects - remains unopened on the bedside table.

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 John Irving

## **Campo Testaccio**

*How an early wooden stadium modelled on Goodison Park captures the spirit of Roma*

Pity the poor referee. Hardly a Juventus v Roma match goes by without provoking controversy. Disallowed goals, penalties awarded or denied, disputed offside decisions, even bitter arguments over throw-ins – all grist to the mill of diehard fans, partisan media and opportunistic politicians alike. It's a rivalry that dates back 90 years, to a game played at the legendary old stadium, the Campo Testaccio, a stormy encounter that left a lasting mark not only on Italian football but also on broader Italian culture.

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🔴 Peter Speetjens

## **The Real Brussels Club?**

*How Union St-Gilloise returned from the depths to shake up Belgium's elite*

Brussels. January 30. After three days of grey skies and an icy wind, the sun finally showed its face. In front of the old Stade Joseph Marien the street turned yellow and blue, as a few thousand fans waited for the derby between their Royale Union Saint-Gilloise and Anderlecht.

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🔴 Scott Oliver

## **Chelsea 4 Liverpool 4**

*Champions League semi-final, second leg, Stamford Bridge, London, 14 April 2009*

Six minutes is a long time in football. Six minutes – you may already be aware of this, already have heard on the grapevine – is a particularly resonant period of time for Liverpool in Champions League football. So it was that, for six minutes after the indefatigable Dirk Kuyt had sent a bullet header from a bullet cross by Albert Riera past Petr Čech on a heady spring evening at Stamford Bridge in April 2009 – putting his team 4-3 up on the night but still 6-5 down on aggregate – I dared to dream that Liverpool might pull off one of the all-time great European comebacks and progress to the semis for the fourth time in five years.

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