



Man Utd the only loser in Lukaku's 'win-win' Inter transfer

The Belgian felt leaving Old Trafford was best for everyone involved but the Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is now counting the cost of the striker's departure

Last March, Romelu Lukaku went to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's office and told the Manchester United boss that he felt it would be best for both parties if he left at the end of the season.

"I wasn't performing and I wasn't playing," the striker later explained.

With Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial ahead of him in the pecking order, and Mason Greenwood just breaking into the first team, Lukaku felt that his exit would be a "win-win situation" for everyone involved.

Just under a year later, Lukaku has undeniably benefited from his departure. The same cannot be said of United, though. Greenwood may have since confirmed his potential as one of the most promising players to have emerged out of United's academy in years but Rashford is presently out injured and Martial is struggling terribly in his absence.

Lukaku, by complete contrast, has been reborn at Inter, for whom he has netted 20 times in 29 outings since joining for £75 million (\$98m) last summer. United are now counting the cost of failing to replace the 26-year-old. As former Red Devils midfielder Paul Ince recently told Paddy Power, "If Ole wasn't already regretting letting Lukaku go, he seriously will be now."

"I'll be the first to admit that I had a go at him at times, and he can't retain the ball, but you do get 20-25 goals a season from him."

Lukaku hit 27 in his first season at Old Trafford, in 2017-18, but, as he acknowledged himself, his form tailed off dramatically last term. The former Chelsea attacker may have played a pivotal role in Solskjaer's successful spell as caretaker coach, netting twice in the dramatic Champions League win over Paris Saint-Germain at the Parc des Princes, but it is worth noting that he didn't score a single goal after the Norwegian was confirmed as United's permanent boss at the end of March. Just six starts followed that famous night in the French capital. Essentially, once Solskjaer got his feet under the table, he started looking to the future - and Lukaku didn't feature in it. Lukaku may still have his flaws and he continues to be nagged by allegations of being a flat-track bully but he has undoubtedly improved since leaving Old Trafford.

So, while Lukaku may not have taken that bet, he did take plenty away from playing alongside a man he describes as "a great champion and professional".

He has no regrets over telling Solskjaer last March he wanted to leave United. One wonders, though, if Solskjaer regrets letting him go.



Ronaldo is too old for us' - Bayern Munich would snub move for Juventus ace

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner may be one of the game's modern greats, but the German champions would never try to lure him away from Turin

Bayern Munich have moved to pour cold water on any move for Juventus attacker Cristiano Ronaldo.

There have been tentative rumours suggesting that they could make a move for the 35-year-old Portugal star, strangely fuelled by the fact that a car given to him for his birthday earlier this week was last registered in the Upper Bavarian district of Pfaffenhofen.

He is not, however, a target who will be moving to the Bavarian giants, according to president Herbert Hainer, who emphatically denied such rumours.

"Of course there are many names linked with us in the press," he told TZ. "But Ronaldo is a bit too old for us."

While the media focused on transfer stories, Bayern are more concentrated on extending their lead at the summit of the Bundesliga, which they have the opportunity to do on Sunday when they play host to RB Leipzig in a top-of-the-table encounter.

Ronaldo, meanwhile, will be seeking to help

Juve cement their place atop Serie A, in which they have a three-point advantage over Inter.

The Turin giants travel to play Verona on Sunday, with Ronaldo in his best form since arriving in Italy from Real Madrid in the summer of 2018. His tally for the season stands at 19 goals in 19 matches, but he has scored in each of his last nine top-flight outings, dating back to Sassuolo on December 1.

Ronaldo is regarded as one of the finest players of the modern era and has been especially impressive due to the fact that he has retained such a consistent level of brilliance so deep into his career.

He boasts five Ballon d'Or titles and has an array of individual records to his name, most notably Real Madrid's top all-time scorer.

He has won a formidable number of trophies, including the Champions League on five occasions, domestic titles in England, Spain and Italy, while he also played a starring role as Portugal claimed their first major international silverware by winning Euro 2016 in France. Such is the high regard he is held in his hometown of Funchal, the local airport has been named after him.



Iranian teams select neutral venues to host Saudi Arabian rivals

Iranian popular club Persepolis has chosen Dubai, the UAE as the neutral venue to host Saudi Arabian team Al Taawoun at the group stage of the 2020 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Champions League.

The Saudi Arabian side has already chosen Al Kuwait Sports Club Stadium in Kuwait City.

Persepolis's Head of International Relations, Amir Ali Hosseini, said: "Persepolis club have selected Zabeel Stadium to host the Saudi Arabia representative and we have announced it to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC)."

Zabeel Stadium is in Dubai, United Arab Emirates and it is the official home pitch for the UAE League side Al Wasl.

Persepolis has also announced that the match against Al Taawoun which will be their first home match (at a neutral venue in Dubai).

Sepahan, the other representative of Iran in 2020 AFC Champions League, has selected Doha, Qatar to host Al Nassr from Saudi Arabia. The Isfahan-based club selected Grand Hamad Stadium, the current home ground of the Al-Arabi team in Duha. The Stadium holds 13000 people.

Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro are also other Iranian teams in the AFC Champions League who have yet to announce neutral zones to host their Saudi Arabian opponents.



Blazevic says 'sure' about Skocic's good results in Team Melli

Former coach of Iran and Croatia national football teams Miroslav Blazevic said that Dragan Skocic will achieve success in his career in Team Melli. Speaking to Dnevnik on Friday, the 84-year-old Blazevic said he is sure Skocic will achieve good results in Team Melli. Skocic has had a hard path to reach here, he said.

He went on to talk about his 'wonderful' memories in Iran, noting "The first match on the Iranian bench was attended by 110,000 people in the stadium and another 30,000 outside."

He parted ways with Team Melli after the team failed to book a place in the 2002 World Cup.

Iran football federation named on Thursday Croatian Dragan Skocic as the new manager national football team. The team lacked a coach for more than two months after Marc Wilmots terminated the contract with the federation. Iran has four must-win games ahead in the 2022 World qualifiers against Hong Kong, Cambodia, Bahrain and Iraq.

Dragan Skocic is the fifth Croat in the role of Iran's leader, after Stanko Poklepovic, Tomislav Ivic, Miroslav Blazevic, and Branko Ivankovic.

Team Melli will host Hong Kong on March 26 in Tehran and face off Cambodia five days later in an away match in the 2022 FIFA World Cup qualification.