

## Achievements of Arsenal should not obscure football's problems

by John Camkin

Arsenal won both the F.A. Cup and the Football League Championship. The climax of the double, first with Leeds United and then with Liverpool at Wembley, produced an unusual fervour of English excitement.

Chelsea, followed by 4,000 spectators, went to Athens to take the European Cup-Winners Trophy from Real Madrid at the second attempt.

And finally Leeds United, so deserving a place on the victors' rostrum again, defeated Italy's Juventus in the Fairs' Cup Final.

For many, the 1970/71 season will be remembered by these achievements. For others it will be the season in which Scotland lost yet again at Wembley and managed only one goal, probably scored by England's Alan Ball, in the whole international tournament.

Yet, in retrospect, the 99th season of England's games with Scotland will be important perhaps for events off the field rather than for the trophies won or lost.

There is little doubt that events are overtaking both legislation and legislators with a disturbing speed.

Fewer goals are being scored than ever before. League attendances dropped by nearly 1.5m at a time when players' salaries and bonuses are rising at an alarming rate.

Scotland's problems are not those of England. But, in April, fewer than 40,000 watched 16 games in the Scottish League – less than half the number on the comparable Saturday a year previous.

Mr. James Aitken, the President of the Scottish League, was quoted 'The blunt fact is we are not giving the public what they want and so they are deserting us.

'We cannot stand by and let the game die. We have to find a formula in which goal-scoring once again becomes the major objective of all the teams.'

### FAMINE

In England, the Viewpoint of the Football League said: 'The man on the terrace, enjoying a better standard of living than ever before, is becoming more selective about what he watches.

'... There must be a return to so-called "Old-fashioned ideas" when scoring was the fundamental object of the game,' said the League.

The lack of goals last season reached famine proportions. Only 1,089 were scored in 462 First Division games – an average of 2.36 which is fewer than at any time since the First War.

In 1961, Tottenham Hotspur scored 115 League goals as they strode towards the Cup and Championship. In 1971, Arsenal scored 71.

In 1961, Tottenham, Wolves and Burnley all scored more than 100 goals and Newcastle United were relegated with 86. Once Aston Villa scored 128.

No First Division team has reached the century for eight years. In 1971, Leeds United led the way with 72 and, of 44 First and Second Division clubs, only Sheffield United managed to average two goals in each home match.

Of course it is a depressing picture but the lack of goals is only one outward manifestation of the economic sickness which threatens the very existence of eight out of every ten Football League clubs.

The root cause lies in the failure of the leading clubs sensibly to use the great opportunities provided in 1959 when Jimmy Hill and the Professional Footballers' Association negotiated the removal of the maximum wage.

Instead of expansion founded on sound economic principles, logic was thrown overboard. Transfer fees quadrupled and player's earnings increased at an even greater rate.

Almost every scruple was discarded in the frantic bid to keep up with the Joneses. Today it is a disaster to lose – and the end, inevitably, justifies the questionable means.

So the strong, rugged defensive player is king. He wears his crown in all too many cases by virtue of tactics which deceive even the most skilled and experienced of referees.

The referee himself has a thankless task. Scrutinised by the slow-motion camera, criticised too often by directors and managers, he must yearn for the day when his decision, right or wrong, was – and will be – accepted as honest and final.

Surely we should not need to close the Leeds United ground, and severely reprimand chairman and managers purely to remind them and spectators that the referee's opinion is the ultimate.

#### INSECURE

So the game in 1970/71, was, by and large, dull and negative; rugged and hard; and resting for the most part, on insecure economic foundations.

Never before has there been so great a need for strong and decisive leadership. As always, there are few grounds for optimism in the deliberation of either the Football League or the Football Association.

If the present structure of the game is worthy of preservation, it is surely time to examine some of the fabric which is now more than a century old.

Cricket and rugby football have both discovered that nineteenth-century rules and competitions do not meet the need of today's critical public. Football prefers to sleep in the past.

The Chester Report, an intelligent outsider's survey of the game's problems, has been almost entirely disregarded. Obsolete Football League regulations, requiring a three-quarter majority for amendment or alteration, effectively block all progress.

The need for reformation falls into three main categories – the rules of the game itself perhaps do not meet today's requirement; the Football League competition was designed for 1870 rather than 1970 and, thirdly, the administration of the sport is inadequate.

Since 12 professional clubs formed the Football League in 1882, the order of merit has been settled on the basis of two points for a victory and one for a draw with goal-average acting as the final intermediary.

#### EXPLOITED

Certainly the system is now being exploited. Only nine of the First Division clubs averaged a goal in each away game last season and Liverpool's 19 away points were backed up by only 12 goals.

As entertainment, football often ceases to exist if the visiting team steal the first goal. The introduction of substitutes has helped managers in these situations to stifle the attacking efforts of their opponents.

Not many years ago, the League's Management Committee invited a small committee of the game's best professional thinkers to examine the increasing trend towards negative play and suggest a remedy. The report indicated extra rewards for extra goals.

It still lies, presumably, in a pigeon-hole in Lytham St. Annes. The experiment has been tried briefly in the Anglo-Italian tournament this summer but it is too early to assess results and, in any event, the premium of one point for each goal was probably excessive.

The principle, however, is right. Cricket experiments with new laws either for one or two years. Rugby football uses specific matches to evaluate new ideas before they are introduced universally – or discarded.

Surely football, with the variety of competitions now at its command, could learn from its neighbouring sports. The Central League, the Football Combination, Texaco Cup, and even the League Cup itself should, like the Anglo-Italian Cup, be used as vehicles of limited experiment.

Perhaps the relegation and promotion system, the stormy petrel of every Football League annual meeting, best illustrates the utter inflexibility of the rules of the premier competition.

Two-up, two-down itself makes a powerful contribution to negative football. Relegation would cease to be a major disaster financially if the road back were not so narrow.

More than thirty years ago, a straight majority of the League clubs recognised this fact

and voted for four-up, four-down. But, of course, the three-quarter majority rule ensured the maintenance of the status quo.

Indeed this regulation, which itself can only be changed by a three-quarter majority, is a solid shield for the protectionists. It has rarely been breached.

#### EXPERIMENT

The Laws of Football present a more complex problem in that they stretch far beyond domestic boundaries. Whilst today's code does not inhibit Pele and his Brazilian colleagues, it can be too easily moulded to the purpose of destruction rather than creation.

Too often the traditionalists claim that any change of Law must be studied carefully for it must apply not only to the Arsenal and Manchester Uniteds of the football world but to every village club as well.

This argument is not altogether tenable. The vast majority of clubs who play each Saturday do not use substitutes. Many do not even have goal nets or linesmen.

There is absolutely no reason why the rich should not have a code of their own. Indeed it is essential if the game is to survive as entertainment as well as recreation.

Is one referee sufficient for today's conditions? Should the offside law be amended once again to exclude everything except two strips at each end of the field? Should a penalty kick be awarded for every offence, whatever its location, if the referee thinks a goal was imminent? A similar principle works extremely efficiently in rugby football.

Nobody knows the answers to these questions. Sadly nobody ever will unless the clubs are prepared to experiment; to search for a modern attractive image, to capture some of the atmosphere, once again, of the Brazilians.

#### FOLLY

It is folly to assume, as do too many legislators, that the game has a divine right to public support. Those days have long since disappeared and the 1970/71 season proved conclusively that the super-League, which threatens the very existence of the vast majority of clubs, is already with us.

Fewer than a dozen clubs can now afford the transfer fees demanded – and obtained – for the exceptional player. Perceptibly, the gap between these clubs and the remainder is widening to a point incapable of bridging.

In politics, the situation might see the emergence of a benevolent dictator. On the American sporting scene, an all-powerful Commissioner might well provide the solution.

In England, Sir Stanley Rous, as Secretary of the Football Association, made an immeasurable contribution. But today, the game's future is in its own hands – hands which have not inspired confidence in the past.

One hopes that Sir Alf Ramsey, Manager of England, may grasp the nettle. He, more than any other, establishes the pattern of the English game, and particularly so since Sir Matt Busby, doyen of English managers, retired to join the Manchester United board in June.

Whilst Frank O'Farrell from Leicester City will prove an admirable successor at Old Trafford, Sir Matt's influence for the adventurous and the attractive on the field will be missed.

Whilst none can blame him for fashioning a basically defensive 4-3-3-system first to take Ipswich Town from the depths to the heights of the Championship and, later, to win the 1966 World Cup for England, there is no doubt that the events of 1966 caused the pendulum throughout the land to swing rapidly towards defensive football.

Five years is a long, long span for one style of play. Brazil, for example became World Champions in Sweden in 1958 with a fluid 4-2-4 system. Yet it was discarded as obsolete before they went to Chile in 1962 to retain the Jules Rimet Cup and introduce a 4-3-3 pattern to the world.

Sir Alf has both the power and the prestige to start the pendulum swinging in the right direction. Certainly England cannot go to Munich in 1974, as they went to Mexico in 1970, wearing their 1966 tactical garb.

The international scene in 1970/71 suffered perhaps by comparison with the 1970 World Cup. It was not surprising. Two semi-finals and one final in Mexico produced sixteen goals compared with seven in six games in May's Home International tournament.

One or two conclusions emerged. Northern Ireland, beaten by a controversial goal scored by England's Clarke in Belfast, were desperately unlucky not to share the title for the first time since 1964.

Or, in fact, in the opinion of many, not to win it outright – last achieved by the Irish in 1914. The manner of their victories over Wales and Scotland indicated that, for the moment at least, they were as accomplished as England.

For Scotland, the season produced only sackcloth and ashes. The results and approach both in the European Nations' Cup and Home International tournament left no doubt that the Scots are no longer a major power in the football world.

### RESTORATION

Mr. Bobby Brown, the team-manager, faced intense criticism. Wherever responsibility ultimately rests, the sport is the poorer whilst Scotland's team does not reflect fully the abilities and talents of Scottish players.

Despite three goals in the first half against Scotland at Wembley, England did not have a convincing year. Few national teams will offer so brittle a defence as did the Scots.

Except at the very top of the tree, where Arsenal gained their first major honours since 1953, the domestic scene in England was largely concerned with the restoration of the status quo.

Blackpool, for example, survived only one season in First Division whilst Leicester City and Sheffield United returned after two and three seasons respectively in the Second Division.

So it was in the Third Division. Proud Preston North End, relegated the previous year, and Fulham, who went down in 1969, ultimately had plenty to spare from Aston Villa.

But the season was a sad one for some of the League's most famous clubs. Burnley lost the First Division status they gained in 1947 and, despite their persistent ability to produce talent of the highest class, might find life very hard in the lower league.

### RELEGATION

For Blackburn Rovers and Bolton Wanderers, two more Lancashire clubs, the season was even bleaker. Both were founder-members of the League in 1888 and now, for the first time, relegation to the Third Division means they no longer have a voice in the control of affairs.

Aston Villa suffered a precisely similar indignity a year previous and, for them, the season was bitter-sweet. Perhaps a place in the League Cup Final against Tottenham Hotspur at Wembley, earned by a semi-final victory over Manchester United, was not complete compensation for the failure to win promotion.

Incidentally it is perhaps a sign of the times that Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers and Aston Villa, who have between them won the F.A. Cup 17 times, should now meet in the Third Division.

Sadly Jimmy Greaves and Jimmy Armfield, two of the great names of the last decade, retired at the end of the season. Greaves was, I think, the greatest goal-scorer in English football history for even today's sophisticated defensive tactics could not extinguish his flair.

In 14 years, he scored 491 times, all at the highest level. He did not really appear happy at West Ham United, his last club. Nor did he enjoy the fashion of the game in his final seasons.

The international career of the quiet, pipe-smoking Armfield who played only for Blackpool spanned eight seasons until he preceded Bobby Moore as Captain. He was never anything other than a tremendous credit to football.

Celtic, in Scotland, emulated Arsenal by winning both Championship and Cup, the third time in five seasons that both trophies have gone to manager Jock Stein's team.

In the Cup Final, Celtic needed two games to defeat Rangers who, however, could only finish 15 points adrift in fourth place in the Championship.

The meeting of these traditional rivals at Ibrox produced unfortunately the worst disaster in British football history. After the death of 66 spectators the Government set up a committee to enquire into safety at all football grounds.