

FASHION

Brazil top scorers in the dressing room

Three of the European epicentres of the fashion world - Paris, Barcelona, Milan and London's Chelsea district - are also home to major football clubs. But the question is, can these highly successful teams cut it on the catwalk as well as on the pitch?

MARTA WENDLINGER

● Even if the term "football kit" means little to you, the outfits worn by football players are all the rage among fans, men and boys alike. Not only are some teams hipper than others, but the amount of money involved in designing and marketing these kits is on a par with the sums received by many internationally-renowned fashion designers.

As many of these clubs are based in the fashion capitals of Europe — Barcelona, Paris, London, and Milan — and as the start of the new season has barely begun, now is a good time to compare how the top teams dress their players, to see if they live up to their cities' reputations. In this year's Champions League, FC Barcelona, Paris Saint Germain, Chelsea, and AC Milan will be striving for footballing glory, but will victory on the pitch be matched by corresponding success in the dressing room?

Any discussion of the link between football kits and success has to begin with the Brazilian national team. Not only do Brazil have a reputation for producing the best footballers on the planet, but the famous yellow and green shirt is the most internationally-popular strip, among fans and non-fans alike. Brazil, five-times winners of the World Cup, have conquered both the footballing and fashion worlds and remain an example for all to follow. The team's home colours include a yellow shirt with green lines and lettering. The design is simple, classic, no-nonsense, and most importantly, recognisable.

Can European clubs live up to Brazil's success? And can Barcelona FC live up to the city's high fashion standards? Barça is one of the most well-known clubs and is the only one in Europe to have participated in every European Cup since 1955. The new home kit incorporates the traditional



Renato, from Brazil's team (up left); Sylvain Armand from Paris Saint Germain; Deco, Ronaldiño and Giovanni van Bronckhorst from FC Barcelona; Shevchenko and Gilardino from Milan and Arjen Robben from Chelsea. / EFE

blue shirt with wide, red vertical lines (fortunately narrower than in previous years), and red shorts, a dramatic change from a 92-year tradition of blue shorts. And for the first time, the shirt incorporates a small Catalan flag design on the back of the collar and the shorts, the result of a presidential directive to reinforce the club's nation-

importance. The jury is still out on the new kit and it seems that you either love it or hate it. But it doesn't quite cut it from a fashion standpoint; they could certainly come up with something a bit more chic for such a chic city.

In Paris, the epicentre of European fashion, again, the new kits are a little disappoint-

ing. The home shirt is marine blue with a wide red strip down the centre bordered in white with white lettering and blue shorts. But where Paris Saint Germain fail in the fashion stakes, they make up for it in the marketing department — the club offers an extensive range of lingerie, from pyjama dresses to g-strings, all with the

club's emblem.

In London, the Chelsea district rose to fame in the fashion world in the mid-'60s with Mary Quant's "Chelsea Look" and, more recently, Vivienne Westwood has helped to maintain Chelsea's ultra-hip character. But is Chelsea FC worthy of this history? Unfortunately, I'd have to say the kits leave a bit to be desired. The home kit is a blue shirt with white lettering and blue shorts. But their major fashion *faux pas* is the white socks. It's almost as bad as tourists wearing sandals with white socks!

Finally, we come to Milan. The northern Italian city is said to be paradise for shopping. Milan has a long-standing history of fashion — Giorgio Armani, Miuccia Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, Gianfranco Ferré and Versace are all associated with the city. As six-time European champion, AC Milan has one of the most illustrious footballing pedigrees on the continent. But the red-black striped shirt also has its own history. It was designed by one of the club's founders, and Milan was also the first club to print players' names on the back of the shirts. On the whole, AC Milan plays the fashion game best. The home kit is a red-black narrow-striped shirt with white lettering and matching shorts.

But the club's fashion taste doesn't stop there. They also offer football fashion for all those women interested in getting in on the traditionally masculine act, with a nice white shell with black trim for 55 euros. AC Milan is doing it right, both on and off the field. Whether they will ever come to rival Brazil's stylistic dominance is another matter. As one of the favourites to lift the European cup this season, footballing success is assured but you can't help feeling that to win over the fashion-conscious it may take more than on-pitch success, or style — ultimately the marketing team will have the final say.