



THE
Mighty
DELTA



DELTA IX



THE GRAPHIC
BOMB



WELCOME

Ageing is a strange process. As grandparents the world over will tell you, there's a child in all of us - albeit packaged in wrinkles.

I mention the passing of time, as football, like most things, is evolving rapidly. The development of elite talent is on a different level to anything we've seen before and Delta Nine kicks off with a look at the next wave of English wonderkids aiming to make a splash.

The rules of the game are literally changing, and being interpreted differently. Once upon a time, a more savage version of the sport only saw bookings doled out for virtual dismemberment of an opponent. Occasionally. Whereas in the modern game, fouls are drawn, free-kicks won. We chat to a master of the art, Newport County's Cameron Norman, in these pages.

Records inevitably tumble as Time marches on, and this season Erling Haaland raised the bar with 36 goals (and counting) in his maiden Premier League campaign. Outscoring the Man City goal machine is a tall order, but Notts County's Macaulay Langstaff can tell you how it's done in this edition.

In recent years, footballing personalities from Raheem Sterling to Marcus Rashford to Gary Lineker have all shown that sport and politics are increasingly entwined. Do football and politics mix, though? That's the central question of our feature article.

When all is said and done, however, the joy of kicking a football will never grow old. Our Mighty Interview with Elliot Watt focuses on the timeless beauty of a well-executed ping, while our chat with Carlisle's Owen Moxon celebrates the magic of leading your hometown club to success.

There's loads more besides, including a countdown of the top performers in the EFL, and I'm confident this issue is up there with our most entertaining.

I very much hope you enjoy this intro...my next may well be written by Chat GPT!



Stephen Gillett | Editor-in-Chief



THE MIGHTY MANIFESTO

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Editor in Chief
(captain)

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(Revolutionary Left Back)



WGRAPHIC
THE BOMB



WONDER KIDS

Words: Alex Lawes

The creation of St George's Park, built in 2012, has contributed to an impressive improvement in the performances and results of England's men's and women's teams, as well as the Three Lions youth sides.

Although they remain trophy-less since 1966, England featured in their first World Cup semi-final for nearly 30 years in Russia in 2018 and then, at Euro 2020, managed to reach a tournament final for the first time since Bobby Moore famously lifted the Jules Rimet trophy aloft at the old Wembley Stadium.

A last eight finish in Qatar last winter added further evidence to suggest that England's revamp of their coaching, talent production and mentality is bearing fruit at senior level, and this trend is even more apparent at youth level.

From Phil Foden to Jude Bellingham, the stars of tomorrow are being sculpted at an early age. With this in mind, Playmaker has identified three outstanding English prospects yet to make a senior appearance at club level.



ZAK STURGE

CLUB: CHELSEA

AGE: 18

POSITION (S): LEFT-BACK /
CENTRE-BACK

In the summer of 2022, lost amid a mega spending spree from new Chelsea owner Todd Boehly, Zak Sturge arrived at Chelsea from Brighton on a free transfer.

Renowned nowadays for their talent identification, recruitment and development, the Seagulls were keen to keep Sturge, but the lure of the capital (in both senses of the word probably!) was too strong.

Since joining the Blues, the defender has made an impression in Chelsea's Under-21 side, as well as the Under-19 team that competed in the UEFA Youth League. A mainstay of the U21's backline, Sturge featured at left-back and left midfield before becoming a regular at centre-back.

Coached by former AFC Wimbledon boss, Mark Robinson, Chelsea's U21 side is relatively young, but does feature several players poached from other clubs, such as Omari Hutchinson, Dylan Williams and Mason Burstow.

Despite the talent around him, Sturge has been outstanding at the back, and his poise and versatility make him a very exciting prospect.

Expert opinion from Parth

([@CFCParee](#)): He's looked best at left centre-back in a back five, where he's put his pace and strength to great use and showed strong ability on the ball too.

He does get caught out occasionally, but that should improve the more he plays in this slightly different role. It's perhaps an easy and lazy comparison to make, but I see him as a better version of Marc Cucurella - which is slightly ironic since one joined on a free and the other for £60 million!

MYLES LEWIS-SKELLY

CLUB: ARSENAL

AGE: 16

POSITION: DEFENSIVE MIDFIELD

Now an Arsenal youth coach, former Gunners midfielder Jack Wilshere described 16-year-old Myles Lewis-Skelly as 'unplayable' this season, and the England Under-17 international's stock is most definitely on the rise.

The St George's Park blueprint for talent development includes a focus on 'English DNA' and the production of technically proficient footballers able to slot seamlessly into multiple positions.

This has applied particularly in attacking midfield areas, but what is less common is the emergence of a prodigious talent in the '6' position.

With the tactical awareness to shield defenders and the technical attributes and nous to dictate the tempo of a game, Lewis-Skelly could be a gem in a few years' time.

Despite his tender years, Lewis-Skelly has shuttled between Arsenal's Under-18 and Under-21 sides, and began to establish himself in the latter in the second-half of 2022/23.

A key man for the Gunners' U18 side that reached the FA Youth Cup final, he scored a magnificent winning goal against Man City in the semi-finals in early April.

Expert opinion from Hale End Productions ([@Balogunner14](#)): To me, there is no clear modern day player who offers a fair comparison with Lewis-Skelly. You could make the argument that he is a combination of Frenkie de Jong and Mousa Dembele.

His physicality, dribbling ability and transitional excellence are akin to Dembele, with the passing range and progressiveness of de Jong. Lewis-Skelly's ceiling is hard not to be excited about, as few youth players have ever impressed in a similar way, physically or technically.

JUSTIN OBOAVWODUO

CLUB: MANCHESTER CITY

AGE: 16

POSITION: STRIKER

Local lad Justin Oboavwoduo, joined the Manchester City youth academy at the age of eight. Now, eight years into his time with the Citizens, Oboavwoduo has enjoyed a very impressive first season at Under-18 level.

At just 16-years-old, and playing two years above his age group, he has notched 15 times in 21 Premier League U18 games and supplied a further three assists this season.

Oboavwoduo's versatility has particularly caught the eye with the prolific forward offering far more than simply goals. He has often played out wide on the right-wing or even dropped behind into a deeper role, as he did in City U18's derby victory over rivals United in April.

His ability to turn provider has been showcased at international level too, with a run of three assists in four matches during England's UEFA European Under-17 Championship qualifying campaign this season.

An athlete with technical ability and the priceless knack of making goal scoring look easy, Oboavwoduo is certainly one for the future.

Expert opinion from Youth

Scouting ([@YouthScouting](#)): He can play as a striker or even as a winger. A technical player with good ball control and a fantastic first touch, he likes getting into the penalty area and copes really well under pressure.

He's a good two-footed finisher who is able to find pockets of space and time his runs really well.



Interview by Stephen Gillett

7EVENS

Altrincham captain Jordan Hulme has worked his way up the non-league ladder from local football in Manchester to the National League during a colourful career that has seen him win multiple promotions with Ramsbottom United, Salford City, AFC Fylde and 'Alty' themselves.

A cult hero in the non-league game, the host of the 'I Had Trials Once' podcast kindly agreed to name his ultimate 7-a-side team consisting of players he's lined up alongside.

It's quite a line-up...

The Cat **Jay Lynch**

I've played with other great keepers like Tony Thompson, Byrne (Ollie Byrne) at the moment and Grant Shenton, but Jay was something else when he came to Salford. In training, you knew if you had Jay Lynch in net, you were winning the five-a-side. He was one of the best I've seen and obviously he's doing very well now (at Fleetwood).

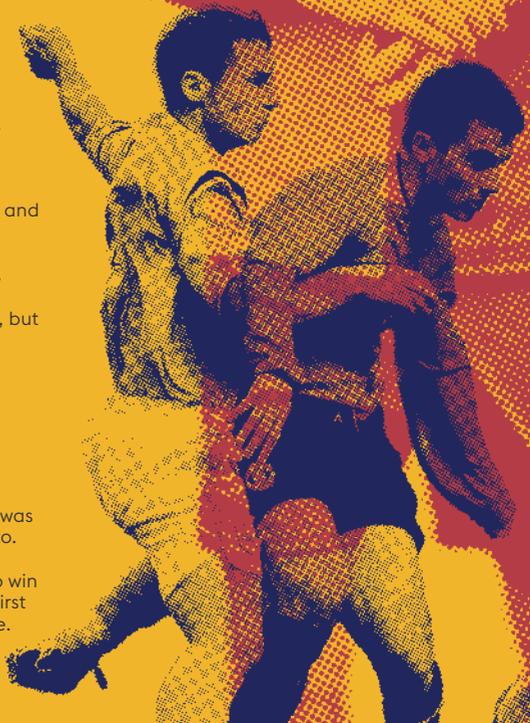
He was a great shot stopper and his professionalism was bang on. He was so good, but so miserable - he used to hate me having a laugh! Goalkeepers are normally mad, but he wasn't, he was very normal.

The Leader **Jake Mould**

I played under him as he led Alty through their most successful period and I succeeded him as captain.

His are big shoes to fill and I've taken a lot from him: he was calm when he needed to be, dished it out when he had to.

When there were big games like play-off finals, games to win promotion, he just settled everyone down. He'd win the first header, the first tackle, push forward; he just set the tone.





The Enforcer **Danny Warrender**

He was a former Man City youth team captain, who fell out of love with the game, and I played with him at Ramsbottom and Salford.

You wouldn't mess with him on or off the pitch, even if you were with a group of 15 other lads!

He came straight in as captain at Salford and did the lot. He played right-back, centre-back, centre-midfield and was different class everywhere. He was like one of those American pitbulls, angry and aggressive - and then after the game he'd stay angry and aggressive, haha!

The Smooth Operator

James Poole

I played with him at Salford and Alty. I remember him turning up for his first training session with long hair and a hairband, and I thought 'This lad is not a footballer', but then we got playing and he was some player.

He was pretty cool; very much had his own personality. On the pitch he was special: great on the ball, great first touch, could score a goal from the half-way line. An absolute technician.

He's now a scout for Man City out in Australia.

The Magician **Nick Haughton**

You just couldn't get the ball off him. Not the biggest or the strongest, but the way he moves the ball is incredible. In training at Salford and Fylde, I just wouldn't go near him, as I didn't want him to dent my confidence!

He could leave all five players on the floor in a five-a-side - the amount of times training would be stopped after he'd taken the mickey out of the whole team! After all of that, right or left foot he'd just bang it in the top bin.

The Finisher **Danny Webber**

He obviously played for Manchester United a few times, but he was coming to the end when I played with him. He wasn't the biggest, quickest or strongest, but a sniff of a chance and it was a goal.

When I first met him I was a bit nervous, as he was a big name, but he was the nicest guy in the world.

I'll always remember one goal where I put him through and the ball was bouncing about 25 yards out - he had no right to score, but just lobbed it into the net.

The Madman **Max Harrop** (+ **Gary Stopforth**)

I couldn't choose between these two, so it's Madmen!

Gary knew his job, which was to break up play and pass the ball on. Afterwards, he'd have 10 pints to drink, then do a 20-mile fell run the next day, hungover. His fitness was out of this world.

Max is hard to describe! He came through at Bury, but fell into non-league. What a player, and what a guy! He was a '10', but would put himself about: he'd win a crunching tackle, then come out with flicks and tricks. There are quite a few Mad Max stories, but I probably shouldn't go into detail!

We also asked Jordan who'd rank as the best opponent he's faced - and he's actually played with him, as well as against him!

The Opponent **Ryan Colclough**

As good a one v one player as you will find even in the Football League. With his pace and wiry strength, you'd back him to beat anyone. He can be an absolute loose cannon off the pitch, but on it he just has to play.

Has loads of EFL experience, from his time at Wigan and Scunthorpe, and he left Alty to join Chesterfield this season.

THE MIGHTY INTERVIEW

Interview and words: Stephen Gillett

CHAMPIONS

A full-page action photograph of two football players competing for the ball. The player on the left is wearing a white kit with 'TalkTalk' and 'EASTOF' visible. The player on the right is wearing a dark kit with 'MIL' and 'GEORGE GRO' visible. The background is a blurred stadium scene. The word 'CHAMPIONS' is overlaid in large, white, outlined letters across the bottom half of the image.

Salford midfielder Elliot Watt has earned a reputation as League Two's silkier passer this season - but he readily admits to stealing parts of his game from Portuguese playmaker Ruben Neves coming through the youth ranks at Wolves.

A regular in Wanderers' Under-23 set-up back in 2017/18, the season in which Nuno Espirito Santo's senior side comfortably won the Championship, Watt spent hours on the training ground with Neves and he believes that 'invaluable' period at Molineux shaped the player he is today.

"I felt like I deserved to be there, so it wasn't exactly surreal, but I signed a few weeks after Wolves were taken over and some world class players came in. You could tell something good was bubbling at the club.

"I was pretty much with the first team training every day and then playing Under-23 games.

"Neves was more my type of player. My game was similar to his in the way he tried to control games from a deeper position and sprayed long diagonal passes, stuff like that.

"I saw my game that way before he came, but he was another level and I thought 'This is what I want to be'.

"It was everything: the way he checked his shoulder constantly and was always an option; the way he read the game and rarely needed to sprint because he was always in the right position.

"He was always plugging gaps, filling holes, screening opposition strikers and the more I trained with him, the more I tried to mould my game around his and also affect the game higher up the pitch with killer passes."

There have been killer passes galore this term for Watt, who joined Salford City last summer after two seasons at Bradford City (his destination after leaving Wolves back in 2020).

After Salford's I-O win over Stockport in the first leg of their League Two play-off semi-final, the former Scotland youth international has - at the time of writing - racked up 16 League Two assists this season to make him the leading supplier of goals in the EFL in 2022/23.

In addition to laying on those 16 goals, Watt has played more successful passes (1752) than any player in the fourth tier while also completing more key passes (98) than anyone in the division.

Watt believes his move to Salford in the summer has taken his game to another level and he credits Ammies manager Neil Wood, the former Manchester United youth coach, for much of his development.

"There were a few clubs in League One interested when I left Bradford, but the big thing for me was being able to play for a manager with Neil's values, who wanted to improve my strengths and weaknesses.

"As soon as I spoke to the gaffer it was a no-brainer. I've still got plenty of time to take a step up in terms of level, but I felt that if I moved up a division too soon or joined the wrong club then I'd never be able to get that time back, in terms of my development.

"It was a big decision, but the right one and I'm loving every minute of it at Salford.

"It's quite easy to look at me and judge me on my weaknesses: I'm not the most mobile, I'm not the quickest over the ground and I'm aware of that.

"But the manager here really values my strengths and the number six position is integral to the team and the way we want to play. Training sessions are geared towards the midfield and there are drills specifically for me to do extras receiving the ball and work on my positioning.

"It's been an eye opener for me in terms of the coaching. It's what I want and what I need to get to where I want to go."

Watt readily admits that his confidence has soared since leaving Valley Parade last July. "No disrespect to Bradford, I love the club and I love the people - even though I did use to get a bit of stick off the fans.

"We just didn't do well enough during my time there, to be honest. We struggled at times and when you're playing for a team that's not doing well, people's confidence gets low.

"When the team's also not playing in a way that suits your style, it just becomes more difficult to show what you're capable of.

"This season I've stuck my shoulders back and said "I'm going to be a key player for this team and in this league" to try and get Salford where they want to be. I feel I've done that and that confidence has probably helped me perform to the levels that I have so far."

There is a definite "family feel" to life at Salford, according to Watt, but it is a different story when it comes to the reception the Ammies receive from rival fans.

Given the club's links to Manchester United's famous 'Class of 92' and the ambition (and finances) of a project aiming to take Salford all the way from non-league to the Premier League, Watt agrees that the club is often cast in a role akin to that of a pantomime villain.

The antipathy towards Salford may have been something of a culture shock initially, but Watt is convinced that the hostile receptions the Ammies now take for granted only fuel their hunger to succeed. Twelve League Two wins on the road and a league-leading away goal haul suggest their siege mentality is working.

"Our away record now is very good, but it was the polar opposite at the start of the season.

"Although Salford's a real family club, we haven't got the biggest following and when we go to away grounds it does sometimes feel like everyone is against you.

"I can't speak about what it's been like in previous seasons, but I feel that it has actually helped us a lot this season and motivated us to show people the belief we have in ourselves and what we are all about."

One ingredient that Salford's promotion push has lacked this season is consistency: the Ammies' longest unbeaten run in League Two to date standing at just four games.

Despite dominating "70-80% of our games" this season, Watt states that he and his team-mates need to develop a "killer instinct".

"Our performance levels have been high for a lot of the season. We've dominated a lot of teams, but have lacked the killer instinct to kill games off.

"We have also had quite a lot of errors that have cost us. It's frustrating when you look at the number of points that we have dropped when we shouldn't, as they would obviously make a massive difference.

"It's criminal really, but if you speak to the other 300 players in the league they would probably say something similar. The league table doesn't lie at the end of the day."

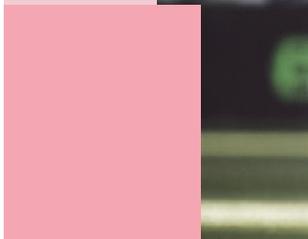
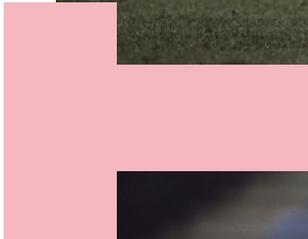
Watt may have moulded his game on an elite Portuguese midfielder, but with the likes of Paul Scholes, Nicky Butt and David Beckham involved at Salford in some capacity, there is a wealth of top class experience in the vicinity of the Peninsula Stadium.

"From what others have said at the club, they (the owners, Project 92 Limited, whose main shareholders are Beckham, Butt, Scholes, Ryan Giggs, Gary and Phil Neville and Peter Lim) are a lot more present at the club now compared to previous years.

"They show their face and are approachable, just this Monday I was having a chit-chat with Ryan Giggs and Nicky. They give their advice here and there, and maybe heckle us when we're doing our crossing drills!

"It's a bit surreal sometimes when you're sat across the table speaking to Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt, who have won so many trophies and had the careers they had. But that doesn't mean they're aliens and you can't speak to them, they're just normal people."

As our interview draws to a close, the writer of this article chances his arm at a more philosophical question: 'What are the differences between a good passer of a football and a great passer?' - and I'm glad I asked, as Watt teems with enthusiasm and ideas on the subject.





“the perfect diagonal ball has the perfect weight, the perfect length and the timing of it has to be right”

“My brother Jerome (a former England youth international who played in League One for Northampton) sent me an article the other day about the perfect diagonal pass, and how under-rated a skill it is.

“People just see a long diagonal ball and think they’re all roughly the same. But, like this article said, the perfect diagonal ball has the perfect weight, the perfect length and the timing of it has to be right.

“There are a million variables involved when you’re playing football, and your decision-making to pick the right pass is key. Your technique, how you execute it, whether you rap it through the lines, play it in front of the

person, to the safe side, there are so many things that can go into it. Is it the right pass to be playing in the first place?

“My game is heavily dependent on my passing and it’s something I take the utmost pride in and constantly try to improve. I look back at every game and look at my stats, how many key passes I’ve played etc. I do everything to try and get to where I want to go.”



CAMERON NORMAN

CAUTION: THE MOST FOULED
PLAYER IN 'THE 92'

Interview and words:
Stephen Gillett

There is a fine line between artfully drawing a free-kick for the benefit of your team and diving - and Newport foul magnet Cameron Norman believes he's on the right side of it.





All-action wing-back Cameron Norman was fouled more than any other player in 'The 92' this season, the Exiles defender winning 124 free-kicks in League Two throughout 2022/23.

Although the decision to award a free-kick is unambiguous, there are scores of factors that influence a referee to blow his whistle and signal an infringement: skill, intent, aggression, deception, coercion, timing (or a lack of it!), the crowd, gamesmanship, the list goes on and on.

In times gone by, in English football at least, going to ground was seen as a last resort, a desperate ploy that followed a lost battle. While South Americans and 'Latin' European countries celebrated gaining an advantage through skill, stealth or cunning, our domestic football scene lauded players staying on their feet no matter what.

For better or worse, that has certainly changed and there is now an acceptance - albeit grudging sometimes - that free-kicks are there to be won, as well as conceded.

Flying wing-back Norman is fully in the camp that winning free-kicks, particularly in dangerous areas, is a positive in today's game and he is willing to (literally) keep taking the hits to help his team.

"I'd obviously much rather be on my feet in dangerous situations than on the floor, but if it helps the team it's only a positive from my perspective," says the 27-year-old former Norwich, Oxford and Walsall defender.

"It's not something I go into games looking to do, but if someone puts themselves in a position where they've miscalculated or over-committed then I'm going to take the opportunity to give the advantage to myself and my team."

There is certainly an art to buying free-kicks, but there are a couple of straightforward reasons Norman wins so many of them: starting with the amount of games he plays and his position on the field.

Having featured in every League Two game for the Exiles last season, Norman again appeared in every L2 fixture this term and racked up more minutes (4015) than any other Newport player in 2022/23.

The former Norwich academy graduate is proud of his appearance record, and has already racked up an impressive century of appearances for the Exiles despite only joining the Welsh side from Walsall at the start of last season.

"I pride myself on my availability. Last season I played every game and this season was the same.

"Always being available and having those fitness levels for the position I play, and my output, is something I'm proud of and something I can hopefully keep on doing.

"I sometimes feel in bad shape with cuts and bruises, but when you get into the mindset of playing every week you just want to be out there, and not playing would hurt far more than receiving a few kicks. I'll keep taking the hits and getting on with it."



The evolution of the wing-back role has been fascinating to watch over recent years, the attacking and defensive demands of the role and its lung-busting nature marking it out as a specialist position increasingly vital to success in modern football.

Norman, who finished the 22/23 campaign with five goals and five assists to his name for Newport, feels that the dynamic nature of his role and his sheer commitment to defending and attacking make him a prime candidate to win, and concede, free-kicks.

"My whole game is built on being as good going forward as I am defending and that maybe explains why I win so many free-kicks. I try to spend as much time as possible in the opponent's half and maybe if I was more conservative I wouldn't draw as many fouls.

"It comes hand-in-hand with the wing back role, which I love. I'm doing two jobs in one almost and (my stats) may be a testament to the areas of the pitch I try to play in.

"Playing wide on the touchline, sometimes you only have one real option, you're almost waiting for the defender to make the first move and the more you work them out, the more you can pre-empt what they're going to do, shift the ball and take the contact.

"I'm very combative and put myself about; as well as winning free-kicks I'm not shy of putting myself about. I can be a little overly aggressive sometimes trying to get into certain positions."

With the 11th-most fouls conceded (65) this season in League Two, as well as the most won, Norman typifies an all-action

modern wing-back. Interestingly, however, he feels something of an "outlier" when he compares himself to many of his peers.

"I look at the modern-day wing-back and I always feel like I'm not really in that mould, as in terms of stature I'm a bit taller than most wing-backs. When you look at the Premier League, most of them are short and dynamic.

"Of course I look at the likes of Reece James and admire their athleticism and output, but it's also quite nice to think from my perspective that I am a bit of an outlier. I like to think that I can do things that other wing-backs can't provide.

"Aerially I can compete in a way that many other full-backs can't and I feel I can physically dominate and provide something a bit different."

After skirting around the subject of diving, Playmaker plunges in. Does Norman do it?

"I'd be lying if I said I've never tried to draw a foul. You're almost looked down upon now in certain situations nowadays if you don't - you'll look at certain players in games and think "He's been too honest there".

"Even I'll sometimes look back on games and think I probably could have got something if I'd gone down in certain situations.

"I think it's something that comes from experience and from playing with players who nearly always win a free-kick when they go down. James Clarke here at Newport is very good at it in defensive areas, for example, and if you use your body well and put yourself between man and ball, there's only one real outcome."

As much as free-kicks depend on what players get up to, ultimately they boil down to one man: the referee. Does Norman have any tricks up his sleeve when it comes to influencing officials?

"Ha, what I would say on that is that you don't want to needlessly draw attention to yourself. If you go down easily early in a game, the ref might think twice about awarding you anything later in the game.

"I'd say it's a case of biding your time and picking your moments, as you're definitely not going to get everything."

Newport scored the most goals from set-pieces (24) in the regular League Two season, which further highlights how Cameron's ability to draw free-kicks has benefitted the Exiles.

The defender is convinced that 'buying' fouls in dangerous areas is essential to a team's success, and nowhere more so than in League Two.

"Everyone knows how important set-pieces are in League Two and you'll obviously try to minimise the number of free-kicks you give away, particularly against teams who carry a real threat from set-pieces."

"Having someone who can win them in dangerous areas is a real weapon."

That brings us on to the subject of master practitioners when it comes to drawing fouls...and one name springs straight to Norman's mind.

"As soon as you asked the question I thought of Jack Grealish. He is the pinnacle really.

"I don't understand sometimes when he'll go down in games and people will judge him negatively, as they're all free-kicks and if other players were winning them, people wouldn't mind.

"Players who get themselves in dangerous positions more than others will naturally draw more free-kicks and Grealish wins most of his in the final third."

"I actually played him in a pre-season friendly when I was at Walsall. Afterwards, we took a photo together and I remember joking to my brother that straight after the picture I fouled him!"

A sudden transformation comes over the average football fan when a free-kick is awarded against their team: initial disbelief quickly makes way for an irrational fury that stems from an absolute certainty, deep down in their gut, that they have been horribly cheated. Jipped. Torrents of abuse rain down on the ref and the opponent who has somehow, inexplicably, tricked the hapless official.

Throughout the course of the interview, Playmaker has been looking to identify the key factor behind why Norman wins so many free-kicks, and maybe that's it: secretly he thrives on sparking such outrage.

"When we play away I definitely receive my fair share of stick from the opposition fans. It's not something I set out to do or really enjoy, but having that edge in a game definitely gives me that extra couple of percent.

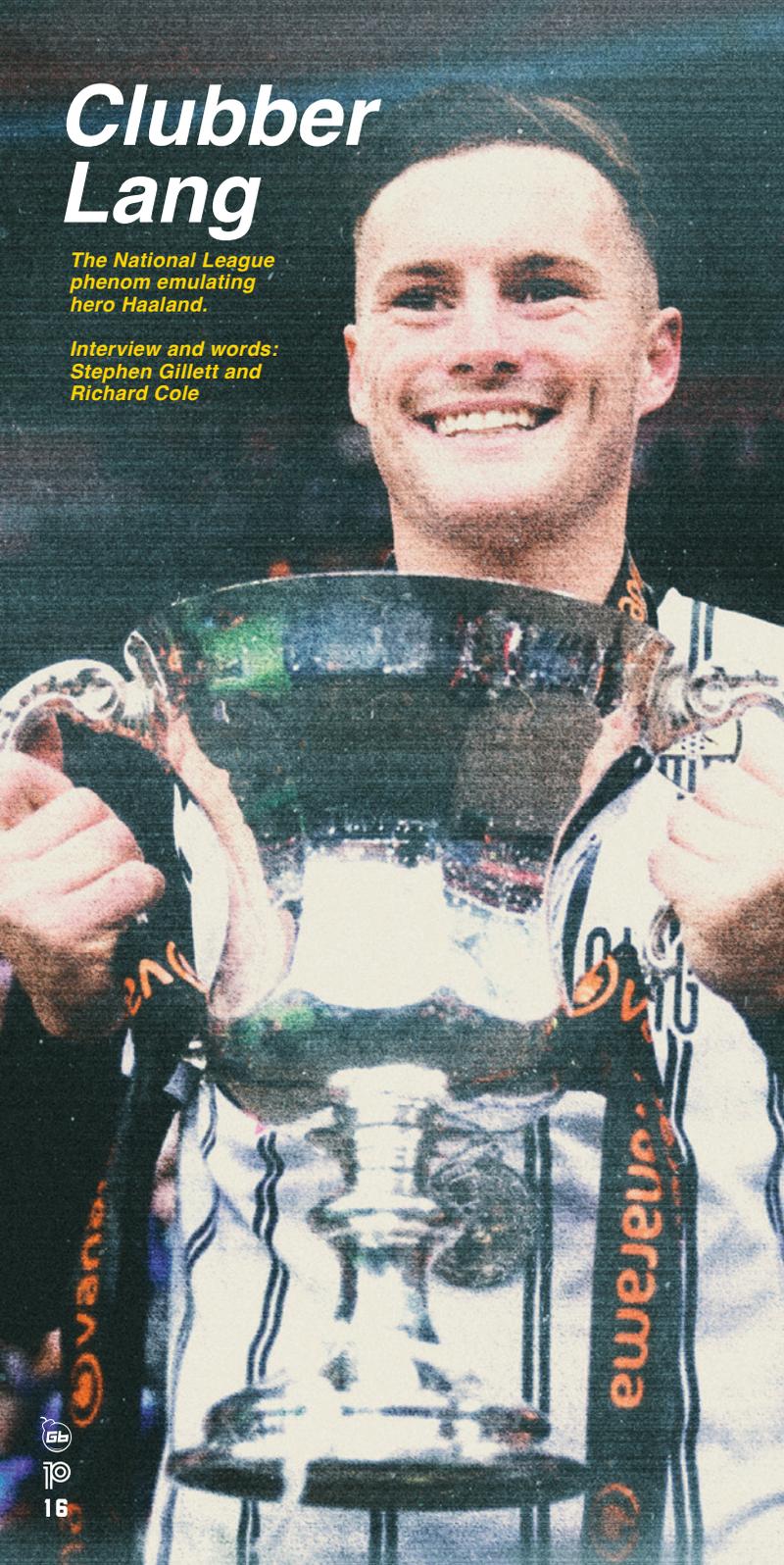
"It sort of gives you even more impetus to go and get a goal, contribute to a goal or win a free-kick in a dangerous area."



Clubber Lang

The National League phenom emulating hero Haaland.

Interview and words: Stephen Gillett and Richard Cole



If you are mentioned in the same breath as Manchester City's bionic striker Erling Haaland then you know you are doing a lot right – and that has been the case for Notts County's Non-League Haaland Macaulay Langstaff throughout 2022/23.

The Magpies swooped for Langstaff after he fired 28 goals for Gateshead in the National League North last term and it has proved a very shrewd investment, as the striker has banged home a whopping 42 National League goals to help English football's oldest club win promotion back to the EFL.

Langstaff's goal haul meant he finished the season as the division's top scorer having scored four more than Wrexham's Paul Mullin (who ended up with a more modest 38 strikes) even if the Red Dragons pipped Notts County to first place after a crazy season.

Yet despite the comparison between Langstaff and City's goal scoring machine, the player hasn't been overawed by any comparisons.

"It's a privilege to be even named in the same sentence really," the 26-year-old told Playmaker earlier in the season. "Obviously I've read the articles and to see my name

and picture next to him is a massive motivation in itself..."

"He has physical attributes and speed that are outside what I can realistically incorporate into my game, so I think I would say his movement. I watch clips of where he goes in the box and try to replicate his movements.

"In terms of the way we play, we are probably more similar to City than anybody else in this division and the manager wants me to get on the end of our build-up play and be in between the goal posts to score goals."

As well as looking a cut above the league physically, the mental side of the game is equally as important. It's something that Langstaff has worked on improving.

"I put a lot of my success now down to my mentality. When I was 21/22, I'd get too low after a game, if I'd missed chances it would carry over for the next few days. I'd be thinking about the game before when I went into the next game, and it affected my confidence.

"When I went to Gateshead, I worked closely with Mike Williamson, who is a brilliant manager, and they were massive on mentality.

"I spent time working on it and developing, and it got to the point where I could have had a great game or a bad game; I would never get too high or too low.

"I'd always be on to the next game and that was a massive change and shift in my mentality."

Like Haaland, Langstaff has benefitted from a strong supporting cast including Cedwyn Scott and John Bostock with the player reserving special praise for Rúben Rodrigues.

The Portuguese playmaker is the Kevin de Bruyne to Langstaff's Haaland to really complete the comparison.

"You'll have seen his stats and he's one of the best players I've ever played with. He was one of the best players in the National League, that goes without saying. The quality that he's got is incredible and he's supplied so many balls for me.

"He gets in little pockets of space, and that channel that De Bruyne likes as well, and when he crosses it in, I've just got to make sure I'm on the end of it."

As you would expect from a player who has bagged 42 goals in a season, eventually just his presence seemed to evoke terror in his opponents.

"I think it's only natural that subconsciously it will affect them, as they'll know that me and Cedwyn have plenty of goals between us and that we're a big threat.

"I've noticed that we're starting to get marked a

little bit tighter in the box, but also that with the attention on me and Cedwyn other players are sometimes left unmarked."

That fear factor probably explains why Notts County ended the season with a mighty points tally of 107 and the highest total number of goals scored with 117 in 46 league games.

Yet that still wasn't enough for automatic promotion as the Magpies finished behind Wrexham with a particularly memorable 3-2 game between the two being played in April that put the Red Dragons in pole position.

After a dramatic semi-final play-off victory over Boreham Wood, Notts County set up a Wembley final with Chesterfield.

The Spireites deserve credit for keeping Langstaff relatively quiet during the game that finished 2-2 after extra-time but like any player primed for the big occasion, he left his mark on the game.

With the game going to a shoot-out, Langstaff was the first man to take a penalty for the Magpies despite none of his 42 goals this season coming from the penalty spot. Still, the striker set the ball rolling for his team's eventual shoot-out victory.

Despite reports of interest from as high in the pyramid as the Championship, Langstaff sounds like he's in no rush to leave Notts County and is happy to repay the faith the Magpies have put in him.

"It's flattering more than anything else given the size of the clubs being mentioned," he told Playmaker before Notts County's Football League status was even guaranteed.

"I think I've just got to use it in a positive way, and say if I wasn't doing something right, I wouldn't be linked with these clubs. It's a confidence-builder."

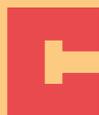
"I don't pay much attention to it though. I've signed a long-term contract with Notts County and it's an unbelievable club to be at, the size of the club and the way it is run. The manager is unbelievable, I've learned so much already and I want to keep learning even more."

A POLITICAL FOOTBALL



UNITED?
ALEX LAUREN





certain politicians will openly parrot the line that 'football and politics do not mix'. Well, throughout history, that has quite simply never been the case. The real question is: should a desire, or need for, social and political change be expressed via the supposedly beautiful game?

To maintain friendships and conduct even-handed conversations with anyone these days, common wisdom dictates that we steer clear of debate and deep dives into politics. Yet football is one of, if not the biggest and best way of beginning a conversation with a total stranger anywhere in the world. With football so inextricably linked to politics and different social classes, how does that work?

Many believe it borders on nonsensical to try and entirely separate politics and sport when there are sporting institutions and major events, especially in football, that are 'hijacked' by states or governments to legitimise exploitative or discriminatory regimes.

Examples of clubs currently perceived, rightly or wrongly, of such practice come in the form of Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester City, and now, Newcastle United. The supposedly 'well run' nature of the clubs (i.e. mega spending and, in City's case particularly, genuinely impressive

re-development of local communities) means many supporters of those clubs overlook more negative aspects of their ownership.

In some instances, supporters go as far as to defend, undermine or justify the actions of their club's owners. The excellent duo of Miguel Delaney and Daniel Storey have led a journalistic fight on ensuring this is held to account but as Storey explains, the tribalism of football fandom, perpetuated by the toxicity of social media, only leads to a more divided discourse than before.

As Storey succinctly puts it: "A growing proportion of fans judge their love for their club not through a communal experience, but by their individual relationship with it. They are not supporters of the club; they are the club and it is them. These supporters have become the militant PR arms of their football clubs."

Another example of the idea of 'sportswashing' comes with major sporting events being held in countries seeking to improve their image and gain greater acceptance around the globe.

Media corporations, certain journalists, and fan groups are so desperate to see their teams in action that they are willing to trade their soul in order to spout propaganda and engage in furious media spin (as highlighted by the reports that Qatar had paid off a supporters group before the World Cup).

This phenomenon has previous. The 1934 World Cup in Italy was used by Benito Mussolini as propaganda two years before the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin.

A more recent example was the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but doesn't it seem odd that a country now banned by FIFA was accepted as the host of the world's largest sporting event just five years ago? Four years before the Russians' full scale invasion of Ukraine, but four years after Vladimir Putin ordered an illegal incursion into Crimea.

It is slightly depressing that the most common blurring of the lines between football and politics these days is geared towards doing precisely that: creating confusion and deflecting attention.

The idea of 'divide and conquer' has been central to the political strategy of recent UK governments and this was abundantly clear in the summer of 2020 when the Health Secretary Matt Hancock MP attempted to focus attention on overpaid footballers donating money to tackle the Covid-19 outbreak rather than the government's struggles handling the pandemic.

Hancock's ham-fisted approach was a classic example of the sport being used as a political football – the irony that footballers were being asked to take a pay cut to fund a National Health Service crippled by cuts under the Tories not lost on many.

ULTRA GROUPS CAN BE SO POLARISING BUT THEY HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BRING SO MUCH POSITIVITY TO SOCIETY

This is not an isolated case and is a clear indication that football and politics are being mixed by elected officials who wish to stoke culture wars rather than focus on genuine issues affecting the country.

Marcus Rashford's work campaigning for the government to overturn a ban on free school meals provided another example that paints politicians in an unbecoming light – the forward was told to 'stick to playing football' when he sought to raise awareness of the millions of families living in poverty.

Similarly, Gary Lineker has also been told to keep his nose out of political affairs by the government on the issue of asylum seekers.

The fact that Hancock fell flat on his face and that Rashford and Lineker have successfully communicated their views highlights that, despite having to fight its corner, football can influence politics in positive, progressive ways.

Outside the realm of government and institutions, there are plenty of recent examples of football influencing political and social causes. These cultural movements are growing

in number and dialling up the volume; modern football is taking a role in them.

For example, the death of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked riots across the globe and protests against racial inequality. The Premier League subsequently adopted the Black Lives Matter movement and slogans.

Although the gesture was eventually perceived to have become 'meaningless' and the Premier League accused of tokenism, at the very least some action was taken and football did enhance the visibility of the BLM movement.

More locally, several sections of the football community are connecting with social movements in the UK. In Merseyside, for example, the rallying and organisation of supporters groups affiliated to both Liverpool and Everton continues to provide food banks with enough to feed those most in need.

Without the positive bonds formed by football 'tribalism' and the shared politics of those within such supporters groups, intensely warm-hearted and badly-needed gestures of this sort may arguably not have happened.

There are many football clubs with strong political and social identities. From the radical left to the far right, football can be a cause for disruption, but also for unity.

On the left, there are several clubs well renowned for their political allegiances. The likes of Livorno in Italy and St Pauli in Germany are famous for their leftist views.

Closer to home, there are clubs with strong ties to socialist movements and messaging, two of the biggest being Liverpool and Celtic.

John Connell, a life-long Celtic supporter brought up in a family full of Bhoys, describes one of the key reasons why the club and its fans are so politically engaged:

"Sometimes people need a voice as they can't be heard, or they are ignored. So what better place to voice it than somewhere where the mass media is?"

As Connell explains, Celtic view themselves as "supporters of the oppressed in society" as they have always, politically and historically, "leaned to the left".

At the other end of the spectrum, there are

many clubs that define themselves as right-wing or have a significantly large proportion of their fan base on the far right. There are several examples across the globe, most notoriously Beitar Jerusalem in Israel and Lazio in Italy.

Beitar Jerusalem have unofficial alignments with both the right-wing Israeli Likud political party, as well as the Revisionist Zionist movement.

Their supporters and even some former players dating back to the club's foundation in 1936, are notorious for their views on Arab and Muslim people. They are seen as unwelcome and Beitar remain the only club in Israeli Premier League history yet to sign an Arab player (although they have, despite protests, signed four Muslims).

Also on the political right, Lazio are one of the more infamous clubs when it comes to debate around politics and football. The club's Irriducibili ultras are one of the largest of their kind in Italy and are one of the most feared hooligan groups in Europe.

Supporters within the club have been known to display swastikas and other fascist symbols on banners ahead of big games at Stadio

Olimpico, and have been seen marching while doing Nazi salutes on away days, as they did in Glasgow when playing Celtic a few years ago.

Despite this, Shawn McIntosh, the Chief Fan Officer of MLS club Charlotte FC and a contributor to the Lazio World site, believes they have been unfairly tarred with a bad reputation.

“Lazio as a club has been much-maligned and misrepresented for the actions of those that represent one side of a political spectrum. I do not take pride in that assumed political affiliation. In fact, I find it quite frustrating that the media and fans often take a lazy approach in painting the club and its fans in a misguided manner.”

McIntosh, whose family comes from the Lazio region, praises the work of groups such as ‘Lazio e Liberta’, which stand up to fight against all forms of discrimination.

“Ultra groups can be so polarising but they have the opportunity to bring so much positivity to society. For one, they offer an opportunity to

build community through shared experiences and passion for a club.

“I’ve seen ultra groups band together to support social change, raise money for charitable foundations, volunteer inside their communities, respond to natural disasters with compassion and assistance,” says McIntosh.

Despite their reputation often being one of far-right views, potentially exacerbated by the recent promotion of Romano Floriani Mussolini (great grandson of Benito) to the first-team, McIntosh believes in the alternative view of his club:

“Lazio represents a club that has had to fight for everything. Lazio represents a club that often takes the hard way, including fighting off the Fascist regime’s attempts to create a super team in Rome.”

For better or worse, football and politics regularly find themselves intertwined. Players, owners, chairmen, politicians, journalists, activists, even nation states can all politicise the sport through their words and actions.

Whilst this may often seem manipulative or self-serving, there is a clear practical importance to recognising the importance that politics has on football, and vice versa.

Given its truly global appeal, football has the potential to hugely influence swathes of society. There may be a tendency to be shallow and flippant in modern society, to not take responsibility, but football has to assume the moral burden that accompanies its popularity.

There is a need for it to be socially conscious, politically aware and alert to the risks posed by ‘sports-washing’ and covert propaganda. It can be such a force for good in shifting general social norms and cultures, and that latent power needs to be harnessed.

It may only be “the most important of the least important things in life”, as Arrigo Sacchi once said, but football’s influence and appeal demand that the game and its fans sometimes take themselves seriously.



MIGHTY MINI INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW: Stephen Gillett



Owen Moxon Carlisle United

Scoring a stunner and wheeling off to celebrate with delirious fans is extra special if you play for the club you support, and Owen Moxon is living that dream at the moment with Carlisle United currently battling it out in the League Two play-offs.

After leaving Carlisle's academy at 16, Moxon went north of the border to learn his trade and excelled in the Scottish League Two last season for Annan Athletic before returning to his hometown last summer.

With six goals and 15 assists to his name, Moxon has established himself as one of the most dynamic midfielders in the English fourth tier and we caught up with the 25-year-old to discuss the joy of celebrating goals with your best mates, the importance of standards and what Carlisle need to do to clinch promotion.

PM: Carlisle have done amazingly well this season after finishing last season in 20th position. When you joined last summer, were you expecting a promotion push?

OM: I did. The form they showed at the end of last season and the gaffer (Paul Simpson) coming in were encouraging and, with me being from Carlisle, I knew the changes that he'd made in a short space of time.

Being from the town and seeing everything over the last few years, it was probably the perfect time for a player to be coming to Carlisle.

There was no doubt in my mind that we'd be pushing to have a good season and there was not going to be a repeat of last year. There's a hype around the city, not just the club.

PM: You joined Carlisle having performed excellently for Annan Athletic in Scotland's League Two. After winning plenty of games north of the border, do you feel you brought a winning mentality back with you?

OM: Annan got to the play-off final last year, but I've not actually won anything yet. But we were winning games last season and pushing for promotion, and it's the same here now, which is great.

It was slightly different for me because I hadn't played EFL football before, so it was a case of coming in and trying to add things on the playing side and getting to know the lads.

We've got a really good dressing room and we're all pushing for the same thing, which is promotion.

PM: You mentioned not playing in the EFL before - how have you found the level? Was it different to what you expected?

OM: There's more quality around every area of the pitch, there's quality in every single game that you play.

Obviously, in the EFL you play a lot more teams as well. Here, you play every team twice, whereas before (in Scotland) I was used to playing each team four times so you sort of got to grips with them and could work out teams' strengths.

I thought I would slot in nicely and handle the level and so far I think I've done that. It's been good and I'm enjoying every minute of it.

PM: Carlisle is your hometown and the Cumbrians were your boyhood club. Does it give you an extra yard playing for the club you grew up supporting - and do you feel an added pressure to perform well?

OM: I wouldn't say pressure, but maybe I feel a bit of responsibility. A lot of my good friends come home and away, and they'll be texting me before games saying 'Three points today!'

It definitely does give you that bit extra. Having a successful season with your boyhood club is something that probably everybody would want to accomplish in their lifetime.

If we keep going the way we're going and working hard then if something successful does come at the end of the season

then it'll be something I'll be very proud of.

PM: Have you seen familiar faces this season when you've scored a goal at home and the players run over to the crowd?

OM: All the time, yeah. You see people that you maybe don't know, but you recognise them from games, or maybe you've said hello a few times.

I remember I scored at Hartlepool and there are a few pictures and my best mate's right at the front of the crowd and even a few youth team lads were there.

It's a very good fanbase and they seem to be buying into it this year. We've been doing well, but we're doing so well partly because of the fans.

PM: Your manager Paul Simpson also has a local connection. Which of his qualities have really stood out for you since you've played for him?

OM: I think it's mainly a mentality thing. Once a game's done, we just focus on the next one.

You need to work and work hard under any manager, but with him there's no slacking off in any way. We have a laugh and a bit of fun in training, but the standards are very high and the message is that we should try to be better in every game we play.

PM: Earlier in the season, Simpson spoke about his hopes for greater consistency in performance from yourself and the team as a whole; have you taken that onboard?



OM: We spoke as a squad, and individually as well, about dividing games into 15-minute blocks and how you can approach them differently depending on whether you were on top, or the opposition was having a good spell. It's all about decision making.

For me specifically, I can maybe play that extra pass sometimes. I'm obviously looking to play forward and create goals, but there are times when we can manage games better.

If you break games down into 15-minute blocks then the more you win over the course of the 90, the better chance you have of winning the game.

PM: Do you feel there's a real variety to the styles of play you face in League Two?

OM: Every game is different. In some games, teams might sit off you and you can keep the ball a bit more.

There are actually quite a lot of teams with big strikers and target men, who look to play off those players, so then it's all about picking up second balls and playing in the right areas.

We don't play out from the back a lot. We look to play in the opposition's half, take no risks, and then get the ball down.



You've just got to play the game as it is, though; adapt to what comes to you on the weekend.

PM: Who has been the toughest side you've faced this season?

OM: I don't think there's been a team that we've played where I thought we really struggled, but I'd choose Stockport if I had to pick one.

We didn't start well and they were on the front foot with their press. They worked hard and had quality too. They did to us what we've done to other teams and on that particular day they were better than us.

I don't think there's anybody out there that we look at and think that we can't beat though.

PM: You've recorded some very impressive stats in L2 this season. You're top for most tackles, joint-top for assists, third for dribbles and third for key passes. Which of your stats please you the most?

OM: It's nice to be up there in all of them, but the assists, probably, as if you're assisting and scoring you're obviously helping the team.

I didn't actually know the dribbling stat. I do like to drive forward and it's something I'm trying to do more - dribble with it a little bit more instead of trying to release it too early.

PM: You're fourth in the division for most fouls made this season but you've picked up relatively few bookings - have you mastered the art of 'professional' fouls?

OM: There have been a couple of times where it's maybe better to commit the foul than let the other team break, but I'd say a lot of those fouls are probably 50/50s where the ref has blown and maybe the other team has bought the foul.

PM: Well over a third of Carlisle's goals this season have been scored inside the six yard box - do you specifically target that area?

OM: We don't like to take risks in our own half and give goals away, but once we get the ball down in the final third we're really looking to punish teams.

We've got strikers who can attack crosses - the top scorer in the league (Kristian Dennis), Garns (Joe Garner), JK (Gordon) and Amari (Patrick) - and who want the ball in the box, so that is something we work on.

PM: You mentioned Kristian Dennis. He's a really natural finisher - what's he like to play with?

OM: At the start of this season, I assisted his first three or four goals and he's just so intelligent with his runs. It clicked in pre-season: I got into certain areas and he knew what runs to make.

His timing and intelligence are the main things I've noticed - though maybe his intelligence off the field isn't as good!

PM: And, finally, your thoughts on promotion?

OM: We need to keep believing and taking it game by game, as boring as that sounds.

Exeter City wing-back Demetri Mitchell is a smooth operator on the pitch, but also cuts a dash off it by running his own clothing label.

Signed by the Grecians from Hibernian in the January transfer window, the former Manchester United academy graduate has settled in well in Devon with two goals and three assists in 16 appearances during the second half of the season.

Handed his Premier League debut by José Mourinho back in 2016/17, Mitchell flirted with the Red Devils' first team for a while before injury curtailed his progress and led to loan spells with Hearts, and a permanent move to Blackpool, prior to joining Hibs.

When asked about the lessons he learned during his time in Manchester under 'The Special One', Mitchell is in reflective mood and aware of how fickle football can be.

"The lesson I probably took, that you can apply at other big clubs, is that when you're at a club like Man United, you're so close - but you're also so far away.

"It doesn't always go the way you expect it to. I know so many players I've played with who were so good when they were younger, but who are now out of the game. Others who I maybe didn't expect as much from as being so smashing it now," Mitchell told Playmaker.

Now 26, Mitchell has had to deal with more than

his fair share of injuries over the years and after leaving Old Trafford it was enforced time on the sidelines that inspired him to start his own line of apparel, Benir Clothing.

Mitchell's decision to trust his entrepreneurial instincts paid off and his passion for business can be traced all the way back to his childhood.

"On the back of leaving Man Utd, I was injured and - because I'm a glass half empty kind of guy - I was worried about not being able to play afterwards or find a club.

"I needed a back-up plan, as I didn't have an education in terms of going to Uni or coaching off the pitch. I needed something to take my mind off things and I've always liked fashion and business.

"Even at school I'd sell Lucozade and sweets to make my pocket money for the week and at 14 I started a clothing label printing T-shirts, so having my own business was always something I wanted to do."

Looking back, Mitchell believes a part of him also started his business to avoid the common pitfalls that can destroy the careers of young footballers with too much time on their hands.

"Before I started the company, I'd get home from training at 2pm, sit on the Playstation all day and do nothing. I just had time on my hands and thought I wanted to do something productive.

"There are players out there gambling and it's easy to fall into traps like that."

Acute Above

Playmaker ended our fascinating sartorial chat in belt and braces fashion by asking Mitchell a few questions on the style (or lack of it) he has encountered in the football world.

Best dressed player:

Harry McKirdy! He's a bit hit and miss, but I like the fact he has a go and tries something different.

Worst dressed player:

Kevin Stewart. The guy's got good money, but he will wear the cheapest thing he can find. I've no idea what brand they were, but he used to wear Spiderman trainers. Terrible!

Best kit: I like lighter coloured kits, particularly for the shorts and socks, so I'd say either the Blackpool kit or the current Exeter home kit.

As the dust settles on the regular EFL season, now is a fantastic time to revisit Playmaker's countdown of the top 72 players in 'The 72'!

The concept is the same as it was last season when our definitive rankings formed the bulk of Issue 7 of the Delta.

It's less a countdown of the 'best' footballers across the EFL and more a celebration of players who have lit up the Championship, League One and League Two throughout the current campaign.

At this point, we normally paraphrase the great

Jeffrey 'The Dude' Lebowski, to make it clear that these are just, like, our opinions, man - although we always did our best to back them up with facts, stats and analysis.

The entire list is here, with a smattering of stats, but the plan is to firmly

shine the spotlight on 'The Class of 23' podium: where Ipswich's Conor Chaplin, Middlesbrough forward Chuba Akpom and this year's winner Coventry City's Viktor Gyökeres await. Vamos!





WINNER!

Ever since last season, when Viktor Gyökeres bagged an impressive 17 goals and ranked just 67th in the first-ever 'Playmaker 72', there have been people saying that the Coventry City forward was one of the best in the league and simply too good for the second tier.

After this season, it's clear Gyökeres really is too good and we're going to dive straight into the numbers to back those claims up.

No player in the second tier has had as many goal involvements as Gyökeres this season with the Swedish international scoring 21 (only behind Chuba Akpom) and assisting 11. Gyökeres also ranks fifth for key passes in the Championship (85) and first for shot-creating actions with a mighty 191 according to FBref.

Gyökeres started the season with style, scoring an absolute rocket of a shot from outside the box to draw the Sky Blues level with Sunderland at the Stadium of Light on the opening weekend.

In November, the Swede showed off some of his other qualities with a brilliant goal against Wigan Athletic. The forward picked up the ball on the halfway line, showed great strength to turn away from his defender then demonstrated his pace as he bore down on goal before finishing with aplomb.

The Coventry man went seven games without a goal midseason but then got back on target against Millwall in spectacular fashion. Midway through Gyökeres held up the ball, found a yard of space, and then fired a pin-point accurate shot to make the

difference. It was magical moments like that that put the Sky Blues in the play-off spots.

But don't just take our word for it, Gyökeres has received praise from all corners including opposition managers.

Sunderland boss Tony Mowbray summed up the player perfectly back in February: "Who is like that in the Premier League at the moment? Who looks too fast, too strong and too big? You would suggest Erling Haaland would be like that.

"Gyökeres in this league, with the players he plays against in the Championship, looks a yard faster and stronger, the way he could buy himself space to shoot looks pretty impressive."

Gary Rowett's Millwall concurs. "He makes things happen on his

own," the Lions' boss said after another Gyökeres' winner in February.

"And sometimes in this division that's priceless because they are tight games... that's where one bit of skill can make a difference."

You could fill up a movie poster with quotes if you wanted – "Outstanding." (Chris Wilder), "The best player on the pitch" (Michael Beale), or "Showed everything" (Vincent Kompany).

Considering the rave reviews that Gyökeres has been getting this season, Coventry will once again have a fight on their hands to keep their star this summer.

Whether the Sky Blues go up or not, Viktor Gyökeres has outgrown the Championship now and is destined to go onto bigger things.



2ND



AKPOM

At the start of this season, Chuba Akpom didn't have a squad number at Middlesbrough as he returned from a loan spell back at PAOK, where he had won the Greek Super League in 2019.

Fast forward about ten months and the former Arsenal forward has claimed the Championship 'Golden Boot' with a remarkable 28 goals in 39 appearances.

Since the appointment of Michael Carrick and Middlesbrough's subsequent rise up the Championship table, Akpom has been the focal point of a Smoggies side for whom he managed just two starts prior to mid-October.

All of that has been accomplished whilst also adapting and evolving his

own game to become a more versatile performer. From originally being an out-and-out striker, Akpom has this season often played in the number ten position behind loanee Cameron Archer.

The free-scoring forward gives much of the credit for his evolution to Boro boss Carrick.

"I think he's the manager I've been dreaming of my whole career," Akpom said in April after setting a Championship record for scoring in nine consecutive home games in a 3-1 win over Hull.

"Honestly, he's a pleasure to work with. Immediately when he came in he put me in the No.10 role and he just gave me the licence to just roam around, you see on the pitch I'm just roaming right to left.

"He's given me the freedom to just go out there and express myself, I appreciate that so much."

Akpom began his career with the aforementioned Gunners, signing a first professional deal in 2012 before loan spells at Brentford, Coventry City, Nottingham Forest, Hull City, Brighton and Hove Albion and Sint-Truiden before a permanent move to Greece with PAOK.

After a couple of successful seasons in Thessaloniki, Akpom joined Middlesbrough in 2020 for a fee believed to be in the region of £2.75 million. However, after scoring five goals in 38 games at 'Boro, he was loaned back to PAOK before his return to Teesside in the summer of 2022.

A quick dig into Akpom's

numbers this season shows that he has honed his predatory instincts: all of his goals scored in the penalty area and eight of them snaffled in the six-yard box.

There has also been a real variety to the threat he has posed, which is reflected in the goals he has scored: Akpom netting more headers (7) than any player in the Championship in 2022/23, but also weighing in with seven strikes with his weaker left foot, as well as 14 with his right.

Akpom's story is a tale of redemption and finding the right conditions to succeed. At 27 years-old, the Canning Town-born striker is looking likely to finally get a crack at the English top-flight.



CHAPLIN

Having a dustbin full of rubbish emptied over your head may not sound the most glorious end to a season imaginable, but it will no doubt be a magic memory for Conor Chaplin to look back on.

The effervescent Ipswich forward enjoyed an unforgettable season for the Tractor Boys as they stormed to promotion from League One racking up some ridiculously impressive stats along the way.

Joint-top scorer in the regular League One season with 26 goals, the 26-year-old former Portsmouth and Barnsley forward was the attacking spearhead of an Ipswich side that plundered a staggering 101 goals in the third tier in 2022/23 – promotion fittingly secured by a 6-0 win over Exeter.

With champagne flowing in the home dressing room at Portman Road, Chaplin led a rendition of 'Super Kieran McKenna' in tribute to his manager, who promptly picked up a bin and dumped its contents over his star forward's head! Scenes.

Chaplin has since admitted that the win over the Grecians was "one of my best days in football...one of the best days of my life".

It certainly has been a special season and Chaplin's bumper goal haul was almost unique by virtue of the fact it didn't contain a single penalty – Cheltenham's Alfie May (20) the only other striker to reach 20+ goals without netting a spot-kick.

Over the course of the season, Chaplin got more shots off (161) than any player in LI and was a threat from all angles: five of his 26 goals coming from strikes from outside the area, no player netting more from that range. A willingness to shoot off both feet also paid dividends: nine goals scored with his right peg, in addition to 16 with his trusty left foot (plus one header!).

Chaplin has a very productive tendency to fill pockets of space between his opponent's defence and midfield and this allowed him to also thrive in a creative capacity.

In fact, Chaplin (31) was one of only five players in the EFL involved in 30+ league goals this season, along with

Viktor Gyokeres (31) and Chuba Akpom (30) in the Championship, Jonson Harris (30 exc. play-offs) in LI and Bradford's Andy Cook (36) in the fourth tier.

Nominated for League One's Player of the Season and winner of Ipswich's Player's Player of the Season, Chaplin's decision to join Ipswich has paid off – and he and the Tractor Boys now look ready to do some damage at a higher level.

After what was the best 'rubbish' end to a campaign ever, he will certainly be looking to carry his form and momentum into next season.

2297

SAM HOSKINS

(Northampton Town): Sam Hoskins has been Northampton Town's top scorer in three of The Cobblers' last four seasons and his 22 goals in the 2022/23 campaign is the second highest tally for a Northampton man since Richard Hill's 33 in 1987 with Scott McGleish managing 24 in 2004/05.



ALEX SCOTT (Bristol City): No Championship player drew more fouls from the opposition than City's Alex Scott with the young Englishman felled 97 times.

MICHAEL COOPER

(Plymouth Argyle): In 123 League One appearances, Michael Cooper has kept a clean sheet in 33.33% of those matches, despite playing for a side that has managed to finish in the top six just once in those three seasons.

33%

AMAD DIALLO

(Sunderland): With 14 goals in the 2022/23 Championship season, Amad Diallo is Sunderland's top scorer and he is the only player under the age of 21 to have hit double figures, too.

24

ILIMAN NDIAYE (Sheffield United)

(Sheffield United): 23 year-old Iliman Ndiaye has directly contributed to 24 goals in the Championship this season with only three players having been involved in more.

14

14

LEIF DAVIS (Ipswich Town):

From defence, Leif Davis has provided the most assists in League One this season (14) with only four other players having managed double figures.



JACK CLARKE

(Sunderland): With 12 assists in the 2022/23 Championship season, Jack Clarke has provided more goals than anyone else in the second-tier with only five other men having hit double figures.

5



ANEL AHMEDHODZIC

(Sheffield United):

At an average of 1.8 interceptions per game, only three players have made more than Anel Ahmedhodzic in the Championship.

1.8

IDRIS EL-MIZOUNI (Leyton

Orient): Idris El Mizouni

led the way for the League Two champions for most tackles won, most interceptions, most passes completed and most fouls committed.

JOAO PEDRO (Watford):

1st

With an incredible 3.3 dribbles per game, Brighton-bound Joao Pedro has comfortably made the most dribbles on average in the Championship.

3.3

THEO ARCHIBALD

(Leyton Orient): Theo

Archibald has six assists for League Two champions Leyton Orient this season and that is the most of any O's player in the 2022/23 campaign.

12

MILES LEABURN

(Charlton Athletic): With

his 12 goals in League One this season for mid-table Charlton Athletic, Leaburn is the top scoring teenager in the third-tier.

DION CHARLES (Bolton

Wanderers): Dion Charles

hit 20 goals in all competitions for Bolton Wanderers this season and is the first Trotter since Michael Ricketts in 2001 and the third this century after Ricketts and Eidur Gudjohnsen.

20

FINN AZAZ (Plymouth

Argyle): At just 22-years-

old, Finn Azaz had 16 goal contributions, eight goals and eight assists. Only three other players under the age of 23 had more than Azaz.

16

FREDDIE WOODMAN

(Preston North End):

During the 2022/23 Championship season, Freddie Woodman enjoyed a 646-minute spell without conceding a goal, which is the most of any player in the 92 clubs.

646

6



**1 VIKTOR
GYÖKERES
COVENTRY CITY**

**2 CHUBA AKPOM
MIDDLESBROUGH**

**3 CONOR CHAPLIN
IPSWICH TOWN**

4 ANDY COOK
BRADFORD CITY

5 SAM HOSKINS
NORTHAMPTON TOWN

6 AARON COLLINS
BRISTOL ROVERS

7 ILIMAN NDIAYE
SHEFFIELD UNITED

8 BARRY BANNAN
SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY

9 JOSH BROWNHILL
BURNLEY

10 JONSON CLARKE-HARRIS
PETERBOROUGH UNITED

11 LAWRENCE VIGOUROUX
LEYTON ORIENT

12 OWEN MOXON
CARLISLE UNITED

13 NATHAN TELLA
BURNLEY

14 LEIF DAVIS
IPSWICH TOWN

15 CARLTON MORRIS
LUTON TOWN

16 CARL PIERGIANNI
STEVENAGE

17 ZIAN FLEMING
MILLWALL

18 JESURUN RAK-SAKYI
CHARLTON ATHLETIC

19 ALEX SCOTT
BRISTOL CITY

20 OLIVER NORWOOD
SHEFFIELD UNITED

21 ELLIOT WATT
SALFORD CITY

22 DAVID MCGOLDRICK
DERBY COUNTY

23 IAN MAATSEN
BURNLEY

24 MICHAEL COOPER
PLYMOUTH ARGYLE

25 BALI MUMBA
PLYMOUTH ARGYLE

26 TOM LOCKYER
LUTON TOWN

27 RYAN GILES
MIDDLESBROUGH

28 COLBY BISHOP
PORTSMOUTH

29 CHRISTIAN WALTON
IPSWICH TOWN

30 AMAD DIALLO
SUNDERLAND

31 MADS ANDERSEN
BARNSELY

32 SAM MORSY
IPSWICH TOWN

33 JACK CLARKE
SUNDERLAND

34 EIRAN CASHIN
DERBY COUNTY

35 ALFIE MAY
CHELTENHAM TOWN

36 WES BURNS
IPSWICH TOWN

37 CONOR BRADLEY
BOLTON WANDERERS

38 ANEL AHMEDHOZIC
SHEFFIELD UNITED

39 SHAUN ROONEY
FLEETWOOD TOWN

40 BEN WHITFIELD
BARROW

41 ADAM PHILLIPS
BARNSELY

42 JOEL PIROE
SWANSEA CITY

43 KRISTIAN DENNIS
CARLISLE UNITED

44 LIAM PALMER
SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY

45 IDRIS EL-MIZOUNI
LEYTON ORIENT

46 TAYLOR HARWOOD-BELLIS
BURNLEY

47 RICARDO SANTOS
BOLTON WANDERERS

48 JOÃO PEDRO
WATFORD

49 CONOR HOURIHANE
DERBY COUNTY

50 ANASS ZAROUY
BURNLEY

51 MORGAN WHITTAKER
SWANSEA CITY

52 JAMES TRAFFORD
BOLTON WANDERERS

53 SAM NOMBE
EXETER CITY

54 THEO ARCHIBALD
LEYTON ORIENT

55 HAYDEN HACKNEY
MIDDLESBROUGH

56 GABRIEL SARA
NORWICH CITY

57 GUSTAVO HAMER
COVENTRY CITY

58 MILES LEABURN
CHARLTON ATHLETIC

59 JACOB GREAVES
HULL CITY

60 DION CHARLES
BOLTON WANDERERS

61 JOHN SWIFT
WEST BROMWICH ALBION

62 LUCA CONNELL
BARNSELY

63 JERRY YATES
BLACKPOOL

64 DAN SWEENEY
STEVENAGE

65 TOM INCE
READING

66 DAN KEMP
HARTLEPOOL UNITED

67 FINN AZAZ
PLYMOUTH ARGYLE

68 DAN AGYEI
CREWE ALEXANDRA

69 FREDDIE WOODMAN
PRESTON NORTH END

70 WILL COLLAR
STOCKPORT COUNTY

71 ANIS MEHMETI
BRISTOL CITY

72 IBOU TOURAY
SALFORD CITY

TOP TEN 2022

1 ALEKSANDAR MITROVIC
FULHAM

2 SCOTT TWINE
MK DONS

3 DOMINIC SOLANKE
BOURNEMOUTH

4 KANE WILSON
FOREST GREEN ROVERS

5 BRENNAN JOHNSON
NOTTINGHAM FOREST

6 DOM TELFORD
NEWPORT COUNTY

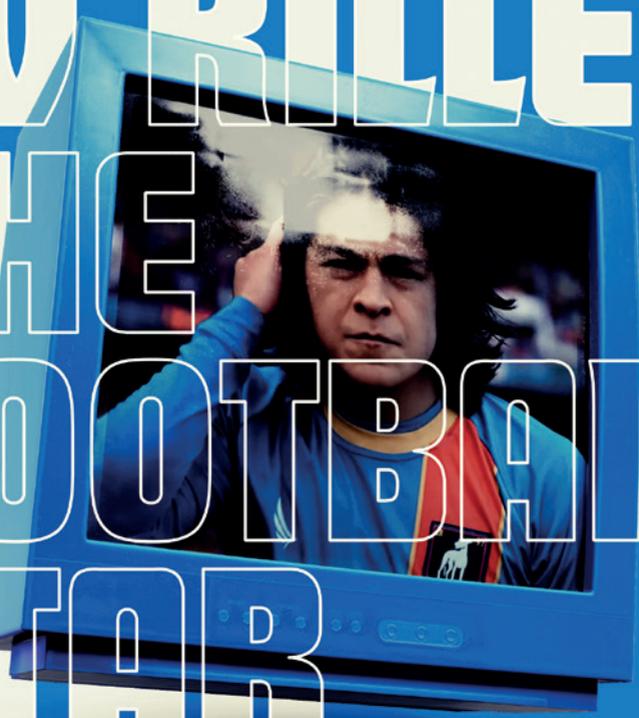
7 FÁBIO CARVALHO
FULHAM

8 COLE STOCKTON
MORECAMBE

9 HARRY MCKIRDY
SWINDON TOWN

10 HARRY WILSON
FULHAM

TV KILLED THE FOOTBALL STAR



There were a few pages left to fill as the deadline for Delta Nine loomed in quite daunting fashion, so imagine our delight when a Portuguese Playmaker associate declared that he had bagged an exclusive interview with an ex-footballer starring in a hit TV drama.

The player in question (hey, that works on two levels!) was Cristobal Fernandez, star of the Emmy award-winning football series 'Ted Lasso', whose depiction of enthusiastic Mexican striker Dani Rojas has won him a legion of adoring fans.

In a series packed with feel-good factor, Rojas' child-like love of the game is a highlight throughout all three seasons - and Fernandez poured his experience as a promising young midfielder at former Mexican champions Tecos FC into the role.

Now 32, Fernandez was forced to channel his passion for football into acting after a knee injury, but the stars aligned perfectly to hand the charismatic performer a chance to combine his two great loves.

Before we get cracking, a quick thank you to zerozero.pt journalist Pedro Cunha for sharing the interview and Playmaker's own Daniel Oliveira for translating it.

There remains but one thing to say before we dive in: 'Football is Life!'

Ted Lasso has been a worldwide success - has its appeal surprised you?

I never thought it would achieve the levels of success that we reached, but when I started working, it was already midway through the first season and I had been well-received and read the scripts.

When I met the people, I saw the work dynamic



and the good vibes and thought to myself 'This has potential'.

But I never thought it would reach success of this magnitude and become a cult series that impacted fans so deeply; where people would approach you and say "Ted Lasso has changed my life" or "Dani Rojas helped me go through difficult periods during Covid".

For a person like me, who is an artist, a film-maker, and an actor, it made me understand the responsibility that we have as artists and the influence we can have on people.

How did you get into the AFC Richmond 'squad'? What selection process did you have to go through?

A lot of different auditions! I did a Masters degree in Acting in the UK in 2016, and had lived in London for a long time.

The truth is that football was always a big part of my life. I used to play in Guadalajara in Mexico,

but because of injuries and because I found other passions, I was able to concentrate on new dreams.

During my time in London, I focused a lot on the types of characters I could represent well and recorded videos.

I first heard about Ted Lasso when I had returned back to Guadalajara in Mexico from London, and the initial audition was to send a video that showed our football skills.

So, the short story is that the producers had planned to have a positive and charismatic Icelandic guy initially, but they liked what they saw in my videos and decided to adapt the character to a Mexican Latino.

With this character having a lot of football scenes, my life has turned full circle. I hadn't processed some situations relating to my football, when I went through a sort of personal existential crisis, so football returning to me in this way, tied to another of my

dreams means that, Thank God, I'm doing the two things I love the most in my life: football and acting.

Talk us through some of the football scenes in Ted Lasso, were they difficult to film?

Yes, they were a challenge. They take a lot of practice and rehearsal and we have a group of people, including an ex-footballer, who help us with them. We will rehearse a week of football scenes, let's say from Episode 1 to Episode 4, and then there's a week solely filming football scenes...but we have many struggles like the negative temperatures, for example.

Doing this in difficult weather in London sometimes means things that normally would take 90 mins can take 10 hours to make. Sometimes it was difficult, but we need to remind ourselves that we are doing what we like.

In Mexico, people really really love football! You played for Estudiantes de

Tecos as a young player? But later had a problem with your knee, is it sorted?

Yes, I did - and yes, yes, everything is under control; that's why everything Dani Rojas does in the series was done by me. I can proudly say that I didn't use a double and that I used everything I got from my football career in the series.

I then played in other parts of Mexico and Puerto Rico, because I wanted to go to the USA, but the dream of acting won through and I went a different route.

There's a really nice scene in the second season when players from different backgrounds are all together at Christmas. The show does have people from lots of backgrounds, was that a good environment?

Yes, yes - I really like Ted Lasso because there's a lot of diversity, lots of different cultures. What you see in the series, that's like that in the background between everyone.

We have spent three years together, spending a lot of time together on and off set. We go to pubs, to stadiums, and really we are like brothers, like a family and the beautiful thing is that there's no egos: we're all in the same boat.

I'm really happy with life and that the producers and writers gave me the opportunity to be in the Ted Lasso 'family'. They were already a family when I arrived and they

welcomed me so well; in this third season, there are new characters, and they too were welcomed into the family.

Dani Rojas has gained more visibility and greater importance throughout the series. Was that planned or did your role grow given what you brought to it as an actor and footballer?

I want to believe it was because of the charisma and energy that Dani Rojas has and how I grabbed hold of the character and gave it part of my culture. In Mexico and other Latin-American countries, we like to have good vibes and be happy and I believe I gave a lot to Dani, as well as the part teaching me a lot.

As the show evolved, the writers understood who we all are as people and that's why the characters look so real. Obviously we create characters, but parts of them are based on who we are: that's why in my first scene I say 'Just like in Guadalajara'!

It's really nice to see the positive reaction fans have had to Dani Rojas. He reflects the Ted Lasso spirit of positive vibes and optimism and joy.

When you see Dani Rojas the first thing that comes to mind for many people is his mantra 'Football is Life'. It's a beautiful thing!

Yes, it is, for me as well. Since I was a kid and even now - including these new dreams - I think life is like a football match. Sometimes you win, sometimes you

lose, but there is always another match. So football is life, in a way.

Do you believe a manager like Ted Lasso can exist in real life?

I believe that many managers will have seen the series and taken some tips from Ted's man-management. There are so many lessons to take that can be used in our day-to-day life too, so yeah, I believe there are many managers with similarities to Ted Lasso.

What was it like playing at Wembley?

We've been to a lot of different stadiums, and it's been really nice. We have been at Wembley and all of the stadiums seen on the show, but the football scenes are done in the studio - we record them at West London film studios, close to Heathrow Airport, and there's a team around that area Hayes and Yeading, whose stadium we use.

That's where we convert the scenes into the stadiums and the producers do the rest. All the other bits, apart from the football, are actually at Wembley, Stamford Bridge, Selhurst Park etc.

And you were also invited to the White House to meet Joe Biden...?

The funny thing is I have never met the president of Mexico, but I have already met the President of the USA!

It was a great experience and it shows how successful Ted Lasso was and the impact it had on so many people. We went there to talk about Mental Health, which is an important topic and a very important topic in the series. Personally, that is what I've learned most about from Ted Lasso.

I was really nervous - I didn't even know where to put my hands! There was a lot of security but they were lovely people. Finding out about the different parts of the White House, which is like a museum, all the stories, meeting Joe Biden and taking a picture were all moments I will never forget. It was a unique moment and, even though we never know if we'll meet again in different projects, it was like the climax of Ted Lasso's success.



IT'S JUST LIKE WATCHING BRAZIL

Flamengo, Santos, Corinthians – Brazil has not only produced some of the greatest players of all time but also some of the sport's most storied clubs.

However, for a few Brazilians the lure of non-league football in England has led to a devotion to an unlikely team in the sixth tier of the pyramid spending their time in the National League South facing the likes of Dulwich Hamlet and Slough Town. At least until their remarkable promotion to the fifth tier this season, that is.

The Hoops have history dating back over 140 years and were briefly managed by World Cup winner Bobby Moore. They're not exactly a household name...yet they've managed to win over supporters from the country associated with some of the greatest teams and players ever to grace the game.

To find out more, we spoke with Vinicius, one of the administrators behind the Twitter account, Oxford City FC Brasil (@OCFCBR) – a

profile dedicated to spreading their love of an unlikely team to South America.

Playmaker: Why Oxford City? I think a lot of people would be surprised to imagine people from a country as synonymous with football as Brazil choosing to support an English sixth-division team.

Oxford City Brasil: It's really unusual and the reaction of most British people when they discover our fan page is one of surprise, but we like it!

Oxford City appeared to both of us in similar ways – through football management games. A certain curiosity about the club was aroused, which led us to investigate more about its history and current moment. And before long, we were following City on social media and following the results.

PM: What inspired you to take your love of the club to Twitter?

OC: Well, the idea of creating an account to talk about the club came from me [Vinicius] – one of the current account administrators.

Brazil has a lot of fan clubs of other countries' teams on Twitter who do a really commendable job, but there weren't many about the less talked about leagues – in particular for non-league football that I was interested in because of Oxford City.

This idea spent a few months developing until it blossomed in January 2021. The following month I met another Oxford City fanatic through Twitter, João, who lives on the other side of the country, and we quickly created a friendship.

In July of the same year, he officially joined the OCFCBR team and is essential to keep this project going.

PM: Have you managed to go to any Oxford City games yet?

OC: In fact, we never left Brazil but it is a big dream of ours. Perhaps our biggest ambition is to go to Oxford, meet the fans, the stadium, the players and, of course, watch the Hoops in action.

Even from here, we see that the club has a fan base that may not seem very big to some, but it is

huge in supporting the team during matches and has a big love for the club. This makes us even more eager to be among them as soon as possible.

PM: Moving on to this season, Oxford City earned promotion to the National League for the first time in their history. It's an incredible achievement, how do you think they will do in the fifth tier?

OC: Well, this season was really exciting and will be unforgettable for us, something we will always want to remember fondly.

In our view, next season will probably bring new and big challenges as it is a completely new experience for the club.

But City only got where it is due to years of good planning, so we believe that the people who helped the club earn this promotion can indeed make it stay and be competitive in a league with stronger teams.

PM: Just how good of a job has manager Ross Jenkins done since his arrival last year? He's only 32-years-old, do you think he has a bright future?

OC: At times, especially at the beginning, we questioned the pair of Ross Jenkins and [Assistant] Andy Ballard. But they have evolved a lot over time, and this year especially was a key turning point for both of them, where they reached a very high level of trust among players and fans alike.

Ballard was one of Oxford City's great players from this century, and Jenkins was someone who was already well established at the club. I think this homemade solution, made up of people who really love the club, was fundamental to reach the glory days currently experienced.

Nowadays we totally trust Jenkins' work, without a doubt he is someone with a lot of potential and who is very dedicated to what he does. We see him achieving great things in the future, hopefully most of them with Oxford!

PM: Speaking of Oxford's great players, who have been your favourite players you've seen playing for City?

OC: It's a very difficult question because in recent years City have been putting together one of the best squads in their history.

We think Josh Ashby, Zac McEachran, Reece Fleet, Joe Iacofano, Canice Carroll, Josh Parker and Klaidi Lolos are the pillars of this team.

But Harvey Bradbury, Ben Dudzinski, James Roberts, George Harmon, Zico Asare and Ewan Clark have already given us great emotions and we have fond memories of them playing for City.

PM: Do you have a particular highlight during your time following the club?

OC: The answer to that question could be a specific match but believe me, City love exciting games. We have fond memories of large scores or results achieved heroically in the last few minutes.

But when we have some contact with the club like an interaction with the fans, a message from someone who works at the club, or when the official profile of the club interacts with us those are the best moments without a doubt.

PM: Have you found that promoting Oxford City to the Portuguese-speaking world has had an effect – have you been able to convert some new fans?

OC: Yes, and these are moments that also bring us great joy. When someone asks more about the club, we respond with immense satisfaction. After all, that was one of the main goals from the beginning: to bring Oxford City to as many people as possible.

We have Brazilians and even Argentinian followers who follow City match by match and I feel that having a profile of Oxford City fans in Latin America shortens the distance and

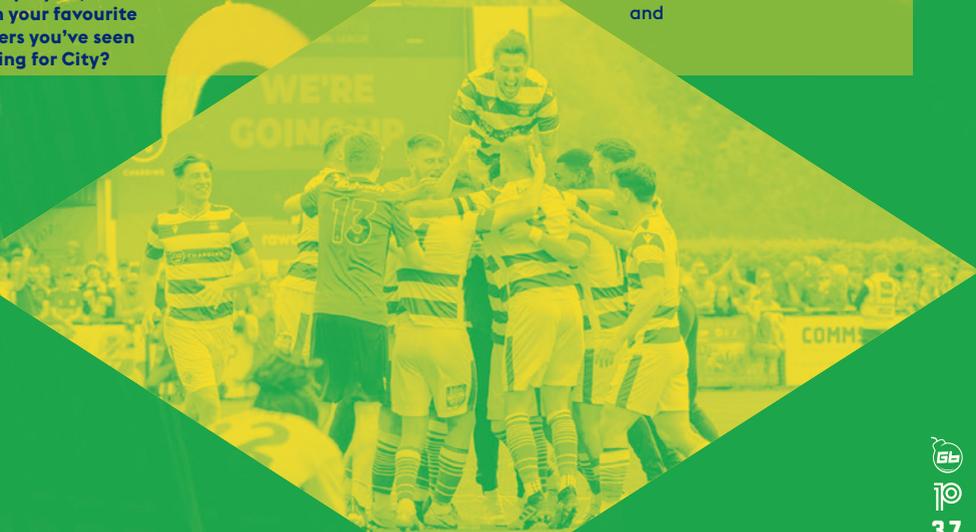
encourages this passion for a club that is so far away. This gives us a feeling of mission accomplished and nurtures the desire to always be looking to improve.

PM: Finally, has the club been in touch with you personally to thank you for your support?

OC: Yes and, as we mentioned earlier, it's the best time for us when that happens. We've already been able to talk to people who are a part of Oxford City FC at all levels from fans, players, and coaches to managers, directors, and even owners.

Everyone has always been kind and welcoming to us and some have even agreed to be interviewed by us.

It makes us feel really inserted into Oxford City FC, just as they have been inserted into our lives over the last few years. It's in our routine, we just can't live without this club anymore!



Charles Drawin's FOOTBALL ART-A-SIDE

Flipping the age-old formula, we asked illustrator Charles Drawin who would turn out for his ultimate football artist five-a-side team...



DANIEL NYARI

The artist that made me realize football could be so much fun to illustrate, his minimalistic portraits are still a source of inspiration for the new generations. Just fantastic.

<<<



DAN EVANS

Amazing use of colour and volumes, he doesn't need too many elements for delivering pop culture remarkable pieces, I think when I'm doing an illustration in my head it should look like a very original Dan Evans.

<<<



JOHN TREGOING

Out of this world skills and infinite patience, I still can't understand how an illustration can have so many details on it. Every single one of John's pieces should be hanging from a museums wall, like actually.

>>>

This guy can turn some simple lines into such expressive faces, no matter who he is drawing he is always on target, you'll guess the character straight away. Also his art is so much fun, I don't want to miss any tiny joke or single detail on it.

>>>



88MMO

Every time I see a Gonza illustration I realise how bad I am at trying to understand volumes on faces, he is so smooth and also enjoys playing with the bodies in a cartoonish way that reminds me of the newspaper illustrators I used to look up to when I was a kid.

<<<



GONZA RODRIGUEZ



CHARLES DRAWIN

THE MANAGER
You can't pin this man down, a constant in creating football imagery that is beautiful, playful and gripping. Check out this ever evolving genius!

Follow him on Instagram
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Commission him at
charlesdrawinart@gmail.com

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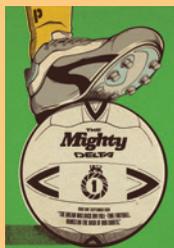
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THE DIRECTORY

A quick look back at the previous eight incarnations of the Delta illustrates two things: a) we very often forget to date the mags and b) people, on the whole, are incredibly generous.

Issue Nine of the Delta (May 2023) again drew inspiration and energy from a fabulous supporting cast, headlined by this fanzine's designers The Graphic Bomb. You have once again knocked the ball out of the park, Darren and John - thanks as always.

We massively appreciate the contributions of the players, social accounts, artists and actors (!) who feature within these pages - without them, there would simply be no fanzine.

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