

Passionate, powerful and supremely talented, Didier Drogba has been a mainstay among the world's top strikers for over a decade. The Ivory Coast captain and all-time leading goal scorer found prominence in France, before becoming the talisman of Chelsea's rise to power in English football.

A club legend for The Blues, he won every English top-flight trophy on offer, scoring in every domestic cup final he played in and becoming the only African player to score 100 Premier League goals - picking up the Golden Boot for the League's top scorer twice along the way.

In his swansong game for Chelsea he scored two crucial goals to win the Champions League and was subsequently voted the club's greatest ever player by fans. Now playing for Turkey's most successful team, Galatasary, he continues to pick up silverware.

As tireless off the pitch as he is on it, Drogba was instrumental in ending a 5-year civil war in his home country, culminating in the national team qualifying for its first ever World Cup in 2006. He was made a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador and named in Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World for 2010.



How important to you is your club doctor and medical team and what sort of relationship do you have with them?

The club doctor and the medical team are very important because they are the ones who give you confidence and the best people to explain exactly what your injury problems are. They help players to know their bodies better.

It's a trust and confidence thing with them. They have to know when you are tired and when they spend a lot of time with you, they can recognise when you need to stop training and when you can carry on. They can also advise you on how to prevent injuries.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 2014** Won the Turkish Cup with Galatasary
- 2013** Signed for Turkish Champions Galatasary, winning the league and Turkish Super Cup in his first season
- 2012** Scored the winning penalty as Chelsea beat Bayern Munich to win the Champions League
- 2012** Won his 4th FA Cup, scoring in the final
- 2010** Won a 3rd Premier League title and 3rd FA Cup with Chelsea
- 2009** Named African Player of the Year a 2nd time
- 2009** Won the FA Cup with Chelsea for a 2nd time, again scoring in the final
- 2007** Scored the winning goals in both the League Cup and FA Cup finals – the first ever player to do this
- 2007** Voted African Player of the Year
- 2006** Scored the Ivory Coast's first ever World Cup goal
- 2006** Won a 2nd successive Premier League title with Chelsea
- 2005** Helped Chelsea win their first League title in 50 years as well as the League Cup
- 2004** Moved to Chelsea for £24 million
- 2003** Signed by Marseille from Guincamp for £3.3 million, scoring 19 goals and reaching the UEFA Cup final

You are 36 years old and still playing in a top domestic league and the Champions League. Do you think sports science has played a role in you having such a long and successful career at the top level?

I think so, because with all the injuries I have had during my career, sports medicine has allowed me to know my body a little bit better each time. I know myself better now than when I was 18 or 19. It has taught me how to avoid some injuries and also helped me when I am injured, to recognise the reasons why I am injured.

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Image left: Drogba makes an acrobatic clearance for Galatasary in Champions League game against former club Chelsea.

Image below: Didier Drogba celebrates with Chelsea teammates Petr Cech and Paulo Ferreira after winning a 4th FA Cup in six seasons.

Image below right: Drogba tussles with defender Juan Camilo Zuniga in the Ivory Coast's group stage match against Colombia at the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.

How difficult is a team doctor's job and what qualities does a team doctor need to be successful?

I think it's very difficult, but at the same time, with confidence and experience it can become easier. Of course it is hard to deal with elite players; the different characters, different injuries each of varying importance, the attitude of the coach – team doctors have a big responsibility. If you are not confident enough and don't have enough self-belief to deal with it then things will be difficult. But most of the doctors I have worked with have managed to do a good job.

You have to listen to the player. If a player comes to you and says 'Doc I'm tired, I don't want to train today', it's better to listen to him and let him sit out because if you send him to train and something happens you are, at least partly, responsible.

Do you know how long you would like to carry on playing for?

It always depends on the player, your body, your metabolism and also the mental aspects of the game – whether you want to carry on playing or not, or if you are tired of playing. Some players start very young and they are tired by the time they reach 28 or 30 years old. Players like Ryan Giggs or Javier Zanetti are exceptions and a great example, and if I do only half of what they have achieved by that age I will be very happy.

You have played around the world, in France, England, China and Turkey; have you noticed different approaches between the different medical teams?

Yes. But in all these different cultures and different approaches you have to try to build the right relationship with the doctor. If the doctor comes to you with the best approach to an injury and you don't trust him, you aren't going to get anywhere. It's all about trust and building confidence.

How often do players see the medical staff?

The more you stay away from the medical room the better – it means that you are healthy. But sometimes you need to go, and not always just for injuries, sometimes because you are not feeling well and you just want to talk to them. I would say if I'm fit, with no problems, the only reason I have to go there is to say 'good morning Doc, how are you?'



“ ***You have to know that injuries are part of the game, just like being out there scoring goals. Football is a sport with a lot of contact and a lot of injuries*** ”

You have been known throughout your career as a great goal scorer – how much of being a top striker is down to natural ability and how much is down to hard work and training?

It is certainly a lot of hard work. When I was 23 or 24 I was scoring nice goals, but I was missing a lot of chances. Out of let's say five chances I would score maybe one goal. You have to work hard to turn that into one chance meaning one goal, or even half a chance – goal. It takes hard work and lots of repetition to achieve that. And there is no age where you can stop doing that, even now I stay after training for 20 or 25 minutes repeating drills.

What sacrifices do you have to make to get to the top of your game in football?

For me, I don't see them as sacrifices because it is my passion, so it is certainly not a sacrifice. Sacrifice is for people like my parents or some of my friends back home who went to work in factories to earn money to support their children and their families. It is more searching for what I can do to help me become the best I can be, whether that's training, work in the gym or learning how to focus more. But to me, there is no sacrifice in football.





Image above: Didier Drogba hurdles a slide tackle by Bayern Munich's Anatolii Tymoshchuk during the 2012 Champions League final.

Image below: Drogba challenges Jonathan Woodgate during Marseille's UEFA Cup semi-final against Newcastle in 2004.



You have played some huge games in your career, how do you prepare for a big match?

I think it's very important to know the opponent, who you are going to be up against; and the more big games you play the more confident you are. For example, in my first Champions League final I played one way and in the second one I played in a different way, I was much more confident and more relaxed even though it was still a final, because between those two finals I had played in many other big games, so I had more confidence. That experience really comes from playing in the big games.

When you are playing in both domestic and European competition the match schedule can become quite congested, how do you recover between games?

We do work in the pool and on the bike, and sleep. Sleep is the best way to recover as well as drinking lots of water. You have to try to get rid of the fatigue. I will also work with the physio, and do a lot of stretching every day.

Do you follow a nutrition regime at all?

Normally I don't. But during my time at Aspetar I have been. Normally I play every three days, so I don't have to watch what I eat so much. Of course, I'm not eating like crazy, but I eat normal things like pasta, rice and chicken.

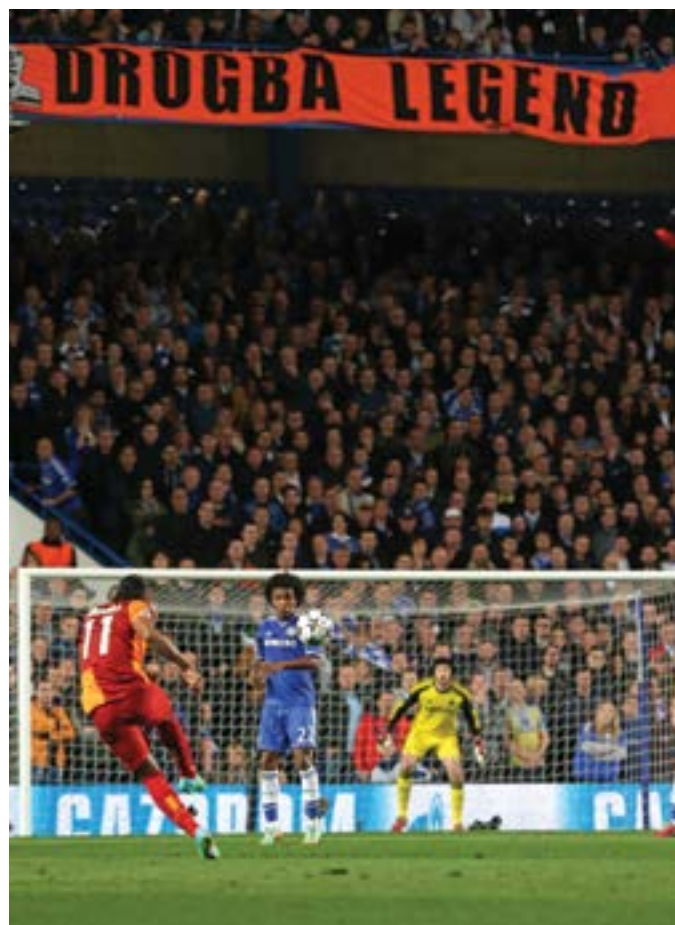


Image above: Didier Drogba's free kick for Galatasaray flies over the goal, hitting a banner reading 'Drogba Legend' hung by Chelsea fans during the teams' 2014 Champions League tie at Stamford Bridge.

Image left: Drogba scores for Chelsea in the 2005 Community Shield final against Arsenal.

What is the most difficult injury you have had to overcome?

I think the most difficult injury is always a player's last one. The one which has been stopping them from playing and being out on the pitch. You have to know that injuries are part of the game, just like being out there scoring goals. Football is a sport with a lot of contact and a lot of injuries; maybe even more injuries than in rugby, because in rugby the players are ready for the contact; in football, sometimes you are not ready for that contact and so the injuries can be more dangerous. But you have to accept that it is part of the game and focus on the recovery and come back stronger.

Aside from the medical team at a club, how do facilities such as the one here at Aspetar help players recover from injury?

They can be better than what you have at the club. Here at Aspetar you can work 6 or 7 hours a day one to one. You can spend 1 or 2 hours with the physio if you need to. In your team there are 24 players and maybe three or four physios and if they each have to see two or three players you might have to wait a day. When a game is two days later you don't have time for that.

You have done a lot of work helping to develop football in your home country – The Ivory Coast – and even helped with the peace effort there during the civil war. How important do you think football is as a tool for development in Africa and around the world?

I think football is a real ambassador for peace around the world. It's not for nothing that people like Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo or myself and other athletes have been named UN ambassadors. Today the image of football is so big and we can help send a message. People listen to us; they look at us as examples. Football can have a big role in this world and help us do great things.

Jake Bambrough