

# THE LEAGUE DOESN'T LIE

BBC  
RADIO

5 live

THE

606

BOOK OF

FOOTBALL

FOREWORD BY  
ROBBIE SAVAGE

LISTS

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Acknowledgements

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## About the Book

*It's six minutes past six on match day. The nation's radios are switched on and the debate begins...*

In *The League Doesn't Lie*, the 606 team have selected the most debatable topics from the world of football, from best manager to most memorable penalty, and worst haircut ever to the ultimate England XI. Learn about the top ten football Tweeters. Jump on your 606 Soapbox about the best ever player. And hear about the show's angriest calls of all time!

With introductions from the 606 team for each topic, *The League Doesn't Lie* is the ultimate book of footballing trivia and opinion for Sunday League players and armchair referees alike.

# **THE LEAGUE DOESN'T LIE**

## **The 606 Book of Football Lists**

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## FOREWORD

Listening to **606** driving back from Bournemouth nearly 20 years ago in my dad's brown Cortina, after I'd scored for Crewe, remains one of my most cherished memories. It's part of the infrastructure of a footballing day: watch or play a game, jump in the car and tune in to Radio 5 live as you drive home dreaming about a cup of a tea and a hot dinner.

Sometimes I'd be screaming at the radio in disagreement, sometimes I'd laugh out loud and often I'd learn something new - and nothing's changed now I present it! It's an honour and a privilege to present the show, and each week a new debate sets us all off.

The beauty of **606** is that there is always a discussion to be had. Often with me it turns into an argument, but it does at least start as a discussion. I love the differing opinions of football fans up and down the country and I love how there are people out there, like me, who will just not back down!

Opinions drive the show and this book is packed full of them - 13 entertaining chapters, to be precise. There are issues that come up for debate on **606** time and time again and we've touched on many of them in here: referees, international managers, best ever players... there's plenty to choose from.

We talk a lot about being the best in *The League Doesn't Lie* - the best ever manager, the best player ever. Everyone has their own opinion on what makes someone the best, but for me it's talent combined with hard work. There's no point having just one or the other - to be the best, you need to have and want to utilise both.

The best ever manager I played for was Martin O'Neill. He was as honest as they come. His man management was

second to none and I would have run all day for him. He took me aside once when I was having a hard time. I wasn't the most technically gifted player, nor the most talented, but I had a big heart and I worked hard. He asked me what I would rather have, all the ability in the world with no effort, heart or desire, or to be me? That has stayed with me ever since.

I could debate the greats all night, but the best player ever for me was Maradona. I never tired of watching him but it was in Mexico 1986 he entranced me, and the rest of the world, with his skill, flair and passion. As well as being the best player in the tournament, the Argentine won the Golden Ball scoring five goals in Mexico but it was his second against England, which, for me was the best goal in football ever. He then led Napoli to their only two Championships in Serie A. He was as talented as they come, and as passionate as they come, and he led teams. He inspired them. And that for me, makes him the best ever.

One of my favourite lists in *The League Doesn't Lie* is the 'Best Chants'. Football humour is second to none. We often sat in the dressing room and laughed about chants we had heard during matches. Because of my good looks and finely groomed long blond hair, away fans often chanted to me, 'Where's your caravan? Where's your caravan?' My reply was always, 'In Monaco, next to my boat.'

I'm pleased to see I made some of the lists - although worst-dressed players and most divisive pundits weren't really where I was hoping to pop up. Had I had it my way there'd have been some top hair, top tan, top teeth in football lists, but also a top passion list. Despite my reputation, I'm proud of what I have achieved in my career and the fact that I've played at the highest level is something not everyone can say.

Now I'm working in the media, I feel really lucky to visit new grounds and watch games from different viewpoints.

My favourite commentary position is in the Etihad. I'll be honest and say that while I love the press box with its perfect vantage point and good seating, the most impressive thing at the Etihad is the food. It's amazing and the pies at half time are second to none, and even beat those at Wigan.

And in terms of commentary positions, I now have a fear of Villa Park. For that I'm blaming the Villa captain and legend Stilyan Petrov. He managed to whack me in the nose during one of my first commentary games for 5 live with Darren Fletcher. To this day, I can't say for certain that it was an accident on his part, but I do have to say - good shot, sir!

Everyone sees things through different eyes and your personal experiences shape those opinions. I know some of you will already be disagreeing with my best manager and best ever player choices and that is why I love **606**, and the premise behind this book. We've all got our own opinions and our own reasons for them. It's purely opinion-led, and all I ask is that you embrace the often-inflammatory subject matter you'll encounter in the next few pages. If you don't, give me a call on **606** and we'll reignite the debate. I'll be ready for you.

I hope you enjoy the book and look forward to carrying on the debate soon on the UK's biggest football phone-in - **606**.

**Robbie Savage**

# PLAYERS

## **Best ever players**

THE ETERNAL ARGUMENT – who is the best player ever? Apart from yourself, of course. This argument has raged in pubs and homes since time immemorial. There are leading contenders for the prize and, in 606's mind, they are the following people.

### **10. Ronaldo**

The Brazilian goal-scorer played for, most notably, Real Madrid, as well as Barcelona, Inter Milan and AC Milan, and wherever he was he scored goals! During the 2006 World Cup, he became the highest goal-scorer in the tournament's history with 15 goals.

### **9. Franz Beckenbauer**

The ex-Germany and Bayern Munich player is seen as one of the greatest ever defenders, and rightly so. He basically invented the attacking sweeper role, but there was no question that this defender should be allowed to push into the opposition half, because his skill and steel have rarely been employed to such effect.

### **8. Zico**

Brazilian Zico is one of the best dribblers and finishers to have ever graced a football pitch and was up there with the best players in the world in the early 1980s. The former Flamengo playmaker was also known for his curling free kicks. After retiring, he was appointed Brazilian Sports Minister.



## **7. Marco Van Basten**

The former Ajax and AC Milan striker won the FIFA World Player of the Year in 1992 and was one of the greatest Dutch players ever.

## **6. George Best**

George Best was best known for his time at Manchester United, where he played 470 times and scored 179 goals. He also played 37 times for his country, Northern Ireland, scoring nine goals. His lifestyle and popularity made him more of a pop star than a footballer but his skill alone puts him in our list. He is famous for his quote 'I spent a lot of money on booze, birds and fast cars. The rest I just squandered.' He helped Manchester United win the First Division title in 1965 and 1967; he also won the European Cup with them in 1968. His role in that tournament gave him the title of European Footballer of the Year.

## **5. Johan Cruyff**

Former Ajax, Barcelona and Netherlands international forward, who was voted European Player of the Century in 1999. His memorable drawback of the ball with the inside of his feet is now standard practice known as the Cruyff Turn. At the time, it was awe-inspiring.

## **4. Zinedine Zidane**

Former French, Real Madrid and Juventus midfielder Zidane won numerous awards such as Ballon d'Or 1998 and World Player of the Year three times.

## **3. Lionel Messi**

Still in his early 20s, Lionel Messi has broken many records and is still setting new ones. He is the all-time top scorer for Barcelona in one season, scoring an incredible 72 goals

in all competitions. His playing nature has people comparing him to Diego Maradona, but many think he is better. The jury is still out but if we rewrite this book in ten years' time, we'll expect to see him at number one.

## **2. Diego Maradona**

The former Napoli and Barcelona Argentinian attacking midfielder steered the then trophy-less Napoli to an incredible two League titles and a UEFA Cup. He also played in four World Cup Finals for Argentina (1982, 1986, 1990 and 1994), winning one of them.

## **1. Pelé**

The former Santos, New York Cosmos and Brazil forward has a goal-scoring record ratio that will not be beaten for quite some time. 'I was born for soccer, just as Beethoven was born for music.' We just can't disagree.

## #Best Tweeters

TECHNOLOGY HAS ALLOWED the space between player and fan to considerably shorten. You still won't get within a hundred yards of your footballing heroes, but at least Twitter allows you to see the football brain at full throttle, filled with imagination, tolerance and great insight. Here are ten of the best examples.

### **10. Robin Van Persie @Persie\_Official**

An essential follow. Van Persie hosts Twitter quizzes and tweets pictures of a sleeping Theo Walcott and other behind-the-scenes photos.

### **9. Michael Owen @themichaelowen**

'About to embark on the biggest challenge of my life'  
Michael Owen is a notoriously mundane tweeter, tweeting about horses and hair products and keeping the bench warm. He even tweeted about starting a 1,000-piece jigsaw. It's good to know he's keeping busy.

### **8. Jack Wilshere @jackwilshere**

'Inconsistent refereeing needs to stop. It's killing the game. If Diaby is sent off, what's the difference between that and Kevin Nolan's challenge on our keeper!?? #Joke'

Arsenal midfielder Jack Wilshere tweets on a range of topics from Britain's Got Talent to family life and, of course, football. The above tweet nearly landed the midfielder in a spot of trouble after criticising referee Phil Dowd for sending off teammate Abou Diaby in the 4-4 draw with Newcastle.

## **7. Robbie Savage @Robbiesavage8**

Where do you begin? The constant filling of our timelines or the numerous 'wars' he has had with Rio Ferdinand, Darren Gough or Stan Collymore. No day is complete without a tweet from Sav. The ET picture he sent to Rio Ferdinand still makes us chuckle.

## **6. Rio Ferdinand @rioferdy5**

Rio Ferdinand has sent some classic tweets in his time, but some highlights have been the insulting 'lookalike' pictures he sends to Robbie Savage. Favourites include an Afghan hound, Ja Ja Binks and Worzel Gummidge.

## **5. Joey Barton @joey7Barton**

'TOWIE firm don't mess with big boys, u and ur shallow, fake, pretentious lifestyles. In a year u'll be opening sh\*\*\*y poundshops if ur lucky.'

Was Joey 'well jel' of *The Only Way Is Essex*? Probably not. But he is known for losing his cool on the pitch and started a war with the TOWIE cast in November 2011.

## **4. Ryan Babel @RyanBabel**

'And they call him one of the best referees? That's a joke. SMH'

After Liverpool felt they were unfairly treated in a game against Man Utd, Babel decided to do a bit of colouring in and post a picture of the referee Howard Webb in a Manchester United top on his Twitter feed. That cost Babel a cool £10,000.

## **3. Carlton Cole**

'Immigration has surrounded the Wembley premises! I knew it was a trap! Hahahaha. The only way to get out

safely is to wear an England jersey and paint your face w/ the St George's flag!'

England were playing Ghana at Wembley and Cole decided to tweet what he thought was a joke... He later deleted the tweet but not before the FA had spotted it and fined him £20,000 for improper conduct.

## **2. Wayne Rooney @waynerooney**

'Hi all there's my head. It will take a few months to grow. Still a bit bloody too. But that's all normal. #hairwego.'

In June 2011, Wayne Rooney tweeted confirmation that he had had a hair transplant.

## **1. Darren Bent @darrenbent**

'Do I wanna go to Hull City. No. Do I wanna go to Stoke. No. Do I wanna go to Sunderland. Yes. So stop \*\*\*\*\* around Levy'

In July 2009, Spurs striker Darren Bent took to Twitter to have a swipe at Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy.

## **Iconic centre-halves**

THEY ARE THE rock of the team, the wall, the insurmountable barrier that forwards have to pit their wits against every week. They are also surprisingly skilful, and their commitment to the cause can often rally the team and turn its fortunes around. No wonder that the ten named below are amongst the most loved by their respective fans.

### **10. Nemanja Vidic**

The Serbian has built a reputation as a no-nonsense defender in an imperious spell at Manchester United. He moved to Old Trafford in 2006 from Spartak Moscow for a fee of around £7m, and has won the Premier League in each of his first three full seasons with the club (2006/7, 2007/8 and 2008/9). He lifted the Champions League trophy in 2008 and was named as United's fulltime captain at the start of the 2010/11 season. Unusually for a defender, he has received personal accolades as well, being named Player of the Year twice (in 2008/9 and 2010/11) and the PFA Players' Player of the Year in 2008/9. He captained his country before retiring in 2011, and was part of the famed defence that conceded just one goal in 10 World Cup 2006 qualifying games.

### **9. Alessandro Nesta**

The Italian centre-back was seen as the natural successor to Franco Baresi and enjoyed a hugely decorated career. He played for almost ten years with Lazio, in which time he won the Serie A title once and the Coppa Italia twice. With his beloved Lazio in financial turmoil, he moved to Milan in 2002 for a huge fee of €31m, where he went on to win two

more Serie A titles, two Champions League medals and another Coppa Italia. Nesta won 78 caps for his country, and the pinnacle of his international career came in 2006 when Italy lifted the World Cup. He was named Serie A Defender of the Year four years in a row from 2000 to 2003.

## **8. Fabio Cannavaro**

Nicknamed 'Muro di Berlino' ('Berlin Wall') by Italian supporters, Cannavaro is a perfect example of a centre-half making the most of what he has. His diminutive stature (he stands at 5'9") did not stop him being named FIFA World Player of the Year in 2006, the year that he captained his country to World Cup victory. He played for a host of Italian clubs, including Napoli, Parma, Inter and Juventus before making a move to Spain in 2006 to play under Fabio Capello at Real Madrid. He won his first League title in the 2006/7 season, quickly followed by his second La Liga in 2008. Cannavaro moved back to Juventus for a single season in 2009/10 before finishing his career in Dubai with Al-Ahli.

## **7. Franco Baresi**

Affectionately known as Piscinin ('little one'), Baresi is commonly mentioned as the finest defender of all time, and played only for Italian giants AC Milan during a 20-year career. The sweeper was initially rejected by Milan's rivals Inter but went on to play over 700 games for the Rossonneri. He won six Serie A League titles and three European Cups (although he was suspended for the 1994 final). He is famous for being part of one of the hardest defences in European club history, lining up alongside Paolo Maldini, Alessandro Costacurta and Mauro Tassotti. Baresi's famous number 6 jersey was retired in his honour by AC Milan after the defender hung up his boots in 1997. His international career was less successful, as he was



often overlooked by Italian coach Enzo Bearzot in favour of Juventus' defensive trio of Cabrini, Gentile and Scirea. He was part of the World Cup-winning squad in 1982, but did not play as he was understudy to Gaetano Scirea.

## **6. Carles Puyol**

A Barcelona and Spain legend who has won every major honour going, Puyol has been the gritty and determined worker in consecutive teams full of artists. Puyol made his first-team debut for Barca in 1999 under Louis van Gaal and has since gone on to win 18 major trophies for the club (most notably five La Ligas and three Champions League titles), captaining the Catalans since 2004. He has also enjoyed huge success with the Spanish national team, winning Euro 2008 and the World Cup in 2010. Spanish fans will surely never forget his bullet diving header that won the World Cup semi-final against Germany.

## **5. Jaap Stam**

The huge Dutchman only played three seasons at Manchester United, but will be best remembered as the heart of the defence that won the famous treble in 1999. He was the most expensive defender in history when United paid PSV Eindhoven £10.6m for his services in 1998. United won the League title in each of Stam's three seasons at the club, as well as winning the FA Cup and Champions League in 1999. After Stam made controversial comments in his autobiography, Alex Ferguson decided to sell the Dutch stopper to Lazio for £16.5m and replaced him with the ageing Laurent Blanc. Ferguson admitted that 'in playing terms, it was a mistake.' Stam went on to play for Milan, before finishing his career at Ajax in his native Holland.

#### **4. Marcel Desailly**

Born in Ghana but raised in France, Desailly struck an imposing figure on the football pitch. He started his professional career in the late 1980s as a product of the famed FC Nantes youth programme, and played alongside a young Didier Deschamps. He later reunited with Deschamps at Marseille, where he won the Champions League in 1993, which earned him a big-money move to Italian giants AC Milan. While at Milan, he won two League titles and the Champions League for the second year running in 1994, scoring in the famous 4-0 demolition of Barcelona. With the national team, Desailly was an important part of the 1998 World Cup-winning side, in spite of being sent off in the final. He also was an integral part of the French side that won Euro 2000, and was named captain of his country after the tournament. Desailly moved to Chelsea in 1998, where he captained the side before moving on to finish his career in Qatar.

#### **3. Tony Adams**

A one-team man who played for Arsenal for nearly 20 years, Adams enjoyed huge success throughout a turbulent career. He won four League titles, three FA Cups, two League Cups and a UEFA Cup Winners' Cup trophy under various managers. Adams was made captain of Arsenal at the age of just 21 and went on to captain the side for 14 years until his retirement in 2002. He was well known for being part of the well-disciplined Arsenal defence under George Graham who would use the offside trap to great effect, alongside Lee Dixon, Nigel Winterburn and Steve Bould. His uncharacteristic last-minute spurt of energy and superb left-footed strike capped a 4-0 win against Everton in 1998, which sealed the Premier League title of that year. 'Mr Arsenal' will forever be remembered as a no-nonsense defender by the Gunners faithful.

## **2. Franz Beckenbauer**

'Der Kaiser' is generally regarded as the greatest German footballer of all time and, thanks to his playing style and comfort with the ball, is often credited with having invented the role of the modern sweeper. He played 103 times for his country, and played in three successive World Cup tournaments. In 1966, he lost in the final to England but his performance in the 1970 semi-final will go down in footballing folklore. He played some of the match against Italy with his arm in a sling after fracturing his clavicle. West Germany went on to lose 'the Game of the Century' 4-3 after extra time. Beckenbauer was the first captain to lift the new FIFA World Cup Trophy in 1974 after leading his side to victory over the 'total football' of Johan Cruyff's Holland. This meant that West Germany became the first national team to hold both the Euro and World Cup titles simultaneously (after West Germany had won Euro 1972). He played over 400 games for Bayern Munich and also turned out for the New York Cosmos and Hamburg. Beckenbauer went on to manage West Germany in their 1990 World Cup triumph, becoming the first man to have won the trophy as captain and as a coach. He also managed Marseille to the Ligue 1 title and Bayern Munich to the Bundesliga.

## **1. Bobby Moore**

Perhaps the most iconic English defender of all time, Moore was England's World Cup-winning captain and was regarded as one of the gentlemen of his era. Moore captained West Ham for more than ten years, making well over 500 appearances for his first club. He lifted the FA Cup in 1964 and the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup in 1965. Pelé (who Moore called 'the most complete player I've ever played against') described Moore thus:

‘He defended like a lord, he would take the ball always hard, always fair.

He was a gentleman and an incredible footballer.’  
The photo of Moore and Pelé swapping shirts after a World Cup match in 1970 is largely thought of as one of the most iconic sporting images of all time.

Moore’s life was tragically cut short by bowel cancer in 1993, and the Bobby Moore Fund was set up in his honour to raise money for sufferers of the disease. West Ham have retired the number 6 shirt that Moore donned throughout his career and there is a statue of him outside the new Wembley stadium.

## **Best foreign import**

THEY DO THINGS differently over there, don't they? But they still produce amazing players. As money poured into the game, clubs could suddenly afford to widen their horizons and trawl the world for great talent. Here are ten players who've had an amazing impact on modern football.

### **10. Dwight Yorke**

With the most recognisable smile in football, the Trinidad and Tobago striker lit up the Premier League with Aston Villa before going on to win numerous honours at Manchester United, forming a lethal striker partnership with Andrew Cole.

### **9. David Ginola**

Ginola arrived in England in 1995, signing for Newcastle United, and was an immediate hit among the Geordie supporters. He left the North East for North London in 1997 and later won the League Cup for Spurs, as well as being named PFA Players' Player of the Year and FWA Footballer of the Year in 1999. His great looks and charm simply added to his allure.

### **8. Paolo Di Canio**

The eccentric Italian's best days came at Upton Park, and his name is still chanted around the ground. As well as producing magical moments, Di Canio was never far from controversial incidents, including his push on referee Paul Alcock in 1998, for which he received an 11-match ban.

## **7. Patrick Viera**

At Arsenal, Viera won three Premier League titles, captained the 'Invincible' squad that went the whole League campaign unbeaten, and lifted the FA Cup four times.

## **6. Peter Schmeichel**

The Great Dane was a formidable presence between the sticks for Manchester United and is still regarded as the finest keeper to play in the Premier League. Ferguson always claimed that Schmeichel was worth an extra ten points a season to United.

## **5. Gianfranco Zola**

The Little Italian is adored by fans up and down the country for his brilliance but nowhere more so than at Chelsea, where he spent five glorious years. His legacy was secured when he was voted Chelsea's greatest ever player and the number 25 shirt was retired in his honour.

## **4. Dennis Bergkamp**

The ice-cool Dutchman was signed to Arsenal in 1995 by Bruce Rioch from Inter Milan. He instantly struck up a partnership with Ian Wright and, when Arsène Wenger joined the club in 1996, Bergkamp hit the form that keeps him a legend in Arsenal and Premier League fans' eyes to this day. In the 2005/6 season Arsenal honoured him with a special 'Dennis Bergkamp Day' in their League encounter against West Brom, in which he appropriately scored.

## **3. Cristiano Ronaldo**

He will undoubtedly go down as one of the greatest players of all time. Signed as a gangly teenager from Sporting Lisbon in 2003, the Portuguese winger emerged as a

pivotal member of Manchester United's team. He enjoyed his most prolific season in 2007/8, scoring 42 goals in 49 matches as United won the Premier League title and the UEFA Champions League. He was voted World and European Footballer of the Year after that campaign.

## **2. Thierry Henry**

After a poor season in Italy for Juventus, Henry was rescued by his former boss Arsène Wenger for a fee of around £11 million. Initially playing as a winger, Henry grew to become the League's most clinical forward, going on to become the club's record all time goal-scorer. The knee-high socks, gloves and colourful boots were as elaborate as his dazzling goals for the Gunners. Henry had charisma and character, and led from the front.

## **1. Eric Cantona**

The charismatic Frenchman enjoyed a triumphant time at Manchester United. Eric Cantona was quite simply the biggest enigma to play in the Premier League. In his day he was unplayable: he would produce sublime examples of skill, and he always possessed the confidence to perform on the big stage. At 30 years of age, Cantona decided to call time on his career, going out at the top. Cantona is still a legend at Old Trafford, and his name can often be heard ringing round the Stretford End.



# **Best partnerships in football**

THEY SAY LOVE and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. But what about in more important areas of life such as the football field – what partnerships have really shone there? Here are ten couples forever bound by their mutual ability to really work at the relationship and never take each other for granted...

## **10. Alfredo Di Stéfano and Ferenc Puskás (Real Madrid)**

Two absolute greats in the history of the game, they were part of the original Galacticos at Real Madrid, in a period when the club won five consecutive European Cups. The pair came together when Hungarian Puskás was signed for Madrid in 1958 after a two-year UEFA ban. He was 31 by then, but was still as bright and adept as ever, grabbing four hat-tricks in his first season in La Liga. In their time together, the pair shared a remarkable goal-scoring record in all competitions. Puskás scored 211 goals in 216 appearances, with Di Stéfano grabbing 147 goals in 212 games. Together at Madrid, they won the European Cup twice (with Puskás scoring seven in the two finals), La Liga four times in a row between 1961 and 1964, the Intercontinental Cup and the Spanish Cup.

Fans of Los Blancos will forever remember the final of their fifth consecutive European Cup triumph in 1960. Madrid hammered Eintracht Frankfurt 7-3 in an incredible match at Hampden Park. Puskás scored four goals, Di Stéfano three.

## **9. Xavi Hernández and Andrés Iniesta (Barcelona)**