

SEX, DRUGS AND SOCCER

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CONTENTS

7	INTRODUCTION
9	ROMÁRIO DE SOUZA FARIA
19	LOTHAR MATTHÄUS
29	EDGAR DAVIDS
41	PAUL GASCOIGNE
49	CARLOS TÓVEZ
59	PAOLO DI CANIO
67	WAYNE ROONEY
75	RONALDO (LUÍS NAZÁRIO DE LIMA)
83	AHMED HUSSEIN ABDELHAMID HOSSAM (MIDO)
91	NICOLAS ANELKA
99	GARRINCHA (MANUEL FRANCISCO DOS SANTOS)
105	ADRIAN MUTU
111	GILLES DE BILDE
117	ROY KEANE
125	HARALD SCHUMACHER
133	DAVID BECKHAM
141	GIANLUIGI BUFFON
147	JOHN TERRY
153	MARIO BALOTELLI
163	DIEGO MARADONA
175	ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIĆ
185	GEORGE BEST
193	PAUL BREITNER
201	ERIC CANTONA
209	RENÉ HIGUITA
217	PATRICK KLUIVERT
225	CRISTIANO RONALDO
233	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
235	ABOUT THE AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION

Before we go any further, this book does not include any stories about Messi, Ribéry, Piqué, Beckenbauer or Zidane. Their respective misdemeanors - tax fraud, sex with an underage prostitute (acquitted!), insulting the police, having an affair with their secretary, Heidi, and the small matter of a head-butt - are all simply too lightweight for inclusion here. Neither will there be any mention of one Nasser Al Shamrani. Who? Yes, Nasser Al Shamrani, the Saudi striker who was crowned 'Asian Footballer of the Year' in 2014 just after he had been suspended for eight duels for spitting and head-butting an opponent during the final game of the Asian Champions League. What about Marco Reus? Also a non-runner, even though the Borussia Dortmund striker drove around in his Aston Martin for three years without a drivers license. The Belgian keeper Jean-Marie Pfaff? Amusing character, but nothing more than a tax dodger. No room here either for Omar Ortiz, world famous in his native Mexico because of his use of anabolic steroids and being an accessory to kidnapping, but in international terms a complete nobody. Luis Suárez? Nope... after all Marco van Basten has already pointed out that there are worse things in soccer than biting your opponent. And indeed, a hickey here and there is not enough reason to place the Uruguayan at the top of the scandalous behavior heap. But surely Johan Cruyff, and the claims by people in his inner circle that he has had a mistress for years, deserves to be included? Not much point, I'm afraid, when this supposed indiscretion amounts to little more than a well-known public secret.

What we (the author and a number of soccer insiders) wanted to do was to dig out those characters who have really earned the title of bad boy, mainly due to their off-pitch antics. Players who reserved their displays of madness for on the pitch were mercilessly excluded. And there was also the minor precondition of being very famous. Not a star? Not a hope of your name appearing on these pages!

It was also interesting to see if we could find some kind of common thread. Are there one or more similar reasons for the excessive behavior of these (former) professionals? Most of them have a relentless will to succeed, an enormous readiness to sacrifice everything to get all they can get from their career. They want to win, always and at all costs. However, that's not true for all of them...

Dutch sports psychologist Martin Pet claims that it is the enormous pressure that makes

top soccer players derail. 'It causes a short circuit in the head.' You can see it everywhere in society where people are under pressure to perform: the artistic world, the business world and, of course, the sports world as well. According to Pet's fellow countryman and colleague, Bram Bakker, the number of sportsmen 'experimenting' with women and gambling has increased dramatically over the past few years. 'They believe in their own 'brilliance' and have a fierce craving for attention. Soccer players don't have to train extremely hard and if they are a little out of shape then there are always ten other people on the pitch they can hide behind.'

In 2000, when I was putting the finishing touches to the biography of the famous Dutch footballing twins Frank and Ronald de Boer, I provoked the latter by stating that soccer players actually have a pretty easy life. A big grin was his first reaction. However, Ronald was very serious when he said: 'Don't forget the pressure that's on our shoulders week after week. That pressure is immense, and unimaginable for the man in the street.' Psychologist Bram Bakker: 'There are all kinds of expectations in the minds of top athletes, but their parents and coaches contribute to this, too. And when things don't work out they try to escape from that fixation, from that focus. Time, attention, money and age are an explosive combination. It can happen that an athlete is not able to take the pressure anymore and ends up handing over control of his life to whatever means or substance that can offer them an escape.'

It will come as no surprise that young millionaires are more likely to fall for the many temptations that life has to offer. They are paid millions to strut their stuff on the field, but in between they happily fuck, drink and snort whatever they can in their spare time. After their life in the spotlights, some seek compensation for the loss of attention and admiration. The black hole that this leaves behind is huge. Does this have anything to do with their background? Is there a common thread? After all, the majority of soccer players manage to walk the straight and narrow after their playing career has drawn to a close. Do the *bad boys* always come from the gutter; is winning all that counts; do they succumb under the pressure of success and feel misunderstood afterwards? In any case, once a party animal, always a party animal it seems. Fact: these kinds of soccer players have as many friends as they have enemies. Fans idolize them or dismiss them mercilessly. And it is also a fact that their behavior is often so controversial that we cannot resist reading about their trials and tribulations...

The Author

ROMÁRIO DE SOUZA FARIA



Nationality: Brazilian

Born: 1966

AKA: O Baixinho (the little one) and O Gênio da grande área (the genius of the penalty area)

Known for: not being very tall (5 feet 6 inches), innocent brown eyes and his perpetual look of fatigue

‘NO DANCING, NO WHOOPIE, NO GOALS’

It is the summer of 1994 and *O Globo*, the biggest-selling newspaper in Brazil, decides to dedicate a full page to a story about the women whose affections Romário had won up to that point in time. 25 women were featured, a small selection from the rumored total number, complete with photos and full names. The article reveals how long the soccer player – the star of the Brazil team – was ‘associated’ with these women (i.e. was sleeping around). Of course, his wife, Monica, also appears on the list. She has already been cheated on so many times by ‘O Baixinho’ that the article will come as no surprise to her.

His friend and teammate at FC Barcelona, Hristo Stoichkov, once said that Romário only cared for two things in life: scoring goals and getting laid, fact that the Brazilian child prodigy was only too glad to confirm. He even admitted to being a *womanizer*. ‘I once had sex with three different women on the same day’ and he claimed to have slept with over a thousand women (and that he was a member of the Mile High Club). He has even done ‘it’ in the famous Maracana stadium, though the seasoned playboy was unable to recall the girl’s name or when it happened exactly. ‘It was a golden opportunity. After the game against Corinthians I was the only one that had to stay behind for a doping test. Everybody else had left when a friend just happened to show up. There was an official fast asleep outside the dressing room door but he didn’t notice a thing.’

Monica, now his ex-wife after seven years of marriage, would later expose Romário’s love of excess in all its gory detail. The last straw was the moment she caught him in the act with a cabaret dancer in Barcelona. ‘The more famous he became, the more women

he had following him around. And in the meantime he acted like a dictator at home, a real dog. I always had to wear high heels and short skirts. I also had to wear lipstick all the time, even though I hated lipstick.’

Monica was only seventeen when she married her childhood sweetheart in a ceremony held on a soccer pitch. This was just before the extremely young couple moved camp to PSV in Eindhoven, the Netherlands (and just after his bachelor party in a strip club). An upcoming fashion model from a well-to-do family, she got to know Romário when he still was unknown and living in the Jacarezinho slum in Rio de Janeiro. He spent his days wandering the streets where, despite his chronic asthma, he would play soccer for hours on end. His father, Edevair, worked as a paint mixer in a paint factory and the family struggled to make ends meet. They lived in a shack they had constructed themselves. The daredevil Romário was regularly beaten by his father whenever he got himself into trouble. Nevertheless, every day, before going to work, his father would get up at four o’clock in the morning and wake up his son to kick a ball around the field alongside the railway track that ran next to their home.

The young Romário - who, according to his mother, weighed less than four pounds at birth and fitted perfectly into a shoebox - turns out to be an outstanding jumper and could easily have pursued a career in volleyball. Instead he signs for Rio’s second biggest soccer club, Vasco da Gama. It isn’t long, however, before he has earned himself a bad reputation. He regularly misses training sessions and sometimes even fails to turn up on the day of a match. Why? Because he believes that the club management doesn’t have enough faith in him, and so he rebels. During matches he stands around waiting for the ball to come his way. ‘Sometimes I just pretend I’m asleep,’ he jokes; this stubborn teenager is also not afraid to open his mouth. Despite everything, he makes his professional debut on February 6th 1985, but remarkably enough he fails to score on that occasion.

Romário’s trademark was scoring goals and he put many defenses to the sword throughout this career. After his successful appearance for Brazil at the 1988 Olympic Games, where he is the top scorer, the Dutch team PSV snap him up. The club’s main sponsor, Philips, offer him a very lucrative deal but make optimum use of the generous exchange rate when doing so. On top of that, PSV are the first club ever to claim the international imaging rights for a player. Over the course of five years, the Brazilian wins three national titles and two domestic cups with PSV. He is also crowned top

scorer of the premier division three times. Romário can score like no other, but at the same time he also frequently fails to deliver. PSV coach Bobby Robson tells him this to his face: 'Sometimes you play like Pelé, other times like Mickey Mouse.' The highly talented *enfant terrible* misses training sessions, fakes injuries and stays on holiday in his native country for longer than has been agreed (his reasons include homesickness, personal problems, carnival time and even a mosquito bite...). Complaints concerning Romário do not flow exclusively from the Dutch side. In Brazil, the coach of the national team, Sebastião Lazaroni, curses his fellow countryman when he pulls out of an international game yet again. *'It's a shame, players who choose their holidays over the honor of their country. They are useless, and don't deserve to be selected at all.'*

A bunch of journalists get the surprise of their lives when they see Romário illegally lining out for a friendly match for the Brazilian club Estrela. In Eindhoven they can only shrug their shoulders. They know that their star player regularly plays matches, contrary to agreement, for his 'family' team. He is lucky that the PSV manager, Kees Ploegsma, never complains. Ploegsma even defends him by saying: 'The coaches shouldn't complain. When we bought him we knew what we were getting into.'

PSV even had to form a special committee to find out why he traveled to Rio so often and for so long. Their probing didn't yield any results however. So all the club can do is focus on the behavior of the little Brazilian on the fields of *Holanda*, where he is not always flavor of the month. 'He lets people down all the time without even flinching.' Many of the PSV players are completely fed up with him. Erwin Koeman: 'It's all just me, me, me. Even his wife is treated like a slave.' And colleague Wim Kieft: 'He often said: "Give me the ball, then I'll dribble past five opponents and give it to you to score." That never happened, of course. He just scored all the goals himself.' Kieft, who frequently hung out with the Brazilian away from the club, but whom Romário also 'forgot' just as often, eventually tells Romário straight to his face that he is an 'asshole'. Another teammate and friend, Stan Valckx, calls Romário a 'super ego'.

Romário's only reaction is to shrug his shoulders. And when he is told that everyone has to play by the rules, he counters this by saying 'I'm not everyone'. He denies that he is spoiled and believes that it is ridiculous to expect the players to train the day after a game. Romário knows exactly who his critics are within the players' group. He ignores their criticisms and sneers at their 'wooden' style of playing.

The club finds it increasingly difficult to handle him. They can just about tolerate him parking his car right in front of the dressing room instead of in the car park like the rest of the team, never mind the fact that he often cheats at card games. But the club is less happy with his refusal to learn to speak Dutch, a liability that makes communicating with his teammates very problematic. He avoids the team bus and the players' quarters. He also leaves camera crews waiting for ages and then fails to turn up, and he ignores all of the bills and tax assessment forms that arrive in the post. Manager Kees Ploegsma is frequently kept waiting at the airport for nothing. The striker visits practically every nightclub in the Netherlands, where he is often found enjoying himself until three or four o'clock in the morning (though he only drinks Coca-Cola). When coach Hans Westerhof introduces a penalty system, the Brazilian immediately pulls out his wallet: 'Here coach, I'll only be in on time on Friday so.'

Whenever he is asked how he is feeling, the Brazilian invariably replies: 'Romário bit tired'. He goes out a lot but sleeps just as much, on average fourteen hours a day (usually in the company of yet another blonde). PSV even has to employ someone to get him out of bed in the morning. All the sleep must be doing him some good, however, because every time the players are asked to undergo a physical examination he turns out to be fit as a fiddle. He waves goodbye to PSV in 1993 after five seasons and 165 goals (in 167 matches). He plays for Barcelona for two years, but leaves because of a conflict with Johan Cruyff, the Barcelona coach. Cruyff was not very happy when his striker failed to turn up for pre-season training prior to the 1994/95 season as he had not given him permission to stay in Brazil. The Brazilian thought he deserved some time off after the World Cup, in which he had played so well (see further on in this chapter). Instead of returning to his club, he partied on like a rock star in Rio.

Nevertheless, Cruyff still thought Romário was the best player he had ever worked with in Spain. Once he even substituted him early because Romário was anxious to return to Brazil to celebrate carnival in Rio. Of course, Cruyff would normally never have entertained such an idea, but he told Romário that if he scored two goals in the game he could leave immediately. Within twenty minutes the striker had scored twice and was able to catch his plane. Later, Romário said of Cruyff (surprise, surprise) that he was 'by far the best coach' he had ever played under in his career.

Their love affair comes to an end after two years and Romário returns to his home

country to happily continue his hedonistic lifestyle. While playing for Flamengo, Romário, Savio and the highly flammable Edmundo – nicknamed ‘The beast’ because of the number of cards he receives and his aggressive playing style – are known to one and all as ‘the Bad Boys’. They are more worried about finding booze and women than they are about playing soccer. Because, to quote Romário: ‘No dancing and no whoopie means no goals.’ His first match after returning to Brazil turns out to be legendary. He is paraded in front of a Maracã stadium that is sold out for the first time in years. The camera crews and photographers trip over each other trying to catch a glimpse of him when he steps out onto the field and the fans go mad. But in the match against archrivals Fluminense, he literally doesn’t take one step more than is necessary. The Brazilian newspaper *O Globo* rewards his ‘efforts’ the next day with a rating of 1 out of 10.

With the alarm bells going off all over the hotel, she spots her husband sprinting to the emergency exit along with his most recent conquest...

A month before the start of the 1994 World Cup his 64-year-old father is kidnapped. The criminals demand a ransom of six million dollars. In a letter to the editor printed in the national newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*, Romário begs the kidnappers to release his father. The Barcelona striker says that he understands the kidnappers’ motives, but

he also adds: ‘I have given the Brazilian people many wonderful moments. I don’t deserve to have my father kidnapped.’ In the end, his father is found and freed, thanks to the efforts of over one thousand cops and the support of the drugs mafia in the slums. Later it is claimed that Romário’s brother and his bodyguard staged the kidnapping in an attempt to force the Brazilian football association to pay the ransom.

A couple of days before the World Cup semi-final against Sweden, the hotel where

the Brazilian squad is staying is in utter turmoil. Monica, Romário’s blond childhood sweetheart has long since passed the stage of enjoying his exclusive and eternal commitment. Her husband has been going astray ever since his time at PSV; and she knows. Romário’s authorized biography ‘From gutter to god’ provides a candid account of his extra-marital activities. But the last straw for Monica is when she is denied access to Romário’s floor in the players’ hotel. When the security guards stand firm on denying her access, she becomes blinded by jealousy and sets off the smoke alarm with a cigarette lighter. With the alarm bells going off all over the hotel, she spots her husband sprinting to the emergency exit along with his most recent conquest...

The day after Brazil win the World Cup, the fans in Rio de Janeiro wait until six-thirty in the morning for their heroes to arrive back home. Romário has been voted player of the tournament, and later he is even proclaimed ‘Best player in the world’ by the FIFA. He scores five goals at the World Cup. Again and again the cry of ‘Romáriooooo!!! ‘Romáriooooo!!!’ resounds in living rooms and bars around the country when the samba star puts the ball in the back of the net one more time. At the end of the nineties he wins the Copa América twice with his country. In the meantime, Romário continuously switches from one club to another. For instance, he joins and leaves Flamengo on three separate occasions and does the same four times at Vasco da Gama. His behavior remains incredibly egocentric during this time. He doesn’t care about his teammates at all, regardless of where he plays. When playing for Valencia, his salary is apparently being paid ‘under the counter’, a rumor that is eventually confirmed by Francisco Roig, the club president at the time. The predictable outcome is even more trouble for Romário.

To achieve his ultimate ambition of scoring 1000 goals in professional soccer, Romário roams from continent to continent, including spells in Qatar, Australia and the United States. He ends up playing – if you could even call it that; he only ever moves when he thinks he might score – mostly in near-empty stadiums. He feels completely at home again on the beaches of Miami. Latino women, who often recognize him straight away, look on in admiration whenever they see him kicking a ball around on the beach. Romário calls it literally ‘playing outside’ with a twinkle in his eyes. Here the days are long, just like in Rio. In Holland, the days were always short and cold. He also indulges greedily in the Miami nightlife. ‘I’m a stray cat, and

the night is my friend. When I think back on earlier periods, between my 18th and 30th birthdays, also when I played with PSV, I can't remember sleeping a lot. I danced, had breakfast and trained. It didn't seem to do me any harm.'

On 20 May 2007, the longed-for moment finally arrives. Romário – who by then is 41 years old – scores his 1000th goal. In the forty-sixth minute of the match against Sport Recife, he nonchalantly dispatches a penalty kick to the back of the net. He is immediately buried under a heap of players and journalists. The game has to be stopped for sixteen minutes. In *Esporte Interativo* he says that he has now achieved more than Maradona: 'Pelé is the undisputed number one in my eyes, after that comes me.' There is some dispute as to the validity of Romário's own tally. Critics allege that goals scored in underage, amateur and friendly matches have been included in the count. Moreover, his club, Vasco da Gama, apparently organized a lot of matches against inferior opponents just so that he could add to his total. It is even said that Romário paid teammates to let him play as a striker in the year he reached his target. A little-known fact is that he was caught for doping in the same year. He claimed that the banned substance finasteride came from a hair growth agent he had been using around that time. He also has to deal with a rumor that he used banned substances while at PSV. In *de Volkskrant*, a Dutch newspaper, he firmly denies this: 'The only thing that came anywhere near doping was the glasses of vodka my fellow team members at PSV drank during the half-time break at a couple of games.'

With his career as a player winding down, O Baixinho slowly but surely moves into the world of coaching and even into politics. This doesn't mean the end to all his troubles however. In 1998 he insults the coach of the national team, Zagallo, and his assistant Zico after they decide to leave him out of the squad for the World Cup finals. The official reading is that they leave Romário at home because he is carrying an injury, but in reality they fear that Romário's presence might damage the team spirit in the squad. The superstar of the previous World Cup calls Zico, who participated in three World Cup tournaments himself (without winning), a 'born loser'. But Romário doesn't leave it at that. In an act of revenge, he orders a few of his staff to paint the toilet doors of a nightclub he owns with unflattering images of the two men. In one of them, Zagallo is shown sitting on the toilet with his trousers around his ankles, while in another one Zico is shown waiting his turn, holding a roll of toilet paper in his hand.

His absence from the World Cup four years later is down to his age (36), stubbornness and unrealistic image of himself. 'I am still the best striker in Brazil,' he claims. However, he had recently refused to play a match against Colombia, making the coach of the national team, Scolari, very angry and unwilling to select him anymore. In response to the question as to whether he will watch the World Cup on television, he replies: 'They start at six in the morning, right? Perfect, that's usually the time I get home.'

As manager of the club América he fires his coach and good friend Bebeto, the player with whom he formed the highly successful striking partnership at the World Cup back in 1994. And according to Romário, the great Pelé is now a museum piece and mentally ill. Pelé is not amused and makes this unmistakably clear by saying: 'I'm a Catholic and I believe that God always forgives the ignorant, so I forgive the ignorant.' Romário counters: 'He is a poet when he doesn't speak. He always talks nonsense. I don't believe he is as Catholic as he claims. If he would have been, he would have recognized his daughter by attending her funeral.'

As for his decision to get into politics... the move is a strange one to say the least. He becomes a member of the city council in Rio for the socialist party (PSB) and even wants to become mayor, though the latter ambition is thwarted. Later on he becomes a federal representative for the party. Rumor has it that he only does this so that he can get out of debt. He has been dodging the tax authorities for some time now. But unfortunately for him, the judge doesn't buy his story and orders him to pay a fine of 550,000 dollars. He is forced to sell his apartment in Rio. 'Everybody thinks I'm a crook, but I'm not. I pay four alimonies and that's not easy,' the ex-player objects. Romário, who in the meantime has fathered six children with four different mothers, even ends up spending a night in jail when he refuses to pay the alimony owed to his ex-wife Monica. He is furious: 'I have to pay 22,000 dollars a month, even though I think 15,000 would be more than enough.' A short time later he is sentenced to three and a half years in prison for tax evasion. In the end he gets away with doing two and a half years of community service.

In closing, before the 2014 World Cup, which is being held in Brazil, Romário is frequently at loggerheads with the powers that be at FIFA and their 'puppets' in the

organizing committee, his fellow countrymen Ronaldo and Pelé. According to him, the public doesn't have the faintest idea how much money their country is wasting on the World Cup. In relation to Ronaldo he says: 'He publicly promised free entrance for handicapped people. And so far, nothing.' When Ricardo Teixeira, the infamous president of the Brazilian football association, flees the country because of an enormous corruption scandal, Romário says he is happy to be rid of this 'cancerous tumor'. He calls for demonstrations, says the amount of money that has been wasted is 'a crying shame' and states that 'it has been enough with all the theft and humiliation. They only come to build up their stuff, take their profit and disappear just as quick. FIFA doesn't even pay taxes. They ought to be prosecuted.' He calls the president of FIFA, Sepp Blatter, a 'son of a bitch' and secretary-general Jerome Valcke an 'extortionist'. Romário: 'They are corrupt, are guilty of blackmailing. The tickets are almost two times as expensive as at the World Cup before this one in South Africa. Let me guess where the money went... We can't expect anything from the FIFA. The country of Brazil will be the big loser after the World Cup.'

One thing Romário never has to worry about is a lack of beautiful women. Nightclubs were often closed off to the public whenever he showed up. Once, after he had been selected for the national youth team for the first time, he had the nerve to urinate over the balcony of his hotel. And as a lauded member of the Divine Canaries he regularly visited prostitutes before a game or had sex in the toilet of whatever airplane they were flying in. In Eindhoven, Romário even had a room permanently booked in the Holiday Inn so that he would always have a place to retreat to with a girl in privacy. He was as stubborn a character as they come. And these days? He hasn't changed a bit: he continues to strut his stuff on the beaches of Rio, has gotten married for the fourth time and is still 'enjoying life to the fullest', as he says himself.

LOTHAR MATTHÄUS



Nationality: German

Born: 1961

AKA: Screwing Machine, Judas, Mister Schwalbe, Der Lothar, Der Loddar and Der Grosse (the big one)

Known for: big mouth, square head and self-righteousness.