

REVEALED: Qatar hoaxer – a cautionary tale of delusion, fantasy and lucre (DFL)

By Nick Harris

SJA Internet Sports Writer of the Year

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The story of Robert Beal, also known as “The man who hoaxed The Times,” might be amusing if it did not have such a dark and disturbing underbelly.

The ‘lighter’ side of this extraordinary saga is Beal’s claim to be connected to QSI, the Qatari firm that owns Paris St Germain football club, and his claims he was a senior executive at a Paris-based company, 10Media.

In fact, aged 38, Rob Beal (right) lives with his parents in Sheffield.

He does not represent QSI and never has. To the contrary, a senior QSI source says Beal was served with a ‘cease and desist’ notice in 2011 for pretending to act for QSI in any capacity.

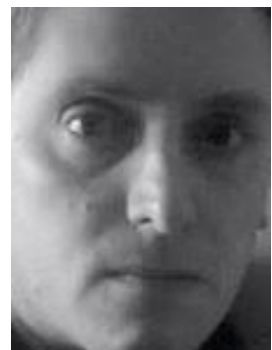
Nor is there any evidence that the media firm Beal purported to run ever existed, except in his imagination.

At one stage Beal advised people to call a UK-based 0845 number to contact 10Media. Calls were answered by a woman with a Rochdale accent. If the caller asked for Beal, he was always ‘in a meeting’.

Several people have told Sportingintelligence they realised the answer was always the same, so they rang the number and asked to speak to themselves. ‘I was told I was in a meeting,’ said one person duped by Beal. ‘Whoever you asked for, they were in a meeting.’

In the first conversation Sportingintelligence had with Beal, on the evening of Wednesday 13 March this year, Beal claimed he was a representative of QSI and said he worked for an offshore consultancy that operates ‘in the shadows’ on behalf of some of the world’s biggest football clubs.

Beal was in the news because he had identified himself via Twitter (@RobBealParis) as a source for what turned out to a hoax story about a ‘Dream Football League’ (DFL) in Qatar. On 12 March, a satirical French website, Cahiers Du Football (CDF), had run a spoof article about a DFL. Sources say Beal had seen that and then ‘briefed’ journalists about what he said was a true story along similar lines, more of which later.



The Times’s story on the DFL, complete with the logo used on CDF, appeared in the paper dated 13 March, and that was followed last Monday, 18 March, by the paper’s mea culpa admission they had been misled.

According to those who know him, Beal has, over time, claimed either verbally and / or in writing to run security companies and to have worked in 'covert ops' in the Middle East. He has also claimed to have worked for intelligence agencies, for the Home Office and for the Foreign Office.

He has, on many occasions, presented himself to journalists as an expert with 'inside' knowledge of sporting stories, particularly related to PSG. Latterly he has said he works for a company called EuroSportsMedia and promotes the idea he is based in Paris by emailing from an account called 'ESM Paris' – albeit from Sheffield and with a co.uk address.

The duped journalists range from people in local newspapers, radio and television to senior reporters for national newspapers, TV stations, other broadcasters and at least one international news agency. There are dozens of them, maybe hundreds indirectly.

It is not known how many stories or broadcasts have been published or aired as a direct result of 'fake' inside information provided by Beal. It is highly likely Beal's information was the basis of far more stories across multiple platforms than one Times story on the DFL.

A number of journalists who have shared their experiences of Beal with Sportingintelligence have requested anonymity either because they have fears of repercussions from Beal or are simply embarrassed that they were duped.

To reiterate: this is the 'lighter' side of the story, of a man acting for reasons not fully clear in a way that has hoodwinked media and other organisations from The Guardian and The Times in London, to Sheffield Wednesday, the Yorkshire Tourist Board, Sky News and others.

The darker side of Beal's story lies in his threats against multiple people living in and around his home city of Sheffield.

Sportingintelligence is aware of a least six people who have reported Beal to the police in the past three years alone.

This website has seen evidence he has been investigated for fraud and, separately, it has been confirmed he appeared in court in Sheffield on 1 June last year in relation to allegations of harassment. A harassment charge against him was dropped by the CPS over the issue of whether a Twitter account being used for malicious purposes – and being operated from his mobile phone – could definitively be proved to be used by him.

None the less he appeared in court, not for the first time, and was bound over to keep the peace for a year. He has been arrested for breaching the terms of that order since then, at least once.

Six of the people known by Sportingintelligence to have reported Beal to the police are:

- An old classmate of Beal called Claire Cleland, and Claire's husband Steven, who was offered a job that didn't exist by Beal in 2011. Both were repeatedly threatened by Beal when they twigged that his job offer was baseless.
- Claire's father, Jack Whitham (below right), a former striker with Sheffield Wednesday (1964-70) and Liverpool (1970-74) among other clubs, who now works

as a scout for Wolverhampton Wanderers. Whitham was the subject of a vile smear campaign emanating from a Twitter account operated from Beal's mobile phone after he intervened to try to stop Beal making threats against his family. Whitham became suspicious of Beal after Beal invited a group including Whitham and his daughter to a VIP box at Hillsborough for a preseason friendly in 2011 and realised Beal had 'blagged' the group into a box unoccupied that day. One giveaway was no food or drink; another was that none of Beal's 10Media 'colleagues' attended as Beal had said they would.



- Two people who work in media in the region, one of them whose wife has been threatened by Beal, the other a commentator who fears for the safety of his own wife and child. Sportingintelligence has spoken extensively to both of them, and they, like others, are ready to testify against Beal as necessary.
- A former bank worker who was also scammed over a non-existent job in Paris, losing £500 in the process.

In all likelihood there are others who have reported threats or scams by Beal in recent times. 'I was told I wasn't the only one, I get the impression there are lots of us,' said one victim. Anyone with information on similar cases or who has been affected should contact the police in Sheffield.

Sportingintelligence has knowledge of long-term correspondence between the Sheffield police and some victims. Beal is 'known' to police and continues, sources say, 'to be of interest.'

This website has also seen evidence that Beal has mocked the police as they have pursued him, deriding one officer in particular via a social network.

There are other victims who until recent days have been unaware that Beal's duplicity was so widespread and hence have never reported him, even when he had taken money from them, typically hundreds of pounds for tickets (concert or football) that never materialised.

"It has been an absolute nightmare and I don't know what more we can do to help make sure that Rob Beal is dealt with in the appropriate fashion," Claire Cleland says.

"After such a long time, it would be easy to give up, try to forget about it, hope it goes away. But I want people to know what he's like, to warn them. I'd be happy to stand up in court and explain everything that's happened to us. I want a chance to face him in court and get an explanation. It's just been dreadful. We've been at our wits end."

Claire Cleland had had no contact with Beal for years until he got in touch with various people from their old school a few years ago via Facebook. They then met socially, and two summers ago Beal offered Steve Cleland a job, as 'Sports Project Manager' at 10Media in Paris, on a salary of €57,000.

Steve Cleland was sent a 17-page employment contract, and a non-disclosure agreement, and given details of flights to France for a preliminary visit before he started work. It was all bogus. Neither the trip nor the job materialised.

Beal made excuses, as did a character called 'Daniel Coyne', apparently 'Chef des Services' at 10Media in Paris, which to all intent and purposes seemed to be the same operation as another fake firm, Gleam Live.



The [10Media Facebook page](#), left (click to on link to see), still online at least at the time of writing today, Monday, has internet links for all 10Media-related news directed to the now-defunct website of [Gleam-Live](#).

It seems highly likely that neither Coyne nor other 10Media 'employees' existed. Emails sent from them were all traceable by IP address back to the same location in Sheffield: Rob Beal's mum and dad's house.

At times it seemed like Beal and 'Coyne' were playing good cop, bad cop with Steve Cleland. Beal kept assuring Cleland the job would materialise. But 'Coyne' was not happy when told by Cleland that Cleland no longer wanted contact.

One email from 'Coyne' was sent to Cleland on 12 August 2011, copied to two other Gleam Live 'staff', Phillipe Beniot and Paul Watson, who are possibly fictional.

'Coyne' wrote to Steven Cleland: "Listen to me you little shit arse rat ... I will fucking stamp on your head, now you tell that to your imaginary solicitor. And I tell you, now, you fuck with with me, I will pay you a visit. Now fuck off you little prick."

Sportingintelligence has seen a string of abusive and threatening communications from Beal to the Cleland family, Jack Whitham included. This text from Beal to Steven Cleland in October 2011 gives a just a flavour:

Now then you little fuck rat...fellas are outside both your lovely sister in laws and your in laws....so, what's to be done...bad state of affairs you daft twat....so we are waiting for you....tick tock...tick tock...grow a pair...???

Claire and Steven Cleland and Jack Whitham have extensive documentary evidence that Beal has harassed them, having duped them first. They are far from the only ones.



TOM Hartley is a 33-year-old Sheffield Wednesday fan who has been in the Royal Navy for 15 years. He first 'met' Rob Beal in 2008 via the internet, on a Wednesday forum in which Beal was heavily involved.

"I got a message from him saying 'It's Rob off the internet, do you fancy a drink next time you're back?'" Hartley told Sportingintelligence. "I didn't think that much about it. We met up a few times. He said he lived and worked in Paris but it wasn't clear what he did exactly. It wasn't an issue."

It was a casual acquaintanceship, so when Hartley was planning to get married in 2010, he was pleasantly surprised if slightly bemused when Rob Beal said he would arrange his stag weekend.

"He offered to sort it out, and yes, I can see that looking back now it might seem far-fetched," Hartley says. "But Rob was telling us he lived in France, had an apartment in Paris, was boss of his own company, gave the impression he was okay for money.

"He suggested we go to Paris on the weekend of the France-England rugby match in the Six Nations [on 20 March 2010], go to the game and take it from there. There was going to be me, my dad, a couple of mates, seven of us altogether. Rob said he knew this hotel, he'd put us up, pay for it, sort it out."

Closer to the date Beal said there was a slight problem with a few things. He asked for £10 per person and a passport photo from each member of the party, apparently to gain access to some nightclub. Closer still, Beal told Hartley he would need £100 to cover some supplement or other on the Eurostar tickets. "He virtually frogmarched me to a cashpoint to get the money," Hartley says.

Two days before the party were due to travel, Beal said the trip had fallen through. He was apologetic, eager to make amends. Beal instead booked four double rooms for the party in the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool. Current rates suggest dinner, bed and breakfast deals were available from £40 per night.

The group went to Blackpool but Hartley had already wasted the £70 'club charge' plus £100 from the cashpoint – and also paid for return tickets from Sheffield to Blackpool for all the party.

"Rob said he'd make it up to me by allowing my wife and I to go on a break to Paris and stay in his apartment. He gave me a set of keys. We never went. I still have the keys. I'm sure they're just a random set of keys.

"Rob also said he'd reimburse me the £300 I'd spent. He said he'd transfer it. It never arrived. After a month I asked him about it. He sent me a concocted financial statement that he said showed the bank transfer had happened. It hadn't. Three years later, I've still not seen that money."

Hartley wrote the episode off as a bad lot, but not before both his father and the best man at his wedding had been offered jobs by Beal in Paris. Jobs that did not exist. Beal even sent Google Streetview images of the street in which he said he had secured them accommodation. He said he needed £500 each as a deposit. Money was sent. No jobs existed.

Hartley said Beal made another attempt later in 2010 to provide entertainment services to a friend of Hartley. He said he could provide tickets to U2 in Paris for £200. Beal took the money. He didn't deliver the tickets.

GEMMA (not her real name, requesting anonymity for fear of repercussions) also fell for the U2 tickets offer. She handed over £300 to Beal that Autumn. No tickets. No refund.



Gemma is not some credulous youngster. She is a woman in her 50s with a respectable job in academia. She also met Beal through football, through a shared loved of Sheffield Wednesday.

The friendship started on the internet, via the 606 message boards on the BBC website, and developed into group gatherings of like-minded Owls' supporters. Gemma does not look back at that time entirely with regret. "A group of us met in the first place ostensibly via Rob," she said. "Most of us still know each other, and have remained friends. Football bought us together, but it didn't end well with Rob."

When the group first met, Beal told Gemma he worked for a company called Global Risk Security (GRS) in Paris.

(In 2007 and 2008, Beal and GRS were the subject of lengthy investigations, and accusations that he was running a scam involving the company. The GRS website was registered to his name, at his parents' house in Sheffield. Reports said he was taking £100 registration fees from would-be security workers and then failing to provide any job opportunities. The company has never existed as a genuine business entity either in France or England).

"Rob told me he worked for GRS and had dealings in the Middle East," Gemma says. "He said it was covert and hush-hush and it seemed inappropriate to push it. When someone tells you that, you just believe it.

"As an outsider looking in now, I can absolutely see the point of view of anyone who questions why I never said anything about what he did [with the ticket money]. I never reported it. For a start, he knew things about my private life and I didn't want to risk he'd tell people.

"And there were no receipts. It was cash. And he was plausible. I'd known him for a while. I know how it looks awful. But I'm an intelligent woman. I'm not stupid. I've wanted to leave it behind but Rob's name has come up in the past few days and I thought I should share what I know. In the last days of our friendship he was verbally abusive."

TOM Hartley and 'Gemma' share one other common link via Rob Beal from their football-based friendship in 2009. He boasted to both that he had made it onto Sky News to speak as an "expert" about the cause of a plane crash.

One of the most mystifying air disasters of recent times happened on 1 June 2009, when Air France flight 447 from Rio de Janeiro to Paris crashed into the Atlantic, killing all 228 people on board.

Gemma received a text from Beal on the day of the crash; she describes his mood as 'excited' that he was going to be on TV. It remains unclear how he got onto television but he was presented as "a spokesman for Global Risk Security, who serve Air France", and he told the watching public – at a time when nobody knew what caused the crash – that it had been a result of "catastrophic mechanical failure".

Tom Hartley was on a six-month posting with the Navy to the Falkland Islands at the time. He just happened to be watching Sky News via the British Forces Broadcasting Service when he saw his acquaintance, Rob Beal, appear via phone link and give his view. "I texted him to say I'd seen him," Hartley said. "It did seem odd."

Within a year, Beal was a spokesman for a different organisation altogether.

Club 9 Sports is a Chicago-based company, which, according to its website "advises, invests and operates in the sports, entertainment and media industries."

They were most recently prominent in the British media last year when showing interest in, but not bidding, for the Glasgow football giants, Rangers.

In 2010, they were in talks to buy Sheffield Wednesday. Sources say Rob Beal got in touch with Club 9 and introduced himself as a Paris-based sport specialist who was also a fan of Wednesday who was often back in the city on business. Beal offered his services as spokesman for the group for nothing – and they took him up on it.

Contemporary press cuttings show Robert Beal cropping up as a bid spokesman several times before the bid fizzled and died. Sportingintelligence has seen a bizarre and lengthy set of documents that outline a 'media plan' drawn up by Beal at that time. "He said he'd do the job if he had total autonomy in communications," said one source. "The Americans were on the verge of pulling out anyway and let him do it. It came to nothing."

Beal soured his relations with some members of the Sheffield sports media that summer by claiming to offer priority access to Club 9 officials – when most media had a direct line anyway. Not that it mattered: next time Beal resurfaced linked to a football club was in 2011, when he was claiming to be intimately connected to the Qatari owners of PSG, via links he intended to milk, however fictitious they were.



By summer 2011, Rob Beal was developing a diverse range of Twitter 'contacts' (in the broadest sense), as a screen grab containing some of his exchanges via his then account, @Rob10Media show. (Left, click to enlarge)

There is no suggestion he had any meaningful relationship with any of the people featured here but he was not shy of dialogue with figures as diverse as former Labour Party spin doctor Alastair Campbell,

former showbiz editor of the News of the World Dan Wootton, Observer political heavyweight Andrew Rawnsley, and all manner of football writers, commentators and personalities, particularly those related to French football.

It has not been confirmed whether Beal has ever lived in Paris, or even in France, although numerous people have said he speaks French.

Beal appeared intent on making a splash in different areas of football life and over the course of a few months tried (and had minor success) in getting involved with The Guardian, Sheffield Wednesday, the team bidding to bring the 2016 Tour de France to Yorkshire, and people who might be interested in getting involved in a project to bring live French Ligue 1 games to British television.

Beal conned The Guardian by "grooming" a well respected writer with flattery and 'insider' titbits to gain his trust and then pitching a proposal to the newspaper.

He told them he was involved with the French league, and that the league and 10Media would jointly sponsor a series of 40 articles on

French football during the 2011-12 season on the Guardian's website. The cash on offer would have turned heads in most media organisations: the paper would be paid £50,000, Beal said, to carry the pieces with the logos of the sponsors at the top (right, as they looked).



It seemed a no-brainer deal. Quality content from an informed writer. Money from the sponsors. Topical editorial at a time when PSG were making waves in the global game with their new riches courtesy of Middle East petrodollars. A press release was even sent out from Paris to herald the partnership. It seemed too good to be true. It was.

After three weeks, and no money, The Guardian got suspicious. They could get no answers. Beal was nowhere to be found. The French league articles were quietly ditched.

Beal was not deterred. On 17 August 2011, he sent the email below (next page) to Andy Daykin, commercial director of Sheffield Wednesday.

He used the Guardian articles as 'leverage' to show that his 'company' was doing deals with major media players. At the time, the link in the email took the user to a 'development' site for the French articles project.

Sources say Beal then proposed that Sheffield Wednesday and his company should work in partnership to bring music acts, including Take That, Beyonce and other 'world artists', to play at Hillsborough.

Nothing came of the venture.

Andy,

Hi, as part of our continued invest in UK sport (see link) we are looking at various marketing partnership with major European Brands looking to establish market footholds in UK. I am looking at SWFC as a viable option for one of these specifically, but we are at a point now where we really need to sit down and have a proper chat rather than missing each other as we have deadlines to meet.

<http://www.guardiancreative.com/index.php?/client-a/ligue-1-td/>

I am sorry for the past 10 days, legal issues over someone breaching an NDA, but that's resolved. I am heading home to Paris this evening for a meeting but flying back Friday first thing for a meeting with Welcome to Yorkshire for bid advice for the Tour De France bid for 2016.

Would be great if we could do lunch Friday? 1300hrs?

Let me know, hope you well as always, shame about last night's result, but sure they will get it right soon.

Regards,

Robert Beal
COO 10MM - PARIS

Part of GLG-SbmG partnership
twitter - @rob10media

The email to Daykin mentioned that Beal was supposedly meeting with Welcome to Yorkshire (the local tourist board, in effect) about the 2016 Tour de France bid.

There was no such meeting. Beal was never involved with any 2016 bid. When Jack Whitham was building his own case against Beal, he got in touch with Welcome to Yorkshire, The Guardian, Sheffield Wednesday and others and gained their permission to cite them as others duped by Beal, as and when necessary. They all granted permission and will attest to their involvement with him as necessary.

In one instance Jack Whitham personally went to see a lawyer who was representing Beal and making outlandish claims on his behalf. It is understood Beal has used multiple firms of lawyers at different times, although it is not known how much any one firm knows about his activities before dispatching letters on his behalf.

Beal was so desperate to be linked to the TdF bid that he took a real press release about cyclist Mark Cavendish backing Yorkshire's bid and doctored it to insert a quote from himself. He then sent that error strewn version of the press release, right, to contacts.



Mark Cavendish Backs Yorkshire to Host Tour de France

Mark Cavendish, the fastest man on two wheels, has given his backing to Yorkshire's bid to host the Grand Départ of the Tour de France in 2016.

Cavendish, who has won 20 Tour de France stages including the green jersey for being the Tour's best sprinter, has thrown his support behind the county's bid.

Cavendish said: "My Mum is from Yorkshire so I'm proud to be backing the Yorkshire 2016 bid. The county would provide a stunning backdrop to the Tour as well as a real test for the competitors. I have fond memories of holidaying in Yorkshire, a lot of my family still live there and it would be fantastic if the world's greatest cycle race could come to Yorkshire, I'm sure it would host a stunning Grand Départ."

Gary Verity, chief executive of Welcome to Yorkshire said: "To have Mark's backing for our bid is massive. We are serious about bringing Le Grand Départ to Yorkshire and giving the French a warm Yorkshire welcome. The county is passionate about sport and would be thrilled to host the most celebrated cycle race in the world."

Robert Beal the Chief Executive of 10MM the Paris based media company, was delighted to add his support to the Yorkshire bid and continue to work with Welcome to Yorkshire "For someone that's lived in France for many years now, I can not support this bid from my home region any more, I am so delighted, **so excited**, to see Yorkshire's bid, I love France, I love Yorkshire, the pair, together, matched is fantastic"

One person who received the press release was a British journalist who also worked as a scout in France, James Eastham. "It was obvious he'd photo-shopped it, why did he send it?" Eastham says.

Eastham is relatively rare in being someone who approached Beal with a proposal, not vice versa. He was impressed with Beal's apparent range of contacts, and the Guardian column sponsored by 10Media, and the 'names' who followed Beal on Twitter.

Eastham had an idea that his local club, Lille, might benefit from better content for the English language version of their website. He thought maybe Beal with his media experience, could help. "He'd tweeted things suggesting he was a media go-between," Eastham says.

When the pair spoke, Eastham found Beal to be "very aggressive, not directed at me, but he didn't have a PR man's tone."

Eastham says he was never taken in by Beal, finding him unconvincing throughout. "He never gave me a French mobile number, which was odd as he said he lived in France. He never kept a promise to meet. I was annoyed with him because I asked for credentials and was never given any. I never thought of him as a conman, more of a fantasist."

Many felt he was a conman, and a time-waster.

Another Beal 'project' from the summer of 2011 was the suggestion he was working with the French Football Federation to find a British broadcaster to show live Ligue 1 games – and bring a new and regular audience to the French game. He had no authority to try to do such a deal, and never did one. But it did not stop him approaching people with related job offers.

"He said he was representing the Qataris and the FFF," one commentator has told Sportingintelligence. "He said the Qataris wanted to get Ligue 1 on English TV and they'd pretty much give the rights away if necessary. He said he was talking to Channel 5 and looking for commentators and reporters.

"He asked if I was interested, said they didn't wanted major established names but fresher, different voices. He said they'd look to remunerate me with around €1,000 a game. That's not a million miles from what Match of the Day pay [commentators].

"He said this face to face to in Sheffield. I thought the only odd thing was he smoked six or seven cigarettes and drank three or four pints during that first meeting and didn't pick up any of my drinks. We probably met six times over six or seven weeks to chat and get updates."

A spoof Rob Beal twitter account popped up. Beal wrongly believed it was the commentator's doing, and the threats started. They became so bad the commentator reported them to police.

Before things got quite that bad, Beal had sent the commentator the following email:

We need to sit down and talk tomorrow, I will make time. I like you, you are a nice guy, but this is business, not play time. You have entered a profession now where most people, me included would turn on there own families to earn money....we are lucky, we have made our money, you are starting out and its a bastard industry to work in.

The Ligue 1 project on English TV came to nothing, but it didn't stop Beal developing contacts.



One gets a better understanding of how Beal has convinced so many people that he is a real "ITK" (in the know) insider when listening to a journalist who has known him for many months or several years explain Beal's 'grooming' process.

"It starts with an #ff on Twitter or maybe a compliment about a particular story," says one Paris-based reporter. "He says nice things, sends a DM, then an email. It becomes clear – or rather it appears to become clear – that he does have information.

"Since The Times story happened, a few of us in Paris have realised we've been had. But this job is all about having a wide range of contacts and when someone is charming, friendly, appears in a position to share gossip, it's all so plausible."

Beal invited that particular writer to go to watch PSG games, even floated the notion of a meeting with David Beckham. "And every time something was set up, it was cancelled, usually the day before. Every time. But again, these things happen."

Another journalist, a senior editor based outside Europe for a media company with a global reach and offices around the world, has been in touch with Beal for more than two years, almost weekly. "His info was often good. My perception is he had a good strike rate, seven or eight times out of 10 what he said would happen at some point."

The crux of Beal's credibility in the eyes of journalists he duped seems to lie here. He had intimated close involvement with QSI and PSG, and even Beckham. Beal certainly got plenty wrong, as a scroll through his Twitter feed shows. But he was also getting stories right.

How? The most obvious explanation was that he was closely monitoring all manner of media outlets, especially in France, and then passing on second-hand information earlier than English-speaking journalists might have seen it. It is inevitable he would also be hearing whispers from these media contacts. His 'ITK' status had, to an extent, become self-fulfilling.

Despite no big deals sealed in 2011, or any real deals it seems, he kept broadening his approach in 2012.

Craig Nicholson, now a journalist, was a trainee in January 2012 when Beal first contacted him via DM on Twitter. Beal told Nicholson he worked for the AFP news agency "and he might have an opportunity for me to do some writing. He explained that he was based in Paris but as a Sheffield Wednesday supporter he was often in Sheffield and would be willing to meet up with me and explain in more detail."

Nicholson leapt at the chance, and they met in a Sheffield pub on 5 January last year. Beal arrived "suited and booted" and verbally laid out Nicholson's

"assignment". "He went on to explain that L'Equipe wanted a piece on French footballers in England on the back of the goings-on at Doncaster," Nicholson says. Beal said he would arrange travel, press credentials and pay Nicholson £200. He made a phone call apparently to sort out some logistics.

"Unprompted he then went on to tell me more about his role in Paris, particularly his close links with PSG," Nicholson says. "He did that classic 'in the know' thing of telling me that the David Beckham to PSG move was a done deal ... He explained he was good friends with Beckham's manager, I think he even showed me on his phone that Beckham's manager followed him on Twitter, and said he'd had a hand in smoothing things over."

Nicholson never saw Beal again. When he contacted him a few days later for an update, Beal said "the wheels were in motion" on the project. Days and weeks passed. Nicholson never did get to write his Doncaster story for a French paper via AFP.

The lure of Beckham stories certainly grabbed the interest of many, even if they did not end up running with what Beal was telling them.

Fanny Lechevestrier is a radio journalist in France and she was also contacted for the first time in 2012 by Beal. He gave her stories about PSG and Beckham and intimated that he was 'connected' to both.

Chevestrier did not use them "because I could not verify them, although some of them turned out to be true."

She has never met Beal, although started following him on Twitter and kept an eye on what he was saying.

When the hoax in The Times became apparent, she unfollowed Beal. He contacted her to ask why and to claim the current situation is a mistake, that he is who he always claimed to be.

Another journalist says Beal is privately protesting that The Times know that his DFL story, as he told it, was true, and that The Times are backing him in private. Unequivocally, this is false. The paper are not backing him. They remain as angry and confused as the day they were duped.



So how did Beal persuade a well respected and self-confessed "risk averse" journalist Oliver Kay that the DFL scoop was worth running?

As The Times have said, he had been a contact for a period of time, had provided good information that was never used, and then offered up the DFL. It is also understood that Beal behaved with Kay in the way he has with many others: diligently, to the extent he would sometimes pass information and then phone later to say things had changed a little.

This is how real contacts behave, good contacts anyway. They keep you updated when things change. They let you know when something they thought was X had been misconstrued and is actually Y.

Beal offered the DFL story to several of his contacts, including inside the BBC, and at other British papers, and to writers and editors in several other countries.

Sportingintelligence does not know the precise pitch he used to each person, so what follows is a guestimated version, representative of how he 'sold' it. Remember that those hearing it had been in contact with him for months or even years. They filtered his pitch through the prism that he was a QSI man, and therefore knowledgeable and authorised to speak.

Clearly there wasn't an imperative to run it past the PSG or Qatari press offices when someone deeper inside was handing out the info.

Imagine this.

"It's Rob here. You ok? Listen, I've got a line for you, a good line. It's a bit of an odd one because something quite big is in the offing, and somehow it seems some of it has leaked. The Qataris want to stage a club tournament from 2015, big money for those involved. It could change the game. And some spoof French website has got wind and is taking the mickey."

Beal actually (mis)directed some to the spoof article on CdF, pointing out that they were clearly taking the piss with their talk of holographic transmissions and private islands for every team to stay on. The point was, he said, the other bits are true. This is happening. And even the logo that CdF has got is real!

And therein lay one whopping banana skin.

Which still leaves one question: what's in this for Rob Beal?

Some money, clearly, from ticket cash and relating to non-existent jobs.

Perhaps the hope of a real job for a real company if one of his schemes comes off? Maybe if Club 9 had bought Sheffield Wednesday, he could have become a comms director. Who knows?

It is also understood that Beal has claimed to some acquaintances that the furore over the hoax story has already cost him income unpaid from now-sceptical 'clients'. Who they are, or what they might have agreed to pay, we do not know.

There is no hard evidence than any media group ever paid for his ITK insights, although if you know different, please get in touch.

It is possible that Beal simply wants to be at the centre of things. And in the age of the cyberspace, pretty much anyone can be pretty much anything they want to be.

Can't they?

We know one thing: Beal is not happy with Sportingintelligence. He has already posted then deleted abuse and lies on Twitter.

And on Thursday 14 March, at 8.48pm, during an evening when he also left three ranty messages to voicemail, he also sent a text that began:

Luckily I also know where you livem seems your friends may not be so friendly....now fuck off you little shit...

The production of this story has been immensely helped by a wide range of individuals, including those who have come into contact with Beal and those who have investigated him. The early and persistent digging of Richard Whittall in Canada needs to be commended, while CDF also did their own investigation into Beal, and more revelations emerged in this fascinating background read on Rue89.com.

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