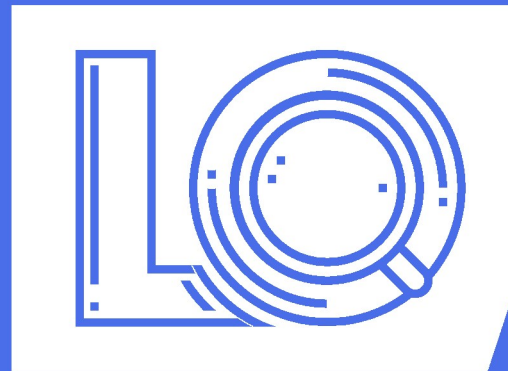# LATTE
QUARTERLY

LQ

Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training, Everything FM | **Issue Thirteen**
Published: 25 November 2022

Editor's Note

LQ13 is here.

For many, 13 is an unlucky number. It might only be the backup goalkeeper's ideal shirt number to you, but for those who suffer from triskaidekaphobia (no, not a newgen name) it is a terrifying ordeal.

Luckily (pun intended), Latte Quarterly's 13th instalment is not terrifying at all, and in fact chock-full of entertaining and insightful content to keep all your deep-rooted fears at bay.

Do you remember the World Cup in 1998? I certainly do. I was 12 years old and it was the most exciting event on the planet. FM Adventure and tommysboy007 remember it fondly too, and in this edition take you on a hugely entertaining, misty-eyed time travel back to experience the competition one more time. Join them as they celebrate the incredible French side who conquered le monde that year, but in a modern Football Manager setting.

Next up is a return of the LQ Book Review, where FM Eadster pretends to us all that he is a learned gentleman with a keen interest in geopolitics when he's not smashing the space bar like the rest of us.

In the following pages you are treated to a new LQ feature, Role Roulette. FM Grasshopper pivots from Fernet-drinking insect to fictional gameshow host where he sets community favourites FM Llama and FM Rensie tactical role-based challenges while managing French sides in FM23.

We close the edition with the inaugural Latte Quarterly crossword, because what could be sexier than a word puzzle? Apart from everyone's favourite Frenchman Olivier Giroud, of course.

It was an honour to be asked to write the Editor's Note for this distinctly Gallic edition of LQ, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did. Turn the page and I guarantee you will be knee deep in interesting content before you can say "Bixente Lizarazu."

Sit back, grab a LATTE and enjoy.

FM Stag

LQ Issue Thirteen:

Front cover illustration by Fabricio (@PrinceOfBandits on Twitter).

France 1998 in Qatar
fmadventure & tommysboy007

As the summer months ticked by and we began to plan for LQ13, my mind immediately clicked on to the fact that this would be released around the same time as the World Cup was kicking off in Qatar. Within an instant I thought back to one of the earlier LQ issues where we used the CM0102 database to recreate the Brazil squad of 2002 in the modern FM game.

I made the decision to go one better this time and bring back the infamous France side of 1998, using the database from CM9798.

As we shared the first images of recreated players in the FM23 world on twitter, the criticism began. "Henry was nowhere near this good in 1998", "8 for Zidane in penalty taking is sacrilege", "Bernard Diomede was taller than 5 foot 9 inches!"

In part, they had a point. The problem lies in the limitations of using such a small dataset. We should first consider the fact that goalkeepers in CM9798 had only 13 attributes and outfield players had 19. By extreme contrast, in FM23 a goalkeeper 's ability is dictated across a range of 38 visible attributes while an outfield player has 36 attributes. We must also consider the fact that CM9798 did not account for individual player traits, let alone personalities and media handling styles.

It is this extremely limited range of attributes that I feel tends to favour attacking players. I made the decision to replicate the players using exactly what attributes existed in CM9798 and allow the game to randomise the remainder based on their suggested Current Ability by the FM23 Editor. I decided to leave them as they were without traits—truthfully, I can't be sure exactly on whether Bernard Lama liked to start counter attacks or avoided using his weaker foot.

Beyond it all, what we need to remember most is that it is just a bit of fun. None of us believe we'll draw any genuine conclusions as to how Aime Jacquet's side would fare if they had access to a Delorean and 1.21 gigawatts of energy back in the summer of 1998.

With that in mind, enjoy the next few pages as tommysboy007 takes you through a tactical recreation and a (potentially) epic Qatar 2022 World Cup Finals…

fmadventure

Introduction

When FM Adventure asked me to write a piece on how France 98 team would fare in the Qatar World Cup of 2022, I asked if he wanted a 1998 tactical recreation or follow FM Grasshopper's Brazil 2002 experiment by slipping them into Tite's modern system. Buyer's choice, I was told. However when I started to compare the system of Aime Jacquet in 1998 with his captain Didier Deschamps' modern France it started to look like a moot point. The tactics of his French team who won the last world cup in 2018 were nearly identical! However since Russia and in particular the return of Karim "the Dream" Benzema has allowed a slight variation of tactic.

In this article I will look at the 1998 team and compare the systems and individuals against the Euro 2020 version of France at the same time noting (and ignoring) that Deschamps changed things up with 3-at-the-back against Spain in the Nations League. We will then run the 98 squad through the WC in Football Manager 2023 to see how we get on. This might not be how France lines up in this winter world cup but hope you find it enjoyable anyway.

France 1998

Aime Jacquet went into the 1998 World Cup under pressure. A coach with little recent success to fall back on, disappointing results pre-tournament, a lack of international success, and a hostile media – especially after naming 28 for a possible 24 man squad – all piled onto the man keen to avoid embarrassment on home soil.

Instead what transpired was the start of a nation's rebirth on the international stage and a triumph of team over individual. France lifted their first World Cup victory over the heavily fancied and star-laden Brazil before winning the following European Championship two years later and remaining a force ever since (self-sabotages aside).

Much has been said of the issues faced by Brazil and Ronaldo in particular around the final so it hard to judge this French team. They were hard pushed by Croatia in the semi final too but history books show them as World Cup winners – running out 3-1 victors. Where they sit amongst the pantheon of others is a matter of personal opinion.

1998 Formation and Style

The team line-up for the final in Paris versus Brazil was almost their most settled side but for the suspension of central defender Laurent Blanc, replaced by Chelsea and Hollywood's Franck Lebœuf.

Line Up
GK Barthez
RB Thuram
LB Lizarazu
CB Lebœuf
CB Desailly
DM Deschamps
CM Petit
CM Karembeu
AM Djorkaeff
AM Zidane
CF Guivarc'h

Jacquet's team set up in a 4-3-2-1 Christmas Tree formation.

France 1998

Mentality:
Positive

In Possession:
Slightly More Direct Passing
Run At Defence

In Transition:
Roll It Out
Counter

Out Of Possession:
Mid Block
Get Stuck In

Barthez in goals had a reputation of being a bit of a maverick. Comparably shorter than your usual keeper, he was good with his feet but took risks. If playing today, you'd not bat an eye but back in the late nineties he stood out. I'd describe him as a competent Jorge Campos.

In Marcel Desailly, you had one of the most decorated players in world football. Used as a defensive midfielder as much as a centre half with AC Milan, for France he was very much the rock in the heart of defence. His partner Larry White was the epitome of smooth, unflappable ball playing defender. Blanc would miss the final but was pivotal in this team's success.

At right back, Lillian Thuram was one of the most dependable right backs in the world. On the other side, Bayern Munich's Bixente Lizarazu was one of these new fangled wing backs that featured heavily with the Brazilian counterparts Cafu and Roberto Carlos.

Deschamps was described as a Water Carrier – funny how FM uses this exact phrase for their Anchor Role description. He would sit centrally in front of the defence. Arsenal's Petit and Real Madrid's Karembeu were shuttlers either side with Petit pushing further forward of the two.

Attack was one of Jacquet's most telling tactical choices. On the bench were future stars like Thierry Henry and David Trezeguet but both were on the cusp of great careers. Instead Stephane Guivarc'h was the lone centre forward flanked behind by Inter Milan's Djorkaeff and their star player, Zinedine Zidane, who scored two decisive headers in the final to propel Les Bleus to a 3-1 victory despite losing Desailly to a red card.

Width came from Lizarazu mainly but this team played very centrally. The system seemed designed to have a solid, hard to break down foundation in defence before breaking quickly and directly trying to get Zidane or Djorkaeff on the ball. Attacks featured a lot of dribbling and long shots. They won with Guivarc'h infamously not scoring a single goal something that Olivier Giroud repeated in 2018.

France Now

Didier Deschamps successfully won the 2018 World Cup in Russia with a system startlingly familiar to the one he captained in 1998. However much the fans loved winning, he was not spared criticism for the style of football. Pragmatic was the polite description.

The Covid delayed Euro 2020 saw Benzema replace the more static Giroud up front but after coming through a group of death that included Germany and Portugal, they blew a 2-goal lead before succumbing to penalties against Switzerland for an early exit.

The Nations League is hard to judge for the top nations. France reached the final against Spain but did either take it too seriously?

Therefore, I chose the 2020 version of France for my modern tactic as a comparison. Below is a summary of the system similarities and differences.

Team System Similarities and Differences WC1998 vs Euro2020

Similarities
- Similar shape with attacks through the middle
- Counter attacks
- Strong set pieces
- Long range shots
- Mid to low block – Standard DL & Standard LoE

Differences
- WC98 team seemed more aggressive in attacking
- EURO2020 at times took up a 4-3-2-1 shape but both AMs were often out wide
- Mbappe (left) and Griezmann (right) prone to peeling out wide like Inside Forward / Wide Playmaker
- Benzema more dynamic than Guivarc'h as a Deep Lying Forward or Complete Forward
- Pogba is now an advanced playmaker, France20 almost attacking as 4-2-3-1
- Kante and Rabiot support players either side
- WC98 team seemed more aggressive in attacking
- EURO2020 More passing compared to WC98 direct pass then dribble
- Both EURO2020 Fullbacks attacking compared to Left Only in WC98

I feel Deschamps' tactics now are due to the personnel he has and in particular how to get the most out of superstar Kylian Mbappe. The 1998 team did not have anyone with his pace and directness with the ball. Zidane could dribble past players but not at the speed of Mbappe and although both were undoubted star men, you will see below that I do not compare them directly in the individual comparisons.. Mbappe also gives Euro2020 the threat of running in behind defensive lines, something that 1998 relied on midfield runners for.

Individual Comparison

We've looked at systems to get shape and team instructions. For player roles and duties, a comparison of individuals will help me plan for the final tactic.
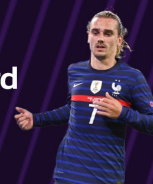

Quick Player Comparison
1998 Vs 2020

Advanced Playmaker (Attack) – Attacking Midfielder (Attack)

Dribbles More	One-Twos
Stays largely central	Gets Further Forward

Shadow Striker (Attack) – Insider Forward (Attack)

Dribbles More	Dribbles More
Moves Into Channels	Cuts Inside

Target Forward (Support) – Deep Lying Forward (Support)

Largely Static	Moves Into Channels
Drops Deep	More Skillful
Holds Up Ball	
Shoots Less	

Anchorman (Defend) – Ball Winning Midfielder (Support)

Shields Defence	Activetly Engages Oppoisition
Simples Passes	Simples Passes

Full Back (Support) – Wing Back (Support)

Stays Back	Gets Forward
	Runs Wide

The Tactics in Football Manager
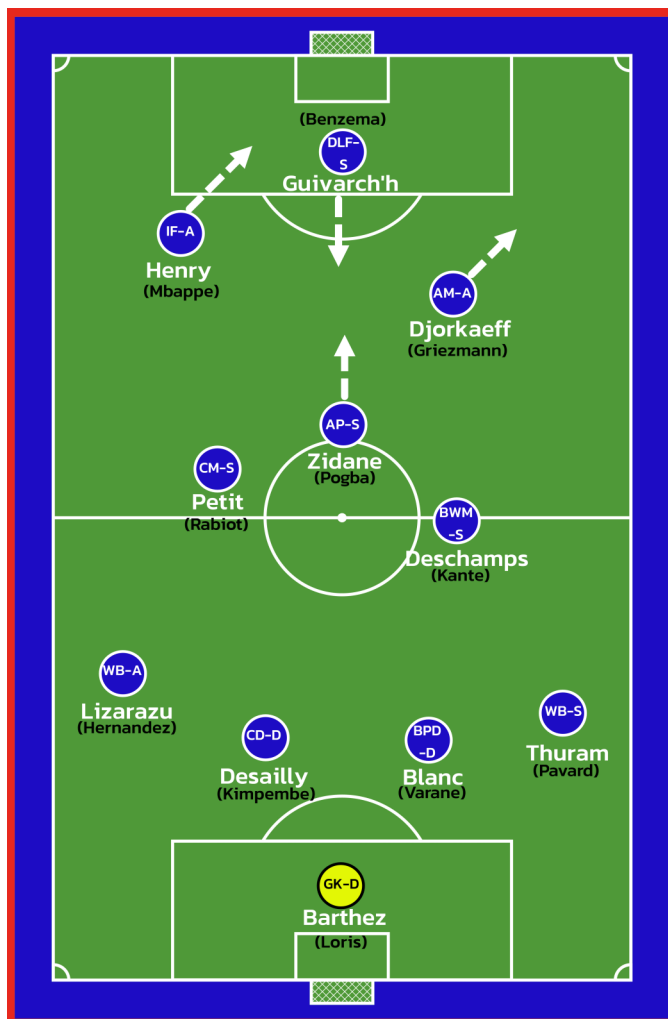
Here are both team systems set up in FM. For taking on the Qatar World Cup 2022 with the 1998 squad, I am really unsure if I will have the players to carry off the 2022 system. The starting 11 in 1998 has some clear positions that are like for like but two key roles may be a struggle.

Mbappe role – who's going to come in off the wing as an IFa. Certainly not Djorkaeff. I might drop him and sensationally call up young Thierry Henry – the irony being it is the role he made his own years before Kylian.

In 1998 it was Deschamps in the heart of midfield keeping the team ticking over. Pogba though is the main creative hub now with more flair and attacking verve. I cannot see Didier walloping one in like Pogba's beauty versus Switzerland. Creative license might mean Deschamps plays the Kante role as a ball winning midfielder, whilst Zizou or Manu Petit become the Advanced Playmaker.

Not wanting to go too in depth about set pieces but with goals scored at corners being so pivotal part of the 1998 win, I wanted to highlight the near post corner we will be championing here with Zidane attacking that near post kick.

World Cup 2022

Ok, we have our tactics and our players. It's a winter world cup with more teams than in 1998. France won the last world cup and return as holders so we're probably due a 2002 implosion full of fall outs and mutineers. All that's left is to kiss a bald man's head for luck and here we go!

<u>Group Stage</u>

We've got everyone fit and raring to go for our World Cup opener against Denmark, statistically our toughest opponent as Fifa's 10th ranked nation. I don't know if it was nerves but something just wasn't right and we found ourselves under the cosh a bit. Thierry Henry got crocked and, to be honest, the resulting reshuffle (Karembeu coming into CMs, Zidane moving up to AMc, Djorkaeff to IFa) seemed to work. Guivarc'h guilty of some big misses. Quelle surprise. Trezeguet comes on for tiring Youri in the second half and pops up with the only goal from a set piece.

Second up is Australia (ranked 38), defeated in their first game to Tunisia (30), and we're out of sight before the Socceroos go down to ten men after a horrific two footed lunge. Zidane opens the scoring after 1'30" getting on the end of a beautiful flowing team move. We've kept the reshuffle in Henry's absence and the front three are purring. Six-nil flattered the Aussies.

We're through with a game to spare. Surprisingly, so too are Tunisia who beat Denmark to set up a showdown for Group D Top Spot.

In true FM International Management style, the French FA want me to hold a Press Conference at the Les Parc Des Princes to discuss the recent Euro Qualifying draw. Focus lads! I declined to attend and half expected the next news item to be Alme Jacquet's sacking. Fortunately not but got me wondering if anyone has ever been sacked mid-tournament whilst still in it?

On to the game and with Thuram and Deschamps both one yellow card away from a suspension, it's all change across the first team line up. Only Barthez (sorry Lama, my mistake), Blanc and Petit remain. Our depth of squad is so good, we knock up a routine win again.

LATTE QUARTERLY LQ
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2022 World Cup Group D

France 1-0 Denmark
Trezeuget (69)

France 6-0 Australia
Zidane (2), Desailly (5), Guivarc'h (16). Blanc (31), Djorkaeff (38, 50)

France 1-0 Tunisia
Drugarry (34)

Second Round

Fat lot of good it did winning the group because we draw Argentina this early in the cup. Pipped by Mexico to their own group, we face Messi and his team whom Fifa ranks 3rd in the world, one above Les Bleus. Lautaro has taken an early lead in the goalscorer stakes too. It's back to first pick XI and Henry is back on the bench. The ref's had a 'mare in this one dishing out yellow cards like they're Dominos discounts. Chances are few and far between as both sides size each other up in the first half. The second half opens up a bit and the introduction of Henry is crucial. He offers the diagonal run behind the defence that Youri doesn't. Zizou picks out such a run and delightful dink over the keeper and it's 1-nil to us. Barthez takes a lot of credit here with a string of top saves to keep a clean sheet. Two clinical counter attacks – including another Henry/ Mbappe run then goal – is enough to see France into the quarters. Sadly Blanc, Deschamps and Thuram all get yellow cards and are out of the next match.

Quarter Finals

From 3rd to 5th ranked team, it's England in the Quarters. Known nowhere as the FM Grasshopper Family Derby, Group B winners, Angleterre, beat Ecuador in the previous round to progress. Toughest game yet but mainly due to the three players being out and the reshuffle required. Henry struggled and was withdrawn in the second half. Kane scored twice but both times correctly disallowed for offside. A poor clearance by Ramsdale fell to Manu Petit who quickly set up Stephane Guivarc'h for the winner.

Semi Finals

With Brazil in the other Semi against the Netherlands, a repeat of 1998 is on the cards as fate has drawn France against Croatia just as it was all those years ago. We welcomed back the missing trio and looked steadier for it. Decision was made to play Djorkaeff at IF for experience and it paid off with a solid start. Zidane again with an early goal to set us up for some devastating counter attacks. Henry off the bench made it two. Blanc missed his second penalty of the tournament making it 3 missed in total. Hope the final doesnt go to penalties!

Final

We made it but Brazil lost meaning Qatar 2022 has an all European final. We arrived unscathed so it is a full strength team unlike in 1998. I resist the urge to play Lebœuf. But wish I had as France finally concede a goal and Blanc and Desailly collectively had a shocker. Gakpo was left unmarked to cancel out Zidane's fine opener. Djorkaeff had already been crocked by this point. Neither team played all that well. Sadly we then shipped another and slipped to a late 2-1 defeat. The Netherlands finally win the World Cup. So near yet so far. However, if you are going to lose a World Cup Final then I defy anyone who wouldn't want to lose to a Wout Weghorst goal.

2022 World Cup Knockout Stages

France 3-0 Argentina [2nd Round]
Henry (62, 81), Guivarc'h (89)

France 1-0 England [Quarter Final]
Guivarc'h (78)

France 2-0 Croatia [Semi Final]
Zidane (4), Henry (70)

France 1-2 Netherlands [Final]
Zidane (11)   Gakpo (23), Weghorst (82)

Summary

It has been a delight to play this save and my thanks go to FM Adventure for setting up the 1998 players. His attention to detail knows no bounds nor ethnicities. Thanks also to FM Grasshopper for fantastic artwork for this article too.

Feel free to follow along my FM23 save on https://tommysboyonfm.wordpress.com/ or you can find me on the OG FM Slack.

LQ Book Reviews – FM Eadster

"In history, a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind."

While Edmund Burke undoubtedly meant this as a philosophical ideal and absolutely nothing to do with winning football matches, this is a pertinent quote. There are many ways in which reading about the rich past of innovative historic tacticians can inspire and motivate us to think differently about the chess match that is every football match we may (virtually) manage in future.

Sometimes the inspiration can even come from books that are not principally about football.
In a semi-regular feature for Latte Quarterly, an FM blogger will tell us about a book from their collection. They will let us know a little about the content and its key themes, but most importantly; how a deeper understanding of football or at least how unique lessons picked up from this title influenced how they play Football Manager, and the lessons you could learn too.

The Book Review

All leaders are constrained by geography, or geomorphology to be more precise. Every choice they make are limited by the mountains, rivers and seas around them. Without question to understand modern statehood you need a good grasp of people, ideology and movements, but if you do not also have a clear understanding of the geography involved, you will never have a full picture.

Prisoners of Geography takes us on a tour of ten regions of the world and explains how leaders in these areas are constrained by the geography around them. Why is Putin obsessed with Ukraine and Crimea? Once you understand geography and realise that the only area of Russia not protected by geographical features such as mountains or harsh climates is its western front, you start to understand the seemingly paranoid sense of a threat coming from the West. It appears less imaged than it may do to our modern day, western-centric, eyes. Any invading army can simply march to Moscow unhindered across relatively flat plains. We may think nobody would want to invade Russia in this way, but that is not how the eyes of history see it. The Poles invaded in 1605, followed by the Swedes in 1708. Napoleon had a go in 1812 as did the Germans twice in 1914 and 1941. If you include the Crimean War of 1853–1856 Russia has been defending or fighting on this front on average, once every thirty-three years. Suddenly Stalin's Iron Curtain sounds like a rational idea.
My favourite quote in the book is this rather chilling outlook, *"All great nations spend peacetime preparing for the day war breaks out."*

It was not lost on me that this quote appeared in the chapter looking at China, and her expansion into the South China Sea. Once again by understanding that for any Chinese Cargo ship or Warship to access the Pacific or Indian Oceans they must pass through the 'First Island Chain'. These islands include the southern islands of Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, all of whom are allied in some way to the United States. Passage in peacetime is a formality, but in wartime these shipping lanes could easily be cut off, rendering China's navy useless and make trade with allies via the sea impossible.

Through this lens, the reader can begin to see why China covets Taiwan so much. It also explains why China has embarked on a massive land reclamation project in the South China Sea, building countless landing strips on tiny atolls and claiming them as Chinese Sovereign lands. The US also has a policy to bolster the "First Island Defence" in this area that dates back to the Cold War and the attempts then to curtail the spread of communism.

The impact on playing Football Manager

After the rather sobering first two chapters, I remember skipping forward to Chapter 9 – Latin America. After reading some interesting stuff regarding a potential Argentine invasion of The Falklands before 2020 but not after; it was the section about Brazil that first got me thinking about football. We all have an image of the typical Brazilian footballer playing football on the sand honing their incredible skills. Have you ever wondered why so many Brazilians live on the coast in the first place? The answer again lies in geography. If you look at many Brazilian cities along the coast, usually there is a massive cliff rising dramatically out of the water to either side of the city or behind it. The inability to easily connect cities in Brazil has hamstrung the country's development since its creation. It was part of the reason the government tried to develop the country's interior by moving the capital inland to Brasilia 50 years ago and one presumes why we had a football stadium built in the Amazon near Manús for the 2014 World Cup.

Once my mind had fused this book with football, I started to wonder about an FM save that would take into consideration some of the geo-political decisions I had read about. It was then I started to consider a save in Eastern Europe, and more specifically a save in Russia. Slowly, but surely, a narrative for a FM19 save began to coalesce in my mind.

What if Russia again tried to control the citizens within the Iron Curtain, not through outdated military might but through a dominating footballing and social ideology?

In a rejection of the failures of capitalism that had bankrupted Anzhi Makhachkala I decided they were to be my club for FM19 to spread this new Russian ideology across Western Europe and so my journey into #CreativeFM blogging started.

In a rather far-fetched FM adventure™, my manager Ruslan Chepiga, a KGB agent, took over Anzhi and attempted to take control of East Europe for Russia once again. Over the last four editions of Football Manager I have had a lot of fun with Chepiga, from cutting off the gas supply to Western Europe (I wrote about this in 2019 long before Putin thought about doing it in 2022), and annexing parts of Africa, to ultimately escaping to the US. Here he took charge of the Portland Timbers and led them to continental glory before again escaping with Ojeda's millions back to Eastern Europe where he remains in hiding.

Sometimes FM inspiration can come from the least predictable places.

Science, Nature & Maths › Earth Sciences › Education
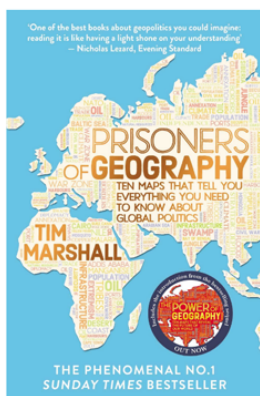
Prisoners of Geography: Read this now to understand the geopolitical context behind Putin's Russia and the Ukraine Crisis: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need To Know About Global Politics Paperback – 2 Jun. 2016

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Role Roulette
FM Llama & FM Rensie

Not to be confused with Miles Jacobsen's 'feature roulette', FM Grasshopper's 'role roulette' sees two FMers slot player roles into their tactic. We'd love for it to become a regular thing, and in this inaugural edition we invite Chris (FM Llama) and Ondrej (FM Rensie) to be tactically tested through the liberté, égalité and fraternité of LQ13…

One player role has been selected from each of the last French World Cup Final appearances (1998, 2006 and 2018). It's up to the guys to build an FM23 Beta tactic using these player roles, from a French league club side (sans PSG svp).

The player roles are:

- The Youri Djorkaeff **Shadow Striker** of 1998. Quick dribbling and intelligent runs off the advanced pivot of Stéphane Guivarc'h. Djorkaeff was an ever-present threat from the attacking midfield position during World Cup 1998.
- The defensively minded **Ball Winning Midfielder** was revolutionised by one man in the early 2000s: Claude Makélélé. So much so that the role is even known colloquially as "the Makélélé role" in England. The World Cup 2006 was his apogee…allowing Patrick Vieira and Zinedine Zidane to play out a masterclass Vs Brazil in the Quarter Finals.
- In 546 minutes of World Cup 2018 action, Olivier Giroud went the entire tournament without registering a single shot on target. But in his own words he was "decisive in another way". Much like France 1998, the supportive **Target Forward** role of 2018 showed the World that the best team in the World did not need a goalscoring number 9.

What did the guys build, and why? And how did it go? If you feel this post has a certain *je ne sais quoi* about it and you want more role roulette in future LQs, please let us know.

FM Grasshopper

FM Llama / Chris at AJ Auxerre

There are many tactical experts in the FM community. I am not one. After much reflection, I've come to realise why. When I watch football, I watch the ball. I can analyse what is going on in the vicinity of the ball – I can recognise a good through ball or lament a poor pass, I can remember how many one-on-one opportunities a striker has missed, but I don't see the whole pitch. Like a 5-year-old playing their first fixture, I am always drawn to the ball. The likes of Cleon, Stinger, RDF, MikaelinhoFM and BustTheNet are different. They have the vision to recognise that, when designing a tactic, what is going on 40 yards away is as important as what is occurring on the ball. Sadly, I suffer from FM myopia. This inevitably means that the tactics I design have faults, and too often this means they are porous, and I concede too many goals.

My New FM Resolution is to work on this failing, beginning with this challenge set by FM Grasshopper. I have tried to design a robust, combative, solid tactic that can ensure survival for a newly promoted Ligue 1 outfit.

The Club

During the 1990's, Auxerre were a big deal where I grew up. Auxerre is twinned with my local town, so the inhabitants of Redditch watched with interest as Guy Roux's side rose to the top of French football. So, when they were promoted back to Ligue 1 following a playoff at the end of last season, they were the obvious choice for this beta save.

The Players

The stipulation of this challenge was that the system must contain a Ball-Winning Midfielder, a Shadow Striker and supporting Target Forward. Following a scrutiny of the playing staff, three candidates presented themselves as the spine of this tactic.

<u>The Ball Winning Midfielder</u>

In order to replicate the 'Makelele-esque' vision of FM Grasshopper, our tactic deployed the Ball Winning Midfielder in the DM position, with the 'Hold Position' instruction. The man awarded the number 6 role was **Birama Touré**, an international for Mali. Technically, there are weaknesses to his game, but his stamina and natural fitness are impressive and his aggression, bravery, teamwork and tackling meant he stood out.

<u>The Shadow Striker</u>

The Shadow Striker position was more difficult to fill. Auxerre did not possess a natural option who could provide the off-the-ball movement and finishing that would allow the player to burst into dangerous areas and finish the chances that came their way. After much deliberation, I put my faith in veteran **Mathias Autret**, a former French under-19 international. Physically, he lacks dynamism, and his finishing is only 10, but he does offer reasonable flair, first touch, composure and vision and he also provides a threat from distance.

<u>The Target Forward (Support)</u>

I opted for a more mobile player in this role rather than someone that only supplied an aerial threat. **M'Baye Niang** appeared for AC Milan earlier in his career and possesses reasonable acceleration and agility alongside more traditional Target Forward attributes such as strength and jumping reach. If we were to avoid a poor start to the Ligue 1 campaign, the emphasis was on Niang to supply the goals.

The Tactic

My initial thoughts when presented with the stipulations for this challenge was that the Target Forward would require a strike partner. Yet the requirement for a Shadow Striker in addition to two further Strikers would have led me away from the defensively solid, safety-first system I wanted to design for a club that was predicted to finish 19th in the table.

Instead, I decided to rely on Niang's all-round game being sufficient for him to play as a lone frontman, with the support coming from Autret as the Shadow Striker as well as an Inside Forward. Playing just one Inside Forward meant an asymmetric formation, but I hoped they would be a goal threat and support counter attacks, as well as providing additional defensive support on one of the flanks and link up with the Shadow Striker.

It was in midfield that I deployed roles I hoped would make the tactic more solid. Behind a box-to-box midfielder intended to provide both attacking and defensive support, I opted for two defensive midfielders. Alongside Touré I employed a Roaming Playmaker. My vision was that this player would drop deep and collect the ball from defenders, play longer balls to the Inside Forward on the opposite side of the pitch, move forward to link with the Box-To-Box Midfielder and Shadow Striker, as well as looking for balls behind the opposition defence for our attackers to chase.

This system naturally left us quite narrow, so impetus down the flanks would hopefully come from two Wing Backs on Support. And to create a more cohesive, solid system, the team were instructed to 'Be More Disciplined',' Regroup' and 'Stop Crosses' as part of a mid-block.

A.J.AUXERRE

Manager: **FM Llama**

Mentality:
Balanced

In Possession:
Be More Disciplined

In Transition:
Counter
Regroup

Out Of Possession:
Mid Block
More Often
Stop Crosses

The Opening Day of the Season

The fixture list provided a stern test on the opening day, pairing us with 2021 champions Lille. We were coming off the back of four successive pre-season defeats and, as the away side against strong opponents, it was at least the ideal fixture to assess whether our tactic was compact enough. In truth, we rode our luck. Lille had 24 shots, although we forced them to take many of those from distance, and only 6 of their attempts were on target. Heading into the final ten minutes, our defence had still not been breached as we won a corner and Niang rose at the near post to give us a 1-0 victory. We had achieved our primary objective of keeping a clean sheet against superior opposition, but I feared on another day, Lille would have taken their chances.

The Results

August could not have gone much better, as we took maximum points from our opening four games, including a 4-1 victory away to Montpellier. Most pleasing was the three clean sheets we kept. September was more of a test. We were soundly beaten by Lyon, before drawing the next three matches. The clean sheets evaporated, and we were being undone by individual mistakes by our defensive players. In some of these fixtures, I experimented with dropping the Wing-Backs to Full-Backs, but the errors continued.

However, this form meant we'd lost just one of our opening eight fixtures and October was a more productive month. We were still incapable of keeping clean sheets, but we were grinding out wins, taking ten points from a possible fifteen. A narrow loss to Nice brought just our second defeat of the season.

November provided just two fixtures before the domestic season adjourned for Qatar 2022. We were unfortunate not to beat Troyes, drawing the game 0-0. A point left us fourth in the table heading into a trip to The Parc des Princes to face PSG. A 0-2 defeat felt inevitable, but the performance was reasonable and meant that after fifteen matches Auxerre occupied the final European Qualification position and were fifteen points clear of the relegation zone.

The Verdict

Despite taking twenty-six points from fifteen games, my initial target was to make Auxerre a resilient, defensively compact side. Despite the encouraging number of points amassed, just four clean sheets indicate I failed in my pursuit of defensive solidity.

Of the three roles that were a prerequisite of this challenge, the Target Forward was more productive than I'd anticipated. M'Baye Niang scored nine goals in fourteen appearances, making him the 5th leading scorer in Ligue 1. The Shadow Striker, however, disappointed a little. Mathias Autret achieved an Average Rating of 7.10 and contributed 4 assists, but he only scored twice and his xG of 2.13 is evidence that he wasn't getting into goalscoring positions frequently enough. A replacement would be my priority in the January transfer window as Auxerre pushed for European football from an incredible 6th place.

FM Rensie / Ondrej at Grenoble

Seven friendlies, fifteen league matches and two domestic cup matches. The time I spent with Grenoble during the FM23 Beta, and the opening days of the new FM edition was pressed to just a couple of months due to the World Cup 2022. I didn't have a typical amount of time to build the club or save itself. I delegated most of the things to the club staff after I signed some personnel. The only thing I took over was training schedules because the way how AI set training schedules is a joke, and the assistant managers react very badly to the changes in the schedules. The rest was only about the tactic.

When Tony/FM Grasshopper shared the idea about making the tactic around three specific roles, my initial thought was that I didn't use the BWM role and Shadow Striker role for a long time. The Target Forward role was a different story as I used this role for almost the whole previous FM edition. Another thing is that I probably can't play the game just with some randomly selected club and I had to negotiate with Tony that I can play in the French Ligue 2 instead of in the top tier. Why? Because I always need some story, some narrative. And when I found out both Djorkaeff and Giroud started their careers with Grenoble Foot, the decision was made.

Tactically, I planned to create something different in comparison with what I will want to use in my main FM23 save. When I put together information about the players in the Grenoble squad, I knew it wouldn't be some "vertical tiki-taka with linear passes to the channels". I ruled out using Ball Playing Defenders but also playmakers in central midfield. I wanted to create something that would be straightforward, but would also be safe enough. I decided to use a 4-3-1-2 formation, and the BWM(D) was placed in the middle of the flat central midfield.

Short-term transfer rules

I set my own rules to sign players at the same age as our legendary trio. I found the new BWM player in Anthony Lippini – a 33-year-old right or left defender. But his attributes for the BWM role were so good that I couldn't resist.

And the same happened with Yannick Mamilonne who I signed to play him as TF(S). His bravery, balance, jumping reach and strength attributes made me crazy to sign him not just because of the TF(S) role but also because of the set pieces.

The Shadow Striker role was the only one from these three I didn't sign some new player(s) mainly because of no funds available – a bold "0" in the transfer budget, red numbers within the wage budget. My main man was Axel Ngando. A 29-year-old midfielder who is only one year younger than Djorkaeff was in 1998, he is French, and he can play this role. And it was the best decision in the end.

The main point of my 4-3-1-2 tactic was to create enough space to give Shadow Striker enough room for his runs around the opponent's half. I set both MCL & MCR to CM(S) roles and both these players got Hold Position, Take More Risks and Run Wide With Ball instructions. The last one was one of my favourites within FM22 and I decided to try it again. The important thing I like to do while using this instruction is to place the left-footed player in MCL and the right-footed player in MCR. The reason is simple – they can cross with their strong foot from the wide area, and they don't have to cut back to pass/cross with their weaker foot.

The Tactic

As I already mentioned earlier, I knew there are no superstars in the squad. I wanted to keep it as simple as possible. I decided to use just Pass Into Space – to try to take advantage of a lot of runs by Shadow Striker and both WB players, Play Out Of Defence and Whipped Crosses – because all strikers including newly signed Mamilonne are strong. The important part of the "in transition" instructions was the "Distribute to Target Forward". I decided to use it instead of Take Short Kicks or distribution to the central defenders because of what I mentioned already – any defender in the current Grenoble squad was good enough to create something. That also lead to the fact I decided to use No-Nonsense Centre-Back. The execution of this idea in all wet FM dreams is very simple – either the goalkeeper or the centre-back will pass the ball to the target forward who will hold the ball or pass it to the space and the shadow striker will go alone to the penalty area or create a chance for some other players. I'm glad I was able to fulfill this idea with the goal I scored (shown in the graphic below).
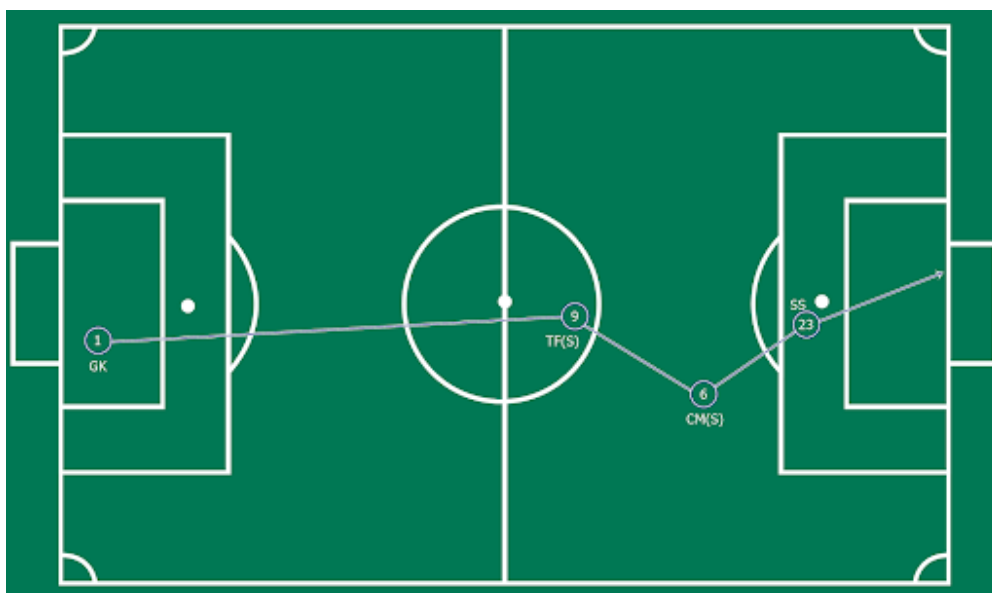
The More Often Trigger Press was one of the first things I usually removed during matches because I already had Pressing Forward here, and the Shadow Striker also had trigger press set to "more often", so it was not needed to have it collectively too. And it was a role-coaster in combination with the BWM role sometimes.

Limitations and possible changes

As the season progressed, I decided to make two main changes. I added Shorter Passing instruction, and I removed the No-Nonsense Centre-Back. Why? Despite there being a lot of great situations thanks to the distribution to the target forward, I thought I will lose all my nerves from too many long passes by No-Nonsense Centre-Back. This role has More Direct Passes instruction by default. I will be clear – I'm not used to this style of football. I hate long passes and I hate having my neck blocked after every match in the Czech lower league I play in in real life. When I removed this role, it returned to the normal regime in my eyes and the passing style in our play was more pleasant to watch. The fact I added Shorter Passing had nothing to do with this, but I had a couple of small injuries in the squad and some worse players had issues with keeping the ball, they made a lot of dribbles, and we lost the ball too often.

Results

The media prediction of Grenoble was to finish 15th in the league. I finished the save after 15 matches and we were 4th in the table with 30 points with 8 wins, 6 draws and 1 defeat. Just two points behind the leader FC Metz. We also won both the 7th and 8th French Cup rounds 2:1. Only two teams beat us – OGC Nice in the first friendly match (2:4) and AS Saint-Etienne in the league at the beginning of October 2022. My highlight would probably be a home 4:0 win against SM Caen (they were top of the league at that time) in the middle of autumn as both Axel Ngando and Yannick Mamilonne scored two goals.

Our "key" players

Anthony Lippini as our main Ball Winning Midfielder was the right man for the hard job in the centre of the pitch. He had 3.9 clearances/90 minutes after these 15 matches – the best from all in the league. But he also received 8 yellow cards in 14 appearances, so he confirmed the BWM reputation.

Axel Ngando as our main Shadow Striker scored 11 goals (only Charles Abi scored one more goal), made 9 assists and he was the best-rated player from all in the league with 7.71 average ratings. It only confirmed that a good system can create a star from the average player.

Yannick Mamilonne as our main Target Forward scored 10 goals and made 1 assist. He was the second-best-rated player in the league with a 7.47 average rating just behind Ngando. The data hub section tells me that he had 1.94 progressive passes per 90 minutes (1.26 more than the league average) – but who knows if it works properly right now. He was also a top performer in terms of headers won/90 minutes – mainly thanks to the distribution towards him and set pieces as he was the main target. Five of his 10 league goals were from corners.

Conclusion

The Grenoble squad offers average players and it would take a lot of time to rebuild it if it would be my main save (mainly in the future, who knows?). But as the starting point for the new edition? That was good because 1) I discovered some new players, 2) I had the option to use some roles I didn't use for some time and 3) it confirmed to me what I don't want to use as my playing style.
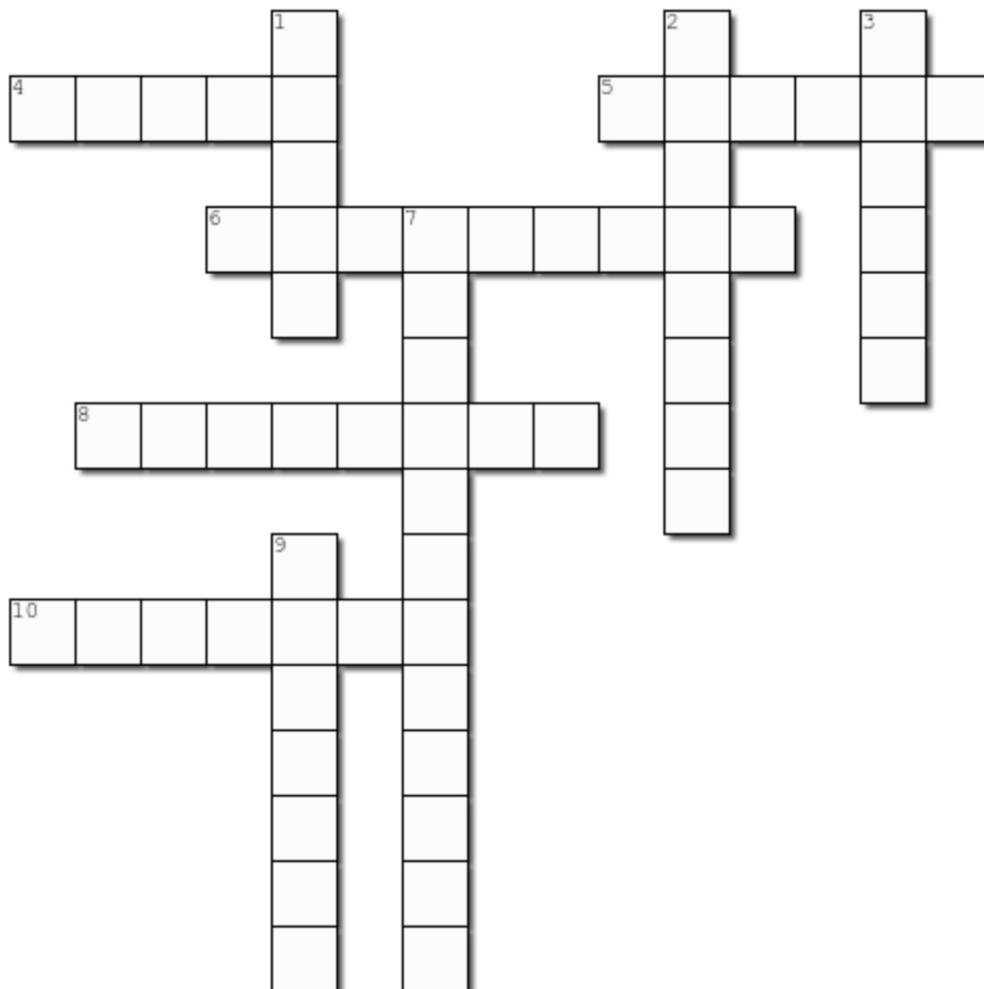
Thank you, Latte Quarterly for the possibility.

LATTE LQ
QUARTERLY
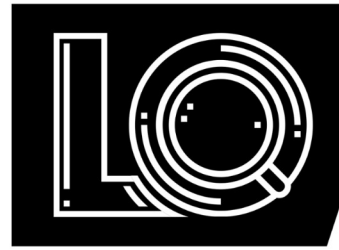
Our inaugural LQ Crossword, can you be the first to crack it?
There's no prize, other than our respect...
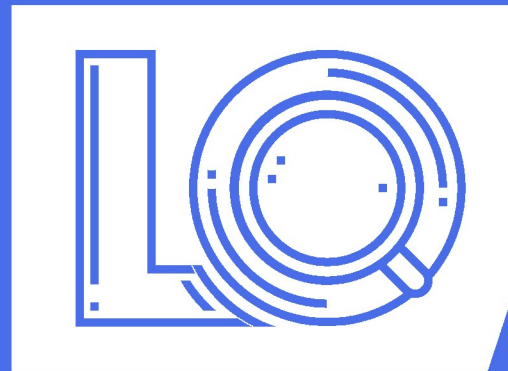
Complete the crossword puzzle below

Across

4. A domesticated South American animal. Found in a herd.
5. Part of the Medical team, undertakes physical examinations
6. Revamped for the 2012 Olympic Games, home to Sports Interactive
8. Measure the atmosphere and cohesion here
10. Don't be caught out of possession, step back

Down

1. A coffee beverage of Italian origin made with espresso and steamed milk
2. Unlucky for some, not for Latte Quarterly
3. Capital city. Home to FM Athlete for FM23
7. Reflect a player's ability to predict and react to events around them
9. Doesn't take risks, shoots to kill

LATTE
QUARTERLY