

**'DELVES INTO AREAS MOST FANS MAY NOT HEAR
OR EVEN THINK ABOUT. FASCINATING.'**

Jim White, SKY SPORTS & talkSPORT



THE TRANSFER MARKET

ALAN GERON

THE INSIDE STORIES



"Delves into areas most fans may not hear or even think about. Fascinating." – **Jim White, Sky Sports & TalkSPORT**

"Really enjoyed it. Would definitely recommend it."
– **Off the Ball, Newstalk**

"It's a fantastic book." – **Sunday Sport, LMFM**

"For every big-money move by the likes of Neymar or Pogba there are countless transfers which slip under the radar. The reality or most footballers is often a nomadic existence of modest wages and budget-hotel rooms hundreds of miles from their families." – **Shropshire Star**

"Good humoured and engaging prose. Gernon's volume provides a fascinating insight into the behind the scenes events that colour a player's ability to settle at a new club." – **The Two Unfortunates**

"Mind-boggling. Even if you're not interested in football, it's fascinating. You need to get this book." – **What's the Story podcast**

"Very interesting. Some great insight into what actually goes on behind the scenes." – **Sunday Sport, RTE 1**

"Really enjoyed the book. A really interesting read. A fascinating, in-depth look into the transfer market." – **Asmir Begovic**

"Brilliant book. Covers all aspects of the transfer market and is an insightful and fascinating read." – **Irish Daily Star**

"Fascinating stuff. Definitely one you should have on your book shelf."
– **Dermot & Dave, Today FM**

"A well-written book that seeks to tease out some of the realities involved with players moving from one club to another."
– **Meath Chronicle**

"Well-researched. Delivers some eyebrow-raising insights, not least about the machinations of the transfer rumour mill."
– **Backpass magazine**

"A book worth reading if you're into football at all." – **Dundalk FM**

"The level of research is excellent. A fascinating insight into the transfer market." – **Beyond the Back Page, Near FM**

"Gernon has been receiving huge acclaim for his second football-related book which delves into the murky world of transfers."
– **Dundalk Leader**

"Fab insight." – **Galway Advertiser**

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FOREWORD BY JIM WHITE



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Foreword

‘**W**HERE’S the yellow tie?’ Seriously, there’s not a day that goes by here in London and elsewhere when I’m not asked that question randomly by a dozen people or more!

It’s clear that most football fans love transfer deadline day and I’ve been privileged to take the watching millions through all the drama and excitement it generates on Sky Sports News for over a decade now.

Great moments. Like Berbatov to United at the same time as Robinho to City. Fernando Torres joining Chelsea from Liverpool for £50m – was that REALLY him arriving at Stamford Bridge in that blacked-out people carrier?

Who can forget those pictures of Peter Odemwingie turning up at Loftus Road in west London, hoping to sign for QPR from West Brom only for him to turn around after no deal was ever on the table!

Great deadline day moments and there will be many more like them.

Some players excel following a big money move, none more so than Gareth Bale when he moved from Tottenham Hotspur to Real Madrid in 2013 for a then world record £85.3m. Bale got the move of his dreams. I’ll never forget the look on his face as my cameraman and I met him at Luton Airport en route by private jet to Madrid, a mixture of shock and bottled-up elation. He has

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gone on to be magnificent in the colours of arguably the world's top club.

But not all players hit the heights Bale has achieved. How could they?

For many others, what unfolds is far from the move they'd been hoping for.

In Alan Gernon's new book *The Transfer Market*, he meticulously examines every aspect of the transfer, the move itself and the implications involved for the player.

How does the player cope with the move? Did he even want that move in the first place?

Following on from the success of his previous book, *Retired*, which explores what can happen to a typical footballer when he calls time on his career, Alan's *The Transfer Market* delves into areas most fans may not hear or even think about.

On this fascinating subject, Alan Gernon digs a lot deeper than anyone else has attempted to.

The man with the yellow tie on Sky just tells you about it first.

Jim White, Sky Sports & talkSPORT broadcaster

Introduction

THE young African man stood trembling in the parked plane's toilet at Birmingham Airport. He knew there was someone waiting for him, someone he'd never met before, but he couldn't move. The noise, the lights, the people – it all added up to potential sensory overload for someone who had only previously visited Europe for a few days.

Meanwhile, in the arrivals hall, Lorna McClelland was getting anxious. All the other passengers had disembarked and she had been waiting for over an hour. As she was about to give up, her new colleague arrived. They walked slowly to her car, where inside he sat hunched over with his hands over his ears in an unsuccessful attempt to block out the airport din. Concerned, she pulled over a few minutes into their journey and he revealed that he'd never been to such a large airport and was terrified. Aston Villa's player welfare officer quickly realised that the club's new signing was going to take some time to adjust to life in England.

His was just one of over 10,000 transfers across the football world that year. What I saw was quite different to what Lorna had seen. I'd read a headline a couple of days earlier linking Villa with a highly rated African prospect. That's all I observed until his first few lacklustre performances at the club. I didn't see the personal consequences of this life-changing move on this overwhelmed young man. I didn't see his struggle to adapt to a

foreign country and an alien culture. I didn't see the tears, the self-doubt and the homesickness. I saw the headline, the money and the glamour. I never contemplated what it might be like for a man in his early twenties to chase his dream on a new continent and how difficult it might be for him to settle in, despite the fee agreed between his new and previous employers. Or whether he'd even had any say in the matter.

'Every transfer is a story. You always want the truth to come out.'

Arsène Wenger was bullish in his comments when questioned about *The Telegraph's* undercover sting of Sam Allardyce in September 2016.

He was, however, correct. Every transfer is a story, although we may only get to read or hear about the big-money moves. Not all transfers are Pogba-esque. Despite the vast sums of cash swirling around the English game, the majority of moves involve little or no money. But behind each move isn't just one story but many.

The story of a journeyman making a final move before his inevitable retirement. The story of a former hot prospect realising a move down the leagues is about all he can hope for. The story of a player, who has been loyal to his club, suddenly told that he is surplus to requirements. The story of a young man unexpectedly traded at the drop of a hat by his employer to another, often with the prospect of a move to a strange town, city or country. The story of a footballer with the pressure of a large transfer fee hanging over him. The story of the agents behind the deals. The story of a player's family and a move's effects on their lives. The story of how the media feed on all of the above. The story of the clubs. The story of countless others who live off this market in human personnel.

It's often easy to glance at the latest transfer gossip and fail to acknowledge that it's human beings we're reading about.

When new signings are unveiled they usually mouth the same sort of platitudes. 'I've dreamed of playing for this club since I was

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a boy,' or 'They're a massive club and I'm delighted to be here,' for example. But you never really hear what they actually think. What the move means to a player on a personal level. Having to move away from his young family. The wrench of leaving a club you've been at since you were six years old. The sudden realisation that you're on your way down the football ladder.

In what was an unlikely setting to all but confirm the world's record transfer, three Mancunian laundry ladies posed in front of industrial washing machines, with a grinning Paul Pogba sporting a Manchester United training top. A few days earlier a Miami barber had hinted at the conclusion of the deal, posting a picture on Instagram of him cutting the French midfielder's hair accompanied by the caption, 'Had to change up Pogba's hair colour for his new team #ManchesterUnited.'

The drawn-out transfer was officially announced a few hours after the laundry ladies' encounter with the star came out in the wash. This time, it was by more contemporary means – an Adidas-sponsored video featuring Pogba with UK grime artist Stormzy. While Pogba's protracted transfer stole the headlines in 2016, his £89m move wasn't typical in the world of football. How many other deals can you remember from that year? N'Golo Kanté leaving champions Leicester City for champions-elect Chelsea? John Stones's £50m switch from Everton to Pep Guardiola's Manchester City? Sadio Mané becoming the latest player on the Southampton to Liverpool conveyor belt? That's four deals, including Pogba's, and you'll probably recall a few new arrivals and outgoing at your own club.

The big names dominate the headlines but there were 14,591 international transfers in 2016 involving 178 associations and 4,379 clubs. While a record US\$4.79bn was spent, this translates to just over US\$325,000 per transfer. Most players are moving for a relative pittance. That's if any money is involved at all. The same year, only 14 per cent of worldwide transfers involved the payment of a fee.

While Pogba broke the world transfer record in 2016, it only took a year for it to be blown out of the water. Neymar's move from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain more than doubled the record, with the Ligue 1 giants meeting his seemingly prohibitive buyout clause.

Things were a lot more prosaic in the lower leagues of English football. Transfermarkt.com estimates that the average League Two signing in the 2016/17 season cost their club £627 – or roughly what Paris Saint-Germain reportedly pay Neymar every 12 minutes. This is based on disclosed transfer fees for the division. Indeed, in theory, you could buy 315,789 League Two players for the price of the Brazilian. Or, closer to home, the starting XIs in all of the 24 clubs in the fourth tier would cost about the same price as Leeds United paid Leicester City for Allan Clarke. In 1969.

This is the level the majority of professional footballers are at. And the level that the majority of football transfers are at. A 2016 report by FIFPro, the worldwide representative organisation for professional footballers, suggests that 45 per cent of footballers worldwide earn less than US\$1,000 net per month, with a further 21 per cent earning between US\$1,000 and US\$4,000 after tax on a monthly basis. And it's not just in footballing outposts – 32 per cent of European respondents reported these earnings. In the country that gave us Pelé, Socrates, Romario, Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima, Ronaldinho and the aforementioned Neymar, almost 85 per cent of Brazil-based footballers earn under US\$1,000 every month. It may come as no surprise then that, according to 2018 research by the CIES Football Observatory, part of the Switzerland-based International Center for Sports Studies, Brazil boasts the most expatriate players worldwide with 1,236 professional footballers playing in the 78 associations represented in the study.

The FIFPro report defines these third-tier footballers as 'representing the majority of players, who are under constant

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pressure to extend their careers in professional football and face precarious employment conditions, including a large degree of personal and contractual abuse.’ One of those interviewed put things starkly, ‘There is no stability. You have one-, two-, three-year contracts your whole career so you’re always looking over your shoulder, thinking “where am I going next?”’

FIFPro represents 60,000 footballers across all continents and their report is the largest data collection about footballers’ working conditions ever produced. This third tier of footballers equates to around 45,000 players, more than the average attendance at Chelsea’s Stamford Bridge or Juventus’s Allianz Stadium during the 2017/18 season.

An elite two per cent – the individuals we read or hear transfer stories about – earned above US\$720,000 net annually. This top tier is ‘formed by the global elite of players with superior talent and skill. They enjoy very good working conditions at the highest level and a very strong market position,’ the report said. This elite equates to approximately 1,200 players, slightly less than Morecambe FC’s average home crowd at the Globe Arena during the 2017/18 campaign or Finn Harps’s average home attendance in the League of Ireland the previous season.

The transfer market for those at the bottom is a world away from the razzmatazz of Sky Sports’s deadline-day coverage. Almost 30 per cent of those who were transferred for a fee were pressured into joining a club against their wishes or a club not of their choice.

When some footballers sign for a new club and hold aloft a scarf it might as well read, ‘I didn’t want to leave my last club’, ‘The best my agent could get,’ or ‘My twelfth club already!’ rather than the name of their new employer. Uncertainty is rife. One player I spoke to admitted that his main thought every day is about the instability of his job and that it sometimes gets him down. He often wonders why he can’t have, ‘A normal job where I know what I’m going to be doing next year, where I’m going to be living.’

Even the elite players are affected. In 2017, Tottenham Hotspur and France captain Hugo Lloris said, 'We know the transfer market is not an easy period for players, for their minds, for their preparations, too, for their bodies.'

I've been a sucker for transfer gossip since I was a kid. Ceefax, ClubCall, the tabloid back pages, Sky Sports News, the internet. But it was probably a camping trip as a teenager that ensured I never missed my daily fix of transfer tittle-tattle again. It was the days before the internet and social media, and some friends and I had just finished school and headed off with a tent, some supplies and little access to the outside world – and more importantly page 312 of Ceefax – for a few days. Upon my return, I was flabbergasted to learn that then Tottenham chairman Alan Sugar (no knighthood those days) had been successfully courting Jürgen Klinsmann on board his Monte Carlo yacht. Not only had Spurs lured the German striker in my absence, but they'd also landed Ilie Dumitrescu – a star for Romania at that summer's World Cup in the United States (US). These were exotic signings at the time and prompted Gordon Taylor, the chief executive of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), to claim that with the likes of Klinsmann and Dumitrescu in the English top flight there would be, 'Less emphasis on crash, bang, wallop and more on the passing style.'

My interest in the whole transfer business was probably sparked on Christmas Day 1987. At 3am I raced into our front sitting room, where we always decamped solely for the festive period, to survey my bounty. I was not disappointed. The perennial favourite Subbuteo, with Watford's Luther Blissett on the front, took centre stage but my eyes were drawn to another, lesser-known board game, Team Tactix, endorsed by the late Liverpool and England midfielder Emlyn Hughes. The box promised over £100m worth of top soccer players, featuring the 25 best-supported teams in British football. If it were nowadays, the £100m would only get you Kyle Walker and Raheem Sterling.

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The 275 player cards all included a value for each and what was called a Factix. Nottingham Forest's Gary (sic) Birtles (£350,000) had 'a way out dress sense' and was spotted by Brian Clough when 'the half time Bovril was better than he was.'

Manchester City's Mick McCarthy (£350,000) was apparently known as the 'quiet man' who 'couldn't stand people with bad manners.' Which might explain that whole business with Roy Keane. Watford's David Bardsley had earned a reputation as a compulsive changer of cars, which may have come in handy for his Hornets team-mate John McClelland who 'refused to learn to drive and walks everywhere.'

The Factix for Queens Park Rangers's £250,000-rated Wayne Feredey (sic) rather dubiously stated 'his time over 100m would have won him a medal at the 1980 Olympic Games'. Nicknames were a common filler, with 'snappy dresser' Jerry Murphy also known as Smurph to his Chelsea team-mates, while they dubbed Colin Lee (£200,000) Quincy after the TV doctor as 'he has a detailed knowledge of injuries'. Watford's Tony Coton (£300,000) earned the sobriquet Droopy as 'he resembles a shaggy dog', while fellow keeper John Lukic (£300,000) was apparently known as Bogdan at Arsenal due to his Yugoslav heritage.

But I had no interest in these Factix, just the values. The game was basically Monopoly with footballers, a precursor to Fantasy Football. You had 90 minutes to 'compile the best team in British soccer'. A bit like that transfer deadline day when the Abu Dhabi United Group bought Manchester City.

For months, possibly years, this was all I played, as the Subbuteo Club Edition gathered dust in my bedroom. It was analogous to my later fascination with the buying and selling of footballers – scanning the transfer gossip rather than match reports in the papers and online.

What struck me looking through these player cards over 30 years later is the abundance of footballers who'd made the jump from non-league or lower-league football to the top tiers

in England and Scotland and the dearth of overseas players. I can only find eight from outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, or less than three per cent, including Danes Jan Mølby, John Sivebæk and Jesper Olsen, Australian Craig Johnston, the Argentinian Ossie Ardiles, South African-born Mich D'Avray, Dutch international Johnny Metgod and Surinam-born Romeo Zondervan.

In contrast, the same 25 teams' starting line-ups last weekend, at the time of writing, included 122 overseas players – or just under 45 per cent. And that doesn't include eight current Premier League clubs, who mustn't have been among the 25 best-supported teams in Britain back in 1987.

To put that into perspective, a 2018 report by the CIES Football Observatory found that expatriates represent just over 21 per cent of footballers globally. Every one of these 122 players had left their home country for a new club, a new land, a new beginning. A total of 107 different foreign FIFA-affiliated nations had been represented in the Premier League between 1992 and the summer of 2018, while footballers from 111 nations outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland have played at least one Championship game since its inception in 2004.

To me, though, transfer gossip had always been just names, clubs and figures. Until recently. As the clock struck midnight, I made my nightly visit to the BBC website's transfer gossip page to get my fix. I usually spend about ten minutes reading the latest rumours and clicking through on links for some of the more attention-grabbing stories. I often wake up the following morning with a dozen tabs open on my phone's web browser, having fallen asleep halfway through a story about Papy Djilobodji, or Steve Bruce re-signing someone. I've done this nightly since the page's introduction in 2002, meaning I've wasted over a month of my life, at least, reading chitchat about the transfer market. A lot more, I'd estimate, considering how slowly the pages of its predecessor, Ceefax, took to rotate. Having satisfied myself that I was now

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up to date with the potential suitors for the latest Portuguese wonderkid I had never even seen play, I continued browsing the web. My Facebook timeline displayed a series of words from *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, a website that ‘defines neologisms for emotions that do not have a descriptive term’.

One of these newly coined words caught my eye. *Sonder*, it explained, ‘is the realisation that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own – populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness – an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you never knew existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.’

Essentially, everybody has a story. Arsène Wenger was correct. Every transfer is a story. But every transfer is about the human stories. I scrolled back to the BBC’s transfer gossip page and experienced a moment of *sonder*, I guess is the right word for it, thinking about that Portuguese wonderkid’s life. Did he really want to join Swansea City? Had he even heard of them? How would his parents feel about their 19-year-old son leaving for a new country, a new language, a new challenge? How did the story originate?

Like a lot of football fans and media, I had been guilty of forgetting the human aspect of a footballer’s life regarding transfers. I got the sudden realisation that these players I’d been reading about for years are each living a life as vivid and complex as my own – populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness. Rather than appear only once, as an extra reading the back pages of a tabloid or as a supporter in Row Z, I wanted to discover what the transfer market actually means to the life of a typical footballer.