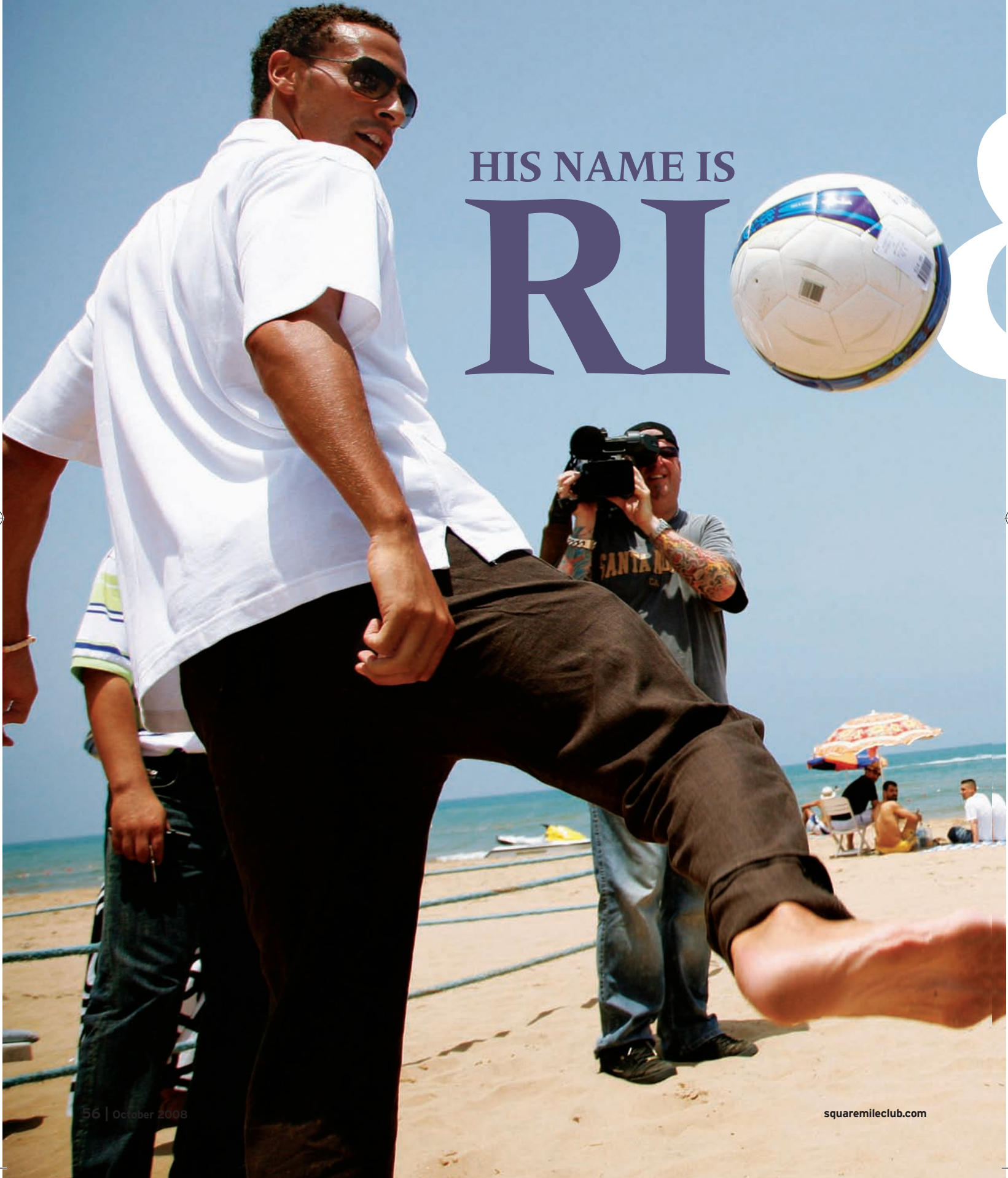




HIS NAME IS

RI



& HE TAKES CHANCES ON THE SAND

Ginetta Vedrickas joins Rio Ferdinand in Morocco where he's invested his millions into a new beachfront resort

GROWING UP IN grimy Peckham, south London, England footballer Rio Ferdinand could never have imagined that one day he would own a property portfolio around the world let alone captain the England squad. He may have missed out on the captaincy for the time being, but today Ferdinand's homes include his main residence in Cheshire, a penthouse overlooking the Thames, homes in the Caribbean, Florida and more recently in Saida, Morocco, where he's recently invested more than £2m in a beach complex, where I joined him earlier this summer.

Missing 2008 European Championships was obviously a huge disappointment to Ferdinand and our football-obsessed nation.

It gave Rooney time to enjoy his nuptials, an event reportedly not attended by Ferdinand, who instead chose to check up on his investments' progress.

The evening before flying to Morocco, we are introduced at a party thrown in Ferdinand's »





FERDINAND FACTS +

ON...

CHILDHOOD HOBBIES

Believe it or not, I did ballet for two years when I was younger; it's helped me in my game – it wasn't all about looking at girls in their tutus

HIS HOMETOWN

I grew up in Peckham and I love it, I still go back as I've got family nearby

FOOD

I love a roast dinner; you can't beat it

RESTAURANTS

Scalini's or Nobu are the best... but Fosters fish'n'chip shop in Alderly Edge comes pretty close

HIS FAVOURITE TV CHEF

I love Nigella and could watch her all the time... while she's cooking I put it on freeze frame

Beach & Golf Resort, close to the Algerian border, reveals an empty, rural landscape, which is a far cry from its glitzy Spanish neighbour across the Med. The streets of Puerto Banus heave with signs of ostentatious wealth and would-be WAGs stalk bars and clubs in pursuit of cash-rich footballers.

Yet this part of Morocco sees mainly local holidaymakers, few women on its beaches, and has a traditional way of life which is worlds apart from Mallorca's Magaluf, known as Shagaluf, where Ferdinand reveals that he holidayed as a lad: "I loved it and used to drink at Linekers bar, it was where all us eighteen year olds wanted to hang out."

The adult Ferdinand cuts a more sedate figure and wants a holiday base where he can bring his girlfriend, Rebecca Ellison and his beloved son Lorenz (with whom he lives in prime footballer territory, Alderley Edge).

"I've been to Morocco five times now including Marrakech and here, but I like the idea that this area is the *real* Morocco." Footballers aren't noted for their financial acumen yet Ferdinand reveals that he's long been a keen investor in the UK and abroad. Much of his portfolio has been sourced through New Era Overseas, an investment company set up by Jamie Moralee, a former professional footballer who played for Crystal Palace before retiring aged 33. Moralee explains why he changed tack: "When I retired there was no help. You only have to look at sporting celebrities like Mike Tyson and Paul Gascoigne to see what can happen. Most footballers start on £30 a week yet by the time they are seventeen they're on 〰"

〰 honour by Sean Cusack of developers Property Logic who are building the Moroccan development. Cusack lives in a large villa at La Zagaleta, a private country estate on a hilltop outside Marbella. A picture perfect setting, we watch deer leap through the undergrowth and spy enormous country piles in the distance, which belong to Marbella's wealthy movers and shakers, including Simon Cowell. There's little time to grill Ferdinand who happily poses for photos and signs autographs for the guests but the next day we take a private jet across the bay to Morocco.

Leaving glitzy Marbella behind, forty minutes later we land at the tiny airport of Oujda. As one of England's best-known players, even the Moroccan locals queue to shake the amenable defender's hand and yet

King Akiolu crowned Rio Ferdinand 'Chief Fiwagboola' which means 'character maketh wealth'

again he signs autographs and has his photo taken for all who ask. This may be Africa but Ferdinand's profile is high here and, on a recent visit to Nigeria, where he is involved in setting up a sporting academy, King Akiolu crowned Ferdinand 'Chief Fiwagboola' whose translation means 'character maketh wealth'. The 40-minute drive to Le Jardin de Fleur



» £20,000 and don't know what to do – they end up blowing it on cars and watches.”

Ferdinand, who is reputed to have a personal fortune of more than £25m, is determined to have a secure future and explains why property is still the best investment long-term: “Four years ago, I bought apartments in Florida and in Barbados which have done well. I'm putting a lot of trust in Jamie but I've known him since I was about seventeen and he made me, along with my mates John Terry and Joe Cole, a lot of money. That breeds trust but you've got to be prepared to hold onto things long term.”

Terry, Neville and other international players such as Vidic, Yokubu and Van der Saar are all investors at the resort, which, when complete by 2010, will boast a marina, three 18-hole golf courses, sports facilities, restaurants and five star hotels including the Barcelo Hotel owned by King Mohammed VI who is backing the development.

Ferdinand has bought several apartments and townhouses for investment plus a five-bedroomed villa for his own use: “I've had a



hand in designing it and plan on spending as much time as I can here with my family and friends. It will be an open house.”

Still under construction, Ferdinand seems happy with progress and afterwards we head to a typical beachside restaurant where he kicks off his Havaianas and plays football on the scorching white sand with delighted local kids. Saidia may not yet be as sophisticated as

Terry, Neville and international players such as **Vidic** and Van der Saar are all **investors** at the resort

Marrakech but he prefers this unspoilt region: “I love the culture here and the villages are the sorts of places I look forward to exploring. This will be somewhere which will be secure and where I can get some privacy. I plan on keeping it for a long time.”

Privacy is something which Ferdinand obviously gets little of and something which he would never have expected as a young lad growing up in South London. As we board the plane back home, he reminisces about Peckham Rye where he spent hours running and dreaming of his future. “Back then the

FERDINAND FACTS

ON... HIS TV PREFERENCES

I love Big Brother but I'd never appear in a reality programme myself

NIGHTS OUT

It's not a proper night without dancing

HIS FAVOURITE CAR

Bond's Aston Martin DB5

FASHION

For casual, I like Luke; for smart, it has to be Alexander McQueen

HOLIDAYS

St Lucia – where many family members still live to this day – is a beautiful island but I only go in the dry season; I hate waking up in the morning and seeing it's raining. I also like trying unusual destinations such as Croatia and obviously Morocco

SAIDIA

It's got sun, sea and sand so it ticks all the right boxes

HIS NEXT PROPERTY INVESTMENT

I'm thinking about the Bahamas

ON MISSING OUT ON THE CAPTAINCY

I would have loved to have been captain but being vice is an honour still

only thing I was worried about was where my next pair of trainers was coming from. I dreamed of living no further than leafy Dulwich Village a couple of miles away.” ■
New Era Overseas, 01732 744 270, nealimited.com