

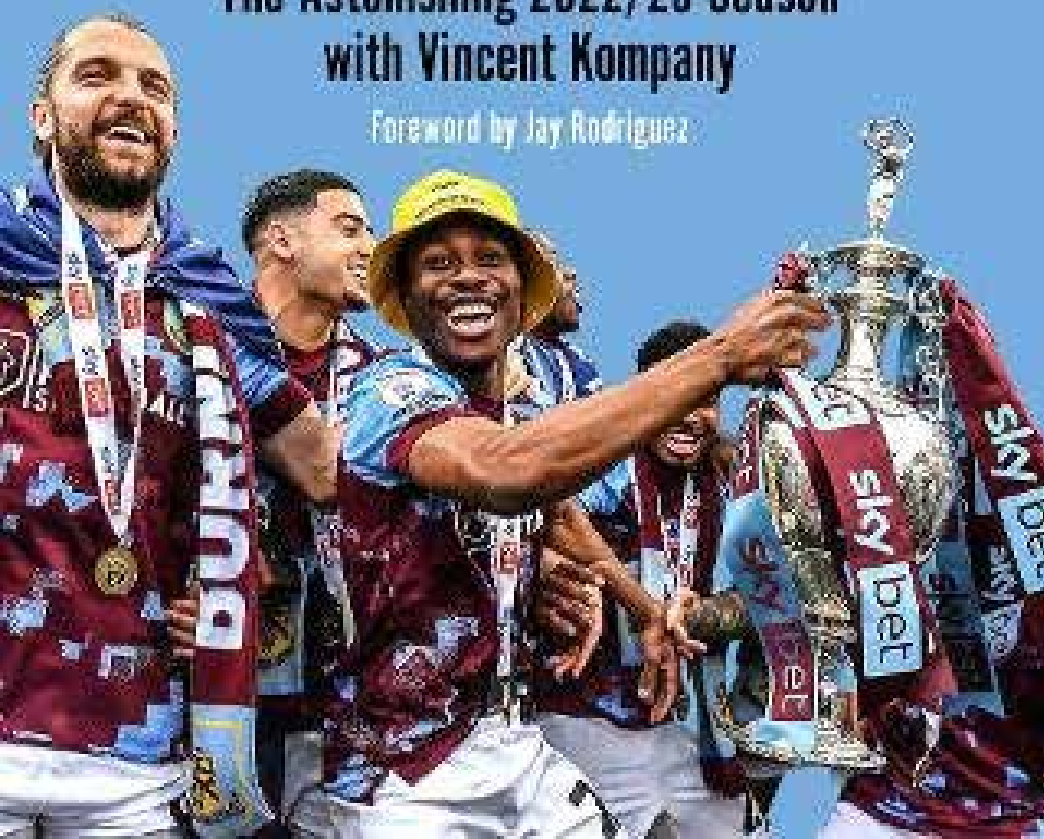
DAVE THOMAS

Burnley FC

CHAMPIONS AGAIN!

The Astonishing 2022/23 Season
with Vincent Kompany

Foreword by Jay Rodriguez



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June and July 2022– A Time of Uncertainty

Wednesday, 1 June: We have no manager, we have been relegated, Cornet is said to be going to various clubs with a £17.5m release clause, Weghorst is rumoured to be off to Turkey, chairman Alan Pace is quiet on everything, money is still owed to ex-directors, money is still owed to Dell, Mee has still to sign a new contract, the natives are getting restless, the pundits are predicting doom and gloom with a fire sale of the top players; one pundit even suggested we could be heading for League One, but apart from all that everything is fine.

Said to be arriving is Vincent Kompany as new manager, but this tale has been going on for a week and more since he left Anderlecht. Alan Nixon insists he is on his way and that there are work permit or visa problems even though his wife and family are all from Manchester. Newspapers remain full of tales that he wants to sign various players from Europe. Other theories are that he is still finalising the fine details, still searching for an assistant, and, or, wants a guaranteed player budget that Alan Pace currently cannot promise.

Meanwhile, Nottingham Forest take our place as the last club to join the Prem having won the play-off final after giving away two stonewall penalties that Moss and VAR turned down. Guess who was VAR judge – why none other than Tierney.

Thursday, 2 June: ‘Mee future uncertain’ headlined many papers this morning. At 32 he has still to sign any new contract at TM and it looks as though he won’t. He could walk into most Prem sides on a two-year deal and secure his future. UTC went into meltdown. One numpty labelled him as a rat leaving the sinking ship and was given a swift comeuppance. Mee goes down as a club ‘great’ and if he left it would surely be with our blessing. This is now a club with a hugely uncertain future and he must know it. Alan Pace must know it too.

Kompany, we are told, still waits for a work permit. I will make a firm prediction. If Kompany, or whoever, produces a side that is struggling midway into the season, and if as predicted other players leave as well, Pope, Cornet etc, ALK and Pace et al will receive the full Turf Moor treatment of withering derision. On the other hand, if by some miracle a new side might be built that succeeds, then Alan Pace will be a hero.

Sunday, 5 June: Silence from the club regarding anything other than shop clearance sales. Wout Weghorst confirms that he is leaving this summer come what may and that he will not play in the Championship. Ben Mee linked with Everton. James Tarkowski linked with Leeds. Pope to Nottingham Forest if they cough up £40m. They have

offered £12m allegedly. *The Sun* seems to have announced that Kompany is manager. Alan Nixon reports that Craig Bellamy will be VK's number two.

Tuesday, 7 June: But the official silence from the club continues to be deafening. Hennessey and Roberts in the Wales team that beat Ukraine in the final play-off game and progress to the World Cup finals. Hennessey was outstanding. Some sort of deal for Weghorst being cooked with Turkish club Beşiktaş. Latest rumours: VK is seen at Gawthorpe and his assistant Craig Bellamy has joined Clitheroe Golf Club.

No manager, no money, no players, players leaving, no plan, no communication at all, the ship is sinking. Just where is Alan Pace? Where are his colleagues? Total silence from them. Are they quietly looking to unload the club? Remember Alan was the one who said the deal that had been struck two years ago was ace, if only he could tell us how it was done, but he couldn't. What is Mike Garlick currently thinking, does he think it's been a good deal? Dear God, pre-season starts end of June. The players (what's left of 'em) start in two weeks.

Latest story is that Kompany is now in talks with Nice. Nice work if you can get it in the sunshine down there. But the story that Bellamy had visited Clitheroe Golf Club to enquire about membership seems to be a true one. But that could mean he is the new Blackburn manager.

Wednesday, 8 June: Apparently, allegedly, supposedly, we are close to revealing Kompany as the new manager. Tarkowski is close to signing for Everton. Barnes has

signed for another year at Burnley. Jack Cork is said to be looking for a two-year deal elsewhere. Weghorst scores for the Netherlands, the winner against Wales. You couldn't make it up. He and Connor Roberts seem to have a row on the pitch.

Not retained: Tarkowski, Mee, Pieters, Lennon, Stephens, Bardsley and a half dozen development squad players. Vydra and Cork are in discussions re new contracts. So, somebody is still at the club making decisions, but who? A new deal had been on the table for Mee but he decided not to sign.

The best centre-back partnership I have seen at the club is now gone. And having been around since 1959/60, I've seen them all. Mee and Tarkowski, the rock at the back, the wall that defied so many top teams and forwards. At their best impassable. Top of the stats for blocks, headers and clearances. Mee here for 11 years and a legend, his place assured in the history books. Tarkowski tough as old boots and brave as a lion. Mee's bravery is unsurpassed. His goals from corners over the years have won many a game. The one against Spurs this last season memorable. Did he not head the ball clear one game when he was flat on the floor? Gone from the club but the two of them still at the peak of their powers. Any club that bought the pair of them would gain a priceless combination. This is the end of something good, something special. For five years they have been immense. How will they be replaced? Hopefully by Nathan Collins and who else?

Sean Dyche's Peak Burnley is now a thing of the past, part of the history books. It served us well. It brought

good years and sometimes good football and good things are cyclical, they always come to an end. In our case after just half a dozen years. The bigger clubs can make their good years last longer but even Manchester United's ground to a halt. We always knew it would end and so did Dyche when he said several times that one day his time would be over. I doubt he thought it would be terminated so drastically and brutally.

So: there are a handful of senior first-team players left and four are goalkeepers. Of those 17, Weghorst has said he will not play in the Championship, and Cornet is expected to be sold. Pope is another likely for sale candidate. Guðmundsson remains but he is frequently injured. The new manager (whoever) faces the task of signing at least a dozen players. Relegated a month ago and since then the communication has been minimal so far.

Monday, 13 June: Official notice. I have left the building. Left the country. Off for my hilibobs. Two weeks in Greece and a week in Manchester airport. Back in July. By then we should know what is going on. In fact, at least we will have the fixture list or know if we can raise a team and a few subs. The silence from the club remains deafening. The last thing I heard was that the owners were allegedly looking for new loans to pay off existing ones.

Sunday, 5 July, back home: Paxos, a Greek island, had no English newspapers and the internet connections were iffy to say the least. News was therefore hard to come

by as were claret T-shirts although the odd one or two stopped for a chat. Definitely no Sky Sports News to look at. Hot weather usually gives us no problems but this was hot, very hot, and humid as well. A lovely island that we knew from 30 years earlier and reunions with people we knew were quite emotional.

But by the end of the three weeks, it was possible to glean that Vincent Kompany was the new manager. Alan Pace sang his praises, saying he had big plans, big visions for the future, plans for youth development, would have links with Man City with a name that would attract players. Yes, it seemed that VK would be the best thing since sliced bread, or Belgian chocolates.

There is no question that VK is super-intelligent with a master's degree, a believer in possession football of an attractive nature. Pace says it is now a time of rejuvenation and that Gawthorpe was like a museum without any masterpieces. Of Dyche there is now not a word anywhere unless he pops up at a pop concert or a golf course.

Speculation followed Pope going to Newcastle, McNeil to Everton or Collins to any of several clubs.

The words financial difficulties were part of any article I did manage to find on t'internet.

Jack Cork signed a new two-year deal which I personally thought a good move by the club, providing some semblance of continuity and a modicum of stability when the pundits were forecasting huge changes and ins and outs. Jack was saying he'd had a fine time at BFC and was excited by the prospect of working with VK. Then suddenly I remembered that we still have the Iceman and if only he could stay injury-free and

rekindle some of his spark, he was another who could do a decent job.

It would seem that the academy has been demoted to category two which if correct would be surprising after all the work and effort put into making it cat one. Is this the result of failure to keep up with the requirements, or the move of Jon Pepper after his three years in charge? Nobody is saying. The impact means fewer quality games against the top sides, and the place becomes less attractive to young players. Plus, the loss of large sums of grant money. To have allowed this to happen is a definite black mark. High staffing levels are a part of requirements, plus reams of record-keeping, and the word is that this is where the problems lay.

The Pope move to Newcastle seems a definite story. Fee mentioned is around £10m which is indicative of the need for money. VK and his entourage will not come cheap and there is still Dyche and staff payments to settle, plus the balance of payments to previous directors. The need to offload the high earners is paramount so that is now three of them gone. Dale Stevens meanwhile claims he found out of his release via Twitter.

The fixtures came out with the first game away to Huddersfield on a Friday night for TV; a good test for the new VK era. There are six games in August with lots of them on Tuesday nights; four are at home. Two home matches come over the Christmas period.

Still no news on the VK backroom staff although it seems certain that Craig Bellamy will be his assistant. Links with players now come fast and furious.

Saturday, 25 June: Pope definitely gone to Newcastle, £10m the quoted fee. If this is correct then it is a giveaway price.

Indeed, it is Vincent Kompany and full marks to Alan Pace for the appointment. The VK press conference – says this is a transition period; hmmm. Immediate promotion is not essential; hmmm. Debts are manageable; hmmm, that's what they used to say at Bolton Wanderers and Derby. Various deals are in the pipeline, pre-season is just about organised.

Couple of games behind closed doors, then Shrewsbury away, then to Portugal for training for a week. VK says he is waiting to fix the details of the Craig Bellamy appointment.

First signing, Scott Twine, £4m, a striker from MK Dons who according to the message board experts is a great signing. You may remember that is what they all said about Weghorst. We fans are curious creatures; as soon as someone is signed, they are accorded all kinds of wonderful skills and properties and strengths, all of them being just what we need.

The expected signing of young Arsenal centre-back Ballard has fallen through. Apparently, all was set and again he was deemed to be just what we needed. Nobody is quite sure why it has been terminated – failed medical maybe, couldn't get a doctor's appointment possibly (can anyone these days?), could not agree terms, chose Luke McNally from Oxford instead for £1.6m.

Much was made of the possibility of signings from Belgium, but nothing so far.

The Weg seems to be Beşiktaş-bound on loan. Good riddance say many who formerly labelled him a top signing.

Not a toot about Cornet at the moment or even a sighting of him.

Friday, 1 July – Burnley 1 Rochdale 0: Scott Twine the scorer at Gawthorpe.

Very sad to report the passing away of two prominent and key Burnley fans: Barrie Oliver, chairman of the Burnley Supporters' Club. Barrie had a long history of supporting the club in all kinds of ways and lately organising many of the away days and weekends; Rocky Mills, someone who needs no introduction. A legendary fan. Known to hundreds, many of them deafened if they sat near him. A true character and one-off.

Two young Manchester City players signed. C.J. Egan-Riley, a centre-back, permanent. And Taylor Harwood-Bellis on loan for a year. Another defender. Along with Luke McNally we now seem to have signed three centre-backs. It is reasonable to assume that we will now cash in on Nathan Collins, with a view to making an early profit on him.

Goalkeeper Hennessey seems Forest-bound but I understand he would love to stay at Burnley if he was number one choice. VK seems keen to sign another keeper, this one from City again, Muric, who has already been red-carded twice in his short career.

Cornet has returned with a new hairstyle that looks like he has stapled piles of gold braid to his head. One pic of them at Gawthorpe showed Barnes much admiring

it (or laughing at it). It was difficult to tell. Chelsea are reported to be considering a bid for him. File under yeh, pull the other one.

And another signing – Samuel Bastien, 25 years old, Congo international, from Standard Liege. For a fee said to be under a million euros. Described as a high-energy midfielder. And that makes FIVE.

Richarlison, now signed by Spurs, will miss one game as punishment for throwing a flare back into the crowd at Everton. Why now? Had the punishment been immediate he would have missed a game for Everton at the tail-end of the season when his two further goals helped keep Everton up with one of them in a key win at home to Palace. It was hugely significant that he was not punished before the end of the season. You have to question the FA thinking behind this. ‘Oh, we’ll wait until Burnley are relegated before we ban him.’

Wout Weghorst now refutes that he ever said he would not play for Burnley now they were in the Championship. This was all to do with translation and he couldn’t remember if the interview was with Dutch or English media. When his alleged remarks came out it certainly turned vast swathes of supporters against him. From being the player who was deemed a great signing when he arrived, he became a pariah almost overnight after the interview. His miss against Villa did not help his cause. But was it a miss or a super block from Tyrone Mings? What he said very recently was that he had a wonderful time, thought the fans were beautiful, loved the songs and chants for him, and never actually said that he was too good for Burnley in the Championship.

Bids of up to £2m for Rotherham's Ben Wiles are being rejected. Wiles said not to be happy.

Tickets for the first game away at Huddersfield sold out in the first 24 hours.

Friday, 8 July: Watford game now moved to a Friday for TV.

Backroom staff announced at last. Craig Bellamy of course, plus a goalkeeping coach, a first-team coach, and a lead first-team performance and set-piece coach.

Alan Nixon suggesting that a deal has been agreed with Coventry for Callum O'Hare.

Looks like Josh Cullen is on his way from Anderlecht but O'Hare from Coventry is off.

Monday, 11 July: Nathan Collins looks set to join Wolves for £20m. I suppose this was inevitable given the number of centre-backs Kompany has drafted in. The club needs the money to fund new players and pay off loans. The reaction was one of both anger and dismay at this poor valuation for a player with such huge potential. This lad will be some player one day, his potential unlimited, and you could build a team around him, Hennessey, Collins, Taylor, Roberts and Brownhill. This is what happens when you have debts. The predicted fire sale. Burnley lost 3-0 at Wolves in the behind-closed-doors friendly last Friday.

Tuesday, 12 July: Collins indeed leaves for Wolves but IN comes Josh Cullen from Anderlecht on a four-year deal.