

**SPANISH**



**SWANS**



**HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

# ROBERTO MARTINEZ



2003-06 AND 2007-09

## SPANISH SWANS

As astute as he was in the transfer market, former Swansea City boss Brian Flynn had no idea that a tentative phone call to Walsall back in 2003 would eventually pave the way for a tiki-taka revolution in the heart of south west Wales.

It was the start of a rollercoaster ride that would propel the Swans through the leagues – in a fashion reminiscent of the John Toshack era of the late 1970s and early 1980s – to Wembley and the ultimate prize; the lucrative Premier League.

On the other end of the phone that day was a certain **Roberto Martinez**, a cultured but relatively unknown Spanish midfielder who had built up a love affair with the British game via the lower leagues.

Born and brought up living and breathing the beautiful game through his father, also called Roberto and a manager himself, in Balaguer, northern Spain, the former Real Zaragoza midfielder would find himself thrown into a Football League survival battle at the Vetch Field following stints at Wigan, Motherwell and just six games at Walsall.

Flynn came and went, but not before ensuring hero status by securing Swansea's Football League status with that famous final-day victory over Hull City in 2003, a game where Martinez played his part.

Kenny Jackett stepped in to take the club to their new home at the Liberty Stadium on the back of promotion to League One.

Martinez, the player, had found it tough at times under Jackett, despite being club captain, with the manager often opting for organisation and physical strength, instead of the cultured and controlled passing of the Spaniard.

Martinez was eventually released by the former Welsh international.

He joined League Two Chester with a lump in his throat, eventually stating he was forced out of the Liberty when he felt he still had a lot more to give. It was something he eventually did give, not as a player, but as a manager.



Swans chairman at the time, Huw Jenkins, was to admit in the preceding years that he spent, and enjoyed, numerous chats with Martinez the player during his spell at the club.

They were footballing chats that would eventually shape the future Swansea and prompt Jenkins to make a call

to Chester to see if Martinez would be interested in stepping into management after Jackett had called time on his own successful reign.

It was described as a gamble in many footballing circles, in Swansea and further afield.

After all, here was a young man, at just 33, not only being asked to take his first steps into Football League management, but also taking charge of a group of players he still regarded as friends and team-mates.

But Jenkins felt the Swans had to be different if they were to compete and progress in the Football League. After all, the club did not have the financial resources to compete with many of the bigger clubs in League One, let alone the Championship.

## STATS PLAYER

LEAGUE APPS 122

CLUB APPS 139

GOALS 4

## STATS MANAGER

GAMES 126

WINS 63

DRAWS 37

DEFEATS 26

# THE 'THREE AMIGOS'



And from the day Martínez was unveiled as the new Swans boss in February 2007, Swansea City became different; very different.

"I needed to bring in players who were different from what we had," said Martínez. "I had players who had fought for the club in 2003 to maintain our league status; players like Leon Britton, Alan Tate and Kristian O'Leary.

I also had the bedrock of strong characters in Garry Monk, Denis Lawrence and Andy Robinson. But we also needed players who could give us a new dimension."

Martínez was convinced, unlike many critics in the game, you could climb out of the lower leagues playing the beautiful game; a patient, intelligent, passing and pressing game that was taken for granted in his beloved Spain.

As a consequence, a Spanish revolution was about to explode at the Liberty Stadium as Martínez returned to his homeland to pluck the players needed to style Swansea's new footballing philosophy and eventually prove the catalyst for life in the top-flight.

It was the start of a Swansea love affair with Spanish talent that continued until a few seasons ago when the likes of Michu, Chico Flores and Pablo Hernandez strutted their stuff in the Premier League.

It started, ironically, with 'The Three Amigos' and reminiscent of Martínez's original move to Britain when Wigan chairman Dave Whelan persuaded him to join a rising football club based in a rugby league town.

Joining Martínez at Wigan back then were fellow Spaniards Isidro Díaz and Jesus Seba. They came to be known as Wigan's Three Amigos.

Teaming up with Martínez at Swansea were Guillem Bauza, Angel Rangel and Andrea Orlandi, while the manager was the first to chuckle when his Spanish trio were ushered away from their first training session for a newspaper photo-shoot with a difference.

You could hear the howls of laughter and banter from within the squad as three funny looking sombreros appeared from nowhere and were duly dumped on the heads of the Mediterranean trio.

'We are not Mexicans,' they pleaded as the camera flashed



before they had time to protest properly. Job done. They were now officially Swansea's 'Three Amigos'.

"I understand everything they are going through," explained Martínez. "It can be difficult moving to a new country with all the cultural differences and the language problem. But I've explained to them that they can't compare things to how they were in Spain.

"They have to have an open and mature mind, embrace the differences and enjoy the experiences. Only then will the football take care of itself."

The trio knew each other before they signed for Swansea, not as friends but as opponents on the fields of Spain.

They were recommended to Martínez by his chief scout, Kevin Reeves, who had been sent packing all over Europe in search of 'something different' – and where he didn't need much use of the club chequebook.

"Kevin's knowledge is second to none," added Martínez. "He shares my vision in finding players, not only with talent, but with a Swansea City attitude.

"Kevin has a sixth sense in spotting talent in foreign markets that is adaptable to the British game."



# GUILLEM BAUZA



2007-10

## SPANISH SWANS

**B**auza was the first to arrive in Swansea. Better known as Bussy, the striker made the move from Espanyol B.

Although he was given a gentle introduction to life in League One, he finished the season on a high after scoring the two goals that clinched promotion at Gillingham, as well as a hat-trick against Leyton Orient in the final home game of the season. It took his tally for the season to 11.

"Bussy has had a huge impact in the British game in a short period of time," said Martinez at the time. "He is a very young but talented striker who I am sure will continue to blossom on the Championship stage."

A regular for Espanyol's B team, he was also a former Spanish under-16, under-17 and under-20 international, who started his career with Mallorca.

The qualified teacher would go on to qualify as a doctor at Swansea University.

"Growing up I'd always wanted to be a doctor, but life changes and football came along," he said.

He was a European Championship winner with the Spain Under-16 team, playing in all six games alongside striker Fernando Torres.

He also started all three games for Spain in the Under-20 World Cup in Trinidad and Tobago.



But the striker found it difficult to command a regular place in the Championship side ahead of Jason Scotland.

And, when Martinez left for Wigan, he became the first senior player to be released by new boss Paulo Sousa in 2010 after 49 league appearances and nine goals.

After a trial at Charlton, he signed for Hereford and then Exeter before being released after an injury-hit spell and financial cutbacks, before spells at Port Talbot and Merthyr.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 49

CLUB APPS 68

GOALS 16



## SPANISH SWANS

**A**ngel Rangel became Martinez's second signing, having agreed a 'performance related contract' for an undisclosed fee with Segunda B club Terrassa.

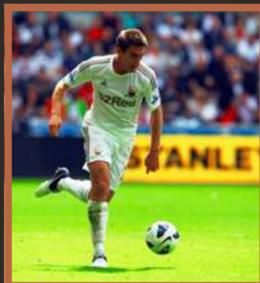
Although the fee was believed to be around £20,000, Rangel has since stated that he actually paid money out of his own pocket to sign for the club.

"He has got all the attributes to be successful in the British game," declared Martinez.

It later emerged that Reeves had actually travelled to Spain to watch a striker from Benidorm. But Rangel impressed so much for the opposition that they signed him instead.

He soon made his mark and as Rangel quickly went from zero to hero, he admitted that for the first time that he actually felt like a footballer.

"It may sound strange," he said a few months into his stay, "but for the first time in my career I actually feel like a real footballer."



"Although I played professional football in Spain for the last three years, it's nothing like playing here. Back home you'd play in front of a few hundred people, possibly 2,000 maximum for really big games, and then just go home."

"There would be no autographs to sign, fans waiting to speak to you. In fact, nobody away from the football club really knew who you were. Here in Swansea it's totally different."

"The crowds we get are unbelievable; fans are asking you for your autograph before and after the game; and people actually know who I am."

Rangel's reputation only grew alongside the club's progression, including a place in the PFA League One Team of the Year in his debut campaign.

There was even talk of a potential transfer switch to Premier League Blackpool and Fulham, which the Swans fans were glad to see the back of.

A regular at right-back, there was no need for a succession of managers to start courting a successor as he remained one of the first on the team-sheet until his eventual move to QPR at the end of the 2017-18 campaign after 11 years and more than 350 appearances for the club.

During that time, he became regarded as one of the best operators in the Premier League.

His ties to the area only grew over time as he married a local 'valleys' girl, Nikki, with his children born and bred in Wales.

It's little surprise Rangel classes himself as a Spanish Welshman, and calls Swansea his 'home'.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 328

CLUB APPS 374

GOALS 10

# ANGEL RANGEL



2007-18

# ANDREA ORLANDI



**M**aking up the original Three Amigos was **Andrea Orlandi**, who arrived on a free transfer from La Liga side Alaves after a tip-off from former Holland, Ajax, Barcelona and Manchester United winger Jordi Cruyff, son of the legendary Johan, and good friend of Martinez.

"Jordi phoned me and said there may be a team in Wales interested in me so expect a call," said Orlandi.

"Then Roberto rang me for a chat and said he wanted to sign me. But it was getting close to the transfer deadline and Aris Salonika in Greece had paid and booked me on a 6am flight to sign for them.

"I was waiting by the fax machine in a friend's shop in Spain . . . and waiting.

"Eventually Roberto's call came, and I signed at 11pm – one hour before the deadline. To say I was relieved would be an understatement.

"I was still nervous about coming. I didn't know anything or anyone. I couldn't even call Bussy or Angel because I didn't know them at the time.

"But sometimes you have to take risks. Thankfully it was the right decision."

Orlandi had spent two seasons on loan at Barcelona, making 66 appearances for Barcelona 'B' and four appearances for the first team.

"Two of those appearances came in the Primera Division, while he also played the final two games for Barcelona as they lifted the Catalunya Cup.

Swansea provided him with his next challenge, but knee and thigh problems disrupted his first two campaigns.

"I don't think I was fit enough or strong enough for British football when I first arrived," he said. "I had problems adapting to the game over here.

"It's totally different to Spanish football where you get a lot more time on the ball and there's no physical stuff. British football is also box-to-box and heavier on the legs."

With his contract expiring and Martinez off to Wigan, Orlandi returned to Spain, only for successor Sousa to persuade him to return on a new deal.

"At one point I thought my time at Swansea had come to an end," he admitted.

## SPANISH SWANS

"When Roberto left, I didn't know where I was. But I spoke to Paulo and he told me to come over to Swansea for a chat.

"He said he was counting on me and that's what I needed to hear, so I flew straight over from Spain.

"He told me I had to improve certain parts of my game and I agreed with him."

Sousa switched him from a winger to a more central midfield role, and the technically gifted Catalan enjoyed a new lease of life, making over 30 appearances.

"Unless I wake up one day with a new turn of pace, I can't see me pushing for a place on the wing anymore," he joked at the time.

"I've forgotten about being a winger at Swansea because not even God is good enough to make me quicker than Nathan Dyer and Scott Sinclair!"

Although he nearly joined Sousa at Leicester City the following summer, he stuck around only to find himself on the periphery again under Brendan Rodgers as Swansea's midfield grew in strength and quality.

And, following Swansea's successful first campaign in the Premier League and Rodgers' departure for Liverpool, new boss Michael Laudrup allowed him to leave for Championship promotion hopefuls Brighton after 90 appearances.

"It's exactly five years since I first joined Swansea in League One," explained Orlandi on the day he left.

"I was a 23-year-old with long hair then. Now I'm leaving with short hair, a baby and the club in the Premier League. I could never have imagined that, but the reality has overcome the expectations.

"I have loved this club from the first day I arrived, and I will always love it. I may not be a Swansea player, but I will always be a Swansea supporter – 'Always A Jack', as they say here."

After Brighton, he had spells at Blackpool, Anorthosis and APOEL (Cypris), Chennaiyin (India), Novara Calcio and Virtus Entella (Italy) before he was forced to retire in February 2019 when he was diagnosed with a heart problem.

Under Martinez, the influx of Spaniards continued, helped by the success and guiding hands of the 'Three Amigos' and the translation skills of their 'Spanish father', Rangel.

"Sometimes it can be a pain," joked Rangel. "But to be honest, I really don't mind doing it. I try to help the Spanish lads out as much as possible because I know what it is like to come to a new country, culture and language.

"Bussy was the only Spaniard who had good English when I arrived here, and he was a big help when I first signed.

"It is no different to now with the Spanish players that we have signed. I know from experience what a massive help it can be.

"I think it also helps your performances if you are settled off the pitch. When you arrive in a new place, you need things like internet, a bank account and furniture in your house or flat.

"These are all essential things and if you can get those sorted out with a little bit of help, then it certainly makes it easier to settle somewhere.

"Once you have everything in place you can relax a bit and enjoy your job, and footballers are no different in that respect.

"During my time at Swansea I have played with around nine or 10 Spaniards. There has always been a great unity at the club. A lot of the Spanish lads stick together, but everyone gets on so well that we can all relax around one another.

"We will often have some food together with our families. It's always great fun and we have a real laugh together."

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 72

CLUB APPS 90

GOALS 3



Under Martinez, Fede Bessone and Albert Serran were the next to arrive in Swansea within the space of two days.

# THE NEXT ARRIVALS

# FEDE BESSONE



2008-10 AND 2011-12

## SPANISH SWANS

Although **Bessone** was originally from Cordoba in Argentina, he was classed every inch a Spaniard having been brought up there from a young child, developing his footballing career in the Barcelona youth set-up.

Signed from Espanyol B, where he played alongside Bauza, the left-back had been on loan at Gimnastic in the Spanish Segunda division.

"I have been following Bussy's progress at Swansea on the internet. In fact, I've become a bit of an internet addict on Swansea," said Bessone.

"Bussy painted a clear picture of the club for me. Having shared a dressing room with him for two years, I've got the utmost respect for him."

Bessone found it difficult to establish himself at first though, despite making 18 appearances.

"My first season here was difficult at times; living in a new country and playing the British game for the first time," he said.

"I found the first three months very difficult. I just didn't have the confidence and made too many mistakes. I also picked up a few injuries as well, which didn't help.

"British football was a lot quicker than I was used to in Spain. I struggled with my concentration levels; I was switching off and getting caught out.

"But I've learnt from my mistakes. Mentally and physically I am now a lot stronger."

It was something Martinez had prepared himself for. He was well aware that some of his Spanish recruits would settle quicker and easier than others.

"It's always hard for players to adapt to the tempo and versatility of the British game," he said.

"It requires different demands of concentration than any other league throughout the continent.

"Fede has had to go through this period and is now a stronger, more focused and better player from the experience."

Martinez wasn't around to see that improvement though and, despite a knee injury the following season, Bessone made 21 league appearances under Sousa.

"I gained the gaffer's (Sousa) confidence and I think I reached a good level to push on over the whole of the campaign," he added.

That push was to happen at Leeds United, however, as he turned down a new deal at the Liberty.

Although it never worked out for him at Elland Road, with his spell there including a loan move to Charlton, Bessone found himself back at

Swansea on transfer deadline day in August 2011, as cover for the injured Alan Tate.

He made just one late substitute appearance in the Premier League against West Brom, plus a FA Cup appearance at Bolton, before joining Swindon Town a year later on a free transfer.

"I've enjoyed every minute of my time in Swansea," he said. "I've not played many games since I came back, and that is the reason I am leaving. I am 28, and I need to be playing games.

"I have to say thank you to the supporters. Even in the two games I played they were singing my name – it makes me feel very proud.

"I've been in the UK for five years and in Swansea for four of them. This feels like my home."

After Swindon, Bessone would go on to play for Oldham, Sporting Kansas City, Millwall, Prat and currently FC Andorra.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 37

CLUB APPS 42

GOALS 1

## SPANISH SWANS

Bessone had arrived just a few days ahead of **Albert Serran** after the defender agreed a £80,000 switch from Espanyol B.

"Albert is perfect for the British game," explained Martinez at the time of the signing.

"He is a committed and aggressive defender; a winner; talented and ambitious – and that is the type of player we want at Swansea City.

"He could have taken an easier option by signing closer to home for a La Liga club – and even had the option of going to Poland – but he wants to play in the Premier League with Swansea."

"I wanted the chance to experience British football," added Serran.

"I was a close friend of Bussy when we played together for two years at Espanyol.

"Obviously, his influence – and the Spanish influence at the club in general – helped me make my decision a lot easier to sign, but it was an opportunity too good to turn down.

"I had a dream when I came here to play in the Premier League. If I can achieve it by helping Swansea gain promotion I will be delighted."

Having played just twice in La Liga with the first team, Serran had to be patient in his first full season at the Liberty with Ashley Williams and Garry Monk established in the heart of the Swans defence.

His Championship bow eventually came against Ipswich in February 2009 at right-back. It proved a memorable debut as his aerial prowess, quick turn of pace and a delightful cross set up Jason Scotland for Swansea's opener after just three minutes.

By the end of his first season in Swansea colours, Serran had made 13 league appearances, including featuring in the last south Wales derby at Ninian Park.



Serran was hit with injuries the following season and missed the first four months with a knee problem. No sooner had he returned against Leicester in mid-January, he was struck down with a hamstring injury.

But the man they called 'The Terminator' in the dressing room due to his tough, rugged approach, had shown enough though to earn another 12-month contract.



"When I first came to Swansea the manager had to take me aside in training and tell me to calm down. Apparently, I was too physical. That's where the nickname Terminator came from," joked Serran.

"But, while the Spanish game is very technical, the way we trained and played in Spain was also very aggressive.

"I thought British football was even more physical than that, so I went into training trying to push the aggressive side of my game. I soon realised it wasn't the case, well not at Swansea anyway."

It was Rodgers who eventually called time on Serran's stay at Swansea in June 2011 after 30 league appearances.

He was to move to AEK Larnaca in Cyprus – who were under the guidance of Jordi Cruyff – followed by a career that took him to Albania, Morocco and recently India.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 30

CLUB APPS 42

GOALS 0

# ALBERT SERRAN



# GORKA PINTADO



## SPANISH SWANS

He was joined in Cyprus by another of Swansea's Spaniards, **Gorka Pintado**.

Nicknamed 'El Toro' - 'The Bull' - by Martinez, Pintado arrived from Spanish Segunda outfit Granada in June 2008 for around £100,000.

He made an immediate impact in his first few appearances.

He scored his first goal in the win over Nottingham Forest after coming off the bench and did the same in the Carling Cup second round tie against Hull City.

He also wrote his name into Swansea folklore by coming off the bench to grab an equaliser at the Liberty Stadium in the 2-2 draw against Cardiff City in November 2008.

"That was the best goal I scored for Swansea," declared Pintado, who will also be remembered for an infamous tackle on Robbie Savage at Derby.



"It was the best because I know how much it meant to the supporters at the time."

Pintado struggled with niggling injuries throughout his stay though, including a shoulder injury that needed an operation.

"He knows the pains he's getting in his body are stopping him being available on a constant basis," explained Martinez. "That's what we've got to rectify - and then we'll see the best of him."

"The intensity of the game and the number of fixtures we play will probably mean it will take him a bit longer to adapt to the British game than the other Spanish players."



"Because he's a 100 per cent player and a very, very strong athlete, his body will have to get used to the intensity."

"But, while he does that, if he can keep coming on to make the same impact as he did against Cardiff City, then I think we'll all be happy."

In the end though, time ran out for Pintado and he left by mutual consent 12 months before his contract expired having made 73 league appearances (48 as a substitute) and scored seven goals.

"It's been a pleasure representing Swansea," he said. "I'm sad to leave, but that's football. I have had a happy three years here and it's nice to know that it has coincided with the best three years in the club's history."

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 73

CLUB APPS 80

GOALS 9

## SPANISH SWANS

Fellow Spaniard, **Jordi Gomez**, made more of an immediate impact at Swansea after Martinez secured his services on a season-long loan deal from Espanyol in June 2008.

Having emerged via Barcelona's youth ranks, he followed Pintado into Swans folklore in his first season by scoring the winning goal against Cardiff City in a tense Carling Cup tie at the Liberty in the first South Wales derby for seven years.

"It was a great feeling," said Gomez. "Everywhere I went in the city after that people were coming up to me to say thank you for scoring the goal."



"It made me very proud to make so many people in Swansea happy."

A technically gifted footballer, Gomez was crowned 'Supporters' Player of the Season' at the club's annual awards dinner after scoring 14 goals in a scintillating campaign that also saw him named in the PFA Championship Team of the Year.

"The manager's style of playing the ball on the floor suits me and the rest of the Spanish players," he said.

"I don't think I would have fitted in so well at another British club because the mentality and style are different."

Such was his impact that Martinez and chairman Jenkins worked tirelessly over the following summer to sign him on a permanent basis.

But his stock had risen to such a level that it was proving too rich for Swansea, as Middlesbrough prepared to pounce in a deal rumoured to be worth £1.7m.

"Jordi has been great to work with over the last 10 months and I'm pleased that all Swansea City fans were able to enjoy watching a tremendous footballer in action," explained a disappointed Martinez.

"He was a good player when he came to us, but he's an even better player now and his valuation in the market has rocketed."

"I think we all wanted to have Jordi for next season, but we were well aware when we signed him on loan that it was just for one season."

"If it was a footballing decision, I think Jordi would have stayed with us. But unfortunately, it's not always just about football."

As it turned out, it wasn't just Gomez who was to depart as Martinez himself left for pastures new. And when he took up the managerial reigns at Wigan, Gomez eventually followed him.

Gomez would go on to play for Sunderland, Blackburn, Rayo Vallecano, Levski Sofia and Omonia in Cyprus, while Martinez took a more glamorous managerial route to Everton and the Belgium national team having led Wigan to FA Cup glory in 2013.

Belgium would finish third in the 2018 World Cup in Russia under his guidance.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 44

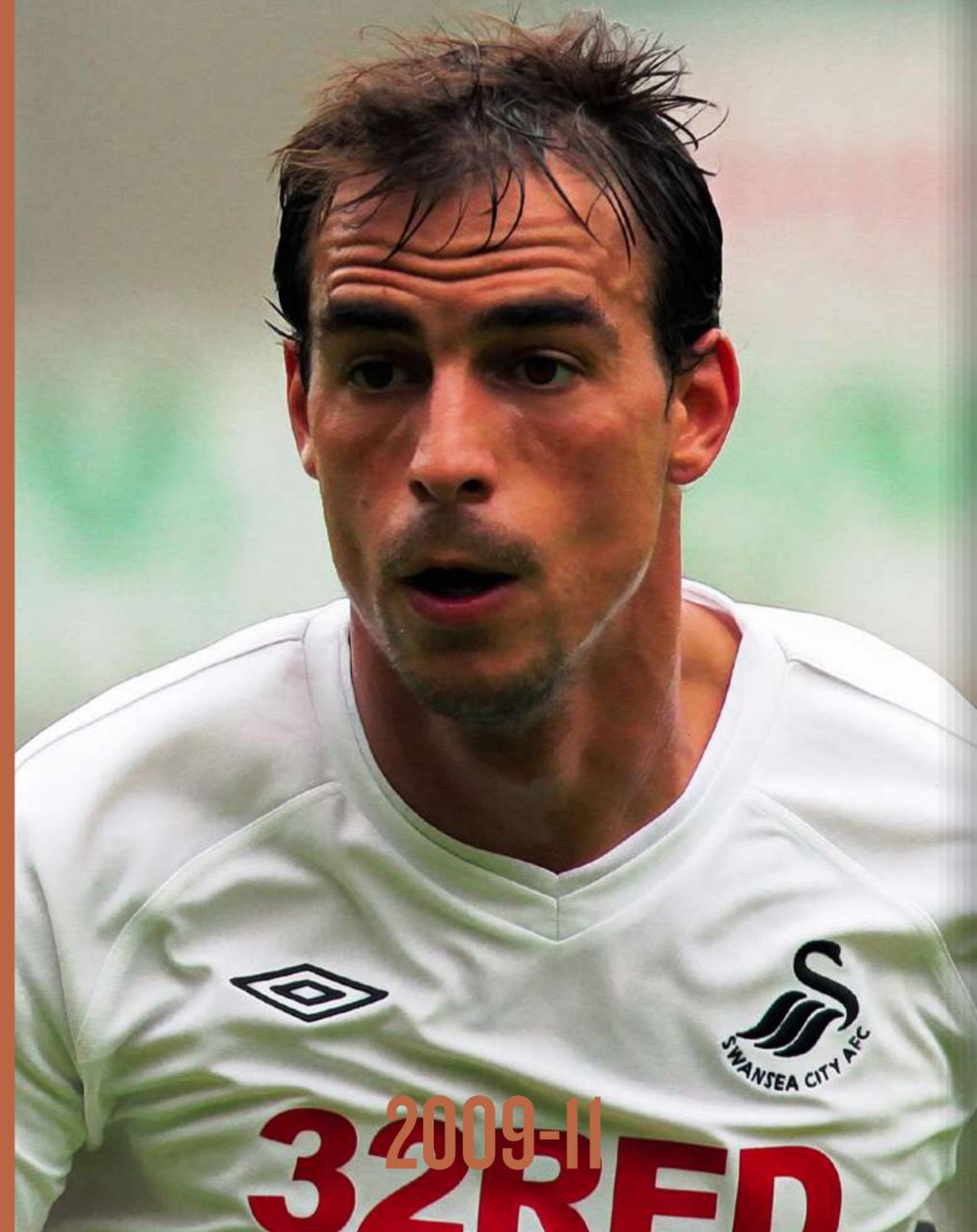
CLUB APPS 51

GOALS 14

# JORDI GOMEZ



# JORDI LOPEZ



2009-11  
32RED

## SPANISH SWANS

**A**ew boss Paulo Sousa continued the Spanish flavour when he brought in midfielder **Jordi Lopez** in July 2009 on a two-year deal.

The former Barcelona and Real Madrid youngster, who went on to win a UEFA Cup winners' medal with Sevilla, worked with Sousa at QPR.

"The three or four months I spent at QPR were really positive for me," explained Lopez.

"I had the opportunity to stay there, but I felt it was a better opportunity for me to come to Swansea and work with Paulo again.

"When Paulo spoke to me about the project he had at Swansea City, I liked what he had to say. It felt like the right move for me."



But, hampered by a number of injury problems, he failed to win a regular first-team berth during his two-season spell at the Liberty and left in January 2011 by mutual consent after just 20 appearances.

He later joined Eredivisie side Vitesse, OFI Crete and FC Hoverla Uzhhorod in the Ukraine.

The next batch of Spaniards to arrive in SA1 would have more of an impact – and on the biggest stage of all; the Premier League.



Rodgers succeeded Sousa in the managerial hot seat.

Having guided the Swans into the top-flight in 2011, he left for pastures new with a dream job at Liverpool, leaving the Swans on the hunt again for a new manager.

The club's success, rising profile and reputation for playing attractive football meant a managerial search was becoming a regular summer activity at the Liberty.



## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 15

CLUB APPS 20

GOALS 0



# THE NEW AMIGOS

# CHICO FLORES



2012-14

## SPANISH SWANS

**B**ut not even the most optimistic of Swans fans expected Michael Laudrup to walk through the revolving door in 2012.

One of the most naturally gifted players to grace the beautiful game, the Great Dane immediately tapped into the market he knew best.

That was the Spanish market after his previous managerial spells at Getafe and Mallorca. He had, of course, also enjoyed remarkable playing stints at Barcelona and Real Madrid.

That batch of arrivals would prove to be inspired acquisitions as Michu, Chico Flores and Pablo Hernandez became the new 'Three Amigos'.

Laudrup was well aware of his first Spanish signing, central defender José Manuel Flores.

Better known as **Chico**, the 25-year-old played under the Swans boss during a loan spell at Mallorca.

This time the reunion was permanent after a £2m fee secured his services on a three-year deal from Genoa in August 2012.

"I know I am joining a club that has been growing over the last few years and is still ambitious to go even higher," declared Chico upon his arrival.

"Having played in La Liga and Serie A (Italy), two great leagues, it's a dream come true to play in the Premier League, one of the best, if not the best, in the world

"Michael Laudrup was one of the main reasons I signed. He knows me as a person and as a player, so I was honoured when the call came.

"Being brought up in Spain, I have the same culture of possession and passing football. I like to play from the back, come forward with the ball, and add to the possession game."

Chico's career started as a youth player with hometown club Cádiz CF in 2005. He also spent loan spells at Racing Club Portuense and Barcelona B, helping the Catalans gain promotion to the third tier.

The defender then signed with Cádiz neighbours Unión Deportiva Almería to help the club maintain its top-flight status in La Liga after a 13th place finish.

Having made his debut for the Spain Under-21 side, he signed a five-year contract for Genoa in Italy for €4 million in July 2010.

A year later he agreed a one-year loan deal with RCD Mallorca where he teamed up with Laudrup, making 33 appearances.

It certainly didn't take the charismatic Spaniard long to make his mark as his passionate and whole-hearted displays quickly secured him cult status among the Swansea faithful and earned him a one-year extension on his contract – a commitment Chico didn't hesitate to make.

"I'm very happy," beamed Chico who was voted the Best Newcomer of the Year by the fans at the club's end of season awards night.

"Everything has gone better than I ever expected. I have found it easier to settle here than when I moved from Spain to Italy.

"I had no hesitation in signing a new contract for a number of reasons, but mainly because I can only see the team and the club growing.

"We play good football, which I think suits me, and the warmth of the fans towards me has been unbelievable. To hear them singing my name is amazing; phenomenal. I love them all.

"If you put all that together, everything is perfect, and I hope to stay at Swansea for a long, long time."

Chico would eventually leave in 2014, after 57 league appearances, to join Lekhwiya in Doha, again under Laudrup. From there he went on to play for Granada, Rubin Kazan and Fuenlabrada.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 57

CLUB APPS 75

GOALS 4

## SPANISH SWANS

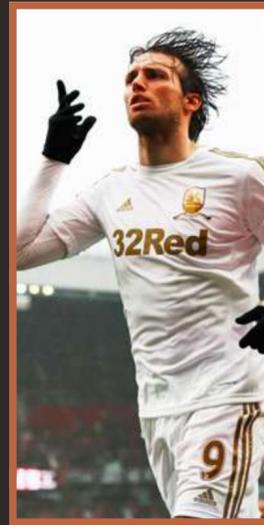
Joining Chico in Swansea was **Michu**, full name **Miguel Perez Cuesta**, in a £2.2m move from Rayo Vallecano, where his 15 goals, most coming from his trademark late arrival into the box, had helped the club avoid the drop from La Liga.

Arriving on a three-year contract and relatively unknown in Britain, his impact was spectacular and the attacking midfielder amassed an amazing 22 goals in his first campaign to be crowned the Premier League's bargain buy of the season by the pundits.

In fact, it could be argued he was also the best buy after announcing his arrival in the top-flight with a brace at QPR on the opening day of the season.

Further goals followed, including crucial strikes against Manchester United, Arsenal, Newcastle and Chelsea as the Swans lifted the Capital One Cup and secured European football.

His form was enough to have Swansea's Premier League rivals questioning why their scouting departments had failed to spot Michu's talent.



"It's been a dream coming here," declared the 26-year-old who would sign a new four-year contract midway through his first season in SA1.

"It's so perfect; the fans, the city, the stadium, the football, the team . . . I could go on and on. It's the best place for me.

"The supporters have been so respectful to me, so I think they are happy with me. I am certainly happy with them. It's that word respect though. They always speak to us; show their support, but in a polite way, which is nice.

"The stadium is also full for every game. When you are on the pitch in a bad moment, suffering because the other team is attacking you for a while, you hear the support and it makes you do that little bit extra. It makes a difference.

"There's a lot more space between the lines here than in Spain. In Spain there's a greater tactical dimension to the game and it's harder to play in the number 10 role," added Michu, who was also redeployed in the centre-forward position at times.

"I don't mind where I play, although I prefer to be just in behind the striker. But that's up to the manager.

"I have faith in my first touch and that's essential here because you have such little time in the area. That gives you a great advantage.

"Playing in a team like Swansea helps me a lot because we like to keep the ball.

"The training sessions here are similar to what I'm used to in Spain because the manager does things in more or less the same way that he did with Getafe and Mallorca, although it's true that your opponents are more physical in the Premier League.

"Playing for Michael Laudrup is an amazing experience. He was one of my idols when I was growing up. He always defends his players; he looks after them and he gets the best out of them."

In return, Michu was determined to repay that faith, not just with goals, but with the sweat off his playing shirt at the end of every game.

"I feel I have two important qualities that represent me - I am a worker and I have humility," he continued.

## MICHU



"When I arrive at the dressing room people might say: 'You played very bad'. But what I can say is all that I can give is out there on the pitch. When I arrive at the changing room I have died."

Michu certainly gave everything for the cause and it came as no surprise at the annual awards dinner when he walked away with the Top Goalscorer's gong, the Players' Player of the Year, Away Player of the Year and Supporters' Player of the Year awards.

Unfortunately, Michu couldn't repeat that amazing first season as a serious ankle injury ruled him

out for long periods and would eventually force him to quit the game he loved so much.

He joined Napoli on loan at the start of his third season at the club before being released by the Swans in 2015 to join his brother's amateur team UP Langrejo and then his first club Oviedo.



His ankle continued to give him tremendous pain, however, and he was forced to retire at the age of 31 before taking up the sporting director's role at Langrejo, Oviedo and currently Burgos CF in his homeland.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 52

CLUB APPS 67

GOALS 28

# PABLO HERNANDEZ



2012-14

## SPANISH SWANS

Laudrup left his big buy of the summer of 2012 until last though, persuading the club to part with a record transfer fee of £5.55m to snatch winger **Pablo Hernandez** away from Valencia on transfer deadline day.

Like Chico, Hernandez had played under Laudrup when they were together at Getafe before eventually returning to Valencia for €1m and a six-year contract.

"There were offers from other clubs, but Swansea was the only club I wanted to join," explained Hernandez, who signed a three-year deal.

"Michael was my idol when I was young. Then I was lucky enough to play under him at Getafe.

"I was a young player at Getafe, and I learnt a lot from him. He gave me confidence and I have a lot to thank him for. Now I want to help him at Swansea in return because he was very important for my career."



A product of the youth system at Valencia, Hernandez made his senior debut in the final match of the 2006-07 season before spending the following campaign on loan at second-tier club Cadiz.



He then transferred to Getafe under Laudrup before returning to Valencia where his form earned him his first international cap as Spain finished third in the 2009 Confederations Cup.

Hernandez's time at Swansea came to an end in July 2014 after 57 league appearances and five goals.

The classy midfielder often saw his patches of fine form disrupted by injury, but he still provided moments of wonderful quality such as a late equaliser against Chelsea and a made-



to-measure pass for Wayne Routledge to open the scoring in an emphatic South Wales derby win in 2014.

He joined Al-Arabi in Qatar before - after a loan spell at Al-Nasr Dubai - Hernandez returned to Spain's top-flight with Rayo Vallecano.

He then teamed back up with manager Garry Monk in August 2016 at Leeds United where he has been an influential figure in their push for promotion to the Premier League.

So, while the scouts from the other Premier League clubs continued to search La Liga for their own Spanish gems, in particular another Michu, up stepped the next batch of amigos under Laudrup's watch as the Swans prepared for their Europa League adventure.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 57

CLUB APPS 71

GOALS 5

## SPANISH SWANS



First to arrive in the summer of 2013 was **Jose Canas** on a three-year contract.

The combative central midfielder from Real Betis was targeted midway through the previous campaign, but was forced to wait for his contract to run down before joining on a free transfer.

A product of the Betis youth system, Cadiz-born Canas rose through the ranks at the club and made his first-team debut in 2009, before helping the club win promotion back to the top-flight in 2011.

The 26-year-old made 27 appearances in La Liga the following season and played a key role in helping them book a Europa League play-off spot after a seventh-place finish.

He was also no stranger to the Liberty after playing against the Swans in a friendly at the Liberty in 2010.

"I remember playing against Swansea for Real Betis and I was amazed by how quickly they passed the ball and how strong they were," said Canas.

"It reminded me a lot of how Spain play. Swansea's style was a key part in my decision to come here.

"The chance to play in the Premier League with a team that loves to play the same way as I do is a great opportunity. I have seen how well the rest of the Spanish players have done, so I'm hoping to make the same impact."

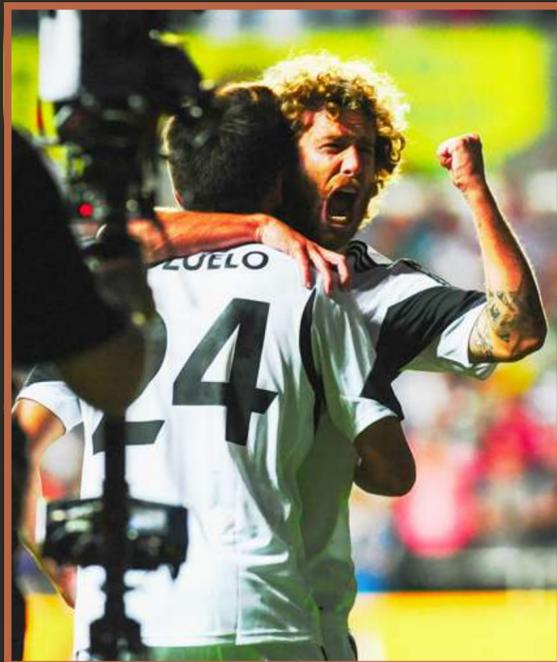
Canas was to make 23 league appearances over the course of his one season at the club before returning to Spain with Espanyol before stints with PAOK and – his current club – Red Star Belgrade.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 23

CLUB APPS 35

GOALS 0



# JOSE CANAS



2013-14

# JORDI AMAT



2013-19

## SPANISH SWANS



Following the lively character to Swansea, this time from Espanyol, was **Jordi Amat**, a 21-year-old central defender who had already represented his country at every level from under-16 to under-21.

Born in Canet de Mar, Catalonia, Amat had been with Espanyol since the age of seven and progressed through the ranks to make his first-team debut at the age of 17.

He remained around the first-team squad for the next two seasons before a loan switch to Rayo Vallecano in 2012-13 paid off for both player and club.

The Swans had to dig deep for his signature with the club parting with £2.5m for his services on a lengthy four-year deal.

"I am very happy to join Swansea. One of my dreams has been to play in the Premier League, and I can do that here with Swansea," said Amat.

"I am very grateful to the chairman and Michael Laudrup for giving me this opportunity and showing a lot of faith in me. My target now is to repay their faith and do everything I can to help the team.

"I watched Swansea last season and what the club achieved was incredible. To finish in the top half of the Premier League and win a trophy too is a massive achievement.

"In Spain, Swansea are very famous now. They talk a lot about the club and how they have become a successful team in the Premier League with an attractive style of play.

So, to be a part of the team is a big moment for me."

Amat was to make 52 league appearances for the Swans over a five-year period that also included a 12-month loan spell at Real Betis.

He would eventually return to Spain on a permanent basis in August 2018 with Rayo Vallecano before joining KAS Eupen in the Belgian First Division A on loan.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 52

CLUB APPS 72

GOALS 0

## SPANISH SWANS



The final piece in Laudrup's Spanish jigsaw was **Alejandro Pozuelo**, a talented midfielder many believed had huge potential.

The 21-year-old arrived on a three-year deal for an undisclosed fee after his contract expired at Real Betis, for whom he made 11 league appearances in La Liga.

"Since I've been a little boy it has been my dream to play in the Premier League," said Pozuelo.

"From the moment I heard of the interest from Swansea I watched their games and followed the news at the club.

"The style of the team suits me, and so too does the style of the manager.

"Of course, there are a lot of Spanish players here. I just want to give everything I have to the club in order to help the team this season."

The trio impressed during pre-season and all featured in the club's first European adventure in 22 years with victory over Malmo; Pozuelo scoring on his debut and again against Romania's Petrolul Ploiesti.

By the end of his only season at the club, he had made 36 appearances in all competitions, mostly as a substitute, before returning to Spain in the close season with Rayo Vallecano.

After a short spell in Belgium with Genk, he now plays his football in the MLS with Toronto in Canada.

It meant the Swans prepared for the big Premier League kick-off against Manchester United on August 17, 2013, with seven Spanish players in their ranks. Swansea's 'Magnificent Seven'.

But, Laudrup didn't want to increase that figure as the season kicked off, expressing the view that the squad must also retain the right mix of nationalities, especially in order to maintain that British feel in a multi-cultural Premier League.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 22

CLUB APPS 36

GOALS 3

## ALEJANDRO POZUELO



# ALVARO VAZQUEZ



2013-14

## SPANISH SWANS



He did eventually add **Alvaro Vazquez** to his ranks in September 2013 with a season-long loan move from Getafe, where he had scored 16 goals in 86 appearances.

Barcelona-born Vazquez had spent his youth career at Trajana before moving to Damm and then Espanyol, where the striker found game time in the B side before breaking into the first team in 2010.

In two seasons, he made 60 first team appearances and broke into the Spain Under 20 and Under-21 sides where he represented Spain at the 2011

FIFA Under-20 World Cup and also the successful 2013 UEFA European Championships.

He made his Premier League debut for Swansea in a 2-0 victory at Crystal Palace but played just 12 league games, plus eight in the cup, before returning to Getafe.

From there he joined Espanyol on a four-year contract before loan spell at Gimnàstic de Tarragona and permanent moves to Real Zaragoza and Sporting de Gijón.

Laudrup had departed Swansea by the time the club went back to Spain for its next batch of recruits.

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 12

CLUB APPS 20

GOALS 0



# THE FINAL CHAPTER

# FERNANDO LLORENTE



Italian Francesco Guidolin was in the hot seat when the club hit the headlines with the signing of Spain's 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012 winner **Fernando Llorente** from Sevilla for an undisclosed fee.

The 31-year-old striker arrived on a two-year deal in August 2016 having already lifted two Serie A titles and the Coppa Italia with Juventus, plus the Europa League with Sevilla.

"I am very happy to join Swansea," declared the 6ft 5in Llorente.

"I have scored goals in La Liga and Serie A, and now I want to score a lot of goals for the club in the Premier League.

"I want to score a lot of goals like Michu. He is a very good player and he did very well here."

Former Swans boss Roberto Martinez described the signing as the best in the Premier League that summer, while Angel Rangel reckoned the club may have made "one of the biggest, if not the biggest, signings in Swansea City's history."

"I don't want to put too much pressure on Fernando," added Rangel,

"But the numbers are there - you can see them. He has won so many medals. He has got a good pedigree and as a player he has all the attributes to be the perfect fit for us. He is big and strong; he can link up well and he can hold the ball well.

## SPANISH SWANS

"The most important thing is that he can score goals - he is a great header of the ball and can finish with both feet. It's a great signing."

It was a view shared by his manager, Guidolin, who added: "I am happy to have him because he is an important player in Europe. He is a good player - I remember him from when he played in Italy with Juventus. He is a good signing for us.

"I think he can do well in the Premier League because it's the first time for him in this league and his motivation and enthusiasm is big."

Guidolin didn't have that long to work with him though before the Italian departed in October. His replacement, American Bob Bradley, had even less time; just 11 games to be precise, before Paul Clement became the striker's third manager of the season.

Llorente proved to be a key component in helping Clement keep the Swans in the Premier League after clinching 26 points from the final 18 games.

In fact, his 15 goals proved vital, including two injury-time goals to help defeat Crystal Palace 5-4; three more doubles to see off Liverpool (3-2), Burnley (3-2) and Sunderland (3-0), plus a critical winner against Everton (1-0).

Having secured Swansea's top-flight status for a seventh consecutive season, it only looked a matter of time before his talents would be snapped up elsewhere.

And, despite missing the start of the new season after fracturing his arm in a cycling accident during the summer break, Tottenham eventually came calling and the Spaniard signed a two-year deal at White Hart Lane for an undisclosed fee reported to be anything between £5m and £12m.

He would spend two years at Spurs that included a substitute's appearance in the Champions League final defeat to Liverpool, before moving to Napoli.

"He will be missed by the players, staff and supporters, but I can understand why he would want to take the move at his age," said Clement.

"He has fought his way back to a high level in the latter stages of his career and is joining a big football club.

"I really enjoyed working with Fernando. He was such a big player for the club in the one season he was here. His goals in the latter stages of the season were vital for us to remain in the Premier League."

## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 33

CLUB APPS 35

GOALS 15

## SPANISH SWANS

Lorente had arrived at the Liberty a few days before another Spaniard in that August of 2016, namely **Borja Baston**, in a deal worth £15.5m from Atletico Madrid.

The striker, 23, had scored 18 goals in La Liga while on loan at Eibar.

A Spanish youth international who finished as top scorer at the 2009 Under-17 World Cup and a 2011 European Under-19 Championship winner, he had come through the ranks at Atletico but only made one senior league appearances before making a name for himself at Eibar.

"There is pressure, but it is good pressure," said Borja, full name Borja Gonzalez Tomas.

"I want to repay the transfer fee paid for me with good performances and results.

Hopefully I can score a lot of goals.

"I want to settle and spend several years here. I am very happy to be here. I am eager to contribute to the success of the team."

With a four-year contract under his belt, he started the season on the bench and scored his first goal in October in a 3-2 defeat at Arsenal in new manager Bradley's first game in charge.

He struggled to force his way into the team though after just a handful of league starts that debut season and he was loaned to Málaga in La Liga for a year.

Both Swansea and Malaga were relegated that season and Borja found himself on loan again for another year, this time at Alaves.

He finally returned to Swansea at the start of the 2019-20 season, although the club made it clear that they needed to offload the high-earner as they looked to rebalance the books following relegation from the Premier League 12 months earlier.

Borja got off to a great start though and scored his first goal in nearly three years in the opening-day victory over Hull City.

The 27-year-old looked rejuvenated as he notched five Championship goals in as many games.

However, he scored just once after August and soon fell behind loans signings Sam Surridge and Rhian Brewster in the pecking order.

And, with his contract due to expire in the summer, the club didn't stand in his way when Premier League Aston Villa made an enquiry on transfer deadline day in January and he moved on a free transfer having made 38 league appearances and scored seven goals.



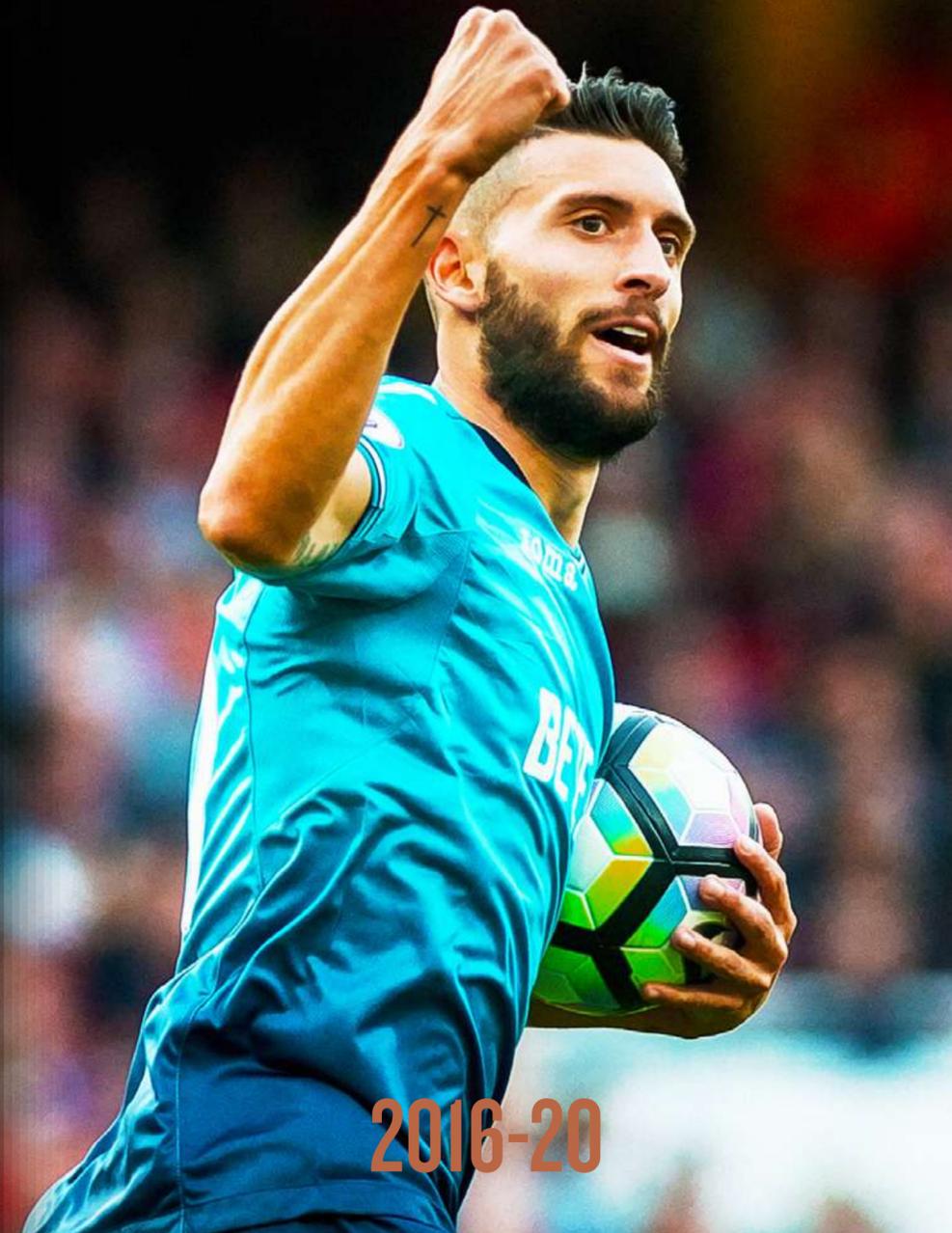
## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 38

CLUB APPS 41

GOALS 7

# BORJA BASTON



# ROQUE MESA



## SPANISH SWANS



"I saw Roque a number of times in La Liga," said Rangel after his unveiling.

"The game that really stands out for me was that match at Real Madrid. When you see a midfielder who isn't the tallest but is running the show against world-class players who have won the World Cup and Champions League, it gives you an indication of his quality.

"Hopefully he can show his quality in the Premier League and help us to achieve something special."

Mesa certainly had high hopes of hitting those heights again.

"I like Swansea. My family like it too. It's a calm place – a very good place to play football – and I am happy here," he said.

"The Premier League is very different from La Liga. At Las Palmas, it's always tiki-taka, tiki-taka – calm and tranquil play.

"In the Premier League it's different, it's box-to-box and it's very quick. For me it's not easy to get used to because I am used to a different kind of football. But I will try to adapt as soon as possible because I like the Premier League very much."

His debut came against Manchester United at the Liberty Stadium in the August, but the man who vowed not to shave off his 1920s film star-like moustache until he earned an international cap for Spain never became a regular in the side.

He joined Sevilla on loan before completing a permanent move having made just 11 league appearances for the Swans. He is currently on loan at CD Leganes in the top-flight in his homeland.

His departure, and that of Borja, brought Swansea's remarkable two-decade Spanish connection to a close – for now at least – without a sombrero in sight!



## STATS

LEAGUE APPS 11

CLUB APPS 16

GOALS 0

The club's final Spanish recruit, **Roque Mesa**, had been and gone by the time Borja made his surprise move to the Midlands.

Mesa was born in Gran Canaria and developed his career in Levante's youth team before going on to play over 50 games in the first team.

Spells at Huracan, Tenerife B and finally Las Palmas followed where the midfielder helped guide them into La Liga for the first time in 13 years.

He became a regular performer in the Spanish top division over the following two seasons before the Swans came calling in July 2017 with £11m.



# SPANISH SWANS 2003-20



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