

***The most feared English player of his generation and the youngest to be capped by his country in 100 years, Michael Owen played for 3 of the world's biggest clubs in Liverpool, Real Madrid and Manchester United, and starred for England at 5 major tournaments, including 3 World Cups. He was also the last British winner of the Ballon d'Or in 2001-the coveted award given to the best player in Europe.***

***Blessed with electric pace and an incredible eye for goal, he burst onto the international scene as an 18-year old, with the best goal of the 1998 World Cup in France-an amazing solo effort against Argentina.***

***Rated among the top strikers his country has ever produced, by the age of 24 he had played 316 games for club and country.***

***Playing so many games as a youngster ultimately took its toll, and a succession of major injuries reduced his speed and curtailed his career, but he remained an instinctive goal scorer, which led Sir Alex Ferguson to say,***

***"His positional play, his first touch and his finish were absolutely magnificent. They were world class. There's no-one better than Michael Owen"***

***A confirmed family man, since retirement Michael has become a successful racehorse owner, with his own Manor House Stables, and continues to work in the game he loves, as a football analyst for BT Sport in the UK.***

- 1997** Scored on his Liverpool debut aged just 17
- 1998** Top scorer in the Premier League with 18 goals
- 1998** Made his England debut, becoming the national side's youngest player of the 20th century
- 1998** Scored sensational World Cup goal against Argentina
- 1999** Retained Premier League Golden Boot, again scoring 18 goals
- 2001** Won UEFA Cup, FA Cup and League Cup treble with Liverpool
- 2001** Scored a hat trick in England's 5-1 World Cup Qualifier win against Germany in Munich
- 2001** Voted European Footballer of the Year
- 2002** Scored goals against Denmark and Brazil during England's run to the quarter-finals of the World Cup in Japan
- 2004** Signed for Real Madrid for £8 million, scoring 16 goals in debut season
- 2005** Signed for Newcastle United for £16.8 million
- 2009** Moved to Premier League champions Manchester United
- 2011** Won the Premier League with Manchester United

*You had a glittering career at the very highest level, winning many major team and individual honours. What was your personal highlight, and how would you best like your football career to be remembered?*

I was really fortunate to have a career at the top level. To be still playing at a team like Manchester United at the end of that career was particularly gratifying. To stay at the top when you have been compromised with the injuries I sustained is not easy. The early part of my career at Liverpool is where I was at my best. I reached the top of my profession in those years, and playing for a great team like Liverpool as well as England were the years I remember fondly. Winning honours and trophies are great highlights, but I think my personal highlight would be winning the European player of the year award. At the time I wasn't aware of what a great honour it was, but looking back at the past winners and the names of the English players that are on that list, it certainly was a huge accolade. If I had



to pick out three main highlights of my career it would be the goal in the 1998 World Cup against Argentina in France, the hat trick in Munich against Germany in World Cup qualification and the two goals in the FA Cup final to beat Arsenal in the last few minutes.

***You made your 1st Team debut for Liverpool in the Premier League at 17 - how difficult was it to play against experienced professionals, who were, in some cases, twice your age?***

I believe that when I was younger I was mentally very strong and ahead of my time in many ways, nothing fazed me. I went into games with a supreme confidence, knowing that I was one of the best players on the pitch. Mentally and physically I certainly felt ready. It didn't matter who we were playing against, I would expect to score, because I had never experienced anything else. I never had any feelings of failure and I just expected to be the star man in every game. When you get a little bit older and wiser and start worrying

about what the opposition's strengths are and whether you are going to beat them, that is when your performance starts slipping a bit and you can over analyse things.

***You once said you were "born to score goals" - to succeed in football, how much is down to natural ability and talent, and how much is hard work, allied with the right coaching?***

There is no doubt it is a mixture of them all. You have to be born with a certain amount of natural ability. Physically you have to have a body that is going to withstand the rigours of the game and if you are fortunate enough to be born with a body that can move quickly, like I was, then you have a head start. But the mental side of the sport also plays a part. There was never any doubt that I would be a football player. My dad was a professional footballer and I used to go on the pitch feeling as if I had scored before I had even kicked a ball. You also need to be coached well. You need to be in the right



place at the right time, natural ability is one thing, but if you do not have that hard work and dedication to the game, and if you don't have people around you that are creating an environment for you to flourish, that talent might disappear. So certainly to get to the top you need a combination of them all.

***You also said, "As a youngster, I was considered exceptional, and in many ways that was to my detriment" - can you explain what you meant by that?***

The only lingering question mark in my mind is; did I play too many games as a youngster when I was not fully developed? I was playing in the national team from under 15s right the way through to the under 21s and the senior team. I was in the Liverpool team at 17 and everyone wanted me in their team. I was playing virtually every game open for me to play in and I wonder if that was that to my detriment? I picked up a huge injury when I was 19 playing away at Leeds and I ruptured my hamstring. Liverpool at the time weren't the best team in the league and they needed me to play. In defence of the manager who was picking me at the time, I wanted to play every game.



***By the age of 24, you had played 316 games for club and country, as opposed to Ryan Giggs (112), Paul Scholes (123) and David Beckham (184) - do you think that affected you in your later career, and do clubs have a duty to protect their young players more?***

It's a huge number and it goes to prove that my body could stand the rigour as I had played thousands of youth games as well. But because the hamstring injury I suffered was so big, I think that left me compromised for the rest of my career. It wasn't rehabilitated properly and that isn't any criticism to the medical staff at the time, but sports medicine has moved on since then. I was running with half the power on one leg than I had on the other, which then creates problems in other areas. It went from hamstrings to groins, to thighs, and it almost took a cycle around my body. I am quite confident in saying that there was a chain reaction of injuries from that initial one.

***How does the doctor earn the respect of the players?***

I think medics in general, can't get through life at the top of their profession without having a great knowledge of their profession. Immediately you are presented as a doctor of a football team with many different injuries, so you need a fantastic base of knowledge. Football is quite unique in that you need to be a certain character to survive in a team environment. If you get rumours of misdiagnosis

**Left:** Michael Owen lifts the Premier League trophy after winning the title with Manchester United.

**Below:** Owen celebrates after scoring for Newcastle in a Premier League match against Middlesbrough.





**Image:** Michael Owen scores a wonder goal against Argentina at the 1998 World Cup.



spreading through a dressing room, it can be very powerful. I think as a team doctor or physio you earn the respect of players by the way you handle them and by the way that you talk to them. Footballers like to build a good affinity and a good relationship with their medical team and they need to earn that respect and vice versa.

***What advice would you give to physios and doctors who want to work in football?***

You need to know your stuff and be at the top of your game but not stop there. You need to have the experience of being at different football clubs, learning the culture and learning how people react at different clubs. There is a lot of pressure on medics at football clubs. The managers want their key players to be fit tomorrow, the players want to be fit tomorrow and sometimes you have to manage expectations. It's not just about learning how long an injury takes. Every situation is different and the pressure that comes from outside is great. Having a qualification to be a sports doctor is not enough.

***How much of an influence was sports science on your career?***

I think sports science is the fastest growing area of football, no doubt about it. When I first came into the game, in terms of sports science, we employed someone part-time just to do an hour or so in the warm up, maybe twice a week. When I left Manchester United there must have been about five or six full-time sports scientists. That is the area that's developing most quickly at the moment. How do you run faster, how do you run for longer, how do you cover more ground, how do you do all of these things? And basically it is down to these sports scientists to provide you with not only the answers, but to put on the sessions and to advise you the right way to do them.

***If you were 18 again now, do you think sports medicine and science would have changed your career?***

Certainly, the injury that I sustained early on would have been dealt with differently and I have no doubts that I would have been at the top of my profession for far longer than I actually was. I think they detect a lot of injury and illness before it actually happens these days, which is obviously to the benefit of the players. I think my career would have been a better one, maybe not a better player, but certainly a better player for longer.

***Did you feel nervous before big games?***

I don't think I suffered with nerves too much. I was really comfortable going into games; I felt I belonged on the pitch and that I could affect the game. Nerves didn't play a huge part during my pre-match preparation. What I did do, was focus in on the game

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## OVERALL CAREER TOTAL - GAMES 607 GOALS 327

Date	Team	Appearances	Goals
1996–2004	Liverpool	306	179
2004–2005	Real Madrid	43	19
2005–2009	Newcastle United	74	30
2009–2012	Manchester United	49	17
2012–2013	Stoke City	8	1
1998–2008	England	89	40

the days before, I was very irritable before a game and often my wife knew that a game was approaching just by my mood swings. Afterwards I was back to normal and I suppose it was just my way of preparing – but nerves, not really, they didn't do it for me.

#### *How did you cope with disappointments in your career?*

It has to do with mental strength. You need a good team of people around you, not just the medical team if you're injured, but at home with your family and an understanding manager is always helpful. Of course everyone will at some point have a dip in form, a bad injury, a family problem or a problem off the pitch during their career. It is how you get over those disappointments and how you come back from them that define a lot of people. I was always really disappointed when I got injured, but I had a good ability to re-focus my mind on the target of getting back to fitness and how I was going to get there; how I was going to put the disappointment

behind me and re-focus on how I was going to get back out on to the football pitch.

#### *Other than the injuries you have suffered, do you have any regrets in your career?*

Regret is possibly the wrong word. There are certainly times I have wondered 'what if'. The 'what if' is what would have happened if I had stayed at Liverpool the rest of my career. I always saw myself as a one club man, but I got offered the chance to play for Real Madrid. I didn't want to leave Liverpool, but I felt that I would regret not playing for one of the greatest teams of all time. It was just an opportunity that I didn't want to pass up and I thought saying no to it might be a bigger regret than leaving Liverpool in the first place. I have had a rounded career and played for some of the great teams, but there is something about being at the same team for your entire career, there is something pretty special about that, and that's one of the things I had to sacrifice when I decided to move to Madrid.

#### *What game from your career would you want to play again?*

It would certainly be a bad one. I would probably go for the World Cup in Japan in 2002, when we played against Brazil in the quarter-finals. The feeling around the camp at that time was if we can get past this, then we can win the World Cup. But it was a disappointing game; I was half fit with a hamstring tear from the game before against Denmark. I scored in the game, but I didn't feel right and the team didn't play right. If we could rewind the clock, I would love to play in that game being fit and healthy again, we never had a better chance. We lost 2-1, after leading 1-0.

#### *How did you switch off after games?*

I think football is like any other sport. You can be as dedicated to it as anyone, but it does help to switch off. Whether you have got family that take your mind off things for a bit, play golf or enjoy other pastimes. I have four children, who occupy most of my time. I would suggest to young players coming through to try to find something outside football that appeals to you, mainly for the times that you're low. I think if you're injured for a month and you're thinking about football constantly, it can drive you mad.



**Image:** Michael Owen scores the first goal in England's quarter final match against Brazil at the 2002 World Cup.

***You had some traumatic injuries during your career - what was the most difficult to recover from?***

I think at the time injuring my knee at the World Cup in Germany in 2006 was probably the worst. I suffered a cruciate knee ligament injury and also had some meniscal damage - that was the hardest injury to get over. Before the World Cup I was absolutely flying at Newcastle, with Alan Shearer banging in goals and then I broke my foot playing against Tottenham at White Hart Lane. A fractured metatarsal meant that I was in a plaster cast for a few months. I came out of that plaster cast, played one game and declared myself fit to go to the World Cup for England- then I got the cruciate injury. Looking back it was the same leg that I had injured with my hamstring earlier in my career. I had a real weakness on that side and I was basically not strong enough. I put it down to being deconditioned and I probably shouldn't have gone to the World Cup. So that injury and that game put me out for a year and really hurt my career at Newcastle.

***In Aspetar, we have a "state of the art" rehabilitation facility, used by many of the world's top athletes. Did you ever visit such a place and what do you see the benefits of it being, over working only at the club?***

Football clubs have their own physiotherapists and doctors, but any specialised problems thereafter, are outsourced to some of the great



**Far above:** Michael Owen lifts the FA Cup after scoring two late goals to help Liverpool beat Arsenal 2-1 in the 2001 final.

**Above:** Owen scores Liverpool's second goal in their 2-0 League Cup final win against Manchester United in 2003.





**Image:** Owen celebrates with Real Madrid teammates David Beckham and Ronaldo.

***At one point in your career, you had an on-going groin issue. What symptoms did you have and how did it affect your performance?***

Hamstrings were my curse, but I did have a time at Newcastle when I had some groin issues and it transpired that I needed hernia surgery. It didn't feel like I had a problem in the actual muscle, but when I was using it, when I didn't feel sure of my footing or I was on a slippery surface, I felt it was recruiting my groin a little bit too much and I was getting a lot of referred pain. I went to see a specialist in Germany and they picked up straight away that I needed a hernia operation. Later I had some mesh put in during a second operation as the first operation only worked for about a year, and I didn't look back. I had another groin strain at some point in my career, basically cutting across the ball doing too much shooting practice and I tore my groin, but that only kept me out a couple of weeks.

***In Aspetar, we have a Sports Groin Pain Centre, which is working to advance the field of knowledge in these injuries. Why do you think groin problems prove so difficult to diagnose and treat, and what issues do you think the Centre should look at?***

I am no medical expert, but I have had many injuries in my time and I am always keen to understand the injuries and listen to the doctor and the diagnosis. The groin is a complex area and has a lot of different uses when you're playing football; running, twisting and turning. It is sometimes easy for medics to look at the affected area and to concentrate on the injury and treat the injury instead of the actual cause for the pain. In my experience the cause of groin pain can come from a variety of different areas, and centres like this should be looking at these different areas that could cause groin problems. Groin pain is a debilitating type of injury, if you have a groin problem it is very difficult to continue playing so you need to get the diagnosis right straight away.

people and great surgeons around the world. It is also the same for anybody who has a long-term injury, as a different environment and a great facility with different people can freshen your mind. It is very hard to plough on through months of injury and so sometimes it is good to use another facility. I have been at clubs where this has been used quite a lot. I have flown all over the world seeing leading specialists, going to some great facilities to try to improve the rate of your comeback from injury and other times just to have a change of environment. Facilities like this, with state of the art equipment and great people running them, are beneficial to everyone in the sporting industry.

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**Image:** Owen receives treatment on the pitch after injuring his knee in England's 2006 World Cup match against Sweden.

***You starred for England in three World Cup Tournaments - what were the differences at this level, compared to league and Champions League football?***

I felt it was more of a mental challenge than anything else. When you go into a World Cup, a lot of the time you play with some weaker nations, so I don't think the standard is far greater than Champions League football or domestic Premier League football. The biggest difference is the pressure. You realise there are millions of people watching you and cheering you on, but you also realise if you make a mistake, cost a goal or miss a penalty that sends your team home, you're going to be scarred with that for life. Some people can't take that expectation and basically buckle under the pressure.

***What expectations do you have from the World Cup in Qatar in 2022?***

Well I don't think there is any doubt in anybody's mind that it will be a fabulous World Cup. You only have to look at the plans and the stadiums that are being built. It is a fantastic country and I have been lucky enough to visit on a couple of occasions. Obviously the weather is one thing which might be a little bit different to what some people are used to, but I am sure once that issue is solved, Qatar is going to host a wonderful world cup. It should bring great things to the country, with a huge amount of people travelling over and I am sure the facilities will be second to none and I can't wait for it to come around.

***You achieved 10 GCSEs at School, despite playing for Liverpool at the same time - how important is it for young athletes to maintain their studies?***

Well it is obviously very important as you never know whether you are going to make it or not. I was fortunate that I always wanted to be a footballer and I turned out to be a footballer, but you really don't know where your career is going to take you so I think it's

very important to continue with your studies. I think study and playing football all comes under the same bracket. You are either a disciplined person who likes working hard or you're not and for me I loved football, loved training hard, loved playing, but also when I was doing something else like an exam or revision, I wanted to do it to the best of my ability - that's just the type of person I am.

***At the Aspire Academy, we have a vehicle for many of our promising young athletes to enhance their development and learn their skills. What piece of advice would you give them, and in particular to the young footballers?***

Having academies like this is fantastic and I was fortunate enough to go to the Aspire Academy when I was at Manchester United and again recently; it is a world class facility. Having facilities like this encourages people to get to the top of their profession. Creating that environment for people to thrive is what it is all about. Not everybody is going to make it, but what you don't want is a really talented youngster not having the opportunity, coaching and the know how to take them to that final level and an academy like Aspire can provide that. My advice to anyone, particularly young footballers, is to make use of facilities like this and make use of the qualified people that work in these facilities. As long as you have got the right attitude and dedication to work and you want to perform to the highest of your ability, then academies like this are going to help you along the way, so there really is a great opportunity to make a name for yourself.

*Dr Ian McGuinness*