

An aerial photograph of a vibrant green football pitch situated in a densely packed urban environment. The pitch is marked with white lines for the center circle, half-way line, and goal areas. It is surrounded by a mix of residential buildings, some with flat roofs and others with more complex structures, and patches of greenery. The overall scene suggests a community space in a city.

THE MODERN FOOTBALLER

ISSUE TWO



A Get Football Group Publication - © 2020

CONTENTS

03 EDITOR'S NOTE

06 UP FRONT

17 CLUB COLUMNS

18 1979

20 PIZJUÁN

22 OLD LADY

24 DREAM TEAM

26 IL BISCONI

28 ROTEN BULLEN

30 DIE ADLER

32 GERLAND

35 LA DER

38 CALDERON

40 SAN PAOLO

42 SÄBENER STRASSE

44 GALACTICOS

46 DIE WERKSELF

-FEATURES- 48

TAPIE 49

ZAMPARINI 54

VALENCIA 57

MATTHÄUS 63

-PROFILES- 86

UPAMECANO 69

CHERKI 72

ZANIOLO 74

BOUANGA 76

LAUTARO 78

ØDEGAARD 80

WERNER 82

ZAKARIA 84

HAVERTZ 86

MAJA 88

VINÍCIUS 90

UP FRONT

GET FOOTBALL WRITERS TAKE A LOOK AT THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS ACROSS LIGUE 1, BUNDESLIGA, LA LIGA AND SERIE A.

MISUNDERSTANDING ENDS LIGUE 1

Farce descended on French football this spring as the other traditional major five European leagues resumed following their COVID-19 enforced suspensions. Despite a willingness from French clubs to conclude the 2019/20 Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 seasons, in parallel with nearly every other European top flight, both divisions were abruptly ended in late April after then Prime Minister Édouard Philippe's statement on April 28th, that *"big sporting affairs cannot occur before September. The 2019/20 football season cannot return."* Although most clubs, given the grave and unprecedented circumstances, agreed to follow that directive, many were shocked.

It seems that the decision was made based on a bizarre miscommunication between UEFA and the French government regarding a UEFA 'deadline' for leagues to be rounded off by August 3rd. In a letter to Lyon President Jean-Michel Aulas, printed in *Le Parisien*, UEFA president Alexander Čeferin confirmed this was in fact not a hard or absolute deadline. Čeferin wrote *"these dates are only recommendations, provisional and not official."* However, then Minister for Sports, Roxana Mărcăneanu later suggested to *L'Équipe* that the government assumed otherwise: *"It was the proposition that I had in my office: the*

season had to finish on 3rd August owing to dates imposed by UEFA."

Nonetheless, various challenges, legal or otherwise, brought by Lyon, Toulouse and Amiens (the latter two were relegated as a result of the early end) failed, and the French football diaspora - according to a recent report by Ernst and Young - will lose a combined €1.27bn as a result. Oddly, France then became the first of the 'big five' to allow supporters to return to games in late July with up to 5,000 fans attending both the Coupe de France and Coupe de la Ligue finals. Although the safety and health of players and staff remains the clear priority, the smoothness with which other leagues completed their campaigns (Spain's Segunda division final day admittedly aside) left French football looking more than a little hasty.

ROMA'S UNDERRATED TALISMAN

When Edin Džeko arrived in Rome in the summer of 2015 on an initial loan deal, there were concerns about the direction his career was heading. The forward had netted just four league goals in his final season at Manchester City, and with his 30th birthday fast approaching, fans wondered whether he had left his best years behind him in England. Yet five years later, the now 34-year-old has

well and truly proven the doubters wrong. In his second campaign in the Italian capital, Džeko won the Capocannoniere, an award handed out to the top scorer in the league, when he netted 29 goals. Roma finished runners-up that year, just four points behind Juventus.

The following season, he scored eight times during Roma's run to the Champions' League semi-finals in 2017/18, demonstrating how important he is to the club's success.

Throughout his time in Italy, Džeko has had to watch club legends bid farewell, with Francesco Totti retiring in 2017, whilst Daniele De Rossi left two years later. Such losses have seen Roma slip out of contention domestically, meaning that Džeko is often overlooked when compared with his contemporaries who are battling for silverware each year.

Yet the striker deserves recognition. He has rescued Roma on more than one occasion this season, lifting the team when they have been struggling in games. The focal point of the team's attack, Džeko is adept at finishing chances, as well as putting them on a plate for others.

Perhaps fans will only fully appreciate him when he hangs up his boots. Roma return to Europa League action on August 6 when they face a tricky tie with Sevilla. If they are to go deep into the competition, expect Džeko to be their shining light once more.

ESPANYOL BOW OUT AFTER 26 YEARS

Espanyol were relegated from La Liga after 26 consecutive years of top-flight football. One of the biggest clubs in Spain - they rank fifth after Real Madrid, Barcelona, Athletic Club and Valencia, for most time spent in Primera.

After spending €40m on Raul de Tomas,

Adrian Embarba and Leandro Cabrera in the January transfer window, fans would have been forgiven for talking of survival, but it was not enough to save their season.

Raul de Tomas joined from Benfica and made an immediate impact, becoming the club's top scorer for the campaign within a month of joining. But the goals soon dried up. The Catalan club finished seventh in La Liga last season, no-one expected such a rapid demise.

Los Periquitos lost key players Mario Hermoso to Atlético Madrid and Borja Iglesias to Real Betis last summer. La Liga is losing a big club. Espanyol have won four Copa del Rey trophies (1929, 1940, 2000, 2006), and played in the UEFA Cup finals of 1988 and 2007.

The signing of Chinese striker Wu Lei promoted the club in Asia with reports of Chinese TV audiences of 40 million watching their games. Espanyol often played in the early afternoon time slots as La Liga authorities helped the club and league grow worldwide. On the domestic front, it was all falling apart.

The owners changed leadership three times throughout the season. Four different coaches, including David Gallego, Pablo Machin, Abelardo Fernández and Sporting Director Francisco Rufete all attempted to change the club's fortunes. The final nail in the coffin came against cross-city rivals Barcelona. A 1-0 defeat resulted in relegation on a heartbreaking night at Camp Nou.

BREMEN'S SURVIVAL QUESTIONED

Werder Bremen secured Bundesliga football for next season by the skin of their teeth. With just four games remaining, the Weserstadion outfit were 17th, three points behind Düsseldorf and six behind Mainz.

In those four final matches, Paderborn weren't yet automatically down and any team from Eintracht Frankfurt in 11th could have finished as low as 17th and therefore in the relegation zone – 16th meaning they would play the team that finished third in the 2. Bundesliga in the customary two-legged promotion/relegation play-off.

Florian Kohfeldt's Werder Bremen went on to put five past bottom-club Paderborn but subsequently lost to Bayern Munich and relegation rivals Mainz, putting their top-flight future in doubt. Whilst Augsburg, FC Köln, Mainz et al. all secured their top-flight status, Werder Bremen, a massive club in Germany, faced relegation on the final day of the season. Fortuna Düsseldorf, the other team in the battle, needed to match or better Bremen's result to avoid 17th. However, Werder, who faced Fortuna's rivals, FC Köln, put six goals past the Billy Goats. Thus, the conspiracy theories arose: *"Köln had let Bremen win, relegating fierce rivals Fortuna to the second division."* Nobody could have predicted Bremen's demise last season but with a plethora of injuries, Kohfeldt found it difficult to discover any sort of momentum, despite the promising performances.

With the backing of the board, he must improve next season, but much like Hamburg and Köln's relegation in 2017, it is important to note that anybody, barring powerhouses such as Bayern and Borussia Dortmund can find themselves in a Bundesliga relegation battle. Like the race for Europe, the relegation battle is just as exciting. With just ten games remaining, only 16 points separated Paderborn in 18th and FC Köln in 10th.

FANS ATTEND FRENCH CUP FINAL

After well over four full months without a ball being kicked in France, PSG and Saint-Étienne became the first to return on July 24th for the last Coupe de France final. Although little was

expected of a Saint-Étienne side who narrowly avoided relegation after a dire run of form under Claude Puel, with PSG tearing friendly opposition apart in warm up games, beating Le Havre, Waasland-Beveren and Celtic by an aggregate score of 20-0, Puel's men were much improved.

The better side in the first quarter of an hour, Denis Bouanga hit the post for Les Verts early on and might have had a first-half hat-trick. Although Neymar stroked home what became the winner after 15 minutes to round off PSG's first meaningful attack and ASSE were reduced to ten men soon after, they kept Paris on their toes with some late pressure and goalkeeping heroics throughout from Jessy Moulin.

Although inconsistent pre-recorded crowd noise and odd computer generated fans reminiscent of a 90s PlayStation game have become the norm since lockdown, 4,100 mask-wearing supporters were permitted to witness PSG's 5th title in this competition in six seasons in-person. 900 tickets went unused as ASSE fan groups boycotted the game as the latest instalment in a long running feud with French footballing authorities, meaning the full 5,000 limit wasn't reached. Whether such an early return for supporters is worthwhile or prudent remains uncertain given the ongoing pandemic and fears of a second wave of cases; the rest of Europe will watch with interest as Ligue 1 becomes the first of the 'big five' to begin the 2020/21 campaign on August 21st.

CADIZ RETURN TO LA LIGA

Cádiz became the first side promoted from Segunda to Primera in 2019/20 for the first time in 14 years. In just four years the Yellow Submarine have gone from Spain's third division to the top-flight. Spain's third tier is known as 'the well' as a result of the difficulty clubs have trying to achieve promotion from

it. Club president Manuel Vizcaíno has promised 10,000 free season tickets to supporters for next season. The city of Cádiz is located on the very southern tip of the Iberian peninsula, meaning the club does not have any great rivals. They will join fellow Andalusian clubs Sevilla, Real Betis and Granada back in the big time. A city famous for its carnival, fans of La Liga can expect a carnival-like atmosphere in the Estadio Ramón de Carranza when supporters are once again permitted to attend matches.

With a wealthy new American shareholder coming on board in March this year, there has been no better time for Cádiz to strengthen their squad as they look to survive in their return to the top-flight. Veteran striker and former Spain international Álvaro Negredo has been named as the club's first top-flight signing.

PJANIĆ BIDS FAREWELL TO SERIE A

It looked as though it would be a transfer story that would rumble on throughout the summer. Would Pjanić stay in Turin or move to Barcelona? Then, one afternoon in late June, an announcement came. Pjanić was going to Spain as part of a swap deal which would see Arthur Melo join the Italian champions. For many, it seemed that Juventus had got the better of the negotiations. With Arthur not turning 24 until mid-August, he appears to have more room for development than the 30-year-old Pjanić.

The Bosnian playmaker has also experienced a dip in form either side of the coronavirus pandemic which disrupted the season. Juventus' midfield has looked vulnerable for some time now, with fans often blaming Pjanić for being unable to dictate the tempo from his deep-lying position.

Perhaps Pjanić moving on is best for all parties. Juventus can look to rebuild their

midfield with fresh personnel, whilst the midfielder himself can show that he remains a high-class performer. And there is the point. Pjanić can be one of the best in the business on his day. That should not be forgotten.

Although he may have struggled this season, it cannot be denied that Pjanić has had an incredibly successful nine-year stay in Italy. From his five years in Rome where he linked up so beautifully with Francesco Totti, to taking over from Andrea Pirlo as Juventus' midfield conductor, Pjanić has shone at two of the biggest clubs in the country.

Moving into the final month of his time in Turin, Pjanić will get one final shot at European glory with Juventus. Can he help the side to their first European Cup in 24 years? It would be a fitting end for the master technician.

MÜLLER'S RECORD BREAKING SEASON

Just when many were thinking that Thomas Müller's career was dwindling down, the Raumdeuter extraordinaire was revitalised under Hansi Flick. Whilst all eyes were on Robert Lewandowski and his goalscoring exploits, it was the World Cup winner who was Bayern Munich's cog in their eighth consecutive Bundesliga triumph. The 30-year-old set a new Bundesliga record: the most assists in a season since data collection began in 1992/93. With 21 assists, Müller broke Kevin de Bruyne's then Bundesliga record of 19 from back in the 2014/15 season for Wolfsburg. Considering Müller completed 90 minutes of football just 15 times in the 33 league games he played in makes this even more astounding.

Dubbed the inventor of the Raumdeuter role, which translates to "space interpreter" or "space investigator", Müller is the best in the business. Once deployed as a striker, it wasn't until under the tutelage of Dutchman Louis

CLUBS

An aerial photograph of a green soccer field with white and yellow markings. The field is surrounded by a fence and lush green trees. In the top right corner, there is a small white building and some equipment. A list of 12 soccer clubs is overlaid on the right side of the field, each preceded by a number in a yellow box. The numbers 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 35, 38, 40, 42, 44, and 46 are in yellow, while the club names are in white. The text is arranged in a vertical column on the right side of the field.

18 1979

20 PIZJUÁN

22 OLD LADY

24 DREAM TEAM

26 IL BISCONI

28 ROTEN BULLEN

30 DIE ADLER

32 GERLAND

35 LA DEA

38 CALDERON

40 SAN PAOLO

42 SÄBENER STRASSE

44 GALACTICOS

46 DIE WERKSELF

GERLAND

WITH PRESIDENT JEAN MICHEL-AULAS EDGING TOWARDS RETIREMENT AND SOME HEAVY TURNOVER AROUND HIM, OL'S IDENTITY IS IN FLUX.

IT has been a rocky 12 months for Lyon. As one of the inarguable powerhouses of French football, changes internally and externally have resulted in questions being asked of their position and whether they are facing something of an identity crisis.

During his tenure, President Jean-Michel Aulas has always had the club's best interests at heart. Therefore, when coach Bruno Génésio announced he was stepping away from the club towards the end of last season, the impression was that new faces would join to help take the club forward. Step forward club legend Juninho Pernambucano, a huge fan favourite and a key player in the team's dominance in the early 2000's.

Aulas brought Juninho in as the new Sporting Director, tasked with the day to day running of the club. His first job was to find a replacement for Génésio. Juninho quickly pushed for the appointment of ex-Brazilian teammate, Sylvinho. The former full-back had held assistant coaching roles for the likes of Inter Milan and the Brazilian national team, however the Lyon job was his first as a head coach. It was a gamble which did not pay off. Only two months into the new season, with results not as expected, Sylvinho was sacked - Lyon losing to local rivals Saint-Étienne in

what turned out to be his final game as coach.

Faced with a struggling team, a rookie Sporting Director and now no coach, Aulas and Juninho turned to Rudi Garcia. A slightly left-field appointment as although he had plenty of Ligue 1 experience during his time with Lille and Marseille, his time at the latter proved disappointing while the rivalry between the two clubs growing ever fiercer during Garcia's OM reign. The Marseille faithful took joy in seeing a coach with a mixed recent reputation and who they were happy to see leave taking over at their Olympico rivals. The Lyon fans were hardly happy about the appointment either and losses to the likes of Rennes, Lille, Nice and Marseille in the early-going did not exactly help turn the tide in his favour.

Looking at the off-pitch personnel, and other than the novice appointments of Juninho and Sylvinho, there have been departures which have not altogether sat well with the Lyon fans. The two big changes saw exits for Florian Maurice, highly respected Head of Recruitment, and Grégory Coupet, former goalkeeper during those glory years turned Goalkeeping Coach.

Maurice, who oversaw the recruitment of the

likes of Ferland Mendy, Tanguy Ndombele and Moussa Dembélé, was seen as a candidate to take the Sporting Director role prior to Juninho's appointment. However, with Aulas opting for the Brazilian, Maurice struggled to gel professionally with his new boss. With Aulas a big fan of Maurice, having previously said he expected him to go only to one of the European giants, it was clearly a major blow when he announced his decision to leave, taking the Sporting Director role at Rennes. Maurice also convinced his assistant at Lyon, Jérôme Bonnisse, to join him in Brittany as Head of Recruitment. Former Director General of the PSG women's team, Bruno Cheyrou, has subsequently been appointed as Maurice's replacement.

Coupet's departure was slightly more acrimonious. After being unveiled as new goalkeeping coach at Dijon, he confirmed he did not receive any contract extension offer from Lyon. He further went on to tell *L'Équipe* that he heard nothing from the club when he asked them about his future way back in early 2020. A breakdown in communications from the club led Coupet, he of that iconic double save against Barcelona, to feel there was a "lack of consideration."

For a club that has worked recently with a few ex-players, the fact that Coupet was overlooked does indeed appear to be a slap in the face. Who that responsibility should have rested with remains to be seen. Certainly, Coupet's concerns over his future pre-dated Juninho's appointment, however, sorting out coaches' contracts is something that should really have been on his to-do list upon joining.

One thing gently bubbling on the backburner

is the future of Aulas himself. The 71-year-old president has previously mentioned he would look to step down from his role when he turned 75 and so speculation has been mounting over his successor. Back in April, *L'Équipe* ran a piece on the close links between Aulas and French basketball star Tony Parker. Parker currently sits on the board of NWSL side OL Reign in the US and is president of Lyon based basketball team ASVEL, who are part owned by the OL Group.

There has been a great deal of mutual praise between the pair with Aulas a fan of Parker's "professional and human qualities", in turn Parker is enjoying the relationship with Aulas, *"I want to develop with Jean-Michel, to continue learning from him....if one day he sees me like this (as a future president)....I think it is a position which can not be refused."* What comes of this remains to be seen but will need to be a move given a great deal of consideration.

On the pitch then and it is not altogether plain sailing there either. With the futures of Houssem Aouar, Moussa Dembélé and Memphis Depay in question, Lyon either need to continue the reliance on their academy or bring in fresh faces. In this area, results have been mixed. The emergence of Rayan Cherki has been a real positive. Cherki carries huge expectations with enormous potential and has recently signed a contract extension. Seeing young defender Oumar Solet and forward Amine Gouiri leave the club, however, does ask the question of whether the current management are able, or willing, to bring academy players through as the club have before.

The departure of forward Martin Terrier to Rennes did feel a little hasty, especially with

'PARKER CURRENTLY SITS ON THE BOARD OF NWSL SIDE OL REIGN IN THE US AND IS PRESIDENT OF LYON BASED BASKETBALL TEAM ASVEL, WHO ARE PART OWNED BY THE OL GROUP.'

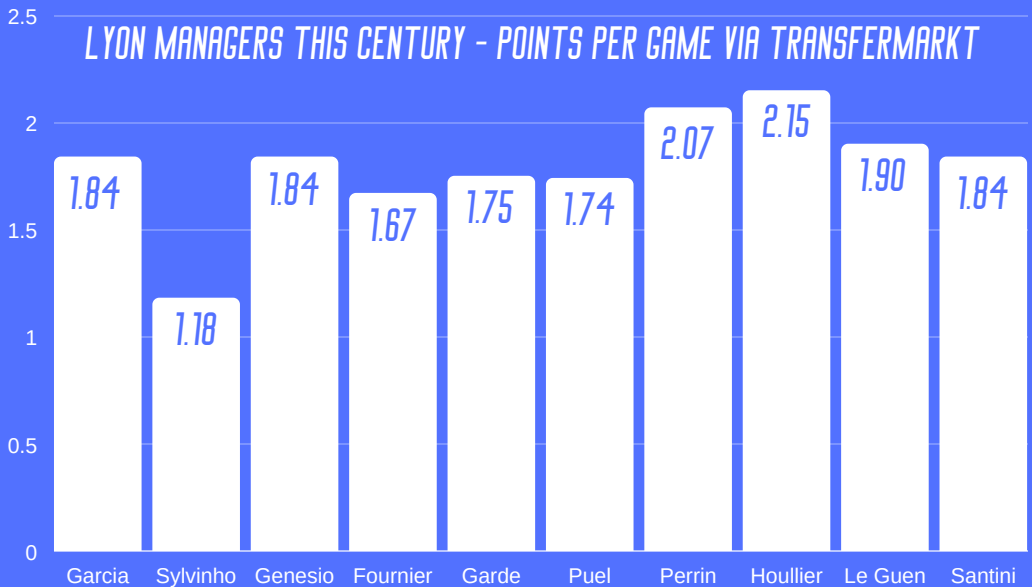
the futures of Dembélé and Depay unsure. That will put reliance upon Jeff Reine-Adélaïde, who is returning from a lengthy ligament injury and striker Karl Toko-Ekambi who turned his loan move from Villarreal into a permanent one. If there has been one recent barnstorming transfer success though, it has been that of midfielder Bruno Guimarães. With Juninho playing a key role in his joining the club, the Brazilian has certainly made a positive impact on his arrival, but with each strong performance, the bigger clubs will begin to circle once more.

It is of course obvious to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused untold disruption globally. With regards to football and Ligue 1, where the decision was made to curtail the season, Lyon were left with the potential of going into the new season without European football for the first time since 1997. With a 7th place finish in the league, their only chance for Europa League qualification is to win the re-arranged Coupe de la Ligue final against PSG. Alternatively, they will need to

win the Champions' League. They play the second leg of their Round of 16 tie against Juventus in early August. A tough ask to progress, even with a 1-0 lead from the first leg. Even if they do so, they would be playing Manchester City or Real Madrid in the quarter-finals before a likely semi-final tie against Bayern Munich or Barcelona.

The 2020-21 season could well be a defining one for the club. With a new sponsorship deal with Emirates coming into force and a hefty new TV rights deal for the league as a whole, the club's finances are well-positioned, however with other clubs such as Marseille, Rennes and Lille evidently catching them up, the onus will be on Aulas and Juninho to bring the entire structure together in order to adapt to the changing environment and to not be blinded by the latter's apparent deference for all things South American and slight neglect for OL's youth academy prospects when it comes to recruitment.

Rich Allen, @rich_allen85



DREAM TEAM

*FINANCIAL CAVEATS ASIDE, BARCELONA'S SURPRISE DECISION TO
TRADE ARTHUR FOR PJANIĆ COULD YET PROVE TO BE A GOOD DEAL.*

"**PAN** *para hoy, hambre para mañana*" (Bread for today, hunger for tomorrow) is an evaluation that one hears more and more of late regarding the situation at FC Barcelona. The expression, which warns against offering short-term fixes as solutions to long-term problems, has become increasingly synonymous with the presidency of Josep Maria Bartomeu.

The 57-year-old has been the subject of a sustained barrage of criticism which has intensified significantly in the last year. Back in March, vice presidents Emili Rousaud and Enrique Tombas resigned from the board alongside four other directors, and in July former president Joan Laporta became the latest in a long line of figures to publicly take aim at what he and others view as years of egregious economic mismanagement of the club. Closer to the field, the decision to sack Ernesto Valverde in January as his side sat top of the table has been widely criticised, as have the less-than-convincing attempts to deal with the remnants of an ageing squad whose spirit of frustration bordering on defeatism threatens to corrode a once ironclad legacy with each passing week.

In this sense, the very vocal and tangible resentment towards the board in light of the

swap deal involving Arthur Melo and Miralem Pjanić represents the tip of a much larger iceberg. Those in favour of the transfer highlight the necessity to provide a longstanding successor to Sergio Busquets, an argument which has failed to pass muster with large sections of the Barcelona support owing to their obvious differences in characteristics. Although Busquets may well be past the apex of his career, the fact remains that he's still only 32, and the decision to bring in someone a mere two years his junior has raised more than a few eyebrows.

Moreover, given the current environment in which senior players - not Quique Setién or his coaching staff - appear to hold sway over the mood of the dressing room, it would be an especially bold and almost certainly ill-advised move should the manager decide to replace Busquets with immediate effect. However, dissenting voices on some sections of fan media aside, few are suggesting that the replacement of Busquets is anything other than a long term objective for the side, and therein lies the confusion. Indeed, an arguably greater question than that of age is just where the Bosnian will fit in at Barça. Arthur, the player Pjanić is coming in to replace, faced a similar problem during his

time at the club. Signed from Grêmio as a defensive midfielder - although one seen as a stylistic successor to Xavi Hernández rather than Busquets, the Brazilian was almost never utilised in a deeper role under Ernesto Valverde who considered Busquets to be indispensable in the *pivote* position. It is not entirely unthinkable that Pjanić could suffer a similar fate under Setién.

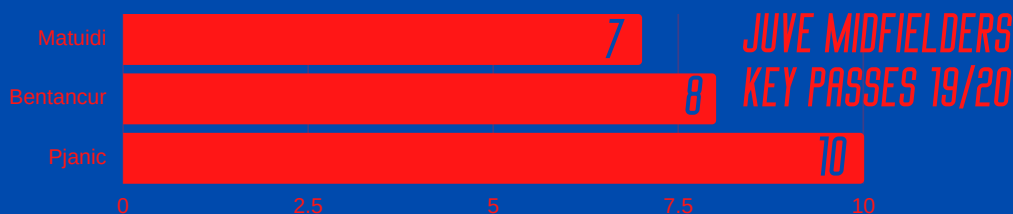
Those who have all but written off the transfer as the latest in a series of bungled decisions of the Bartomeu presidency could well be justified in their thinking. However, amid the wave of pessimism in Catalonia which surrounds this deal, perhaps more attention should be paid to the simple and reassuring fact that in Pjanić, Barcelona have acquired one of the finest midfield organisers in Europe; a world class talent whose enlightened understanding of the game has been infinitely enhanced by the need throughout his career to redefine himself as a player with the passing of time. He arrived at Juventus in 2016 having previously achieved prominence at Roma as an offensive midfielder noted for his ability to score from distance and create chances high up the pitch, yet under Massimiliano Allegri he was deployed in a far deeper position, seamlessly reigning in his naturally attacking game to effectively marshall the side from further back.

Pjanić has long since proven himself as a player of undeniable quality capable of controlling the pace of matches at the highest level. He also resembles Busquets in the

sense that the significance of his input to the outcome of games is frequently undervalued. His contribution to the Juventus side that reached the 2017 Champions' League final can be easily forgotten, especially given his role as part of a squad remembered chiefly for its ostensibly impenetrable backline of Andrea Barzagli, Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini and from which the names Paulo Dybala and Dani Alves most likely spring to mind before that of the Bosnian. As he steps into a turbulent situation at Barcelona in which his role remains unclear, Pjanić's pliability and subtle effectiveness as an organiser in midfield may once again prove to be his greatest strengths.

If he hasn't done so already, Pjanić will soon learn that a player's success at Barcelona depends on several factors, some of which are invariably outside his control. While this is true for a number of clubs, the fact remains that the more one studies this deal, the more obvious it becomes that the decision to sign Pjanić in place of Arthur was driven primarily by the economic interests of the board rather than by any kind of footballing decision made by Setién (or even Maurizio Sarri) himself, with the Catalan club reportedly needing balance the books by July 1st to appease Financial Fair Play regulations. As such, Arthur was 'sold' before that date with Pjanić then being 'bought' afterward using what effectively were the same funds. However, now that Pjanić is on his way, whether or not he will be given the chance to flourish in the current footballing environment remains to be seen.

Tommy Hay, @TommyHay94



FEATURES



49 TAPIE
54 ZAMPARINI
57 VALENCIA
63 MATTHÄUS

The Modern Gattopardo



INFAMOUS FOR REPEATEDLY FIRING COACHES, COULD EX-PALERMO PRESIDENT MAURIZIO ZAMPARINI FIND A WAY TO STAY RELEVANT?

THE term *Gattopardismo* is used by Italians to describe the ability to withstand upheaval in order to guarantee one's status in society. It comes from Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's landmark 1958 novel *Il Gattopardo*, in which a noble Sicilian family, headed by the apathetic Prince Don Fabrizio, bear witness to the societal changes brought about in the late 19th century from the vantage point of the outskirts of Palermo. Such is the impact of the novel – famous to international audiences for Luchino Visconti's 1963 film adaptation – that the term derived from its title has gone on to be synonymous with the ways in which the upper classes and nouveau riche reinvent themselves, but also falter over time.

It is fitting that a century and a half on, the city had its own *Gattopardo* figure in the form of eccentric football club owner Maurizio Zamparini. In a country where the loud-mouthed, outlandish owner dominates the sporting landscape, Zamparini manages to stand out impressively. He takes the unconventional management and abject lack of rationality to new heights, running with the stereotype further than any of his fellow

presidentissimi. The Friulian had previously spent fifteen years at the helm of Venezia, a club which under his tenure would enjoy modest success as it seesawed between the top-flight and Serie B. Exasperated at the impossibility of building a new stadium – he had offered to pay for it out of his own pocket in return for land to build a shopping centre – Zamparini left his native north-east Italy and headed south.

By 2004, Palermo would return to Italy's top-flight after a 30-year absence – a feat that earned Zamparini an honorary citizenship of the town. Two years later, they would reach the last 16 of the UEFA Cup, a competition the Sicilians would regularly qualify for thanks to their high finishes in the early years of their return to Serie A – including three 5th place positions. In that time, the *Rosanero* shirt has been donned by the likes of Edinson Cavani, Luca Toni, Javier Pastore, Andrea Barzagli and more recently Paulo Dybala.

Nevertheless, the fate of his Palermo tenure, ultimately, mimics that of *Il Gattopardo*'s noble house of Salina – a heyday of bombastic

MAURIZIO ZAMPARINI: THE MODERN GATTOPARDO

pomp spent among the elite that gradually erodes in credibility, as they wither away into irrelevance, outmanoeuvred by their more adroit contemporaries. With so much upheaval on a yearly basis, it was impossible to build a long-lasting project, however many talents made up the squad.

In 16 years of presidency, no less than 29 managers were fired, with the job changing hands more than 40 times. The 2015/16 season was particularly volatile, with eight different tenures over the campaign – Beppe Iachini and Davide Ballardini each taking charge on two separate occasions. The precarious nature of the Palermo job was the

when there weren't any suspicions". The fact remains, though, that these Northern clubs are still widely supported throughout Sicily. Although Turin is no longer the political capital of Italy, it is very much its current footballing centre - and the long-running success of its flagship team has seen support spread all over the country. Garibaldi had needed a thousand men to conquer Sicily; Juventus managed it with only 11.

Despite the club's recent troubles, any Palermo fan will recognise that the first decade under Zamparini was one which saw the club reach unprecedented heights under an owner genuinely invested in the team. For

'IN 16 YEARS OF PRESIDENCY, NO LESS THAN 29 MANAGERS WERE FIRED, WITH THE JOB CHANGING HANDS MORE THAN 40 TIMES. THE 2015/16 SEASON WAS PARTICULARLY VOLATILE, WITH EIGHT DIFFERENT TENURES OVER THE CAMPAIGN.'

hallmark of an incessant, erratic, and often unsuccessful search for short-term success that characterised the latter half of Zamparini's reign. In his desperate attempt to keep Palermo in the spotlight of *Calcio*, the owner would capriciously go through coach after coach. By the time he anointed his latest managerial find as Palermo's saviour, the media attention would also have long since shifted elsewhere.

Just as Don Fabrizio, Zamparini has at times acted as though he were the last rampart to Piedmontese hegemony, albeit with an attitude that is anything but apathetic. Countless times he has claimed that the referees of Serie A were out to get him and his club specifically, while calling out the likes of Inter - *"they only know how to rob"*. His comments looking back on the *Calciopoli* scandal of 2006 were a clear lament of this domination - *"This football is rotten, Calciopoli is just the tip of the iceberg. I was saying it even*

a Northerner, Zamparini would develop a strong link with the island, constantly arguing in favour of its autonomy. He had suggested introducing a separate currency and was against the construction of a bridge to create a link with the mainland - 'Sicily should not be linked to politics in Rome, but to politics in the world.' The Friulian would even venture into politics, creating in 2011 his 'Movement for the People': *"Italy and the World needs a new cultural model."*

He has been an owner with a volcanic character befitting of the island. The few instances where he would take a step back and leave sporting matters to others would not last long – Pietro Lo Monaco, hired by Zamparini as a delegate, would resign after four months – just one from a long list of directors who would see themselves unable to work with the owner, who always remained an overbearing presence. In the end, his grand schemes and dubious behind the

MAURIZIO ZAMPARINI: THE MODERN GATTOPARDO

scenes activity would catch up with him, just as he left Palermo. Shortly after Zamparini sold the club for a symbolic €10, the club went bankrupt at the end of the 2018/19 season and was founded again for the fifth time in its tumultuous history. With all football in Italy brought to a sudden halt in March due to COVID-19, the Serie D season was officially called off, and Palermo were granted promotion back into the third tier.

The end of *Il Gattopardo* is an admission of defeat to the Turin-based political classes, as the old regime slips out of memory. As Palermo duly climb their way back into top-level Calcio, Maurizio Zamparini's tenure will be best remembered for the erratic management he saw as the only way to keep the club going, rather than the more than respectable successes he has overseen.

A polarising figure that constantly changed and adapted the dynamics of his club, Zamparini may have come from the maligned north of the peninsula, but has understood the Sicilian psyche better than anyone. It was precisely the one Lampedusa conveyed in his novel to tell the story of Italian unification from the island's perspective, rather than from the domineering north. The businessman also managed to fend off mafia involvement in the club, although he would later be reprimanded for claiming that *"sometimes I think the mafia is an invention to give a salary to those who work against it."*

In early 2019, Zamparini had been placed under house arrest after some 'creative' accounting and money laundering in order to inflate the club's value – he had specifically founded a company to take ownership of the club and bypass regulations – this earned him a five-year ban handed down by the Italian FA. Nevertheless, he would maintain his innocence when it came to the downfall of his former club, characteristically speaking in

third person – *"someone made Palermo disappear, and it wasn't Zamparini."*

His departure from football would have a clear sense of disillusionment and bitterness – *"I feel defeated by a pseudo-sporting world, where despite my 25-year-long fight, sporting values are increasingly missing and where we are reigned over by the economic and media power of 3-4 clubs who want to divide the titles between them."* Just as a handful of men from the north of Italy – Cavour, Garibaldi, Mazzini – were able to decide the fate of Sicily from Turin.

Ultimately, Maurizio Zamparini's rallying cry against football's aristocracy was to no avail and it fell on deaf ears. Much like the Prince of Salina, the Palermo owner was unable to stem the fervent tide from the north, with the domination of the likes of Juventus and Inter having an air of inevitability about them. Football became a world in which he, like many other anachronistic *presidentissimi*, became the outsider as younger and more competent counterparts took over and shaped the future of the country. Despite his constant attempts of renewal, there was to be no such *Gattopardismo*.

While the battle was lost on the pitch, it was another story in the stands. When Palermo went down to the fourth tier, they sold a record-breaking 10,000 season tickets for the Renzo Barbera stadium before the season started. The monopoly of successful northern clubs on Sicilian support was broken, as fans flocked to see a club that could represent them better. In the end, on top of the highlights he provided in his first decade of presidency, that will have been Maurizio Zamparini's legacy.

Raphaël Jacobin, @rafajuc





PROFILES

69 UPAMECANO

72 CHERKI

74 ZANIOLO

76 BOUANGA

78 LAUTARO

80 ODEGAARD

82 WERNER

84 ZAKARIA

86 HAVERTZ

88 MAJA

90 VINÍCIUS

ZAKARIA

CLUB: MÖNCHENGLADBACH AGE: 23
POSITION: MIDFIELDER NATION: 

WITH a fourth placed finish obtained this season, Borussia Mönchengladbach have arguably over-achieved in qualifying for next year's Champions' League ahead of local rivals Bayer Leverkusen. Under Marco Rose's management, *Die Fohlen* have not only produced some of the best free flowing, attacking football in Europe, but have remained impressively solid at the back. With an ability to heavily influence the play across the park, whether in attack or defence, 23-year-old Swiss midfielder Denis Zakaria has arguably become Mönchengladbach's most important player over the past year.

A native of Geneva in Switzerland, Zakaria was born in late 1996 to a Sudanese mother and a Congolese father. Picked up at the age of eight by local side Servette FC, Zakaria was initially used as a striker but was then moved back to the defence before making the central midfield spot his own later on in his development.

Overall, Zakaria enjoyed a steady rise through the youth ranks at the then Swiss Challenge League (second tier) side before making his first team debut at the age of 16 in November 2014 against Lausanne-Sport. Despite his debut only lasting a few minutes and his not

featuring in the next 15 matches for the club, the central midfielder played in his side's last five matches of the season. Over those five games, Zakaria majorly impressed in a midfield two, adding two goals to his fine defensive work. Servette finished the campaign as runners-up, but due to financial problems were unable to obtain a licence for the following season and were relegated as a result. The club's off-field troubles ultimately proved to be Zakaria's launchpad and in the summer of 2015, BSC Young Boys bought the talented youngster for a fee reported to be around £250,000.

His impact with one of Switzerland's biggest clubs was swift. In his first season in Bern, Zakaria made 33 appearances across all competitions, often playing as the anchorman in defensive midfield as his new side finished runners-up to Basel in the standings. His second season in Bern was injury-hit, but Zakaria still managed to make a further 34 appearances before making his big switch to Germany, joining Borussia Mönchengladbach in the summer of 2017 for a fee of £10m.

The defensive midfielder has already racked up just shy of 100 matches in a Gladbach shirt, adding eight goals and six assists along

DENIS ZAKARIA

the way. During his time to date, Zakaria has become an integral cog in the Mönchengladbach machinery and is perhaps now the club's most important player. His willingness to get stuck into the tackle and to chase down every loose ball in midfield regardless of if it is the first or last minute of a match has made him a crowd favourite at Borussia-Park since his switch from western Switzerland. This season in particular, Denis Zakaria has risen to the next level for Gladbach, often dominating matches from midfield with his powerful runs and strong tackles. The midfielder has formed a formidable partnership in Gladbach's explosive midfield with fellow youngster Florian Neuhaus which has pushed the club towards eventual Champions' League qualification. Adopting the more defensive role between the two youngsters, the Swiss international has again widely impressed fans, coaches and pundits alike this term with some stand-out performances. Despite his relatively young age, Zakaria is a leader on the pitch. The midfielder is not shy of barking orders to and at his teammates when necessary whilst in possession, Zakaria assertively dictates the play from deep. Standing at 6'3, the now 23-year-old offers a physical edge for Mönchengladbach in the centre of the park and gives boss Marco Rose much needed protection for the centre-backs in the formation and system that the German manager opts for. Due to his remarkable versatility, Zakaria has also himself operated as a centre-back four times this season, putting in steady performances when called upon to fill the defensive gap.

His stats per 90 make for fantastic reading. Making on average 2.3 tackles a match in the Bundesliga and boasting an impressive 87.4% pass completion rate, Zakaria has gained huge praise from his teammates, among others, again this season. Gladbach goalkeeper and fellow compatriot Yann Sommer has previously stated, *"It's not easy to compare him to the greats of the past, but he combines many qualities that were really defined by Michel Platini and Zinedine Zidane."* Therefore, it is little wonder that Premier League clubs such as Liverpool and Manchester United are said to be very interested in capturing the Swiss international in the near future.

But it is not just on the domestic stage where Zakaria has thrived. Despite having the chance to play for both African countries of his parent's heritage, Zakaria has always represented his country of birth, making his full Swiss debut in 2016 after his first season with BSC Young Boys. At the age of 23, the box-to-box midfielder already has 23 full international caps to his name and was a member of his country's squad for the 2018 Russian World Cup. Still a few years from his prime in central midfield, Zakaria will only continue to improve his overall ability. Defensively, Zakaria is already the complete midfielder but if he can add that extra bit of quality to his offensive decision-making and all-round attacking play, the Swiss international could develop into one of Europe's best all-action midfielders over the next few seasons and beyond.

Nathan Evans, @nathanevans94

'GLADBACH MIDFIELDERS DUELS WON 19/20

Neuhaus

312, 1ST

Zakaria

252, 2ND

0

100

200

300

400

@NATHANEVANS94

85

CHERKI

CLUB: LYON AGE: 16
POSITION: FORWARD NATION: 

IN Rayan Cherki's second start for Lyon, he set the world (or at least the Stade Beaujoire) alight with a barnstorming performance against Nantes, steering *Les Gones* to a 4-3 victory in the Coupe de France. Recording two goals and two assists, he played inspired football throughout, scoring twice in the match's first ten minutes before setting up Martin Terrier and Moussa Dembélé later in the fixture. Playing centrally in a 4-2-3-1, Cherki's performance evoked a similar burst of brilliance from an unheralded attacker in Nabil Fékir's demolition of Bastia in 2014, and the comparisons were immediately made to the World Cup winner, whose departure to Betis in the summer had left *Les Gones* without a true attacking fulcrum. Indeed, despite Lyon's impressive play at times in recent seasons, one had always felt that the team's fortunes turned too much on individual brilliance, such as that of Memphis Depay, or the goal-scoring ability of players like Mariano Díaz or Moussa Dembélé. With a creative presence to knit the side's considerable talent together, there was less reliance on the often fleeting brilliance of those players, and a tilt at the title, as in 2014/15, or in 2017/18, when only PSG scored more in Ligue 1, with Fékir anchoring an attack that relied on each of he, Depay, Díaz and Bertrand Traoré, over one player.

This, then, the idea that Cherki, despite his youth, can follow in the footsteps of Fékir and make such an impact is tantalising indeed for the club's supporters. But how well can Cherki fill Fékir's boots? Is he the same type of player physically? Will he be given the privileged position tactically, the freedom on the pitch that allowed for his fellow academy product to blossom so readily? Despite Cherki's outsized talent, the jury still remains firmly out on this count, not only for his youth but also for the way that the team has been constructed around him. The latter element looks particularly daunting for the youngster in presenting an obstacle to his being given much in the way of opportunities, particularly without either the Coupe de la Ligue (now defunct) or, likely, European football next season.

In January, in that relatively inconsequential cup game, and with Depay and Jeff Reine-Adélaïde having recently suffered gut-wrenching season-ending injuries, it was all well and good for manager Rudi Garcia to roll the dice on starting Cherki. With Houssem Aouar needing a rest, and Nantes unlikely to have much of a guide for the youngster's performances in senior football, it was easy to see why the manager would have wanted to risk the 16-year-old's inclusion. For Cherki to

respond with such brio to what basically amounted to a free hit, given Lyon's impending fixture congestion and a squad badly lacking in attacking depth, especially prior to the signing of Karl Toko Ekambi, was a bonus. Now, however, with two massive fixtures set to be played, the Coupe de la Ligue final and the second leg of the team's round of 16 Champions' League tie against Juventus, there's little to indicate that Garcia is ready to place any level of trust in the teenager quite yet. Even as bigger roles in the team have emerged for the sublime Maxence Caqueret and perhaps even teenage defender Melvin Bard, who has been a revelation at left-back in the club's pre-season friendlies, Garcia has yet to really give Cherki the reins, and more confoundingly has also played him in a variety of positions, few of which are actually a good fit for the youngster tactically.

Lyon's players have extolled the virtues of tactical flexibility in their interactions with the press of late, it is clear that they have heard Garcia's message, and their ability to move comfortably among a 3-4-3, 4-3-3 and 4-2-3-1 will be paramount to cracking the matchday squad with regularity. This is also where Cherki may have drawn the short straw, even despite the possibility of FIFA authorised additional substitutions for the upcoming Ligue 1 season, although at the time of writing the LFP have yet to make a firm decision on this matter. Despite having been miscast on the left wing against Rangers in a recent friendly, or even having played wide on the right last season in the Coupe de France, there's no question that Cherki works best as somewhere between an orthodox number ten and a second striker.

Playing Cherki in this role, however, immediately limits the potential involvement of several players, with Depay being chief among those. The same is also true for any of Aouar, Reine-Adélaïde, or Bruno Guimarães,

who has been hugely impressive in exhibiting a remarkable dynamism in midfield. While Aouar may admittedly be on his way out, it is unreasonable to expect Cherki to play in the same box-to-box role as his fellow academy product with any modicum of success at this point in time, which means that his featuring in a 4-3-3 is unlikely and, broadly speaking, a misuse of his talents. In a 3-4-3, there is some suggestion that he could play in a more advanced role, in front of a more conservative midfield partnership, were it to take the form of a 3-4-1-2, but this formation would likely leave no place for either Aouar or Reine-Adélaïde. There has been, to be fair, some suggestion that he could play as part of a front two — his goalscoring record in the UEFA Youth League does bear that out, but questions linger over his youthful frame. Even if it's perfectly natural for Cherki to gain strength as he matures, the more physically ebullient likes of Depay or even Traoré make for better options alongside Dembélé.

What, then, of a 4-2-3-1, that same formation which worked to such success in Nantes some seven months ago? Again, the weakness here is that Depay is not at his best when deployed on the wing, nor are Traoré or Reine-Adélaïde, the likely candidates to flank Cherki were he to take up the number ten role in this formation. All of those three are somewhat suspect defensively and would flourish more readily in front of a three man midfield, to say nothing, again, of a lack of a place for Aouar.

Thus, no matter how Garcia lines up his side, it appears, at least for the biggest matches, that one will have to plunge the depths of the Championnat National or the UEFA Youth League to see Cherki at his best. Still not yet 17, rest assured his chance will come, but those who thought it to be sooner rather than later may be sorely disappointed by Garcia's pragmatism and the relative lack of fixtures for Lyon this season.

ED

CONTRIBUTORS

Adam White is a European football writer, covers French football for the Guardian, is Chief Features Writer at Get French Football News, Football Radar's Senior Ligue 1 Analyst and editor/designer of this publication. @Adam_White_

Raphaël Jucobin is Editor-in-Chief at GIFN, studying a degree in modern languages and writing about European football. @rafajuc

Kieran Quaile is Editor-in-Chief at Get Spanish Football News, based in Madrid and regularly attends La Liga matches. @kquaile90

Ryan Plant has followed La Liga since being inspired by Madrid's Galácticos. He has watched and reported on football around Europe for some of the UK's biggest outlets and clubs, and has a rapidly-growing vintage football shirt collection. @ryanplant1998

Sam Brookes is a freelance football journalist and has been a regular contributor at GIFN over the last two years. @sam_brookes2

Axel Falk is a Swedish sports writer with a love for German football as well as a passion for the philosophical side of the game. @Falkfurt

Tom Fenton is a freelance sports writer and regular contributor at Get German Football News. He also writes for the likes of ESPN FC, AVTP and The Video Analyst. @Tomfenton11

Lewis McParlane is a European football writer, video and podcast host with a soft spot for the next crop of emerging talents. @LewisMcParlane

Eric Devin has been writing about French football for the better part of a decade. His work can be found regularly on the Guardian, Get French Football News, and WhoScored.com. @ericdevin_

Richard Hall is Chief Correspondent for Football Italia and creator of The Gentleman Ultra. @RichHall80

Tommy Hay is a Scotsman in Madrid, presenter for Grupo Vaughan, Speaking Football and the Talk Fútbol podcast. @TommyHay94

Drew Thompson is a native New Yorker, Arsenal fan and a seasoned youth coach who has been football-crazed since childhood. He holds German football close to his heart and continues to dispel the notion that Americans have no place in the football community. @FMLehrer

Rich Allen is a writer and podcaster for GFFN and, covering the French top flight since 2013, has appeared on Sirius XMFC, BBC Nottingham and Liverpool Echo amongst many others. @rich_allen85

Tom Cserép is a freelance writer and photographer focusing on European football, culture and the environment. @tomicserrep

Tom Canton is a writer, broadcaster, host of the successful analytical Arsenal-specific YouTube channel The Gooner Talk and contributor to many fields surrounding European football. @TheGoonerTalkTv

Daniel Pinder is the editor-in-chief of Get German Football News. With a keen interest in fan culture, Daniel attends several Bundesliga and UCL games throughout the year and has had work published in Deutsche Welle and FourFourTwo among others. @DanielJPinder

Astorre S. Cerebronè is a content creator, loves French and Spanish football and still searching for happiness in Valencia. @Cerebronè

KT Stockwell is a football writer living and working in Toronto, covering French and Spanish football across multiple publications. @TheFootballing

Kaustubh Pandey is a freelance football writer. Published at GGFN, GFFN and GIFN. He has also had bylines at the Times, Manchester Evening News, Man Utd, Calciomercato and more. @Kaus_Pandey17

Nathan Evans is a Football Analyst for Opta and freelance sports journalist. His work is often found online at Get German Football News, Breaking The Lines and various other websites. @nathanevans94

Jeremy Smith is a French football writer and podcaster, who has featured on GFFN, the Guardian, CNN and TalkSport. @jeremysmith98



A Get Football Group Publication - © 2020

