

# Real Madrid fans need to leave Gareth Bale alone and focus on the poor performances of Cristiano Ronaldo, Casillas and Ramos

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Head of Sport Paul Abandonato launches a staunch defence of under-fire Gareth Bale and argues the criticism of him has got hopelessly out of hand.



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A video is doing the rounds on social networking of Gareth Bale being jeered by disgruntled Real Madrid fans as he drives out of the Bernabeu Stadium deep into the Madrid night on Wednesday.

Alone in his Audi and peering pensively through the driver's window, Bale looks bewildered, anxious, even frightened at the treatment being meted out to him as some blamed him yet again for Real's UEFA Champions League exit at the hands of Juventus.

I don't know exactly how fluent Gareth is in Spanish these days, but let's just say the slurs and barbs thrown his way by furious fans weren't exactly complimentary.

Bale's face at the wheel told a picture of someone perplexed at what was happening to him. It was the opposite to the happy-go-lucky, smiling, jovial Gareth we have become accustomed to whenever he teams up with Wales, an individual secure in the knowledge that he is surrounded by an adoring nation fully supportive and appreciative of the effort and exploits he produces in the red of his country.

Gareth Bale is possibly even more popular here than Ryan Giggs was. There can be no greater testament to a Welsh footballer than that.

Sadly for Bale, some of the hostile treatment he is receiving out in Spain could not be more contrasting – and a lot of it is distinctly unfair, too.

Look, Bale is not stupid. He knows criticism goes with the territory when you are the world's most expensive footballer joining the world's biggest club, where expectation levels amongst the supporters are higher than anywhere else on the football planet.

I recall going to the Bernabeu to watch John Toshack's Real Madrid thump Real Zaragoza 7-2 during a record-breaking season in which they scored more goals and secured more points than any side in La Liga history.

The Real fans jeered during the match. "Winning by seven isn't enough out here, they're unhappy we conceded two," said Toshack by way of explanation afterwards.

Toshack, by then, was a battle-hardened individual who understood, and came to terms with, the many off the field politics that went with being a kingpin at Real Madrid. He adopted a pragmatic approach, stating: "You'll never please everyone in Madrid. Provided you understand why certain people have got it in for you and choose to criticise, you have a better chance of dealing with it."

Bale has been based in Spain for a year and a half, but he is younger than Toshack and doesn't seem to be handling quite so easily the fierce flak that continues to fly his way.

## Easy target!

It's become far, far too easy to knock Gareth. He doesn't pass enough, he doesn't run enough, he doesn't score enough. He doesn't do enough for animal rights, the nuclear disarmament programme. Crikey, he'll be blamed next for Labour's election defeat.

Sorry to sound flippant. But it does seem to be bash-Bale, whatever the circumstance or reality of the situation.

Everyone is entitled to their views, particularly the Real Madrid paying customer. But, in my opinion, the criticism has got way out of proportion.

Real lost. Let's bash Bale. Real didn't win with enough panache. Let's bash Bale. Real only drew. Let's bash Bale.

Even some sections of the London media jumped on the bandwagon following Madrid's Euro elimination. 'Bale Fail' read the banner headlines in the Independent and Daily Mail. One Madrid newspaper had a front page photograph of Bale looking dejected as Juve goal scorer Alvaro Morata celebrated his team's triumph.

Look, Bale is not playing well. Pointless pretending otherwise. He seems a player shorn of confidence, who snatches at chances and is less willing to use his blistering speed and tricks and feints to take on full-backs.

He has been like this for some time. The exception to the rule, of course, was when Bale helped Wales batter Israel, scoring twice, and producing a man-of-the-match display.

It's no coincidence that happened with Wales because Bale knows everyone rallies around him. Being the undisputed kingpin with his country – which he can't be at Real Madrid because Cristiano Ronaldo rightly possesses that mantle – brings the best out of Bale because he knows he has to be the talisman.

That said, Bale has hardly been a bit-part figure at Real Madrid. His wonder goal won the Copa del Rey final against Barcelona last season. His brilliant header against Atletico Madrid set Real on the path to Champions League success.

In his first year he struck 22 goals in 42 games. This season he has managed 17.

These are not Cristiano Ronaldo goal figures, admittedly, but for a bloke who started out as a left-back they're not bad, are they?

The irony is that Bale was one of Real Madrid's better players against Juventus. He had seven attempts on goal, as many as Ronaldo and Karim Benzema combined. Yes, he didn't score, but what's that old adage about still getting into the positions and refusing to hide?

Still, though, Bale seemed to cop the majority of the flak. It doesn't seem an even playing field to me.

Ronaldo quite rightly deserves some latitude, given his exploits down the years, but he didn't exactly step up to the match-winning plate as a senior player against Juve, did he?

## Look at the legends

Speaking of Real Madrid legends, wasn't it Sergio Ramos who needlessly gave away the free kick that led to Morata's goal? And wasn't it Iker Casillas who flapped at the ball, failing to clear his lines properly as it fell to the Juventus man inside the box?

How is Bale more to blame than those two, who just happen to be steeped in Bernabeu folklore and less prone to the criticism?

Bale seems to have become the narrative these days, but James Rodriguez, who didn't cost that much less than the Welshman, isn't targeted in the same way.

And what about Toni Kroos? He's hardly in the mould of fellow German midfielders Lothar Matthaus or Gunter Netzer. Not from what we saw the other night, anyhow.

Whatever our thoughts, it seems this is a situation Bale simply has to battle through. He is capable of it and liable to have the last laugh.

It wasn't so far in the distant past that Bale had become a butt of jokes because he had never appeared on a winning Premier League side for Tottenham.

He then roared onto the Champions League stage and produced enough match-winning League performances to persuade Real Madrid to make him the most expensive talent on the planet.

It appears Bale will have to silence the critics and the doubters once again. When he faced a similar barrage of abuse earlier in the season, he responded in the only way he knows how out in Haifa, forcing the headline writers to splash the Spanish front pages with his brilliant exploits for Wales.

Rising above adversity through ability is the mark of the greatest players. We in Wales have no doubt Bale is one – and no doubts he will prove it.

And you can bet those same fans shouting at his car on Wednesday night will be singing his name when he does.

### Source

Article written by Paul Abbandonato on 14 May 2015: <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/real-madrid-fans-need-leave-9258451>

[Accessed 19 May 2015]

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Image: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gareth\\_Bale\\_WAL\\_2015.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gareth_Bale_WAL_2015.jpg) (Author: Jon Candy, Cardiff)

## Reading

1. How does the writer of this text feel about the reaction to Gareth Bale in Spain?

- |    |                                |                          |
|----|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. | He feels sympathetic.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | He feels annoyed.              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | He thinks it is well deserved. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. | He feels bewildered.           | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*This is an inference question which asks you to think about what is suggested by the vocabulary used.*

2. What is the meaning of the word 'pragmatic' as used in the following sentence about John Toshack's attitude? 'He adopted a pragmatic approach...'

- |    |             |                          |
|----|-------------|--------------------------|
| a. | aggressive  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | idealistic  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | realistic   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. | impractical | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*This is a context question. You can identify the correct meaning of a word by reading and understanding the surrounding text.*

3. What do Welsh people think about Gareth Bale?

- |    |  |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| a. | They are pleased that he is playing for Real Madrid at the moment. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | People are hostile towards him because he plays in Spain.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | They jeer at him when he plays for Real Madrid.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. | They are ecstatic when he plays for Wales.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*This is an inference/retrieval question which asks you to think about what is suggested by the vocabulary used, and to find and convey information.*

4. Paul Abbandonato, the writer of this text, feels very strongly about Gareth Bale's treatment at Real Madrid. Which language choices suggest that he is expressing his own opinion?

*This is an analysis question which asks you to look at the language the writer uses to convey the meaning effectively.*

*You need to comment on:*

- the writer's choice of words;
- the details the writer has chosen to include;
- the types of sentences and paragraphs used.

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[illegible]

5. The beginning of this article states that Paul Abbandonato ‘launches a staunch defence of under-fire Gareth Bale and argues the criticism of him has got hopelessly out of hand.’ Look carefully at the argument used and summarise how the writer tries to convince the readers of his feelings.

*In this question you will analyse the language used by the writer and interpret its meaning. Use your own words to summarise the argument.*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

6. What is your opinion of Gareth Bale? Give clear reasons for your ideas.

*Remember to give your own opinion and use evidence from the text to back up your answer.*

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### **Oracy**

7. In a small group, discuss your thoughts on football players' salaries.

- *Ensure that each group is made up of girls and boys.*
- *Ensure that everyone has a chance to give his/her opinion and that you listen carefully to everyone.*

8. Give a talk on what changes you would like to see in order to improve football.

**Or**

Give a talk on how women's football could be made more popular as a spectator sport.

Your talk should be 5-6 minutes.

Make your talk convincing by using features such as:

- rhetoric
- irony
- contrast
- repetition
- surprise

Link your points using appropriate discourse markers such as:

- In addition ...
- Of course, we can also add ...
- Furthermore ...
- What is more ...
- Most worrying is ...
- The best thing about this is ...

Think carefully about the ending of your talk. You might like to end by:

- inviting the audience to think about their own interpretation of the topic;
- creating a climax to the talk using repetition or rhetoric;
- summing up what you have said and making your own interpretation clear.

## **Writing**

9. Write an article for a magazine about what you like and dislike about football. You should write 400-500 words.

Think carefully about the structure of your article:

- Use an appropriate headline for the task;
- Write a challenging opening which is intended to make the readers pay attention;
- Ensure that you include relevant facts and opinions together with sound arguments for/against;
- Write a memorable ending to your article.