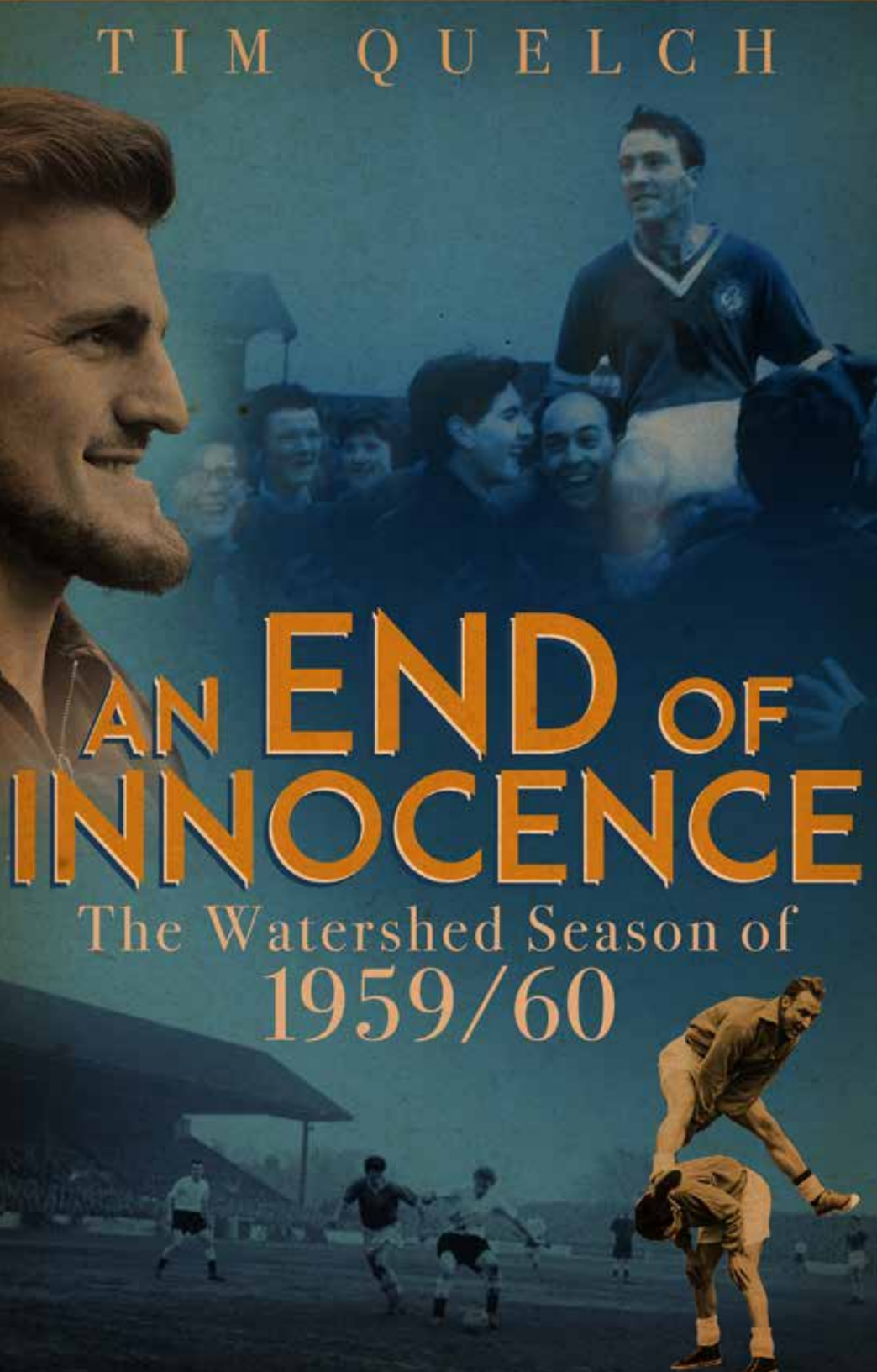
TIM QUELCH



AN END OF INNOCENCE

The Watershed Season of 1959/60

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pitch

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1.
LOST SUPREMACY 1945–1950

GREAT BRITAIN concluded its part in the Second World War battered, barren and bankrupt. After suffering six years of trauma and hardship its working people were eager for something brighter and fairer, with greater protections against want and disease, better standards of living and improved educational prospects. It was this deep-seated sense of entitlement, aroused by the bleak deprivation of the hungry '30s, which brought about the Labour landslide of 1945.

On the back of the excited VE Day celebrations, the British public flocked once again to our sad, neglected seaside resorts and turned up in their thousands to watch five vibrant 'Victory Tests' of 1945 in which a creaking England cricket side took on a scratch Australian Services XI. Brilliant England batsman Wally Hammond recalled the occasion with uncharacteristic euphoria, 'There was a feeling of peace and happiness in the air that was very delightful to me. It seemed as though after years in the shadows England was marching into the sunshine again.'

Our cinemas, dance halls, race tracks, athletics stadia, boxing arenas and football and cricket grounds became packed, too, as the grim war years were cast aside with almost febrile glee. Writer and former diplomat Bruce Lockhart exclaimed in 1945, 'Never have I seen a nation change so quickly from a war mentality to a peace mentality. The war [in the Far East] has disappeared from the news. Sport and the election now fill the front pages.'

But the carefree mood did not last long. The country was £3bn in debt. Capital and overseas investments had taken huge hits. The nation's infrastructure was in tatters. Bombed-out housing had to be replaced. With servicemen returning to their estranged families and

the first wave of 'baby boomers' voicing their needs, an enormous and urgent housing shortage had to be addressed.

As an emergency response, 30,000 prefabricated dwellings were erected from kits financed by United States subsidies under the Lease-Lend programme. When that programme ceased in 1945, Britain had to cadge another £4bn loan to meet its 'financial Dunkirk', as John Maynard Keynes aptly put it. This was not charity. With the Cold War pressing ever closer, the Americans needed Britain to maintain its position as head of the Commonwealth to help stem the spread of international communism.

In a statement resonant of Britain today, Labour minister Herbert Morrison declared, 'We are in danger of paying more than we can afford for defences that are nevertheless inadequate, or even illusory.' Yet it was in this anti-communist capacity that Britain obtained additional American funding, via the Marshall Plan, to pay for its Welfare State reforms. This loan was not repaid until 2006.

Pumped up with wartime heroics, Britain professed to be a world power still, despite its increasing reliance upon US financial support. While its leading politicians attended world summit conferences, its servicemen undertook global policing duties in Malaya, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Berlin blockade was defied, and a further global conflict was in prospect in Korea.

Meanwhile, Britain struggled to make and pay its way. Industrial production needed to be modernised, diversified, and expanded to deal with the vast balance of payments deficit. The state of British agriculture was dismally primitive. Almost 80 per cent of West Country farms lacked electrical power. Milking was done mostly by hand. The situation was scarcely better closer to London where only 50 per cent of farms had electricity. With home-produced food needed for export to help repay the huge national debt, a depressingly long list of rationed items was retained until the '50s.

The railway network was in a decrepit state. But the railway companies found the remedial costs too high, so the government stepped in. As radical as the Welfare State reforms were, they had to be delivered on the cheap. The ascetic-looking Stafford Cripps seemed to epitomise the Labour government's grating exhortations of self-denial. David Lean's *Brief Encounter* was on-message. Family duty came before affairs of the heart. Morale was worse than during

the war years, not helped by the arctic winter of 1947. Coal was short, so were other fuel and food supplies. Production halted, household pipes and geysers froze, and the shivering occupants went to bed in heavy clothes and balaclavas.

This was the scene as the country returned to its sporting life. If the VE- and VJ-celebrating crowds thought that a British military victory would translate into sporting success they were much mistaken. After all, the war had not been won by Britain's efforts alone. Without the colossal resources supplied by the USA, USSR and, indeed, the British Commonwealth, this nation's brave, lone stand in 1940 would not have been converted into collective victory. Unabashed, London successfully laid on a cheap and cheerful 'Austerity' Olympics in 1948 in which 'Team GB' gained four medals. As if there was any doubt that taking part took precedence over winning, one of our sprinters replied to a question about his training regime with, 'Train? I just stubbed out my cigarette and ran.'

Not that such self-deprecation inhibited the jaunty Pathé news team who flew the patriotic flag in Britain's smoky cinemas. Their message was that Britain was best at manufacturing, design, fashion, military actions, and sport. At least the England football team did their best to raise public morale as they thrashed world champions Italy 4-0 in Turin in 1948, albeit after a shaky start. Crushing victories were also achieved against Portugal (10-0), the Netherlands (8-2) and Switzerland (6-0). But this was a deceptive interlude of success.

With a full resumption of the Football League programme on a stormy late August afternoon in 1946, the fans returned to their grounds in droves, oblivious to the soaking many of them had to endure. During the 1946/47 season 35.6 million people watched English Football League games, 15 million in the top tier. But not all were excited by what they saw. One British journalist carped, 'The game is currently being played by large numbers of young and not so young men who know little about the game, watched by large numbers of others who know practically nothing about it. It is being administered in many instances by gentlemen whose attitude to a tough profession is unrealistic and directed in its performance by too many men who are nearly two wars behind its development.' So much for the 'Golden Age of Football'.

On 9 March 1946, a horrific disaster occurred at Burnden Park, Bolton. Thirty-three people were killed and over 400 injured when crush barriers gave way. This tragic incident emphasised the dangers of accommodating huge crowds in Britain's decrepit stadia. Incredibly, the two teams played on amid the carnage.

British cinemas were packed too in these pre-TV times. In 1946 there were 1.6 billion admissions although what was shown did not appeal to everyone as this sour gentleman illustrates, 'Whatever picture is on, whatever drivel it is, the queues are there. Dogs, pictures, tobacco, drink, football pools, crooners – what an indifferent lot of pastimes there are for our people. To do a monotonous repetitious job you loathe, and to use these anodynes to help you forget tomorrow's work!'

Outside the football grounds disenchantment was spreading virally. During the winter of 1948–49 the nation's big cities became engulfed by filthy, sulphurous smog. In London it lasted for six consecutive days. The capital's coughing citizens shuffled through the grimy shroud with scarves wrapped around their downcast faces trying to filter out the noxious fumes. These were indeed the dark ages. Railway signalmen were depicted peering hopelessly into the impenetrable gloom. Trains collided, so did cars, buses and lorries as street flares failed to disperse the murk. Worse was to follow. The pound was devalued by 30 per cent in September. Feted novelist Doris Lessing recalled 'London was dull and grey. Clothes were still "austerity", dismal and ugly although clothes rationing ended in March 1949. Everyone was indoors by ten, and the streets were empty. The dining rooms served good meat, terrible vegetables, and nursery puddings. The war still lingered, not only in the bombed places but in people's minds and behaviour. Any conversation tended to drift towards the war, like an animal licking a sore place.'

A familiar cry in Great Britain was, 'We're so short of everything.' So, when the England Ashes squad arrived in Australia in the late autumn of 1946 they were amazed at the array of 'goodies' available. An Australian broadcaster commented, 'In between meals the English cricketers were forever eating fruit, cakes and chocolates.' Fast bowlers Bill Voce and Dick Pollard put on two stones, while another admitted eating more in one day than in a week in his heavily rationed homeland. Although completely outclassed by the

Australians, the English players admitted that abject defeat had never tasted so sweet.

With the Home Nations tournament accepted as a qualifying process, England headed for the World Cup finals in Brazil after beating Scotland 1-0 at Hampden Park. At the instigation of FA secretary Stanley Rous, the organisation decided to participate this time having refused condescendingly to participate in the two pre-war tournaments. Just as Churchill realised in 1946 the importance of Britain joining a newly formed European community in the interests of enhancing mutual prosperity and peace, the FA realised that it would be better if it was on the inside of a rapidly growing FIFA if it was to maintain its presumed global standing. Continued insularity was no longer viable. Meanwhile, the jingoistic Pathé news reels whipped up a belief that England could, should and would demonstrate their world supremacy at football by bringing back the FIFA Jules Rimet Trophy.

Walter Winterbottom had been appointed as England's team manager and FA head of coaching in 1946. He was a thoughtful, innovative, and engaging man who had briefly played for Manchester United during the '30s. Although he was well regarded, he was strangely marginalised in the FA's World Cup preparations. The FA decided it would continue to conduct often difficult negotiations regarding the release of players from their league clubs. Chairman Arthur Drewry also took it upon himself to select the teams in Brazil. Talk about buying a dog and barking yourself!

Incredibly, the FA also arranged a simultaneous tour of Canada with Stanley Matthews and Jim Taylor selected to take part. So, when FIFA demanded that each country name 22 players 21 days before the finals, these two players appeared unavailable. Seemingly, so were Aston and Cockburn of Manchester United, their club having unilaterally arranged a summer tour of North America. And to cap it all, England's best centre-half, Neil Franklin of Stoke, excluded himself by joining a Colombian club in Bogota for a lucrative fee. He had played in all of England's 27 previous games and his loss was keenly felt. Charlie Mitten followed him a little later, giving an early indication of footballers' mounting frustrations with their capped wages.

It was a relief, though, when Matthews, Taylor, Aston, and Cockburn were released just in the nick of time. Despite these

difficulties, England won their opening World Cup game against Chile, 2-0, but their victory was not as comfortable as the score suggests, The South Americans had only one full-time professional, Newcastle's George Robledo, but had the better of the game before Mortensen headed in Mullen's fine cross in the 39th minute. The longer the game went on the more likely it seemed that Chile would equalise. However, Mannion saved English blushes by scoring England's decisive second goal with only 20 minutes remaining. Chile still strove hard to get back into the game and were unlucky when Robledo's scorching 30-yard free kick smacked against the post. It was a close-run thing.

Wilf Mannion found the going very tough, explaining, 'We needed to have been there for a few weeks to acclimatise, especially after having had a hard season. It would have been better if we were given time to just walk about maybe. But we were immediately pressed into training in that sizzling heat. It was all against us. We beat Chile but it felt as if we had weights on us, despite having oxygen ready for us at half-time.' Tom Finney added, 'We had a three- or four-day get-together in London. It had been a tough season. The grounds were particularly hard at that time of year, and then when we arrived in Brazil, we were put in this hotel on the Copacabana beach. We were fortunate to get any sleep there with the noise that was going on. In the early hours there were car horns blaring and of course we went from a temperature here of about 60°F into something like 90°F and bone hard grounds.' Years later, Stanley Matthews recalled, 'The food wasn't good at all. Tom Finney, Wilf Mannion, and I shared our rooms and we were eating bananas mainly. There was no preparation as there is today.'

Just as England were preparing for the Chile game, the sombre news reached them that communist forces were streaming across the 38th Parallel separating North and South Korea. Clem Attlee responded by dispatching a British military force to assist the United Nations' peace-keeping effort. He also put British Far Eastern naval forces at the disposal of Second World War hero General Douglas MacArthur, who led the combined force. The bellicose MacArthur was soon threatening the North Korean invaders with the atomic bomb. It was a dismal prospect with the previous war still painfully fresh in peoples' memories. Meanwhile, the House of Commons

considered a complaint that nylons laddered too easily and indignant clergy in Brighton condemned the town as 'morally dead' for allowing cinemas to open on the Sabbath. A fiddle for Mr Nero please!

With the Chile result in the bag, the England squad were confident of qualifying for the later stages with the USA team to play next. The American side comprised players who had settled either temporarily or permanently in the USA, originating from six different countries. Captain Eddie McIlvenny was a Scot who had been given a free transfer by Wrexham 18 months before but would be signed later by Manchester United. Clearly, he was no mug. Moreover, just two weeks before, an England XI struggled to beat this team in New York, ragging a 1-0 victory. Spain found them no pushovers either. For in their opening World Cup game against the Americans they were 1-0 behind with only ten minutes left. However, a chastened Spanish team belatedly got their act together, scoring three times to win.

With the USA game planned for Belo Horizonte, the England squad moved from the Copacabana beach to the British-owned Morro Velho gold mine in the mountains above the city. Here they luxuriated in the generous hospitality provided. There was no intensity of preparation. Meanwhile, the Americans' Scottish coach from Pennsylvania allowed his team to stay up late enjoying themselves, believing their defeat to be a formality.

Winterbottom's examination of the narrow ground on which they were to play revealed it to be totally unsuitable for a World Cup game. The pitch was rutted and stony and the dressing room was dimly lit, and rat-infested. Winterbottom took issue with the dressing room, obtaining leave to change at the Minas Athletic Club, a ten-minute coach drive. Strangely, though, he did not complain about the unsuitable pitch, which caused the American centre-half Colombo to wear protective leather gloves throughout the game. Winterbottom wanted to rest some of his best players in preparation for the harder tests ahead. Drewry would have none of it, believing the game to be a light work-out. Neither Matthews nor Milburn were selected which was odd given the efforts made to bring about Matthews's release.

From the off, England poured forward. The American defenders were at sixes and sevens. Mullen was presented with an open goal but at the crucial moment the ball bobbled badly, resulting in his shot

sailing over the bar. At first, pratfalls like this were amusing but soon exasperation crept in when the England team realised their superior skill counted for little.

Urged onwards by the 20,000 Brazilian crowd, the Americans began to grow in confidence, believing they could keep England out. US inside-left John Souza set his ambitions higher, having already scored against Spain. Shaking off his late-night hangover, Souza forced Williams to make his first save of the game.

Mannion's brilliance was nullified on this unpredictable surface where the ball suddenly stood up or diverted crazily, leaving the England ball players floundering. It was almost impossible to pass accurately. Then suddenly Finney struck the post with goalkeeper Borghi helpless. England struck the woodwork 11 times in this bizarre match. But with their spirit shrinking, and their forwards becoming increasingly hesitant, the re-energised US defenders eagerly dispossessed them.

Then, in the 38th minute, Gaetjens, a naturalised Haitian, scored. It was a freakish slice of fortune. US wing-half Bahr unleashed a shot 25 yards from goal. Williams had it covered before Gaetjen's ear intruded, defecting the ball past the stricken Wolves keeper. Although England were left with over 50 minutes to save the game, they could not find a way to do so, despite making several positional changes. They nearly salvaged a point in the final seconds when Mullen's header appeared to have crossed the line before being hooked away. However, the referee was unconvinced, and in a blast of firecrackers, shame-faced England slouched off the pitch. American wealth and culture already dominated British lives. Now their ragbag team had beaten England at its favourite game.

Drewry considered appealing against the result on grounds that the USA had fielded an ineligible player. However, there was little support for this action and the matter was quickly dropped. While the American team were jubilant, they received little or no acclaim from their indifferent countrymen. Tragically, Gaetjens was arrested by Tonton Macoute thugs on his return to Haiti during the '60s, never to reappear.

Walter Winterbottom commented afterwards, 'America, let's be fair, had held Switzerland to a 2-2 draw. It was a team of Europeans who had been over there for three months and allowed to play.

It was a game that we dominated. They scored by a deflection and from then on, they did everything to stop us playing, but you cannot blame them. We missed our chances, striking the woodwork 11 times. That is ridiculous! The South American teams were in mid-season. They are fresh. We are at the end of an exhausting season. And the refereeing was not as good as it is today. The South Americans can push you off the ball with impunity but if they are brought down by tackling, they get furious. Our game is based on fierce tackling.'

Tom Finney added years later, 'We had probably 85 per cent of the game. It was like when North Korea beat Italy in the 1966 World Cup. It is just one of those things that happens in football. It was a poor pitch, but it was the same for both sides. We have no excuses. We should have beaten them comfortably.' Billy Wright reckoned, 'We didn't play badly. We could not hit the target. It was a disaster. I think it was the worse result I ever had playing for England.'

Journalist Bryon Butler carped, 'Walter Winterbottom got the blame, but he didn't pick the team. He was just the manager and carried the can. We had about 23 selectors capable of going into a geriatric ward that used to pick the team, but on this occasion, it was left to one man, Arthur Drewry. He did his best, but it was an awful result.'

On Thursday, 29 June 1950, the English football and cricket teams suffered grave humiliations. While its football team were losing to a lowly side of part-timers, its cricket team was being routed at Lord's, set up by the bludgeoning blades of the three Ws, Walcott, Weekes, and Worrell. The bewildering spin of those 'pals of mine' Ramadhin and Valentine did the rest, sharing 18 English wickets. West Indies won this Test by 326 runs. It was their first victory on English soil. They went on to win the series emphatically, much to the pleasure of the *Windrush* immigrants who had been greeted so shabbily by their 'mother country'. At Lord's and Lancaster Gate, the respective homes of MCC and the FA, one could imagine a tattered Union Jack hanging limply at half-mast.

England's footballers still had a slim chance of reprieve, but only if they beat Spain in their last group game. Changes were made with Milburn and Matthews selected but to no avail. Despite dominating the first half, England were once again unable to score. Soon after the

break Zarra scored for Spain who then barred all routes to their goal. England lost and were shown the door. Spain were then obliterated by Brazil 6-1, underlining how far England were from global supremacy.

The South American expedition was not entirely in vain, though, as the England players and manager were given amazing masterclasses in football skills by the Brazilian children on Copacabana beach. Tom Finney commented, 'There were hundreds, literally hundreds of kids playing on the beach, and not with footballs. Some had small rubber balls, but some had brown paper parcels tied together with string. One youngster kept up his parcel one hundred times. This is where they learn their skills. I am a big believer in that. Look at the number of players from poorer countries like Pelé who have come from very humble beginnings.'

Southampton Football Club's summer tour of Brazil in 1948 was an eye-opener, too. It was meant to be an English masterclass for the supposedly inferior Brazilians, but the roles of teacher and pupil were rapidly reversed. Southampton player Ted Ballard said, 'Every player in a Brazilian team was an accomplished footballer. In British football this was not the case. Players were confined by their position. The full-backs were good kickers of the ball but had difficulty in beating a man. This was true of other players too. The Brazilians paralysed Saints. Even a reserve goalkeeper could perform outstanding acrobatic ball skills.'

First Division table (6 May 1950)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Goal ave.
1. Portsmouth	42	22	9	11	74	38	53	1.9
2. Wolverhampton W.	42	20	13	9	76	49	53	1.6
3. Sunderland	42	21	10	11	83	62	52	1.3
4. Manchester United	42	18	14	10	69	44	50	1.6
5. Newcastle United	42	19	12	11	77	55	50	1.4
6. Arsenal	42	19	11	12	79	55	49	1.4
7. Blackpool	42	17	15	10	46	35	49	1.3
8. Liverpool	42	17	14	11	64	54	48	1.2
9. Middlesbrough	42	20	7	15	59	48	47	1.2
10. Burnley	42	16	13	13	40	40	45	1.0
11. Derby County	42	17	10	15	69	61	44	1.1
12. Aston Villa	42	15	12	15	61	61	42	1.0
13. Chelsea	42	12	16	14	58	65	40	0.9
14. West Bromwich Albion	42	14	12	16	47	53	40	0.9
15. Huddersfield Town	42	14	9	19	52	73	37	0.7
16. Bolton Wanderers	42	10	14	18	45	59	34	0.8
17. Fulham	42	10	14	18	41	54	34	0.8
18. Everton	42	10	14	18	42	66	34	0.6
19. Stoke City	42	11	12	19	45	75	34	0.6
20. Charlton Athletic	42	13	6	23	53	65	32	0.8
21. Manchester City	42	8	13	21	36	68	29	0.5
22. Birmingham City	42	7	14	21	31	67	28	0.5