

[Transcript] SmartLess / Listen Now: Sports Explains the World

When we think of sports stories, we tend to think of tales of epic on-the-field glory or incredible against all odds comeback stories, but what about the moments that don't make the front page?

Well, on the new podcast, Sports Explains the World.

You'll hear some of the wildest and most surprising sports stories you've never heard.

Like the teenager who wrote a fake Wikipedia page for a young athlete and then watched as a real team fell for his prank.

As a kid, Kieran Morris loved pulling pranks to fool the press.

Then when England played Honduras in a friendly soccer match, he found a young player on the Honduran side and inflated his stats on Wikipedia to equal those of a young Messi and Ronaldo. Stats no one should have believed.

But when a real Major League team bids \$1 million on the player, Kieran starts to wonder how harmless his fun really was.

I'm about to play a clip from Sports Explains the World.

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So here goes.

When I was 13, me and my best friend got really into prank calls.

We were obsessed with this comedian, a guy called Chris Morris.

We cleared through his TV shows, then hunted down his radio calls.

We even joined his fan forum.

Morris had this unbelievable knack for getting his subjects on the hook and tying them up in knots.

Time and again he'd trick politicians, TV stars and athletes into saying shocking, unbelievable things.

Morris was a genius.

All his tricks and pranks, even the really stupid ones, had a deeper meaning, exposing just how shady and self-serving Britain's elites could be.

I on the other hand, was not a genius.

I was just a kid, and I didn't perceive the depth in Morris's humour.

The only thing me and my friends learned from him was that you could just phone people up and lie to them for fun.

Our next target, naturally, was football.

In the few crazy months of the summer transfer window, the whole sport becomes a hive of rumours and whispers.

We knew that we could prey on some gullible journalists craving their next scoop.

So we hatched a rumour that was tailored to catch a report's eye.

Surprising enough to be funny, but not so far-fetched as to be ridiculous.

The Chris Morris sweet spot.

For us, that was the veteran French centre-back William Gallas, swapping Arsenal for the unglamorous

Birmingham city.

First, we made a fake booking at a fancy hotel under Gallas's name.

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Then, we called all the local papers and told them that Gallas was about to sign for Birmingham, having heard from our friend at the hotel reception desk.

The bait was set.

Now, all we had to do was wait.

The next morning, Birmingham's manager, Alex McLeish, was quizzed by the anchors on SkySports News and forced to deny an interest in signing Gallas.

No, no, nothing like that, I've got two young centre-halves and it's not the right move for me, I need to spend my money on other positions to improve things.

We laughed our heads off.

The whole scheme began to feel like a little teenage sideskill, like forging a grade or flashing a fake ID, dumb, slightly illegal but somehow pretty forgivable.

And now we'd made a dent with the British press, we wanted to go even bigger.

So this time, instead of picking someone who was already famous, we decided to use our skills to make our own superstar.

It was 2012, the summer of the London Olympics, and my friend and I were watching Honduras take on Moroccan.

Playing in the midfield that day was Lopez.

We'd never heard of him before, but reading Wikipedia, we found that he was 20, had just broken into the national side, and played for CD Olimpia, a professional club in Honduras. Perfect, we thought.

Alex Lopez looked like our new star.

Our plan was to try and sell him to an English club that had signed a lot of Hondurans, Wigan Athletic.

But before we did that, we needed to give him a makeover.

Diving into his Wikipedia page, we turned three career goals into 11, and added 20 new assists for good measure.

We gave him fake trials at big clubs like Napoli, Malaga and Tottenham Hotspur.

And to top it all off, we wrote that Olympia's fans had given him a nickname, the Honduran Maradona.

His profile was complete, so we followed the Galas playbook, phoning newspapers and pretending to be journalists, agents, club doctor, or even a friend of the club doctor.

By the end of the night, we duped the Times of London, one of the biggest newspapers in the UK, to print our nonsense.

Wigan Athletic have agreed a £2.5 million deal for Alexander Lopez.

The fake story even made it back to the papers in Honduras.

We were unstoppable.

We'd done it again.

Over the next year, we kept boosting Lopez's online profile.

Soon enough, Lopez had 18 goals and 34 assists, having barely reached his 20s.

Figures that put him alongside Messi and Ronaldo.

Figures that nobody would, or should, have believed.

Then, just over a year after the Times fell for our prank, we saw a press release from an American MLS club, the Houston Dynamo, that blew our minds.

The Dynamo were proud to announce the signing of a young international with a bright future

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for a transfer fee of a million dollars.

This player had, wait for it, 18 goals and 34 assists, and he would, like any mercurial playmaker, be wearing the number 10 shirt for the Dynamo.

On their homepage was a smiling Alex Lopez, and fan boards and forums were crazy with excitement about the arrival of the Honduran Maradona.

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