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## The World Cup's Loudest Star Will Be the One Sitting Behind a Desk

*Zlatan Ibrahimovic, the Swedish giant who lit up European soccer, has never been short of opinions. Now retired, he's about to spend all summer firing off his takes.*

By Joshua Robinson

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Zlatan Ibrahimovic appeared at two World Cups and four European Championships for the Swedish national team  
Agence France-Presse/Getty Image

Over the course of his transition from Swedish soccer god to World Cup analyst, Zlatan Ibrahimovic has had to make a few significant changes. For one, he no longer wears shorts or shinguards to work. The tightly-pulled samurai ponytail is also gone.

But there's one habit from his 25-year playing career that he hasn't left behind. When "Ibra" talks about Ibra—which will happen a lot on America's TV screens over the coming month—he still refers to himself in the third person.

"They want Zlatan, and I will give them Zlatan again," Zlatan said. "But from a different angle."

This is the angle where he wears a suit and folds his 6-foot-5 frame behind a desk to make his broadcasting debut for Fox. Though he appeared at two World Cups and four European Championships for the Swedish national team, the 44-year-old has been retired since 2023. The spotlight was beginning to feel a little distant. So now, Ibrahimovic is about to spend the summer practicing the one other skill where he can match his world-class talent with his feet.

He'll be running his mouth.

"I've been judged for 25 years," he says. "And now finally I get to judge other ones, but in my own way—nice or not—let's see what mood I am in."



Ibrahimovic will be an analyst for Fox during the World Cup. Spada/LaPresse/ZUMA Press

The various moods of Zlatan shaped his entire playing career as he lit up the capitals of European soccer. Wherever he went—from Ajax, to Inter Milan, to Barcelona, to Paris Saint-Germain, to AC Milan, and Manchester United—he left his imprint, for better and for worse. He was the top scorer in Italy twice. He was banned for fighting with opponents and teammates more than once. He now also claims to be “the architect of PSG,” which went on to win the Champions League seven years after he left. What’s certain is that he’s never short of opinions.

“I’m professional, so this for me is not a joke,” he says. “I’m not there to become a clown.”

The last time Ibrahimovic performed in front of American audiences, it was as a member of the LA Galaxy in Major League Soccer. He announced his arrival in 2018 with a full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times that read simply, “Dear Los Angeles, You’re welcome”—and then proceeded to score two goals in his debut.

The whole venture, he says, was an exercise in discovering “if I was alive or not,” after a major knee injury at Manchester United. It turned out that as he approached his 40th birthday, his soccer career wasn’t dead yet. Ibrahimovic returned to AC Milan and delivered four more seasons before quitting and, for the first time in his life, feeling anything less than total confidence.

“When I was close to retiring,” he says. “I got a little bit panicked because I didn’t know what will happen after my exit from football.”



Ibrahimovic played for the LA Galaxy in the MLS in 2018 and 2019. JAVIER ROJAS/Zuma Press

That’s when he linked up with Gerry Cardinale, the sports and entertainment investor who founded RedBird Capital Partners and owns AC Milan. Cardinale knew that the moment the cameras were on him, Ibrahimovic the man tended to mesh with Zlatan the character—the swaggering, self-eulogizing centaur who trademarked his own name in Europe and once accused Pep Guardiola of deploying him like a Fiat, when in fact he was a Ferrari.

Cardinale felt that Ibrahimovic’s charisma didn’t require him to have a ball at his feet. He helped organize the Fox gig and both men genuinely believe that this could be a springboard into Hollywood.

“My aspiration for Zlatan,” Cardinale says, “is actually he should be the next Bond villain.”

Ibrahimovic would happily return to the lair he kept during his time with the Galaxy. During his Californian revival, away from the glare of European soccer, he spent two idyllic seasons in Beverly Hills—“the flat areas,” he points out. At the time, Ibrahimovic had an English bulldog who could handle going downhill, but struggled going the other way. “And I would not carry him.”

His family back then was easy to spot. Ibrahimovic, the son of immigrants to Sweden from the former Yugoslavia, was the Scandinavian dad urging his kids to ride bikes to school. “Every other kid, they had a

driver, or they had a nanny to bring them, or security,” Ibrahimovic explains. “My two boys, I bought them two bicycles, and I said, ‘This is your house where you live, and this is the school.’”

Now, as a World Cup talking head, Ibrahimovic plans to be the one doing the educating. And he’s mindful of the audience he’s talking to. Ibrahimovic has no designs on introducing complex tactics to a casual World Cup audience. Zlatan is there to be Zlatan.

“Let’s begin with soccer,” he says. “But we will end with football. Don’t worry.”



Ibrahimovic was honored for his 122 appearances for Sweden during a ceremony in 2024. Jesper Zerman/Zuma Press

There is only one way he would rather spend this World Cup, and that’s in Sweden’s yellow jersey. (Just don’t tell anyone that he likes Norway’s chances a little better.)

“To be honest, I could play the game still,” he says. “I would just need five minutes, and I would make the difference.”

Then Ibrahimovic pauses for a moment of self-reflection.

“That’s my ego speaking,” he adds. “Realistically, I don’t know.”