

Craig McGill, *Football Inc. How Soccer Fans Are Losing The Game*, Vision Paperbacks, London, 2001, viii + 264 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

Football, the beautiful game, the world's game, the game of the people has never been more popular. Football is the dominant sport in Europe, South America and Africa. It is becoming increasingly popular in Asia and North America, languishing only in Australia, who are currently world champions in three other football codes – rugby union, rugby league and Australian rules football! The World Cup is equal to, if not more popular, than the Olympic Games. Football is now played in more fan friendly stadiums, attracts huge crowds – both at games and in front of television sets – and generates increasing streams of revenue through turnstiles, sponsors and broadcasters.

Football, like many other sports, is a growth industry. As income and leisure time have advanced, people, or what Craig McGill would describe as fans, consume more and more of football. Football has gone up market, attracting richer and more middle class fans. *Football Inc. How Soccer Fans Are Losing The Game* constitutes a lament for times past, when football was mainly supported by the working class; who McGill depicts as football's real supporters.

McGill tells his readers that 'real football is concerned with romance, passion,

and adventure' (p.1) and that '[i]n the coming years football's biggest and most important moments may take place off the pitch instead of on it' (p.4). McGill's analysis and understanding of football is ahistorical. As Wray Vamplew demonstrated in his seminal *Pay Up And Play The Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1975 – 1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988), football, from the very beginning, has always been about business, and maximizing filthy lucre, where key decisions about governance and organisation are made off the pitch. Football has adapted to and/or adapted practices used in other areas of business. More recently, it has found itself being a business innovator, taking advantage of technological developments associated with pay for view television and other forms of new media.

In this lament McGill provides details of major events associated with football, mainly in the United Kingdom and other parts of the globe, especially developments within Europe. His book is organised into four sections. The first concerns brief descriptions of major 'figures' in football – fans, players, referees, managers and club chairmen. Being the spokesperson of the fan he begrudges players' high and increasing incomes – why 'offer a free starting place in the Manchester United, AC Milan or Barcelona line-up and people would fight for the right?' (p.27) – and is dismissive of player injuries – 'anyone can be injured at work, and many jobs have higher risks than football' (p.30) – and their employment rights (chapter 13). In a statement that is beyond belief for its naivety he says chairman 'is the one position that adult fans who no longer have a chance of playing actually have a possibility of getting if they are educated and lucky. Money also helps' (p.70).

The second section concerns various business, financial and commercial developments associated with football. These include issues associated with television, sponsorship, floating clubs on the stock exchanges, challenges and changes to European cup competitions, new international transfer and compensation rules, corruption and machinations associated with determining the location of the 2002 and 2006 World Cups. McGill is very dismissive of Asian football, displaying a displeasing arrogance (can arrogance ever be pleasing?). He quotes a journalist, after spending some months in China, Japan and Thailand who said of Asian standards of play, 'It's shite' (p.135). He also quotes a language teacher who lived in Japan for more than a year, pointing to difficulties that English speaking fans will have in 'negotiating travel' during the 2002 World Cup in Japan and Korea (p.136). McGill is unaware of both nations' penchant for organisation and their traditions of hospitality.

McGill bemoans the processes that resulted in Germany being allocated the 2006 World Cup; England being one of the nations defeated. He said, 'The bid process, spanning years and costing millions of pounds, has nothing to do with

most fans, but again it is fans who will suffer, as they will have to traipse around the globe, going to countries that may care little for the game but are offering a lot of money to host it' (p.149). Football might be the world game, but for McGill some fans are more equal than others. If the object of the World Cups is to make it 'available' for most fans, particularly those with limited incomes, logic would seem to indicate that future World Cups should be held in China or India, the world's most populous nations.

In the third section McGill examines what he describes as ugly aspects of football – hooliganism, racism, sectarianism ('The Old Firm' battles between some Rangers and Celtic fans), a trial involving the aftermath of the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy when 96 people died, and a legal battle between Newcastle United and its supporters over ten year bonds and guaranteed seating. The first three of these issues constitute the best chapters in *Football Inc.* The final section details examples of where fans exercised their 'voice' and became proactive. The first example concerns Manchester United and its failed attempt to merge with Rupert Murdoch's media empire. The second is where representatives of fans were elected to the board of Northampton, providing cash injections to help it avoid insolvency. In the final chapter McGill paints a football Armageddon if the powers that be continue to ignore real fans.

McGill deplores football's increased commercialization. Amongst other things this is because he sees, or equates, such involvements, with a desire by those so involved for increased profits. In contradiction to this he notes that very few English clubs make any profits (p.77). He also quotes Gerry Boon of Deloitte and touché who said '[f]ootball clubs have always spent all "spare" cash on players wages' (p.253). McGill also maintains that fans do not like the way football is being run, and are being lost to the game. Contrast this again with the following quote from Gerry Boon:

At the end of the day it is the fan who drives value; directly through "the gate", in the shop and at the stadium, and indirectly by providing the fan base which underpins TV values and sponsorship rates. What this means, of course, is that as in any market, it is the customer – in football's case, the fan – who will dictate what the product will look like, what it will cost, how it will be presented as so on (p.254).

McGill employs two contradictory notions in his lament. The first is that football is the people's game; the second is the *real* fan. His notion of the *real* fan, those with a *true* passion for football are traditional working class supporters. In McGill's hands *real* fans and the people's game is not a privilege afforded to middle class, richer supporters. Such persons are apparently not people. It is as if McGill is saying that such persons should be ignored despite (or is it because

of?) the income that they provide whether it be by purchasing more salubrious, and expensive seating, merchandise and pay for view broadcasting. This exercise in double think, of excluding persons who are from the 'wrong' class/strata while maintaining football is the people's game is a major blight on McGill's analysis and understanding of the world of football.

Overall, this is a disappointing work. While on some issues – hooliganism, racism and sectarianism – McGill writes with sensitivity and insight, *Football Inc. How Soccer Fans are Losing The Game* is little more than a rave by someone who doesn't like the way in which football is evolving. Moreover, McGill is bereft of historical knowledge and nuances concerning football's development. Other than for providing a few tidbits on recent events in football it is a work which will be quickly forgotten.

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