

Chelsea Is the Luckiest Team in Football

By [John Leicester](#)

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Lots of money, lots of luck and players who didn't care about winning ugly, just so long as they won, turned Chelsea into the champions of Europe Saturday night.

The money, of course, is Roman Abramovich's. The billionaire finally got his hands on the shiny trophy with big ears he so coveted. A bargain at £800 million (\$1.2 billion) and counting.

That's roughly how much of his wealth the Russian has poured into the London club he bought in 2003, filling the heads of Chelsea fans with dreams of such special nights and scenes like these.

Striker Didier Drogba, scorer of the late goal that kept Chelsea in the game in normal time and of the penalty that won it after extra time ended with a 1-1 draw, running across the pitch with the Champions League trophy in his arms and delight on his face.

Tens of thousands of Bayern Munich fans, forming a wall of red and white, silenced and shellshocked in their own magnificent stadium.

Chelsea now has the bragging rights of being the first club from London to claw its way to the top of Europe. Tottenham, Arsenal — are you watching?

There were times in the Champions League final when Abramovich may have wished that he had bought another superyacht instead. At least it would have been prettier than a lot of the football played by his expensive team.

But there's no law against playing ugly football. Chelsea didn't travel to Munich to dazzle as Barcelona and Real Madrid surely would have, had those Spanish clubs not foundered in the semifinals.

No, Chelsea came to right the wrong of the tear-streaked night in Moscow in 2008, when Chelsea captain John Terry slipped on the soggy turf and hit the post in the decisive penalty shoot-out won by Manchester United.

So what this final lacked in beauty, it made up for in drama and absorbing story lines.

Like that of Terry, forced to watch from the sidelines because of his stupid red card earned in the semifinals, meaning that he couldn't make amends for 2008 himself.

Or Chelsea manager Roberto di Matteo, the stand-in who succeeded where the likes of Jose Mourinho and Carlo Ancelotti failed when they were at Chelsea.

Abramovich has burned his way through seven managers in nine years, his impatience for success costing him tens of millions of pounds. Di Matteo only ended up in charge because Abramovich ditched the last manager, Andre Villas-Boas, in March. So is Chelsea the luckiest team in football? There are those who will argue that it is.

Chelsea was the underdog and played like it, too. To borrow a phrase from Mourinho, Chelsea parked the airplane, letting the Germans come at them in waves and waiting for opportunities to counterattack.

The victory may well have been the last big European hurrah for the nucleus of the team upon which Chelsea built a remarkable decade of success, with three Premier League crowns, four FA Cups and now the Champions League in the Abramovich era.

The renovation, both in Chelsea's style of play and in its roster, which Villas-Boas was hired at great expense to perform this season but which came to a juddering halt when Abramovich pulled the rug from under him, still lies ahead.

Chelsea also has work to comply with UEFA's drive to wean clubs off huge financial losses and generous sugar daddies like Abramovich. And it needs a new stadium larger than the 41,800-capacity Stamford Bridge, which is only the eighth-

largest Premier League venue.

But all that is in the future.

The here and now is that shiny trophy. Chelsea are the champions of Europe.

John Leicester is an international sports columnist for The Associated Press, which published this comment.

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