



## The problem with Pjanic

Football-Italia - "If you ask my opinion, I'd like to see Miralem Pjanic touch the ball 150 times per game," Juventus boss Maurizio Sarri famously declared at his official unveiling 11 months ago, resisting a possible reunion with Chelsea and Napoli protégé Jorginho. Eleven months later, however, and the Bosnian is facing an existential crisis in Turin. Despite his struggles adapting to 'Sarrball', Pjanic has no shortage of suitors and Juve don't seem to mind.

Pjanic and Sarri felt like a match made in heaven. The former Roma star was one of Max Allegri's most trusted lieutenants, yet never enjoyed continuity in a fixed position. With the tactician regularly switching between formations, the 30-year-old was the first to be shunted around. That all changed when Allegri's successor arrived from Chelsea, vowing to entrust Pjanic with the keys to the Old Lady's midfield as its deep-lying playmaker.

"My teammates always look for me and I like that," he said of his new role. "Playing under Allegri was completely different, we immediately looked to get the ball wide. Now it's different. In the last few games I've tried more forward passes, but it all depends on what the coach asks of me. I want to get to 150 touches per game. I want to be one of the best midfielders in the world. I'm playing for one of the best teams in the world." The early signs were promising. Pjanic had 127 touches during Juve's 2-0 victory over SPAL on September 28. And when he wasn't involved

against Genoa a month later, the Old Lady tussled and toiled, only winning 2-1 through Cristiano Ronaldo's controversial late penalty. "We missed his quality, of course, but also his rhythm because he moves the ball fast and our play becomes quicker as a result," Sarri admitted after the game.

Then there was the Supercoppa against Lazio. The first Final of the season, Juve lost 3-1 to Lazio and their midfield crumbled with Pjanic at the heart of it. Another poor performance followed against his former club Olympique Lyonnais in the Champions League and he was dropped by Sarri for the first time during the Bianconeri's 2-0 win against Inter. Rodrigo Bentancur came of age as the replacement 'regista' to leave his teammate in limbo.

The Catalans were reported to have clinched an improbable deal for the set-piece specialist, receiving him, Mattia De Sciglio and €25m for Nelson Semedo. That was then shot down by Juve's demands for Arthur Melo on top of the right-back. Arthur is considered expendable by Barca, even if he is considered the closest thing they have had to Xavi Hernandez since the Spaniard himself. His loss would be Sarri's gain. A huge gain, at that. Pjanic remains a class act, but his best days in black and white are certainly behind him. He has been a loyal servant, with over 150 appearances, three Scudetti and a Champions League Final under his belt, but Juve now need to move on. He has been their past and present, but he can't be their future.



## AC Milan confirm Ibrahimovic has not suffered career-ending Achilles injury

Goal - The Serie A giants will continue to monitor an untimely knock suffered by their Swedish striker, but have calmed fears over his long-term fitness. Zlatan Ibrahimovic has not suffered a career-ending Achilles injury, AC Milan have confirmed, but the Swedish striker is still facing up to a spell on the sidelines.

The 38-year-old suffered an untimely knock during a training session with the Rossoneri on Monday. Initial fears regarding his long-term fitness suggested that the vastly-experienced frontman may have to consider hanging up his boots.

A calf complaint had laid Ibrahimovic low, but there were also claims that an Achilles problem was forcing a modern-day legend onto the treatment table. Any tendon damage in that area would have made it difficult for a seasoned performer to work his way back. Milan are, however, adamant that no muscles have been snapped.

The Serie A giants said in a statement posted on their official club website: "AC Milan reports that Zlatan Ibrahimovic in yesterday's training reported an injury to the soleus muscle of his right calf. The Achilles tendon is perfectly intact.

"An instrumental control examination will be carried out in 10 days."

While Milan will continue to monitor Ibrahimovic's situation, no timescale is being put on a possible recovery.

That means that the former Juventus and Manchester United forward will likely be missing when competitive football resumes in Italy.

Serie A clubs have been allowed back in training since May 19.

A vote has also been passed that is intended to see the 2019-20 campaign resume on June 13.

The Italian football federation has set a deadline of August 20 for getting the current season completed, with the next one due to begin on September 1. There had been reports during a period of indefinite lockdown that Ibrahimovic would not return to Milan. He spent time training with Hammarby in his homeland during an enforced break and saw it suggested that he could stay on with a club that he holds a stake in. Said speculation proved to be wide of the mark, as the enigmatic striker returned to San Siro, but it remains to be seen if any more minutes will be taken in. Ibrahimovic only committed to a short-term deal with Milan in December after leaving MLS side the LA Galaxy, although that agreement does include the option for a 12-month extension through to the summer of 2021.



## Kane offered 'one career' advice amid Man Utd

Goal - Harry Kane has been urged to weigh up his options carefully, as he approaches a career "crossroads", with Teddy Sheringham, who once made his own move from Tottenham to Manchester United, telling the Spurs star he "only has one career".

Back in 1997, one ambitious England international took the decision to swap north London for the north west and that call was vindicated as Sheringham went on to form part of a United side that collected three Premier League titles and an historic Treble in 1999.

Kane now finds himself in a similar situation, with a lack of tangible success at Spurs forcing him to consider a switch elsewhere.

United are said to be in the mix once again, with there even talk of record-breaking £200 million (\$246m) offers, and Sheringham can see why the 26-year-old's head may be turned, even with his strong emotional ties to Tottenham taken into account.

A man who sandwiched his stint in Manchester with two spells at Spurs told Sky Sports of Kane: "There are similarities but you have to look at where they are and where Tottenham were when I was playing for them.

"I think the ambition had been sucked out of the club when I was at Tottenham, we weren't really going places. At least with Tottenham at the moment they're getting in the top four, they're challenging for things, they were in the Champions League final not long ago.

"He's got to work out his situation, does he want to leave? Will there be top players coming to Tottenham to play with him, or does he have to leave to play with top players?"

"At the moment, I'd say his career at Tottenham has been steadily going forward but I think it might be at a crossroads. If not this year, if they haven't won anything or look like they're challenging for things and moving forwards, there could be changes.

"Harry only has one career and he wants to win things. We'll see what happens but my advice would be 'you only get one career, Harry, make sure you make the most of it'."

Kane has conceded that personal ambition may lead him to seek a new challenge elsewhere, but Spurs will be understandably reluctant to part with a talismanic presence that has plundered 181 goals in 278 appearances for the club.