

Charles Korr, *West Ham United. The Making of a Football Club*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1986. (Also available in paperback from Duckworth), Bibliog., Illus., index, pp.257, 27.95 paper.

For many of us brought up in the British and Australian sporting tradition the major sports of our long-severed colonial brothers of the United States are of an alien culture and tradition. We can only be astonished at the parochialism that proclaims a World Series in a bat and ball game that is hardly played outside the States and while most of us can understand and enjoy (in different degrees) football of the two rugby codes, soccer, Rules and Gaelic codes, 'gridiron' remains something of a mystery. Overlaying it all is the American's unblushing propagation of Kitsch and commercialism, with talk of consumers and commodities, franchises and packages, so that the lovers of sport outside the States pray that our traditional team sports will resist their slide towards the American model, as threatened cricket, is threatening football and has condemned the Olympics.

One of the great interests of Chuck Korr's book on West Ham United is that here we have an American's view of a British sport,

which, added to Janet Lever's book on soccer in Brazil (*Soccer Madness*) and Richard Stremski's *Kill for Collingwood* allow 'outsider' insights into football in three different countries. What is also remarkable about these three books is the way in which officials and players opened up their hearts and records to provide a feast of sources often denied other historians. While this has its advantages, it also has the disadvantage because the view tends to come more from the directors' box and the game and community tend to fade into the background. It is clear that Janet Lever knew almost nothing about soccer when she wrote her book (and not very much when she finished it), and while Chuck started out as a soccer greenhorn, he grew attached to it: Richard, of course, is a dyed-in-the-wool Magpie, but he was not born in the Magpie nest. Like Chuck his conversion came late, and perhaps this lack of early education in the mysteries of the game and the fans who follow it, through hail, rain and shine, from spectator accommodation that to the American sports fan must seem like a form of masochism is something that Americans can never quite understand. But that is only one side of a club history, and Chuck Korr's history of West Ham, like Richard Stremski's on Collingwood, is a club history seen from the inside, by an 'outsider'.

Football is not just about the teams on the field and the fans urging them on. It is also about the directors and the unsung heroes behind the scene who provide the stadium and prepare the gladiators for their weekly encounters. Here Chuck Korr provides a wealth of data on the problems of running a football club, and the temptations and sacrifices that face the men handling the money. He is honest and forthright in detailing the few scandals the club had to face, and gives balanced accounts of the personalities who guided The Hammers' destinies. The book itself, as befits an academic history, concentrates on the early history of the club, from its foundation in 1895 as the works team of the Thames Ironworks, its severing of the ties from Arnold Hill's benign paternalism, (although his family retained a major share-holding) to the first great triumphs of 1923, when they gained promotion to the first division and narrowly lost that first Wembley Cup Final watched by about 200,000 people, packed to within a couple of feet of the playing area. In those first years the club had relied mainly on

local men for its players, and local families like the Pratts and the Cearns to run it. The book is studded with gems that the reader will garner for his or her special interest: for me it was the information that Syd Puddefoot, superstar of his time, was transferred to Falkirk (!), Scotland, in the 1920s for the immense sum of £5,000, a welcome reversal of the usual movement of players across the border.

West Ham have never captured the imagination the way Arsenal, Spurs, Man. United and latterly Liverpool have done, being seen to be as dull as their strip of claret and blue. This comes through in Korr's book as he shows how some managers were happy enough to have the club as a second-rate outfit, one Bert Davis even being reported in 1936 as saying that he was glad West Ham had not made promotion as it was a better financial proposition to be in the second division. Indeed one of the unhappy records of West Ham was that they had spent more consecutive years in second division than any other club in history. Nevertheless, it is as a first division team that West Ham are best known, and with players like Johnny Byrne and the trio of Bobby Moore, Geoff Hunt and Martin Peters all members of the victorious England World Cup team in 1966 together with Ron Greenwood as manager they entered an era that saw them rise to great heights. They were the second English team to win a European competition, the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1965. However, they made more than one visit to the Second Division, and although they won the English FA Cup in 1964, 1975 and 1980, they have never won the League, their third place in 1986 being their highest ever finishing spot.

This book is an exhaustive study of the West Ham Football Club, based largely on its own archives, with many insights into the day to day running of a professional football club away from the lime-light (or the flood lights), where the more mundane tasks of accounting and equipment preparation are carried out, and without which the dramatic events on the field would not be possible. It is the history of a 'family club', and this comes through in the scrupulously honest way in which the faults and frailties as well as the honesty and dedication of the 'family' members is depicted. The Alf Garnetts are not here, nor are the characters from the Eastenders, but in their place we have the likes of Syd King

('suspended as secretary dismissed committed suicide', as the excellent chronology tells us: the full story is in the text), W.J. Carns, who ran the club from 1935-50, Alan Searles ('dismissed for "defalcations"'), Reg Pratt, who took over from W.J. Carns as chairman, and who had the audacity to consider opening up the Board to someone outside 'the family'- and this was in the 1970s! If this family tradition has led to the accusation of the Board adhering to antiquated practices it has preserved them from the greater evils of crass commercialism. That it were so with more clubs!

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