

**Exclusive interview with Gaizka Mendieta: David Raya would start for every country but Spain at the World Cup, Cristiano Ronaldo will think about it forever if he doesn't win the World Cup this summer, Harry Kane could be the key to ending Barcelona's Champions League drought, Jose Mourinho could be sacked even quicker than Xabi Alonso at Real Madrid**

Speaking exclusively with **Grosvenor Sport**, former Barcelona and Middlesbrough star Gaizka Mendieta has given his thoughts on the Premier League, World Cup and more.

Mendieta has discussed David Raya's chances of playing for Spain this summer as well as Cristiano Ronaldo's dreams of winning the tournament at his final attempt.

The former midfielder has also spoken on Harry Kane's ongoing links to Barcelona from Bayern Munich and the pressure on Jose Mourinho for results at Real Madrid.

**Q: What is the feeling around Spain of Xabi Alonso taking the Chelsea job? Is there expectations on him to win major honours?**

"Chelsea finished 10th and I don't think they will want to be there again next season. Xabi is a winner, he showed that at Leverkusen. He would have done it at Real Madrid if he would have been allowed and given the time.

"At Chelsea, I don't expect anything less. He will want to win trophies. I'm assuming from the club that's the target. A club like Chelsea every season has to fight for them.

"There's no other way, but I think it will mostly come from him. He will want to win wherever he goes, and especially a team like Chelsea, win trophies, a hundred percent.

"I don't see fans just being happy with obviously not tenth, but even being in the Conference or Europa League, not winning any domestic trophies. So certainly trophies are on the agenda for Xabi Alonso straight away."

**Q: Is the feeling that Xabi Alonso would rather be managing Liverpool than Chelsea? Did he take the job too soon?**

"I think for Xabi Alonso, the project at his next club was a priority in terms of what happened at Real Madrid. He probably thought the same about going back to Madrid, that he'd be loved and get time but things didn't work out the way they were supposed to.

"Maybe at Liverpool, he thought it might be similar. Certainly, for me, it would've been a better fit if he were going to Liverpool.

"It caught us all by surprise how they sacked the manager, maybe it would've taken Xabi by surprise too. If both jobs were available he'd likely be at Liverpool, but Chelsea came along first.

“Maybe now he’ll be thinking he should’ve waited a little longer.”

**Q: Given their style of play, is Andoni Iraola a better fit at Liverpool than Xabi Alonso would’ve been?**

“Andoni Iraola is a great fit for Liverpool thanks to his style, but also because Iraola has already been in the Premier League. The players have already seen the style of football he plays on a weekly basis, and they have seen what it’s all about.

“With Xabi Alonso, players would’ve seen him at Leverkusen, but I’m sure none of them watch Madrid or Leverkusen in every single match.

“So I think in that way, Iraola has a bit of an advantage over Xabi Alonso in the sense that the players and fans have seen the way he works in more detail, and I’m sure they’ll be happy because, obviously, Iraola is a fantastic manager.

“It was also a surprise how he announced he was leaving, but there was not really anything lined up. Maybe he knew something we didn’t, but it was after a successful season and getting into Europe, he decided to leave.

“It’s a great signing by Liverpool as well. I think both teams will have fantastic managers but there are obviously challenging seasons ahead of them both.”

**Q: What do you see as the most likely destination for Cesc Fabregas?**

“Knowing Cesc Fabregas, he’ll be wanting to grow with Como. Obviously, it was a big bet on him going into the B team and then being given the first team with no experience. But I think times have changed so much.

“Nowadays, to see a manager with no experience going to big clubs, look at Xabi Alonso at Leverkusen. He did fantastically with no experience at that level.

“Or Vincent Kompany to Bayern Munich, he had no connection whatsoever to the club. But certainly, maybe in a couple of years, we can see him going somewhere else as a bigger step in terms of the club’s history.

“Because again, I’m sure he will want to reward the club for the trust they put in him when they signed him for the B team and as a player.

“They gave him the first team with full power. But obviously, eventually, we’ll see him in any of the big clubs in Europe for sure. It’s only a matter of time.”

**Q: Barcelona and Real Madrid are considering a bid for Marc Cucurella, where is the best fit?**

“I think both Barcelona and Real Madrid would suit Marc Cucurella. He is very intelligent tactically and can adapt to different roles. We’ve seen him be more defensive, and we’ve seen him more offensive, playing higher up almost as a winger.

“He obviously has the ability to be up and down the pitch, so I could see him at both teams. Obviously, his connection with Barca is stronger, but again, it’s a matter of opportunities, a matter of playing Champions League football and not losing his role in the national team.

“I’m not sure we’ll see him leave this season, especially with Xabi Alonso coming in. I’m sure Xabi will trust him and want him in the team. But it’s something players think about, a season without Europe is a big miss for an international player.”

**Q: Can Marc Cucurella get back to being among the best left-backs in the world under Xabi Alonso after previously being keen on Barcelona?**

“Marc Cucurella will be a key player under Xabi Alonso. He plays with fullbacks quite offensively, it’s very demanding physically because you have to support the midfield.

“The fullbacks at Leverkusen used to be quite prolific in attack, so that suits Cucurella. If for some reason he has to be a bit more defensive, like we saw in some games for the Spanish national team, that’s fine, but his natural style is to get up and down the pitch as he usually does. So, I think that would fit well with Xabi Alonso’s style.”

**Q: Could Xabi Alonso reunite with Jeremie Frimpong at Chelsea?**

“Jeremie Frimpong could be a good asset for Xabi Alonso at Chelsea. Managers have players they trust from previous clubs and there will be a belief from the player that they can find that form again.

“We often see players reuniting with former coaches for that reason, especially if things aren’t going well for those players like Frimpong at Liverpool.

“It’s a way of getting them back, to form hoping you can get the maximum out of the player and help you win things. I’m sure Chelsea will be active again in the market, they have to let players leave and bring new players in to suit the new coach.”

**Q: Did Barcelona’s huge signing of Anthony Gordon come as a shock? It seemed as though a deal was agreed with Rashford?**

“Anthony Gordon’s move to Barcelona came as a huge surprise. It shows how good they are at negotiating, as there were no rumours anywhere.

“We were focused on the situation regarding Marcus Rashford, but they are clearly trying to replace Raphinha, whose presence they have been missing, even with Fermin Lopez playing there. Rashford isn’t the player who makes those types of runs.

“Secondly, regarding the financial side, we all heard about the 'one-for-one' rule that La Liga imposes. It's a lot of money for an early signing, and it won't be the last one. It's nice to see Barca back in the market with such energy.

“The reception has been very good because, with Newcastle being in the Champions League, many Barca fans have seen him play, especially given that they faced each other this season. They are expecting good things.”

**Q: Did Barcelona sign Anthony Gordon on the back of his Champions League performances?**

“Those performances have helped but they have definitely looked beyond just his Champions League performances, I've seen him play in the Premier League as well. To me, he's a great alternative to Raphinha, he's fast and makes those high-intensity runs.

“It was a surprise, though, because nobody had heard anything beforehand. The Champions League really made him more visible. Honestly, if Newcastle hadn't been in that competition, I don't think many fans in Spain would have been familiar with his talent.”

**Q: Has Anthony Gordon impressed more than Gareth Bale did on his arrival at Real Madrid?**

“He has had a better start than Gareth Bale in that sense, because it shows his commitment.

“I think it shows his interest. It also tells us that these negotiations have been going on for a while because learning some Spanish for your presentation takes time, unless he is naturally very good at languages.

“It shows the fans his desire to settle and adapt to the new culture and club. He should probably learn Catalan as well. He would have gained more points by speaking Catalan than Spanish, but it is a good start regardless.

“Most people speak Catalan there. If you approach someone in the street or in a shop, they will often speak to you in Catalan, though they will switch if you respond in Spanish. It is the primary spoken language in Catalonia, and in the city especially, many people speak it, including most of the employees at the club.”

**Q: What does the signing of Anthony Gordon mean for Marcus Rashford?**

“The signing has definitely changed the nature of the negotiations for Marcus Rashford. Barca has demonstrated that they have funds people didn't think they had.

“However, with another player in that position, I'm not sure if keeping Rashford remains a priority, they might be looking for a different profile.

“I know the club is happy with him and wants him to stay, but this puts pressure on the financial side. It becomes a matter of, 'You want to stay? This is what we can afford.'”

“You either accept that price or you don't. It's interesting how quickly things have switched with just one signing and Rashford might be left disappointed.”

**Q: Marcus Rashford has been training with Inter Miami, would he be the best player in MLS if he made that unexpected switch?**

“Marcus Rashford to Inter Miami? I think regarding how he played last season, he wanted to stay in Europe to play Champions League football and win trophies. That's why he went to Barca, he needed to return to a place where he had the respect he showed in previous seasons.

“If he were to go to Miami or MLS, he would certainly lose his place in the national team, so I don't think that's likely.

“I think it's also due to the connections between Barça and Inter Miami, as a lot of employees have crossed over. I'm sure there was some help and support from that perspective to keep him fit. You can read between the lines a lot there.”

**Q: If Jose Mourinho doesn't apologise to Vini Jr, can you see him leaving the club this summer?**

“Jose Mourinho needs to sit down and clear the air with Vinicius Junior, for sure. They'll have to clear the air regarding whatever isn't fixed.

“But I'm sure a coffee with Mourinho can convince anyone. I'm sure Vinicius will also want to clear the air and get on well with the coach if it is eventually Mourinho.

“They need to get back on track, align on the same objectives, and try to end this dry spell of two seasons without trophies.”

**Q: Mbappe has the lowest defensive contribution in Europe's top five leagues, does that have to change?**

“Kylian Mbappe's style is to come back into position rather than press high and intensely to win the ball back. It's not like what Xabi Alonso asks of his players, where if you lose the ball, you have to press the nearest player immediately.

“I think with Mourinho, it's more about staying in position and then attacking from there. Assuming that's the case for both Vinicius and Mbappe, it suits them.

“But again, I don't see Mourinho falling out with his stars from the very first moment. Knowing him, he wants to make them happy and make them feel important, as we all know, he wants to be the important one.

“But yeah, if everything goes the way it looks, it will be interesting to see how he manages all these egos and big players in the team. But Mbappe will prefer Mourinho's style to Alonso's style.”

**Q: Could Jose Mourinho utilise Jude Bellingham like he did Frank Lampard at Chelsea?**

“Jude Bellingham can be like Frank Lampard was under Jose Mourinho. The best thing is for him having the freedom to move around and go wherever he feels like, as he did in his first season for Real Madrid, but I don't see him matching those numbers.

“That said, given his ability to score, which he obviously has, if I were the coach, that's where I'd want him to be, close to the box, scoring goals, getting headers and shots off.

“Linking up with the players up front while starting from deeper positions is effective when he's already in the right place. So, I think that's what Mourinho will try to do, figuring out how to fit Guler, Mbappe, Vinicius, and Bellingham all into the same team is the challenge.”

**Q: If things turn sour under Jose Mourinho, could he be gone even quicker than Xabi Alonso was?**

“I think the fact that he's been there before means people know him very well, you know what you're getting into. With another coach, you might say, 'Okay, let's give them a bit longer if things aren't going well.'

“But with Mourinho, he's not going to change; he is who he is. If things aren't working, you reach a point where you're just not happy and he'll be gone very quickly.

“You know what you're getting with Mourinho. So, you either commit to him or you don't, especially if things aren't going well. If results don't go your way early on, or whenever the president decides he's had enough, that's when you make a move.

“Again, it could be one of the most fascinating things this season, seeing how things pan out for Real Madrid with him in the dressing room. I'm very intrigued.”

**Q: Barcelona are weighing up an approach for 24-year-old Arsenal and Ecuador defender Piero Hincapie, is that a step up for him?**

“I think Barcelona are looking for players to replace or bring into both defensive positions. Arsenal won the league and reached the final, and even if Piero Hincapie hasn't played in every game, that's because it's one of the best defenses in football right now.

“So, massive credit to him for playing in that team and in that defense in particular. But if Barcelona comes knocking on your door, it's difficult to say no, especially if you want to be considered as the number one in that position. So yeah, if they go for him and they call, it would be tough for him to turn it down.”

**Q: Ibrahima Konate refused a new Liverpool deal because he wants to play for Real Madrid, would he get into their current starting XI?**

“Ibrahima Konate to Real Madrid? Last year everyone thought that Rudiger or Eder Militao would find it difficult to get into the team, but they ended up with so many players injured, so I think they want back-up in that position.

“The World Cup will be important when he goes into the dressing room, and all the players will be talking to him, telling him he has to go to Real Madrid, and so on.

“The fact that he hasn't signed this contract at Liverpool tells us a lot, he wants to move. If we talk about Barca or Madrid, if Madrid opens the door, it's very difficult to say no. I can see him fitting into the Real Madrid defense very well.”

**Q: Do you think he would be keen to bring some players from Bournemouth to Liverpool, or would he find that disrespectful? Eli Junior Kroupi is very highly rated**

“It can be difficult to bring players directly from La Liga to the Premier League due to style differences. However, moving from Bournemouth to a club like Liverpool is different, fans and the league already know these players, and the transition is smoother.

“If a manager feels specific players can help him succeed at a new club, he will bring them because he values players who understand his system and expectations. They also help settle the dressing room and relay the manager's philosophy to the squad.

“Regarding Eli Junior Kroupi, it would be a lot of pressure for him to join a club like Liverpool, which already has a strong squad. It will depend on who leaves the club, as the manager will look to adjust the team to fit his demands.”

**Q: Could Andoni Iraola tempt Nico Williams to replace Mohamed Salah at Liverpool? Would he be able to handle the pressure?**

“There will definitely be interest in Nico Williams and Andoni Iraola might be able to convince him to join Liverpool. There were rumors about him potentially joining Barcelona last year.

“Unfortunately, he's had a difficult season with a few injuries, but if he performs well at the World Cup, the rumours will likely start again. He is a great, versatile player, I prefer him on the left, but he can play on both sides.

“Of course, Andoni Iraola knows him very well. There will certainly be interest if, as we hope, the World Cup goes well for him and for Spain. It would be exciting for Liverpool fans that's for sure.”

**Q: Do you think Arsenal would have any chance of tempting Julian Alvarez to join them over Barcelona this summer?**

“I think Julian Alvarez is more likely to go to Barcelona than to go back to the Premier League and sign for Arsenal. There are a lot of changes and differences. Personally, I think he had a good season, not a great one, but a good one.

“His numbers weren't fantastic, but he scored in all the important games. It took him some time to settle into the team, which is normal for a lot of players when they join a team like Cholo Simeone's. I think he would prefer to go to Barca than to the Premier League so maybe Arsenal should look at other targets.”

**Q: Do Mikel Arteta's Arsenal play a style that is very anti-Barcelona? Has he forgotten his roots in that sense?**

“Arsenal were a long way from the Barcelona style that Mikel Arteta grew up with and that's probably not the style he would naturally prefer.

“However, every season has been a learning curve for him, and he's reached a point where he realizes he must be competitive and solid at the back to win. He knows Arsenal isn't quite the Barcelona side that could score five goals even if they conceded three. He's been learning to become more competitive defensively, and by doing so, he's won the league.

“I'm sure he would love to win playing like Pep Guardiola's Barcelona, but you need the right players and all the necessary ingredients to do that. Analyzing his options, he decided that his current approach was the best way to succeed, and it led to a league title and nearly a Champions League trophy.

“As an Arsenal or football fan, you might not always be happy with that style, but when you are part of the staff, you have to follow the path that brings success. They have proven that they can win with this style, even if it's not the one everyone expected.

“Now they have won it, who knows, that style could come back next season.”

**Q: Real Madrid have been linked with a stunning move for Declan Rice, would he be a megastar if he made the switch?**

“I don't think Declan Rice will leave Arsenal anytime soon, trophies have finally arrived, and they reached the Champions League final, missing out by a tiny margin.

“There were rumors last year with Real Madrid, and the press was happy to see him linked, and he would fit that system. Madrid is looking for that position and they are even talking about Rodri.

“Rice would be a great fit for Real Madrid, but I don't think he will leave Arsenal anytime soon. I can see him staying there for quite some time, he's really a through-and-through Arsenal player.”

**Q: Dominik Szoboszlai was said to have dreamed of playing for Real Madrid as a child, does he fit the profile of being a Real Madrid star?**

“If Real Madrid show interest, Dominik Szoboszlai might be put in a tricky situation given what has been said about his love for the club.

“When a club like Madrid comes calling, players naturally think about it. The fact that it's being mentioned by people that know him is already sending a message.

“Would he fit there? Yes, of course. He had a fantastic season and is excellent at set pieces. It's a position Real Madrid is openly looking to strengthen, everyone knows that.

“They should have looked last season, and I'm sure they will sign someone in that position this time around. Negotiations are likely already underway for various players, they definitely need to add someone in that role and Szoboszlai would make perfect sense.”

**Q: Do you think Yéremy Pino would be ready to step up to a club like Arsenal from Crystal Palace?**

“Yeremy Pino had a good first season when they won the Conference League, and he played from the start, so I think he's a great player that is improving.

“Regarding the World Cup, there was competition with other players in the same position in Spain. Nobody really said he shouldn't be there, but the question was why other players in his position weren't included, so he obviously deserves to be there.

“If he's targeting bigger clubs in the Premier League, he needs to keep improving. He started very well, but he needs to adapt further to the physicality of the Premier League. I really like him as a player; he's a special talent. If he adds more goals to his game, he'll have even more quality. As a young player, he still has a lot of room to develop, and Mikel Arteta might have one eye on him, who knows.”

**Q: Could Robert Lewandowski be a success at Man Utd?**

“I think Robert Lewandowski can still perform at that level, but on the one condition that Man Utd provided plays to his strengths.

“In the box, he remains one of the best players you can find. That's why, when Hansi Flick arrived, he shifted his role. He had been playing further out, but Flick moved him closer to the box, and that's where he was lethal.

“If he joins a team that plays high up the pitch and delivers plenty of balls into the box, he can certainly make a difference. However, I'm not convinced he can play a full season at that intensity, that would be my concern.”

**Q: If you had to predict it, what will be Pep Guardiola's next job after leaving Manchester City?**

“Pep Guardiola is playing golf right now, which isn't a bad way to relax. I think we will see him return, similar to after his time at Barcelona when he said he needed a rest.

“The intensity and demands of the job are incredibly high, the longer you go on, the tougher it gets. He might need more time this time, but he loves football and he loves coaching. It's only a matter of time, unless there are reasons outside of football that influenced his

decision. But he loves what he does, and we will see him back in football. I don't give it longer than a season before he returns.

"We all think he is going to manage a national team next. If he is waiting for a specific target, he might need to wait a bit longer, but I don't think it will be longer than a season for him to return from his current advisory role.

"I could see him managing England or Brazil. He always said even as a player that he would love to manage Brazil. I could have seen him in Italy if the team was in a different place.

"He will manage several national teams because of his love and passion for football. If he doesn't do it, he will feel like he missed out. Coaching in a World Cup is more appealing than a Euro, and winning a World Cup as a coach would add to his already impressive list of trophies.

"If he doesn't do it, he will sit back in his later years and think about how he never coached in a World Cup, and that is something he will regret."

**Q: Should Pep Guardiola prove his doubters wrong by managing a struggling nation like Italy?**

"I don't think Pep wants to go somewhere to build it up from scratch. He would go somewhere where he could challenge for the World Cup straight away.

"I know a bit about the Italian league, and honestly, even Italians tell me that making the national team competitive right now is not an easy job. If you had good players but were just unlucky in qualifying, he might think there is a future there.

"But as it stands right now, where it's tough to even field a competitive team, I don't see him doing that."

**Q: Inter Miami co-owner David Beckham wants to hire Pep Guardiola, would it be huge for MLS?**

"He would surely be happy to coach Lionel Messi again. It's unlikely, but having Pep in MLS would be amazing. Seeing Pep and Messi together again would be something special, but I see that as quite a difficult move.

"Perhaps he'll eventually manage the US team or head to Inter Miami, but that remains to be seen."

**Q: Does Carlo Ancelotti need to favour Raphinha or Vini Junior over Neymar if Brazil are to win the World Cup?**

"I would have done the same if I were the manager. You lose nothing by bringing Neymar into the squad. People always want to talk, but a player like Neymar, if he is fit, is difficult to find nowadays, even for Brazil.

“With players like Raphinha or Vinicius, Neymar offers something unique, he can do things that others can't.

“So, bring him into the squad and see how he feels. Ancelotti can talk to him face-to-face to assess his fitness and commitment for the World Cup. If he's not fit, you don't play him. If he is, you have nothing to lose.

“By leaving him out, you're just discarding an asset that could potentially make a difference in the latter stages of the tournament. I'm sure Ancelotti will work his magic, talking to him to get him motivated and focused. He's a player who still has something to give to football, so I think Ancelotti has done the right thing and Brazil have a great chance.”

**Q: Will Barcelona be put off Joao Pedro due to his Brazil snub?**

“If I were Barcelona and I wanted Joao Pedro, I would prefer him not to go to the World Cup. Firstly, the price is lower, and secondly, there is no risk of him getting injured.

“Those are two very positive factors. However, in respect to Brazil, it tells me that Carlo Ancelotti didn't see him as a player who would be important in the squad, because he decided to leave him out and pick Neymar.

“Whether it is a player in a different position or not, it shows that he sees someone else ahead of him. If it were the other way around, he would be there and someone else would have been left out.

“By seeing him train and behave within the group, you can tell if a player is important for the squad. The fact that he isn't there suggests that Ancelotti has other preferences.

“He had Endrick at Madrid, so he knows what he is getting. Managers, especially for a national team with the World Cup around the corner, want players they know and trust.

“Even if a player's season hasn't been great, you know Endrick can score goals and Neymar can work magic. He knows the capabilities of players like Raphinha and Vinicius.

“He knows them well, and if they don't play, it is no trouble. They bring something to the group as people, and that is what you want as a manager with the World Cup about to start.”

**Q: How big of an impact would Harry Kane have at Barcelona next season?**

“Harry Kane to Barcelona? Barcelona have signed Anthony Gordon and I think the budget I think is more relevant than having two or potentially three English players in the team, which I don't think would be a problem.

“The position is obviously still there to be taken. Would he go to Barca if all the things were aligned? I think so. I mean, Barca have won the league twice, the Champions League is getting closer.

“With a player like him, he could be the key to winning it again. So, if all the ingredients were on the table, I think he would say yes.

“However, I don't think we have all the ingredients on the table just yet because I think he's happy there scoring goals. I think they were close with Bayern, obviously with the fantastic PSG games that we watched.

“So, I think he will probably want to challenge it with Bayern before going to another club, but again, if all the things are aligned, I don't see why he would say no.”

**Q: Do you think David Raya deserves a chance with Spain? Do you think he'd be starting for any other nation at the tournament?**

“There is an argument to say that David Raya would start for 47 teams at the World Cup, but he won't be starting for Spain.

“After the Spanish squad was named, there was a lot of talk in Spain, as well as in England, about why Raya is not playing for the national team. It's a debate even in Spain, will Raya play or not? I stick to what I said last time.

“I know Luis de la Fuente won't change, his number one is Unai Simon. Will Raya get minutes? Only if Spain has already qualified in the group stages or if Unai makes a mistake.

“It's one of those situations where, as you say, many managers would wish to have him, almost any team in the World Cup would want one of the other two Spanish goalkeepers on their bench. Juan Garcia was the best goalkeeper in La Liga, and Raya was the best goalkeeper in the Premier League.

“It's just that managers trust who they trust, they don't want to change many things. They want to keep the group environment and atmosphere right, and you don't want to mess that up. Unfortunately for both Raya and Joan, Unai is the national coach's number one choice at the moment.”

**Q: Will Spain's World Cup chances be over if Lamine Yamal's injury rules him out of the tournament?**

“If Lamine Yamal is injured, Spain would lose a huge asset and a massive talent. Could we win it without him? Maybe, but I am a believer that you need top-tier talent in these competitions, that's why I think Neymar should be there for Brazil, and it's the same for us with Lamine. What he brings to the squad is irreplaceable.

“Spain could handle things differently, but to win a tournament, you need that kind of talent. It would certainly be a huge miss, but let's hope we don't have to worry about that.

“We'll have him in the squad, he might not be fully fit for the first match, which is a bit risky, but he'll certainly be ready for the second one.”

**Q: Can Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal use the climate to their advantage?**

"My underdog? Someone local to the competition, like Mexico. A lot of people aren't talking about Portugal, but I think they have a fantastic squad. Ronaldo, I think, has finally accepted he can be on the bench or play a different role, it's about finally understanding that the team is the priority.

"He understands there are other players. It's about being a team player rather than just chasing numbers like in the past. You look at the squad, it's an incredible group.

"Maybe Morocco, who were very good in the African Cup of Nations and the last World Cup, most of those players are still there, plus they have the experience. So, perhaps those two plus Mexico could be the underdogs that nobody is expecting."

**Q: If Lionel Messi looks older and tired at 38, would that be a sad end to his glittering career?**

"Both Messi and Ronaldo go to the World Cup truly believing they can win it. It's not just about participating. For Argentina, I'm sure the manager will be thinking about how to get the best out of Messi, how to set the team up with him on the pitch, and how to manage without him."

"That is how I look at it. If Messi is fit, which I think he will be, he must be the reference when he is on the pitch. Argentina will want to set up the team around him, and they will have to play differently when he is not there.

"But the goal is winning, it is not just about going there and taking part. Will we remember them as less great if they don't do well? I don't think so for Messi. People might still ask if Ronaldo needed to win the World Cup, but he will certainly be remembered as one of the greatest players in history, regardless of whether he wins it or not.

"In my view, it won't change Messi or Ronaldo's legacy, but not winning it might be something that Ronaldo thinks about forever."

**Q: Do Middlesbrough players need to use their disappointment as motivation in the Championship next season?**

"Middlesbrough players can use this as motivation. The players, the team, the club. They got there this season, playing really nice football.

"It didn't all go to plan but still they managed to step over those little hard hurdles that they had throughout the season and came so close.

"They can learn and improve. Improve the squad. There's always things you can change and you can improve. And let's go again next season. It was so close.

"I was watching the game and it was so unfortunate that the goal came so late on, it felt harsh but we have to go again.

“The margins are so small, it's unfortunate how the ball dropped in the box, but it's football and Boro can learn from these past experiences.”

**Q: Hayden Hackney has been linked to Everton, would that be a big blow?**

“If Hayden Hackney leaves it's sad, but that's football. When you get promoted, you manage to attract big players and keep your best players because they want to play in the Premier League, but if you don't get promoted, players who did very well will be looking at Premier League clubs that I'm sure are knocking on their door.

“That's one of the downsides for the club, you might lose players who performed well last year, and you have to rebuild and start over again. But Boro can do that and come back stronger.”

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