

# THE Blizzard

THE FOOTBALL QUARTERLY / ISSUE FIFTY-TWO



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

← Jonathan Wilson

## **March of the Zombie Elephants**

*Côte d'Ivoire kept looking out of the Cup of Nations but claimed an implausible triumph*

Perhaps, when nothing makes any sense, it is as well to begin at the end, with what we do know. Côte d'Ivoire won the Africa Cup of Nations with an 82nd-minute goal in the final from Sébastien Haller who, leg extended, turned a Simon Adingra cross into the net with his studs, somehow guiding it in with a flick of his ankle. It was such a strange goal that the instinctive reaction was that it must have been an own goal, diverted in off William Troost-Ekong. Replays, though, showed the strike was clean, innovative and brilliant.

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← Alasdair Howarth

## **Coming Home**

*The trend is clear: African teams are turning more and more to African coaches*

There is no doubt that this was the greatest Africa Cup of Nations in the competition's history. A festival of more fans, more colour and more drama than ever before was led by the rise of smaller nations competing with the traditional giants. But one thing was unmissable at this tournament. It was a Cup of Nations managed by Africans.

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← Osasu Obayiuwana

## **Herding Eagles**

*José Peseiro is just the latest coach to find managing Nigeria an almost impossible task*

With the distinguished record of coaching Nigeria's Super Eagles to every Africa Cup of Nations medal available – silver in 1990, bronze in 1992 and the gold medal and trophy in 1994 – the Dutchman Clemens Westerhof, nearly 84, knows a thing or two about what it takes to manage the national team in Africa's most populous country.

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↔ John Duerden

## Reputation Restored

*After a miserable performance at the World Cup, Qatar retained their Asian Cup crown*

The 2023 Asian Cup should have taken place in China in the summer of 2023 but instead was held in Qatar in the winter of 2024. It is hard to find two countries so different in terms of population, culture and history. The same can be said in football too. China have never won a major trophy and exited this one without scoring a single goal; their worst ever performance. Qatar won a second successive title, becoming the first team since Japan in 2004 to do so.

↔ Sam Kunti

## Perspective

*As war devastated Gaza, Palestine's players achieved a best-ever Asian Cup performance*

Mohammed Saleh could not hold back any longer. While playing against Hong Kong in his team's final group game of the recent Asian Cup the central defender had fought back tears, but at the final whistle – as Palestine ensured a historic passage to the round of 16 – he knelt, prayed and finally wept. He seemed desperately alone, his body shaking, contending with his emotions, thinking of his family back home in Gaza, who were in mortal peril amid Israel's relentless bombardment. It was day 109 of the war and, according to Gaza's health ministry, 25,490 Palestinians had been killed.

↔ Roger Domeneghetti

## Guns and the Grail

*How Derry City overcame political chaos to win the Irish treble in 1988-89*

In May 1989, the players of Derry City wrote themselves into immortality. With a tense, hard fought 1-0 win against Cork at Dublin's Dalymount Park in the Irish FA Cup final replay, they not only won the trophy for the first time but also secured an unprecedented domestic treble. In the 34 years since it has never been repeated.

← **Brendan Madden**

## **The Dissident**

*Isaiah Stein was an anti-Apartheid campaigner who fled South Africa. His sons were Luton legends*

Southampton, February 1968

The Shaw Savill Line's Southern Cross has just docked, completing its 11-week trip around the world. Standing on the dockside is the Bishop of Stepney, Trevor Huddleston, a prominent anti-apartheid campaigner. The family he patiently waits to greet boarded at Cape Town, left with little option but to forge a new life elsewhere after they were tortured, arrested, harassed – even dragged naked from their beds in the middle of the night – as the authorities went to ever more extreme measures to crush dissent. A final petty insult delivered when the South African government stripped them of their nationality before they boarded the ship, sailing away from Table Bay with a government fleet ushering them off into the Atlantic. Their voyage offered them one last poignant look at the ultimate symbol of the ruling regime's brutality, Robben Island.

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← **Osasu Obayiuwana**

## **A Scorer of Great Goals**

*Tony Yeboah talks about life in Europe, Jupp Heynckes and Howard Wilkinson*

**Your achievements as a footballer are well-known but I've been told you never saw football as something to enjoy. For you, football was purely business. Is that true?**

Yes, that's the truth. This is why after football, I went into business... The reason I took football very seriously was because football was my job. It was what was going to make me a star, make me rich and popular. I disciplined myself and put everything into it. I knew that after football I had to do something else. I'm not a typical football fan. Now I'm also employing people here too [at his Yegoala Hotel, in his hometown of Kumasi, in Ghana]. They also have to be very disciplined. And if they are not disciplined, I will sack them. I was

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↔ Daniel Rey

## The Go-Between

*The Way of the Scorpion and a player destined to be forever misunderstood*

René El Loco Higueta was not mad – at least not on the pitch. Rather than an extravagant oddball, the Colombian – best known for the scorpion kick and for being tackled by Roger Milla – was a calm presence and a pioneer of modern goalkeeping.

↔ John Irving

## The Manager Who Sold Himself

*Ivor Broadis, the bonds of football and the joys of Carlisle childhood*

From Monday to Friday, I would go to school and dad would go to the office. He worked as a clerk for a firm of solicitors in Bank Street, in the centre of town. He had begun as an errand boy in the late 1920s; he had no qualifications but had gradually picked up the ropes, eventually earning himself a desk of his own, which he stayed rooted to for over 50 years. His only time away had been the war, when he served in the North African, Greek and Italian campaigns with the Eighth Army. The fact that he had fond memories of what he called “six years behind the blazing gun” says a lot about the drudgery of his day job.

↔ Jonathan Wilson

## The Little Rebel

*Sweden, the rejection of VAR and the limitations of an anti-establishment ethos*

There are times when it feels my job is to chart football’s decline, to tell people how it was, how it is now, where it is going, and what went wrong. And there are other times when I tell myself I’m being desperately pompous about all this and all that’s happened is that I’ve become middle-aged and therefore distrustful of anything modern: please, make it like it used to be. Remember when change used to be for the better?

← Sergey Bondarenko

## The KAMAZ of Forgetting

*A Russian fan and dealing with disillusionment after the invasion of Ukraine*

From my very early childhood — as far as I can remember — I was obsessed with the idea of forgetting. I knew from conversations with grown-ups that I would inevitably forget everything which I saw day by day. “You are too young to remember all these things. You will forget it, as you get older.” This idea — I definitely believe it — made me anxious and sad. Almost every day (as far as I can remember) I tried to recall the most interesting events of my past. There weren’t many of them. Most of them were football games.

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← Phil Walker

## 200 Days of Ange

*How a new manager with new ideas has bred new hope at Tottenham*

**8 March 2023**

**Spurs 0-0 AC Milan (Milan go through 1-0 on aggregate)**

*Uefa Champions League, Round of 16*

*Tottenham Hotspur Stadium*

Half-time at the Lane, three-quarters into a tie against a useless but vaguely coherent Rossoneri. Spurs still haven’t scored. Harry Kane is there but not there, a lonely sunken presence at the apex of a dissolute mess conceived by a man who’s spent the evening scowling on the touchline, confined in his little box, arms folded, begging to be sacked.

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← John Duerden

## Come to See Cristiano?

*Al-Hilal v Al-Nassr and the experience of attending the Riyadh derby in the days of plenty*

People don’t usually walk for long distances in Saudi Arabia. The cities are sprawling, for much of the year the weather, of course, makes it tough and public transport is not extensive. There is, however, a new metro ready to open in Riyadh. In December, sleek

trains could be seen on the overhead rails on their way to shiny new stations but, at the time, they were still testing the six lines around the city. Khalid, my Uber driver, still by far the easiest way for visitors to get around, had his doubts about it all. "Arabs like to drive by themselves," he said, adding that he planned to leave the city due to the increasingly bad traffic and head north with his family. "And the stations then drop you at a place and then you still have to drive to get where you want to go. We want to know where we are going and then get there as quickly as possible."

↔ **Peter Speetjens**

## **The Nostalgia Principle**

*Diniz, Fluminense, Brazil and the fragile rise of the pioneer of relationism*

Fernando Diniz wrote history twice in November 2023: winning Fluminense's first Copa Libertadores and losing three World Cup qualifiers in a row. Dinizismo has worked for Flu, yet did not quite fly for the Canaries.

On 4 November 2023, the Estadio Maracanã in Rio de Janeiro erupted in joy when Fluminense beat Boca Juniors to win the Libertadores. Fluminense were the better team throughout, yet still needed a nail-biting half hour of extra time to seal the victory.

↔ **Ben Gilbert**

## **Temporal Windows of the Soul**

*How modern behavioural neuroscience proves that goalkeepers really are different*

In the end, it was not Harry Kane, Mo Salah or Erling Haaland that did for Aaron Ramsdale as Arsenal's number one goalkeeper. So who was it? In a match against Southampton last season, the England international was bamboozled by a pigeon. The bird wandered into the penalty area at St Mary's, seemingly distracting the England international, who was then beaten by a shot from Stuart Armstrong. Arsenal drew 1-1, dropped two valuable points and went on to finish behind Manchester City as Premier League champions.

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