

The £20m Question That Can Be Left Unanswered

Much like new kits and pre-season tours, the summer would not be the same without an annual transfer debacle. With increasing reliability, players will announce intentions to leave or join a club, listing numerous explanations, the majority of which will irritate the more suspicious supporters of his once beloved current employers.

Admittedly, this is a cynical approach to looking at summer arrivals and departures, and it is worth remembering that football is not about the self, but for the whole. For every headline that details an agent demanding their ego-inflated client is immediately transferred to his “dream” club, you get a story such as Sami Hyypiä, who was reduced to tears in front of a standing Anfield ovation at the final whistle of his last game, despite having signed a deal with Bayer Leverkusen three weeks earlier.

When Hyypiä signed for Liverpool, they had been trophyless for seven years; their last success being the FA Cup in 1992. After a decade of playing, captaining and collecting numerous trophies along the way, he left Merseyside in the summer not only as a club legend, but as a creaking 35-year-old, winding down his playing career. Aside from a Premier league winner’s medal, his job had been completed.

Over the last month, Arsenal’s Samir Nasri has emerged as this pre-season’s talking point. As it currently stands, Nasri has returned from his summer break, and is back in pre-season training for the new season. However, with just 11 months left on his current contract, and with a strong desire to win titles, a move away from the Emirates looks to be the most likely outcome. Understandably, the Frenchman has found fervent interest from other clubs, notably Manchester United.

“One of the reasons I came to Arsenal was to win titles and I’m not expecting to leave without one. I’m always flattered when my name is mentioned in connection with any big club. If there was any offer it would be different, then I would have to make a choice.”

- Nasri, speaking to Sport Magazine earlier this year.

So the Mexican standoff is in place: Nasri may leave in order to win trophies. Arsene Wenger wants Nasri to stay and win trophies. United have informally bid £20m for the player. Arsenal will balk at selling to a rival club. With time running out on his contract, Nasri can walk away from London for free next summer, meaning Wenger will not only lose someone he describes as a ‘complete player’ from his squad, but also any transfer fee; a double blow that could easily have been avoided at any point throughout the past season.

However, is it all doom and gloom if Wenger and Nasri cannot agree terms right now? The sensible, parsimonious fan in this situation would perhaps suggest that £20m now is better than zero at the end of the season; therefore common sense suggests cashing in on the United offer and start looking for alternatives.

But that, under the circumstances, is the worst option of the lot.

Nasri has not come out like Berbatov in 2008, to say it would be a ‘dream’ to join another club. He has not come out like Tevez, and admitted he hates the city and will never return. He hasn’t even mentioned anything to do with leaving Arsenal. He has simply admitted his desire to win titles.

So let him have one final season.

The problem is that fans, and perhaps even the board, will in this instance look no further than the price-tag that will go ignored. If for arguments sake the final price-tag is £20m, is this not a figure the club could easily retain via other means over the course of a season?

This may bring up the argument of how a player is valued in today's game. In modern football, the longer a player has on his contract, the more money it would take to prise that player away from his current club. His value is based on how much the club can achieve on the pitch for the duration of his deal.

But in this case, that doesn't tell the whole story. Nasri, off the back of his best season in England, is unquestionably a future poster-boy under Wenger. Should another summer transfer debacle be completed this year, that being Fabregas re-joining Barcelona, then Nasri is the readymade brand replacement for the foam fingers, scarves and replica shirts that sell like hot cakes, not forgetting what his presence will do for season tickets and TV matches for a worldwide audience. Having Nasri in the first XI could be enough to claim a decent progression in the Champions League, as well as qualification for the following campaign.

If the £20m valuation has been established with all this in mind, then Wenger has nothing to lose. Yes, that figure could go a long way to finding a replacement, but as many fans will tell you, there are no guarantees he will pick up where Nasri left off.

"I can understand that people say 'you have money, just go out and buy', but it's not only that, we want to find the quality we need."

- Arsene Wenger, speaking to the club website about replacing Gael Clichy.

Nasri, much like Hyypiä and many other professionals, would love to end his career in his mid-thirties, kneecaps crumbling, but with medals to show off. Whatever his future holds, he will achieve that. Given one more season at Arsenal, Nasri may realise that his own job is far from being completed.