

Euro 2020

From boo-boy to national talisman – the eight games that made Raheem Sterling

Amid the adulation he has received for his Euros scoring exploits, it is easy to forget the difficult journey leading him to this point, writes *Sam Wallace*

Nov 14, 2012: Sweden 4-2 England



Raheem Sterling's debut at the age of 17 years and 342 days, just seven months and 13 Premier League appearances after his senior club debut with Liverpool. He played 85 minutes in Stockholm, but

it was Zlatan Ibrahimovic's four goals that the game is remembered for. As far as England went, this was a mess, giving Sterling a taste of the volatility of the international game. He went back to the

under-21s for a period and was a non-playing member of the senior squad on other occasions. He did not win another senior cap for 18 months, in time to break into the team for the 2014 World Cup.

June 11, 2016: England 1-1 Russia



Violence on the streets of Marseille, and rage online. Sterling was targeted after this insipid opener to Euro 2016. He responded by calling himself #TheHatedOne on Instagram. Sterling, who

had also been targeted after his move to Manchester City, saw an uncomfortable subtext to the criticism of a young black man singled out for abuse, and would later take a much more outspoken

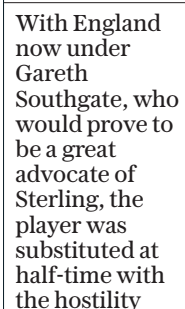
stand. These were painful moments but he came through and was now a regular England starter. The era of Steven Gerrard and, latterly Wayne Rooney, was ending, and a new generation would step up.



June 13, 2021: England 1-0 Croatia

Sterling came into the Euros having lost his place in the City team for the latter stages of their title push and a poor performance in the Champions League final. Straight into the team for England's Euros opener, he scored with a classic run in behind the defence to reach Kalvin Phillips's pass. It was a brave finish, too, as he was sent spinning after the contact. England took seven points from the first stage, with another winner for Sterling against Czech Republic. Then, against Germany in the last-16, he scored again. This was turning into his tournament in his home stadium of Wembley and the young man from north-west London was now a 65-cap senior international, the most experienced player in the squad and one of the tournament's standout stars.

Sept 1, 2017: Malta 0-4 England

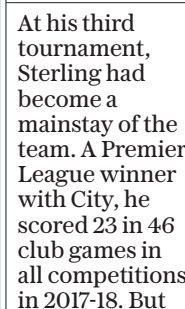


With England now under Gareth Southgate, who would prove to be a great advocate of Sterling, the player was substituted at half-time with the hostility towards him still a concern. Reflecting later on this game, Southgate saw it as a turning point for the player. "He has shown tremendous

resilience," he said recently. "It's not been a straightforward path, there was a game in Malta where I took him off, the crowd were on

his back." At City, the goals started to flow, contributing to the changing perceptions of Sterling as a scorer rather than a winger.

July 11, 2018: England 1-2 Croatia



At his third tournament, Sterling had become a mainstay of the team. A Premier League winner with City, he scored 23 in 46 club games in all competitions in 2017-18. But the England goals would not come. Croatia was his 43rd cap and he had scored just two by then. In the first half, Harry Kane was through with a

man to beat and Sterling free in the centre. Kane shot instead of passing. Was it a turning point in Sterling's attitude to scoring and

taking chances? Since then he has hit 15 goals for England and his greatest moment is not long to come after the 2018 World Cup exit.

Oct 15, 2018: Spain 2-3 England



March 22, 2019: England 5-0 Czech R

Five months on from Seville, his first hat-trick for England, scored less than a mile from his childhood home on the St Raphael's estate in Stonebridge. While a major player in the Premier League and for England for more than

six years, this felt like the moment when the forward was truly appreciated in the stadium he calls home. He would watch as a boy as Wembley was bulldozed and then rebuilt. He left the game with 20 minutes to go to a

standing ovation. Southgate described his performance as "devastating". He also won the penalty that Kane tucked away. Another Premier League title was on its way and the road ahead looked clear at last.

Nov 17, 2019: Kosovo 0-4 England

Less for the game itself and more about arguably the most difficult moment of the Southgate years. Days earlier, Sterling had confronted Liverpool's Joe Gomez at St George's Park over a grievance that began in a club game at

Anfield. Sterling was regarded as the aggressor and, for a day, confusion reigned. Did he leave the camp and have to be recalled? He was suspended from selection for the next qualifier. It was a big worry for the manager, with Sterling

given the captaincy against Holland three months earlier. That sort of volatility went against the calm, united spirit Southgate wanted to build. But he had a strong bond with Sterling and wanted to rehabilitate him swiftly.

Yarmolenko, the West Ham fringe player who can spoil Southgate's plans

By Sam Dean

Ukraine captain arrives in Rome with point to prove after three injury-blighted, patchy seasons in the Premier League

It is never too late to embrace new levels of professionalism and, even at the age of 31 and with more than 500 senior appearances to his name, Andriy Yarmolenko was willing to try a fresh approach at West Ham United last season.

Like many of his team-mates, Yarmolenko was inspired by Tomas Soucek and Vladimir Coufal, the Czech duo who have done so much to transform the club's fortunes under David Moyes. He quickly became close friends with the pair and, before long, began to join them at the training ground on their days off.

Moyes joked last season that it was impossible to keep Soucek and Coufal away from their Rush Green base, such was their appetite for hard work, and Yarmolenko soon became part of the gym-going gang. "Yarma", as he is known at West

Ham, did not feature regularly for his club last season, but it seems clear that those hours of fitness work have paid off as he has been one of the standout performers at the Euros. Ukraine's captain is the biggest threat to England tonight, and he arrives in Rome with a point to prove after three patchy seasons in the Premier League. "He is a real captain," said Yarmolenko's international team-mate Ruslan Malinovskyi. "He takes the team with him. He will be motivated to play against England because for him it is a little bit special. It will be a chance for him to show that he

deserves to play in the Premier League."

Yarmolenko's quality has never been in doubt, especially when he represents his country. He has scored 42 goals in 98 appearances for Ukraine, a tally bettered only by Andriy Shevchenko, who is now the national team manager. Yarmolenko has already scored two and assisted two in this tournament.

Manuel Pellegrini, Yarmolenko's former manager at West Ham, once said he had the ability

to be one of the league's best players. When he plays as he did in the group stages against Holland, scoring a gorgeous curling effort from range, it is easy to see what Pellegrini meant and why West Ham paid £17.5 million to prise him away from Borussia Dortmund. Why, then, has this Yarmolenko not been seen more often in the Premier League? The primary reason is the winger's fitness record. A ruptured Achilles set him back for months in his first campaign, and he has since suffered a torn abductor muscle and knee ligament damage. His cause was not helped last sea-

Motivated: Andriy Yarmolenko has scored 42 goals in 98 appearances for Ukraine



son by West Ham's superb form under Moyes. The team were settled, suffering from very few injuries, and winning. So Yarmolenko started just one league game. Others might have sulked, but Yarmolenko has remained a boisterous, smiling presence at his club. He is one of the jokers in the team, creating nicknames for staff and always searching for the next gag. He has thrown himself into his English lessons and it came as no surprise to his colleagues at West Ham when he waded into the sponsorship storm created by Cristiano Ronaldo earlier in the tournament. Rather than object to the presence of Coca-Cola and Heineken bottles at

The forward's quality has never been in doubt, especially when he represents his country

press conferences, Yarmolenko placed them in front of him. "Guys, contact me," he said, giggling. With one year remaining on his contract, West Ham would be unlikely to stand in Yarmolenko's way if an offer came in. He is one of the club's highest earners, though, and potential suitors might struggle to match his salary.

His performances this summer could yet convince other clubs that he is worth the outlay, or equally he might reignite his West Ham career. There have been moments of genius class at the London Stadium. And although he has struggled for consistency, there can be no questioning his talent. England, and especially his club-mate Declan Rice, will be well aware of the threat Yarmolenko poses. They will know that, if they can shut him down and keep him off that left foot, they might be able to remove that smile from his face for a few hours at least.

Vitali Klitschko

Mayor of Kiev and former world heavyweight boxing champion



Fighting for independence adds strength

Football is a very popular sport in Ukraine but our country has never reached such heights at the Euros. This is why all Ukrainians are thrilled and delighted now and all our attention is on the tournament. The game against Holland – which we lost 3-2 – was very dramatic, but during the matches against North Macedonia and Sweden our team played really good football. These were very emotional moments for the

country: they brought our people together. That success is all the more important when Ukraine continues to fight for its territorial integrity and independence. Now all the fans here in Ukraine are holding their breath for the England match. It will be tough and nail-biting because England are one of the best in Europe and the world, but we can be confident. Andriy Shevchenko, Ukraine's coach, has played for Chelsea and hopefully understands the English strategy and will make use of his expertise.

And we have some excellent players ourselves – I keep an eye on Oleksandr Zinchenko, Andriy Yarmolenko, Georgiy Bushchan, Ruslan Malinovskyi, Roman Yaremchuk and Artem Dovbyk, who shone in the match with Sweden. But our entire team have great potential. Success at this championship increases Ukraine's international prestige and adds to the country's accomplishments – and a win today would take us to a new level. We are all keeping our fingers crossed.