

Zlatan Ibrahimovic: the most charismatic player of them all on and off the pitch

Al Arabiya senior sports presenter Liliane Tannoury remembers the time she met the Swedish legend



Zlatan Ibrahimovic of PSG in 2012. Getty



Liliane Tannoury
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Zlatan Ibrahimovic is undoubtedly a legend of world football and a global star, having become the first player to represent seven different clubs in the Champions League; Manchester United, Ajax, Juventus, Inter, Barcelona, AC Milan and PSG.

Wherever Ibrahimovic goes he transforms the teams into his personality and fosters incredible motivation. Many games have been won by the strength of his drive, and that is happening again now in Milan.

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But there is also much to admire about Ibrahimovic off the pitch.

Recently he accepted an invitation from the Lombardy regional government, where Milan is located, to front a public awareness campaign in the fight against the coronavirus. Ibrahimovic himself tested positive last month and he did the work free of charge.

"The virus challenged me, and I won. But you are not Zlatan, do not challenge the virus. Use your head. Respect the rules: distance, and mask always. We will win!" he said in a video recorded at the top of the Palazzo Lombardy.

These words from Ibrahimovic, who last month turned 39, reflect exactly who he is, and reminded me of the time we met.

I interviewed Ibrahimovic in 2018 when he was a Manchester United player. I had met him before and after Paul Pogba gave me his phone number and we spoke, I was reminded of his brilliance.

He immediately made some jokes. I was talking to a football legend but it didn't feel like that, he is very natural and contagious.

He agreed to do the interview but despite that, when I contacted the Manchester United media manager, she told me: "Forget it. That player does not give interviews."

Accustomed to these situations, I again contacted Ibrahimovic, who told me: "I'm the one who decides. I am Zlatan." It was said with the same force as he used for the coronavirus campaign.

A few days later I received approval from Manchester United, and it went ahead at the training ground.

It went very well - he is very positive and all his responses were hilarious. Speaking to him for just a few minutes made me appreciate a man full of character and perhaps the most charismatic player I have ever met.

Phrases like "I don't need a trophy to tell myself that I'm the best", or more recently "Covid had the courage to challenge me. Bad idea" define Ibrahimovic very well: an unlimited self-confidence that he transmits to his teammates.

No doubt controversial but a very good person and definitely only fake arrogance. I was able to prove it.



Liliane Tannoury with Zlatan Ibrahimovich. Courtesy Liliane Tannoury

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