

Fernando Torres is the new Cristiano Ronaldo for all the wrong reasons



Fernando Torres is perhaps one of only three players who could fill the void left by Cristiano Ronaldo as the golden boy of the Premier League, the superstar face of the self-styled best league in the world.

Ronaldo was the undisputed poster boy of the Premier League prior to his £80m move from Manchester United to Real Madrid last summer. He was head and shoulders above the rest.

Without him, only Torres, Wayne Rooney and, possibly, Cesc Fabregas could genuinely claim to possess the star quality to grasp Ronaldo's glittering mantle.

Rooney, having scored 33 goals for United this season, has emphatically beaten Torres and Fabregas to assume Ronaldo's status as the Premier League's number one box office star.

But while Fabregas might yet have the last laugh by inspiring Arsenal to a Premier League and Champions League double, what about Torres?

Ironically, despite Liverpool's miserable season on and off the pitch, the Spaniard is beginning to show more Ronaldo characteristics than either Rooney or Fabregas.

But unfortunately for Liverpool, Torres seems to be adopting the negative aspects of Ronaldo's game rather than the positive.

By admitting that he has urged Torres to show more 'focus' and 'concentrate on football', Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez is adopting a high-risk strategy in his attempts to quell the bad angels in the 26-year-old's character.

Even when Ronaldo was at his toddler-like worst last season, Sir Alex Ferguson

steered clear of publicly admonishing his star player.

Would any other United star have got away with the strop produced by Ronaldo when he flung his tracksuit top to the floor last season after being substituted during the derby victory against Manchester City?

Ronaldo also played the four-year-old when he practically substituted himself in the 1-0 win against Sunderland in Dec 2008 by walking off the pitch with an injury before the Ferguson had even been able to arrange a replacement.

Torres has yet to come close to that level of petulance, but the warning signs were there during Liverpool's defeat at Old Trafford on Sunday.

After putting Liverpool ahead with a stunning headed goal, Torres then proceeded to ruin his display by choosing to launch into a childish stream of complaints in the direction of referee Howard Webb.

Whenever the TV camera focused on Torres, he was usually in the midst of a sour-faced rant at England's number one referee.

And then, of course, there was the bizarre incident when Torres kicked the penalty spot, taking a sizeable chunk of turf with him as a result, following Webb's decision to award the home side a soft spot-kick following Javier Mascherano's tussle with Antonio Valencia.

Torres escaped a booking, but Webb later confirmed to the FA that he would have issued a yellow card had he seen the incident at the time.

Liverpool believe that Torres was on

the receiving end of some physical treatment from the United defenders, but as Benitez acknowledged, such tactics are the price paid by all of the world's top strikers.

Torres, despite his angelic appearance, can look after himself as well as any centre-forward, but the frustrations are creeping into his game and it should be a worry for Liverpool and Benitez.

He has now collected five bookings in seven games and, by giving an interview in Spain earlier this month when he called for Liverpool to make 'four or five' signings this summer, he directly challenged the club to match his ambition.

It is hardly the Liverpool way, but then there is also a school of thought that Torres is at least showing how much he cares by venting his frustration in a manner that Steven Gerrard would never dream of.

But whichever way his temperament is perceived, Torres is not focusing purely on football as Benitez wants him to.

He is wasting too much energy on arguing with officials and telling the owners how to run the club.

Both he and Ronaldo are undoubted world-class players, megastars of the game who will dominate the headlines in South Africa this summer.

But Torres needs to drop the petulance that marred Ronaldo's final two years at Old Trafford.

He only started smiling again once he left Manchester for Madrid. Liverpool supporters will dearly hope that it does not require a similar change of scenery for Torres to put his demons to bed.

Gianfranco Zola quit fears grow as West Ham board demand change in tactics to avoid relegation struggle

Gianfranco Zola has been forced to deliver a playing report to the new West Ham owners - in a bid to convince them he can still save the club from relegation.

After five successive defeats and a chronic lack of confidence in their rookie manager, senior West Ham officials have demanded what is effectively a survival dossier. The report is expected to cover tactics, formation and selection.

All have been questioned in the aftermath of the 3-1 home defeat by Wolves and they suspect Zola is making too many mistakes.

Drastic changes are being called for and Zola and his No2 Steve Clarke are being asked: 'Do you have the answers?'

West Ham considered Zola's future on Wednesday, but it would cost £3.5million to sack the pair. There is also the fear that such dramatic action could be counterproductive.

Also, alternatives such as Mark Hughes, are currently unwilling to step into the hot seat. Zola, who feels the board have been over-zealous in their management since taking over in January, may find the latest intrusion intolerable.

His players have held a team meeting, with senior squad members demanding a greater all-round effort. West Ham play Stoke at Upton Park on Saturday and Zola must win that game.

His long-term future is already uncertain. It is expected he may resign at the end of the season, when a fair financial agreement may be thrashed out.

He and Clarke signed new four-year deals last April but West Ham co-chairmen David Gold and David Sullivan were stunned to learn, on taking over in January, that no provision had been made to reduce their salaries in the event of relegation.

Zola was handed a deal worth £1.9m a year by the previous owner, Iceland businessman Bjorgolfur Gudmundsson, despite his lack of managerial experience. Clarke has a £1.2m-a-year contract, more than double that of his Manchester United equivalent, Mike Phelan.

However, the owners are understood to be furious at the naivety being shown by the pair.

Experienced alternatives have been discussed, with Hughes a long-term possibility. Hughes, however, is believed to be unwilling to discuss the role while Zola is in charge as he is still angry at the way Manchester City dismissed him and brought in Roberto Mancini.

In footage posted on YouTube by a fan, Sullivan described West Ham's situation as 'a mess' and admitted the team need 'a new centre-half' after watching the talented but overexposed James Tomkins hand Kevin Doyle an opening goal for Wolves following a dreadful back-pass.

Even so, Zola is expected to be given another chance to steer West Ham away from the relegation zone when they take on Stoke. But defeat could seal the Italian's fate. Striker Benni McCarthy has revealed the gravity of West Ham's situation is not lost on the players.

Following the demoralising 3-1 defeat by Wolves, he said: 'It's hard to know what to say any more because it was just shocking.'

'The fans started showing their frustrations and it made things even worse on the pitch. We should have shown our character and changed people's minds but we didn't. We let it affect us.'

'Everyone started hiding a little bit and that's no way to go about it when things are not going your way.'

'In the dressing room afterwards everyone was too shy to show their faces. It was really hard.'

Gold said on talkSPORT: 'I had a chat with Franco after the (Wolves) game. He's disappointed, we're all disappointed. People are going to question the manager because people look for someone to blame. Every West Ham fan will be asking "who can we blame?"'

'The fans are entitled to be disgruntled when a team loses 3-1 at home, it's the way of things but we can't carry that negativity into the next game.'

After the final whistle on Tuesday, Carlton Cole became embroiled in an angry confrontation with fans near the tunnel. Police say one fan was thrown out of the stadium 'for using abusive language towards a player'.

On the club website, captain Matthew Upson said: 'We need to have a long, hard look and change something about what we are doing. It is up to us, the management and the players, to do something. It just looks like we have lost that ability to work as a team.'

