

THE Blizzard

THE FOOTBALL QUARTERLY / ISSUE FIFTY-ONE



Below are extracts from each of the pieces featured.

Ewan Flynn

The Romanov Revolution

As a young man, Vladimir Romanov served as a cook in the Soviet Union's navy aboard the K-19 submarine, the first Soviet nuclear submarine to be equipped with nuclear warheads that became infamous for the number of accidents that befell it. Today, in the tiny Russian village of Nikulskaya, the hulk of the decommissioned vessel is his home. There – writing poetry and pleading poverty – he remains ensconced, beyond the reach of Interpol and the Lithuanian authorities. Romanov insists he is innocent of any crime. Fans of the deceased football clubs FBK Kaunas and Partizan Minsk, and supporters of Heart of Midlothian, are entitled to think otherwise.

Tim Vickery

The Global Game

Nearly 50 years have passed since The Moment, the fork in the road, the great heist. Antiquated but avuncular Sir Stanley Rous, guardian of the game's traditional virtues, was strangely ousted as Fifa president by the sinister, steely-eyed Brazilian João Havelange and thereafter football knew the price of everything and the value of nothing. First they stole the game and then they sold it.

John Irving

Big Head

Which Argentinian footballer was famous for a mop of black hair on a head too big for his body; learned to play on *potreros*, patches of scrappy waste ground; became a national hero at an early age; loved dribbling, got kicked and kicked back; rarely trained properly; argued with his clubs' directors and the football authorities; came to play in Italy; became a folk hero in Naples; lined up for Napoli with a brilliant Brazilian centre-forward; constantly courted controversy; managed a string of club sides in Argentina and elsewhere, not to mention the national team; and ended up a television personality?

Ben Gilbert

The Barron Legacy

Confronted by a haul of 11 trophies in less than a decade, Bobby Robson seemed unfazed by the prospect of stepping into Johan Cruyff's gilded boots. "I am not afraid to follow him," the former Ipswich Town and England manager declared in July 1996 during his first press conference as the new Barcelona boss. "When the president of the United States leaves, they have to get another president of the United States," he commented somewhat mischievously in reference to the Dutchman's departure.

Igor Rabiner

The Crash

I enter Tashkent First City Cemetery, which is named after the 19th-century professor of medicine, Sergey Botkin. Just by the entrance there is a well-tended monument with four pairs of columns. They have not scrimped on the space for it. In the centre is a goalkeeper rushing after the ball, and in a ring around him are 17 names of Pakhtakor football players who died on one terrible day for Uzbekistan, 11 August 1979. Above, the inscription: "Pakhtakor-79. We remember. We honour. We are proud."

Dominic Bliss

The Glorious Storage Issue

At first glance it looks like any other late Victorian team photograph. Men with moustaches and slickly parted hair pose with their arms stiffly folded in long-sleeved hooped jerseys. Their trainer is standing to one side, in a flat cap with a towel folded over his arm, posing like a sommelier. In the middle of the back row, standing on a platform, is the manager, wearing a three-piece suit and a bowler hat, and leaning on an enormous oak shield.

Michael Sheridan

Top of the World

A young girl, wearing a thick jacket on top of her football kit, places the ball down for a free-kick and walks backwards slowly, pacing out her gargantuan Roberto Carlos-esque run-up. The other girls standing in the wall know what's coming, and they don't look pleased about it.

Shaul Adar

Still There

It is the first game of the season, in August in Mommsenstadion in west Berlin. It is a warm sunny day and the stands are packed with unusual fans while Israeli trash-pop is blaring. It looks like the football version of *You Are So Not Invited To My Bat Mitzvah* and even in the queue for a grilled Stadionwurst most of the men have a Star of David pendant. The Jewish community of Germany is here in droves. They have been waiting for this game since May 2023, or maybe since 1938.

Chris Lepkowski

Memories of Mexico

Jan Mølby gasps for breath. He is dazed, wheezing, struggling. As he leans over, hands on his hips, his chest is being compressed by a lack of oxygen. He continues to wrestle and grapple for any air he can get.

John Smith

Changing Places

There is nothing out of the ordinary about the venue at which I find myself on the final day of the Harlow & District Sunday League season. Three or four pitches, all occupied and frantic, stretch away from an unprepossessing Leisure Centre just outside of the M25. I missed the turning for it first time around, so nothing out of the ordinary there either. Nor is there anything too radical about the home side, Langley Colts. They are a tidy team containing the usual mix of the talented and the triers that make up thousands of club sides up and down the country every weekend from August to May. The opposition, however, offer the real point of difference. Today's visitors are Changing Lives FC, currently the nation's only competitive refugee football team.

Alessandro Bai

The Third Term

On the night when the reigning Serie A champions Inter travelled to Salerno for their final league fixture of 2021, the vast singing repertoire of the home supporters was reduced to one single chant as more than 15,000 spectators cried "Free Salernitana" with one voice for the full 90 minutes, their chorus now and then interrupted by some insults directed at co-owner Claudio Lotito.

Simone Pierotti

Treble Tóth

Beach soccer is not exactly the first sport you would think of in relation to Hungary, a country which does not overlook the sea. But imagination has no limits. It is August 2018, and the national championship playoffs are being staged in Siófok, on the southern shore of Lake Balaton. Gyöngyös and Jászfényszaru are duelling in a frantic final, with the score level at 2-2. The Gyöngyös goalkeeper is fouled in his box with few seconds left and, according to beach soccer rules, he is awarded a free kick. That he is at the opposite end to the goal his team are attacking, 32m away, is no deterrent. Shockingly, he scores.

Brendan Madden

The Man who Coined Tiki-Taka

It started as a bit of fun. A light-hearted way of capturing the mesmeric, all-conquering style of Barcelona and the Spain national team that set the world abuzz toward the end of the 2000s. Almost inevitably, the phrase came to be disliked, even derided – a byword for possession for possession’s sake.

John Wheatcroft

On the Way

After a harmonious and mercifully short meeting to discuss the pantomime, John Buchanan headed for the newsagent’s and bought 20 Kensitas. It was a quarter past two. He had time, Manchester Corporation Transport willing, to make it to the game.

THE
Blizzard

www.theblizzard.co.uk

RRP £13.00

