

Super stars

iINTERGAMINGi talks to **Jeevan Jeyaratnam**, odds compiler with Super Soccer Oddsfeed, about the year ahead



WITH the European football season enjoying its regular halfway hiatus we spent some time with Super Soccer Oddsfeed's Jeevan Jeyaratnam, finding out what the goalscoring specialists have been up to and how they view the year to come from their niche stance.

iINTERGAMINGi: This year will feature a somewhat barren summer, lacking a major tournament. How can you help firms keep football punters engaged during this break?

JJ: "Barren" is a severe way of phrasing it but yes, it will be a quieter summer for football punters. That said we'll be covering the World Cup warm-up tournament from Russia - the Confederations Cup, which takes in 16 games between June 17 and July 2. Given the lack of much else there will be a strong focus on this tournament, though without British involvement, turnover expectations won't be particularly lofty.

"With seven of the eight teams already known, FIFA will be hoping for a 'big' African nation to lift their regional tournament trophy (ongoing at this time). Ideally a winner from either Ivory Coast, Ghana, Algeria or Senegal would produce the most interest.

"Poland will stage the 2017 UEFA European Under-21 Championship from June 16-30; this is another tournament that will benefit from the quieter summer and can expect extensive coverage. We'll be providing full goalscorer pricing for both, via Goalscorer Prices and Settlement - or GPS - feed, and expect all our clients to sign up for it."

The Africa Cup of Nations has been taking place in Gabon, presumably you covered it; what unique challenges does it present?

"The AFCON is a staple of our coverage and offers a colourful diversion from the usual January blues. We've noticed this year that more players have refused to answer call-ups in order to stay and 'help' their clubs. I can't help but think that CAF and FIFA need to look at this tournament and its respective 'slot' in the calendar.

"From a compiling point of view, tournaments are great - you have official squads and once the leg-work regarding player stats is complete, the rest usually runs smoothly. Personally, given that I have done Group D, Uganda proved the toughest test. Many of the players ply their trade on the African continent, where club stats are very tough to track down. A Europe-based player in a squad like Uganda's counts for a lot.

"A great example is Farouk Miya; he plays his club football for Standard Liege - and is very much on the fringe. For his national team, he is a

key goalscoring threat. The compilers must factor this 'added influence' into their expectations of a player's ability within the frame of his squad. This is the key difference when compiling national teams, opposed to clubs."

Given the scope of coverage, how easy is it to keep up to date with transfers during the January window?

"With many of the European leagues enjoying winter breaks it would be acceptable to think the compiling team have it easy post-Christmas - the transfer window lays to rest that assumption. Given the extensive (and ever extending) coverage that GPS provides, the daily job of tracking transfers, and in particular loans, is a cumbersome task.

"We use a variety of sources and I'd wager anyone who thinks they do it better or faster than our team."

The Chinese Super League continues to make compelling overtures towards Europe-based players. Realistically, how worried should some of the major European clubs be about losing out to Chinese clubs paying ludicrous salaries?

"We started covering CSL goalscorers mid-way through last season, when Sky Sports picked up televised coverage. There were already top foreign players and seemingly endless supplies of finance. Despite all this, it still felt like something was missing.

"Information regarding the league along with day-to-day club updates are non-existent; without this it is hard to see the league really becoming a key battleground in terms of bookmakers' turnover. That said, this close season (the new season begins in March) has seen some crazy deals go through.

"Oscar, the former Chelsea fringe player, is alleged to be the lucky recipient of £500,000 per week after a £60m transfer fee, while Carlos Tevez, undoubtedly in the twilight of his career, has secured a ludicrous reported £615,000 per week!

"While neither of these transfers will unduly unsettle any major club's hierarchy there is one deal that has larger ramifications. Axel Witsel recently rejected a move to Juventus in favour of a huge pay-day in China with the newly promoted and unheralded Tianjin Quanjian.

"This may be seen as a worrying move for European clubs but rule changes announced by the Chinese Football Association in January are designed to curb recent irrational investments by clubs, high-figure transfer fees and salaries paid to domestic and international athletes and other issues.

"They have reduced the limit on the number of foreign players able to appear on the field at any given time, changing from four per club to three, which now includes players from other Asian Football Confederation countries. This means no more than 48 non-Chinese players can play at any time. Though this doesn't rule out players being signed and sitting on the bench, it will make both clubs and players think twice before signing for a CSL club. These new, protectionist measures (president Xi Jinping has set a goal for China to win the World Cup by 2050), mean that the CSL is a long way from establishing itself as a creditable threat to European football's elite."

Super Soccer Oddsfeed, in conjunction with Abelson Info, supplies the popular Goalscorer Prices and Settlement (GPS) feed into a high-quality tranche of the bookmaking industry.



Carlos Tevez