

SHOOT MONTHLY

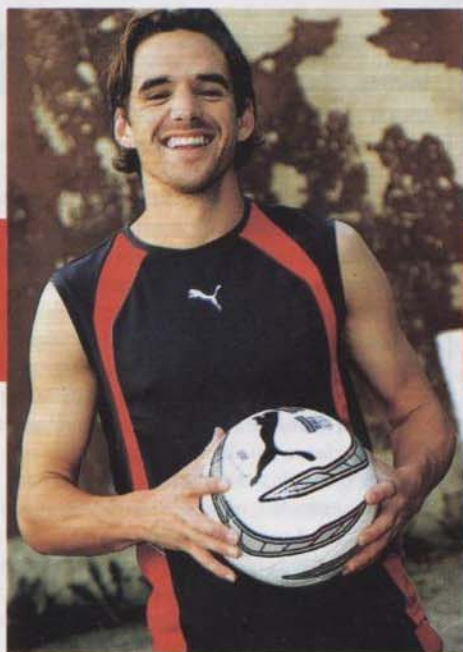
OWEN HARGREAVES
BAYERN MUNICH & ENGLAND



Owen is pictured wearing the new PUMA Cat Velocity training package available in stores nationwide from June. For stockists call 01924 425555.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

OWEN HARGREAVES TALKS BAYERN, BECKS AND THE SUMMER RACE FOR HIS SIGNATURE. **WORDS: Frank Tennyson**



Owen takes on England team-mate Frank Lampard

The next he suggests with equal forthrightness that: "the Premiership is a place where I see myself playing football."

Mind you, if you look at Owen's route to the top, you can perhaps understand why he has this unapologetic sense of his own worth. It's not been an easy ride.

Born in Calgary, Canada, to British parents, 16-year-old Owen Hargreaves joined Bayern Munich and "left behind my mum, my dad, my girlfriend, my mates for a completely new life in a strange country."

final performance from Owen, against the tournament favourites Real Madrid, set up the final and victory against Valencia.

To this day, he sees that semi-final as when Owen Hargreaves really came of age. "I was just 19 and had a few second thoughts before the game. This was *Real Madrid!* But after the first few minutes I realised that I was just as quick as everyone else on the pitch, and definitely wasn't out of my depth.

"To come through an experience like that made me much tougher and a lot more confident in my ability."

OPEN ANY NEWSPAPER this summer and we bet you the price of a **Shoot** subscription there will be weekly, if not daily, updates about the future of one man.

No, we're not talking David Beckham or Michael Owen here, although the respective destinies of England's two favourite sons are still shrouded in mystery. Instead it's international team-mate Owen Hargreaves who could generate the most column inches.

Courted twice by Spurs last season (in the summer and again in the January transfer window), the 24-year-old is also a rumoured target for Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Aston Villa... the list goes on.

Clearly the desire for a holding midfielder with Champions League (he won in 2001) and international experience has made Owen a valuable commodity. And he knows it.

The Munich man has been playing his cards close to his chest. One moment he declares: "Bayern has become like a second home to me."

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

ALL ALONE BUT unwavering in his determination, Owen overcame the cultural difficulties and footballing hurdles of an ultra-competitive youth set-up to emerge as the cream of the crop of Bayern youngsters.

He made the first-team squad just three years after leaving the family home. But even in the first-team there were points to prove.

With the likes of controversial and outspoken midfielder Stefan Effenberg and Oliver Kahn, Bayern's arrogant yet talismanic keeper, holding sway in the dressing room, it was a baptism of fire.

"They were massive players with massive reputations," recalls Owen. "In my first year with the senior squad, some of the players just went after me because they saw me as a threat. But that's what I needed. Eventually you earn their respect and get their support."

Much of this respect was earned during Bayern's Champions League campaign in 2001, during which a barnstorming semi-



SO NEAR AND YET SO VERY FAR AWAY

OWEN'S FULL COMPETITIVE debut came in England's infamous 5-1 drubbing of Germany on his home turf of Munich during September 2001.

He then went on to become the only player who played his trade outside the Premiership to make the England squad for the World Cup in Japan and Korea.

But having featured in the pre-tournament friendlies against Cameroon and South Korea, as well as England's opening game against Sweden, he was struck by disaster in the Sapporo Dome against Argentina. England sealed a famous 1-0 win but a clash with team-mate Michael Owen would see the midfielder leave the pitch after only 21 minutes.

Since then, his international career has been derailed somewhat, with the emerging dominance of Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard establishing a new midfield pecking order. A perennial bench-warmer, and no more than a bit part player in Euro 2004, Owen is philosophical about how his international fortunes changed in an instant.

"That definitely set me back because I had never really been injured before," he says. "The highlight of my career was starting the game against Argentina. The low point was having to go off.

"I had tears in my eyes. To be forced out of the biggest game of my life was a cruel blow, but maybe it was fate. Maybe it wasn't my time.

"Now, I don't think the competition for places has ever been hotter, especially when you see how young most of the players are. The quality is phenomenal – probably the best in Europe.

"For me personally I have to be patient. Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard are great players, but crucially they took their chances when they got them. I have to do the same.

"With the World Cup coming up, everyone has to be at the top of their game to even get into the squad, so my goals are pretty clear. Play well, win things with Bayern Munich and make it difficult for Mr Eriksson to leave me out."



UNCERTAIN FUTURE

OWEN IS NOT short of medals. A third Bundesliga title came last month, although the Champions League quarter-final defeat to Chelsea remains a source of regret – his absence from the second leg's starting line-up ("Of course it hurt!") even more so.

Yet throughout our exclusive interview at Bayern's training ground, Owen was in an upbeat mood. Signing T-shirts, autograph books and wrestling with an unruly mobile phone, this is a young man clearly enjoying life to the full.

But what about that move to the Premiership? In such unguarded moments, can we perhaps get an inkling as to where he might end up playing his football next season?

"Any ambitious (Premiership) team would look at a national player in their early 20s, wouldn't they?" he says, immediately returning to "dead bat" mode. "My next move is the most crucial of my career. I've never been so comfortable with myself and what I have to offer.

"I feel a very old 24-year-old! I have been successful and won things at the beginning of my career. I would like to continue on that path. There are a lot of great players in the Premier League and a lot of great teams. But I am under contract here next season and need to spend the summer thinking about my options."

That's a no, then. But we're not giving up...!

OKAY. LET'S NOT NAME NAMES BUT WHAT KIND OF PREMIERSHIP CLUB WOULD SUIT YOU?

"I'm at one of the biggest clubs in the world who play Champions League football every year. For me to move I would first of all have to fit into the right system, and secondly I would have to be playing Champions League football and, of course, winning things. You can draw your own conclusions as to which clubs that would be in the Premiership."

NOW WE'RE GETTING SOMEWHERE... WE HEAR YOU ADMIRE THE WAY MOURINHO GOES ABOUT HIS BUSINESS.

"Mourinho is an excellent manager, very impressive. He seems to have a clear sense of what he wants and the players all respect him. Just look at what he achieved with Joe Cole. Joe had all the talent but now he has the discipline to go with that.

Mourinho's record really says it all, what he did with a club like Porto and now what he is doing at Chelsea. It compares favourably to any current manager in the world."

AND YOU LIKE WENGER TOO...

"He's had a lot of success and players want to play for people like that. He also knows what he wants from his players and takes

care of them. Just speaking to the likes of Ashley Cole and Sol Campbell, you can tell how highly they regard him. He's been one of the best in Europe for a very long time."

SO THEY WOULD BE CANDIDATES FOR THE HARGREAVES' SIGNATURE?

"It's all very good talking about other clubs, but even if I was to leave Bayern, who's to say which clubs would need a player like me? It is important that I play in one position so I can get some consistency into my game. I like the defensive holding role, and think I could do that job at a top club. Which one? Well, I'm still a Bayern player..."

WE GET THE MESSAGE! DO YOU THINK THAT PLAYING IN A LOT OF POSITIONS FOR BAYERN HAS HELD YOU BACK AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL?

"Look at Frank Lampard. He is playing week-in, week-out in the same position which has helped him, I think. I haven't had the same opportunity to do that at Bayern – I've had to fill in where necessary. That's not taking anything away from Lamps, because in the last couple of years he has really worked on his game. But I'm a couple of years younger, and if I can get a settled starting position I can start pushing him for that England place."

THE WAY SVEN TALKS TO THE PLAYERS, THE RESPECT HE GIVES THEM, IS BRILLIANT.

OWEN HARGREAVES TIMELINE

JANUARY 20, 1981

Born in Calgary, Canada.

JULY 1, 1997

Signed professional forms for Bayern Munich.

AUGUST 12, 2000

Played in his first Bundesliga game for Bayern as an 83rd minute substitute against Hertha Berlin.

SEPTEMBER 2000

Withdrew from Wales Under-21s to train with England. He could have played for Canada (his place of birth), Wales (his mother's) or England (his father's).

MAY 2001

Won the first of his three Bundesliga titles as Bayern topped the table, one point above Schalke.



MAY 23, 2001

Helped Bayern win the Champions League as they beat Valencia 5-4 on penalties in the final after a tense 1-1 draw.

AUGUST 15, 2001

Made his England debut in a 2-0 friendly defeat at White Hart Lane against Holland.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2001

His competitive international debut in England's 5-1 thrashing of Germany.

WHILE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT CHELSEA, THERE SEEMED TO BE QUITE A BIT OF ILL-FEELING BETWEEN THE CAMPS DURING THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TIES.

"We have a lot of respect for Chelsea as a club and, of course, their players. I have a lot of respect for their key players, Lampis and John Terry, who have been absolutely brilliant this year. I play with quite a few of the Chelsea lads at international level and they are great people. And they are very talented – Frank Lampard has become a class act, everyone has seen how good Joe Cole is now and then there is Duff who is very exciting when on top form."

YOU WERE BORN IN CANADA AND LEARNED YOUR FOOTBALL IN GERMANY. DO YOU FEEL ANY LESS ENGLISH THAN SOMEONE WITH A MORE CONVENTIONAL UPBRINGING?

"I grew up in Canada but in an English household, eating Yorkshire pudding and shepherd's pie! I grew up with the same things as other English children – it was just that I was in a different place geographically."

"It was a different route to get where I am, but I'm sure there are thousands of people in my position. It doesn't make you any less English just because you live in a different country or had to learn a different culture."

HOW DO YOU KEEP UP WITH THE SCENE IN ENGLAND?

"Maybe ten years ago that could have been a problem, but now with the Internet and the media it's easy to find out what is going on back home. Every Sunday we get some English newspapers or magazines and pore over them in an English cafe. That keeps me in the loop."

YOU SEEM QUITE STRONG-MINDED. IS THAT A PRODUCT OF HAVING TO SURVIVE AS A YOUNGSTER IN A STRANGE COUNTRY?

"Even when I was 12 I was like that. I had a job because I wanted to do things for myself. So when I came to Bayern I felt pretty confident, even though looking back I must have been a little bit scared. It just seemed natural for me to make that step to get my career going, even though I never expected the move from Canada to Germany to open up so many doors for me."

ONE OF THOSE DOORS LED TO INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION. DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO PLAY FOR ENGLAND?

"I might have wanted to, but growing up where I did it was never in my wildest dreams that

I would play international football. I remember watching the World Cup in 1990 and supporting England – it was never in my mind that I would actually be like those boys on the telly."

WHAT IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS WHEN PLAYING ABROAD?

"Determination is very important. I arrived at Bayern with a lot of other players from other countries who had great potential but couldn't go on to the next level. Some went home after two weeks. It wasn't lack of ability but more to do with their mentality. You must have the desire to compete."

BUT GOING TO MADRID MUST HAVE BEEN A CULTURE SHOCK FOR DAVID BECKHAM AND MICHAEL OWEN?

"That's the biggest culture shock you can get! Yes, Madrid is a beautiful city and they are a fantastic team but there are so many



new things to get used to – a new home, new surroundings, a different way of living... Learning a language is just one of the difficult things but it's also one of the most exciting."

"To go there you have to be confident and open-

minded, and Becks and Michael have both those things in their make-up. You learn a lot about yourself, about life, about different food. It makes you a more rounded person to experience something like that."

SVEN SEEMS TO BE A BIG FAN OF YOURS. WHAT IS HE LIKE AS A MANAGER?

"I think he is one of the best I have ever seen. The way he talks to the players, the respect he gives them, is brilliant. It's a very modern way of managing. Ten years ago there was a different emphasis, with people yelling from the sidelines, but those days are gone. Big players and teams need a different approach."

BOTH HE AND DAVID BECKHAM GET SOME FEARFUL STICK. COULD YOU DEAL WITH THAT LEVEL OF CRITICISM?

"Being England manager is probably the most difficult job in football. The scrutiny over your decisions and also your private life must be tough. It's the same for the captain because he is one of the biggest personalities in the world. It takes a special person to take that level of attention. I'm sure 99 per cent of us couldn't cope with that but Becks always bounces back."

IS DAVID BECKHAM A GOOD LEADER?

"Definitely. He is confident in his ability and doesn't need to shout to get his point across."

WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM A WORLD CUP HOSTED BY GERMANY?

"It's great for Germany but also for Europe and all European teams. The Germans are famed for organisation and if you see the stadiums now, they are absolutely beautiful and way ahead of schedule. It will be a first-class tournament and probably better than anything that has gone before. It will create a lot of excitement across Europe."

AH, BUT WILL ENGLAND WIN?

"We are one of the best teams in the world right now. There is strength in depth and there are very few weaknesses, if any. The expectation is always high, but I think this group of players can go all the way. Of course there are the likes of Brazil, Italy, and Holland to compete with but with the great support we will have behind us, we should have a very special tournament."



MAY 9, 2002

Started England's first two World Cup Finals games against Sweden and Argentina, but injury saw him subbed and ended his first World Cup adventure.

MAY 31, 2003

Part of Bayern Munich's double-winning team. Set up one of Ballack's goals in a 3-1 cup final win against Kaiserslautern.



MAY 17, 2004

Selected for the England squad for the European Championships. Made three substitute appearances in four games. Successfully netted in the penalty shootout defeat to Portugal.

APRIL 6, 2005

Played for Bayern against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in the Champions League quarter-final. Missed the starting line-up for the return game (Bayern won 3-2 but lost on aggregate).

APRIL 30, 2005

Wins his third Bundesliga title at Bayern after a comprehensive 4-0 win away at Kaiserslautern.