

The Review of the Season

by Brian James

Old footballers, unlike old soldiers, do not simply fade away, for the game has little affection for ageing skills. Jewelled careers are often ended with an almost callous abruptness, for retirement and decline are facts of the sporting life, to be accepted without question. Thus the final days of the 1972-73 season wore a sad face, as enough definitive names from the past decade slithered from the forefront into obscurity or the more shadowy corners of the Football League to give some real meaning to the clichés 'An end of an era', or 'We'll never see their like again'.

Unquestionably the most revered victim to the march of time was Bobby Charlton, who sadly played his final League match at Stamford Bridge on the same afternoon as brother Jack, his hamstring torn, pulled off a Leeds United shirt for the last time. Manchester United also decided to turn their backs on Denis Law, who for years had matched Charlton's grace with electric athleticism, and, if one dare predict the unpredictable, George Best.

Gordon Banks had continued to defy the years, but it was left to tragic circumstance to remove him from the arena, alas almost certainly for all time. Others, rather than making their last exit, moved from the centre of the stage to the wings. The P. Thompson more frequently seen on the Liverpool team sheet was the youthful Phil, not Peter, who unlike his evergreen colleague Ian Callaghan could no longer command a place. Ron Davies departed from Southampton for Second Division Portsmouth. Frank McLintock, though retaining his Division One status with Queens Park Rangers, will find playing at Loftus Road almost repertory after the Palladium of Highbury.

More often than most years, relegation deprived the top-flight of players who had pulled in the crowds. The demise of Crystal Palace means that Don Rogers starts next season as he started the last - a Second Division player. Charlie Cooke, like Rogers, an exhilarating individualist on his day, went with him. West Bromwich Albion sank with all hands, including the combative young Scot Asa Hartford and his midfield colleague the gifted Len Cantello.

In all a sombre prospect. Or is it? Joe Mercer, often the romantic himself, offers a note of perspective: 'It's inevitable that we lose these characters. But we lost the Dixie Deans, the 'Pongo' Warings, and even Pele, and we have survived. You can only be the best in your day. It's pleasing that they contributed, but the great thing is that the Charltons, and Gordon Banks are, I'm sure, all staying in the game. It's people like Danny Blanchflower who are the sad losses. These types, like your Alex James, your Di Stefano, your Joe Boszic, your Stan Cullis - all their own men. But we lost them and survived, and we shall again.'

Tommy Docherty, the manager apparently most deprived by the farewells, shares Mercer's optimism: 'Of course it's sad. It's always sad when great players give up. But it has to happen. We've been hit by the loss of Bobby and Denis and, for different reasons, George. We hope to be able to replace Bobby on the field though it will be harder to replace him as an overall influence to the club. We've got young Trevor Anderson, who did so well for Northern Ireland in the Home Internationals. He's a tremendous prospect. And there's another young lad that I promise you'll be hearing a lot about in the future - Gerry Daly. So I'm not at all depressed about the position at Manchester United. And look elsewhere. There's Mike Channon. What a fabulous player he is. John Richards,

at Wolves, is another. There's Willie Carr and young Daley at Wolves, they're fine young players. Look at Ipswich, they've got Kevin Beattie and Trevor Whymark, David Johnson and the Irishman Bryan Hamilton. Willie Donachie is another. There's Steve Perryman at Spurs. He's still a youngster. Arsenal have some wonderful young players waiting to break into the side. Chelsea, they introduced a couple towards the end of the season - Britton and Brolly. There's Martin Dobson too at Burnley.

'Nobody in football, like in any other walk of life, is indispensable. It's sad when we lose great players, but the game always brings up somebody new. Look at Pele. When I was over in Brazil with Scotland last summer, I saw some tremendous youngsters. Great skills. Pele was unique but some of these young Brazilians - they'll be players in their own right.'

Charlton, Law, and Banks are all products of a generation of footballers born before the abolition of the maximum wage. The affluence of the new breed is, in Docherty's opinion, another weapon to the perpetuation of talent.

'The money in the game is a great incentive. The young players of today have realised that the longer they stay in football the more money they will make. So, I think, they tend to look after themselves much better than in the past. That can only be to the future good of the game.'

The *valetes* apart, the F.A. Cup Final ensured that the 1972-73 season will be well-remembered. Sunderland, who at Christmas were relegation candidates, became transformed under new manager Bob Stokoe, and reached Wembley after eliminating First Division favourites Manchester City and Arsenal. Every logical argument stated that the fun had to stop in the face of the Leeds United machine, but in the face of this particular competition logic continually flees. Ian Porterfield's goal, with a rare shot from his 'wrong' but right foot, and Jim Montgomery's acrobatic rebuff of Peter Lorimer's opportunity to restore some sanity to the occasion, not only provided the first Second Division Cup win since 1931. They restored belief and pride into an area starved not only of football success, where the queues that straggled around Roker Park in the golden years of Gurney and Carter were now more often seen at the Department of Employment.

Not even the disorder and disgrace of the League match against Queens Park Rangers at Roker four days after Wembley, when referee Reeves led the players from the field because of crowd behaviour, will dim that glow. But the result - a 3-0 win for promoted Rangers - was more than enough to show that promotion for Sunderland in 1974 is by no means the foregone conclusion predicted by so many in the euphoria of the final.

That Leeds should be the losers on such a day is symptomatic of an era that began nine seasons ago when Don Revie pulled his team into the First Division. This was so much a typical Leeds season - beaten at Wembley, third in the League, losing finalists in the European Cup-Winners' Cup. To be there when the honours are decided would be success enough in its own right, but when Leeds have built a career on near misses their record deserves careful consideration.

In those nine seasons in the very best company, they have reached nine major finals. On four occasions Billy Bremner has stepped forward to collect a trophy - two Fairs Cups, the League Cup and the F.A. Cup. On the debit side - if coming second can be labelled so - are three F.A. Cup failures at Wembley (plus two losing semi-finals), a Fairs Cup loss and the Cup-Winners' Cup defeat (plus two more losing European semi-finals). Their League record is even more illuminating. Winners in 1969, they have been runners up five times and fourth

twice, in addition to the third place of 1973. Over that period, 378 First Division matches have brought Leeds 213 wins and 522 points; a mere 18 extra points at the right moments and they would have been victorious on six occasions.

Comments on the effects of too much competition, especially in the last hectic month, flow easily from the pen. The bewildering pile-up in April 1970 that thwarted a treble on all counts, the fixture at Wolverhampton on a Monday night in May 1972, on which the double depended, played 48 hours after the Cup Final, the injuries and suspensions which culminated in the 1973 Cup-Winners' Cup Final being played without the core of the team – Bremner, Giles, Clarke and Gray.

But how much is the animosity and controversy that has surrounded Revie's side at the outset a factor to be considered? The legacy is now of several years standing but Leeds continue to be the most criticised as well as the most consistent English team. Significantly, charges arise from within the game. Bobby Moore spoke out against the 'professionalism' of Leeds in a newspaper column; Bill McGarry added his voice to the cause, again through newsprint, during Cup Final week; Brian Clough is a patent critic of the Leeds-genre. Even Bob Stokoe, surely unexperienced in the banter and propaganda that surrounds an important occasion, announced that Leeds had pulled tricks at Wembley in obtaining the better end for their supporters and the more favoured dressing-room. Unjust comment as it turned out, and if ever there was a case of a team's reputation doing its talking it was this.

In detail, the Yorkshire side are suspected of putting pressure on referees, by questioning decisions and over-acting, that they feign injuries to disrupt the play. Guilty or not, they have made enemies in the game. One is tempted to suggest that this has gone against them over the seasons; that opponents have set their hearts on beating Leeds United; that those 18 lost League points might have been gathered, against a back-ground of less ill-feeling. It can be no coincidence that Liverpool – who play no more attractively, who have arguably fewer stars and who are no innocents – were acclaimed in their League triumph. Clough's comment that 'if my side couldn't win, I'd want Shanks and Liverpool to have the title' merely echoed the thoughts of others.

So it was to Liverpool that Leeds bowed at the end of a season that began in a flurry of promises before a ball was ever kicked. The vows were bracketed together under the heading of 'total football', and Arsenal and Manchester City led the band who decreed that this would lead to attacking, adventurous play. Excellent August public relations no doubt, but at the end of the day the total number of First Division goals scored remained, remarkably, the same, 1,160, as in 1971-72. Moreover, when the attendances were aggregated to discover a loss of three million to League football as a whole, the lack of stimulating football was one of several reasons put forward to explain the decline. Others included the familiar chestnuts of television, hooliganism on the terraces, and the lack of attractive amenities on the grounds, and there seemed validity in varying degrees on all points. Some weekends, it was possible to see the goals from five First Division matches without leaving the fireside; in certain rounds of the F.A. Cup, highlights of six ties were broadcast by B.B.C. and Independent networks. Against the latter point West Ham took issue with the F.A. in an attempt to reduce the figure to one per channel. Queens Park Rangers, who took just £1,500 from the previous season's share-out, spoke for many when they claimed that the fees paid by the television networks should be raised to cover the cost of the armchair fans if televised football is to continue on the same basis.

With more police control and a greater awareness of the problems by the clubs, hooliganism existed more often in the minds of headline-seeking sports editors than on the terraces. One paper came up with the supposedly shocking figure of 3,000 arrests at First Division matches (though they had to make up the number by including Second Division Aston Villa's crowd problems), neglecting to provide the comparison figure that over 16 million fans attended these games. – that is just three arrests in a crowd of 16,000.

At Anfield, though, neither shortage of numbers nor the behaviour of the faithful proved a problem. Leading from the front, Liverpool, unlike the Leeds of two years ago, withstood a persistent and harrying chase from Arsenal. From the side that had stood one point adrift from Derby County in May 1972, Bill Shankly made one perceptive change. He signed Peter Cormack, a fluent, creative midfield player, from Nottingham Forest, and in doing so increased the depth of Liverpool's play. The ebullient Kevin Keegan buzzed wasp-like in front of goal, the new hero. Smith, Lawler, and Callaghan of the old guard provided the solidity, the reliability. But the triumph was Shankly's; perhaps the most lovable bigot of all time, his faith remained blind and totally inspiring.

Arsenal's adherence to 'total football' brought them some early success, but more often uneasiness which culminated in a 5-0 thrashing at Derby in November. The immediate re-appraisal brought a return to basics and to consistency; with Ball and Radford at their very best, some honour seemed certain until Sunderland crossed their path. Ipswich, too, provided a threat. Bobby Robson knitted a team of great flexibility and balance. Moreover, potential abounds; the Ipswich youth squad which last year produced Kevin Beattie, an Under-23 international in his first season, won the F.A. Youth Cup. Derby County succumbed to the attractions of their European adventure and began their defence of the title in listless form; the subsequent recapture of their best came too late to threaten the leaders. They did, though, top one league; they paid the highest fee – £225,000 to Leicester for David Nish – in a year which saw a massive £6 million change hands among the clubs.

Success, apparently bears little relevance to the appeal of Manchester United. Despite a year of wretched form and unwholesome boardroom politics, more than one million fans made the pilgrimage to Old Trafford. The unconvincing early form, aggravated by the wilful behaviour of George Best and unaltered by the introduction of expensive signings Wyn Davies and Ted Macdougall, came to a head with a 5-0 annihilation at Crystal Palace. The sacking of Frank O'Farrell was the immediate consequence and Tommy Docherty left the Scottish World Cup squad to replace him.

O'Farrell, transparently honest, had largely been undone by the Best affair in which he was not permitted full managerial control, and Best's tolerated aberrations had undermined his team. United came out of the affair with less than credit, though Docherty imported Scottish internationals in sufficient quantities to keep them in the First Division.

Manchester's managerial merry-go-round was not confined to Old Trafford. Malcolm Allison, after nine months without Joe Mercer, was tempted away from Maine Road by a reputed £13,000 per year offer from Crystal Palace. For Palace, spenders of over £600,000 during the season, it was the last cheque in their attempt to buy the renewal of their First Division ticket. It failed, and Allison moved almost directly into the Second Division, leaving behind him an unhappy Rodney Marsh, bereft of his mentor.

Crystal Palace plunged downwards with West Bromwich Albion after Norwich

City, with the noose tightening and the trap door open, had somehow wriggled clear. In an amazing debut season in Division One, they were once sixth and then from November 18th to April 14th did not win a League match. When it really mattered, they beat Albion and, through Stringer's injury-time winner, Palace, to stay up. In the midst of their spell of non-production they reached Wembley and the League Cup final, only to lose to Tottenham Hotspur, whose poetic but flickering talents seem more suited to Cup football, in a match of outstanding drabness.

Just as Crystal Palace replaced Queens Park Rangers in 1969, so they are replaced themselves by Rangers who, with Burnley, ran away with the Second Division. From mid-season they ploughed on inexorably, dogged at first by Aston Villa and then clear – the title going to Burnley who once again have the opportunity to test their meagre resources and unending supply of talented youngsters against the demands of the top flight.

After Liverpool and Burnley, Lancashire also provided the winners in Divisions Three and Four – Bolton Wanderers and Southport – both revitalised by England full-backs Jimmy Armfield and Jimmy Meadows. Alongside the re-establishment of the old (the oldest League club of all, Notts County, go up with Bolton) the two youngest League clubs, Hereford United, in their first season, and Cambridge United, gained an early taste of promotion; a flavour sampled by Aldershot for the first time in their 46-year history.

If the blackest of the season's statistics concerned attendances, discipline on the field came close behind. Ninety-nine players were sent off in League, League Cup and F.A. Cup matches; the previous record was 51, four seasons earlier. In addition, more than 2,000 bookings were recorded. Much of the punishment came as a direct result of a continuation of the referee's charter of tougher control. The new system of disciplining offenders by the totalling of points for bookings and automatic suspension introduced a welcome element of consistency into punishing the guilty. Its main failing concerns the appeals procedure; an appeal against a caution automatically stays the execution of the suspension, and clubs and players have consistently used the procedure to keep the defendant available for vital matches. Irritating and time consuming it may be for all the parties involved, but an appeal procedure is essential to justice and any attempt to prevent this aspect of off-the-field gamesmanship must not threaten the status of the genuine plea.

Violence on the field as well as off continued, then, to disturb. Inevitably Value Added Tax has increased admission prices to pose another threat to attendances; the extra million pounds from the Pools Promoters Association can only partially support any further losses. These, together with the need to stimulate attractive play and the problem of how much of it to televise, are the crucial issues the administrators carry with them into 1973-74.

For the managers there remains the question of how they are going to replace a mini-generation of fading stars. They are confident that they will succeed. That in itself is a promising sign for the future.

It was April 28 1973 when the Charlton brothers, Bobby and Jackie, bade farewell to the clubs they had served all their careers as Football League players.

For Bobby the occasion was at Stamford Bridge, a strangely shaped ground during the 1972-73 season, but one where the applause from the temporarily three-sided stadium was unanimously directed at him. He needed just two goals to bring his total to 200 in League games, but did not score. His 606th League match in Manchester United's colours passed uneventfully, the crowd's homage to him lifting it above mediocre level. But if the ending was far from a story book one, the chapter and verse had been sufficient to put him in the forefront of the truly outstanding footballers of his and any other era.

Bobby was born in Ashington and the family association with the Milburns was enough to give him a footballing background. When he was taken to a League club it was to Old Trafford as a youngster in 1953. He made his debut against Charlton Athletic at centre-forward in October 1956 and scored twice. He was one of only a handful of United players to survive the Munich air tragedy in 1958 and went on to become Footballer of the Year in 1966 and Europe's top ace the following year. In 1970 he was awarded the OBE. He played a leading part in England's World Cup triumph in 1966 and throughout his career brought considerable credit to his profession.

Off the field he was quiet and shrewd; on it he was quick, a fine mover with the ball, and could finish with a tremendous shot. Above all he had flair. For England he set up a new record of 106 international appearances and 49 goals.

While Bobby played in the forward line during his career, brother Jackie was for the most part a stalwart in defence. His footballing journey took him first to Leeds. He made his League debut against Doncaster Rovers in April 1953, and played his last game at Southampton.

For the giraffe-like Jackie the exit was even more odd. He walked off in the second half after damaging the hamstring he had pulled in the F.A. Cup semi-final against Wolverhampton Wanderers. In fact a week before the final itself it had seemed he might even play at Wembley—the scene of some of his greatest moments for club and country.

Jackie, vociferous but a charitable soul for all that, was as ungainly as brother Bobby was elegant on the field, but fewer centre-halves have presented a more formidable prospect to opposing attacks. He had to wait until quite late in his career for his best years. In fact during his earlier days at Elland Road he was at odds with Don Revie and almost left them. He had a few games at centre-forward, but by the time the 1960s arrived he was established at centre-half. He followed Bobby into the Footballer of the Year rating in 1967, having been in the centre of England's defence in the World Cup the year before.

In all, Jackie played in 35 internationals for England, and when he made his Football League farewell in Leeds colours he had played 629 League games for the club.

Before the season ended, both players were in demand as managers. Bobby took over the reins at Preston and Jackie made a similar move to Middlesbrough. And both appear regularly on the respective TV channels as experts; Bobby for BBC and Jackie with the ITA.

But whether playing, managing, or talking about the game, the Charltons have had much to offer and the quality of what they have given to the game has ensured that they will be remembered far away from Ashington, Manchester, and Leeds, not to mention Preston and Middlesbrough.