



# Teens dreaming of Premiership success



Zieler

**T**hey're 17 and the world is at their feet – quite literally. Ron-robot Zieler and Tomas Pekhart have moved to England in search of their dream - to play football in the best league in the world.

But with potentially two decades of professional football ahead of them, their aspirations for Premiership glory are on hold, if only for a couple of years.

Zieler, an agile German keeper currently at Manchester United and Pekhart, a towering Czech striker who will join Tottenham Hotspur in July, are beginning their careers in the reserve and youth teams as they settle into their new surroundings.

The duo have taken an enormous step by moving abroad at such a young age but are managing to take it all in their stride.

They see their transfers as opportunities that were too good to miss rather than expecting a big money move later in their careers.

"Of course it was a difficult decision because it is not easy for a 16-year-old to leave his family or home," says Zieler, showing maturity beyond his years.

"When I first came over to Manchester United and I saw the club and the people, then the decision was made easier."

6ft 2in frontman Pekhart is equally nonchalant about leaving his homeland.

"When I was younger I moved from my home to Prague to play for Slavia," he said

"This move is just the same for me."

Both players describe their moves to England as the highlight of their careers so far but both find it difficult to describe the emotions they felt when

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Ron-robot Zieler

they found out that the clubs were interested in signing them.

"I was very happy, it was a big step to make at 15 and I can't explain exactly what I was feeling it was just unbelievable," said shot-stopper Zieler.

Pekhart was just as elated but had a more professional first-reaction.

"I felt it was the right deal for my career," he said

"Slavia told me: 'if you go to any club in England, you must go to Tottenham' (because of business links with Enic plc who have shares in both clubs) but this was good for me because this was what I wanted to do."

Despite signing for massive clubs, the players, who have long and successful careers ahead of them, share a simple short-term ambition - they want to progress.

"We have to train hard to improve," said Zieler.

But they are fully aware of the stubborn realities of football and realise what is important to succeed.

"Each player must work hard on every aspect of their game for their whole career," said Pekhart.

Surprisingly, with Premiership clubs continuing to sign young, foreign talent, the pair are the only two English-based players who will get to showcase their skills at the UEFA European Under-17 Championships Finals 2006.

But while most players are concerned with the number of scouts in the crowd, (who often outnumber the fans) Pekhart and Zieler can concentrate on their own games, safe in the

knowledge that they can return to the Red Devils and Spurs when the tournament is over.

Pekhart summed up the benefits of competing without this added pressure when he remarked: "Each player can see the agents and scouts here but this is not a worry for me and I can play my best all the time."

Zieler feels the same: "I play for United and I just try to give my all, it doesn't matter if there are scouts. There is no extra pressure, it's just normal for me."

After watching impressive performances throughout the tournament, it is easy for the media to label youngsters such as Pekhart and Zieler with the non-descript tag of being 'the next big thing'.

But in doing so, they are putting the players under immense pressure to prove themselves.

When asked about a description of himself on the latest Football Manager game, which describes Zieler as 'the next Oliver Kahn', the former FC Koln keeper is dismissive.

"That would never have come from me."

"When Kahn was in good shape and form I liked him very much. I

thought he was a great goalkeeper," he adds.

"But I don't try to model myself on him. I am my own personality and I decide who I want to be."

It is often difficult to

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Tomas Pekhart

understand how a youngster must feel living in country where they have no family for over a thousand miles, only a few people speaking their

native tongue, and just a football club to turn to when they need help.

Not that the club doesn't look after their young prospects.

Thanks to United, Zieler has lived with an English family and two Irish teammates since his move to Manchester over a year ago from his hometown of Cologne.

"I think it is important that I live with an English family because especially at the start it was important for me to stay with people who would look after me."

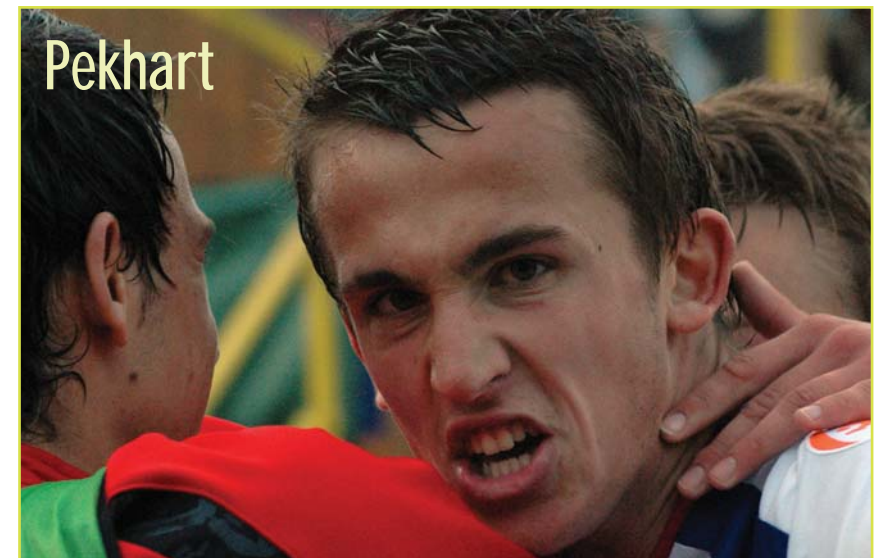
The same can be said for Pekhart, who, when he

completes his move to London in July, will live with alongside one of his elder Spurs compatriots.

For two players with such obvious ability, a move to a Premiership side is a well earned dream-come-true.

By committing to a foreign club they have shown immense devotion both on and off the field throughout the early stages of their careers.

But after completing this massive first step, they can now begin their careers in England, with a common aim of finding their feet in the beautiful English game.



Pekhart