

A Brit blitz on what you need to know about David Beckham

by Mark Zeigler

David Beckham may or may not make his debut with the Los Angeles Galaxy on Saturday night against English club Chelsea, pending the status of his swollen left ankle.

But when he does step on the field and instantly elevate the profile of American soccer, here's what you need to know about the 32-year-old midfielder the international media loves to call "Spice Boy."

THE MEASUREMENTS

The Galaxy says he's 6-feet, 163 pounds, but more commonly over his career he has been listed at 5-foot-11 and as little as 148.

Either way, the point is he's no giant, which is a change for American sports heroes, most of whom are literally larger than life. Consider that Phoenix Suns guard Steve Nash, one of the smallest players in the NBA, has four inches and 30 pounds on Beckham. Barry Bonds is 6-2, 236. Peyton Manning is 6-5, 230. Shaquille O'Neal is 7-1, 325.

The question then becomes: Will a pumped-up nation obsessed with supersizing everything embrace the short, skinny guy?

THE RIGHT FOOT

One problem for the average American sports fans in grasping the genius of Beckham the player is that he doesn't score many goals, instead making his mark by putting a 60-yard pass at a teammate's feet or striking a cross that curls away from the goalkeeper and on to a teammate's head at just the right angle to redirect it into the net.

But on the occasion that he does score, it's usually pretty special. Here are four goals you should know about:

1. The 60-yard rocket from midfield against Wimbledon in 1996 that dipped into the net past a goalkeeper who, amazingly, was not that far off his line. This put Becks on the map.

2. The 93rd-minute free kick over a defensive wall against Greece that dramatically put England in the 2002 World Cup.

3. The penalty kick that gave England a 1-0 win against Argentina in the 2002 World Cup, avenging the second-round loss to the Argentines four years earlier when Beckham was ejected.

4. The 25-yard free kick that smacked off the post into the net to give struggling England a 1-0 win against Ecuador in the 2006 World Cup and make Beckham the only player to score for England in three World Cups. (A few minutes later, he infamously threw up in the sweltering heat.)

THE POSITION

Beckham made his name as an outside right midfielder, swinging in dangerous crosses from the wing. But he fashions himself as a master ball distributor, and Galaxy coach Frank Yallop will put him in the center of a 4-3-3 formation - the theory being that his talent is wasted (particularly in a mid-level league such as MLS) if he's stuck on one side of the field.

It's a position he has played sparingly, with limited success. Most notoriously, he played there in England's embarrassing 1-0 loss to Northern Ireland in 2006 World Cup qualifying. But he also played in the middle for Manchester United in its epic 1999 UEFA Champions League final against Bayern Munich and for Real Madrid when he first joined the Spanish club in 2003.

"I probably played some of the best football I've played in my career," Beckham said of his central role with Real Madrid. "I don't have any concerns."

THE FAMILY

You know the wife, former Spice Girl Victoria "Posh" Beckham. This move is as much or more about her career than his, evidenced by all the TV time she's already logged (Jay Leno last Friday, an hour-long NBC special Monday).

The rest of the family, you'll barely see at all. The Beckhams are adamant about keeping their three sons -

Brooklyn (8), Romeo (4) and Cruz (2) - out of the spotlight, so much that they were whisked out a back entrance on the family's arrival at LAX last week while David and Posh walked through a gantlet of paparazzi.

THE HOUSE

Their new mansion - or is it a villa? - in Beverly Hills has six bedrooms, nine bathrooms and 13,149 square feet. The listing sheet described it thusly: "The H-style floor plan sprawls across the 1 1/4-acre site, maximizing city and ocean views while creating enchanting and intimate interior and exterior spaces that flow seamlessly."

The official sale amount is not yet listed in public records, but it has been widely reported the Beckhams paid the asking price of \$22 million. With, say, 20 percent down and a 30-year mortgage at 6 percent, your monthly payments would be a mere \$105,521 - not including property taxes or home owner's insurance.

That's nothing, though. Beckham pals Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes just bought a place around the corner for a reported \$35 million.

THE CARS

Beckham has a soft spot for exotic cars, and over the years his garage has included a \$220,000 Lamborghini Gallardo along with the latest from Ferrari, Porsche, Jaguar, Aston Martin and every other exotic car manufacturer you can imagine. He is a driven player on the field, but not off it; he prefers to pilot himself everywhere.

When he arrived in town last week, two cars were waiting at the top of the long driveway to his new home: a Cadillac Escalade for him and a Bentley Continental GTC convertible for Posh with "VB" monogrammed on the rims and headrests (estimated price: \$190,000). The Hollywood rumor mill claims they were both house-warming gifts from Cruise, which Beckham denies.

"I bought them," he said.

THE SILVER SCREEN

Beckham has actually played himself twice in movies - in the "Goal" trilogy about a player from Los Angeles who makes it big in England, and in archived footage in "Bend it Like Beckham."

And that's the end of it, he says of the swirling rumors that his true motivation for coming to L.A. is to parlay his friendship with Cruise into an acting career.

"People have talked about me going into the movies," he said. "That's not what I'm here for."

THE SUPERSTITION

Beckham insists he's not overly superstitious, otherwise he wouldn't have agreed to hold his official introduction last week on Friday the 13th.

But he does plead guilty in one area: He always, always wears a long-sleeved jersey, no matter how hot it is. He doesn't know its true origin, other than he thinks he played well early in his life in long sleeves and never strayed from it.

That works fine in England, or even in Spain in a season that runs from fall through spring. But what about in the dead of summer in the MLS?

"It's something I'll have to adjust to," he said.

THE MONEY

When Beckham was signed in January, the Anschutz Entertainment Group, which owns the Galaxy, reported that his deal is worth up to \$250 million. More recently, wire services have taken to saying he's making \$32.5 million over five years.

The truth is somewhere in between, although exactly where remains a bit of a mystery in the absence of hard numbers. Beyond his Galaxy salary of \$6.5 million per season, Beckham controls his own endorsement rights - worth by some estimates in excess of \$25 million per year. He also gets a healthy cut from jersey sales as well as the estimated \$20 million jersey sponsorship that the Galaxy signed with Herbalife.

And there appears to be some sort of contractual agreement with the league, too, that commissioner Don Garber says is to "promote and market Major League Soccer and the sport." Asked to confirm that it's a separate financial agreement, Garber said: "I won't comment on that." (In other words: Yes.)

THE HAIR

Thehairstyler.com is devoted to celebrity hairstyles and how to replicate them on ordinary subjects. When it comes to Beckham, it has a gallery of 12 different 'dos. Another site, beckham-magazine.com, lists 17.

Perhaps more famous than his wife or his right foot are his locks, so much that English tabloids try to scoop each other on his latest creation. There was the short mohawk, the half mohawk, the mohawk with the blonde spikes, the long and stringy look, the pony tail, the braids, the full buzz cut, or the one in which thehairstyler.com says "Beck's hair has been left long and jagged at the back and his top section has been cut at one length all over to achieve this sexy, messy design."

His current 'do: a bleach-blond buzz with a stubbly brown beard.

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