



as the assistant of a top coach abroad instead of working with a top club in Belgium.

About the UAE

The United Arab Emirates is an amazing country. There is nothing which is merely 'good' there; Only the best! Luxury restaurants, the highest skyscrapers, immaculate tidiness, safety and comfort in everything and every way. If you forget your phone in a café, nothing will happen to it. Every thing has been thought of down to the tiniest detail. You check out at a supermarket, and there will be a special person to pack your purchases; and on a parking lot of a shopping mall a porter will hurry to open the door of your car. At a gas station, you don't even need to step out of your car—you simply lower the window and say, "Full tank, please". And oh, the cars there! When in Belgium, I had only seen one Ferrari in my whole life; and in the Emirates I lost count of them. The players on our team, however, were big fans of Rolls-Royce, and two guys favored Lamborghini. My apartment in Abu-Dhabi was a luxury four-bedroom duplex with a private beach.

At the same time, you can never overlook some restrictions and traditions in the Middle East. Say, you are in an elevator, and the women would turn their backs on you, so they can't see the man. It was kind of awkward at first. During the month of Ramadan, we might not eat or drink in public, even when in our car, and we started to train only around 10 in the evening. When the fast was over, the whole country had a great party. In the club, the players had a giant carpet on the floor; and there was lots of delicious food. We sat cross-legged and we were taking the food with our hands. Not that I like eating without knife and fork, but the culture of the

country where you work is always the starting point. Unfortunately, we only stayed in the UAE for seven months. With "Al Jazira" we were second in the league, reached the semi-finals of the two Cups, won the first game of the Asian Champions' League, and then we were let go. That was strange and unexpected, but that's football: one moment you are in, and the next you are out.

About Iran

After "Al Jazira" I had lots of proposals from teams in Belgium, Greece, Sweden, Turkey, Australia, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia, but I kept waiting for something bet-

around waiting for their children to earn them money for some drugs. Now that's nasty.

What was really good was the hospitality of the local people. Notably the fresh fruit, especially pomegranates. And, of course, our team! Iran qualified for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. Once our training was visited by none less than Mahmoud Ahmadi-nejad himself! We were preparing for an extremely important game against South Korea, and there in the sky appeared a helicopter. It landed near the pitch, and the President and his men stepped out. One of the most powerful people in the world greeted us, shook our hands and then... sat

What really upsets me about Russia is the serious gap in the society: the difference between the rich and the poor is tremendous.

ter and special—and it came: the Iranian national team! Working as a foreigner with a national team is a big honor. I assisted the famous Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz. Tehran was the complete opposite of Abu-Dhabi. Lower standard of living, litter in the streets, smog in the air and exhaust fumes. I was living in a big apartment building and was quite safe, but there were guards with Kalashnikov rifles close by our entrance. With all that, living in Iran was physically demanding: the city is situated at 1150 meters above the sea level, and you always felt the high pressure. Besides, men can't wear shorts outdoors even in the hot weather—it's trousers only. Another thing, there are lots of kids in Tehran selling different stuff in the streets. They are running between cars, and their so-called parents are sitting

down on the ground. We all—about 60 people—followed him: we could not look down at the leader. He explained to us how important that game was. Football victories bring happiness and inspire optimism in the people of Iran. A couple of days later I realised that he wasn't exaggerating. Some ten thousand people spent the night on the eve of the match around the stadium waiting for the game. By the afternoon the following day there were 50 thousand spectators at the stadium, and the match was to begin only at 8 in the evening. An hour before the game all 125,000 seats were occupied. The Tehran stadium is one of the largest in the world; and there wasn't a single woman among those people. Iranian women are not allowed to enter football stadiums, though they are big fans. Anyway, it was a fantas-