

Comeback Kings

NEVER SAY NEVER



The ability to keep going back for more when all others are leaving is what makes turnarounds not only difficult but, if successful, enormously rewarding. The sporting world has similar stories to tell and here we look at four individuals who have either continued against popular opinion or returned to have another crack

**Michael Schumacher**

The seven time World F1 Champion returned to the sport this season to drive for Mercedes. In a sport famed for its glamour, Schumacher's focus and determination has at times been infamous as Damon Hill became all too aware of. Seemingly a young man's sport with more than a hint of danger, Schumacher should be applauded for putting his reputation (and life!) at stake in a sport where the "man versus machine" debate continues. Whilst the return is thus far unspectacular with Schumacher not setting foot on the podium, the German continues to make positive noises and unlike Lewis Hamilton has not laid the blame squarely with his team. How long this continues for will be interesting; the presumption that Schumacher has returned to F1 to do anything other than win races is incomprehensible.

**Lance Armstrong**

You would have thought that winning the Tour de France seven consecutive times would be enough. If you had beaten cancer along the way and bagged a world title as well you'd surely deserve to retire with a rather large smug grin on your face. However, retirement is one thing Armstrong hasn't been good at. After two years in the cycling wilderness Armstrong, an ever present figure in examples of sporting determination, returned to shake up the cycling world much to the annoyance of the French

media who (even following numerous editorial reviews to soften their comments) could not hide their hatred of the Texan.

Three weeks of torture in the Tour de France would decipher whether Armstrong was up to it, and a podium finish in Paris proved he was. It was not as smooth or as spectacular as before, but the intensity, focus and determination were all clearly visible. Armstrong will again start this year's Tour de France and, whilst the competition is tough, it is a brave person who bets against him.

**Brett Favre**

It's hard to explain to non American Football fans why Brett Favre is so good, but suffice to say Favre holds just about every personal record for a quarter back, since records began. Once he retires hall of fame membership is a matter of course...It is just that Favre has already tried to retire, twice.

Despite a stinker of a season for his first comeback, Favre had another go. To add some spice he joined the Vikings, the arch rivals of his career club, the Packers. For many Packers fans Favre's start was bitterly disappointing; the Vikings were immaculate and quickly raced to the divisional title ahead of the Packers. Favre was spectacular; with a strong arm and unnerving accuracy he took the hits from the defence and came back for more. The season ended one game short of the Super Bowl in the Championship final where the Saints utilised a policy of 'remember me' hits to rough up the 40 year old. Nearly victorious, but not quite. What about next year?

**David Beckham**

Never one to avoid publicity Beckham took the frankly odd decision to move from football dynasty Real Madrid to be closer to Minnie and Mickey Mouse at the LA Galaxy. Many were puzzled and some were outright delighted that the superstar and occasional footballer would be off TV screens until his inevitable return on Match of the Day or on Strictly Come Dancing on Ice with Giraffes.

The odds did not seem good for Beckham's England chances; new manager Fabio Capello's desire to see his players perform regularly at the top level did not quite fit with soccer US style. Credit where it is due though: Beckham did not give up. Average performances in the MLS were superseded by solid games for AC Milan during the close season. His contribution to England games could hardly be called startling, but did have an element of reliability about them. Trust is clearly high on Capello's list of priorities as John Terry recently found out. With other players failing to cement their place, Beckham may well have been on the plane to South Africa had his Achilles not intervened. Let's hope he can turnaround the failing 2018 bid to host the World Cup in England.