

Stephen Wagg, *The Football World: A Contemporary Social History*. Harvester Press, Brighton, Sussex, 1984. pp.252. £5.95 paper.

Herbert Chapman was the manager of The Arsenal 1925-34. Jimmy Hill managed Coventry City 1961-67 and was the club's chairman in the early 1980s. Chapman was a qualified mining engineer who said his proudest moment was when his son qualified as a solicitor. Hill had a grammar school education and a father who was a stockbroker. Chapman ordered his players not to wear cloth caps. Hill demolished the terracing at Coventry's ground to make way for seats that workers could not afford, Chapman wrote in 1934 that football 'is largely a business...In these days you have to fetch them (the crowds) in by making an irresistible appeal and, in this respect at least, we do not differ greatly from other entertainment promotors (38). Hill in 1960 wrote that as 'football is big business...there will be a tendency for business ethics and gamesmanship to extend from the board room to the field of play. Clubs cannot afford to have an amateur attitude to a professional game' (150).

Throughout Stephen Wagg's book it is these two men who continually hold centre stage. They are rightfully seen as beacons for the development of professionalism in British football, with

Chapman showing the way and Hill providing directions in the last twenty years. Yet both Chapman and Hill are seen by Wagg in a broader context than just football. They are used to show that the game did not develop in isolation; that football, in fact, has reflected the changing political, economic and social conditions of Britain.

Although there are many themes taken up, such as the emergence of the cult of the manager (the cure-all 'witchdoctor'); the rise of a 'technocracy', viz. the qualified coach; the link between national teams and national ego; the unbinding of financial and trade restrictions on players, the main thrust of *The Football World* is that 'the values of modern football, as well as those of the modern footballer are, in essence, the values of advertising and public relations, and of a business world less constrained than in the earlier part of this century by notions of fairness and probity (148).'

For Wagg, British football in the post-war years has become permeated with a consumerist mentality fostered by the media, advertising and public relations 'elites'. It is no longer the League Cup, it is the Milk Cup. Players like Kevin Keegan and Peter Shilton are not just footballers but marketable commodities. The decision to eradicate the professional, dubbed the 'cynical', foul was based on the belief that it reduced goals; thus lowering the game's appeal, especially for television audiences, and therefore the likelihood of sponsorship.

In two key chapters of the book Wagg convincingly links the consumerist mentality with, firstly, the 'consumer capitalism' of Conservative governments and, secondly, the importation of the values and methods of American capitalism. He pinpoints how important the introduction of commercial television was and how it enabled the advertising-public relations industry to 'snowball'. This industry, though, needed the abolition of the maximum wage and 'retain-and-transfer' system in order to crack the football market. Forced to compete heavily for players at a time when crowds were decreasing, clubs were left with little alternative other than turning to commercial interests in order to survive, let alone grow and prosper.

Overall, Wagg's thesis is well argued and convincing. In making good use of the massive autobiographical literature spawned by players, coaches and managers, he has found abundant material to substantiate his claims. Yet this is not all. Whereas most serious histories of football have concentrated on the emergence and early forms of professionalism, Wagg's contemporary history has revealed facets of professionalism that have only emerged after the mid 1930s. These include, of course, the commercial-media aspects but, perhaps more interestingly, the attitudes of players and management to their 'craft'. With the rise of a 'technocracy', and the advance of 'experts' and 'science', Wagg details how a cultural elite has emerged.

The text of *The Football World* reads easily and only occasionally jars. For example, leading footballers were 'catapulted... into the wide, blue, new-bourgeois yonder' (1411, and football has undergone 'bourgeoisification' (204).

However, the book does deserve criticism on two accounts. Firstly, many interesting points are raised but Wagg tends often to pass up the opportunity to elaborate. The most noticeable example of this concerns Britain's reluctance to adopt the more technical approach that has always characterised football in Europe and South America. This is a crucial point in understanding British football, not only because it explains Britain's lack of World Cup success before 1966 (and after?), but because it is a reflection of the depth of British insularity; an insularity stemming from days when 'British was best' and 'Britannia ruled the waves'.

The second point of criticism is that the people most responsible for professional football - the supporters - are dealt with all too briefly. Not till the very last chapter, titled 'Never Walk Alone? - Today's Supporters', is the subject given a decent airing and, disappointingly, it is confined to the subject of hooliganism. Moreover, while the research of others on hooligans is faithfully surveyed, Wagg offers precious little comment on it and barely any conclusion.

If supporters, though the financial backbone of professionalism, were not crucial to developments in post-war football then this should have been made clear. Supporters are too obvious a feature in British football for their importance, or lack of

importance, to be left unexplained. Logic seems to indicate that changes in modern football were not due to supporters for, while the post-war decline in crowds was largely responsible for clubs adopting the commercialism of 'consumer capitalism' in order to survive, the decline in itself was due to the same 'consumer capitalism' providing workers with leisure alternatives outside of football. This Wagg proposes but does not prove.

Not many books have seriously tried to deal with the history of British football. The great majority have been concerned only with 'who won what and when'. A few have successfully gone deeper but they have concentrated on either different periods or issues than those dealt with by Wagg. As such, his book is a pioneering effort of good contemporary social history.

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