THE FOOTBALL GOAT

WHO IS THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME?



WHO IS THE ULTIMATE

PREMIER LEAGUE

INDEPENDENT & UNOFFICIAL

GOAT?

MATT OLDFIELD

SETH BURKETT

YOU CHOOSE YOUR FAVOURITE PLAYER OF ALL TIME




YOU
CHOOSE YOUR
FAVOURITE
PLAYER
OF ALL TIME



Remember, our footballers are still playing and scoring goals. All stats are up to 24 May 2026.

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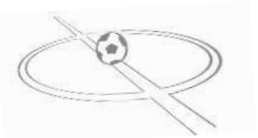
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KICK-OFF

WHO IS THE PREMIER LEAGUE GOAT?

Hi there! Matt and Seth here, two friends who love arguing almost as much as we love football. And arguing *about football*? Well, that's our favourite thing EVER!



Matt
Hey, I only deal in facts: Southampton are by far the greatest team the world has ever seen. Over 30,000 fans can't be wrong.

Seth
Err… Yes, they can.





Matt
Oh, so you think your team, Peterborough, are better, do you?

Seth
No, I didn't say that… But in 2007, we did beat you 2–1 in the League Cup first round.





Matt
The League Cup? Who cares about that – it's all about the Premier League, mate!

Seth
Err … don't Southampton play in the Championship?





Matt
Yes, but at least we know what the Premier League is…

Our football debating never ends, and there's one topic that gets us more fired up than any other: deciding who is the Football GOAT – the player who is the …

GREATEST OF ALL TIME.

We've had some great head-to-head battles:

- Messi v. Ronaldo
- Pelé v. Maradona
- Mbappé v. Haaland

We're now ready to tackle an even bigger question, especially for English football fans like us:

WHO IS THE ULTIMATE PREMIER LEAGUE GOAT?

We want to know who the greatest player has been to grace the English game since the start of the Premier League era, back in 1992.

Seth
Easy! Thierry Henry. The End.





Matt
Really? But what about Mo Salah? John Terry? Cristiano Ronaldo? Alan Shearer?

Seth
OK, yeah, those guys are pretty good too… Maybe I need to think about it before I make my final decision.





Matt
Woah, you never say that! To make this a fair football fight, we need to get properly nerdy and use categories and rules. Because every Premier League superstar is different, and comparing attackers with defenders is like comparing sheep with…

Seth
Goats?





Matt
Ha, yeah! And we can't have that…

We're going to focus on our Top 20 Premier League GOATs, and we'll be comparing them in a series of different head-to-head battles:

THE PREMIER LEAGUE GOAT CATEGORIES

CHARACTER

The mental side of the game:

- Who has the biggest personality?
- Who has the strongest mindset?
- Who is the best leader?

SKILLS

The physical, technical side of the game:

- Who is the best all-round athlete?
- Who is the most creative player?
- Who is the most skilful player?
- Who is the smartest player?



STATS

The numbers that matter most:

- Who is the Premier League GOAT when it comes to goal contributions?
- Who is the Premier League GOAT when it comes to individual achievements?
- Who is the Premier League GOAT when it comes to team trophies?





CONTRIBUTION

How they've changed their clubs and the Premier League.

Then we'll rank our 20 GOATs on these categories. Finally, we'll put the top two players up against each other to decide …

WHO IS THE ULTIMATE PREMIER LEAGUE GOAT PLAYER?



In EXTRA TIME, we'll tackle a couple of big bonus questions:

- Who is the Premier League GOAT manager?
- Who is the Premier League GOAT club?



THE PREMIER LEAGUE GOAT RULES

Before we begin, let's list our rules for a fair fight.

1. To answer each of our GOAT questions, each football ~~expert~~ fan must pick only **one** player to argue about.

2. Arguments shouldn't be too long, and should mix facts, stats and stories, all of which **must** be true.

3. Comparisons with your rival's chosen player are encouraged, but angry insults and dirty tactics will result in disqualification.

Exciting, eh? We can't wait! But before we officially let the Premier League GOAT battles begin, it's time to discover the history of the league that totally transformed English football…

ORIGIN STORY: THE PREMIER LEAGUE

"The Premier League is the best league in the world!"

Who said that? Well, over the last 30 or so years, it has been the opinion of football players, managers and millions of fans from all over the planet!

But before we get on to the superstars and magic moments that make the Premier League so great, let's go back to 1990, when English football was in a pretty bad place.

All over the country, stadiums had become old and dangerous, leading to tragic accidents like the Bradford City Fire in 1985 and the Hillsborough Disaster in 1989, where fans lost their lives.

DID YOU KNOW? At that time, English football fans were allowed to watch games from the "terraces", large standing areas accessed via concrete steps. These terraces could become overcrowded and dangerous. It was only after the Taylor Report in 1990 declared them unsafe that clubs were forced to switch to all-seater stadiums.

And things were far from perfect on the pitch, too. With English clubs banned from playing in Europe between 1985 and 1990, due to fans behaving badly, the quality of football had also declined.

If the top English teams were going to come back and compete with the great clubs from Italy and Spain, then something had to change. So was it time for a fresh start, with football that was safer and more exciting to watch? According to England's "Big Five" clubs – Arsenal, Everton, Liverpool, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur – the answer was yes. They met up in October 1990 to discuss the idea of breaking away from the old First Division to form a league of their own, along with the other best teams in the country.

By then, the "Big Five" were all big businesses, looking to make as much money as possible, so the idea of starting a brand-new competition was very appealing to them. Together, they signed an agreement at the end of the 1990–91 season and told the English Football League about their big, ambitious plans.

The next step was an important one: to win the support of the Football Association (FA) that governed the English game. Once they had that, everything else happened very fast.

On 20 May 1992, the league signed a massive £304 million TV deal for Sky to show 60 live games each year, and the BBC to broadcast highlights on *Match of the Day* every Saturday night.

A week later, the FA Premier League was officially formed. Less than four months later, the first season kicked off, with 22 teams, colourful kits, an all-star TV advert and a catchy new tagline:

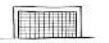
"IT'S A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME."



DID YOU KNOW? Only 13 of the 242 players involved during that opening weekend were from outside the British Isles. Two came from Denmark (including Manchester United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel), two from the Netherlands, two from Sweden, plus one each from France, Poland, Norway, the Czech Republic, Russia, Israel, and travelling furthest of all, Ipswich Town goalkeeper Craig Forrest from Canada!

So could the new Premier League live up to everyone's high entertainment expectations? At 3.05pm on Saturday 15 August 1992, Sheffield United striker Brian Deane scored the league's first-ever goal in a 2–1 win over Manchester United. But, over the course of the season, Sir Alex Ferguson's team fought back to win the first-ever Premier League title on 2 May 1993, partly thanks to the signing of French forward Eric Cantona (more on him a little later!).

So with season one complete, had the Premier League successfully proved that it was here to stay? Yes, an exciting new era had begun, full of stylish football and magical international talent. And the rest is English football history…



PREMIER LEAGUE TIMELINE

– 1994–95 Blackburn Rovers surprise everyone (and especially back-to-back champions Manchester United) by becoming the second team to lift the Premier League trophy.





CLASSIC PREMIER LEAGUE MOMENT

FINAL DAY DRAMA

LIVERPOOL 2 | 1 BLACKBURN ROVERS

WEST HAM 1 | 1 MANCHESTER UNITED

13 MAY 1995

It was a final day of the season that no one would forget.

At half-time, Rovers were winning away at Liverpool thanks to yet another Alan Shearer goal, while United were losing at West Ham. But there were more twists and turns to come. First, United equalized, and then so did Liverpool, bringing the gap back down to two points.

Was there time for one more moment of drama? In the very last minute, Liverpool scored again to beat Blackburn, but luckily for Rovers, United couldn't quite find a winner at West Ham, and so the Premier League title was theirs.

"It's a miracle," declared the club's emotional owner Jack Walker, who had supported Blackburn since he was a boy. ■

– 1997–98 In his second season in English football, French manager Arsène Wenger leads Arsenal to their first Premier League title.

– 2000–01 Ferguson's Manchester United become the first team to win three Premier League titles in a row.

– 2003–04 Wenger's Arsenal "Invincibles" go the whole season unbeaten on their way to another Premier League title.

– 2004–05 In his first season in English football, Portuguese manager José "the Special One" Mourinho leads Chelsea to their first Premier League title.

– 2011–12 Thanks to Sergio Agüero's dramatic last-gasp goal, Manchester City win their first Premier League title over local rivals United.



– 2015–16 Against all the odds, Leicester City go from relegation favourites to Premier League champions.

CLASSIC PREMIER LEAGUE MOMENT

UNLIKELY LEICESTER LIFT THE TROPHY!

CHELSEA 2 | 2 TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

2 MAY 2016 • STAMFORD BRIDGE

No one would have backed Leicester City at the start of the season.

They were expected to be fighting down at the bottom of the league as usual, but instead, with Claudio Ranieri in charge and N'Golo Kanté, Riyad Mahrez and Jamie Vardy on fire, they had fought their way up to the very top. In fact, going into this game, if Tottenham failed to beat Chelsea, then Leicester would be crowned Premier League Champions.

When Tottenham went 2–0 up in the first half, the Leicester players thought their celebrations would have to wait another week. But no: after the break, Chelsea staged a comeback, with one goal, and then another. A draw of 2–2 meant it was all over, and Leicester City had just won their first Premier League title!

"We did the impossible," said Vardy. And, as promised, Foxes fan Gary Lineker was soon presenting *Match of the Day* in his pants. ■

– 2019–20 At last, after 28 years of trying, Liverpool finally win the Premier League title.

– 2023–24 Manchester City become the first team to win four Premier League titles in a row.

– 2025–26 After a 22-year wait, Arsenal are crowned Premier League champions again.

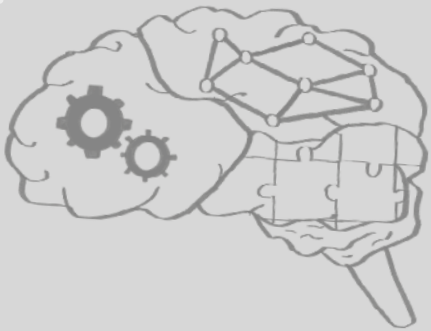
Today, the Premier League is home to 20 teams and over 500 top players from over 60 different countries, who come together to create a super-competitive league featuring high-quality football, thrilling drama, and fierce rivalries. And because of all that, the Premier League is now the most-watched sports league in the world, followed by billions of people all over the planet!

So who are the best footballers to ever play in the world's favourite league? Well, that's what this book is all about.

It's time to start answering our all-important question:

WHO IS THE ULTIMATE PREMIER LEAGUE GOAT?

CHARACTER



WHAT IS CHARACTER?

We football fans love to focus on the 3Gs: **goals, genius, glory!**

We'll get on to all that stuff soon, but first, we'd like to kick off with another, equally important part of every football superstar: **character**.

Character is the different qualities that make each person unique. Without a strong, confident character, brilliant football skills are never going to shine as brightly as they should.

Character is like the glue that holds a Football GOAT together, and it's made up of a few main ingredients. We're talking about:







PERSONALITY

How to get the best out of yourself, whichever kind of character you have.

MINDSET

The strength and determination to perform under pressure and bounce back when bad things happen.



LEADERSHIP

The ability to inspire the people around you, whether you're wearing the captain's armband or not.

Since 1992, the Premier League has been the home of many of the game's most incredible characters. Now it's time to sort the GOATs from the showboats, and start tackling the big questions…

WHO HAS THE BIGGEST PERSONALITY?

PALMER V. CANTONA

Seth
Easy. It has to be Chelsea's maverick attacker with the iconic celebration…



COLE PALMER



Whether playing on the wing or as a number 10, Chelsea's ice-cold creator taunts defenders with his lethal left foot … and charms fans with his lovable personality.

HE'S COLD

Top four battles, penalty kicks and Club World Cup finals

might test the greatest of players, but not Palmer. When everything around him is on fire, he remains cool. Just look at his penalty record: in 2024 he equalled a Premier League record by scoring 12 penalties in a row. To follow? His iconic (and much-copied) Cold Palmer "shiver" goal celebration, of course!

"[The celebration] symbolizes joy, passion and hard determination for the game," he says. "Plus it's funny as it works well with my name."

HE'S (UNINTENTIONALLY) FUNNY

In an era of media-trained footballers, Palmer is never afraid to have a laugh. Whether declaring his love of "chippy chips", hugging referee Paul Tierney in Chelsea's pre-match huddle, rapping, performing dance routines, or pulling faces at US president Donald Trump, Cole regularly has fans in stitches.

He's become so popular for his sense of humour that he even has his own social media hashtag: #Palmercore!

HE'S CHARMING

Cole is funny for simply being himself, and not

even all the fame in the world can change that. "He is always the same guy: humble. He enjoys football like a kid," said his former Chelsea coach, Enzo Maresca.

Such warm characteristics have made him hugely popular with fans.

> *"More people are holding him up as a national treasure because of his refreshing authenticity."*
>
> AHMED SHOOBLE, JOURNALIST

He may still be in the early days of his career, but he's already one of the most Googled players in the Premier League. Surely, he's only going to become even more popular…



Matt
Ha, well played, mate. You've tried your best, but sorry, there's no way Mr Chippy Chips is beating my guy…

ERIC CANTONA

The French forward arrived in England in 1992, just as the Premier League was starting, and over the next six years, he changed the game for ever.



At Manchester United, he won nine major trophies and scored too many glorious goals to mention, but it's his one-of-a-kind personality that we want to talk about here…

HE WAS PASSIONATE

For all his skill and flair, Cantona was also a super-competitive and aggressive footballer. At 1.88 metres (6ft 2in), he was tall and powerful, and always happy to battle it out with any defender in the fight for victory. Cantona's one major challenge, however, was that he couldn't always control his intense emotions. During his time in the Premier League, he received two red cards and was also famously banned for nine months for a flying kung-fu kick on a Crystal Palace fan.

"I play with passion and fire. I have to accept that sometimes this fire does harm."

ERIC CANTONA, MANCHESTER UNITED

HE WAS CHARISMATIC

Apart from his temper, everything else about Cantona was so, so cool: the turned-up collar on his shirt, the ice-cold celebrations, the Nike adverts he starred in, the beautiful goals he scored, even the strange quotes about seagulls and sardines.

At a time when English football was seen as a bit boring, it was Cantona who helped introduce some much-needed excitement. He talked and moved like a movie star, and after retiring from football at the age of just 30, that's exactly what he became, back home in France.

HE WAS "THE KING"!

"Collar up, back straight, chest stuck out, he glided into the arena like he owned the place."

ROY KEANE, MANCHESTER UNITED

No one has ever brought together "football" and "swagger" quite like Cantona, but he always played the game with confidence, rather than arrogance. He was a team player who listened to his coaches and really loved to give everything in training.

"You have to work very hard to find the confidence," he once said, "and with the confidence – because you work hard – you can enjoy it."

And the Manchester United supporters certainly enjoyed watching him in action. "He is the King of Old Trafford," said former teammate David Beckham, "and that's the way he should always be remembered."

Hear, hear, Becks, although you can call Cantona the "King of the entire Premier League"!

Seth
Move over, Cantona, there's a new king in town. Long live Cole Palmer.



Matt
Cole Palmer doesn't even have a personality. Paint watches Cole Palmer dry.

Seth
He's inspired an entire country to do his goal celebration.



Matt
Well, actually, Morgan Rogers did that celebration first. Cole is cold, but Cantona was Cool with a capital C. How else could he have become a movie star?

THE RESULT

Palmer may go viral online, but becoming a movie star? That's a true GOAT move. Cantona was the Premier League's original maverick who oozed cool.

OUR PREMIER LEAGUE PERSONALITY GOAT IS ...



PERSONALITY CHALLENGERS

Have we nailed our selection? These are our Personality challengers for the GOAT crown:

MARIO BALOTELLI (MANCHESTER CITY, LIVERPOOL)

Balotelli gave lots of money to charity, but he also had a wild side. After setting off fireworks from a window, Balotelli famously unveiled a vest that read: "Why Always Me?" "He's a total rock 'n' roller!" declared Oasis frontman Noel Gallagher. "Football needs players like him."

SON HEUNG-MIN (TOTTENHAM)

According to Son's former Spurs teammate Moussa Sissoko, he's "a top man, a top player, a top human being". It's a widely held belief. Son is considered to be one of the most humble, respectful players to have graced the Premier League.

IAN WRIGHT (ARSENAL, WEST HAM)

Arsenal's star striker overcame a tough upbringing to become a club legend. Considered one of the nicest men in football, teammates adored playing with him. "He loved a laugh, he loved a joke … his personality was infectious," said former Arsenal striker Kevin Campbell.



WHO HAS THE STRONGEST MINDSET?

GERRARD V. VAN DIJK



Matt
I'm going for a player who nearly lost a toe as a kid in a freak garden fork accident, but showed the fighting spirit to recover and become a Premier League legend…

STEVEN GERRARD

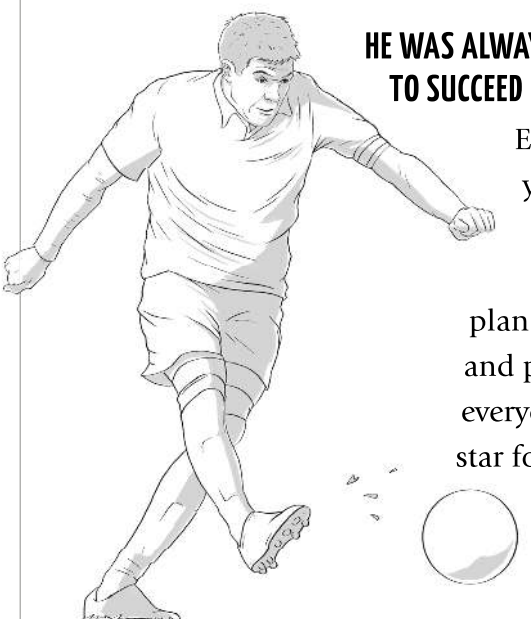
WHAT THE DOUBTERS SAY



"Gerrard a mindset monster? No way, he famously slipped against Chelsea and cost Liverpool the title in 2013–14! What does he know about mindset?"

WRONG!

Gerrard was one of the most complete midfielders the Premier League has ever seen, capable of playing impossible passes and scoring incredible goals. However, his greatest weapon was his super-strong mentality.



HE WAS ALWAYS DRIVEN TO SUCCEED

Even as a youngster, Gerrard had an ambitious plan: to work harder and play better than everyone else, and star for his local club, Liverpool, for a very long time.

At that time, Liverpool already had England internationals Paul Ince and Jamie Redknapp in central midfield, but Gerrard soon overtook them both, breaking into the starting line-up in 1999, and then becoming club captain in 2003.

And his drive to succeed didn't stop, as he led his team to Champions League glory in 2005. The will to win, the battle for every ball – that's what made Stevie G such a special Premier League superstar. Just look at what happened in 2005.

"He's got that unbelievable engine: desire, determination. Anyone would take Gerrard."

SIR ALEX FERGUSON, FORMER MANCHESTER UNITED MANAGER

HE NEVER GAVE UP, NO MATTER WHAT

We can't talk about Gerrard without talking about the 2005 Champions League final, can we? With Liverpool losing 3–0 against AC Milan at half-time, it was Gerrard who led the fightback with a stunning header, as the Reds went on to lift the trophy.

For Gerrard, a game wasn't over until the last whistle blew. Take the 2006 FA Cup final against

West Ham, for example, when he scored a sensational 91st-minute equalizer to save the day.

And although he couldn't quite deliver Liverpool's first Premier League title, he never stopped trying, producing so many big-game moments: including a hat-trick in the Merseyside Derby against Everton in 2012 and three different match-winning strikes against Liverpool's big rivals Manchester United.

HE WAS BRILLIANT AT BOUNCING BACK

"I probably learnt more from the lows because you look at yourself first, look at what went wrong and try to learn from your mistakes."

STEVEN GERRARD, LIVERPOOL

After "that slip" that allowed Chelsea to score in a crucial match in 2014, many players would have hidden away, but not Gerrard. He was determined to stand tall and bounce back, and that's exactly what he did, setting up three goals for his teammates in the last two games of the season. Sadly, it wasn't quite enough to win Liverpool the title, but still, it shows the amazing resilience that makes Gerrard a Premier League Mindset GOAT.

Seth:
Yes, Gerrard was great. But there's another strong Liverpool legend with an even stronger mindset. I'm backing a Dutch defensive monster who stays on his feet…



VIRGIL VAN DIJK

The big Dutch defender arrived in the Premier League in 2015 when he joined Southampton. Soon he was on to bigger and better things with Liverpool. At Anfield, his quality skills and monster mindset quickly transformed Liverpool's leaky backline. So what makes him tick?

HE SHUTS OUT THE NOISE

When Liverpool paid a world record £75 million for Van Dijk, many pundits such as Alan Shearer and Gary Neville thought the fee was *far* too high. "I'm not sure he's even been playing that well… That is an incredible amount of money," said Neville. Did their words bother Van Dijk? No way! "It is a strength of mine to not really bother too much when people have their opinions, especially negative opinions," he said.

So he shut out the noise and got to work. He scored a late winner against Everton on his debut, and kept on going. Soon those same pundits were