





**NOTTINGHAM FOREST DEFENDER** John Curtis enjoys the good life. He drives a Mercedes and is planning his dream home. His wife, Gemma, likes nothing better than wearing Dolce & Gabbana and Versace. She appeared on the catwalk recently with former Hear'Say singer Kym Marsh. The Curtises have the odd row but theirs are not the typical Wayne 'n' Colleen spats over nights out with the lads or how many gold taps to install in the bathroom.

With an A-level in economics, John Curtis likes to play the Footsie when he is not playing footie. The former Manchester United defender invests online in unfashionable large companies and waits for their share price to rise. He recently told his wife he wanted to install a Bloomberg terminal in the corner of their newly redecorated lounge. Gemma put her foot down. The couple did not speak for days.

A footballing couple falling out over share-trading? It wouldn't make a plot line in *Footballers' Wives*. But the Curtises' thoroughly modern 'domestic' reveals the latest trend in footballers' lives. Sporting pros on the field are suddenly turning into business proff it.

Stars who in the past lost money as fast

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as they made it, by investing in restaurants and nightclubs, are now sinking their millions into complex and imaginative new investment schemes. "Today's top players earn record sums of money and hang out with other money-minded high-earners, so have picked up their ambitions and habits," says Kevin Roberts, editor of *Sport Business International* magazine. "Wealth is fashionable and many players talk financial tactics as readily as they do team tactics."

Established sports representation companies such as IMG, Stellar Group and SEM include financial advice as part of the package and have now been joined by the big banks. UBS, HSBC, RBS and most notably Coutts, where a large number of footballers have their current accounts, are

setting up specialist sports divisions devoted to managing Premiership stars' millions.

Small boutique firms offer highly specialised financial services. Jersey-based Herald Sports Promotions has built up a multi-million pound business selling footballers' image rights. Specialist law firms and independent financial advisers, such as Kingston Smith, RHK and Vantis Sports Solution, offer offshore tax planning.

Players also get financial support from their union. The Professional Footballers' Association has set up a wealth management advice service. "Players are treated like pop stars with pop star incomes," says Gordon Taylor, the PFA chairman. "There is a serious danger that if they aren't advised properly they will waste their money, and that can often mean gambling, drinking and drugs. Good, imaginative financial planning is crucial."

As well as offering tax, insurance and pension advice, companies are diversifying into highly complex, bespoke equity funds, tax-efficient holding companies, UK and overseas property and media.

"Players realise they have a very short time to earn their money and they have to maximise their earning potential," says Jerome Anderson, who runs the SEM group. "Firms these days offer just about any financial service you can imagine."

"No investment is too complex or too imaginative these days," says Rob Sharp, managing director of Herald Sports Promotions. "A lot of players now find themselves investing in films and the latest trend is to take advantage of tax breaks on environmental projects, such as forestry. It sounds odd but the guys driving the Ferraris are investing in carbon trading."



David Beckham, the most highly prized sporting asset in football, has invested in Scandinavian forestry, as well as hoovering up lucrative advertising deals to market everything from sunglasses to razor blades. Robbie Fowler has amassed a property portfolio of almost 100 houses, to the extent that a favourite song for Manchester City supporters is now 'We all live in a Robbie Fowler House', to the tune of The Beatles' 'Yellow Submarine'. Others have bought into prestige projects such as Palm Island off the coast of Dubai.

One company has emerged as the model for the modern professional. Kraken Sport and Media was set up a few years ago by Karl Fowler, a multi-millionaire former derivatives trader and partner at investment house Goldman Sachs. Kraken's history mirrors how much the chavvy game has become the savvy game.

Fowler, 35, started his business by providing free 'financial MOTs' for footballers. He did not expect his job to be easy but, as he sits back in his office overlooking St Paul's, he rolls his eyes at the financial chaos he encountered.

"Typically, the footballer would come in to the office with his agent," he says. "His agent would bring a mate, or 'preferred partner'. There would be a not-so independent financial adviser, the player's dad and his dad's best mate."

Fowler uncovered some cripplingly bad investments. One well-known Premiership >



How to spend it: (from left): Wayne Rooney's £4.5m mansion; Gary Neville pondering an investment in Palm Island; Paul Scholes with Ferrari; Colleen McLoughlin out shopping; Rio Ferdinand looking for designerwear; Frank Lampard and his Aston Martin

## ONE FERRARI OR TWO?

Footballers may be choosing to invest their money sensibly these days, but there's still plenty left for spending. By Des Kelly

IT REQUIRES A CERTAIN LEVEL OF IMAGINATION to think of ways to spend your money when you are earning tens of thousands of pounds a week. Once the obligatory boys' toys from Ferrari, Aston Martin and Bentley are parked in the driveway, any self-respecting Premiership footballer has to find new ways to maintain his conspicuous consumption.

To give them their due, they do try. Take Liverpool's Harry Kewell. He had his bathroom

*Liverpool player Harry Kewell had his bathroom sink flown in all the way from Australia to his new Cheshire home*

sink flown in from Australia to his new Cheshire home, a journey of 11,000 miles. His bath took a shorter route, with the delivery crew only making the trek from Italy. Mind you, there were ten of them armed with a crane, since this was no ordinary bath, but a tub carved from a solid piece of stone weighing in at one ton. At either end of this monument fit for a Caesar was a decidedly modern touch: two large plasma screens – his and hers televisions. His wife even

has a purpose-built 'handbag cupboard'.

Not far from Kewell's mansion, another Cheshire resident, Robbie Savage of Blackburn Rovers, has his entire über-modern house decorated in pristine white – including a white leather bed.

But nobody in the modern game has made the jump from inner-city deprivation to millionaire playboy status quite as quickly as Wayne Rooney. Brought up in the Liverpool suburb of Croxteth, he rocketed to worldwide fame when his £28m transfer to Manchester United was completed. Now he is spending some

of the windfall earned by his talents, although not everyone is applauding the results. One newspaper described his new £4.5m mansion as 'Chav Towers'. That description looks a little less unkind if you believe the story that the chandeliered hallway has marble inlays marked with the initials of Rooney and his girlfriend Colleen McLoughlin, which, by an unfortunate coincidence, happen to spell WC.

The home cinema and games room complete

with pool table and pinball machine are the norm for nouveau football interior design. But the indoor swimming pool and a specially-constructed sports hall containing a five-a-side pitch, basketball, tennis and badminton courts, are certainly out of the ordinary. Yet there are limits, even for the Rooneys, with one report saying Wayne was banned from having beer taps installed in the kitchen by his girlfriend.

There are other ways of spending money, of course. Robbie Fowler, the Manchester City striker, is one of the biggest British 'celebrity' racehorse owners in the country, in partnership with his friend Steve McManaman. Another former Liverpool player, Michael Owen, travels daily to training at his new club in Newcastle from his home in Chester by helicopter.

Crass as some of this may sound, there are few who wouldn't relish the barmy ostentation of it all. It's hard to imagine many young men blessed with a similar fortune who wouldn't pass up the chance to stock their garage full of dream cars, adorn their walls with plasma screens and have lager on tap in every room in the house. It's their money after all and they can spend it as they like. ●



> player – Fowler won't name names – had invested hundreds of thousands of pounds in what he thought were four different British films. In fact, he had invested in the same film four times. One group of Premiership players invested some £30m in a property scheme in the Caribbean – which would have been a good idea had the scheme actually existed.

Fowler devotes himself to crafting a bespoke wealth management service. His City background gives him access to funds not normally open to investors with less than £20m. "Hedge funds are usually off limits for ordinary investors but we have managed to negotiate smaller units," he says.

Fowler is also pioneering a new kind of media and merchandising business, which he believes is "the holy grail of investments" because, if successful, it will generate revenue long after the footballer has retired.

### Footballers' finances have been transformed over the past decade as the sport itself has become a leading global business

Typical is his latest venture, Jake Jones. Few sports fans will have heard of Jones but if Fowler gets his way he will be a sporting hero from Sunderland to Shanghai.

Jones is a fictional character created by Adam Hargreaves, the son of Mister Men creator Roger Hargreaves. An 11-year-old schoolboy, he is bullied into taking part in an FA-sponsored soccer skills tournament in his town. He turns out to be a skillful player and even manages to score a goal

against England goal-keeper David James, who is making a personal appearance at the tournament. England striker Michael Owen, who is also there, spots Jones and tells Sven-Göran Eriksson. The England manager invites the boy to train with the England football team and he ends up being picked for the first team.

So far, so bedtime story. But Fowler has persuaded Eriksson to narrate the story and Owen and James to grant image rights in return for a stake in the intellectual property. He is now in talks with the BBC to make a children's TV version of the story. If that happens, there will be lucrative merchandising contracts and the show can be adapted and exported to markets as far away as China.

So what's behind the boom? Why are million-pound-a-year bankers, such as Fowler, quitting their comfortable jobs

with guaranteed seven-figure annual bonuses to spend time with people who think hedge funds are horticultural

investments? "One word," smiles Jonathan Rice, partner in the Private Clients' Group at global financial giant Deloitte. "Cash."

Footballers' finances have been transformed over the past decade as the sport itself has become a leading global business. Every year Deloitte publishes an Annual Review of Football Finance. Its latest study reveals that, thanks to rising broadcast revenues, increased merchandising and higher gate receipts, England's top

### WEST LONDON WEALTH: CHELSEA'S BIG EARNERS\*

£94,000/week	Hernan Crespo
£90,000/week	Frank Lampard
£80,000/week	John Terry
£70,000/week	Damien Duff
£65,000/week	Didier Drogba
£60,000/week	Shaun Wright-Phillips, Michael Essien
£50,000/week	Ricardo Carvalho, Petr Cech, Joe Cole, Eidur Gudjohnsen, Claude Makelele
£40,000/week	Arjen Robben, Asier Del Horno
£35,000/week	William Gallas

REPORTED FIGURES

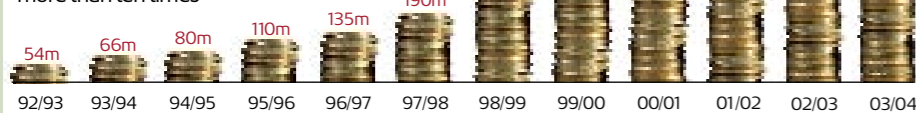
92 clubs generated income of more than £1.75bn in 2003/04. Spending on players' wages and transfers exceeded £1bn, with the average Premiership player earning around £15,000 a week.

Most managers approve of the new breed of wealth management firms. "Young players are extremely vulnerable," says Newcastle manager, Graeme Souness. "Players need to be taught not just in football terms but in the ways of the world as well." Former Arsenal star Paul Merson, who is now manager of Walsall, believes players should be forced to take out compulsory savings schemes and sign up with wealth management companies. "Young players get paid too much and that causes trouble," he says.

Kraken's Karl Fowler agrees. So what advice would he give Nottingham Forest's John Curtis if he finally wins his domestic battle with his wife and installs a Bloomberg share-trading terminal in their lounge? "For part-time day traders, my rule is simple," says Fowler. "Close out your position every night. So many people think they know what is going to happen in the future and find out that shares in companies like, say, Parmalat, are worthless. You might sometimes lose out but you will never lose out heavily. As I like to tell all my clients, big or small, sometimes the business you don't do is as important as the business you do do." ●

### HOW THE CASH HAS INCREASED: TOTAL PREMIERSHIP PLAYERS' EARNINGS

In a dozen years the Premiership clubs' wage bills have grown by more than ten times



SOURCE: DELOITTE