

ShareSport



INSIDE:

- > MANCHESTER CITY TAKE ON KAKA
- > ALL THE LATEST TRANSFER NEWS
- > TROUBLE IN THE ENGLISH CRICKET CAMP
- > ROUND UP OF THE AUSTRALIAN OPEN
- > SNOOKER BORING?
- > DAVID BECKHAM - AC OR LA?
- > AND MUCH MORE

ISSUE 4

F R E E

ShareSport

In this Month's Issue...

02 EDITORS LETTER

ARTICLES

03 WIMBLEDON 1988: The year of the 'Crazy Gang'

04 DEAL OR NO DEAL?: Kaka fiasco

05 TRANSFER UPDATE

06 NO CUE REVOLUTION: Simon Cowell bringing the X Factor into snooker...surly that's not going to get the judges vote?

07 YET ANOTHER CRICKET FARSE: Surprise surprise... it's England again

08/09 TENNIS SPECIAL

10 SUPERBOWL PREVIEW: The most exciting event in sports entertainment...well in the US anyways

11 BECK 'mil' HAM: Where will Becks end up?

12 WOMEN'S FOOTBALL FOCUS



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Show me the money...

It was just over a month ago we were saying our goodbyes to 2008 and looking forward to a brand new year ahead of us. January has always a busy month in the sporting world, with transfer windows opening, teams starting a fresh and tournaments starting to do the rounds.

Here at ShareSport we continue to bring you the latest sporting news from around the globe, as well as bring you features and articles from past memories.

Hope you enjoy.

ADAM HULME, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

WIMBLEDON: THE CRAZY GANG

As the FA cup gets into full swing in the month of February we go back in time to the year of 1988 and possibly the biggest shock of all time in the famous competition.

Wimbledon, a part of the country more famous for its Tennis Championships and some rather famous Wombles had never been a heartland for football. London of course was full of more fashionable and successful teams such as Arsenal and Chelsea but the late 80's truly saw the arrival of the Crazy Gang.

The team originally set up in the late 19th century had spent most of its existence in non league football. It wasn't until the early 70's that Wimbledon had entered the league and over the next decade and a half would slowly rise to the top league in the country.

They gained promotion to the 1st division in 1986, but were still highly underrated and unfancied despite having a host of young talent including future England International Dennis Wise and of course Hollywood royalty Vinnie Jones.

The FA cup competition had added importance for all the major clubs in 1988 as all English clubs were banned from European competition after the disaster of Heysel only two years previously. Extra incentive was given to the FA cup and all the biggest teams played their strongest teams to gain the needed victories to progress.

As a so called smaller team Wimbledon slipped under the radar in the early rounds of the competition despite of some impressive victories.

In the third round The Dons easily won what was billed to be a tough game against West Brom 4:1 and victories against Mansfield, Newcas-

tle and Watford followed to set up a semi final against local rivals Luton.

As in the third round the game against Luton was said to be too hard to call. Wimbledon were level on points with their rivals in the league at the time of the game in the cup and victory for either team would be hard thought many felt.

They proved right as the Dons scraped past their London rivals 2:1 but all that mattered was that they were on their way to Wembley to face the Holders and Champions of the previous year.

Liverpool had a team that could only be dreamt of from one to eleven. Bruce Grobbelaar was possibly the world's greatest keeper at the time, Alan Hansen was one of the most feared defenders and the forward combination of Barnes, Beardsley and Aldridge had been reigning in goals that season.

However in the game at Wembley the trio found it hard to settle and were marked out of the game by Jones, Terry Phelan and Eric Young.

Whereas the game had been billed as an onslaught in became clear that this was not going to be the case. After a thirty minute period of defensive football it seemed like one goal would win the game. Many expected that goal to come from the Reds.

Those expectations changed radically in the 37th minute as Wimbledon centre forward Lawrie Sanchez headed in a Dennis Wise cross and the ball flew into Grobbelaar's goal.

Prior to the game Sanchez, a future Northern Ireland International had been recognised mainly for being the first player to be sent off for a professional foul, after committing a deliberate handball while play-

ing for Reading against Oxford in 1982.

After the opening goal the holders pushed the Crazy Gangs defence to their very limit. They were unlucky when Beardsley had a goal ruled out for offside and were on the offensive for most of the game.

Perhaps the most famous moment of the game came in the 60th minute when Liverpool were awarded a penalty after a foul by Clive Goodyear. The spot kick was taken by John Aldridge a Liverpool legend and Republic of Ireland International.

The Liverpool man could not convert however as the Dons keeper Dave Beasant got a strong palm to the ball and converted it wide. It was the first penalty to be saved in an FA cup final and more importantly set up Wimbledon for a famous win.

When the final whistle blew the Wimbledon players celebrated and congratulated each other knowing that they had created history and defeated the undefeatable.

The Captain, quite fittingly Dave Beasant lifted the trophy to rapturous applause and the side had put themselves on the map and put themselves in the shop window to bigger and better things.

Wise played for over a decade at Stamford Bridge, Beasant became a regular in the Premier League and Vinnie Jones, well he starred alongside Brad Pitt.





Deal Or No Deal?

MANCHESTER CITY MISSED OUT ON THEIR MAIN TARGET, KAKA IN THE JANUARY TRANSFER WINDOW. BUT WHY DID THE DEAL BREAK DOWN AND ARE CITY EXERTING THEIR SPENDING POWER IN THE RIGHT WAY?
BY DANIEL ETHELLS

The recent transfer debacle surrounding the AC Milan and Brazilian playmaker, Kaka, has certainly raised a lot of eyebrows. The reported bid from Manchester City, believed to be in excess of £100 million, was seen as ludicrous by a number of people in the game and has instigated a firm belief that the lack of financial balance in football is beginning to get out of hand.

Yes, the likes of Manchester United, Liverpool, Chelsea and Arsenal can realistically afford to spend £20-30 million pounds on just one player, but £100 million?, no chance. For the other teams in the Premier League these sorts of figures are only conjured up in dreamland.

Manchester City knew that they had to offer seriously big money for Kaka because on the pitch they haven't established themselves as a major force in English football as of yet.

If any of the big four made an offer for the former World Player of the Year, neither would consider paying half as much to Milan and certainly not half as much of the reported £500,000 weekly wages being offered by City. Meer interest alone from any of these sides would considerably reduce the price on both counts.

If Kaka became the subject of a bid from England's finest he

would have to at least consider his options. Forget about £100 million, who are Milan to turn down a world record breaking fee of £50 million, in the scenario that their most prized asset wanted to leave the club (The £46 million paid by Real Madrid to Juventus in July 2001 is the current record).

Make no question about it, you cannot begrudge Milan for showing an interest in such a massive proposal. Just think of the amount of players they could have bought with £100 million.

Ultimately, however, the deal was never going to happen because Kaka did not want to leave Milan. It's almost like playing on football manager. You could offer a ridiculous amount of money for the world's top talent, knowing full well that the players' club will accept the bid, but there's always the definitive stepping stone of whether the player actually wants to come to your club.

The best players in the world want to compete in the best competitions in the world and until Manchester City qualify for the Champions League they are going to find it difficult to attract the players of Kaka's calibre.

Ironically, Milan are not competing in Europe's elite competition this year, but they certainly look a lot more likely than City to gain qualification into next year's tour-

nement. The Brazilian can't afford to go to a team that's in transition at this stage of his career.

He isn't just a good player he's an exceptional player. City fans may argue that the signing of Robinho demonstrates their ability to bring in the biggest names but Kaka is on a different level to that of his compatriot, alongside the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

They need to build a team slowly. Martin O'Neill's Aston Villa is a prime example of how to do it on a much smaller budget. After just two and half seasons in charge, O'Neill has taken the West Midlands outfit from being an average Premier League side to one that is challenging for the much coveted top four places.

The players that City have managed to bring in over January are of much more benefit to them. Despite being slightly extortionate, the signings of Nigel de Jong, Wayne Bridge and Craig Bellamy will be invaluable for City particularly in the short term and potentially in the long term. £42 million spent on those three players makes much more sense at this stage than splashing out £100 million on Kaka.

Mark Hughes' first target is to get his side into the UEFA Cup and from there they can move forward. Whether the owner of City, Sulaiman Al-Fahim, likes it or not, success will not happen in the blink of an eye. If he isn't willing to be patient and allow his business venture to grow steadily he might as well sell the club as soon as possible.

His arrival in English football has increased the gap between the richest and the poorest clubs across the world but from City's perspective there's no point in having so much money if it's not spent in the right way. Their challenge is clear, but can they pull it off?



EXPERT VIEW DAN NELSON

Unlike the rest of us, the credit crunch seems to have had little effect on the Premier League. A record £178 million was splashed out on players during the January transfer window.

However, this figure could have easily been doubled if Manchester City's persuasiveness had not let them down. The "Kaka deal" estimated to be in the region of £108 million would have made nonsense of the spending recession currently afflicting the rest of the economy.

For all their money and talk, Manchester City's efforts during the transfer window were eclipsed by the man formally known as the 'wheeler dealer' of the Premier League, Harry Redknapp.

His Spurs side took full advantage of the extra time provided by the FA on Monday night with their bid for Robbie Keane. The deal which saw Liverpool lose out on £8 million pound took the north London club's spending to £47 million for the month.

Rafael Benitez's £8 million blunder was arguably the biggest transfer to go through during the window. Keane who cost £20 million only 6 months ago scored only 7 times in 28 games for the reds – a cost of £1.1 million per

goal. Flop Keane will be a weight off Benitez's mind, he was costing the Spaniard £5000 a minute while at the club.

This year's January transfer window saw one of the craziest pieces of business ever completed between two clubs. Once again, it involved the billionaires from Manchester, who paid Hamburg around £16 million for Nigel de Jong. However, the player was available at the end of the season for a price of around £3 million. This example should be used in schools to show children how not to spend their money.

Arsene Wenger, also known as 'Scrooge' by some Arsenal fans, dipped his hands into his pockets to buy Zenit's Andrei Arshavin. Hopefully the attacking midfielder will not take as long to settle in at Arsenal as it did for his transfer to go through, lasting a staggering 228 days.

The 'Top 4' clubs were surprisingly quiet during the transfer window, after spending a total of £17 million on two young players from Partizan Belgrade, Fergie decided he was happy with his table topping squad and saved his money. The same could also be said for Chelsea, whose only major signing during the window was that of Ricardo Quaresma, on loan from Italian giants Inter Milan.

With the transfer window closed, the rumour mill is now fully operational again as we wait to see what crazy transfers are being lined up for the summer spending.

COMMENT

Senior Writer

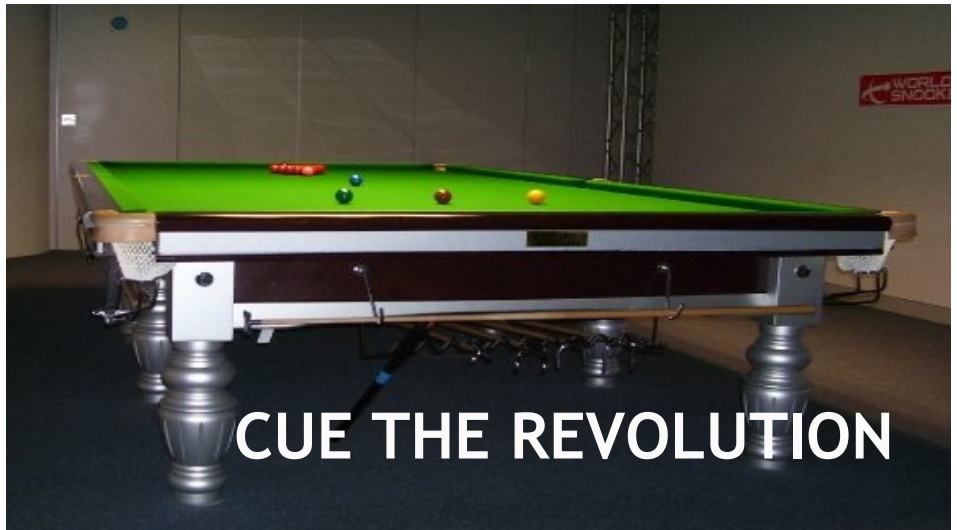
Jamie Holt

Despite earlier in the tournament claiming the sport needs more verve, it was actually Ronnie O'Sullivan and counterpart Mark Selby who provided the necessary excitement in the Wembley Masters final, culminating in the final session which provided tension, drama, and the uncanny run of luck and flukes only applicable to the game of snooker.

After going behind, Selby produced the best run of the match as he fired in breaks of 101, 89 and 114 in consecutive frames to build a 7-5 advantage.

A 110 helped O'Sullivan turn that around to lead 8-7, but a thrilling match then became level again as Selby took the 16th frame - 8-8. Selby had his chance in the 17th, but again wasted it and O'Sullivan took advantage to take the lead once more, and he knocked in a 55 under pressure to secure his 10-8 success. Previously, O'Sullivan had bemoaned the lack of excitement in the game, and urged for a similar revolution to that which has transformed the popularity of darts, even putting forward the name of music mogul Simon Cowell as the revolutionary kingpin.

You can imagine it now, Peter Ebdon and John Higgins walking out to Leona Lewis' latest single, to a crowd holding banners bearing the numbers 147.



TRADITION

It shouldn't, and hopefully won't happen to snooker, because it is a sport which upholds tradition. The origins of the sport lie in middle class England, where sportsmanship is the vital component, and silence and order is necessary for players to produce their best snooker.

It is something which draws people into the sport, a ray of hope for sporting fans, fed up with the gamesmanship of football, to name but one, to cling to, where fouls are conceded by the players and gentlemanly conduct remains a top priority.

That's why, in the UK Championships prior to the Masters, Stephen Maguire was so badly hurt by claims he was part of a match fixing scandal, after irregular betting patterns were found to have been made on his match with fellow Scot, Jamie Burnett.

The drama which unfolded in the O'Sullivan v Selby matchup proves no extra jazzing up is needed. The introduction, made famous by the late David Vine, is as spine tingling as any of the

darts entrances, particularly those in the finals.

Calls for the rules to be adapted whereby players have a set time per shot have also reared their head, and if implemented, would spoil the game entirely, meaning players would rush shots, causing less quality safety play, a hallmark of the game, and less break building master classes.

Viewing figures of the sport have remained relatively high. The World Championship regularly gets over 5million viewers for the big matches, (7.8million for the Stevens v Murphy showdown in 2005), meaning it is the second only to football. Prize money offered also shows the health of the sport, and O'Sullivan pocketing £150,000 for 4 matches isn't a bad weeks work.

The viewing figures are reflected by the spectators eagerness to see the professionals up close. Wembley Arena was sold out for most of the Masters week, even in the first round matches, and it was justified. A brilliant weeks snooker was unfolding before their eyes.

“YOU CAN IMAGINE IT NOW, PETER EBDON AND JOHN HIGGINS WALKING OUT TO LEONA LEWIS' LATEST SINGLE, TO A CROWD HOLDING BANNERS BEARING THE NUMBERS 147”

ANOTHER CRICKET FARSE

SO IN WHAT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY THE WORST KEPT SECRET IN THE RECENT HISTORY OF BRITISH SPORT, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT PETER MOORES HAD BEEN SACKED AS THE COACH OF THE ENGLAND CRICKET TEAM. HOWEVER THE BIGGEST SURPRISE WAS THAT KEVIN PIETERSEN FOLLOWED HIM OUT OF THE DOOR, TO BE REPLACED BY ANDREW STRAUSS AS CAPTAIN

BY AARON GALES

The sad thing about the whole sorry debacle is that it could have been avoided. I don't think I was the only one who heard alarm bells ringing when Pietersen spoke about his relationship with Moores after being promoted following the tearful departure of Michael Vaughan.

"Yesterday I sat down with Peter and we had a really good discussion on how we want to take this team forward. My position as a player to becoming captain is now totally different and we need to unite and get onto the same hymn sheet and we need to get this team going forward."

It was thought that Pietersen disagreed with Moores' intense training programme on the previous winter tour to New Zealand, Pietersen believing that he was the best judge of how he should prepare himself for a game, and rightly so as he is undoubtedly one of the most talented players the game of cricket has ever seen.

However his ego, which makes him the great batsman that he is, was always likely to be his downfall as a captain. It was his way or the high way and unfortunately for Pietersen it proved to be the highway. No player should have the power to oust the coach no matter how influential he thinks he is. It would send out a dangerous message and all future coaches under Pietersen would surely live in fear of questioning the captain's methods in fear of ending up on the scrapheap with the dignified Peter Moores.

The strangest part of the whole episode though is that English cricket might end up in a better position.

They have a potentially outstanding captain in Andrew Strauss, who has twice been overlooked for the job despite being undefeated in five Test matches as stand in captain. He is a thoughtful character, but someone with inner steel, who has fought back with fantastic centuries when it has appeared his international career could be in jeopardy. He now has six Test matches against the West Indies to get the team back on track before facing an ailing Australian side, decimated by retirements and pummelled by a fantastic South Africa side.

England will also now begin the search for a truly world class coach to replace Peter Moores, who had failed to really get to grips with the demands of being an international coach. The main names in the frame appear to be

Graham Ford and Tom Moody, with Ashley Giles and even Shane Warne also being mentioned as possible candidates.

The most important man in all this, though, is Kevin Pietersen. He is a man who feels angry and betrayed and will surely look to channel this rage against the bowling attacks of the West Indies and Australia. And if he has learned from his mistakes there is no reason to think that he might not have another crack at the captain's job in the future. He clearly fancies it.

"I feel I've got unfinished business as captain of England- I definitely feel that." If those aren't the words of a man who wants his job back I don't know what are, and few would bet against him regaining his place at the top of the English game.



BATTLE FOR ATP SUPREMACY

WITH ANDY MURRAY JOINING THE ELITE OF MEN'S TENNIS THERE IS NOW A BIG FOUR AT THE TOP OF THE ATP TOUR AND WITH THE FIRST MAJOR OF THE SEASON OUT OF THE WAY, WHO OF THE FOUR CAN RIGHTFULLY CLAIM TO BE THE BEST PLAYER IN THE WORLD?



Rafael Nadal (Spain)

World Ranking: 1

Australian Open Performance: Winner bt. Roger Federer (SUI)(2) 7-5 3-6 7-6(3) 3-6 6-2

I'll admit, I was unsure if Nadal could maintain the level of perfection that he found throughout the most part of last season, but after witnessing the Australian Open Final, I, as well as most others, will admit that this is the era of Rafael Nadal.

The man from Manacor has now claimed Grand Slam titles on all three surfaces, and by winning the final at Melbourne Park in a four hour epic, has now put daylight between himself and Federer at the top of the rankings.

If Nadal wishes to remain as the top dog on ATP tour, he has one challenge left to overcome, and that is himself. Nadal at the back end of last season stumbled over the finish line in the latter tournaments and pulled out of the season ending Master's Cup through fatigue. There is no doubt that Nadal is an exceptional athlete but the punishment that he forces upon himself will eventually take its toll at the back end of the season.

Nadal for the meantime will continue to hold supremacy at the top of the men's game, as long as he manages his schedule properly, in doing so keeping himself fresh, fit and fighting.

Roger Federer (Switzerland)

World Ranking: 2

Australian Open Performance: Runner Up Lst. Rafael Nadal (ESP)(1) 5-7 6-3 6-7(3) 6-3 2-6

There is no doubt in my mind that Federer is the best player ever to grace the ATP tour, and despite not being able to pick up a record equaling 14th major against Rafael Nadal, he certainly is still up there as one of the best.

At the moment though, the challenges that are being thrust upon the Fed Express, from Nadal, are testing Federer mentally like no one has done before, and as of yet, Federer hasn't found the solution.

Both men in the Australian Open final produced tennis that dreams are made of, but when it came to the crunch points, it was Federer who lost his way, spraying shots left, right and centre, a mental frailty that you do not often associate with Federer.

Until the former world number one can figure out a way to beat Nadal on the big stage, Federer may just have to wait quite a while longer before he surpasses the great Pete Sampras' record of 14 grand slam titles and comes close to retaining his number one ranking.

Novak Djokovic (Serbia)

World Ranking: 3

Australian Open Performance: Quarter Final Lst. Andy Roddick (USA)(7)7-6(3)4-6 2-6 1-2 ret.

Being the defending Australian Open champion and last year's Masters Series winner you would of thought that 'Nole' would of been brimming with confidence going into this year's Australian Open, but straight set's defeats to Ernest Gulbis and Jarkko Niemenen in the warm up events in the lead up to the first major of the year, wouldn't of done his confidence any good at all.

Strong early victories over Stoppini and Chardy were to be the highlight of Djokovic's run to the Quarter Finals. After struggling past American Delic in the 3rd round, and playing late into the night against the Cypriot Bagdatis in the 4th round, Djokovic was unable to complete his quarter final against Andy Roddick, citing heat exhaustion for his retirement.

With Djokovic losing a vast amount of points from his ranking after this tournament, many don't expect it will be too long before Murray overhaul's him and climbs above the young Serb in the rankings. Many though thought that at the end of last season Novak was running out of steam, before he went on to win the Masters Cup in Shanghai.

Djokovic certainly isn't going to freefall down the rankings anytime soon, but he is, at the moment, the weakest of the four at the top of the game.

Andy Murray (Great Britain)

World Ranking: 4

Australian Open Performance: 4th Round Lst. Fernando Verdasco (ESP)(14) 6-2 1-6 6-1 3-6 4-6

Britain's Andy Murray went into this year's Australian Open in identical fashion to which he walked into Melbourne Park last year. The young Scot was unbeaten in the warm up events leading up to the Australian Open, retaining the Qatar Open as well as winning an exhibition event beating Federer and Nadal on the way.

It was no surprise to most then, that Murray was heavy favourite to pick up his first grand slam of his career,

but unfortunately that was not the case, as was shown in his 4th round defeat to surprise Semi Finalist Fernando Verdasco.

Murray who had waltzed through his first three matches against Pavel, Granollers and Melzer showed signs of inconsistency throughout his match up against the Spanish number 14 seed, who's own run came to an end after a mammoth five set thriller with Nadal in the Semi Final.

Murray has shown at the back end of last season, and for the most part of this season, that he is one of the top guys on the tour and with wins against all three above him, he now knows that he can compete with the best, and beat the best. For Murray to continue climbing and win Majors in the months to come, he has to eradicate the inconsistent performances that have plagued his game of recent years, and that lost him the match against Verdasco.

Murray will almost certainly climb above Djokovic in the rankings, but until he wins a Grand Slam, he can forget about toppling Nadal and Federer.

Robson, who has just turned 15, was appearing in her first grand slam junior event, since winning Wimbledon back in July 2008, and managed to win through to the final, beating the top seed, and her opponent in that Wimbledon final, Noppawan Lertcheewakarn in straight sets in the semi final.

Robson though couldn't match her performance from Wimbledon in Australian, losing out 6-3 6-1 in the final, too Russian third seed Ksenia Pervak, who is nearly three years her senior, and played all of last year on the senior tour.

It was a double blow for Robson who also missed out on the World Number 1 junior ranking with this defeat, but it was yet another good week for the British starlet.



AMERICAN SPORTS MONTHLY

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, ANYTHING UP TO A BILLION PEOPLE WILL HAVE WATCHED THE ARIZONA CARDINALS OR THE PITTSBURGH STEELERS BE CROWNED NFL CHAMPIONS IN SUPERBOWL XLIII. THE SPORT OF AMERICAN FOOTBALL IS GROWING IN POPULARITY AROUND THE WORLD, MOST NOTABLY HERE IN BRITAIN
BY TOM SNEE

British interest in the sport really began in the 1980s, when the newly launched Channel 4 started to show live games on a Sunday evening. These were great years for the sport in general, with some of the most memorable Superbowl games being played out to adoring audiences around the globe.

With more people watching the game, interest naturally moved toward participating. During this era, teams in London, Sheffield, Milton Keynes and Northwich began to spring up, playing exhibition matches with each other. Aided by the large number of U.S. Forces personnel in England, the first games took place in 1983, with mixed success.

By 1984, the wheels were set in motion for forming a national league. Eventually, two leagues were created after 7 teams split away from the original 26 to form their own competition. During this era, teams came and went, sometimes not even playing a game before folding. By the next year, seventy teams were playing in four rival leagues.

The London Ravens were the first national recognised champions, beating the Streatham Olympians in Bud Bowl I. However, for all the success and popularity of the 1980s, the 1990s were barren years

for British American Football. With the newly formed World League taking many of the country's best players and fans, interest in the British leagues dropped, and teams either had to fold or relocate to survive.

As Sky Sports took over the exclusive rights to show live NFL games in 1996, different audiences became interested in the game. In particular, the student league - known as BCAFL - reached new heights in terms of interest and participation. The gap in talent between the best and the worst got smaller, and this in turn filtered through to the senior leagues as committed, gifted players graduated and went onto bigger things.

In the 21st century, the organisation of American football has improved vastly. The British American Football Association oversees both the university and senior

leagues, and has unified previously disparate groups under one banner. The senior league (BAFL) runs under a similar pyramid system to the Football League, while the university league (now BUAFL) has over 2,000 players in 45 teams across the nation.

Alongside this, the NFL International Development Practice Squad program gives the better college players chance to get recognised by NFL teams by getting them a place on the practice squad - kind of like reserve team football. Recent graduates of this program include Jermaine Allen, who plays for New Orleans Saints, and Marvin Allen (no relation), who plays wide receiver for Pittsburgh Steelers. Although neither has made the step up to professional just yet, it is only a matter of time before a young Brit makes a name for himself in the NFL.





WILL STAY IN BECKHAM MILAN?

Jack Thornton investigates...

After moving to America and losing his place in the England squad, it would have been easy to think that we wouldn't see much more of David Beckham. However, this is not the David Beckham way and in his latest attempt to regain his England place, he has moved to AC Milan in a two month loan deal. He has been criticised by some who say he has only moved so he will be part of England's next squad, and have the opportunity to equal Bobby Moore's outfield record of 108 caps for England. But it is obvious that Beckham's big move to America hasn't worked out the way he would've wanted it to.

Probably the biggest fashion icon this decade, moving to the fashion capital of the world seems like a match made in heaven, and so far his move has been a great success. So much of a success that there is now talk of Beck-

ham staying in Milan permanently, with the England International even hinting he would like to stay. "Even if my contract says that I'll be here until March. We'll have to see."

Beckham is proving a huge success at the Italian giants and has started every match since joining, even scoring two goals, including a trademark free kick against Genoa. It seems no surprise that Milan are trying their best to keep Beckham at the San Siro permanently. However, LA Galaxy are still confident he will return to the States. Senior executive Tim Leiweke said: "He loves it in LA. His kids go to school here and there is no story."

His time in America, though, hasn't yet been the success that Beckham thought it would be. Just before moving to Los Angeles, there were huge expectations that the former Man United midfielder

would have a big impact on the game and turn it into one of the biggest sports in America. But with many injuries during his time in America, and poor league finishes for LA Galaxy, Beckham has not had anywhere near the impact predicted, and with the current success at Milan, he must be considering ending his American Dream.

He will also be thinking about England and trying to be part of their World Cup qualifying campaign and the World Cup finals in 2010. England manager, Fabio Capello has already said that players who aren't playing regularly will not feature in the squad, which meant Beckham was left out of his last squad against Germany. And if Beckham stays at LA Galaxy next year he will run the risk of missing crucial friendlies before the World Cup and maybe even the final squad.

~~MEN'S~~ WOMEN'S FOOTBALL FOCUS

ShareSport Journalist Rachel Jones goes in to the heart of Women's football in the 21st Century

As mentioned in previous articles, women's football at the end of the 20th century was vastly improving. In 1999, the F.A. had announced its plight to try and raise women's football to become the top sport for women in Britain by 2004.

The beginning of the 21st century was the first time that people began to realise the extent and demand there was for women's football, not just in Britain, but all around the world. With the introduction of development squads and national coaching, women's football was blossoming into the sport we know it to be now.

It was no surprise that in 2002, the F.A. announced that women's football was the leading sport within Britain, amazingly, 2 years ahead of schedule.

Due to the fast growth and popularity of the sport within Britain, it was decided that England would be allowed to hold the 2005 UEFA Women's Championships, and ultimately gain automatic qualification into the competition.

During the preparation for the tournament, Blackpool, Blackburn, Manchester City, Preston North End and Warrington Wolves RLFC, had all given permission to allow the championship matches to take place within their stadiums.

In the summer of 2005, the tournament began and ran from the 5th June to the 19th June. Unfortunately, England was the only British team to

make it into the tournament.

The tournament consisted of two groups of four teams, which meant the top two qualifiers from each group would play off in the semi-finals against each other. Teams in the tournament consisted of England, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Italy and France.

The opening match between England and Finland attracted more than 29,000 spectators at the City of Manchester Stadium and a further 2.9 million viewers, watching the match on BBC 2. In the opening match, England overcome Finland with a 3-2 victory, but lost both their other matches, which meant they didn't qualify as shown by the final group standings:

Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
 Sweden	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
 Finland	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
 Denmark	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
 England	3	1	0	2	4	5	3

Germany eventually won the competition for the 4th consecutive time.

After that tournament, preparations began for the 2007 Women's World Cup in China. The beginning of 2007 was to be a great year for women's football, with the team of the century, Arsenal ladies, who claimed a fantastic quadruple of trophies.

September then saw the England

squad travel to China for the World Cup, the first time for 12 years that they have made the finals. England managed to get to the quarter finals, but eventually dipped out to an impressive USA team. Germany was again crowned the winners.

This year sees England playing in the European Championship in Finland, their third tournament in succession.

During the past nine years, women's football has expanded greatly, especially England's women's team. This is encouraging for all young girls coming through, the idea that there is a chance and opportunities in the sport for women.

PROFILE

Here is a brief timeline of the formation of one of the greatest women's team in the 20th century: Dick Kerr's Ladies.

On the 4th August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany, which meant that more women began to work within factories. It was during their breaks, that women began to play football. David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, encouraged these games as these matches helped raise money for wartime charities.

Alfred Frankland, who worked in the office of Dick Kerr factory in Preston, used to watch the young ladies kicking the ball around from his office window. During this time, Alfred approached Grace Sibbert, who eventu-

ally emerged as the leader, to start a team for the girls that worked there. She agreed and became manager.

Their first game was on Christmas Day 1917, in aid of the local hospital for wounded soldiers at Moor Park. Frankland persuaded Preston North End to allow the women to play the game at their ground at Deepdale. It was the first football game to be played on the ground since the Football League programme was cancelled after the outbreak of war. Over 10,000 people turned up to watch the game. After paying out the considerable costs of putting on the game, Frankland was able to donate £200 to the hospital.

At the end of the war, most women lost their jobs in the factories. However, some retained their interest in football. The ladies used to train at Ashton Ground, a sports ground which was owned by their Managing Director of the Dick Kerr Company, John Kerr. During this time, some members of Preston North End helped with the coaching of the team. These included Bob Holmes, Johnny Morley, Billy Greer and Jack Warner.

Next Issue I will look at the rest of the history for the Dick Kerr Ladies.

WORLD IN NUMBERS

Around the world in numbers...

1,140 – The ranking of Andy Murray's first round opponent in the Australian Open, Andrei Pavel.

7 – Pittsburgh Steelers will be playing in their seventh Super Bowl, looking to win for a record sixth time.

1,025 – Petr Cech's old record of consecutive minutes without conceding a goal, beaten by Edwin van der Sar in Man United's victory over West Brom.

18 – Grand Slam finals played in by Roger Federer, one away from Ivan Lendl's record of 19.

314 – Minutes it took Rafael Nadal to beat Fernando Verdasco in the Australian Open semi-final, a record in the competition.

£944,000 – The price given to Kevin Pietersen for the Indian Premier League auction, the highest priced England player

23.5 – Points won by Europe's new Ryder Cup captain Colin Montgomerie over his Ryder Cup career.



Photo: Before the first game on the 25th December 1917

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