

= Mario Balotelli =

Mario Balotelli Barwuah (Italian pronunciation : [ˈmaʔrjo baloʔtʃilli] ; born Mario Barwuah ; 12 August 1990) is an Italian professional footballer who plays as a striker for Premier League club Liverpool and the Italy national team .

He started his professional football career at Lumezzane and played for the first team twice before having an unsuccessful trial at Barcelona , and subsequently joining Internazionale in 2007 . Inter manager Roberto Mancini brought Balotelli into the first team , but when Mancini left , Balotelli 's disciplinary record fell away . He had a strained relationship with new manager José Mourinho and was suspended from Inter 's first team in January 2009 after a number of disciplinary problems .

With doubts over his career at Inter , former coach Roberto Mancini had since moved to Manchester City and decided to give Balotelli a fresh chance at a new club . He joined Manchester City in August 2010 , where his performances and off @-@ field activities continued to be enigmatic and unpredictable . Balotelli eventually fell out of favour with Mancini after a " training ground bust up " between the two in January 2013 . His departure from City and return to Italy with A.C. Milan followed several weeks later . After 18 months at Milan , he returned to the Premier League with Liverpool , going back on loan after an unsuccessful season .

Balotelli earned his first cap for Italy in a friendly match against the Ivory Coast on 10 August 2010 . He has since amassed over 30 caps and represented his country at UEFA Euro 2012 , the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup , and the 2014 FIFA World Cup ; he helped the national side reach the final of Euro 2012 , and also won a bronze medal at the Confederations Cup . Along with Antonio Cassano , he is Italy 's top @-@ scorer in the UEFA European Championships , with 3 goals . He is also Italy 's top scorer in the FIFA Confederations Cup , alongside Giuseppe Rossi and Daniele De Rossi , with 2 goals .

= = Early life = =

Mario Balotelli was born in Palermo , Sicily as the son of Ghanaian immigrants . The family moved to Bagnolo Mella in the province of Brescia , Lombardy , when he was two .

In 1993 , when he was three , Balotelli was placed in foster care to the Balotelli family when his own family was unable to pay for his health care needs . His foster parents are Silvia , the Jewish daughter of Holocaust survivors , and Francesco Balotelli . They lived in the town of Concesio , Brescia , in northern Italy .

At first , he stayed at the Balotellis during the weekdays , and returned to his biological parents on weekends . He later was permanently fostered by the Balotellis full @-@ time , and adopted their surname . In June 2012 , he dedicated his goals that put Italy in the final of the Euro 2012 football championships to his foster mother Silvia . Balotelli had to wait until his 18th birthday to request Italian citizenship , as his foster family had not adopted him . He officially gained citizenship in Concesio on 13 August 2008 . After the ceremony he released the following statement :

I am Italian , I feel Italian , I will forever play with the Italian national team .

Mario Balotelli

Mario has three biological siblings : Abigail , Enoch , and Angel Barwuah . Enoch Barwuah , two years younger than Balotelli , is also a professional footballer .

= = Club career = =

= = = Lumezzane = = =

Balotelli began his career at Lumezzane . At the age of 15 he was promoted to the first team , making his first team debut in a Serie C1 league match against Padova on 2 April 2006 .

= = = Internazionale = = =

Having had an unsuccessful trial with Barcelona at the age of 15 , Balotelli was signed by Internazionale in 2006 on loan with a pre @-@ set price of ? 150 @,@ 000 to co @-@ own the player . In June 2007 Inter exercised the option and purchased another half for additional ? 190 @,@ 000 . On 8 November 2007 , as part of Sheffield F.C. ' s 150th anniversary celebrations , Balotelli featured in a friendly between the two sides at Sheffield United 's Bramall Lane . The game finished 5 ? 2 to Inter , with Balotelli scoring twice . He made his first team and Serie A debut on 16 December 2007 , replacing David Suazo in a 2 ? 0 win against Cagliari . Three days later he was featured in the starting lineup in a Coppa Italia match against Reggina , scoring two goals in a 4 ? 1 win . Balotelli gained national attention after he scored two goals against Juventus in the return leg of the Coppa Italia quarter @-@ finals , being instrumental in a 3 ? 2 away win for Inter . His first Serie A goal then came in April 2008 in a 2 ? 0 away win against Atalanta . Inter went on to win the 2007 ? 08 Serie A. Balotelli was a substitute in the 2008 Supercoppa Italiana final against Roma . He came on as a replacement for Luís Figo , scoring in the 83rd minute . Inter went on to win the final 6 ? 5 on penalties after the match ended 2 ? 2 .

In November 2008 , Balotelli became the youngest Inter player (at 18 years and 85 days) to score in the Champions League when he scored a goal in a 3 ? 3 draw against Cypriot side Anorthosis Famagusta , beating the previous record set by Obafemi Martins (at 18 years and 145 days) . In an April 2009 match with Juventus where he scored Inter 's only goal in a 1 ? 1 draw , Balotelli was racially abused by Juventus fans throughout the game . This led Inter owner Massimo Moratti to say that he would have pulled the team off the pitch had he been present . The racist chants were also condemned by Juventus chairman Giovanni Cobolli Gigli and Juventus were given a one @-@ game home @-@ fan ban because of the incident . Inter won Serie A for the fourth time in a row .

In his second season with Inter , Balotelli had a number of disciplinary problems , most notably involving head coach José Mourinho who excluded him from the first team in the second half of January 2009 . Earlier that season Mourinho had accused Balotelli of showing a lack of effort in training , stating " as far as I 'm concerned , a young boy like him cannot allow himself to train less than people like Figo , Córdoba , and Zanetti . " Balotelli continued to be the subject of racist chants throughout the season , becoming the focus of Juventus fans even during games not involving Inter , leading to Juventus being fined twice and the club ultimately punished with a partial stadium closure .

Balotelli 's disciplinary problems , and his difficult relationship with Mourinho , continued in the 2009 ? 10 season . In November Inter drew 1 ? 1 against Roma and Mourinho criticized his players , even going as far as saying that Balotelli " came close to a zero rating " . Balotelli had another negative encounter with Juventus fans in the heated Derby d 'Italia encounter in an away match against Juventus on 5 December 2009 , which Inter lost 2 ? 1 . When he was elbowed by Juventus midfielder Felipe Melo in the shoulder , Balotelli fell theatrically onto the pitch , for which he was booked , while Melo was sent off for a second yellow card . The incident sparked an altercation between Balotelli 's teammate Thiago Motta and Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon . The tension between Balotelli and Mourinho reached its peak on the eve of the UEFA Champions League second leg against Chelsea after the young striker was not called @-@ up , following an altercation with his manager . Despite Inter 's 1 ? 0 win at Stamford Bridge , London , Balotelli was criticized by several senior players including captain Javier Zanetti and veteran defender Marco Materazzi , as well as by his own agent . In March 2010 he came under heavy criticism from fans after he publicly sported an A.C. Milan (Inter 's cross @-@ town rivals) jersey on the Italian show Striscia la Notizia .

Balotelli released a statement of apology in Inter 's's official website that read :

" I am sorry for the situation that has been created recently . I am the first person who has suffered because I adore football and I want to play , and now I am waiting in silence so I can return to being useful to my team . I want to put the past behind me , look to the future and concentrate on the upcoming commitments and make myself ready . "

Mario Balotelli

After a falling @-@ out with Mourinho , Balotelli was recalled for Inter 's April 2010 match against

Bologna , and he marked his return with a goal in their 3 ? 0 win . He again caused controversy in the Champions League semi @-@ final against Barcelona on 20 April 2010 as he threw his jersey on the ground after the final whistle , in response to Inter fans who had booed him for his poor performance . He admitted three years later that the incident was the only regret in his life . Disgruntled fans confronted and tried to attack Balotelli after the game . His behavior on the pitch brought disapproval from his teammates , with Zanetti publicly saying " Mario needs to focus on doing what he can do on the pitch , he can 't allow himself to behave like this . " Amid these controversies with his club and manager , many Premier League teams , including Manchester United and Manchester City , indicated that they were interested in signing Balotelli in July 2010 .

= = = Manchester City = = =

= = = 2010 ? 11 = = =

After weeks of speculation , Inter reached an agreement for Balotelli 's transfer to Manchester City on 12 August 2010 for ? 21 @.@ 8 million . At Manchester City Balotelli reunited with his former boss , Roberto Mancini , who said , " His style of play will suit the Premier League , and because he is still so young there is a big chance for him to improve . He is a strong and exciting player , and City fans will enjoy watching him . " Balotelli exchanged squad number with teammate Greg Cunningham so that he could continue to wear the number 45 shirt .

On 19 August 2010 Balotelli came on as a substitute to score in his debut against Politehnica Timi?oara in a 1 ? 0 away win in the Europa League , but during the match injured the lateral meniscus in his right knee and on 8 September underwent surgery that sidelined him until October . Balotelli eventually made his Premier League debut on 24 October as a substitute in a 3 ? 0 home defeat to Arsenal and made his first Premier League on 30 October in a 2 ? 1 away defeat to Wolverhampton Wanderers . Balotelli scored his first and second Premier League goals on 7 November in a 2 ? 0 away win to West Brom . In the same game Balotelli received a red card for violent conduct as the result of a clash with Youssuf Mulumbu , which his manager Roberto Mancini described as unfair . Balotelli scored the first two of City 's three goals in the 3 ? 0 win over FC Red Bull Salzburg in Manchester City 's Europa League group stage match .

On 21 December 2010 Balotelli won the Golden Boy Award , saying that only one of the past winners was slightly better than he was ? Lionel Messi . He also claimed not to know of Arsenal 's Jack Wilshere , the player he narrowly beat to the award . On 28 December 2010 Balotelli scored his first Premier League hat @-@ trick in a 4 ? 0 win over Aston Villa . Despite this success Balotelli still had disciplinary problems , and in March 2011 he was sent off in the second @-@ leg of Manchester City 's Europa League draw with Dynamo Kyiv . On 14 May 2011 Balotelli was man of the match in the 2011 FA Cup Final as Manchester City defeated Stoke City 1 ? 0 to win their first trophy in thirty @-@ five years .

= = = 2011 ? 12 = = =

Balotelli scored his first goal of the 2011 ? 12 campaign in a 2 ? 0 League Cup win against Birmingham City . He followed this up with the opening goal against Everton three days later . On 1 October 2011 he scored his third goal in as many games in a 4 ? 0 win away to Blackburn Rovers . Balotelli scored the opening two goals and forced the dismissal of Jonny Evans as City beat Manchester United 6 ? 1 at Old Trafford on 23 October 2011 in what would prove to be a decisive game in helping win Manchester City the league title . Balotelli made his Champions League debut for City on 2 November 2011 , in the second leg against Villarreal . He scored on a penalty shot near the end of the first half , his first Champions League goal for City and his seventh goal overall in the season . On 27 November , Balotelli came on as a 65th @-@ minute substitute against Liverpool and was sent off after receiving two yellow cards . Balotelli scored using his right shoulder in City 's 5 ? 1 win over Norwich City on 3 December . He put City 1 ? 0 up against Chelsea at

Stamford Bridge after just two minutes on 12 December , although Chelsea rallied to win 2 ? 1 .

On 22 January 2012 , Balotelli came on as a substitute during a match against Tottenham Hotspur . He appeared to stamp on Scott Parker during the match against Tottenham , but , already booked , did not get a second yellow from referee Howard Webb , who did not see the incident . Balotelli subsequently scored his first goal of 2012 , an injury @-@ time penalty which secured a 3 ? 2 win for City . He was charged for violent conduct for the kick against Scott Parker and was suspended for four matches , three for violent conduct and one for his second sending off . On 25 February , he scored his tenth league goal of the season in a 3 ? 0 home win against Blackburn Rovers . He scored again the following game in a 2 ? 0 win against Bolton Wanderers . On 31 March , Balotelli scored twice as City drew 3 ? 3 at home against Sunderland . However , Balotelli was criticized for his actions in the match after squabbling with Aleksandar Kolarov over a free kick . Roberto Mancini claimed after the game that he had considered substituting Balotelli just five minutes into the match . On 8 April 2012 , Balotelli received his fourth red card of the season , after receiving his second yellow card during the match for a tackle against Bacary Sagna during City 's 1 ? 0 loss to Arsenal in April 2012 . He was banned for three games (one for the two yellow cards and two for the previous two red cards in the same season) . After the Arsenal match , Mancini appeared to have finally lost his patience with Balotelli , suggesting that Balotelli would not play any part in the remainder of City 's season and be sold by the club . Despite this , Balotelli did make an appearance as a late substitute in the last game of the season , a title @-@ deciding match against Queens Park Rangers . Balotelli provided the assist to striker Sergio Agüero , who scored in the 94th minute to give City their first league title since 1968 .

== == 2012 ? 13 == ==

In December 2012 , Balotelli decided to fight against Manchester City 's decision to fine him two weeks ' wages for his poor disciplinary record the previous season by taking his club to a Premier League tribunal . Balotelli missed 11 games domestically and in Europe last season because of suspensions . With less than a day remaining to the start of the hearing , Balotelli dropped his tribunal action and accepted the fine .

== == A.C. Milan == ==

== == 2012 ? 13 == ==

On 29 January 2013 , A.C. Milan 's organising director Umberto Gandini announced that the team had agreed a deal to sign Balotelli from Manchester City on a four @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half year deal rumoured to be worth ? 20 million plus bonuses and add @-@ ons . Manchester City 's then manager Roberto Mancini suggested he had sanctioned Balotelli 's sale to Milan for the good of the player , describing the forward as " like another one of my children " and saying Balotelli could become one of the best players in the world when restored to Serie A. On 31 January 2013 , the Serie A giants completed the signing , and Balotelli was awarded the number 45 shirt , the same number he wore for Inter Milan and Manchester City . Milan 's vice @-@ president , Adriano Galliani , said " Balotelli in Rossoneri is a dream that has been realized . It is a transfer that everyone wanted : club , president and fans . " Balotelli received a warm reception when he returned to Milan . His arrival saw some fans scuffling with police and one policeman was taken to hospital with head injuries . It was stated that Silvio Berlusconi 's signing of Balotelli would help him gain extra votes in the 2013 Italian general election .

On 3 February 2013 , Balotelli made his debut for Milan and scored two goals , including a last minute penalty to earn a 2 ? 1 victory over Udinese . The win lifted Milan to fourth in the table , ahead of Inter Milan on goal difference . In the next two matches , Balotelli scored two goals , including 30 yards (27 m) free @-@ kick against Parma . With that goal , he equaled Oliver Bierhoff 's record of four goals in first three matches for Milan . In his fifth appearance Balotelli

appeared as a substitute against Genoa and scored his fifth goal for his new club . In the match against Palermo , Balotelli continued his impressive scoring streak with two more goals , one from a penalty and another from an M 'Baye Niang cross .

On the final day of the season , Balotelli scored his twelfth goal in thirteen games for Milan as the team beat Siena to qualify for the 2013 ? 14 Champions League .

===== 2013 ? 14 =====

On 22 September 2013 , Balotelli missed a penalty in a competitive match for the first time in 22 attempts as a professional ; the kick was saved by Pepe Reina as Milan lost 2 ? 1 to Napoli . During a match against Catania on 1 December , Balotelli accused opponent Nicolás Spolli of racially abusing him , but there was insufficient evidence for any action to be taken . The following week , Balotelli scored two goals in a 2 ? 2 draw with Livorno , including a sensational 30 @-@ yard direct free kick that was clocked at a speed of 109 km / h .

=== Liverpool ===

===== 2014 ? 15 =====

In August 2014 , Balotelli joined Liverpool for a fee of £ 16 million , to replace the outbound Luis Suárez . He made his Liverpool debut in a league game away to Tottenham Hotspur on the 31st of August , a game Liverpool won 3 ? 0 . Balotelli scored his first Liverpool goal on 16 September , opening a 2 ? 1 Anfield victory against Ludogorets Razgrad in the group stage of the UEFA Champions League . In a match in the same competition on 22 October against Real Madrid , Balotelli was criticised by manager Brendan Rodgers for swapping shirts with opponent Pepe at half time , saying " It 's something that doesn 't happen here and shouldn 't happen here . "

On 18 December 2014 , he was suspended for one match and fined £ 25 @,@ 000 for posting an image on social media which appeared to contain anti @-@ Semitic and racist references .

Balotelli 's first Premier League goal for Liverpool came on his 13th appearance , on 10 February 2015 , an 83rd @-@ minute winner in a 3 ? 2 victory over Tottenham Hotspur at Anfield , nine minutes after replacing Daniel Sturridge . He scored just 4 goals in 28 appearances and at season 's end he was adjudged by many to be among the worst signings of the season .

===== Return to Milan (loan) =====

On 27 August 2015 , Balotelli returned to A.C. Milan on season @-@ long loan deal . On 22 September 2015 , Balotelli scored his first goal after returning to Milan on his third appearance to open the scoring in the 5th minute from a free kick at 25 yards out against Udinese in a 3 ? 2 away win . However , a week later he suffered a groin injury in a 1 ? 0 defeat to Genoa on 27 September , requiring surgery and ruling him out for three months . He returned to action , coming on as a substitute on 17 January 2016 in a 2 ? 0 home win over Fiorentina ; before scoring the lone goal from the penalty spot nine days later during the first semi final leg of the Coppa Italia against Alessandria , as he helped Milan reach the final of the tournament . On 1 May , he had his penalty saved in a 3 ? 3 home draw against Frosinone , for which he was mocked by opponent Mirko Gori . Balotelli finished the season with only one goal in 20 league appearances , as Milan finished the season in seventh place , once again failing to qualify for Europe following their 1 ? 0 defeat to Juventus in the 2016 Coppa Italia final .

== International career ==

Balotelli was unable to answer call @-@ ups to the Italian national under @-@ 15 and under @-@ 17 teams as he was still considered to be a Ghanaian immigrant .

On 7 August 2007 , five days before his seventeenth birthday , Balotelli received his first senior International call @-@ up for Ghana from their coach Claude Le Roy for a friendly against Senegal at the New Den stadium in London , England , on 21 August 2007 . He declined the offer citing once again his willingness to play for Italy when he became eligible . He also stated his willingness to represent Italy at international level once he acquired an Italian passport .

Italy U @-@ 21 coach Pierluigi Casiraghi stated his intention to call up Balotelli once he obtained Italian citizenship . On 13 August 2008 Balotelli was finally given Italian citizenship .

This is even more exciting than making my debut in Serie A. The best birthday present I could receive now would be a call to join the Italy squad , although I 'd be happy to play for the Under 21 team .

Mario Balotelli

Casiraghi called him to join the Italy national under @-@ 21 football team Azzurrini on 29 August for the matches against Greece and Croatia . In his debut on 5 September 2008 he scored his first international goal in a 1 ? 1 draw with the Greek U @-@ 21 's .

Balotelli was named in the final 23 @-@ man squad for the 2009 UEFA European Under @-@ 21 Football Championships and scored the opening goal against the hosts Sweden in the 23rd minute . Barely 15 minutes later he was shown a red card for retaliating against a Swedish midfielder Pontus Wernbloom . Italy were eliminated by eventual champions Germany in the semi @-@ finals , following a 1 @-@ 0 defeat .

On 10 August 2010 , Balotelli made his first appearance for the Italian senior team , as part of the squad announced by new head coach Cesare Prandelli , in a friendly match against Côte d 'Ivoire ? Italy 's first match after the 2010 World Cup . In that match he started alongside debutant Amauri and striker Antonio Cassano in a 1 ? 0 loss . On 11 November 2011 , Balotelli scored his first senior international goal in a 2 ? 0 win against Poland at Stadion Miejski in Wroc?aw , Poland , also setting up Italy 's second goal of the match .

= = = UEFA Euro 2012 = = =

Before the tournament in Poland and Ukraine , Balotelli was interviewed by a newspaper about racism amongst fans in the host countries . During the interview , Balotelli reiterated his threat to walk off the pitch if any of the opposition fans racially abused him in any way , and said that he would ' kill ' anyone that threw a banana at him . He spoke about his increasing fears that black players would be targeted by racists and that he refused to accept racism in any form , talking of his past experience of racism in football notably during his time playing in Serie A for Inter Milan . During the build @-@ up to the competition Manchester City 's manager Roberto Mancini had repeatedly defended Balotelli , but he and footballer Daniele De Rossi believed that Mario would need to grow up and mature if he was going to become the centrepiece of future Italian success .

On 10 June 2012 , Balotelli also became the first black player to appear for Italy in a major tournament (Euro or World Cup) in a 1 ? 1 draw against Spain , Italy 's first match of Euro 2012 . Italy and Spain later played each other for the second time in the tournament in the Ukraine 's capital city of Kiev . During the 1 ? 1 draw Balotelli failed to make an impact , he was substituted off during the 56th minute after missing multiple chances ; specifically a one on one with Spanish goalkeeper and captain Iker Casillas just minutes before being subbed off . His replacement was Antonio Di Natale . The 34 @-@ year @-@ old managed to secure his 11th international goal and put Italy ahead within his time on the pitch . With Balotelli continuing his run of poor form for his nation , fans and critics began calling for Di Natale to replace the " immature and unpredictable striker . "

Later in the tournament , on 18 June 2012 , Mario Balotelli scored his first goal in a major international tournament in a 2 ? 0 victory against the Republic of Ireland . When he attempted to celebrate this goal , he was immediately halted by teammate Leonardo Bonucci , who covered Balotelli 's mouth with his hand for fear that the striker would say something to " get in trouble . " Balotelli had been dropped to the bench by Cesare Prandelli prior to the game due to his lack of ability shown in his previous group games , so when he was subbed on against Ireland fans didn 't

expect him to have much of an impact , and his celebration of his goal may have originally been directed towards the naysayers who believe he is bad for the team . Balotelli went on to start against England in the quarter @-@ finals , his performance was described as wasteful but his effort was rated highly in a game where he missed multiple chances . He scored the first penalty taken in the shootout against his Manchester City teammate Joe Hart . On 28 June , Balotelli scored twice within the first 40 minutes in Italy 's semi @-@ final clash with Germany , as the Azzurri won 2 ? 1 and progressed to the Euro 2012 final against European and World champions Spain . After scoring the second goal in that semi @-@ final , he ripped off his shirt and stood motionless as he flexed his muscles , developing a famous celebration . Going into the final Balotelli said that , Manchester City 's title success meant that failure in the Euros would not signal a personal failure this season . He also said that he was unfazed by the pressure he supposedly has on his shoulders going into the final , with new high expectations of him from his home supporters after his amazing performance against Germany .

During the tournament , Balotelli was subject to a case of racial abuse during the game against Croatia , which led UEFA to fine the Croatian Football Federation ? 80 @,@ 000 . Italy were defeated 4 ? 0 in the final by defending champions Spain . Despite the heavy defeat , Balotelli was named as part of the Euro 2012 Team of the Tournament due to his performances . With 3 goals , Balotelli finished the tournament as the joint top scorer along with 5 other players , although the Golden Boot ultimately went to Fernando Torres , due to his assist in the Euro 2012 final .

= = = 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifying = = =

After establishing himself in the side at Euro 2012 , Balotelli remained the first choice striker for Italy 's 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign .

On 21 March 2013 , he scored a long range equaliser in a friendly match against Brazil at the Stade de Genève . Five days later he scored both goals as Italy defeated Malta in a World Cup qualifier , continuing his prolific scoring streak for both club and country since signing for A.C. Milan .

On 7 June 2013 , Balotelli was sent @-@ off in a 0 ? 0 draw with the Czech Republic in Prague . On 10 September 2013 , Balotelli scored the winning goal in a World Cup qualifying match against the Czech Republic in Turin , which allowed Italy to clinch the first place spot in their qualifying group , and ultimately achieve their objective of qualifying for the 2014 World Cup . Balotelli finished the 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign as Italy 's top scorer , with 5 goals , and he was also the top scorer of his qualifying group , helping Italy to win their group undefeated and qualify for the upcoming World Cup .

= = = 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup = = =

On 3 June 2013 , he was named in Italy 's squad for the 2013 Confederations Cup . In Italy 's opening match on 16 June , Balotelli scored a late @-@ winner , helping Italy to beat Mexico 2 ? 1 . In Italy 's next group match with Japan , Balotelli scored a penalty to make it 3 ? 2 after being 2 ? 0 down in the first half . Italy went on to win the match 4 ? 3 , which allowed them to participate in the semi @-@ finals of the Confederations Cup for the first time in their history . In Italy 's final group match against hosts and eventual champions Brazil , Balotelli set up Emanuele Giaccherini 's equaliser with a back @-@ heel , although Italy eventually lost the match 4 ? 2 . Prior to the semi @-@ final , Balotelli suffered a thigh injury , preventing him from playing in the remainder of the tournament . Italy finished the tournament in third place after defeating Uruguay in a play @-@ off .

= = = 2014 FIFA World Cup = = =

On 1 June 2014 , Balotelli was selected in Italy 's squad for the 2014 FIFA World Cup . In Italy 's opening match of the tournament , he scored the team 's winning goal in a 2 ? 1 defeat of England on 14 June . After the match against England , Balotelli says playing in the World Cup for the first time was " a wonderful sensation to experience " and dedicated the goal to his future wife . Italy lost

their next two matches , however , and were eliminated in the first round , finishing third in their group , while Prandelli stepped down from his position as Italy 's manager .

= = = Conte era = = =

Under Italy 's new manager Antonio Conte , Balotelli only received one call @-@ up in November 2014 , but was unable to make a single appearance for Italy due to injury . After a negative season with Milan , he was left out of Conte 's 23 @-@ man squad for UEFA Euro 2016 .

= = Style of play = =

Agile , quick and powerful , Balotelli is credited with pace , strength , and technical ability , but criticized for a perceived poor and immature attitude at times . Balotelli is also a set @-@ piece specialist due to his powerful shot , and is regarded by teammates and the media as a promising but undisciplined player . He is regarded as one of the best penalty kick takers in world football , a view backed by his former Manchester City goalkeeping team @-@ mate Joe Hart . Balotelli missed his first competitive penalty against Napoli on 22 September 2013 when it was saved by Pepe Reina .

In his two years at Manchester City , he received four red cards ? against West Bromwich Albion (November 2010) , Dynamo Kyiv (March 2011) , Liverpool (November 2011) and Arsenal (April 2012) . He also in this time served suspensions for other incidents such as the supposed stamp on Scott Parker .

= = Personality and public image = =

Balotelli is nicknamed Super Mario after the Italian video game character Mario from the iconic Nintendo series .

Balotelli has been given a reputation by the media for being a difficult character and taking part in questionable and often amusing activities . He was once described by Jose Mourinho as " unmanageable . " In June 2010 , Balotelli and a group of friends fired air pistols in the open in Milan 's Piazza della Repubblica . Although denying that he is " crazy " as his mentor Roberto Mancini frequently claims , Balotelli has admitted that he " sometimes does strange things " . In 2010 , he was photographed in the company of two noted Mafia mobsters . Since joining Manchester City , Balotelli has gained a cult following . Manchester City supporters regularly sang a song with lyrics which made reference to his activities . Musician Tinchy Stryder recorded a song in Balotelli 's honour , Mario Balotelli .

Balotelli has been the subject of numerous newspaper stories since joining Manchester City ; some have been confirmed as true while others have turned out to be erroneous . Within days of joining Manchester City , Balotelli was involved in a car crash . It was reported that Balotelli was carrying £ 5 @, @ 000 cash at the time ? and that when a police officer asked why he had such a large sum of cash Balotelli replied : " Because I am rich " . Off @-@ field activities involving Balotelli have included driving into a women 's prison in Italy to " have a look round " , and throwing darts at a youth team player during a training ground ' prank ' ? all of which have been confirmed to be true . Balotelli has also been subjected to tabloid rumours about him confronting a bully in a school after querying why a young Manchester City fan was not attending classes , and giving £ 1 @, @ 000 to a homeless man on the streets of Manchester . Both of these reports turned out to be false .

Video footage before City 's Europa League clash with Dynamo Kiev in March 2011 showed Balotelli requiring assistance to put on a training bib , an incident which teammate Edin Džeko was seen mimicking the following week in the warm up before City 's game at Chelsea . In September 2011 , Balotelli was reportedly seen using his iPad whilst on the substitutes ' bench for Italy during their game with the Faroe Islands , although he denied this on a visit to a prison later that week .

Balotelli celebrated his goal against Manchester United in October 2011 by unveiling a shirt with the words : " Why always me ? " on it ? a celebration which seemingly disputes the accuracy of newspaper reports . The day before the match , Balotelli and his friends set Balotelli 's house on fire

when a firework was let off in it , and later that week Balotelli was unveiled as Greater Manchester 's ambassador for firework safety . On 5 November 2011 , at the annual fireworks display at Edenbridge , Kent , a 12 metre tall bonfire effigy of Balotelli was unveiled ? complete with a Super Mario hat , and a house in the right hand and a ' Giant TNT ' firework in his left , which were reference to his recent incident . In December 2011 , Balotelli broke a 48 @-@ hour curfew before City 's game against Chelsea to go to a curry house , although he " was not drinking alcohol , signed autographs , posed for pictures with fellow diners and was involved in a mock sword @-@ fight using rolling pins " . The club launched an internal investigation . In March 2012 , when Inter Milan (Balotelli 's former club) held a press conference for their new manager Andrea Stramaccioni , Balotelli gatecrashed the event . In December 2012 , Balotelli was due to take Manchester City to a Premier League tribunal to protest against a fine of two weeks ' wages over his poor disciplinary record , but eventually dropped his tribunal action a day before the hearing .

On 1 December 2014 , Balotelli was accused of racism and antisemitism for posting an image on Instagram of the video game character Mario . The image promoted anti @-@ racism by telling others to be like the character , attributing him qualities stereotypically associated with different ethnicities , ending the idea that he " jumps like a black man and grabs coins like a jew " . In response to criticisms , he wrote : " My Mom is jewish so all of u shut up please " .

= = Personal life = =

In 2012 , Balotelli featured in GQ where he and British musician Tinie Tempah were named as the best and second @-@ best dressed men in the world respectively . Balotelli also appeared on the cover of the November 2012 edition of Time Magazine .

Balotelli is a fan of mixed martial arts , as he has stated in the past that he would love to compete in the sport professionally if he were not a footballer .

Balotelli owns several cars , including a Range Rover Evoque , Ferrari 458 Spider , Bentley Continental GT , Maserati GT , and Audi R8 V10 .

In January 2013 , Balotelli 's net worth was estimated to be US \$ 40 million , up from US \$ 25 million in January 2012 . Balotelli bought a £ 3 million mansion in the United Kingdom .

Balotelli no longer drinks alcohol .

In July 2012 , Balotelli 's former girlfriend Raffaella Fico claimed that she was pregnant with his child , while Balotelli responded by claiming that he would only assume paternal responsibilities upon a positive paternity test . Fico 's daughter Pia was born on 5 December 2012 . Later in December 2012 , Fico accused Balotelli of being " irresponsible " and " not interested " in her newborn daughter . In response , Balotelli threatened to take legal action against Fico to defend his reputation against what he considered false accusations . In February 2014 , Balotelli finally acknowledged paternity of his daughter Pia following a positive DNA test .

In March 2013 , Balotelli became engaged to wed his Belgian girlfriend , Fanny Neguesha . They split in September 2014 .

= = Career statistics = =

= = = Club = = =

As of match played on 21 May 2016

= = = International = = =

As of match played on 24 June 2014 .

= = = = International goals = = = =

Scores and results list Italy 's goal tally first .

= = Honours = =

= = = Club = = =

Internazionale

Serie A (3) : 2007 ? 08 , 2008 ? 09 , 2009 ? 10

Coppa Italia (1) : 2009 ? 10

Supercoppa Italiana (1) : 2008

UEFA Champions League (1) : 2009 ? 10

Manchester City

Premier League (1) : 2011 ? 12

FA Cup (1) : 2010 ? 11

FA Community Shield (1) : 2012

= = = International = = =

UEFA European Football Championship Runner up : 2012

FIFA Confederations Cup Third place : 2013

= = = Individual = = =

Coppa Italia Top Goalscorer (1) : 2007 ? 08

Golden Boy Award (1) : 2010

FA Cup Final Man of the Match (1) : 2011

UEFA Euro Team of the Tournament (1) : 2012

UEFA European Championship Co @-@ Top Goalscorer (1) : 2012

Serie A Team of the Year (1) : 2012 ? 13