

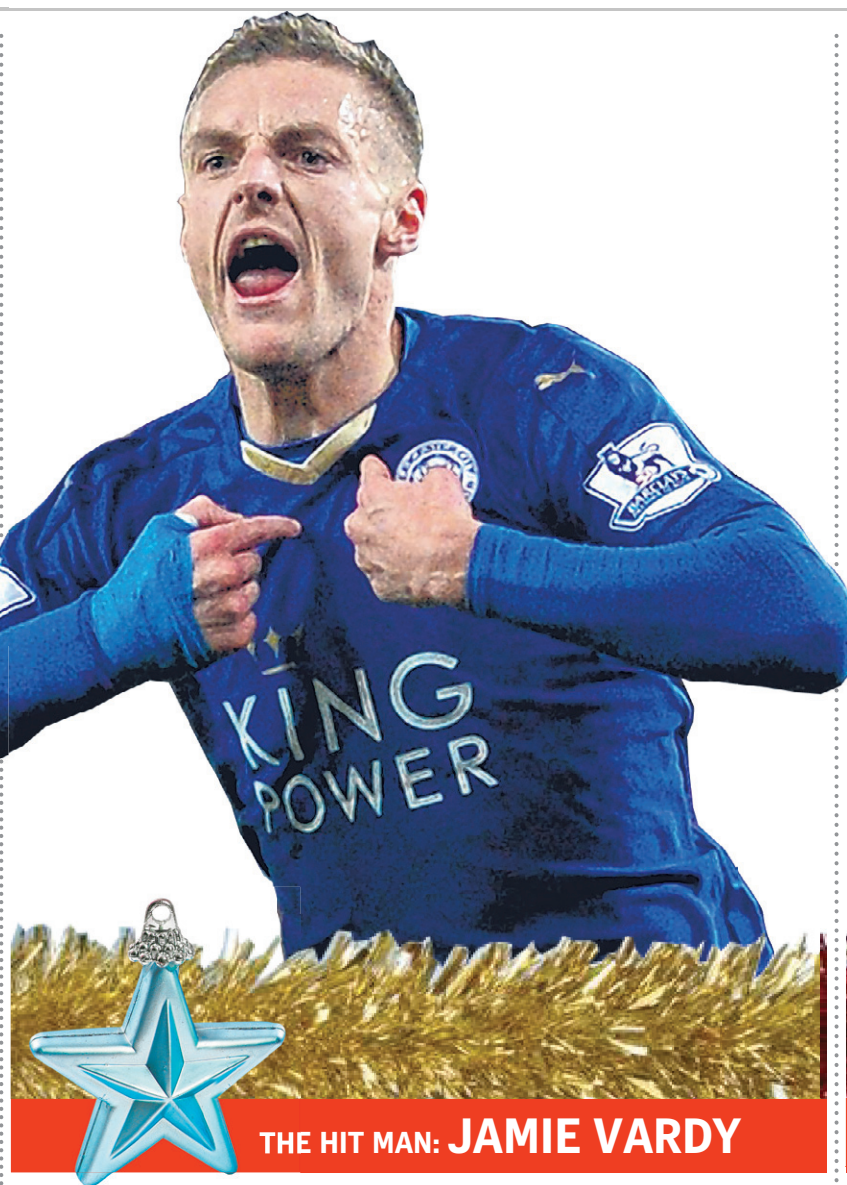
EPL's surprise Christmas package

Not many fans could have predicted Leicester City to be at top of the table at Christmas, but Claudio Ranieri and his merry men have somehow defied the odds.



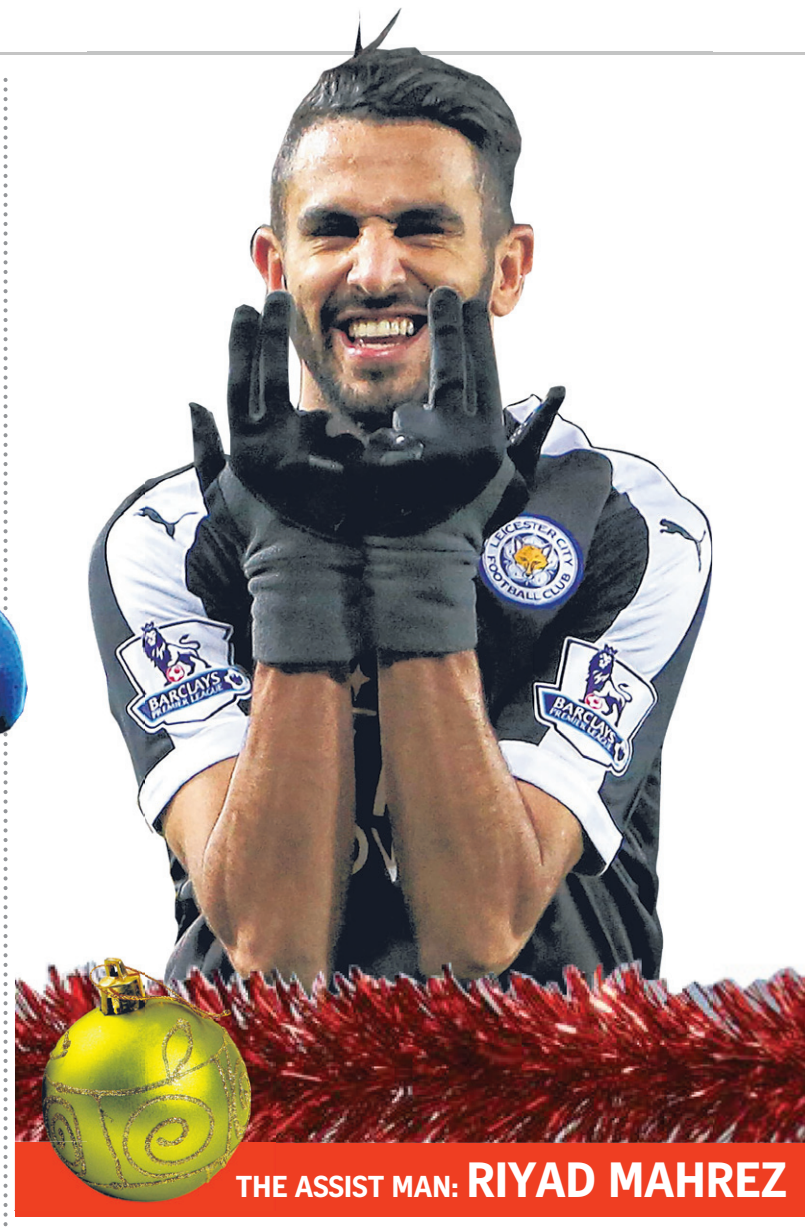
THE MANAGER: **CLAUDIO RANIERI**

- His famous nickname, Tinkerman, was given by the Italian media for his tendency to over-rotate his squad. When he became Chelsea manager in 2000, he actually reminded the English media of that moniker.
- Never forgetting his Italian roots, he treated the entire Leicester team to pizza after they managed a clean sheet against Crystal Palace.
- He may look like a thin Santa Claus, fatherly and friendly, but he also has fire in his belly. For example, he used the song Fire from Leicester-based band Kasabian to lift his players to a 4-2 win over Sunderland, urging them: "When you go on the pitch and hear the song, that means they want warriors."



THE HIT MAN: **JAMIE VARDY**

- EPL-leading 15 goals this season, including scoring in record 11 straight matches.
- Why is he so prolific? Maybe it is because he is the fastest player in EPL this season – 35.44kmh registered against West Ham in August.
- He also has a "most expensive" signing record – being the priciest non-league player when Leicester signed him from Fleetwood Town for around £1 million (\$2.1 million) in 2012.



THE ASSIST MAN: **RIYAD MAHREZ**

- Club-leading seven assists this season, also has 13 league goals.
- The Algerian became the first North African footballer to score a hat-trick in the EPL, against Swansea on Dec 5.
- Speedy winger was once deemed "too frail" by French teams. Bought from French second-tier side Le Havre for £350,000, he is now wanted by Manchester United and Tottenham. The starting price: £29 million.

THE CITY

- Britain's 10th largest city.
- Famous people born there: Richard Attenborough (actor), David Attenborough (broadcaster), Gary Lineker, Gordon Banks, Peter Shilton, Emile Heskey (footballers), Martin Johnson (former England rugby captain).
- First British city outside of London to have traffic lights. Now it has more traffic lights than any other British city.



THE TEAM

- The Foxes may be a top-table side at the moment, but at a combined value of £52.8 million, they are 17th most expensive team in the EPL. Manchester City come in tops at £411 million while Bournemouth are last at £26.4 million.
- Leicester's record signing is Croatian striker Andrej Kramaric, who cost a mere £9million from Croatian side Rijeka.



THE CLUB

- They have won the league seven times – the second-tier league, that is. They have never been champions in the top tier, with their best finish being second in the old First Division in 1929.
- They are the first EPL team to go into Christmas top of the table, after being bottom at the same time the previous season.
- If all goes with history, then Leicester will probably play in Europe next season. That is because the lowest-ever finish by a team who were top of the EPL table at Christmas was sixth (Aston Villa in 1998/99). Hopefully, the Foxes will not do worse.