

Kicking beats: Football's unlikely popstars

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The Independent If 75,000 people yell your name as one every Saturday afternoon, you could be forgiven for thinking your talents were limitless. Lord knows Rio Ferdinand has made a few fantastic tackles in his time, but his latest attempt to diversify is unlikely to earn him as many fans as his football does. This week, the Manchester United player's own record label, White Chalk, released *Black Ice*, the debut album by young singer Nia Jai, on which Ferdinand himself makes an appearance – rapping.

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"This is Rio Ferdinand," he explains helpfully on the opening track. "Make sure you don't sleep on Nia Jai, White Chalk's first signing: this girl spits out fire." Ferdinand evidently fancies himself as something of a mogul. Jai, a former nurse from Burnage who won a talent search conducted by White Chalk in 2006, has admitted that her boss was also involved in the studio mixing of the album. The defender, apparently, texted Jai his ideas and opinions.

Ferdinand is far from the first footballer to take a punt with his vocal cords, and his contemporaries Carlos Tevez (Manchester United), Ryan Babel (Liverpool) and Djibril Cissé (Sunderland) are all in the early stages of their own recording careers. Many stars have distinguished themselves behind the microphone as well as in front of goal, but – Rio, take note – very few of them have been English. We all recall what happened when Chris Waddle and Glenn Hoddle were given their three minutes on *Top of the Pops*, and it wasn't nearly as pretty as their on-field performances.

Pele, on the other hand, complemented his career as the world's greatest footballer with a respectable sideline as a samba singer-songwriter. Franz Beckenbauer, then at the top of his "game", as it were, made an impact on the German charts as a singer of easy-listening covers during the Sixties and Seventies. Among his stellar singles was the Scott Walker-esque "Du Allein", or "You Alone". The formerly dreadlocked Dutchman Ruud Gullit is a reggae fan, and had a huge hit in Holland with his single "Not the Dancing Kind" in 1984.

What is it that makes men like Kevin Keegan (who reached No 33 in 1979 with "Head Over Heels In Love") or Andy Cole (whose 1999 single "Outstanding" did not trouble the Top 40) think they need a second celebrity string to their bows?

Perhaps it's the hubris of sportsmen who are already beloved by hundreds of thousands for their ability to put the ball in the back of the net. It's no coincidence, surely, that most singing footballers are also goalscorers.

Or perhaps it's the fault of the marketing men, who hit upon a sporting sensation like, say, Gazza, and decide they can make a few extra bob on the side by persuading Lindisfarne to re-record "Fog on the Tyne" with a vocal contribution from the impressionable young midfield maestro.

Ferdinand deserves praise for his efforts to uncover musical talents such as Nia Jai, but after hearing his own heavily distorted contribution to his new protégé's record, I doubt that anyone would advise him to give up the day job.

Footballing musicians

Djibril Cisse

The flamboyant Frenchman and Sunderland striker with the gold-dyed beard is, perhaps unsurprisingly, an artist, too. In 2006, he recorded a jumping pop single, "Shake My Play Mo, Bitch" ("Ladies shake, fellas shake/ From the crib to the club you can hear us all shake!"). Lord Cissé of Frodsham then released 'Music and Me: The DJ Inside Me', an LP-length compilation of his favourite dance tunes – including some of his own. His taste isn't bad, but his talents are still best suited to the pitch.

Carlos Tevez

The Manchester United striker is the frontman of an Argentinian "urban shantytown" band called Piola Vago, which was formed in the slums of Villa de Los Andes in Tevez's hometown of Buenos Aires. The band's output is largely devoted to its singer's stellar sporting career, with tracks like "A Carlitos Tevez" expounding the joys of goalscoring and making his family proud. Tevez's latest composition is an ode to his beloved English club, entitled "My Love Affair".

Kevin Campbell

The Arsenal, Everton and West Brom striker invested in his own record label, 2 Wikid, in 2003, and soon made his first signing, the troublesome rapper Mark Morrison. When it emerged that Morrison planned to release his album 'Innocent Man' on a rival label, Campbell found himself embroiled in legal proceedings. The album was finally released, by 2 Wikid, in 2005, to little or no fanfare. Campbell said of the music industry: "There is no loyalty in this business, just greed," before returning to the far more noble business of Premiership football.

Ryan Babel

Back home in Holland, the Liverpool winger raps under the name 'Rio' – confusing for Ferdinand fans. Among his oeuvre is a rap collaboration with fellow Dutch footballer Royston Drenthe of Real Madrid. A 'Rio' rap on Dutch radio contained this line: "I know what time it is, I've just bought a new watch."

Andy Cole

In 1999, Cole rapped on a cover of The Gap Band's "Outstanding". It wasn't, and it sank without trace. When the striker moved back to Nottingham Forest this summer, fans set up a Facebook group with the aim of getting Cole's single re-released and into the Top 40. The group boasts just over 1,500 members.