

JURADO HOSTILITY UNWARRANTED

BY JOE YOUNG

In the last few months José Manuel Jurado has undertaken the role of booby from some segments of the Vicarage Road faithful. Previous winners of this prestigious accolade have gone to players such as Gavin Mahon (unfairly), John Eustace (also unfairly) and Jordan Stewart (fair enough).

Arguably, the much quoted statistic of zero goals and zero assists this season does suggest that he has been a disappointment, especially from our marquee creative signing of the summer.

However, due to the form of Troy Deeney and Odion Ighalo, Jurado was moved to accommodate them and rather than being the primary creative spark, was shifted out into the left midfield position.

In his first season at Vicarage Road, Deeney was asked to play in the right wing position for the entire season and scored a measly three goals. He was derided by a lot of fans. Fast-forward to 2016 and almost 100 goals later, Troy is a Watford legend: a complete striker played in his best position.

Instead of receiving the ball in the centre and driving at centre backs, Jurado has been forced to learn an uncomfortable new position with a defensive edge where keeping the ball is more important than trying to create a chance. This is not like the case of Jordan Stewart, who is remembered for his unfortunate penchant for carrying out step-overs whilst leaving the ball behind and was rightly criticised.

Another example of this is Almen Abdi; a heralded attacking force for three years in the Championship, he only has one goal to his name and no assists.

Has Almen Abdi become a poor player overnight? Certainly not. But due to his form over the last three years this statistical 'evidence' has gone unpunished on social media and in the stands. Abdi has had to adapt his game to play a defensive, wide midfield role. When the attacking responsibility falls on two red-hot strikers, there is a lesser need for a creative spark from midfield and a further need to keep possession whilst being defensively adept to accommodate the two players in advanced positions.

Quique Sánchez Flores is a defensive coach; he expects all of his players to track back and defend from the front. The 4-2-3-1 formation is more often than not a 4-4-1-1; the wide midfielders are expected to provide cover for their fullbacks at all times. Flores began his career at Watford by making sure that they were firm at the back before focusing on an attacking element. This tactic does harm creative players such as Jurado and Abdi but it is, at the end

of the day, easier to score one goal to win at 0-0 than it is to win after having conceded; this solidarity is one of the primary reasons for our impressive position this season.

Furthermore, Sanchez Flores has been in charge for less than six months and is still tinkering with player positions and the formation. For a while, Ighalo was positioned in the hole and Deeney was alone up front. Flores astutely swapped them around after a lack of goal threat and has not not looked back since. After two losses in a row against Swansea and Sunderland, he once again changed the formation to more of a 4-3-2-1 or even a 4-3-1-2, allowing Jurado to perform in his natural position as a central attacking midfielder.

When played as the primary creative outlet in a central position, as Jurado was against Newcastle, his talent is obvious. Rightly voted man of the match, he was a constant attacking threat. Linking with the midfield and the two strikers, he was a genuine joy to watch as he seamlessly glided across the pitch, David Silva-like, putting in through balls and one fabulous cross in particular which Ighalo should have done better with. He was also directly involved with both of the goals.

Regardless of any of this, when you look back at the first XI five years ago in a game against Cardiff (which we lost), our most creative player was Stephen McGinn. Not a bad player by any means but nothing compared to the pedigree we are bringing in now. To deride one of the most clearly talented players that the Pozzo family have brought in seems ridiculous and lacking in perspective.

Rather, we are extremely fortunate to be in a position where a player as talented as Jurado could even be considered a failure.

Joe Young has been a committed patron of Vicarage Road since a 0-0 draw with Aston Villa in Watford's last season in the Premier League, where the Hornets finished in a very unspectacular 20th position. He has not looked back since.

