

The Emirates FA Cup Semi-Final

EXCLUSIVE

THE BOSNIAN BLADE

Anel Ahmedhodzic on his
Cup Final ambitions

BLADE RUNNER

ILIMAN NDIAYE:
THE RISING BALLER
FROM NON-LEAGUE
TO WEMBLEY

THE GAFFER

Paul Heckingbottom
on facing the Premier
League champions

DOYLE & MCATEE

The impact of the
missing City loanees

BLADES' ROAD TO WEMBLEY

From Millwall to Blackburn, via the
National and Premier Leagues

Sheffield UNITED

£5 | 16:45, SATURDAY 22 APRIL 2023
WEMBLEY STADIUM, CONNECTED BY EE

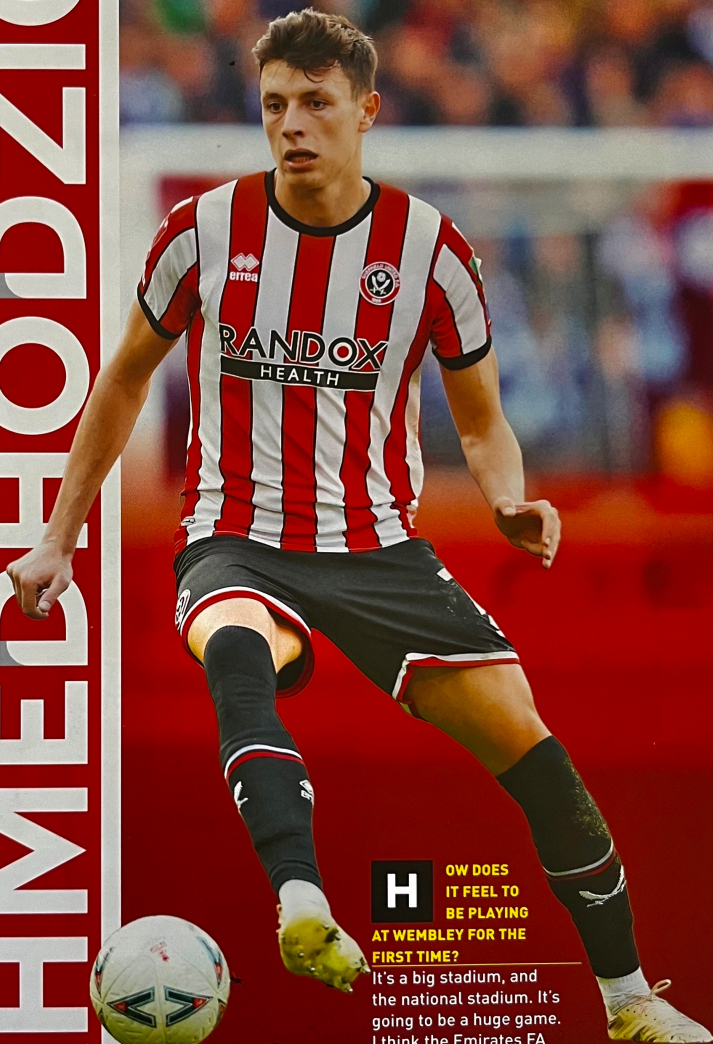
WEMBLEY
CONNECTED BY EE



ANEL

DEFENDER – AND MANCHESTER CITY ADMIRER – ANEL AHMEDHODZIC IS IN GREAT FORM, AND HE CAN'T WAIT TO TEST HIMSELF AGAINST 'THE BEST'

AHMEDHODZIC



HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE PLAYING AT WEMBLEY FOR THE FIRST TIME?

It's a big stadium, and the national stadium. It's going to be a huge game. I think the Emirates FA Cup is the biggest cup in England. All over Europe, people know about it. I can't wait for the game. >>



"I JUST WANT TO GO PLAY. I LOVE PLAYING, AND THE WAY WE PLAY HERE I CAN JOIN IN ATTACKS, WHICH IS FUN FOR ME"

AHMEDHODZIC
15
ULTIMATE CHAMPION

Ahmedhodzic picks out Ilman Ndiaye as a star man

WITH THE CALIBRE OF YOUR OPPOSITION, A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY WRITTEN OFF SHEFFIELD UNITED. HOW DO YOU APPROACH A GAME AS AN UNDERDOG? WILL YOU USE THIS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE?

Yes of course. I mean, all the pressure is on them. That is the beauty of football. Anything can happen.

YOU'VE ALREADY BEATEN A PREMIER LEAGUE SIDE IN TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN TAKE FROM THAT VICTORY THAT WILL HELP YOU TODAY?

There was a big difference in the tempo and the way that the game was played compared to the games that I've played in the Championship. I think that that experience and that win against Spurs, we want to take it with us.

DO YOU THINK THE EXPERIENCE THAT YOU HAVE GAINED AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE ACROSS THE TOP LEAGUES IN EUROPE, AS WELL AS IN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, PREPARES YOU FOR BIG GAMES LIKE THIS?

Of course, you get to learn a lot from your first games. In the big matches you get to learn how good the quality is, how good the players are, and that you need to stay focused all the time. All that experience is very useful to take with you in these types of ties.

AS A TEAM YOU HAVE BIG AMBITIONS TO BE PLAYING TOP-FLIGHT FOOTBALL NEXT SEASON. ARE YOU LOOKING TO MAKE A BIG IMPRESSION AND PROVE YOU CAN TEST YOURSELF AGAINST TEAMS LIKE MANCHESTER CITY?

I just want to go out there and play and enjoy myself. I think every game we try and prove ourselves, regardless of who we're playing. I just want to play. I love it, and the way we play here I can join in attacks, which is fun for me.

Manchester City are probably

one of the best, if not the best, in the Premier League, so it's definitely going to be a good test, but they don't reflect the other teams in the league as much because they're just so good. I think it's going to be an amazing test and challenge for us.

YOU'VE SAID PREVIOUSLY THAT YOU HAVE FOLLOWED THE CAREER OF FELLOW BOSNIAN EDIN DZEKO AT MANCHESTER CITY, AND EVEN EXPRESSED AN INTEREST TO PLAY FOR YOUR OPPONENTS IN THE FUTURE. SO HOW DOES IT FEEL TO ACTUALLY COME UP AGAINST THEM?

I have followed City since I was a kid. The first player that got me to follow them was Dzeko. But another player that I really admired, and I think he was one of the best midfielders, was Yaya Toure. It's just going to be a great feeling to play against them.

JAMES MCATEE AND TOMMY DOYLE ARE BOTH CUP-TIED. HAVING PLAYED SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN YOUR SUCCESS THIS SEASON, THEY WILL OBVIOUSLY BE A BIG LOSS ON THE PITCH, BUT WHAT DOES THEIR ABSENCE MEAN FOR TEAM MORALE?

I think they're both great players. They've definitely made an impact. Tommy's goal got us to the semi-final and McAtee's creativity on the pitch is going to be missed. We're going to miss them of course, but we are a good squad of players and I think we have players to do the job even though the job will be really hard.

THE LOAN PLAYERS OFTEN OCCUPY THE HEADLINES. WHO DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR?

There's one player. Ilman [Ndiaye]. I think he's going to have a good game. He always does.

Fellow Bosnian Edin Dzeko



YOU ALWAYS LOOK LIKE YOU'RE ENJOYING YOURSELF OUT ON THE PITCH. WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT PLAYING IN THIS SHEFFIELD UNITED SIDE?

Probably that the coach wants me to attack every time. In my whole career, I've been missing that. It just feels great to have that freedom. To start attacks, to build them up and then to join in. It does take a lot of energy. It does make me tired during the week, but it pays off. It makes me happy on the pitch. It makes me happy off the pitch. I'm really enjoying myself in this role, and this team.

YOU COME ACROSS VERY ASSURED AND CONFIDENT, BOTH ON AND OFF THE PITCH. DO YOU EVER DREAM OF BEING CAPTAIN ONE DAY, AND WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE AS A LEADER?

One day in the future I would like to be a captain. But I don't really see the captain's armband as a big thing, because on the pitch you need to have eleven leaders. All the players need to take responsibility for leading the team. If you just see the captain as the leader, normally that team won't do well. I'm not too fussed about the captain's armband or anything. Maybe in the future, I would like to be, but I think helping your teammates out, communicating, being a part of the team, and everyone leading. I think that's the key to success.

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