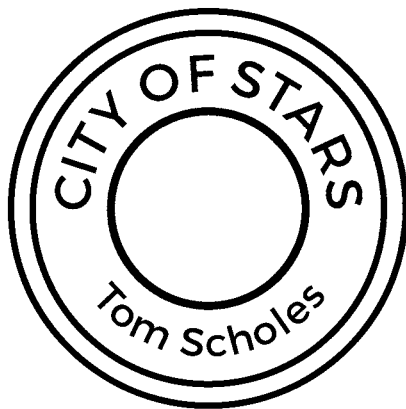


Tom Scholes



The Controversial Story of Paris Saint-Germain



The Controversial Story of
Paris Saint-Germain



Contents

Acknowledgements	9
Introduction	11
1. Pre-1970	13
2. <i>La formation du Paris Saint-Germain –</i> The formation of Paris Saint-Germain.	27
3. <i>L’histoire de deux clubs et d’une ville –</i> The tale of two clubs and one city	44
4. <i>La Renaissance –</i> The return	81
5. <i>Une nouvelle ère –</i> A new era	121
6. <i>La théorie de Bianchi –</i> The Bianchi theory.	151
7. <i>L’été 1982 –</i> The summer of 1982	175
8. <i>La prochaine étape –</i> The next step	201
9. <i>Le vainqueur oublié –</i> The forgotten winner	227
10. <i>Le Classique –</i> The Classic	254
11. <i>Championnes –</i> Champions	286
12. <i>Faire sa marque en Europe –</i> Making a mark in Europe.	317
13. <i>Ronaldinho and samba à Paris –</i> Ronaldinho and samba in Paris	340
14. <i>La légende du Portugal est arrivée –</i> The legend from Portugal has arrived	361
15. <i>Ruée vers l’or du Qatar –</i> Qatari gold rush	385
16. <i>Quel avenir pour le PSG ? –</i> What is the future for PSG?.	409

1

Pre-1970

PARIS, TO put it simply, is wonderful. It is diverse. It is culturally intriguing and important. It looks beautiful both during a summer's day and a winter's night. The architecture – such as the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe and the Grand Palais – is superb, the art is beautiful and the historical significance of the city cannot be underestimated, both in French and global history. If you walk down the River Seine on a bright, quiet, sunny day, you will find it difficult to find an individual who doesn't find it either peaceful or enjoyable.

You can look throughout history to see France and Paris involved, including the Storming of the Bastille as part of the French Revolution, homing some of the art world's most famous and influential artists such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, while after World War One more creative brains moved in such as Ernest Hemingway, Salvador Dali and James Joyce. Perhaps the most famous, and arguably most significant, historical moment that took place in Paris was in 1940 when the German army marched through Paris after it had been

declared as an ‘open city’ (meaning, in wartime, that the city has essentially surrendered in order to avoid all-out destruction of the infrastructure). The French Resistance during World War Two was based in Paris, and following the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed just outside of Paris in 1919, Paris and France had two massive hands in the bid to defeat Germany.

If you walk down any street in Paris, you will feel the history coming out of the walls or even the ground that you stroll upon, such is its significance in the world. But notice how I’ve nearly gone 300 words talking about just a handful of things that are historic and important about Paris without even mentioning sport, let alone football. That isn’t to say that football isn’t important in Paris – because it is – but it’s something that hasn’t really been a Parisian staple until the last 50 or so years. At least, for the majority of fans across the world, that is the case.

The fact of the matter is Parisian football clubs seem to have fallen by the wayside with two in particular slipping away with barely any mention, or any sort of acknowledgement for their part in the popularity of the sport in France’s capital city. In fact, it’s not even well known that the first recorded football club in Paris was formed by English and Scottish expats.

The two oldest clubs in the city were Racing Club de France Football – or Racing Paris – and Red Star Paris. Racing were formed in 1882 as a multidiscipline club for football and athletics with their previous home, the Croix-Catelan Stadium, hosting athletics events for the 1900 Olympic Games. Due to their status as a multi-discipline sports club, many won’t recognise Racing as one of France’s earliest football clubs, despite the fact that they

were a founding member of Ligue 1, and because people must just assume that they are an amateur outfit, even with players such as David Ginola and Pierre Littbarski on their books over the years. They have had a grand total of ten different names, including four name changes in the 21st century alone.

The second-oldest in the city is Red Star Paris, a team with much more noted history behind them and one that is still alive and kicking as of 2022 and still manages to bring a good crowd to their games, with a tonne of history to look back on. Officially recognised as France's second-oldest football club behind Le Havre, as they were on the record as being formed in 1897 (remember, Racing wasn't solely a football club when they formed in 1882), the story goes that Red Star were formed in a Paris cafe by future FIFA president Jules Rimet and Ernest Weber, alongside Rimet's brother Modeste. The name supposedly derives out of inspiration from a woman called Miss Jenny, Rimet's English governess (private tutor), who suggested the club be named after the Red Star Line, a historic shipping line with ships built in Birkenhead on The Wirral in the UK that serviced the United States, Belgium and France, with Miss Jenny coming over from England to France on this line. Therefore, the name was Red Star, the club was formed and the club was placed into the third tier of French football. And just like that, by the turn of the 20th century, Paris had two football teams.

So why is it that these teams are hardly even mentioned in conversations about Paris and football? Red Star won five Coupe de France trophies before 1943 while Racing also won five before 1950 and went one better by actually winning Division 1 (as the top division

was known then, not becoming Ligue 1 until 2002) in 1936, only the fourth club to win the title, and they even did it one season before Marseille. So it wasn't like there wasn't any success to write home about because, clearly, the two Paris clubs brought home silverware. In fact, the Coupe de France finals of 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922 and 1923 were all won by Parisian teams (Olympique de Paris won in 1918 although they merged with Red Star in 1926; CASG Paris won in 1919 although they were a team set up by the bank Société Générale and remain the only corporate team to have ever won the cup; Red Star managed a hat-trick of Coupe de France triumphs, winning from 1921 to 1923).

These six finals all took place in Paris, but it's quite incredible to think that only one venue, the stadium that hosted the 1919 final, is either still in use for football or in existence: the Parc des Princes. The Parc des Princes is situated in the 16th arrondissement (the name of a particular district or borough in the city) which is a beautiful area indeed, one fitting of a venue that was originally used for day trips, hunting and forest walks for the French royal family. Originally, le Parc was a multi-sport venue hosting athletics, football and cycling, which was mainly due to the fact that the director of the stadium was a man named Henri Desgrange, a former elite cyclist and founder of the magazine *L'Auto*, which played an important role in the inception of the Tour de France, with the final lap of honour being taken at the Parc des Princes in honour of Desgrange. The first football match for the French national team was held there (a 1-0 win over Switzerland). During the early part of the 1930s, Desgrange and his business partner Victor

Goddet worked on the reconstruction of le Parc and in 1932 opened up the newly improved stadium with a capacity of 45,000 (although that was later reduced down to 38,000). The Parc des Princes hosted the opening game of the 1938 World Cup, but the final was played in the Stade Olympique Yves-du-Manoir, the main stadium for the 1924 Olympics.

As a result of hosting no events during the 1924 Olympics, Paris City Council gave Desgrange the keys to the stadium and that's what prompted the upgrade and refurbishment. As time went on, le Parc was becoming more and more integral in the sporting landscape. Away from football, the 1954 Rugby World Cup Final was hosted there while the first European Cup Final was hosted in the stadium, in 1956, as Real Madrid beat Reims 4-3 in a game that had two of the world's greatest players involved with Alfredo Di Stéfano for Real Madrid and French maestro Raymond Kopa representing Reims.

Of course, various Coupe de France finals were played at le Parc but that was it in terms of domestic football, with the stadium being used mainly for France international football and rugby games, the occasional European Cup final and various athletics events. Racing used the Stade Olympique Yves-du-Manoir as their main stadium as it was in the Colombes area, still on the banks of the River Seine, while Red Star had a strange time of finding a home that wasn't the Parc des Princes. They were originally based in an area called Meudon, a suburb build overlooking the Seine and nicknamed 'Bellevue'. It was a beautiful area but in 1907, when Red Star had one of their many name changes and went with Red Star Amical Club, the team moved from Meudon to Grenelle in the

15th arrondissement. Three years into their Grenelle adventure, Red Star moved yet again, this time to Saint-Ouen in Seine-Saint-Denis to play in the Stade de Paris, or, to give it its current name, Stade Bauer.

But despite problems with stadia and the constant chopping and changing of Parisian clubs' homes, they carried on playing and carried on representing the capital. In 1930, the French Football Federation voted in favour of professionalism in football in France and thus Division 1 was created, with Red Star in particular being a strong advocate for professionalism and listed as one of the founding members of the new competition. In typical Red Star fashion, however, they were relegated from Division 1 and played in the inaugural Division 2 season, creating history by playing in two inaugural seasons of two different leagues, although it's doubtful that was the kind of history the club wanted to make. Fellow Parisians Club Français were also relegated in the same season but due to the financial pressure of now being a professional club the team dissolved in 1935.

Racing, on the other hand, seemed to fair a bit better than their Parisian counterparts. Finishing third in Group A in the first season of Division 1, they floated between 11th and third before finishing first in the 1935/1936 season, capturing their first Coupe de France led by goals from René Couard, and Englishman Fred Kennedy, a striker from Bury, Lancashire, who started his career with local side Rossendale United before moving to Manchester United and then Everton. Kennedy played for Racing in 1932/1933 before returning to England to play with Blackburn Rovers, then once again returning to Racing for four years and later ending his career with Stockport County.

But the fortunes of both Red Star and Racing fluctuated, with Red Star being relegated in 1938, Racing winning their last Coupe de France, all happening before the outbreak of World War Two. One week they would be fine, the next they would be battered by FC Sète, the club who eventually won the Division 1 title in that final season, four points ahead of Racing. This headline of a match report in the newspaper *L'Ouest-Éclair* from May of 1939 said all that needed to be said on the game that clinched the Division 1 for Sète: 'F.C. Sète literally choked Racing and were 4-0 ahead at half-time.'

If you look through the league tables of Division 1 after World War Two, you'll notice a trend. Very rarely are Red Star and Racing involved in anything positive with the odd exception in cup competitions. In 1948 Red Star finished rock bottom of the league on just 16 points, while Racing won the Coupe de France the following season despite being closer to the bottom of the table than Stade de Reims, who won the title with a young Raymond Kopa slowly making his way on to the footballing scene.

In the 1952/1953 season, it became official. After years of stagnation, Racing were relegated on goal difference meaning that Paris was represented in the top division by only one team: Stade Français. Stade are perhaps more well known now for their rugby team, which plays across the road from the Parc des Princes in the Stade Jean-Bouin, although they officially became a professional club in France in 1942 and have a history of merging with clubs within Paris, such as between 1942 and 1944 when they merged with Cercle Athlétique de Paris and then with Red Star for a two-year stretch from 1948. While the club's rugby department may be one of the best in the

world, there is no doubting that the main reason why – if there even is a reason – fans would be aware of their footballing heritage would be because of an ex-player who then became the manager of the club before embarking on one of the most successful and influential managerial careers that the sport has ever seen.

Born in Argentina to Spanish parents before moving to Morocco at a young age, there wasn't anything overtly special about the playing career of defender Helenio Herrera. He was secure and solid as a defender but lacked anything special that made him stand out from the rest. He performed well in France with spells at various clubs including Red Star and Stade Français but a knee injury curtailed his career by the time he reached his mid-20s and forced Herrera, known by his initials H.H. by those who knew him best, to retire. Herrera was so underpaid at Stade Français – as was seemingly every other player in France at the time – that he would find different ways to earn a living. He went door to door in Paris selling brass polish to housewives and he would sneakily jam his foot in the door to prevent his prospective buyer from shutting the door on him. Due to his upbringing in Morocco – which at the time was still a French-occupied country – he was able to be called up but managed to avoid army duty due to the fact he was now a specialist in fibreglass, a material that was key in warfare, and classified as a key worker in France. Herrera's time on the sidelines gave him the ability to watch games and even allowed him to implement new ways to defend when he did eventually get back on to the field of play. It was his spell playing at Stade Français in 1942 that set him on his path to greatness, with Herrera starting to play in a style that was known in

Italian as *il béton* (translated to cement). That style would come to be known as *catenaccio* which is what Herrera's legacy is built on in the modern day.

It was also at Stade Français where he realised his true calling in life: teaching football. Herrera would teach PE during the latter days of his playing career and eventually moved on to teach physiotherapy work, gaining a first-class diploma as a masseuse, thinking it would be easier to get a job as coach–masseuse than just as a regular, run-of-the-mill coach. There was a close call in Lorient in 1945 – Herrera went to sign a contract with the club but left a day earlier than planned based on a premonition, only for the town to be the victim of an aerial bombardment the next day. At least, his own website claims he had a sudden and unknown premonition; the book *Steel Boats, Iron Hearts* by Hans Goebeler claims that the citizens of Lorient did in fact receive prior warning to the bombings and were told to flee immediately.

Herrera would soon join Stade Français where he was told by the club chairman to spend more time looking at new signings to help bolster the squad. During his spell from 1945 to 1948, Français managed to finish fifth twice, tenth and managed to reach the semi-finals of the Coupe de France before Herrera left France to go and coach Atlético Madrid in 1948, a year before the decline of Français started to take place. The year after Herrera's departure, Français finished 16th and one place above relegation before eventually returning to Division 2 the following season, finishing bottom with just 21 points. Français had the occasional flirtation with a return back to Division 1, winning Division 2 in 1952 before being relegated straight back the following season. Bar a few

years in the mid-1960s, Français were destined to be a second-tier club.

That time under Herrera, while only a fleeting memory in what turned out to be an incredible career, proved to be the 'glory years' of Français, but Parisian football itself could not claim to be doing much better. Racing came agonisingly close to winning Division 1, finishing second behind Monaco by a point in 1961 and then managed to outdo themselves by finishing second the following season behind Reims, despite being level on points and level on goal difference. With Just Fontaine and Raymond Kopa, two legends of the French game, playing for Reims during that season, it does actually make Racing's achievement of finishing so close to Reims somewhat impressive even if they did end the season empty-handed. However, as so often happens with football, society dictates the feeling around the game. If people are happy, the football is usually great but if people aren't happy, the football usually suffers. France in the 1960s was going through a cultural change that affected everything, both culturally and financially and football wasn't hidden from that. If anything, it was one of the outlets that was most affected, as the book *France and the 1998 World Cup: The National Impact of a World Sporting Event* says:

'France became an urban society and this urbanisation went against the football culture that had grown up. One can explain the crisis which afflicted French football in the 1960s as a consequence of the scale of the urban change which then took place. Between 1960 and 1968 some of the most prestigious French clubs disappeared or dropped into the second division never to come back up, for example, Sète, Red Star, Le Havre, Ales, the CAP, the

CORT and they did so amidst an almost total indifference on the part of the local public.

‘The cost of running a professional football club cannot be covered by gate receipts, its only source of income other than municipal funding. The small and mid-sized towns which lost their economic vitality could not sustain a professional club and those two which were expanding were peopled by families who were preoccupied by the business of making a living in a new locality, or who were more interested in new forms of leisure. This phenomenon was replicated in all European countries, where there has been a marked drop in attendances at games, but was more dramatic in France no doubt because of this great geographic and cultural upheaval.’

French football needed to change because France had changed. As the *New York Times* headlined an article in 1968, it was the ‘Month of Revolution that Pushed France into the Modern World’, and it did, but it was also a period in time that pushed French football forward too. Players wanted fair living wages and wanted to be treated with respect, fans didn’t always want to go to the football so decided to spend their money on other activities, and the game itself was not in a great place. Parisian football was not in a healthy state on the field or off it.

On the field, the teams weren’t performing admirably. In 1960, Racing were one point away from Monaco in top spot. By the end of the decade they weren’t even in the second division. Red Star’s last season in the top flight was in 1975 so at least they remained there for a little while longer, but to no major effect. It wasn’t just failure on the pitch that was the problem, however, as Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff points out in her book *The Making of Les*

Bleus: Sport in France, 1958-2010, 'Labour issues within the professional game also contributed to football's crisis. Professional football players long complained of unfair labour limitations enforced by their contracts. The inability to be transferred and play for another team curbed a player's capacity to earn a living. While in the 1960s football players were greatly admired by most young boys, the players "are all under contract for life" in what was considered a harsh labour system. Despite attracting great attention to labour complaints of players, progress was not evident in 1968.'

And 1968 would be the turning point for culture in France and for the lives of millions. The year saw an uprising among students in France, in particular Paris, that changed how France lived and acted, and changed the entire culture in ways that can only be described by those who lived through it. Newspaper *Le Monde* described the French public at this time as being 'bored' because they had nothing to do. Everyone had their own reasons as to why they protested or stood for what they believed in. It wasn't a political uprising – or at least it didn't intend to be – but it certainly was a cultural uprising. France was at a crossroads and, quite frankly, no one really knew what was going on, and football was at the back of everyone's minds.

But, as is always the case when things go wrong in society, football ended up being used for good and the events of 1968 ended up benefitting football, in turn eventually ending up benefitting Paris too. Many people believed that getting the youth into organised sports would prevent them from misbehaving and keep them occupied. In the earlier part of the 1900s, the common consensus was that sports could only be good for creating

physical strength but by the time the '60s rolled along, that viewpoint had changed. Sport was seen as not only a good way to keep an eye on the youth but by playing games that had strict rules and you had to 'obey' authority, then it was also a great way to teach the youth how to act and how to respect those in authoritative positions. More youth offender centres bought sports equipment to attempt to rehabilitate their youths, with everyone using sports as an opportunity to try and restore some form of balance – whatever balance may be – post the events of 1968.

So by the time 1970 came, the footballing landscape in Paris had changed an awful lot. It went from a position where Parisian teams won the Coupe de France on an almost automatic basis to having just one team in Division 1 at the end of the 1969/1970 campaign. A future great of football management basically started his fledgling career at a Paris club and started to introduce what would go on to be known by the wider world as his own form of *catenaccio*. While it may just be seen as an insignificant step in his career by the majority of those who glance at the CV of Helenio Herrera, to those in Paris it wasn't. Such was his popularity, he became friends with movie stars and stars of the entertainment industry. Herrera did in fact claim to have invented the system solely on his own, without knowledge of the work of Swiss manager Karl Rappan, saying he had invented and executed the system 'around 1945'. This would mean that, provided Herrera wasn't bending the truth a bit, the sweeper system that he used to dominate Italian and subsequently European football was born and developed in Paris.

Despite this, Paris seemed to have stagnated in the world of French football. In the amateur era (1893–1929),

the city's teams either won the league or finished second (11 times), but since the league turned professional in 1932 only Racing managed to win the title. Racing were also the only Parisian team to finish second; meanwhile Nice and the Raymond Kopa/Just Fontaine-led Reims teams both had periods where they looked like world-beaters, demonstrated by the fact Reims were the first – and only until 1976 – French team to reach the European Cup Final. The same went for the Coupe de France, a cup that could legitimately be seen as 'Paris' Cup'. It last had a Parisian winner in 1949, which was Racing. Racing ended up being the premier Parisian team but that wasn't going to be the case for long. Because while Paris and the whole of France was changing, there was work going on in the background to add another team to the French footballing pyramid that belonged to Paris, perhaps to try and revitalise the football scene in the capital. The move to merge two clubs together had been done before but perhaps not to this level and certainly, if we look deep into the future, not with this much impact on the game.