

ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED COMEDIANS IN BRITAIN, IAN HAS BEEN PERFORMING STAND-UP FOR 20 YEARS, A REGULAR ON TV AND RADIO INCLUDING **MOCK THE WEEK** AND **FIGHTING TALK**. IAN IS A DIEHARD GOONER OF OVER 30 YEARS AND AIRS HIS VIEWS ON THE CLUB WITH **GOOD FRIENDS AT AN LAMBS ON THE TUESDAY CLUB** PODCAST. IAN WRITES FOR THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE EVERY MONTH.

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Wemberlee! Wemberlee!

The Champions League draw took place a few weeks ago and all 16 teams will be dreaming of the final at Wembley. So who are the runners and riders for this year's trophy?

Of the other British teams left in the draw, Manchester United have got a great forward line (sorry to remind you) but, sooner or later, they're going to go behind and not be able to come back. Celtic have done wonderfully well to get this far but, let's be realistic, their chances of winning are minimal at best. Also, if they do win it, Rod Stewart will try so much he'll be a dried up wrinkled old hack by mid-May. And no-one wants to see that.

As for us, we have a rather large German obstacle in our way in the

shape of Bayern Munich but I think they're beatable. It's they're one of the grandees of European Cup football but as Paul Weller said in a radio interview over Christmas, back catalogue counts for nothing and you're only as good as your last gig. Also, although it's assumed otherwise, there's actually very little statistical advantage to playing the first leg away from home for the boys, looking for the positives and I think to a certain extent, it takes the pressure off. We've come so close to knocking out one of the favourites in the past few seasons and it's time for us to step up. We know we can live with the big boys, and a little lack and a couple of decent refereeing decisions going our way can take us deep into the latter stages of the competition.



Of the rest, Dortmund qualified top from a very strong group so they can't be ignored. Schalke looked good when they came to The Emirates and I have a sneaky regard for Shakhtar Donetsk. Having said all that, I think it's unlikely that the winner will come from outside of Spain. Barcelona are of course brilliant and short of actually stealing his kit and tying him up in the dressing room, there doesn't seem to be any way to stop Lionel Messi scoring. And some of their other players are half decent as well.

As for Real Madrid, Cristiano Ronaldo is so in-demand that he's only considered the second best player in the world that he may well use that indignation to take Real Madrid all the way. Plus they have a manager who believes himself to be God's gift to humanity and who knows what he might conjure up (Messierius, not God).

We'll see. I predict that Barcelona fans will be celebrating again after the final at Wembley Stadium in May. Until they have to queue for two hours for a Tube after the game.



Rule Britannia!

When Arsène Wenger first came to these shores, there were a lot of comments along the lines of "who is this Frenchman?" and "what could he possibly know about the culture of English football?" Within a couple of years, he'd won the first of two doublets and it was blatantly obvious to even die-hard Tottenham fans that he understood English football very well indeed.

As time progressed and our team took on a more cosmopolitan feel, the comments changed. "This kid seems to win the English Premier League but most of the players are from France or Holland or further afield!" Not that I never cared but when one looked on the back of the programme at the national flag next to the names on the team sheet and saw the lack of St George Crosses, this was understandably true. But here we are, gone.

Fast forward 16 years and things have changed. There's a photo on the website of an esteemed manager signing four young English boys (and one Welshman) to new contracts: Jack Wilshere, Kieran Gibbs, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Carl Jenkinson and Aaron Ramsey represent the future



of our club and I'm sure Arsène Wenger appreciates the opportunity to do a bit of long-term planning.

I can't deny that I like having a core of Brits at our club. But before anyone accuses me of giving a bit UKID, I'm not advocating an all-British team.

Personally, I think a mix of cultures and language is ideal. I'd like to see a mix of British and, possibly, Spanish. But and to be fair, I'd like to see French fitness and German know-how and experience. Like the European Union but without the financial constraints.

Regrets. I've had a few

I try not to miss too many Arsenal matches. I've got a season ticket for The Emirates, I go to the odd away game and for most of the rest, you'll find me somewhere in front of a TV, but I missed the Newcastle game. I had a long standing radio commitment and I'm not keen to do that any more, only I don't go to that one. I think my reaction might have had something to do with it. But, 34 years on, it's hard to recall the details.

Well, I notice this is quite a short list and neither of the more recent examples.

There are a few games I've missed over the years. I had a reasonably well-paid gig in Yorkshire on the night of the Real Madrid game at Highbury. It was a gaffer's dream but I saw the highlights and it was a fantastic game that will live long in the memory. The money on the other hand, has long gone, multiplied by the bottomless pit that is my house we call family finances. I missed the Leeds home game when Thierry got four. That was also for a gig. It wasn't even a particularly nice one. I remember getting in the car afterwards, feeling that peculiar mixture of elation and lack of self-esteem. But only comedians after a tough gig can ever truly understand and, when I heard

the score, I felt slightly worse for having missed seeing the game. For the older readers, I missed Tottenham away when we won 5-0 and Liam Brady scored THAT goal. I got it up on YouTube. I used to go to all the games around that time so I can't be too far off in my opinion why I don't go to that one. I think my reaction might have had something to do with it. But, 34 years on, it's hard to recall the details.

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are for family reasons. Luckily my family understands my affliction and makes allowances. I missed Tottenham away when I could go to Paris for the Champions League final. As I told him at the time, "You'll never let us off this one. This may be the only Champions League final we ever play in."

It's almost certain he's forgotten me, although it's difficult to tell from the fuzzy silence that greets me when I pass him in the hall every day.

