

1 **Exploring Migration Experiences of Foreign Footballers to England through the**  
2 **use of autobiographies**

3

4 This article examines the sport labour migration of elite footballers who have  
5 transferred from another European country to the English Premier League (EPL).  
6 Sport labour migration happens for a number of reasons, including financial gain  
7 and professional development. With this, however, comes various challenges like  
8 cultural shock and cultural dislocation. To extend the research on migration, data  
9 was gathered from autobiographies, with ten premier league footballers who had  
10 transferred from one of five selected European leagues. Results revealed a number  
11 of insights into a player migratory experience, including the importance of settling  
12 in, dealing with the characteristics of a new league, a need for positive support from  
13 the club and the negative impact of the media. Findings inform how to improve the  
14 migration experiences in both sport and other job sectors that require acculturation.

15 **Keywords:** Autobiography, Migration, Sport, Football, Acculturation, Culture

16

17 **Introduction**

18 People, including elite athletes, are now moving globally to seek employment. The global  
19 movement of athletes has accelerated since the late twentieth century, and the migration of  
20 administrators, coaches, athletes, and ancillary staff is a prominent feature of global sport.<sup>1</sup> In  
21 the highly competitive world of sport, driven increasingly by the demand for immediate  
22 success, athletes are now able to sell their services to the highest bidder, wherever  
23 this team may be located.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, countries at the core of capitalist sport (such as the  
24 UK) are able to use their economic superiority to recruit cheaper talent from peripheral  
25 countries in order to minimise their labour costs.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, athletes recognise that their  
26 bodies 'are invested with cultural capital that they can translate into economic capital', which  
27 others are willing to pay large sums to acquire.<sup>4</sup> In light of such migration occurring in elite  
28 level sport, it is important to understand more fully the migration experiences of athletes. This  
29 study aims to provide such an understanding within the context of elite professional footballers,  
30 including challenges faced by such athletes when relocating to another country to compete.

31 **Contextual review**

32 Sports labour migration is a dynamic and multifaceted process, and while the reasons for it are  
33 varied a number of typologies have been developed.<sup>5</sup> Of relevance to this study, Magee and  
34 Sugden also devised an alternative typology of migration for English league football with a  
35 combination of overlapping categories.<sup>6</sup> Their typology comprises the Settler, Ambitionist,  
36 Exile, Nomadic Cosmopolitan, Expelled, and Mercenary. Significantly, the motivations of  
37 footballers for moving can impact on migratory experiences at a later stage,<sup>7</sup> either mitigating  
38 against or enhancing the cultural challenges faced by migrants.<sup>8</sup>

39 Many athletes see that a successful sporting career can be a source of financial  
40 security for their families and the wider community.<sup>9</sup> Sports labour migration can also create  
41 tensions in the host nations, with fears surrounding cultural integration reflecting similar local-  
42 global tensions arising from increased global interconnectedness.<sup>10</sup> In some countries, these  
43 fears have also resulted in the introduction of ‘protectionist labor [sic] barriers, including  
44 quotas, residency clauses, selection limitations, and eligibility thresholds’ that are designed to  
45 protect local interests.<sup>11</sup> As a result, it is not uncommon for migrating athletes to have negative  
46 experiences, which can force them to return to their homeland.<sup>12</sup> Players can face loneliness  
47 and insecurity, due to the impact of giving up families, cultures and part of their personal and  
48 social identities in order to pursue their careers abroad.<sup>13</sup> In these situations, when players come  
49 into contact with different cultures that requires changes in their original cultural patterns to  
50 adapt to their new host culture,<sup>14</sup> they undergo a learning process, referred to as acculturation.<sup>15</sup>  
51 In the early stages of acculturation, migrants often experience homesickness, isolation and face  
52 language difficulties. In addition, similar issues are also felt by the migrant’s families.<sup>16</sup> Such  
53 feelings have been termed as culture shock<sup>17</sup> and cultural dislocation.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, nations  
54 are often willing to sacrifice a degree of their national identity, and to recruit citizens  
55 ‘specifically for their short-term potential to enhance the nation’s international standing’.<sup>19</sup> In

56 these instances, international sporting success (and the assumed associated increase in national  
57 pride) is prioritised over ‘local interests’, and is indicative of the significant place of sport in  
58 the national identity of some nations.

59         There has been an increased rate of football player migration in the 1990s, which was  
60 driven by two factors; the withdrawal of quota rules, which freed the restrictions of the number  
61 of players clubs were permitted from outside of their National Association, and perhaps even  
62 more significantly, the introduction of the Bosman ruling. This change followed a case  
63 surrounding Belgium footballer Jean-Marc Bosman, resulting in clubs being prohibited from  
64 withholding player registrations following the conclusion of a contract, which gave players  
65 more power and freedom with regards to an overseas transfer.<sup>20</sup> These legislative changes have  
66 had an effect on all of the major football leagues across Europe, but perhaps none more so than  
67 the EPL - the highest domestic men’s football league in England. It was formerly known as the  
68 Football League First Division, before a decision was made to break away from the Football  
69 League, establishing itself as a global brand with games viewed by telecasts around the world.<sup>21</sup>  
70 The television rights for the new league created high financial revenue, with satellite  
71 subscription company British Sky Broadcasting Limited, (Sky) paying over £190 million for a  
72 five-year deal to broadcast matches.<sup>22</sup> The value of the broadcasting rights deals has increased  
73 significantly, with a record-breaking split between Sky and British Telecom (BT) set to surpass  
74 the £5 billion mark over a three-year deal.<sup>23</sup> These developments have also accelerated the  
75 migration of overseas footballers to England. During the first year of the EPL in 1992, there  
76 were just eleven foreign players that started the first round of fixtures. By the 2008/2009  
77 season, there had been an increase with 358 registered foreign players having now plied their  
78 trade in England’s top division.<sup>24</sup> This trend has continued into the latest premier league season  
79 (2018/2019) with 377 of the 565 players registered at the beginning of the season not being  
80 from England.<sup>25</sup>

81           The EPL is a global product at the centre of international attention that creates added  
82 pressure, has an insular nature in its traditions and is positioned as the dominant domestic  
83 sporting competition in the U.K..<sup>26</sup> For these reasons alone, it is vital for an overseas player  
84 and their clubs to understand the consequences of such a significant career change. Previous  
85 research has provided some evidence of the challenges players face when migrating from one  
86 country to another, especially in elite level football. For example, Weedon interviewed youth  
87 footballers following their migration into English Premier League (EPL) academies, and  
88 Richardson et al. interviewed five young players who had transferred to EPL clubs.<sup>27,28</sup> Our  
89 study aims to expand on this limited research evidence, in order to more fully understand the  
90 experiences of overseas players migrating to the EPL, while being aware of the social and  
91 cultural implications of living and working abroad as an elite athlete. In the current study, we  
92 explore a sample of elite footballers. We adopted an in-depth qualitative approach, using the  
93 autobiographies of elite players with the aim of understanding the migration experience of elite  
94 foreign players moving to the EPL, including the challenges faced by such athletes.

## 95 **Methodology**

### 96 **Using Autobiographical data**

97 One potential avenue for understanding players' experiences of migrating to the EPL is by  
98 gaining direct information from past and current players through interviews.<sup>29</sup> However,  
99 interviewing such elite athletes is difficult, with Sparkes and Stewart highlighting time, access,  
100 and cost as barriers to conducting interviews.<sup>30</sup> Sparkes and Stewart proposed autobiographies  
101 as an alternative analytic resource due to the ease of access to elite performers, the low cost,  
102 and how autobiographies can provide a depth of insight. An autobiography can be defined as  
103 a person's written story of his or her own life.<sup>31</sup> They can provide a written narration of the  
104 prominent aspects that have occurred throughout the athlete's own life, within the context of

105 their living society, allowing them to share both individual and social experiences.<sup>32</sup>  
106 Autobiographies also have mainstream appeal,<sup>33</sup> with human's socially constructed  
107 experiences that are conveyed through storytelling, dominating contemporary publishing and  
108 allowing people to consume and spread information.<sup>34</sup> From a research point of view,  
109 autobiographies focussing on the careers of athletes, as they provide detailed information about  
110 their lives,<sup>35</sup> have been used as an analytical resource in a number of studies in sport. These  
111 have focussed on investigating illness and injury,<sup>36</sup> mental health issues,<sup>37</sup> and difficulties from  
112 alcohol.<sup>38</sup> Butryn and Massuci suggest that by investigating an athlete's individual story,  
113 researchers are better equipped to understand athletes' experiences.

114 Sparkes and Stewart (2016) highlight how autobiographies can provide appropriate  
115 data concerning elite athletes due to their availability, and the illuminating insights they can  
116 provide, and that they can enhance our understanding of such social phenomena as migrations  
117 experienced by elite individuals who lived through them (Plummer, 2001). However, Smith  
118 and Watson (2010) call researchers to consider the authenticity of autobiographical texts,  
119 highlighting that readers of autobiographies should consider while such writing may contain  
120 "facts," they are not factual history about a particular time, person, or event; rather they offer  
121 subjective truth rather than fact. Autobiographical accounts are influenced by a range of  
122 factors, such as the writer's own motives and biases, and their ability to accurately recall events  
123 and experiences (Howells & Fletcher, 2015). Thus, autobiographical texts may be considered  
124 as "commercial commitments" (Thing & Ronglan, 2014, p. 1), and outside influences might  
125 influence the style of the narratives (e.g., length and depth of content) as well as the "inclusion  
126 and relevance of psychosocial-related content" (Howells and Fletcher, 2015, p. 46). When  
127 using autobiographies, we need to recognise the intersubjective exchange between narrator and  
128 reader (Smith and Watson, 2010), and Sparkes and Stewart highlight how the use of  
129 autobiographies propose that readers need to adopt a 'critical analytical stance' (p. 126) when

130 reading such texts. Taking these debates in the literature into account, we use autobiographies  
131 in the current study as they illuminate our understanding of the experiences of elite players  
132 migrating to play in a new country.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the autobiographies provide the involve  
133 players recounting the personal experiences that are important to them (i.e., what is important  
134 when moving to another country to play football). As the aim of the current study is to  
135 understand the ‘lives’ and ‘experiences’ of players migrating to play in the EPL,  
136 autobiographies appear a very suitable resource to understand the subjective experiences of  
137 this elite sample.

138

### 139 **Sampling Procedure, Participants and Analysis**

140 A detailed search of elite male footballers who had played in the EPL took place. To ensure  
141 that the selection of autobiographies was relevant to the topic of interest, purposive sampling  
142 was used to identify appropriate participants that fit the particular area of interest.<sup>40</sup> The initial  
143 criterion for inclusion was that the autobiographies had to be of an elite footballer. When  
144 classifying an ‘elite’ player, eight broad categories defined in previous research were  
145 considered for inclusion/exclusion of an elite player.<sup>41</sup> This included categories such as their  
146 international level, experience, professionalism and training frequency. A player also had to  
147 have represented their countries first team, and also has to have made at least fifty appearances  
148 in the EPL. The second criteria were that players had to have transferred from one of the top  
149 four European leagues (Spanish La Liga, French Ligue 1, German Bundesliga & Italian Serie  
150 A) or the Eredivisie into the EPL at any point during their career. The top four European leagues  
151 were selected through their current UEFA coefficients, which are based upon their current  
152 levels of success in European competition. The Eredivisie was also used due to the frequency  
153 of transfer activity from that league to the Premier League, with at least two per season over  
154 the last eight years and thirty-nine in total over the last seven seasons.<sup>42</sup> The final criteria were

155 that the autobiography had to include information about their transfer to, and subsequent time  
156 playing, in the EPL. The final sample consisted of 10 male footballers (no female footballers  
157 who had written an autobiography that have met the above criterion of representing their  
158 countries first team, played over fifty matches in the female equivalent Women's Super League  
159 and transferred over from one of the five leagues). This sample included two autobiographies  
160 from each of the five European leagues; Holland, Spain, France, Germany and Italy (the details  
161 of the players sampled are summarised in Table 1).

162  
163 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

164  
165  
166           After sourcing the autobiographies, the first author read through each book, identifying  
167 and highlighting specific information relevant to the research question of understanding the  
168 experiences and challenges of elite football players migrating to the EPL. This data was  
169 transcribed and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's guidelines.<sup>43</sup> Six key  
170 guidelines were followed here, where initially, the first author immersed himself into the data  
171 by reading and rereading the autobiographical data. The second stage saw the generation of  
172 initial codes to identify and provide a label for potentially relevant information. A shift then  
173 took place from the initial codes by putting them into themes. The initial codes were reviewed  
174 to identify areas of similarity and overlap that could be used to generate a theme, which would  
175 have captured something important about the data in relation to the research question. All  
176 themes were then reviewed in relation to the initial codes and all of the data gathered to ensure  
177 that all the themes were relevant. The themes were then defined and named in order to  
178 differentiate their unique value to the research question, before finally being presented in the  
179 actual report. Throughout this process, the second and third authors acted as critical friends.<sup>44</sup>  
180 They were not involved with the initial data collection and analysis; instead, their role was to  
181 challenge the first author on his interpretation of the data, and the organisation of the thematic

182 structure. This process resulted in four general themes; *issues of settling in a new living*  
183 *environment, the need for positive support from their clubs, appreciating the characteristics of*  
184 *English football, and increased media scrutiny.*

185

## 186 **Results and discussion**

### 187 **Settling in a new living environment**

188 Throughout the autobiographies, players (indirectly) spoke about the acculturation process, and  
189 the importance of settling in their new environments and the many challenges that came along  
190 with this. One of the most prominent issues surrounding this transition, was the difficulty in  
191 speaking the national language. Didier Drogba, an Ivorian who moved to Chelsea from  
192 Olympique de Marseille in France, encountered this issue, saying “My initial problem was that  
193 I didn’t speak English, my command of the language extended to the pointless sentences that  
194 all French kids learn at school”.<sup>45</sup> This lack of English language proficiency had an effect on  
195 Drogba’s ability to find somewhere to live, claiming that his “poor command of English” meant  
196 he “couldn’t face the thought of visiting loads of houses”. The anxiety that is present in this  
197 comment can be added to the loneliness and insecurity that Maguire and Stead identified as  
198 issues faced by migrating players.<sup>46</sup>

199 Spanish player Fernando Torres also found the language barrier particularly difficult  
200 when he transferred from Atlético Madrid. He says, “one of the biggest problems I faced when  
201 I first moved to Liverpool was the language barrier. My English was limited”<sup>47</sup>, something he  
202 claims to have prevented him giving “as much as I would like” in terms of expressing himself  
203 both on and off the pitch. This barrier can, therefore, impact on the on-field performance of  
204 players, and subsequently their careers and livelihoods. The language issue also had an  
205 influence on Suarez’ career both on and off the field. He claimed that, “To start with at  
206 Liverpool, I had to rely on gestures to communicate”<sup>48</sup>. The location within England should



207 also be considered for Torres and Suarez. Liverpool English can also be referred to as Scouse,  
208 an easily distinguishable accent, that some claim to have regionally specific grammar and  
209 vocabulary to be considered its own dialect.<sup>49</sup> Due to this regional variation, Torres found  
210 particular difficulty when conversing with the medical staff at his new club. When highlighting  
211 an early experience of having to explain an injury to the medical staff, he says:

212         One place you can't afford to get it wrong is at the doctors. You have to be very careful.  
213         If you don't explain your symptoms properly, you can end up being given the wrong  
214         treatment. If you can't explain exactly where the pain is, and what kind of pain it is, it  
215         can hinder your rehabilitation.

216

217 In fact, this language barrier was a common issue amongst most of the players when migrating  
218 to England. French player Patrick Viera, for example, felt a particular pressure. He says:

219         I remember how difficult those first few weeks were. I didn't speak the language and,  
220         in England, more than anywhere, that's a handicap that you have to get over quickly...  
221         The English think that not speaking their language shows a lack of respect and, in the  
222         end, they are quite right<sup>50</sup>.

223 In a sporting culture that has previously been identified as xenophobic, in terms of the media  
224 and supporter attitudes,<sup>51</sup> not speaking the language can result in players being perceived to be  
225 more 'foreign' than others.<sup>52</sup> These players are often the first to be blamed following a poor  
226 team performance, with their dedication to the team questioned. Moreover, football managers  
227 have historically hired "those who most resemble themselves since they believe they can be  
228 trusted to act in the expected manner".<sup>53</sup> Torres claimed that the manager did "insist on the  
229 importance of learning English" because it would help him "understand and integrate" into the  
230 local culture a lot quicker.

231           Issues with speaking the new language are a particular challenge for the players coming  
232 to England, as is supported by Weedon, who found that academy footballers experienced  
233 negative feelings of frustration and despondency when interacting with native players. In other  
234 employment situations, however, language may be less important for several reasons.<sup>54</sup>  
235 According to culture learning theory there are considerable learning outcomes across  
236 individuals and groups, including personal factors, such as motivation and expectations, and  
237 situational factors, like previous experience and intercultural contact.<sup>55</sup> In football, for  
238 example, there is perhaps more practical reasons that enhance the expectation of them learning  
239 the language. There is more cultural diversity in European football teams compared to other  
240 work sectors such as labour work.<sup>56</sup> All of the players here were motivated to learn the  
241 language, either independently, or with the help of others.

242           Language issues were not confined to the player, but also extended to their families (as  
243 both Evans and Piggott, and van Tonder and Soontines highlighted. A concern over their family  
244 was a common theme to emerge within autobiographies.<sup>57</sup> Jens Lehmann highlighted the  
245 difficulties that his family faced when he migrated to England from Germany. He says “Besides  
246 my salary, two things were important to me: a house for the family and a good school for my  
247 kids”<sup>58</sup>. In terms of his children’s schooling, Lehmann’s child initially had a negative  
248 experience. He explains, “to move to a neighbourhood and a school where, initially, he did not  
249 understand a single word. He began to suffer from stress induced hiccups that would not stop  
250 during the first few days”, something that Lehmann stresses was “too much for him (Mats, his  
251 son). He felt a total outsider, an alien, whom no one understood”. Because of his own  
252 circumstances, Lehmann says “I myself could not be of much help to my kids as I had to go to  
253 work, in other words, training”.

254           Several players also struggled to adapt to the environmental differences that they would  
255 be experiencing in England. Pepe Reina points out:

256 when you move to a new country [in this case from Spain], you have to pick up the new  
257 language, adapt your culture, get used to a new way of driving and adjust to a different climate  
258 – and you do all this without the support network you had at home.<sup>59</sup>

259 He says that he and his wife could “not prepare [themselves] for when you leave a hot  
260 climate and go to one where it feels like it rains all the time”. Torres also speaks about adapting  
261 to the climate and lifestyle differences, saying “you have to get used to a new country, a new  
262 currency, and new climate, so you have to feel comfortable in your new home”. Drogba  
263 however, saw the negative side of not adapting to a new environment, he says:

264 The move to England had been harder than I’d expected. I had a lot to adapt to both in terms  
265 of the language and the team’s way of playing, and my family had a difficult time adapting  
266 as well.

267 He adds that his challenge was exasperated because his wife and children were, at the time,  
268 living in a hotel suite, something Drogba argued was unsustainable in the long term. This  
269 perceived challenge of settling in has also been found previously. Richardson et al. examined  
270 the migration of elite young football players moving to the EPL finding that leaving their home  
271 and family to try and establish a career in professional football, in an unknown environment,  
272 was particularly difficult.<sup>60</sup>

273 Maguire identifies the ‘settler’ category of athletes that stay in a host country for a  
274 considerable period of time. However, the time taken to settle in to living and playing in  
275 England for these players should not be underestimated. In Magee & Sugden’s study, a former  
276 Manchester City forward said it took him “about 4 years to get to grips with it all” before  
277 eventually staying in England for 11 years. All of our analysed footballer autobiographies  
278 revealed difficulties with the acculturation process that followed their transfer.

279

280 **Appreciating the characteristics of English football**

281 Difficulties with settling are not confined to off-field problems. Several players spoke of the  
282 unique differences and challenges that come with playing in the English Premier League. Dutch  
283 player Dennis Bergkamp (who moved from Italy), for example, was told that “when he first  
284 came he needed to toughen up a bit. At the time, he wasn’t as physical as he became later, but  
285 the English Premier League was very physical”.<sup>61</sup> Maya Yoshida is another player that quickly  
286 learnt about the physical nature of the league. After making his debut he says, “once in the  
287 Premier League, I quickly realised that physicality is a must for a centre-back”.<sup>62</sup> He goes on  
288 to claim: “In England, being strong physically and mentally is a minimum requirement”, so  
289 much so, that he created a plan to do extra strength training in the gym. Drogba is another  
290 player that struggled with the initial physical nature of English football. He says “In England,  
291 when you get fouled, you have to stand up and shake the guy’s hand! At the time, it was a big  
292 culture shock and let’s just say that I took a long time to get used to it”. Torres also found out  
293 about the characteristic, and was quickly told, “you’ve got to get to the gym. You’re too thin  
294 to play in England”. Although not related to the topic in question, other research has provided  
295 evidence for the importance of both a physical and physiological profile for elite soccer players,  
296 something which should be considered during sport labour migration.<sup>63</sup>

297 A number of players identified further physical challenges that the EPL posed to them,  
298 namely the speed and intensity of the play. Lehmann admits, “right from the start I realised  
299 that I would have to speed everything up...the football there is strong, hard, quick...I had to  
300 adapt to the English way of playing, and that meant getting used to a game that was harder”.  
301 Viera also speaks about the intensity, something that he enjoyed. He says “English players are  
302 perhaps less technical...but they make up for these shortcomings by playing with real intensity.  
303 I have to say I love the English game”. In contrast however, Drogba took time to adapt to this  
304 new-found intensity, admitting that “I had been shocked, by the relentlessness of the premier  
305 league and the pace at which games were being played”. The increased physical requirements

306 of the EPL was exasperated by the lack of a mid-season break in the playing season over the  
307 winter months, as is common in many European countries. Yoshida points out:

308       There is no winter break in the Premier League, unlike domestic leagues in other European  
309 countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany, France and the Netherlands. For a player, it is also  
310 a time to recharge your batteries both mentally and physically after the first half of the  
311 season. However, in England, where I understand that football is part of people's everyday  
312 life and has always been the biggest source of entertainment, the league schedule gets busier  
313 instead of coming to a break during the festive period! ... In that winter, I found it seriously  
314 tough to play on New Year's Day with only a two-day interval.

315       For the football migrant, needing to adapt to different working conditions and playing  
316 styles is a key factor. In other employment sectors, (such as factories or office work) migrants  
317 typically find a very similar working style, yet our findings indicate that players were  
318 confronted with a new, physically demanding style that they found to be particularly  
319 challenging, in line with both Richardson et al's and Weedon's findings.<sup>64</sup> However, in both  
320 of these examples, the footballers studied were younger, maturing players that are more likely  
321 to be given time to develop. Elite players, conversely, are likely to be put into the first team  
322 very quickly and expected to perform, which would heighten this challenge.

323

#### 324 **Need for positive support from their club**

325 All the players considered it a necessity to have a strong supporting network from within the  
326 club. An example of this is the perceived support they received from the manager. Viera talks  
327 up the importance of his manager:

328       The reason Arsenal won the day over these other two clubs was of course Arsene Wenger  
329 [the then manager]. I was convinced by what he told me, because he had first been interested  
330 in me as a person before he had thought of getting in touch with me the player... Arsene

331 really wanted me to join and he did everything he could for the negotiations to be finalised  
332 as quickly as possible.

333 Eric Cantona also speaks about the importance of the manager; he says “the manager of  
334 Leeds was ready to put his confidence in me”<sup>65</sup> after a difficult period during his playing career  
335 in France. Cantona was very appreciative of this support, where he later says “I would like  
336 Howard Wilkinson [Leeds United manager] to know, and the public of Elland Road [the home  
337 ground of Leeds] with him, that Leeds gave me my life back...I came back to football thanks  
338 to him and that incomparable welcome which was given to me”.

339 Players also spoke about the club staff members that helped them to settle in, with  
340 mixed experiences occurring for different individuals. On one hand, Torres found that he  
341 received strong support from the club. He says “I’m accompanied by staff from Liverpool,  
342 especially David Bygroves and Owen Brown (Club advisors). They have been great in helping  
343 me to adapt to life in Liverpool, especially at the start”. He also praises those who helped him  
344 with learning the language, claiming “Two people were vital during my first few days in the  
345 city: Rob and Alan, the English teachers Liverpool laid on for me”. Reina shared this view,  
346 praising the staff for their help in the early days. He says “The staff... They made me feel at  
347 home. I’ll always be grateful to them for the confidence they had in me”.

348 In contrast, Yoshida felt that he didn’t receive sufficient support from within his club.  
349 When speaking about his struggles to find housing, he claims “I imagined that various  
350 essentials for life in a foreign country – such as a house – would be arranged by the club. But  
351 I was wrong”. Because of this “it was a challenge not to feel frustrated or irritated by the time  
352 it took to sort out some basic stuff involved in living in a foreign country”. Drogba shared this  
353 frustration, claiming that:

354 . . .when it came to helping me to settle in and find somewhere to live, Chelsea were  
355 not the impressive organisation they are now...I either relied on other players to advise  
356 me, or did it myself...This was not easy.

357 Another important support network from within the club was the teammates of the player  
358 migrating. Reina for example, was particularly grateful of the teammates who helped him when  
359 he moved to Liverpool. He says:

360 There was a community of Spanish players there. Xabi, Luis Garcia, Fernando Morientes  
361 and Josemi were all at the club – and this undoubtedly made it easier for me to settle in.  
362 They were telling me everything that I had to do, all the rules I needed to follow and showing  
363 me where I needed to go... Thanks to them, the adaptation process was much easier than it  
364 might otherwise have been...Thanks to them, the adaptation process was much easier than  
365 it might otherwise have been... I had an instant sense of belonging and that was thanks to  
366 my teammates”.

367 Rosler shared this positive experience, suggesting he:

368 was lucky in that I was coming into a team that had a lot of experienced players such as  
369 Steve McMahon, Tony Coton, Keith Curle and Niall Quinn. McMahon was great in those  
370 early months by taking me to one side and explaining things to me when needed...It helped  
371 me settle in a lot quicker. I really appreciated him taking the time do that”.<sup>66</sup>

372

373 Rees highlights the importance of social support in elite populations, and how support  
374 networks are crucial to health, well-being, and learning and transfer of skills. <sup>67</sup> For example,  
375 Cranmer and Sollitto<sup>68</sup> found that players receiving informational and emotional support,  
376 predicted higher levels of athlete satisfaction with their sporting experiences, and Fletcher and  
377 Sarkar,<sup>69</sup> highlighted how social support can improve player resilience. In their study  
378 examining migration experiences of young European players, Richardson et al. (2012) found

379 the players' own parents to be a key source of support, highlighted how the migration transition  
380 would have been difficult without them.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Pummell, Harwood, and Lavallee  
381 illustrated how such social support from significant people in athletes' lives is crucial when  
382 making within-career transitions.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, this study highlights the importance for different  
383 support sources such as their manager and teammates. The findings also point to frustrations  
384 and difficulties when this support is not forthcoming. Even more worryingly, low levels of  
385 social support amongst both current and former footballers is also associated with mental health  
386 issues.<sup>72</sup>

387         Despite the increasing frequency that footballers are bought and sold, this research should  
388 also act as a reminder that footballers (and other athletes) are not just a commodity. Admittedly,  
389 they are now earning millions of pounds/euros per year and are more financially secure than a  
390 lot of other job sectors in the UK and Europe.<sup>73</sup> This doesn't neglect the point however, that  
391 they still require sources of support from elsewhere to avoid a negative consequence. In other  
392 job sectors, evidence suggests that emotional labour, burnout and job satisfaction can impair  
393 employee well-being,<sup>74</sup> but this should also be the case for footballers. Social support, such as  
394 from the family,<sup>75</sup> the coaches,<sup>76</sup> and the club<sup>77</sup> is key for footballers succeeding in a new  
395 country.

396

### 397 **Increased media scrutiny and shaping public perception**

398 Several players spoke of the intensity of the media when moving to England, and the negativity  
399 of their reports. Cantona for example, indicates that "In England, the media publicity and  
400 pressure is much more intense than in France, and the newspapers and television can create a  
401 tension". He says the media were "scrutinising every little thing I did". Cantona continues to  
402 speak badly of the British media, suggesting "there will always be little shits who are  
403 attempting to dig up dirt, even where it doesn't exist.



404           Lehmann was also wary of the British media, whom he claims can turn on a player  
405 pretty quickly. He says “There is a game that the English media, though not exclusively, likes  
406 to play: praising the player lavishly, only to run them into the ground ruthlessly at the slightest  
407 mistake”. Lehmann also speaks about the importance of ignoring the media, saying that ,“my  
408 advice in terms of working with press, advice that has always worked well for me, is simple.  
409 Focus on your skills and do not pander to the press”. Drogba certainly had a difficult  
410 relationship with the media during his early days at Chelsea. He boldly claimed that ,“The  
411 British media were different. I learned my lesson the hard way... My answer was headline  
412 news in every possible media – TV, radio, newspapers, internet. Drogba went on to say that  
413 “the media had decided on an image of me, it seemed, and that made it harder for me to win  
414 people over with my football”.

415           Yoshida also points out how the media can influence how they are perceived as  
416 footballers, indicating how the “people in the media might have given him a lower  
417 (performance) grade” something with Yoshida himself was able to deal with, but admits others  
418 may struggle with that sort of label. He says, “I know some players and managers do care, but  
419 I have never seen that sort of attitude guiding them somewhere positive or good”. Viera also  
420 agrees with this, claiming that “the media loved to pigeon-hole people”. Rosler also highlights  
421 how manipulative the media can be, arguing that after a particular incident, the “media turned  
422 it around and suggested there was something other than a goodwill in my gesture... it was a  
423 reminder of how even the simplest gesture could be turned on its head when things were going  
424 badly”.

425           For the majority of the players here, the media was perceived as a negative influence.  
426 Similarly, Kristiansen, Roberts and Sisjord<sup>78</sup> found that players had to learn to cope with  
427 perceived negative content in the media, whilst Kristiansen & Roberts,<sup>79</sup> found that a higher  
428 performance climate increased a player’s perception of negative media exposure. This link

429 between level of performance and media exposure may explain why those in the high-  
430 performance climate of the EPL, had a negative perception of the media, whereas migrant  
431 youth players in Premier League academies, mentioned very little about the negative impact of  
432 the media in Weedon's study.<sup>80</sup>

433 More significantly, the media has, traditionally, shaped the views of fans and others in  
434 the football world (in addition to the wider public). Once established, it is very difficult for  
435 players to shake off the reputation that has been formed in the media, particularly if their  
436 language skills are lower. This was the case with Drogba and Yoshida who initially struggled  
437 physically in the English Premier League, and many of the players who struggled with the  
438 language. The players believed that the media used these struggles to portray them in a negative  
439 way, suggesting that they were motivated by short-term, financial gains and not interested in  
440 acculturating into the English culture. In this manner, the players were typecast and may be  
441 considered to fit within the 'Mercenary' category that Maguire identifies. Maguire does point  
442 out, however, that "it would be foolish to see their categories as either mutually exclusive or  
443 set in stone".<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, once pigeonholed by the media, it can take time and considerable  
444 effort for players to move between 'categories'.

445

## 446 **Conclusions**

447 Migrating to another country to play football has proved to be a complex experience. This  
448 article identifies some unique challenges that occur for elite level footballers when they have  
449 to acculturate to England. Other research which has looked at the acculturation experiences  
450 amongst youth footballers, has found contrasting findings to the ones in this paper. Challenges  
451 like family settlement and media scrutiny were not so prevalent in other papers. This indicates  
452 that it may be easier for players to migrate at a younger age to prevent such stressors occurring.  
453 One key difference between the sample of elite footballers and others using academy/youth

454 players, is that those in the elite category are expected to perform straight away and to a high  
455 standard. This could also explain the scrutiny behind them struggling with the language.

456 By using a variety of leagues, it is hoped that the consistent findings here can be  
457 transferred to a wider audience in similar circumstances. This allows for comparisons between  
458 several populations, that can be applied to a variety of settings and groups. It should also be  
459 noted that elite level clubs have put things in place to support foreign players, with a lot of  
460 clubs now recruiting education/welfare officers, language teachers and liaison officers. This  
461 extended form of support was evident for several players, and perhaps shows a willingness  
462 from clubs that players do indeed need patience and time to adapt to a new league and  
463 environment. In contrast, other findings pointed to frustrations and difficulties when support  
464 from clubs is not forthcoming. If athletes perceive low levels of support, they are more likely  
465 to appraise difficult situations as stressful. Our research suggests that there are negative  
466 outcomes if social support is not received, and highlights the need for football clubs to carefully  
467 consider the support they give to players migrating to EPL, as such migration experiences can  
468 be particularly stressful.

469 Using autobiographies allowed us access to the transition experiences of elite  
470 footballers. Alternatively, interviews would have been an appropriate approach to enter into  
471 conversations with elite players about their transition experiences<sup>83</sup>, and a limitation of the  
472 study, compared to interviewing, was not being able to explore further the challenges identified  
473 in the transition process. Interviews allow researchers to focus questions, and an interview-  
474 based study might have provided richer data. Nevertheless, using published autobiographies  
475 afforded us access to such an elite sample, who it would be difficult to access directly for  
476 interviews in person.<sup>84</sup> Autobiographies have also been criticised as an analytic tool due to the  
477 role of 'ghost writers' in the majority of celebrity autobiographies. Yet, the depth of personal  
478 detail provided in those in the current study demonstrate that the players have 'played a full

479 role' in the 'telling' of the story. We conclude that autobiographies provided a suitable source  
 480 to address the specific research aims of the current study. A further potential limitation is that  
 481 autobiographical writing does not provide factual history but offers subjective truth from the  
 482 perspective of the writer,<sup>85</sup> allowing events to be reframed in order to improve their public  
 483 image.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, autobiographies focus on the personal experiences of players, which  
 484 can provide a deeper kind of 'truth' than athletes might reveal directly in an interview.<sup>87</sup> In  
 485 summary, the insights provided in autobiographies appear to be an appropriate resource to  
 486 study migration experiences, as the elite players are recounting their subjective, personal  
 487 accounts of transitions that are important enough to include in their 'life story'.

488 Finally, having to appreciate the characteristics of English football proved how unique  
 489 the English Premier League is in comparison to other top European leagues, especially when  
 490 considering the physicality and intensity required in such a rest deprived league. This is  
 491 something that players should immerse themselves in when coming to the country, but is also  
 492 perhaps something both coaches and fans should be mindful of when assessing their new  
 493 players.

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## Notes

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1. Falcous and Maguire, 'Globetrotters and local heroes?' 137.
  2. Jackson and Haigh, 'Between and beyond politics'.
  3. Lee, 'Global outsourcing: a different approach to an understanding of sport labour migration'.
  4. De Vasconcellos and Dimeo, 'The experience of migration for Brazilian football players.'
  5. Carter, *In foreign fields*.
  6. Magee and Sugden, 'The world at their feet'.
  7. Molnar and Maguire, 'Hungarian footballers on the move'.
  8. Rainer and Wrisberg, 'Everything was different'.
  9. Lakisa et al., 'Pasifika diaspora and the changing face of Australian Rugby League'.
  10. Maguire et al., Jarvie, 'Sports worlds'.
  11. See note 1 above.
  12. Simiyu and Wycliffe, 'Distance running in Kenya'.
  13. Maguire and Stead, 'Far pavilions?'.
  14. Evans and Piggott, 'Shooting for Lithuania'.
  15. Berry, 'Immigration, acculturation and adaptation'.

16. Van Tonder and Soontiens, 'Migration acculturation and the workplace'.
17. Bourke, 'The road to fame and fortune'.
18. Maguire, 'Global sport; Stead & Maguire, Rite De Passage'.
19. See note 2 above, 351.
20. Bullough et al., 'Player migration and opportunity; Giulianotti & Robertson, Mapping the global football field'.
21. Buraimo and Simmons, 'Do sports fans really value uncertainty of outcome?'.
22. Chadwick, 'English football's Premier League TV right auctions reveals opportunities for academic researchers'.
23. Premier League, 'Premier league awards UK live broadcasting rights for 2016/17 to 2018/19'.
24. Rollin and Rollin, 'Sky sports football yearbook 2009-2010'.
25. Spencer, 'What proportion of every premier league squad in 2018/19 is "English"?'.
26. Mills and Boardley, 'Expert Premier League soccer managers' use of transformational leadership behaviours and attitude towards sport integrity'.
27. Weedon, 'Glocal boys'.
28. Richardson et al., 'An examination of the migratory transition of elite young European soccer players to the English Premier League'.
29. Ivarsson et al., 'Injury as a career transition; McArdle, Moore & Lyons, Olympic athletes' experiences of a post games career transition program'.
30. Sparkes and Stewart, 'Taking sporting autobiographies seriously as an analytical and pedagogical resource in sport, exercise and health'.
31. Power et al., 'Autobiography as a genre for qualitative data'.
32. Newman et al., 'The dark side of top level sport'.
33. Heineken, 'Gender and jockography'.
34. Bahktin, 'The dialogic imagination; Rak, pop life: An introduction; Smith & Watson, Reading autobiography'.
35. Sparkes, 'Auto-ethnography and narratives of self'.
36. Stewart et al., 'Sporting autobiographies of illness and the role of metaphor'.
37. Newman et al., 'The dark side of top level sport'.
38. Palmer, 'Sport and alcohol – who's missing?'.
40. Pipkin, 'Sporting lives'.
41. Palinkas et al., 'Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research'.
42. Swann et al., 'Defining elite athletes'.
43. Patel, 'Analysis of transfers from European leagues to premier league'.
44. Braun and Clarke, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology'.
45. Smith and McGannon, 'Developing rigor in qualitative research'.
46. Drogba, '*Commitment*'.
47. See note 13 above.
48. Torres, '*My story*'.
49. Suarez, '*Crossing the line*'.
50. Christensen, 'What you mean laa? Scouse-dialect or accent?'.
51. Viera, '*My autobiography*'.
52. Boyle, 'Power play'.
53. Millward, 'True cosmopolitanism or notional acceptance of non-national players in English football'.
54. McGovern, 'Globalization or Internationalization?'.
55. See note 27 above.
56. Masgoret and Ward, 'Culture learning approach to acculturation'.

57. Dustmann and Fabbri, 'Language proficiency and labour market performance of immigrants in the UK'.
58. Evans and Piggott, 'Shooting for Lithuania'.
59. Lehmann, '*The madness is on the pitch*'.
60. Reina, '*My autobiography*'.
61. See note 28 above.
62. Bergkamp, '*Stillness and speed*'.
63. Yoshida, '*Unbeatable mind*'.
64. Mangine et al., 'A physiological profile of the elite soccer athlete; Davis, Brewer & Atkin, Pre-season physiological characteristics of English first and second division soccer players'.
65. See note 27 and note 28 above.
66. Cantona, '*My story*'.
67. Rosler, '*Knocking down walls*'.
68. Rees, 'Social support in sport psychology'.
69. Cranmer and Solitto, 'Sport support'.
70. Fletcher and Sarkar, 'A grounded theory of psychological resilience in Olympic champions.
71. See note 28 above.
72. Pummell et al., 'Jumping to the next level'.
73. Gouttebarga et ., 'Mental and psychological health among current and former professional footballers'.
74. Frick, 'The football players labour market'.
75. Granday et al., 'Affective states and traits in the workplace'.
76. Wood et al., 'Male professional footballers' experiences of mental health difficulties and help-seeking'.
77. Hampson and Jowett, 'Effects of coach leadership and coach-athlete relationship on collective efficacy'.
78. Nesti, 'Psychology in football'.
79. Kristiansen et al., 'Coping with negative media content'.
80. Kristiansen and Roberts, 'Media exposure and adaptive coping in elite football'.
81. See note 57 above.
82. Maguire, 'Sports labour migration research revisited'.
83. Sparkes and Smith, 'Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product'
84. See note 30.
85. See note 34.
86. Collins et al., 'Super champions, champions, and almos: important differences and commonalities on the rocky road'
87. See 40 above.

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Table 1: Footballer, club and autobiography information.

Footballer	Transferred from	Transferred to	Title	Year of transfer	Year of publication	Premier League appearances	International appearances
Luis Suarez	Ajax (Netherlands)	Liverpool FC	Crossing the Line – My Story	2010	2014	110	106
Maya Yoshida	VVV-Venlo (Netherlands)	Southampton FC	Unbeatable Mind	2012	2018	135	88
Pepe Reina	Villarreal (Spain)	Liverpool FC	Pepe – My Autobiography	2004	2011	285	36
Fernando Torres	Atlético Madrid (Spain)	Liverpool FC	Torres: El Niño: My Story	2007	2009	212	110
Didier Drogba	Olympique de Marseille (France)	Chelsea FC	Commitment: My Autobiography	2004	2015	254	105
Eric Cantona	Nimes (France)	Leeds United FC	Cantona: My Story	1991	1994	143	45
Uwe Rosler	FC Nürnberg (Germany)	Manchester City FC	Uwe Rosler – My Autobiography: Knocking Down Walls	1994	2013	103	5

## EXPLORING MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF FOREIGN FOOTBALLERS TO ENGLAND

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Jens Lehmann	Borussia Dortmund (Germany)	Arsenal FC	The Madness is On the Pitch	2003	2017	148	61
Patrick Viera	AC Milan (Italy)	Arsenal FC	Viera: My Autobiography	1996	2005	307	107
Dennis Bergkamp	Inter Milan (Italy)	Arsenal FC	Stillness and Speed: My Story	1995	2014	315	79

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