

6-24-2003

David Beckham Sold off to Madrid

Richard C. Crepeau
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)
Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "David Beckham Sold off to Madrid" (2003). *On Sport and Society*. 551.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/551>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
June 24, 2003

The sale of David Beckham by Manchester United to Real Madrid must be the highest profile transnational sports transfer since Wayne Gretzky was shipped out of Edmonton to Los Angeles. There were moves in the Canadian Parliament to designate the Great One as a national treasure to prevent that sale from completion and Canadians went into a period of national mourning. Neither Tony Blair nor his Minister of Sport suggested such an action at Westminster but still there was considerable reaction among British football fanatics.

I must admit that a year ago before I spend five months in London this transaction would not have grabbed my attention. However having seen Beckham Mania up close and personal I have a greater appreciation for the significance of the Beckham sale.

It seemed as if not a day went by that I did not see the face of David Beckham, and/or Victoria and Brooklyn. They were staring down from billboards, looking out from newspapers held by the great-unwashed masses on the underground, appearing on the tele, and sometimes even turning up on football highlights. It seemed as if nothing could be sold in England that was not endorsed by Becks and Posh. No public event of any significance could take place without Becks and Posh. At times it seemed there might have been several sets of Becks and Posh, the first great episode of human cloning.

Children and adults wearing the red Vodaphone jersey with the number 7 on the back were always in evidence no matter the time, place, or event. Manchester United seemed to have some sort of religious significance and Beckham was clearly the high priest. Even the royals operated in the shadow of the Beckham public relations juggernaut.

And now David Beckham has been sent packing by Sir Alex Ferguson and the suits at Manchester United. How could this be? Would the United fans tolerate it? Can the British economy take such a blow? Not to mention British football.

Certainly there has been disappointment in Manchester and there are those who would have preferred Sir Alex's departure if such a choice had to be made. What the long-

range impact will be remains to be seen, but certainly the international appeal of Manchester United and its merchandise sales will feel some negative affects. It remains to be seen what this will mean for United on the pitch although one would think that Manchester United will be able to add some talent with the \$40M or more that Real Madrid paid for Beckham.

If spirits were down in Manchester then one could expect that in Madrid they would be up. In point of fact they were. Spanish television screens were full of Beckham, the newspapers were covered with Beckham, and the most popular sports daily Marca devoted twelve pages to the Beckhams, Marca's main rival AS did the same. My favorite line from Spanish sportswriter Tomas Roncero who wrote that on the day Beckham arrives in Madrid "the knight of the British Empire will wear white."

One British journalist said that Beckham is a god in England and in Japan, and he now is well on his way to being one in Spain. He may not be a god, but he certainly is a cash cow. Beckham's popularity in Japan and Asia at large will allow Real Madrid to cash in heavily replacing Manchester United as the merchandise sales leader in that market. The benefit that accrued to United will now move to Real Madrid. Seventy percent of daily merchandise sales in Tokyo's World Sports Grand Dome is Beckham merchandise. Beckham is so popular in Japan that he and Victoria will earn a cool \$10M over the next two years endorsing chocolates and beauty products. Reports say that Beckham will turn over 50% of all endorsement fees to his new club.

Apparently Manchester United had no real desire to keep Beckham and Beckham had no real desire to stay with United, although he was selective in where he would go rejecting a trade to Barcelona. Sir Alex Ferguson is said to be quite happy to see Beckham and his celebrity lifestyle leave Manchester, although if profits and the wins both drop in Beckham's absence the United fans might not share Sir Alex's viewpoint. Ferguson has been particularly unhappy with Victoria's influence on Beckham and blames her for his loss of focus on the game and his preoccupation with celebrity. If this move ends up hurting Manchester it will be Sir Alex who will be blamed by the fans.

Real Madrid now clearly surpasses Manchester United on the glamour quotient scale, just as they surpassed United as

the world's richest football club a few weeks ago according to World Soccer Magazine. The man behind this development is multi-millionaire Florentino Prez one of the richest men in Spain and world. In three years Prez has transformed a financially struggle football team into what is now one of the biggest collections of stars in the history of the game.

How deep an impact all this will have on English football and on Spanish football remains to be seen. One thing is clear, Manchester is no longer the home of the most glamorous couple in sport, and it is no longer the home of the most marketable and popular player in sport.

It is difficult for Americans to believe this to be true, but then Americans just don't get soccer and don't quite get Becks and Posh even if "Bend It Like Beckham" is doing good business at the movie box offices.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't need to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

Copyright 2003 by Richard C. Crepeau