

## Review of the Season

After squeezing into the First Division at the last moment even Brian Clough had to admit that survival was Nottingham Forest's priority for the season. By the time they were crowned champions for the first time in April, it was hard to imagine the First Division without them.

Such was their impact on domestic football, that the treble of League title, FA Cup and League Cup was a reality until an FA Cup quarter-final defeat by West Bromwich. That was taken in their stride and the consolation was the League Cup final replay defeat of Liverpool 10 days later, even with the ineligible Shilton, Gemmill and Needham watching the 'shadow' team from the bench. A month later came the title-winning draw at Coventry to complete a unique double.

But it was Forest's runaway success in the gruelling months of the championship which astonished the football world. At first it baffled rivals and critics, eventually drew grudging admiration and finally the unstinted praise it richly deserved.

At Christmas, six points from four holiday games finally convinced the last of the dwindling sceptics that the bubble would not burst and it was only by virtue of having more games played that Everton once came within four points of the leaders in the run-in. Forest climaxed the season with a goalless draw in the forbidding Anfield home of deposed champions Liverpool to finish seven points clear of the Merseysiders with 64—a total bettered only by four post-war champions.

How did Clough, with the stabilising influence of management partner Peter Taylor, emulate another bluff Yorkshireman, Herbert Chapman, in being the only man to take two clubs to the title?

His inspirational and leadership qualities are unquestioned and his influence permeates all levels of the revitalised Forest. But it was his shrewdness and boldness in the transfer market which laid the foundations to a remarkable season.

Shilton, Burns, Needham and Gemmill brought class to his workmanlike promotion side and as a bonus his Scotland winger John Robertson and Young England striker Tony Woodcock were to thrive in the First Division and emerge as matchwinners.

Forest's football was simple but positive providing no room for shirkers and if there are still those who are searching for the vital ingredients in Clough's formula perhaps they should look no further than the old fashioned virtues of hard work, honesty and integrity he demands from all his players.

Despite Forest's domination of the race there were a handful of teams clinging desperately to their shirt tails with pretensions to the title. Everton, competent but a little dour, were the most dogged and they have the consolation of a place in Europe plus the first 30-goal man for seven seasons in Bob Latchford, who earned £10,000 from a national newspaper by completing the feat on the last Saturday of the season with two goals in a 6-0 defeat of Chelsea. More than shades of Dixie Dean there!

Arsenal's young team struck a skilful mid-season consistency and it looks as if their time will come despite being badly beaten Cup Final favourites. Manchester City remain a puzzle. They had one of the strongest squads but never mixed into the blend of champions.

Although Liverpool finished as runners-up to complete an amazing six years in which they have been three times champions and three times runners-up, they were never a threat once Forest wrested their early leadership in October.

Not surprisingly, Liverpool felt they had bigger fish to fry in Europe and their concentration on the League Cup for the first time eased Forest's task. A major crisis developed in November when Liverpool lost three successive League games for the first time in six years. Bob Paisley calmly diagnosed a little flagging in midfield and went out and paid £352,000 for Graeme Souness. Rumours of Liverpool's demise proved dangerously premature as they took 18 out of the last 20 points to overhaul frustrated Everton with the form that was to retain the European Cup.

Elsewhere, the transfer spiral almost disappeared out of sight despite revelations that the English game is some £16 million in the red and only five clubs are operating at a profit. One of those, Manchester United, spent £850,000 on Leeds United's prized Scots Joe Jordan and Gordon McQueen in their bid to rejoin the elite under Dave Sexton. The £500,000 for defender McQueen in February broke the British record set seven months earlier by Liverpool for another Scot, Kenny Dalglish, whose first season's repayment was a haul of 30 League and Cup goals.

Nobody could keep Tommy Docherty out of the market place as he pursued over £1 million of business to keep Derby in the First Division. He plans to relaunch his 4-2-4 perpetual motion machine in Derby colours this season in a bid to strengthen the Midland revival, led by Forest, that has West Bromwich, Coventry and Aston Villa surprising and entertaining us in their wake.

The relegation issue was almost as clear cut as Forest's first championship in their 113 year history. On the day in October that Forest took over at the top, the bottom three positions were occupied by Leicester, Newcastle and West Ham. That was how it would be at the end with hardly a whimper from the first two. Newcastle's sad departure to the Second Division was an almost inevitable result of their internal strife in the past few seasons and Bill McGarry plans a whole new team. Frank McLintock's brief and salutary lesson in management ended just before the fate of an inadequate Leicester side was mathematically decided, while West Ham finally lost their almost annual battle for survival, fighting to the last and leaving nerves shattered at Queen's Park Rangers, Chelsea and Wolves, the last of whom saved themselves and burst the Upton Park bubbles by beating Aston Villa four days before the Cup Final.

The struggle to reach up to the First Division ended with the three favourites—Bolton, Southampton and Tottenham—duly promoted, but not before the most fascinating battle in all four divisions had been drawn out to the last day of the season by Brighton's brave challenge.

Bolton survived another attack of nerves to take the championship with their crisp economical football while Lawrie McMenemy saw the fruits of a brave decision to dismantle his star-studded FA Cup winning side and invest in less flamboyant but quietly efficient players. Tottenham's resilient young side soon recovered from the traumas of relegation and appeared to be strolling back to the First Division until they lost momentum in the second half of the season, particularly in front of the White Hart Lane faithful.

It was they who came under attack from Brighton who spent wisely in a bid for a second promotion year. But on a tense last Saturday, Tottenham earned the point they needed at Southampton and kept Brighton in fourth place on goal difference with 56 points—four more than Forest had gone up with a year earlier.

The outcome at the bottom of the division was even more dramatic and Blackpool must still be wondering how they find themselves in the Third Division for the first time in their history, with Mansfield and Hull. Early promotion runners, they slipped down gradually until Orient, FA Cup semi-finalists, saved themselves in the last Second Division game of the season with a victory at Cardiff and completed Blackpool's misery as the first relegation dark horses.

The story of the Third and Fourth Divisions was of outstanding teams in Wrexham and Watford. The Welsh side enjoyed another season of giant-killing by reaching the quarter-finals of both League and FA Cups before walking away with their championship. Cambridge gave hope to all the little clubs by bridging the Fourth and Second Divisions in two seasons while Preston are carrying their heads a little higher under the no-nonsense approach of Nobby Stiles.

Watford cleaned up the Fourth Division—it's nothing but the best for Elton John. The Third Division will hold no terrors for the ambitious pop star chairman who has gathered such staff names as Bertie Mee and Eddie Plumley around him, not to mention one of the most promising young managers in the game in Graham Taylor.

In all it was a season of hope with the new champions' positive approach under Brian Clough mirrored in the national revival under Ron Greenwood. But the threats to the game remain—the creaking financial structure, the increasing violence on and off the field which always stirs brave words from the clubs but seldom brave actions. If the game can throw up men of Clough's and Greenwood's calibre in the dressing room why not in the real corridors of power?