

# A rocky road to Rome for Wenger but a £30m kitty could help Euro bid

By Matt Lawton

A few minutes after emerging from a Champions League draw that will stretch Arsenal's resources, Danny Fiszman suggested Arsene Wenger could have made life easier for himself.

The largest shareholder on the Emirates Stadium board remains Wenger's greatest supporter but he did end one argument that does not reflect well on Arsenal's manager.

It is not that the club do not have money to strengthen a squad significantly weakened by the departure of Mathieu Flamini, Gilberto Silva and Alexander Hleb. It is that Wenger appears to be in no hurry to spend the £30-million Fiszman insists is still available for what remains of the transfer window.

Wenger would be a dream for most football club executives. He treats Arsenal's money as if it were his own. But fans are unlikely to be impressed when a defeat by Fulham would suggest they are not equipped to sustain a serious Barclays Premier League title challenge.

The road to this season's Champions League Final in Rome definitely looks more daunting than it should be, after Arsenal were drawn against Porto, Fenerbahce and Dynamo Kiev. If nothing else, it is a group involving a lot of travel.

'It is a tough draw,' conceded Fiszman.

'And we've got Blackburn and Bolton away with Kiev in the middle, so it's a good fun start.'

No fun when Wenger does

not have a holding midfielder.

The Kiev game will coincide with the publication of Arsenal's financial results. Results, says Fiszman, that will show the club is in good financial health.

'Two things,' he said.

'First, there is this constant thing that the Emirates is bleeding the club. That we've got these repayments. It's total crap.

'Look at our accounts and you'll see our net payments are £20m and the revenue increase from the new stadium is close to £50m. Explain how that stadium bleeds the club if it's producing an extra £30m a year.

'If Arsene said "I want this guy and he's £30m. Can I buy him?" the answer is yes. Absolutely yes. But it's not our decision how he spends money and nor will it ever be our decision. We want to win, and win badly, but Arsene believes in creating teams the way he does. We totally back him. It's his decision.

'If Arsene could find the right player he would buy that player, but at the moment he hasn't. There's still a little bit of time.'

Chelsea, Manchester United and Liverpool are in a healthier state — even if Sir Alex Ferguson remains frustrated by his pursuit of Tottenham's Dimitar Berbatov — but the draw will test one of England's three Champions League semi finalists from last season.

A group that also contains PSV Eindhoven, Marseille and Atletico Madrid will be difficult for Liverpool, as boss Rafa Benitez knows after seeing his fellow Spaniards beat Schalke 4-0.

United have a relatively easy ride. Celtic beat them 1-0 two seasons ago, after United had won the Old Trafford

leg, while Wayne Rooney was sent off clapping in the face of the referee at Villarreal the previous season, but a group that also includes Bruce Rioch's Danish champions, Aalborg, does not represent a major obstacle.

Ditto Chelsea and a group that comprises Roma, Bordeaux and Romania's CFR 1907 Cluj, who have a Transylvanian ground capacity of little more than 25,000 and are in the first round of the Champions League as Romania's champions for the first time.

But Chelsea boss Luiz Felipe Scolari will be more worried about Roma. Everyone appears to be worried about Roma because any more violence in or around the Olympic Stadium and Michel Platini will demand the final — to be played on a Saturday — be moved elsewhere, possibly Wembley.

'We can't tolerate violence,' said UEFA's president yesterday.

'If we have more violence in Rome, we will withdraw the final from there. It's not an ultimatum but we're keeping an eye on them.'

Judging by the players' awards, English clubs, in particular Chelsea, should dominate again. It was slightly bizarre to see Petr Cech win the goalkeeper award ahead of United's Edwin van der Sar — and then answer questions about a shoot-out Van der Sar so excelled in — just as it was a surprise to see defender John Terry get the vote ahead of Rio Ferdinand, while midfielder Frank Lampard made it a hat-trick for Chelsea before Cristiano Ronaldo received the best forward and best player trophies.

Yet it remained an all Premier League affair at the Grimaldi Forum, like the last final in Moscow.



Wenger

## Robinho's £29m Chelsea move in doubt as Real Madrid outline determination

Real Madrid placed Robinho's proposed move to Chelsea in doubt by unexpectedly outlining their determination to keep the Brazilian forward at the Bernabeu.

Although Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon remains confident that a deal will still be completed before the transfer window closes on Monday, Real's failure to recruit Valencia's David Villa and Villarreal's Santi Cazorla has slowed down negotiations.

It is understood that Chelsea have provisionally agreed a £29 million fee with Real, as well as personal terms with the player, but the deal has been dependent on the Spanish club finding a replacement.

After saying that they would not hold a player against his will, Real abruptly changed their stance yesterday. "The coach and the sports director want the player to stay and I am sure he will," said president Ramon Calderon. "Our squad is complete and it is impossible for us to have one better than the one we have."

Sporting director Predrag Mijatovic added: "Robinho still has two years left on his contract. Therefore he is our player for the next two seasons, so you can draw your own conclusions from that."

Mijatovic also shrugged off concerns about keeping a player who is unsettled. "That can always be put right," he said. "In

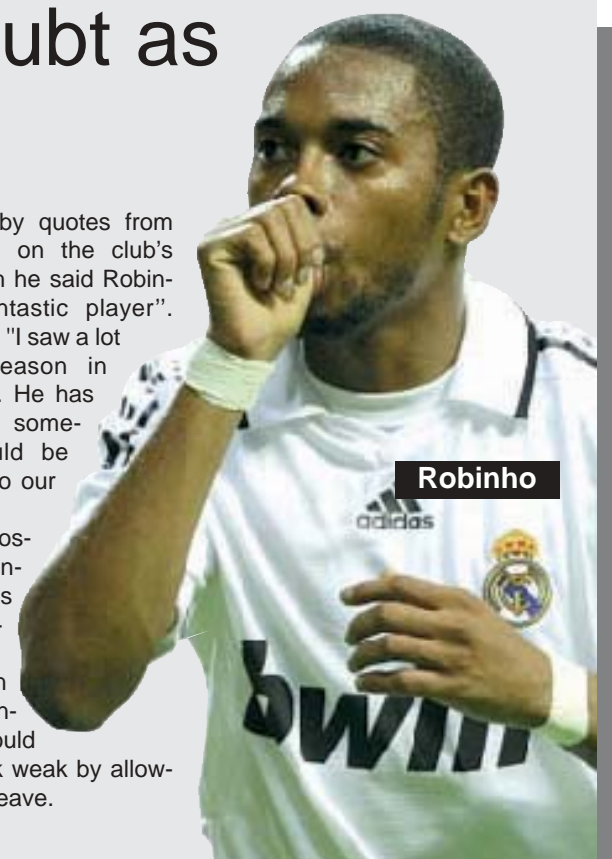
a healthy environment such as the one we have at the club, there is no problem that cannot be sorted."

If the Robinho deal falls through, it would be an embarrassment to Chelsea, particularly after they advertised shirts for sale yesterday with the Brazilian's name printed on them and the number "to be confirmed".

"Our online partner, Kitbag, always prepares in advance of any potential signings, and unfortunately it accidentally made its way onto the site but has now been removed," said a club spokesman. "The club has always made it clear he [Robinho] is a major target and we hope to compete a deal soon." Chelsea's confidence was fur-

ther illustrated by quotes from Frank Lampard on the club's website in which he said Robinho was "a fantastic player". Lampard added: "I saw a lot of him last season in Spanish games. He has great flair and something that would be nice to bring into our team."

However, after losing out on Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo, there is a feeling in Spain that Real are concerned they would be made to look weak by allowing Robinho to leave.



Robinho