

Senrab FC: Backwards By Name, Forwards By Nature

When you think about your sunday league journey, what comes to mind? Are you lacing up your boots that are still pitted in last weeks mud? Is it how time seems to freeze as the kid in the year and waist size above you is already off the ground with no intention of winning the ball cleanly? Or perhaps it's the half dad, half Diego Simeone stood pitch side screaming bloody murder because you've misplaced a through ball in the 93rd minute although being 5-1 up. I get it, Mr Francis, you don't rate me as an impact sub but I'm trying my best. Although most football lovers have tried their hands at sunday league during their childhood and teenage years, our experiences differ.

I was a regular benchwarmer turned occasional starter with an appetite for the outrageous. I'd don my electric blue vapours with missing studs and attempt bicycle kicks from outside the area with a less than devastating effect because it was fun. There is seldom anything more harmonious than playing football with your mates. That was my sunday league. But it's a slightly different story if you're remotely talented. There is a team in south east London that is drenched in history and success. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the world of Senrab FC.

Founded in 1961, Senrab FC have gained nationwide acclaim for having one of the most successful sunday league teams for young, aspiring footballers. Equipped with the famous red and black stripes, similar to that of a 1990 AC Milan side, these 30 teams across the age groups of 5-17 are a hotbed for raw talent. At Senrab, which is Barnes backwards on account of them training near Barnes Street upon their foundation, they breed quality. Senrab aren't just a sunday league team, they're a stepping stone into professional football. They are the dream club for the kids who know they will make it. At Senrab, aptitude is respected and nurtured.

The list of former players reads like a past and present directory into success. Boasting such names as John Terry, Sol Campbell and Jermaine Defoe. In Senrab's illustrious 58-year existence, over 170 players from their ranks have turned professional. That's over 3 players a year. For such an unprecedented record for eventual professionals, it's hard to look past the amazing work of the coaches. It's not only the players of Senrab FC that springboard into long, successful careers. Alan Curbishley and Dario Gradi have occupied the Senrab technical area long before they were household names.

Let's jump to alternate reality for a second if you will. The year is somewhere between 1960 and 2010 and, unleashed, is the team you see in the picture. They're all hitting their peaks at exactly the same time and play a simple, renowned 4-1-2-1-2. Imagine how far that team could go.

Europa League? Champions League? Title winners? The eagle-eyed amongst you will have noticed the lack of a goalkeeper in the mock formation. If there is a goalkeeper who turned professional after laying for Senrab, I can't find him. To counteract the lack of goalkeeper, I moved Ugo Ehiogu to CDM. If there's a loose end, he'll tie it up.

It gives the kids who play for Senrab FC a clear and reachable path into their footballing future. Much like Southgate has given the youth of England a route to the first team, the coaches who devote their time to these kids are doing something similar. This club is ran like a mini professional outfit. They build training regimes around playing from the back and keeping possession plus detailed looks into past games and actively trying to alter tactics to ensure they're progressing.



Training is equally essential. My sunday league training wasn't strict on attendance or even heavy on tactics. We'd meet up to discuss who is texting who and throw around predictions for the champions league game that would be on when you got in. At Senrab, carefully orchestrated drills are the centrepiece of the affair with the juvenile prospects aiming to better themselves with every session. They aim to grow and advance at every opportunity and learn the importance of hard work and application early doors.

Making the comparison with education, a school offering academically what Senrab offer in experience and training, you would expect tuition fees to be high. Remaining firm on not increasing their subscription fees, they're giving underprivileged kids the chance to get on a football pitch. In a climate where grass roots football is feeling economical effects, it's no wonder clubs like Senrab are folding. With pitch prices, officials fees and kit prices rising, we can expect more of the same.

Senrab are the lit beacon guiding any footballer from any background home. They're devoted to giving everyone a chance to do what they love in an environment where they know they will thrive. Find me something more pure. Without the selfless commitment of the volunteers at Senrab we wouldn't of had some of the Premier League's best. You may see Senrab as the mecca for all the talented youth but what is more remarkable is the passion of the society

behind it. Not swayed by money or fame, these heroes have swapped their capes for something grander, the opportunity to give any kid a chance to fulfil their dreams. That is fucking beautiful.