

Premiership Headline Makers: TEDDY SHERINGHAM

**By Graham Lister, Chief Football Correspondent,
China Monitor (UK) Sports Division**

Teddy Sheringham has achieved the remarkable distinction of picking up both of English Football's prestigious Player of the Year awards for his performances this season.

The Football Writers Association voted Sheringham their Footballer of the Year, making him the oldest ever recipient of this honour at the age of 35; then his fellow players – the Professional Footballers Association – elected him their Player of the Season.

The dual award reflects one of the most productive campaigns in Sheringham's long career. His 21 goals in all competitions (15 in the Premiership) for Manchester United have been a major factor in another successful season for the Old Trafford club. But with Sheringham it is not just his scoring record that makes him so highly valued, but his all-round contribution.

Although never the quickest player on the field, his sharp footballing brain consistently buys him vital split-seconds in which to take up a threatening position or lay-off a perceptive pass to a colleague. He is sometimes described as a thinking-man's footballer; certainly there is often much intelligence in his play. It is this quality that has prompted Sven-Goran Eriksson to recall Sheringham to the England squad and team after an absence of two years.

Sheringham had been an automatic choice as Alan Shearer's striking partner during the Euro '96 reign of Terry Venables – the manager who bought him for Spurs from Nottingham Forest in a 1992 transfer whose financial details have always been shrouded by controversy.

Sheringham had scored 14 times in 42 League games for Forest, having joined them in 1991 from his first club, Millwall – for whom he scored 93 League goals in 220 matches.

At White Hart Lane he was idolised by the Tottenham fans, one of the genuine stars in an under-achieving team, and it was a big blow to them when he requested a transfer, unhappy with the club's perceived lack of

trophy-winning prospects. He d scored 75 goals in 166 League appearances for Spurs.

What made his departure in the Summer of 1997 harder to bear for the fans was that he moved to Manchester United who had just won the Premiership for the fourth time in five years. Sir Alex Ferguson saw Sheringham as the replacement for Eric Cantona, who had just retired. It was a step-up for the player, but one that put heavy expectations on his shoulders.

His first season at Old Trafford was a little disappointing for the ambitious Sheringham, as Arsenal (whom he loathed from his Tottenham days) eclipsed United to claim the Premiership and FA Cup double. In his second season there (1998-99), his appearances were restricted as Ferguson deployed the rotation system with his four strikers. Sheringham was often relegated to the bench as Dwight Yorke, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Andy Cole grabbed the goals and the glory.

However, the campaign was to have a distinctly silver lining for Teddy, who was a goalscoring substitute in both the FA Cup and European Cup Finals as United already Premiership champions again - swept to an unprecedented treble. At last Sheringham had won the medals he craved.

He has since added two more Premiership winners medals and has proved to be one of Ferguson s more astute purchases. It is perhaps surprising, then, that Sheringham s immediate future remains unsettled. He has been offered a one-year extension to his United contract, but has not signed it, the implication being that he would favour a longer deal. His hesitation has alerted a host of clubs at home and abroad, including West Ham and his old club Tottenham whose new manager Glenn Hoddle is an admirer.

Despite his age, they are attracted by the player s enduring ability to link the play and create danger in and around the opposition s penalty area. His dual personal honours for the 2000-01 season will have done nothing to lessen his market value.