

Manchester United Score Falcao

Radamel Falcao joins the English team on loan.

BY STUART WEIR

In a move that took most people by surprise, Manchester United acquired the services of Radamel Falcao on the last day of the summer transfer window. Falcao comes to Manchester United initially on loan but with a view to the move becoming permanent later.

With Manchester United's season starting with a home defeat at the hands of Swansea City, followed by draws against the mighty Sunderland and Burnley – not to mention the 0-4 League Cup disaster away to MK Dons, stern action was needed.

First they prized Angel Di Maria away from Real Madrid to join other new signings Marcos Rojo (Argentinean World Cup player from Sporting Lisbon), Ander Herrera (Athletic Bilbao), Daley Blind (Ajax) and Luke Shaw (Southampton). Then Louis van Gaal was heard to complain that he seemed to have five centre forwards and no defenders! So the obvious thing to do was to buy another centre-forward?

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But Radamel Falcao – named after the Brazil star Paulo Roberto Falcão, who played 28 times for Brazil (1976-86) – is no ordinary centre-forward. He is a proven goalscorer in four countries for River Plate in Argentina, FC Porto in Portugal, Atletico Madrid in Spain's La Liga and for AC Monaco in the French league as well as for Colombia (see table).

The striker told his new club's website: "Manchester United is the biggest club in the world and is clearly determined to get back to the top. I am looking forward to working with Louis van Gaal and contributing to the team's success at this very exciting period in the club's history."

He is simply a natural goalscorer with a rate of more than a goal every two games. For him, goals are what football is all about: "I think I'm lucky to play upfront because you could say it's the best job in football, scoring goals! I have the chance to score goals on a regular basis, and the goal is the best expression of the game... players and fans alike enjoy a special moment in football which is triggered by a goal, and I feel truly blessed to have the opportunity to do this."

The son of a professional footballer, by the age of 13 Falcao played for Lancers Boyaca, becoming the youngest ever player in the Colombian professional league. At the age of 15 he left Colombia to play for River Plate in Argentina where he stayed for nine years, when his 34 goals in 90 games for River Plate opened a door for him to play in Europe for Porto.

When he was young, Falcao's mother attended a local church and took him to Sunday School. He was brought up in a home

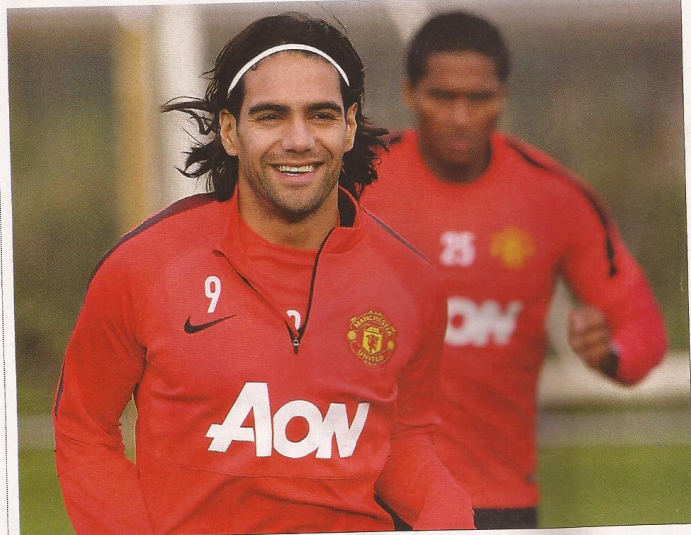
whose principles were based on the Bible.

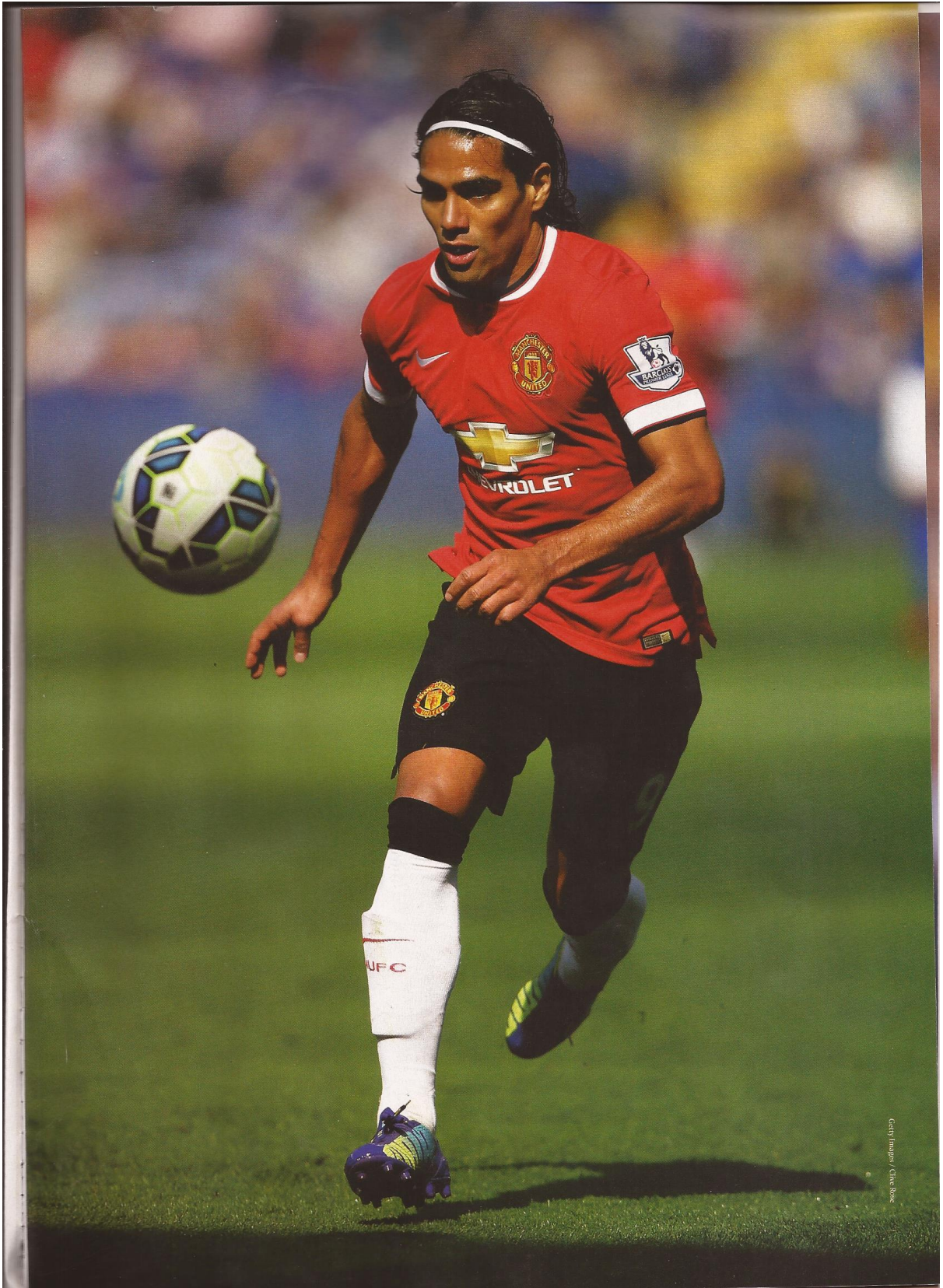
"From an early age I attended church and when I could understand, I made the decision to follow Jesus Christ and let Him guide my life. I understood that He has a plan which I simply needed to obey because He would go on to fulfil the promises that He had made for my life."

Reflecting on this early life he now says: "To have been brought up in a Christian home was the best thing that could have happened to me, to know that God is in the midst of my family, that His love sustains us. Now my wife and I share the same principles of wanting to love, obey and please God. This means that we can grow together and walk towards the same goal rather than different ones, which is to please God in all that we do."

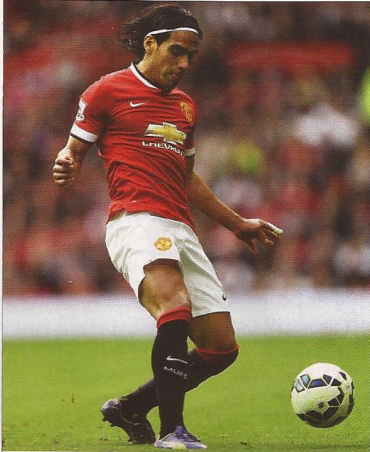
In his two seasons at Porto he scored 34 goals in 90 appearances – enough to help Porto win the League, the Portuguese Cup (twice), and the UEFA Europa League. It also resulted →

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in a transfer to Atlético Madrid. In the 2010-11 Europa League he scored a record 15 goals in a single annual club football European competition.

"To tell you the truth, Portugal didn't figure as one of my career goals. I had little knowledge about the football played there. But I believe that God used this time for my growth and as a professional player I was able to learn a great deal. I had a lot of success and began to be recognised on a world scale, as it was there that I won my first International European title which is of great significance."

He spent two seasons in Madrid, scoring 52 league goals in 67 games. In his first season he helped Atlético win the UEFA Europa League, becoming the first player to win the Europa League in successive seasons with different clubs. In the second season, Atlético won the Copa del Rey (Spanish Cup) beating Real Madrid in the final.

In the 2012 European Super Cup game, Atlético beat Chelsea 4-1 with Falcao scoring three times. Of that game, he said: "To go three-nil up against a team which on paper was much stronger than Atlético was totally unthinkable. We were playing extremely well with great efficiency, and to have scored three goals in such a big game which was being watched all over the world was an incredible feeling."

The move to AS Monaco surprised a lot of people – some said cynically that it was just about money. He argued that he saw Monaco as an exciting, long-term project to take an average French League club and turn them into one of the top clubs in Europe. His plan was to "play an important role, which will enable me to grow as a player. It's above all for those reasons that I chose Monaco". Some people would say the same attitude could apply to Manchester United as it could be a "long-term project" to take Man U back to the summit.

His goals took AS Monaco towards the top of the French League – they finished second behind Paris St Germain – until a serious knee injury ended his season, forcing him to miss the World Cup. Ironically it was in a French cup tie against fourth tier Monts D'or Azergues that the injury occurred, after he had given his team the lead.

In 2007 he played his first game for Colombia, "fulfilling my childhood dream of representing my country, and in particular for the main senior team among the best players in the country. It was another stepping stone in my career. It was a friendly in Colombia against Uruguay, and it was so extremely hot! My first goal for Colombia was during an international tournament in Japan against Serbia which we won one-nil with my goal. As well as being my first goal for Colombia, I was particularly happy as it was the goal that practically secured victory".

Colombia qualified for the 2014 World Cup finishing second in the South American table. With nine wins and three draws they were second, first being Argentina. It was the first time they had qualified for the World Cup finals since 1998. Falcao scored nine goals in the qualifying competition. Sadly, the knee injury meant that he could only watch his team-mates in Brazil.

Being a goal scorer – and a highly paid player – puts pressure on him. Falcao recognises that quite simply people expect him to score. He expects it too adding: "The pressure always comes from inside."

He has learned how to deal with that pressure: "I try to lean on God, knowing that He is always there to help me. God has helped me a lot to maintain composure and stay firm in certain moments, good and bad."

"The Bible is a manual for us here on earth to live according to God's will. It's full of teaching about what's best for us, what's right or wrong, but above all about what God put in place so that we could live vigilantly and be blessed here on earth. I often read Proverbs, sayings of wisdom which produce discernment in me and encourage me to think about what I want, what I think is right or wrong."

"I try to place all areas of my life in God's hands and this includes my football career. I pray for God to take control. We can have a constant, daily relationship with God through the Bible and through prayer, and know that He loved the world so much that He gave His Son so that we might be saved. He loves us despite our imperfections, mistakes and sin."

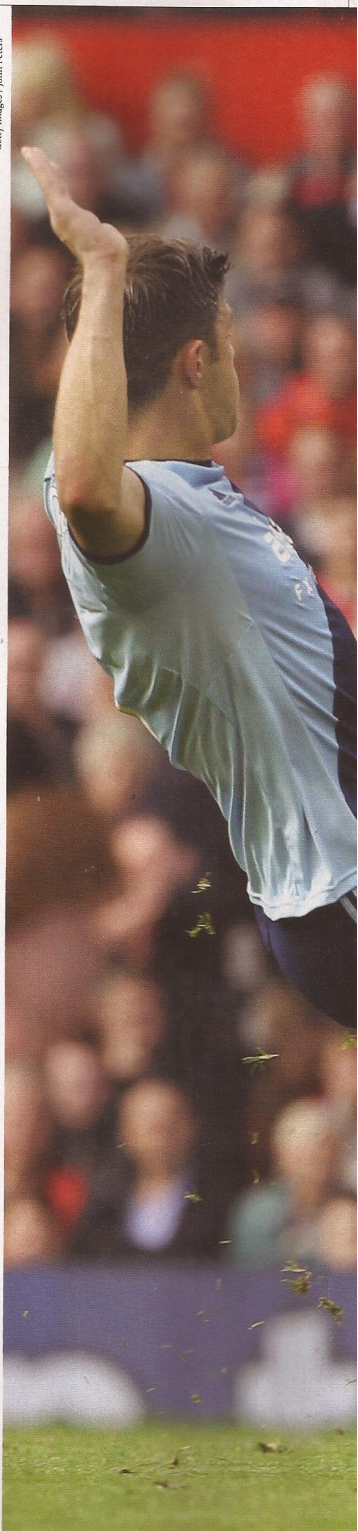
People might think that as a successful, rich footballer, he has everything but Falcao is quick to point out that there is more to life than fame and fortune. "There is a material world but there is also a spiritual aspect to life. We can have everything but if we're not satisfied spiritually then it's as if we had nothing and we feel empty. With Jesus Christ, we can be assured that He will never leave us, He'll always be there, something which I have experienced in my own life through His faithfulness, love and through showing me that Jesus paid a price for our lives." ■

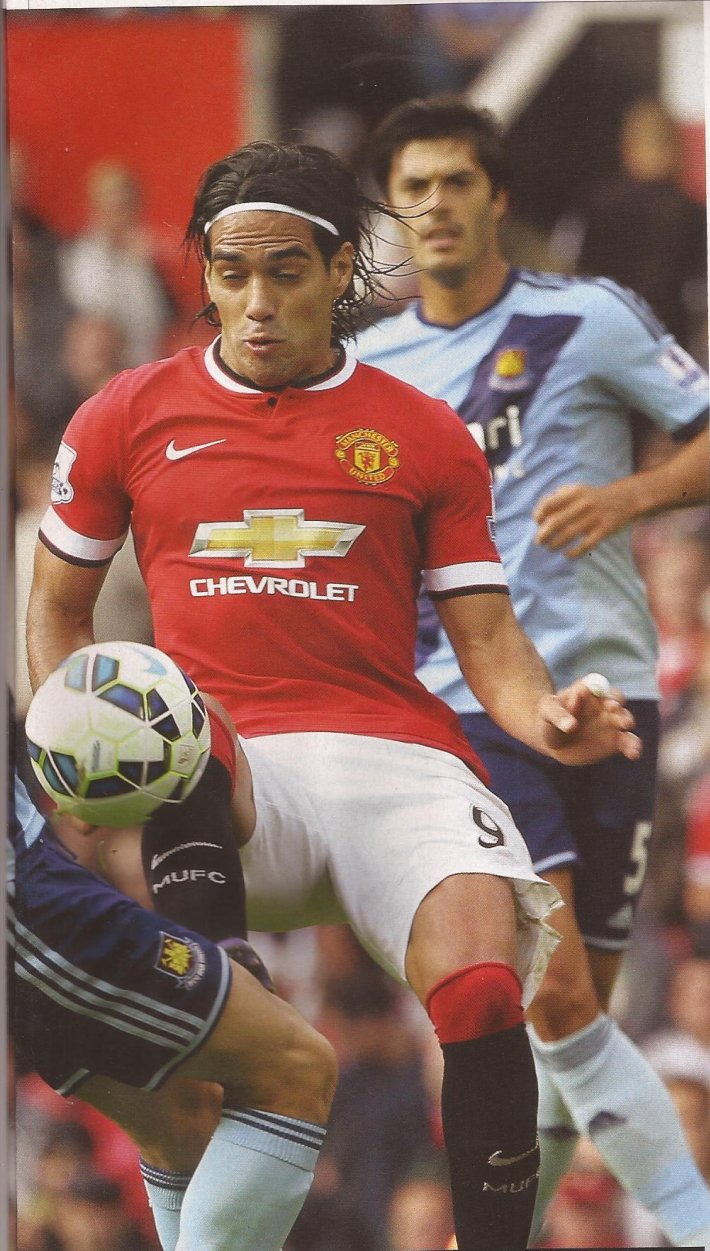
Stuart Weir spoke to Falcao in Monaco last season.

Stuart Weir is passionate about Jesus Christ and about sport, and he spends his life trying to help people make the connection. He has written several books about sport and Christianity and has worked as a sports writer at Olympic, Paralympic and World Championship events. He has been to three football World Cups and was Togo's Olympic attaché at the 2012 Olympics. Married to Lynne, he has two grown-up children. He is a member of Kidlington Baptist Church and Frilford Heath Golf Club.

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Playing Record

Club	Dates	Games	Goals
River Plate (Argentina)	2004-9	30	34
FC Porto (Portugal)	2009-11	51	41
Athletico Madrid (Spain)	2011-13	68	52
AS Monaco (France)	2013-14	20	11
Colombia	2007-	51	20

Source www.soccerassociation.com

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