

Bosnich back from the brink

By Matt Connellan



Bosnich

To say that Mark Bosnich is one of Australia's footballing greats is no exaggeration for those who've closely followed him since his modest beginnings growing up in Fairfield in Sydney's western suburbs, not far from the family home of Harry Kewell.

For a small window during his seven years at Aston Villa, he could quite rightly be regarded as being in the upper echelons of world goalkeepers.

But to many Aussie fans, the tale of Mark Bosnich is also one of woe; a story of abused talent and an abuse of an altogether different kind, in the cocaine habit that saw him sacked by Chelsea in 2002. His drug addiction continued to plague him and once his nine month ban from the game had been concluded, his hunger and desire to play football had long deserted him. Coupled with a tumultuous affair with British model Sophie Anderton, as well as becoming estranged from his parents, Bosnich was on the brink of oblivion.

But now, the outrageously talented 36-year-old is making a comeback in his home country, with a trial at the A-League's Central Coast Mariners. In his own words, this is 'the beginning of a new beginning' as he takes the opportunity to impress the club, who are in need of a goalkeeper due to the imminent suspension of Danny Vukovic.

Bosnich showed glimpses of his brilliant best in his first Mariners' training sessions, clearly impressing manager Lawrie McKinna and goalkeeping coach John Crawley. Bosnich though, had a clear idea of what more he needed to do in order to get himself back in full working order. 'What I need to improve on is my co-ordination with the ball, hand-eye co-ordination and getting a feel for general positional play,' he said.

Bosnich is back home after

two decades in England. He moved abroad at the age of 16, linking up with Manchester United after a handful of appearances for Sydney Croatia in the old National Soccer League. Just three first-team games in two seasons for the Old Trafford club meant it was time to move on, and he did in 1992 to Aston Villa. It was at Villa Park that he forged a reputation as one of the league's top keepers.

In 1994, Bosnich, then aged 22, kept goal for Villa in the League Cup Final against Manchester United, which Villa won. Two years later, they won the League Cup once more, again with Bosnich in goal. His stock was on the rise and he cemented his position as first choice for the Soccerroos.

By 1999, Manchester United had established themselves as the top team in Europe, winning the Treble with Peter Schmeichel in goal. However, at the end of that historic season, the 'Great Dane' departed, leaving a massive gap at the back. Sir Alex Ferguson turned back to Bosnich and signed him on a free transfer.

Bosnich endured a turbulent time at Old Trafford, winning the English Premier League in 2000, before falling from grace to become third choice goalkeeper the next season. Not long after he was on his way out after a falling out with Ferguson, transferring to Chelsea in 2001.

By now his personal problems had already begun to take hold and as he struggled to get games at Chelsea ahead of Ed de Goey and Carlo Cudicini, he spiralled further downhill. After just five appearances for the West London side, he tested positive for cocaine in September 2002 and was subsequently sacked and given a nine month ban from the game. Now, after five years out of the game, save for a brief dabble in commentary, Bosnich is back.

The impetus for his comeback came at Queens Park Rangers, where their goalkeeping coach, former Chelsea team-mate Ed de Goey, helped Bosnich to get back in shape. He eventually made an appearance for the reserve team, before declaring his desire to go ahead with a full scale comeback.

Bosnich refused to rule out a return to the national team, should his return to the A-League be successful but, most importantly, his desire to play football has returned. 'I've got that hunger back ... every day I want to perform the best I can ... and I think here at the Central Coast Mariners is the right environment to do that,' he said.

And with that, who are we to rule out a return to the green and gold, for Australia's most talented goalkeeper of all time?

Where are all the stars?

By Ian Wright

MY old Arsenal team-mate David Rocastle would be turning in his grave right now if he looked at what is happening with the Gunners.

Rocky's life was tragically cut short when in its prime.

But I'd like to think I was the same as him with regard to how much passion and pride we showed when the name Arsenal was mentioned.

Yet I have to admit, I am worried. Worried about the present, worried about the future and worried about the direction in which Arsenal appear to be heading.

I am constantly asking myself if Arsenal are now seen as just a stepping stone for wannabe great players and no longer the place where world-class stars are happy to see out their careers.

Dutch master Dennis Bergkamp was a footballing genius who packed up football when Arsenal let him go at the ripe old age of 37.

I was desperate to finish my own career in that red shirt but, for one reason or another, I was moved on.

Bergkamp was the catalyst for so many good things at Arsenal.

His immense presence helped to attract the likes of Patrick Vieira, Thierry Henry, Freddie Ljungberg, Robert Pires — the list is endless.

Who can fill that role now?

Who is the magnet to attract the best? Maybe Cesc Fabregas but, as good as he is, the young Spaniard is still learning his trade.

Meanwhile, the Gunners seem unable to hang on to even squad players, with Mathieu Flamini switching to AC Milan and Alex Hleb going to Barcelona.

If any Arsenal fan told me they expected the club to finish in the top four this season, I reckon they would be optimistic rather than realistic.

They would be talking with their heart and not their head.

I just hope they are not losing their heads in the boardroom, as normally the people upstairs get it right. But, with all the unrest we have been hearing about, maybe that's not the case.

It's been suggested to me that manager Arsene Wenger is now toeing the line — that he's a board man.

But that will never be the case as he cares intently about the team and what he can bring to it with his own skill. I'd imagine the board are scared about losing him too!

Yet Arsene has not been the busiest in the summer, which seems a bit strange as Arsenal don't make idle boasts — especially about money.

So when you read that they have £70million or so to spend, you know it's for real. But their

transfer dealings have been overshadowed by Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool. United have shown resilience by fighting tooth and nail to keep Cristiano Ronaldo.

And though Dimitar Berbatov may not arrive, United signalled their intent with their audacious bid for the Tottenham star.

Chelsea have landed Deco and Jose Bosingwa and are on a high-profile tour of the Far East and Russia.

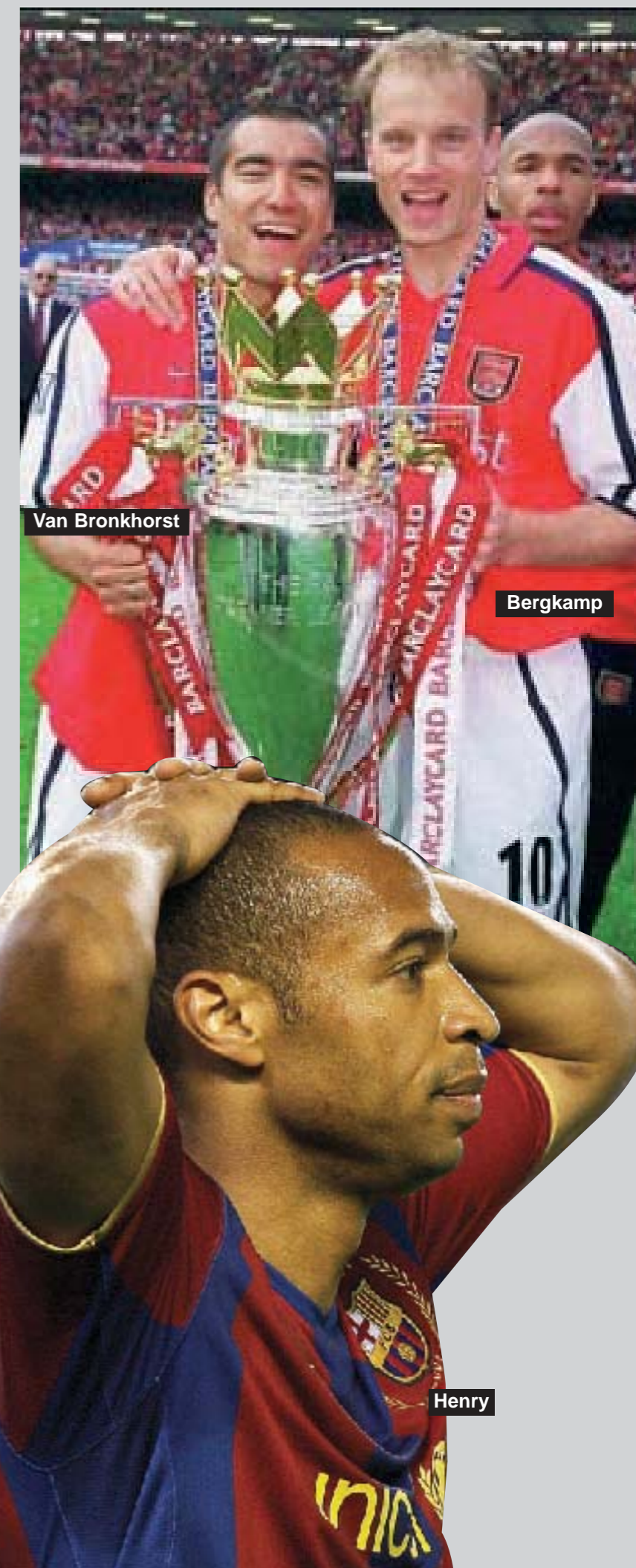
Everyone knows the foundations at Arsenal ARE strong but everything else looks a bit shaky.

Emmanuel Adebayor answered all questions last season but even he appears to be trying to get away.

Top-class players are bought not only for what they bring to the team but for the 'wow' factor too.

You want to give fans a sense of anticipation for the upcoming season, a feeling that they can't wait for the first ball to be kicked.

I'll have to be brutal here and say that I sadly don't feel that way about Arsenal with the new campaign just about to start.



Van Bronkhorst

Bergkamp

Henry