

Bienvenue Monsieur Zidane



PHOTO: STAR FILE

THE TALISMAN AT HIS BEST: Zinedine Zidane is about to fire home an unstoppable left foot volley for Real Madrid against Bayer Leverkusen in the final of the Champions League in 2002 in Hampden in Scotland.

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

On the evening of May 15, 2002 in the Scottish city of Glasgow, an unassuming Frenchman in the all-whites of the team of the century unleashed a left foot ballistic missile that thumped into the back of the net. The goal, since recognised as one of the best ever scored in the history of the Champions League was carved out by a man who will in the generations to come be spoken of in the same breath to that of legends like Pele and Maradona. And that goal to settle a scrappy encounter in Hampden only further served to enhance the fact as to why Zinedine Yazid Zidane is quite possibly the most gifted and famous footballer of his generation.

But that goal is hardly the be-all and end-all of Zinedine Zidane. For

in a career littered with spotlights, the man of Kabyle ethnicity and son of Algerian immigrants did more than most even dare to dream of.

So, where to begin? Do you start with his irrefutable impact on two different World Cup finals? Or do you start with saying how Zidane's appeal transcends the religious and racial divide in one of the most tense multi-ethnic societies in Europe? Do you start by speaking of his undeniable brilliance or his fatal character flaw for which he is both loved and loathed?

In the end it's only fitting to start at the beginning and how all this could so nearly not have been.

Born into what is known in France as a quartier difficile or, a sensitive zone, the backstreets of the notorious La Castellane in Marseilles is where Zidane learnt his trade and inimitable football

skills that would later enchant the world. La Castellane is also what he most identifies himself with, as in a subsequent interview Zidane spoke of how he was first and foremost "a Kabyle from La Castellane."

As a kid plying his trade in the youth teams of US Saint-Henri and Septemes Sports Olympiques, Zidane dreamed of pulling on the kits of Olympique Marseille, but it was with AS Cannes that he got his first chance, after the Marseille academy famously rejected him for being 'too slow and fragile.'

And to complete the enigmatic streak in his characteristic, playing for his hometown club was a dream that Zidane would never go on to realise.

His stay at Cannes was supposed to be for four-weeks but he ended up staying for four years before swapping to ironically, Marseille's big rivals, Girondins de Bordeaux in 1992.

At Bordeaux he met Christoph Dugarry and Bixente Lizarazu and they along with the fair-haired Emanuele Petit would go on to form a partnership on and off the field that led them to being dubbed the "Four Musketeers." It was also at Bordeaux that coach Roland Courbis gave Zidane the nickname of "Zi Zou" -- a name that sticks with him to this day.

All four were to later form the backbone of the team that went on to win the World Cup in 1998, courtesy of two headed goals in the final from Zidane himself.

But before that Zidane first caught the eye when he inspired Bordeaux into the final of the UEFA Cup in 1996 where they lost to Bayern Munich.

His exploits were enough to

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PERSONAL INFORMATION

Full name: Zinedine Yazid Zidane
Date of birth: June 23, 1972 (age 34)
Place of birth: Marseille, France
Height: 1.85 m (6'1")
Nickname: Zizou, ZZ, Yaz
Position: Attacking midfielder

NUMBERS SPORTED

5 (Real Madrid)
21 (Juventus FC)
10 (France)

PROFESSIONAL CLUBS *

Years	Club	Apps	(goals)
1988-1992	AS Cannes	61	(6)
1992-1996	Girondins de Bordeaux	139	(28)
1996-2001	Juventus FC	191	(28)
2001-2006	Real Madrid	155	(34)
National team			
1994-2006	France	108	(31)

* Appearances and goals are exclusive of Champions League games.

ZZ touches down in Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER

Living football legend Zinedine Zidane arrived in Dhaka last night for a brief three-day stay. The Frenchman was given a warm but simple welcome on his arrival at the Zia International Airport.

Secretary for Youth and Sports Sirajul Islam received him after Zidane, clad in jeans, white t-shirt and black jacket, descended from a Singapore Airlines flight at 10.30pm. Bangladesh Football Federation general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal and Grameen officials were also present.

Zidane will make a public appearance at the Bangabandhu National Stadium this afternoon. A brand ambassador of Danone Foods, he will visit the head office of Grameen Bank this morning. He will inaugurate the plant of Grameen Danone Foods and is expected to make a cutesy call on President and Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government Prof Iajuddin Ahmed tomorrow.

A World Cup winner in 1998 and thrice World Footballer of the Year, Zidane will depart Dhaka tomorrow evening.

KUMAR V SANATH CCL final today

SPORTS REPORTER

It would be nothing special for Sanath Jayasuriya to play against his young countryman Kumar Sangakkara when his team Acme Laboratories face off with defending champions Beximco in the final of the GrameenPhone Corporate Cricket League (CCL) at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium today.

The 37-year-old dashing left-hander, a veteran of 105 Tests and 370 ODIs, arrived in Dhaka yesterday to play for Acme who are desperate to dethrone their corporate rivals.

"So far we played against each other in different clubs in Sri Lanka, so this is nothing new for us. I think it is not a big issue because my main objective is to contribute something for my team to clinch the title," said Jayasuriya when he was asked whether it was special for him to face Sangakkara who

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Dhaka gears up for legend

AL MUSABBIR SADI

Due to his sublime skills, Zinedine Zidane has often been referred to as a footballer from a different planet. People had a glimpse of what he could do with a ball for the last time when he single-handedly mesmerised the Brazilians in the quarterfinal of the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

He was inspirational in the semifinal and also scored an equaliser in the final against Italy but his last act of the game was not the manoeuvres of his magical feet, rather his once celebrated head (ask Brazil) that turned villainous.

The 34-year-old of Algerian origin, who learned the tricks of the trade in the roads of Marseilles, came close to settle the fate of the final with a powerful header but for an equally brilliant save by

Gianluigi Buffon. Eight years ago, two-headed goals by the same man had broken the hearts of the Brazilians in Paris but the enigmatic Frenchman, in the end, made headlines for all the wrong reasons when he head-butted Italian defender Marco Materazzi and took a sad exit from Berlin and the game itself.

The arguments went on and the incident was also the talk of the football crazy Bangladeshis for months. Only a handful took Zidane as a villain but for the majority, he remained graceful even in defeat.

And his arrival in Dhaka for a brief visit has created enough enthusiasm, and the idea that he will really kick the ball, much expectation, although late, among the people of all ages.

"For the first few days, I could not believe Zidane is really coming.

Now as I realise that he will be here, the thought of seeing him with my own eyes is giving me goose bumps," said Shahriar, a student of Dhaka University. "I am a fan of his skills and I want to watch them with my own eyes."

To see Zidane, people made call after calls to the football federation yesterday to know where they would find tickets. The federation is expecting a big crowd to welcome one of the greats in the line of Pele and Maradona.

A football fan wanted to give Tk 1,00,000 to the federation to have a photograph with Zidane and have it signed by the legend. A businessman had offered Tk 20,00,000 to have Zidane wear a 'lungi' (local dress) of his business-house.

National captain Habibul

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PHOTO: STAR

Former Sri Lanka captain Sanath Jayasuriya (R) leaves the vehicle on his arrival at the Acme Tower in the city's Kallanpur area yesterday.

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