



Arjen Robben – The most predictable/unpredictable player

Description

Imagine seeing a magician performing the same trick repeatedly. Would that not get boring? Well, that doesn't apply to Arjen Robben. The most predictable/unpredictable player of all time. You knew what he was going to do but you couldn't stop it. Not many players have a trick that becomes synonymous with their play. The sight of Robben cutting in off the right wing to curl into the far corner became a regular in club football and on the International stage. Like the 'Cruyff turn' made famous by his fellow countryman Johan or 'the 360' made famous by Maradona, perfected by Zinedine Zidane, Robben always be remembered for his signature move.

The beginning



A young Robben at Groningen in 2001

Robben started his professional football career in a regional club FC Groningen and thereafter he was transferred to PSV Eindhoven where he was instrumental in helping PSV lift their 17th Dutch title. He was named "PSV co-player of the year" along with striker Mateja Kezman (future Chelsea teammate) with whom he formed an attacking partnership known as "Batman and Robin". He also won the "Talented player of the year award" to cap off a fantastic first season at the club.

By 2004, awareness of the impressive Dutch star had spread across to England and in Sir Alex Ferguson's eyes, the Robben's attributes would be a perfect fit for the Premier League. However, the transfer never materialized as Chelsea hijacked the transfer with Roman Abramovich offering a stunning 18 million Euros to secure the Dutchman's signature.

Moving across the North Sea

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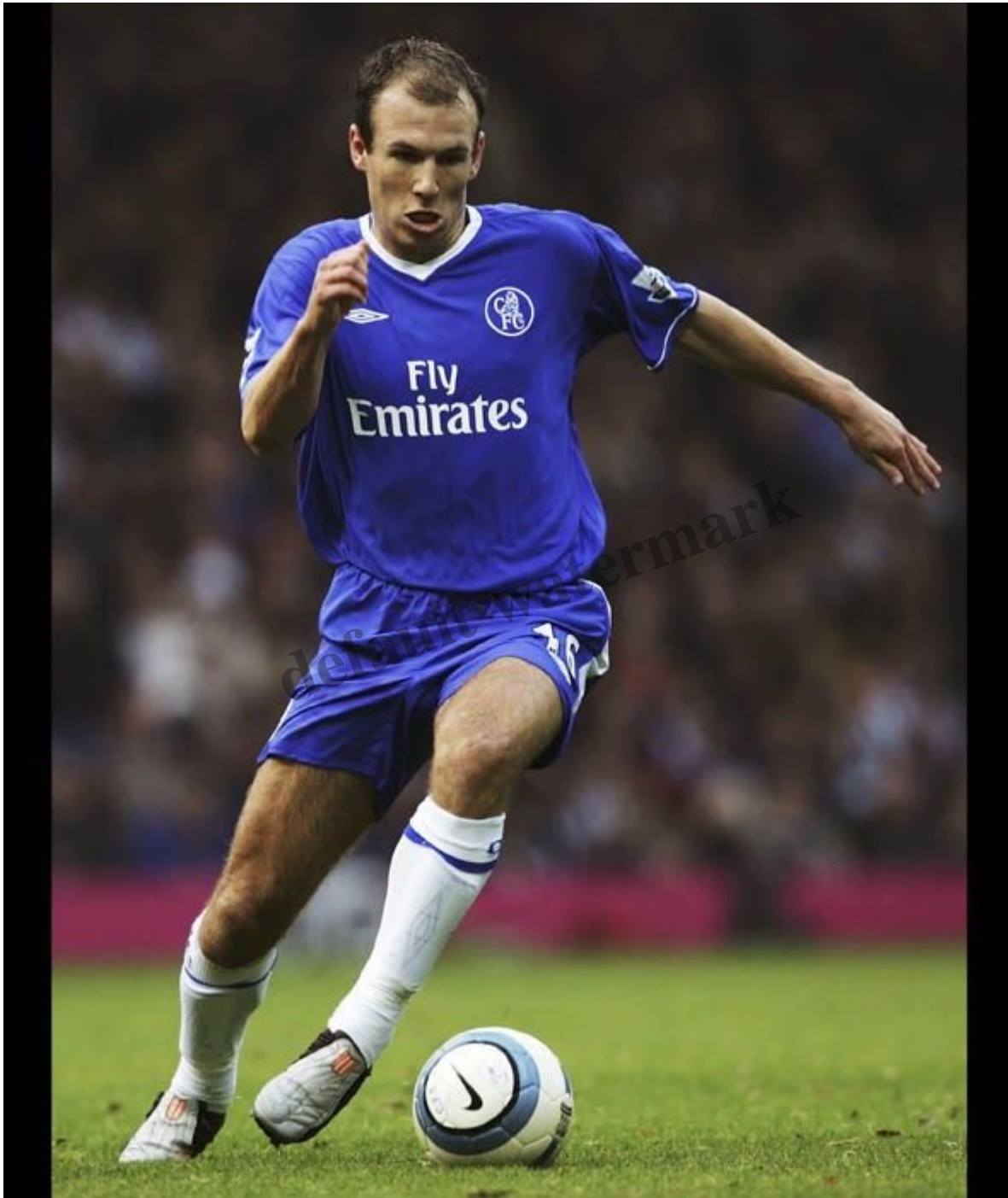


Football - Chelsea Football Club Press Conference - Windsor Suite - Hotel Six - West Drayton - 20/04
Arjen Robben, Jose Mourinho - Manager, Petr Cech and Mateja Kezman at the Chelsea Press Conference
Modeling Credit: Action Images - Neil Walker
Lions

Robben alongside Jose Mourinho, Petr Cech and Mateja Kezman

Robben had a rocky start with the Blues in the 2004-05 season, delaying his league debut after breaking a metatarsal bone in a pre-season game against Roma. With time, Jose eased the winger back into the side towards the end of October and Robben found his feet scoring his first premier league goal in early November and winning the Premier League player of the month award. The timing of his transfer was perfect as Chelsea were rebuilding a path towards the Premier League title. Under the "Special One", Robben was able to flourish as a player. With Damian Duff on the opposite flank, and Didier Drogba playing through the middle, Jose created a winning formula that resulted in

relentless goal-scoring and Chelsea putting numbers on the boards (word to Pusha T). Robben was in a rich vein of form until he broke two bones in his foot against Blackburn Rovers leaving him out for 6 games including the 2005 league cup final vs Liverpool in which Chelsea won.



Robben in action for the Blues.

Regardless of his spell off the pitch, Robben had been a crucial player for Chelsea in helping them lift their first league title in 50 years. Robben was again integral to Jose's side in his second season, capable of playing on either flank but primarily as a left winger. He scored six league goals in Chelsea's historic campaign lifting a second consecutive title and the first back-to-back titles for the west London club.

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Robben was a crucial member of the Chelsea /Photo by Darren Walsh/Chelsea FC Via Getty Images

Chelsea had a poor start in Robben's third season, and it affected his form as he failed to replicate his numbers from previous years. Despite this, Robben still had some memorable games like his Man of the Match performance against Wigan where he scored his first goal of the campaign. 2007 would be a stop-and-start year for the Dutchman as he was plagued with injuries. Chelsea still clinched the FA and league cup but conceded the Premier League title to Manchester United.

Making a name in Spain



Robben being presented at Real Madrid/ Image credit: Reuters

In the summer of 2007, Chelsea announced that they had sold Robben to Real Madrid for a fee of £24 million much to the anguish of Chelsea fans. Robben made his European and La Liga debut in September 2007, but it took three games for the Dutchman to suffer yet another injury with a torn muscle. He returned on the 10th of February to start against Real Valladolid who endured the wrath of Robben. He scored his first Spanish goal and provided two assists in a 7-0 triumph. From here, he proved to be an essential part of the team for the remainder of the season as the Los Blanco's held

on to the top spot for the 07-08 season and won the La Liga title adding to the Dutchman's growing collection.



Robben lifting the la Liga title alongside his fellow countrymen Van Nistelrooy and Sneijder

The following season in 2008-09, Robben held on to his place in Madrid's starting eleven mainly as a right winger and continued to perform well in Madrid as both a provider and goal scorer. Robben's electric pace would often overwhelm defenses and would beat offside traps which allowed him to run through on goal. Despite his one-footedness, Robben's left had become so good that he could approach the keeper from any angle and slot the ball with relative ease.

The small touches he took as he was heading for the opposition box always gave him the upper hand over opponents as every touch could be a shot due to the very little difference in body shape in dribbling and shooting. This meant that defenders had two options: try to block the shot or run the risk of being dribbled past. Either way, you're damned if you do or damned if you don't. There was nothing you could do to stop him.



Where the legend was born



Robben made the Allianz Arena his home

Handed the No. 10 shirt, Robben made his debut in Bayern's opening league match. Feeling the instant love from Bayern fans, Robben had a fantastic game scoring a brace against Wolfsburg which kicked off his finest season yet. In a January four-game spell of back-to-back scoring, he struck an amazing freekick against Werder Bremen and bagged his second brace of the year in March against Freiburg in a 2-1 victory. Robben shared Bayern's desire to win their first UCL trophy since 2001 and in their round of 16 games against Manchester United and Fiorentina, Robben shone with a magnificent strike in Florence which put the Germans through on away-goals. In the next round, Bayern was trailing Manchester United. And desperately needing one more goal to advance, Robben struck an incredible first-time volley kick directly from a corner past Edwin Van der Sar in the 74th

minute for another 4-all draw seeing the Bavarians progress again on away-goals.



Robben's sweetly timed volley at Old Trafford in 2010

With fellow winger Franck Ribery, the number 10 formed a formidable duo that became known as "Robbery". The two players' careers became intertwined from the moment they first stepped on the same pitch together. These two world class footballers would go on and rack up a total of 268 goals and 284 assists between them during their time in Munich. Like Suarez and Sturridge, or Xavi and Iniesta in days gone by, they will go down as one of football's greatest double acts.



“Robbery” A defender’s worst nightmare

The dutchman scored a hattrick in a 7-0 win over Hannover 96 and in May, Bayern was declared Bundesliga champions. On the 15th of May, Robben netted again to help Bayern clinch their 15th DFB pokal. With a comfortable win against Lyon, Bayern progressed to the Champions League final in Madrid where he would come up against his old manager in Jose Mourinho and Inter Milan. The Italians were too strong for the Germans and suffered a 2-0 defeat. Robben was named footballer of the year in Germany after scoring 23 goals in 37 appearances across all competitions.

His performances for Bayern earned him a spot in Bert van Marwijk’s world cup squad as a key figure for his country. However, Robben wouldn’t start the tournament for the Netherlands as he picked up a hamstring injury in the team’s last friendly match against Hungary. His first start came in the last 16 against Slovakia in which he went on to score the opening goal and won the man of the match award. Robben also scored in the semifinal tie against Uruguay with a well-placed header to send his team to the final where they would come up against Spain.

In a brutal game that resulted in fourteen cards being shown, nine of which were shown to the Dutch, the game sat deadlocked for the entire ninety minutes, but Robben missed a golden opportunity to put his team ahead in the 62nd minute. That chance would come back to haunt the Dutch as Andres Iniesta scored the match-winner in the 115th minute breaking Dutch hearts. Despite the painful loss, Robben had performed very well during the month and was nominated for the Golden Ball, the award given to the tournament’s best player, which he lost to Diego Forlan.

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Robben's missed chance cost Netherlands the World cup

Back with Bayern, Robben was unfit to play for two months as his hamstring had not properly healed. Upon his new year return, the Dutchman took no time in getting back into the swing of things. In the fourteen games he played, Robben scored twelve goals and provided ten assists, but it wasn't enough to save Bayern in the league as they finished third and dropped out of Europe in the first knockout round.

Bayern made the UCL title their focus for the 11/12 season. The Bavarians knocked out Real Madrid to set up a final with a familiar side in Chelsea. The odds were heavily stacked against the blues as they had changed managers halfway through that season and many key players were missing from their team. As expected, Bayern dominated the match with most of the possession and found themselves ahead in the 82nd minute with a headed effort from Thomas Muller. Within two minutes of the full-time whistle, Drogba drove an equalizer to take the game into Extra Time. The Ivorian marksmen clumsily brought down Ribery in the box and Robben approached Cech to convert the spot kick. The Dutchman's kick was guessed by his old teammate leaving penalties to decide the champion. With the game tied at 3 all, Schweinsteiger miss hit his penalty, leaving Drogba to slot away the pivotal

penalty to win Chelsea their first UCL trophy.



Things went from bad to worse for the Dutchman as the Netherlands suffered an early exit at the Euro 2012. The forward's 2012/2013 campaign was riddled with injuries and he only featured sixteen times in the Bundesliga. Fortunately, he managed to stay fit for Bayern's knockout games as they breezed past Arsenal and Juventus to play Barcelona in the semi-final. The Bavarians thumped the Catalans 7-0 on aggregate with Robben scoring two goals across the legs setting up the first-ever all-German champions league final against Borussia Dortmund at Wembley.

In the final, Bayern struggled in the first half as Dortmund had most of the possession but struggled to create clear-cut opportunities. In the second half, Bayern broke the deadlock courtesy of a Mario Mandzukic goal assisted by Robben. However, Dortmund drew level eight minutes later through an Ilkay Gundogan penalty. As the clock was winding down with extra time on the horizon, a long ball from Jerome Boateng was controlled and backheeled by Ribery into the path of Robben where he scored a scuffed left-footed shot past Weidenfeller to win Bayern their fifth European cup, to go along with the Bundesliga title and DFB pokal to secure a famous treble. Robben had finally won the trophy that had eluded him twice before, atoning for his shortcomings twelve months earlier. I guess the third time is a charm.



Robben's late goal wins Bayern the Champions League



Robben finally got his hands on the Champions League trophy

Now under Pep, Robben returned to more frequent Bundesliga appearances in the 2013/2014 season in all but six as he scored eleven goals. Highlights for the winger include a clever chipped finish against Borussia Dortmund and a hat-trick against Schalke in a 5-1 win. These were his prime years in a Bayern team that looked to dominate European football.



Robben with Pep Guardiola

Robben's final notable major tournament with the Netherlands was the 2014 World Cup. In the team's first match against defending champions Spain, Robben contributed two goals in a stunning 5-1 victory. He then helped the team make the semi-finals by earning a penalty against Mexico and scoring in a penalty shootout against Costa Rica. Though the group proceeded to lose to Argentina, they recovered in time to beat Brazil 3-0 in the third-place match.

Across the next five years, he remained a vital cog in a Bayern team that won all Bundesliga titles from 2014- 2020. Robben continued to astound audiences with signature skill runs down the right-hand side and continually scoring for the Germans as he finished his Bayern career with a total of 144 goals and

101 assists in 309 appearances.

The end ?



Robben back at his first club

On the 4th of July 2019, Robben decided to retire. However, eleven months later in June 2020 in the wake of Covid-19, Robben returned to football and signed with his first club FC Groningen for one last dance. His return was to help the club with financial setbacks resulting from Covid-19. Although injuries restricted his playing time, the move attracted a lot of attention for Groningen in a period of difficulty. Robben finally hung up his boots in July 2021 after thirteen months in his hometown.

The bald Dutchman with his pace, skill, and agility made him a nightmare for defenders. A genius who, despite being riddled with injuries throughout his career, found ways to adapt and evolve. His trademark cut-in-and-shoot maneuver that many players still attempt to this day with mixed results, is

regarded as one of the best. Admired by players of his generation and lauded as among the best wingers in football history and a fan favorite wherever he went, Arjen Robben is an unforgettable legend of the game.

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1. Sport

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