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Joy*

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**TORRES**  
special delivery

'How the Liverpool fans  
helped me make up my mind'

Exclusive interview



**ANDRIY  
VORONIN  
SIGNS IN**



Plus Reds training pics and TV fixtures



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**10.07.07**

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Fernando

# TORRES

Anfield passion. Exclusive interview by: David Randles





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# Fernando 9 TORRES

**I**MAGINE if you will how you might have felt had Steven Gerrard left Liverpool for one of Europe's top clubs four years ago.

At just 23, our new club captain was fast becoming one of the most sought after players on the continent but the thought of him wearing the colours of another team sent shivers down the spine.

As a boyhood Liverpool fan who once stood on the Kop with his mates, Gerrard was our representative on the pitch, the epitome of our wildest dreams played out in real life.

Now spare a thought for the Atletico Madrid fans.

In Fernando Torres we have just captured their Steven Gerrard.

The two may play in different positions but in symbolic terms are very much alike.

However, as Gerrard had only just been handed the skipper's armband back then, Torres had been captain at the Vicente Calderon since the tender age of 19.

The Rojiblancos – the Red and Whites, rather appropriately – continued to do everything within their power to keep hold of their local hero, and Torres admits it was only ever going to take a very special club to tear him away.

"Once I knew of Liverpool's interest, it wasn't a difficult or complicated decision to make," he says.

"I had quite a lot of offers from other clubs in England, Spain and Italy, but the first time I heard of Liverpool's interest I knew that was the club I wanted to go to.

"As soon as I heard of Liverpool's interest I said to Atletico 'please will you allow me to speak to them?'. I told them that this is the offer they must take seriously and they did.

"I didn't pay attention or listen to any other offers once I knew Liverpool were interested.

"It is a big leap for me and I think it was the right thing for everyone.

"Yes, it was difficult to leave Atletico, the club I have supported all my life, but I have always been aware of and followed Liverpool's great history. To have a chance of playing a part in that is too good an opportunity to turn down.

"I noticed on Liverpool's website after last year's World Cup an opinion poll asking the fans which player they had been most impressed by at the tournament. They voted for me and that made me very happy. It struck a chord and it was great to see the support from the fans even then."

Indeed, Torres has been on many a wish-list for the past few years.

And word that he rejected a move to Chelsea after shining for Spain in Germany last summer will endear him even more to The Kop.

As he suggests, Torres has also resisted overtures from many of Europe's leading clubs, including approaches from Arsenal and Manchester United in the past, but took no time in deciding to come to Liverpool.

Rafael Benitez was notably impressed by his 'desire and passion to join us.' In return, the player explains how instrumental the manager was in his decision to

**'I am very aware that the fans here at Liverpool are also very important. The fact that they get behind you whether you are winning, losing or drawing is very, very special and doesn't happen everywhere. As a player, you need to pay that support back'**

leave home for the first time.

"First and foremost, Rafa Benitez is here," he says.

"He is a manager I know well from his time in Spain. It is important to have the confidence of a manager with his reputation. As soon as I heard he was interested in me, that was one of the main reasons I decided to come here.

"There are also many parallels between Liverpool and Atletico Madrid with their relationships between the fans and club. The supporters are very much an integral part of the club. They go hand in hand with each other here very much as they do at Atletico Madrid."

His appreciation of the fans is more than just lip service. Although 'El Nino' (The Kid) has graduated to 'El Nino de Oro' (The Golden Boy) he has always stayed in touch with his roots and maintains the ethics of his upbringing in Fuenlabrada, a working class suburb to the south west of the Spanish capital.

Aligned with his obvious talents, this was another reason why Torres was adored by the Atletico public. They have always related to him and Torres has done his utmost to reciprocate his part of the deal both on and off the pitch.

"We were not exactly in the lap of luxury growing up but we were well looked after and didn't want for anything," he recalls.

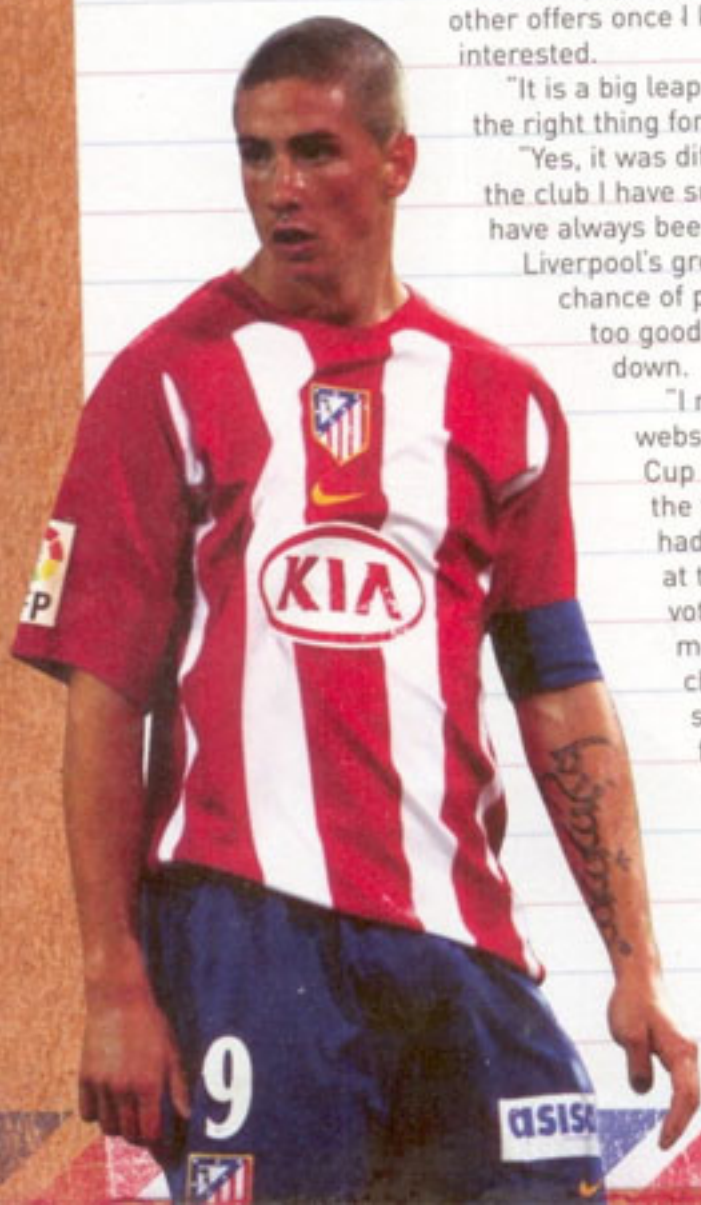
"My upbringing in Fuenlabrada taught me certain values that will stay with me for life.

"These are the same sort of values from which I always identified with Atletico Madrid, who are seen as the working class club in the city.

"The fans are very important to me.

"I was always a fan of Atletico before I was fortunate enough to play for them so I have seen it from both sides. That used to be me on the other side of the barrier waiting for autographs so I know what it is like.

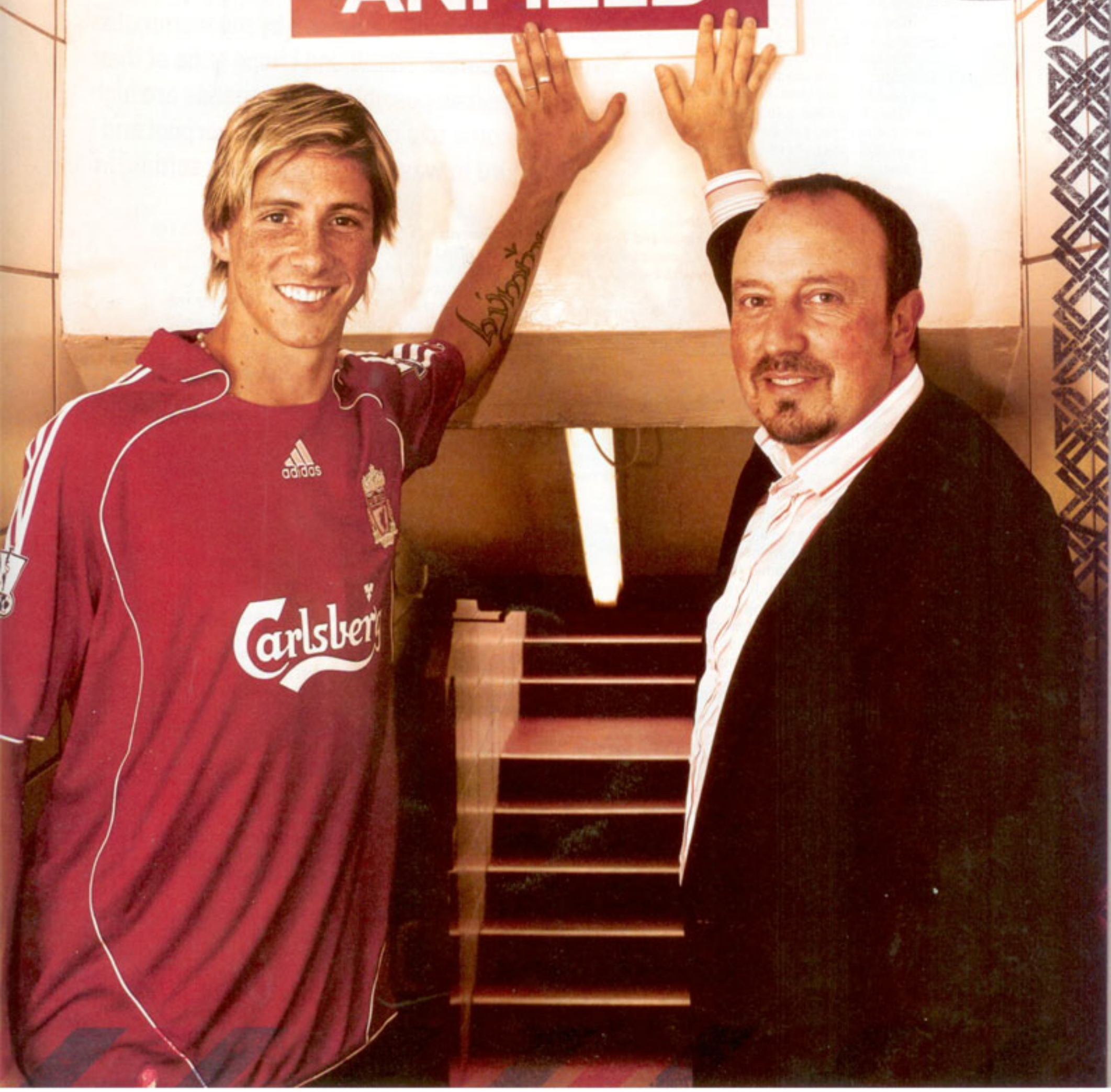
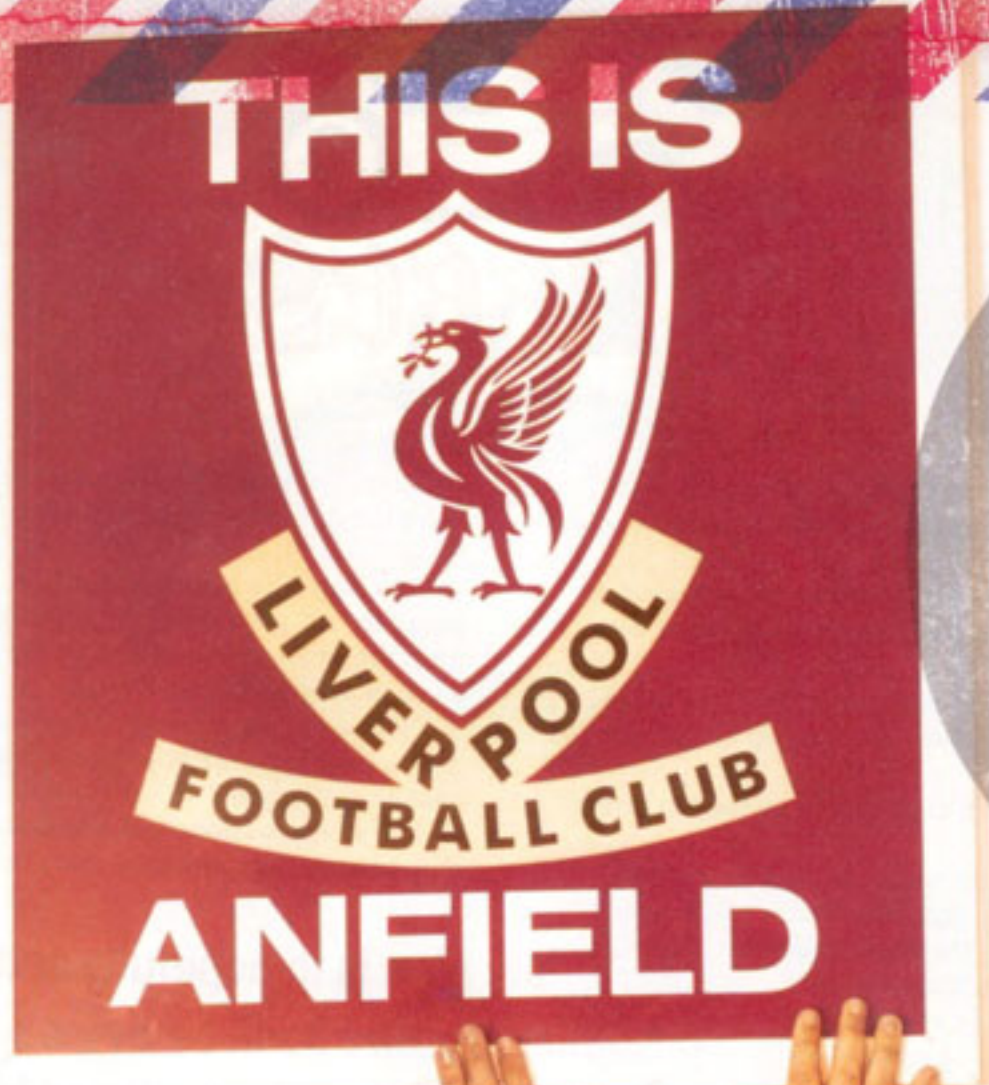
"I am very aware that the fans here at Liverpool are also very important. The fact that they get behind you whether you are winning, losing or drawing is very, very special and doesn't happen everywhere. ▶



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# Fernando TORRES

► "As a player, you need to pay that support back."

The most obvious way for a striker to do that is with goals.

His average of 15 league strikes per season over the past five years equates to a ratio of a goal every 2.3 games.

Logic suggests that with better service and players around him, those figures will improve further, and Torres agrees.

"I have signed for a club playing at the top level in Europe," he nods.

"This means the demands on a player as an individual are higher. But, with that, you can benefit from the higher quality in terms of the players around you.

"The sooner that I can adapt, the better. I will be working as hard as I can to settle in to my new surroundings and adapt to the players and quality of the team around me.

"One of my aims is to try and increase that average number of goals and improve my ratio while I am here at Liverpool."

As Torres traded Madrid for Merseyside, Luis Garcia went the other way, his three years in England hailed largely as a success. Pepe Reina and Xabi Alonso are two other Spaniards who continue to thrive in the Premiership but others, it has to be said, have not been as fortunate.

Talk of another Fernando who arrived from Madrid, Morientes from Real, was never too far away last week. While his 18 months at Anfield defied the legend, Nando has been scoring for fun since his return to La Liga. He is still a class act, but one who was perhaps simply not suited to the English game.

Morientes was five years Torres' senior and very much the finished article when he came to Liverpool. Still only 23, this Fernando has time on his side and plenty of scope to adapt to different ideas and a new brand of football.

The youngster is aware of the pitfalls the Premiership may pose and a six-year contract will allow him the breathing space to adjust. However, rather than feeling his way in to life at Anfield, Torres reveals he has no intention of resting on his laurels.

"When you arrive at a new club, in a new country, I imagine you do so hoping that things will pan out in the best way possible," says Torres, who is expected to get his first outing for the club during the forthcoming trip to Switzerland.

"There are examples everywhere of players such as Luis Garcia or Fernando Morientes who have had differing levels of success.

"I don't intend to make this a year of transition but to hit the ground running and start off as I mean to go on.

"My plan is to hopefully settle in as quickly as possible. I'm sure I will be helped by my teammates from the Spanish squad and I hope to be at their level as soon as possible.

"The demands are high when you come to a club as big as Liverpool and I can't afford to waste a whole season settling in."

If first impressions last, our new number nine should have little problem doing so.

**'My plan is to hopefully settle in as quickly as possible. I'm sure I will be helped by my teammates from the Spanish squad and I hope to be at their level as soon as possible. The demands are high when you come to a club as big as Liverpool and I can't afford to waste a whole season settling in'**

"Everything I've seen so far has been excellent and better than I expected, 10 out of 10," he says.

"The treatment from everybody here at the club has been fantastic, as it has from the supporters.

"My first taste of them was when I arrived in the airport on the day I signed my contract. I was being clapped and applauded in the baggage arrivals hall by a group of fans who had just come in on another flight.

"That was a nice gesture and made me feel very welcome from the moment I arrived in Liverpool."

By now you will probably know the story of the message inscribed inside his captain's armband at Atletico Madrid.

He tells us the words 'We'll Never Walk Alone' were the brainchild of his close circle of friends, who each have a tattoo bearing the same message.

"One of them in particular is an avid Liverpool fan," smiles Torres.

"The armband was a present from him. He is delighted I have signed for Liverpool and will be coming over as soon as possible.

"My friends are really important to me and they will all be over at some point and have been on at me for tickets already.

"We are all very good friends and wherever we are or whatever happens in our lives we will always be connected and identify with each other from these words."

Torres explains that he couldn't get the tattoo himself while still an Atletico player.

No doubt when his good friend touches down in Liverpool, he will be encouraging Fernando that there is no better time to do so.



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