

Wagg, Stephen. *The Football World: A Contemporary Social History*. Brighton, Eng.: The Harvester Press Ltd. 1984. Dist. in U.S. by Salem House. xv, 252 pp. Notes, index. \$22.50 (cloth) \$11.95 (paper)

In the past five years, a number of scholarly works dealing with football (soccer) in England have appeared. They include Tony Mason's finely crafted, detailed analysis of the social and political setting of football (*Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915*) and Steven Tischler's use of football to demonstrate class and economic distinctions in England *Footballers and Busi-*

nessmen). *The Football World* contains some of the elements of its predecessors, but it is a very different kind of book. It contains a more pronounced political and social message about football as well as the state of present day English society

The book is true to part of its subtitle, it is very much a study of “contemporary” football. It lives up to the introduction where Wagg states he wanted to write a “book blending important elements of the history, sociology and politics of football.” The latter two are the strength of the book; the historical analysis is its weakness. Almost three fourths of the text deals with the period after 1945, an allocation of space that fits in with the subject that Wagg has chosen. However, the introductory chapters do not establish a historical context. They give the appearance of bowing to the necessity of providing background, but have the effect of highlighting the difference between Wagg’s approach towards his subject and that of a social historian. Wagg’s book is important because it is not the academic social history that it appears from the subtitle, but it is a passionate, involved, informed look at how football has changed over the past forty years. This approach does have some problems, especially when it appears that Wagg assumes that his readers share his political and social philosophy. When he criticizes the crude market place philosophy of the Thatcher government he should give his readers a stronger sense of what is wrong with it and how it is reflected in football. The description of “the saloon bar philistinism prevailing in the board rooms of the Football League and among its national spokespeople” is a forthright statement of Wagg’s beliefs, but it does not do much to further our understanding of how and why directors act. It is easy to share Wagg’s revulsion at West Ham supporters becoming “animated about ‘Tottenham Yids’ “, but he should provide some historical context about the roots of that slur (a brief look at anti-Semitism in East London would suffice) that go beyond concluding that it is a product of “the dismal renaissance of British fascism.”

Wagg’s involvement with his subject may cause problems for historians, but his ability to identify, and identify with, the class distinctions that permeate English society and football are extremely important. He raises a question about football that is crucial to anyone interested in the social significance of sport—“Whose sport is it anyhow?”

The book will present difficulties and challenges for American readers who are unfamiliar with the subject. His references to the importance of particular players, teams and events may be as puzzling to Americans as an off-handed comment about the significance of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Joe Namath or Curt Flood would be to a Britisher. Some issues Wagg emphasizes will seem almost commonplace to American readers who are conditioned to the idea that managers of professional sports teams exist to be fired. At times, Americans will be struck by the depth of class identity, witness Wagg’s belief that Herbert Chapman (the prototype for the great managers) was showing “respect for his social betters” when he said that “the greatest day of his life was when his son qualified as a solicitor.” It would be unfortunate if readers allowed these problems to

dissuade them from dealing with the important themes that recur periodically throughout the book: the importance of the press and television to football, the impact of the cult of the manager on the sport, the transformation of the footballer from a well-paid artisan into a highly-paid celebrity and the increased pressures not to lose.

Wagg is very skillful in discussing the transformation of the manager from a glorified office boy into a powerful administrator with a high public profile. This was followed by an emphasis on the ability of the manager to understand tactical subtleties and to be able to act as a coach. The phrase "track suit manager" might be strange to Americans, but it encompasses a series of significant changes in the social structure of football, as well as how the sport was marketed to the public. Wagg also raises important questions about the role of the sports journalist and ties that in with the new status achieved by managers after 1945 and players after the maximum wage was abolished in the early 1960's.

The important, subtle, issue that pervades the entire book is the constantly changing relationships between the various elements that are involved in the world of football—directors, managers, players, writers, supporters and the public. Change never occurred in isolation. When the players' lawsuit against the League abolished the maximum wage the conditions were prepared for an estrangement between the players and fans. When directors turned over greater authority to managers they set the stage for a new style of sports journalism. When players lost the status of "soccer slaves" they were forced to cope with their new "middle class" status. When journalists benefited by their access to insider information from the clubs they created a gulf between themselves and many players. When groups of supporters began to display a passionate, sometimes violent, loyalty to a club, they alienated thousands of former supporters and convinced potential future fans that football was not the game for them.

No discussion of *The Football World* would be complete without special mention of Jimmy Hill. This former player, manager, director, broadcaster and chairman is the focus for much of Wagg's discussion and the subject of some of the best quotations. At various times in his career, Hill has been the English equivalent of Marvin Miller, Al Davis, George Allen, and Howard Cosell. If English football had ever demonstrated a real interest or understanding of principles of consumer capitalism, Hill probably would have been the game's Pete Rozelle.

Wagg is correct in trying to establish the links between his various themes and trying to relate them to events outside of football. It is a difficult task that he has set for himself. We must respect his ambition at the same time we question some of the evidence he uses and the conclusions that he draws. The book forces us to think about the broader implications of football in England and is a useful background against which to look at parallels (or lack of them) in North America. *The Football World* raises many more questions than it provides

answers, a quality that should recommend it to anyone who is interested in sports history or English society.

University of Missouri-St. Louis

Charles P. Korr