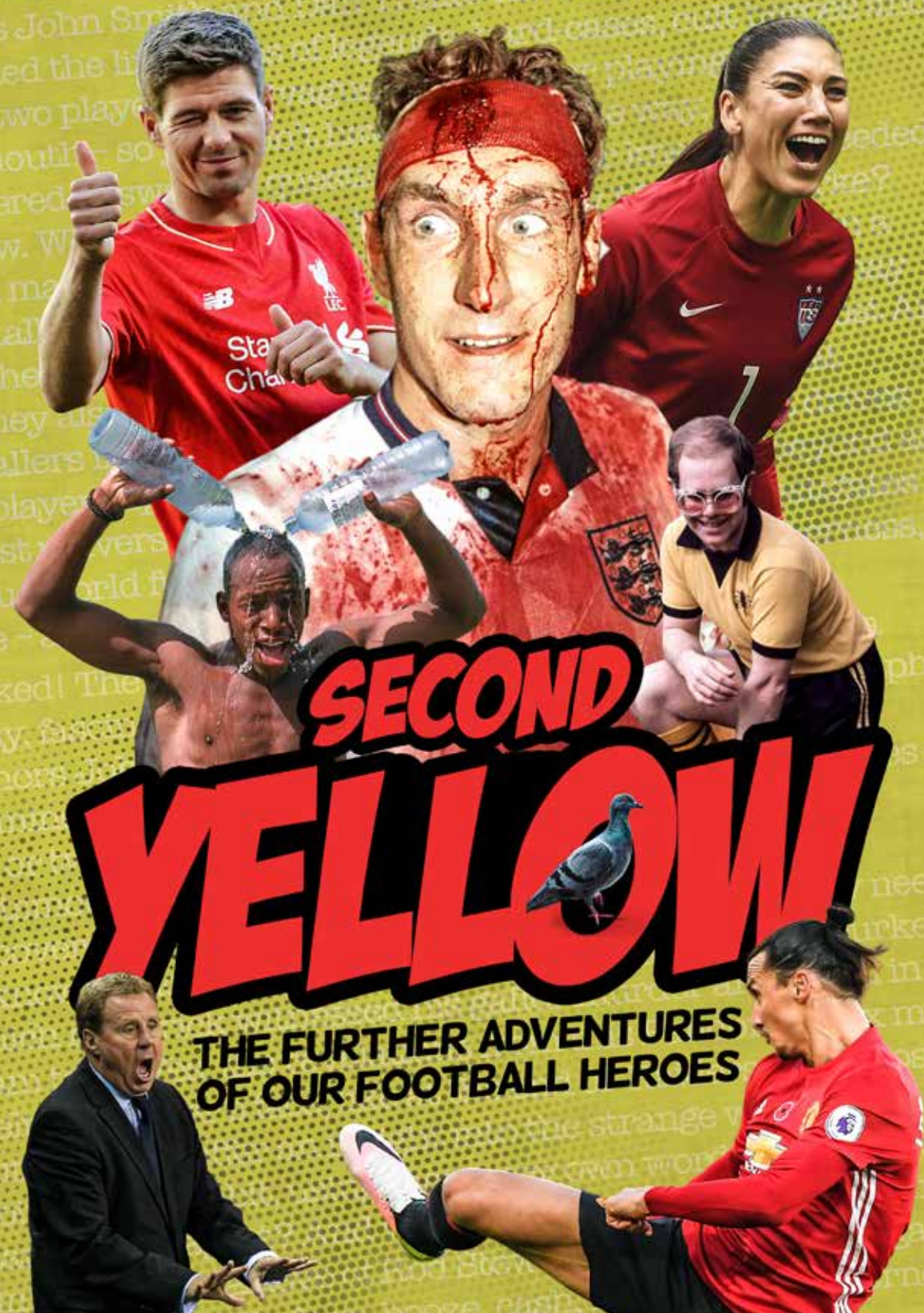


JOHN SMITH AND DAN TRELFER



# SECOND YELLOW

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES  
OF OUR FOOTBALL HEROES

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# CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	7
Train in Vain . . . . .	11
Isn't It Romantic? . . . . .	30
Just Call Me Robbo . . . . .	51
The Magic Sponge . . . . .	58
That's Entertainment! . . . . .	68
Young, Gifted & Blackpool . . . . .	83
Before the Glory . . . . .	106
Watching Them Watching Us Watching Them . . . . .	121
Four-Four-Two-by-Two. . . . .	144
Done Deal . . . . .	153
Box to Ballot Box . . . . .	172
Christmas with the Lads. . . . .	183
Over Land and Sea . . . . .	198
All We Want is Consistency . . . . .	221
Tactics, Tantrums & Tea Cups. . . . .	235
The Greatest Show . . . . .	254
Final Word . . . . .	270
Acknowledgements. . . . .	271
Bibliography. . . . .	273

# TRAIN IN VAIN

‘One-nil down against no one’

‘Straight off the training ground’ is a frequently heard cry from over-excited commentators, usually in response to some kind of set-piece wizardry. Think Javier Zanetti’s bit of devilry for Argentina against England or a classic short corner for Teddy Sheringham to belt home. But we’ve looked into it for you, and it turns out it’s not all tactics boards and unfettered genius down there among the balls, bibs and cones. In fact, at times it seems like some of them are making it up as they go along.

Before we get too involved in the session, it’s vitally important that we stretch and warm up – all footballers must surely agree on that. Apart from Andrea Pirlo, who has views: ‘I hate it with every fibre of my being. It actually disgusts me. It’s nothing but masturbation for conditioning coaches.’ Disgusted, you say. Well, this changes things. Pirlo was both pretty good at football and stunning to look at so maybe we should listen to him. As you were then. Just make sure your laces are tied and let’s get cracking.

The stadium might be where the eyes of the world are on players, and where they get the glory and the fame, but fame costs, and the training ground, to paraphrase a great thinker, is where they start paying in sweat. It’s therefore important to build a welcoming sense of camaraderie between players, to create an environment where they can relax and give their best.

Norman Whiteside tells us that he and Arnold Mühren had a nice running gag that at least one of them enjoyed, wherein the Irishman would greet the Dutchman ‘with an extremely formal hello. “Good morning Arnoldus Johannus Hyacinthus Muhren,” I would say. “How are you this fine day and how is your father Arnoldus Pietrus Hyacinthus Muhren?”’ A bit of fun to get the day started, and no harm

## SECOND YELLOW

done, but the Man United training ground wasn't always so convivial. Dwight Yorke informs us that when he arrived from Villa with a huge price tag hanging (not literally) off of him, Roy Keane was every bit as brusque as you might expect him to be, wasting no time in flogging a hard ball into Yorkie's feet to test him. 'I didn't control it properly and he said: "Welcome to United – Cantona used to kill them." That was his little dig at me.' It seems this was Keane's regular welcome; he did the same to Rio Ferdinand, who struggled with a similar nervy first touch. On that occasion, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was on hand with a snide comment of 'How much?!', like a giggling Richard Hammond to Keane's bullying Clarkson, or that little puppet that sits next to Jabba the Hutt. That story comes from Michael Carrick, who says that by the time he arrived, it was Paul Scholes who 'lashed the ball at me' on day one, minute one. Nice of them. Most people just get shown where the toilets, kettle and photocopier are on their first day.

Even if Keane and the rest did this with every single new United signing<sup>1</sup> it still wouldn't make them as unwelcoming as Mick Channon at Portsmouth, who seems to have made making people feel bad an art form. Vince Hilaire reports that when Channon was the senior man at Pompey, he placed a lot of emphasis on Saturday's starting XI, at the expense of everyone else, claiming: 'I hate reserves' and labelling them 'parasites'. Hilaire says that Channon told him: 'Every morning, when I come in, I'm going to open that door to their dressing room and say, "Morning, Reserves" because they'll hate that. ... and he used to do it without fail.' Even if this was funny once, and we can safely say it wasn't, surely it didn't sustain? "They hate me but I don't give a fuck." He used to emphasise the word "reserves" and he used to make it last about ten seconds: "Morning, Reseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeervees!" It's nice to be nice isn't it?

If you've managed to avoid Mick Channon thinking he's better than you, still more dangers lurk on the training field – not everyone can shield under Neil Warnock's umbrella, you know. He only afforded that luxury to his Sheffield United 'sons' Phil Jagielka and Michael Brown. The rest of you are on your own.

Look out for Alex Ferguson's 'sniper', Paul Scholes, who would ping 40-yard balls at the head of anyone who sloped off for a crafty wee in a bush on the sidelines; Dirk Kuyt, who according to Peter Crouch

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1 Good luck with that, William Prunier.

## TRAIN IN VAIN

‘would leave a series of large tubs of hair gel in various places around the training ground so that he could dip in whenever he wanted’; and Jermaine Pennant, who kept a stash of toast ‘tucked down his socks’. According to Emile Heskey, who played with him at Birmingham, ‘if he didn’t have the ball, he’d be bending down to take the toast out and eat it. I would be shaking my head. That wasn’t professional and it was just strange.’ It is a bit strange, and with breakfast and ankle tags down there, it makes Jermaine Pennant’s socks out to be some kind of ‘Mary Poppins’s bag’ set-up.

Of course, Pennant is not alone in being a bad trainer. Some players just think it’s not for them. Stan Collymore claims that: ‘My curse is that I’ve always been blessed with a great touch. I don’t need to practise my ball skills. I was born with them.’ Which is an interesting way of looking at things – and getting yourself out of some hard work. It occurs to us that Stan may not be the only footballer ever to suffer such a curse, and that some of his fellow sufferers might have even felt that a solid work ethic alongside such talents might be the way to success. Although Stan makes a compelling case for doing sod all, it was an approach that found short shrift with Forest teammate Brian Laws: ‘I told him: “Fuck off, just get out there and DO it.”’ Which Laws says worked, for about a fortnight.

Having scoured the accounts of so many football folk, we find ourselves in a position to present the coaching methods of some of the finest minds the game has known. Here then is a glimpse behind the curtain of *Oz the Great and Powerful*. Here are some of the methods we’ve picked up. Please feel free to make notes in the margin.

### **JIMMY SEED - NO BALLS**

Danny Blanchflower played under Mr Seed on his way up at Barnsley and seems to have succeeded as a player in spite of him. Seed’s methods involved rather more snooker and rather less football skills than Danny was after. When Blanchflower requested a ball to work with he was told no, because if he wanted one, everyone would want one. Seed’s philosophy was: ‘If you don’t see the ball during the week you’ll be more keen to get it on Saturdays.’ That is certainly one school of thought. Not a good school of thought, but a school of thought.

When Danny moved on and signed for Villa he says he did so on the condition they would let him train with a ball as much as he liked after official training.

## SECOND YELLOW

### **HARRY REDKNAPP - OPEN HOUSE**

‘One of the things I changed when I became West Ham manager was to allow fans in to the training ground. When I first came they had to stand outside the gate and couldn’t see anything, but now we invite them all in. And why not?’ Very charitable of man of the people Harry ‘Jam Roly-Poly’ Redknapp. Why not indeed? Well, there was that time Alvin Martin and Matthew Rush had a big fight and Harry was almost immediately fending off phone calls from newspapers because: ‘One of the fans who’d come to watch us training had raced off the moment the punch up had finished and tipped off the paper to earn a few bob.’ So it’s possible that opening training to the public wasn’t such a good idea, and if Harry didn’t learn his lesson then, then he learnt it when John Hartson almost kicked the head off Eyal Berkovic a few years later and the same thing happened again. Who could have seen that coming? That time the grateful public even filmed it.

### **PETER TAYLOR - MANNEQUINS**

Adebayo Akinfenwa played under Peter ‘briefly England manager’ Taylor at Gillingham and says that the gaffer had an over-reliance on mannequins. Bayo says they were the only opposition Taylor allowed and points out the flaw with that, namely: ‘you always look great against mannequins because they obviously don’t move’. According to the big target man, it meant they started every game too slow as ‘when we faced actual moving players, it took us a while to adjust’. Far be it from us to disagree with someone as big as Akinfenwa, but this sounds a bit like an excuse doesn’t it? Surely the many years of playing against actual people was still in the locker somewhere?

### **CHRIS NICHOLL - YOU CAN ONLY BEAT WHAT’S NOT IN FRONT OF YOU**

At Southampton in the 1980s they could only dream of mannequins. According to David Armstrong, manager Chris Nicholl had a certain ‘lack of coherence in training’, illustrated by a time he had them playing ‘shadow football’ against nobody at all, presumably to work on shape. Armstrong says: ‘Colin Clarke kicked off, passed the ball to Hobson, Hobson to Case, Case to Francis Benali, and Benali back to goalkeeper Tim Flowers.’ Unfortunately, Flowers was sorting the back of his net out and ‘so the ball trickled over the line into the goal. One-nil down against no one. It took us a further 30 minutes to “equalise”.’

## TRAIN IN VAIN

Now we're sure Armstrong must be exaggerating for comic effect, but we like to imagine the relief when they levelled was palpable.

### **BOBBY GOULD - TOXIC**

Bobby's methods are as labyrinthine and impenetrable as you might expect. At times he used a traffic-light sticker chart on the wall for players to see, with different-coloured stickers according to performance, like a cross between Opta Stats and a toddler's potty chart. At other times, Gould insisted on training in public parks on away trips, which carried predictable hazards back in the day. Before a game at Everton, his Wimbledon side were practising set pieces when, 'Eric Young headed the ball smack on then recoiled when he realised he had dog shit splattered all over his bandana. Unfortunately for Lurch, the ball hit the bar and rebounded into his face.' When it rains it pours.

Obviously, Bobby's approach to toxins was: what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, because Eric Young needing to give his bandana a thorough rinse didn't stop him playing fast and loose with poisons. As Coventry boss he took his boys, including his actual boy Jonathan, down to Aldershot barracks for pre-season training with the army. Bobby cheerfully tells us: 'Our Jonathan almost died when the players had to wear masks to negotiate a narrow tunnel that was filled with poisonous gas. He started choking, the gas got into his lungs and he needed resuscitating. I would have had a near death experience as well if Marge had got to hear what happened.'

That's real poisonous gas. It seems a bit of an upgrade on zip lines and cargo nets doesn't it? If your son's being resuscitated and your first thought is, 'The wife'll kill me for this', then we reckon you're doing parenting wrong; and if your goalkeeper is being resuscitated because you sent him through a tunnel of poisonous gas, then we reckon you're doing coaching wrong.

### **NEIL WARNOCK - FERRY 'CROSS THE MERSEY**

Warnock prides himself on his meticulous preparation for games, and being on a ferry is no reason to set that aside. When he took his Sheffield United side to Liverpool for a League Cup semi-final he took the gang to the top deck of the Mersey Ferry, 'and went through a couple of our defensive routines up there'. Warnock improvised and used lifebuoys for a goal and set up a wall. 'Poor Wayne Allison,



## SECOND YELLOW

our centre forward, was sitting on one of the steps on a stairway and had gone very pale. He was bloody seasick on a ferry across the river.' Maybe he was, or maybe he just didn't want to look daft, joining in with the rest of you.

### **HOWARD KENDALL - GROG**

Howard Kendall had methods, and those methods often involved booze. Peter Reid recalls a rough time at Manchester City with the side struggling and the Platt Lane training ground too frozen to get on and fix it. Reid assumed they would move inside somewhere for five-a-sides but Howard, being from the school of 'If life gives you lemons, make vodka and lemonade', decided to throw open the players' lounge and get right on it – at half past ten in the morning. 'After two hours of playing table tennis and drinking Budweiser he sent us home,' says Reidy, with a rallying cry to be at their best in training the next day. The ping-pong seems to be providing the thinnest veneer of being some kind of physical exercise. It is, after all, the sport you can play most easily with a beer in the other hand.

### **KENNY DALGLISH - BISCUITS**

The sustenance that bound Liverpool together, at training at least, was altogether more wholesome. Alan Hansen tells us that a feeling of togetherness was engendered as 'the players had tea, biscuits and a social chat before their training sessions on Friday mornings'. That's right, Kenny Dalglish invented the PTA Coffee Morning. Over a milky brew and a selection of Lincoln, Abbey Crunch and other lost classics they 'could forget about football and just enjoy each other's company'. This sounds altogether more lovely than all that dog shit stuff Wimbledon were up to.

### **MALCOLM ALLISON - GO!**

It's fair to say that Big Mal wasn't in his pomp by the time Vince Hilaire came through at Crystal Palace, so the winger never saw the best of him. He goes further and says: 'Malcolm was making no sense to anyone.' Hilaire recalls one particular quirk of Allison's that he wanted players to be alert at all times and that in any given situation around the club he could shout 'Go!' and he would expect players up on their toes. This stretched way beyond the training ground and could have happened when a player was sat reading a newspaper,

## **TRAIN IN VAIN**

enjoying a game of snooker or getting a rubdown. On one occasion Mal shouted 'Go!' as his team were enjoying breakfast at a hotel before an away game, resulting in 'cutlery falling all over the place and plates coming off the table because we'd all got up straight away when he shouted'. Now we suppose it depends how you measure success, but we can't work out if this is a win for Malcolm or not.

### ***BILLY MCNEILL - EARLY AWAY***

Billy McNeill didn't become the first British captain to win the European Cup by sodding off home halfway through, so why he expected to coach Aston Villa that way is anyone's guess. Yet Mark Walters well remembers being 'in the middle of a tough training session and we'd look over and see his car heading out the main gate and off into the distance. That didn't exactly endear him to the players who were covered in mud, sweat and tears and the manager is halfway home in his fancy big car.' You can see why it didn't go down well. Walters describes McNeill's short tenure as 'shambolic'. Villa finished rock bottom and the team McNeill had left to join them in September of that season, Man City, were also relegated just one place above them. So Billy can reasonably be said to have relegated two teams in one season. Walters goes on to say that 'when I eventually moved up to Scotland, he did thank me for not divulging certain things about his time at Villa.' Important to note that McNeill was at Celtic, Walters at Rangers, but that Mark decided that the Old Firm divide wasn't enough to make him a grass.

### ***RONNIE ALLEN - MRS RONNIE***

Ronnie Allen isn't the only manager to get his wife along to the training ground but none were quite so involved as Mrs Allen. Richard Edghill recalls that during Alan Ball's time at Man City, Mrs Ball was there on his first day in charge 'waving his World Cup medal to anyone who cared. Nobody did much.' But while Mrs Ball might have been around to establish little Alan's credentials, Mrs Allen was Ronnie's enforcer.

Ally Robertson tells the story of an early training session under Allen:

She walks to the main pitch, unfolds the chair and sits down. The lads are all wondering what on earth is going on as we start working on some heading drills. All of a

## SECOND YELLOW

sudden this woman stands up and shouts across. ‘Ronnie!’ ‘Yes, love.’ ‘That group over there aren’t doing it properly like you told them to do it. And that one over there is messing about.’ It was his missus! Ronnie shouts over to a group, ‘My wife says you’re not doing it properly, so come on.’

This may have been a case of short-term gain, long-term pain for Allen, though. As Robertson explains, ‘That was Ronnie dead with the lads after that, finished on Day One. We couldn’t believe it.’ It seems that nothing undermines a manager’s authority like having his missus in a fold-up chair snitching on players.

Any aspiring coaches among you can apply some of the above principles to your own approach to the game as you wish – you’re very welcome. But there are some elements of training that are universal and override such quirks:

Everyone’s got to run.

Everyone’s got to hit the gym.

Sooner or later, despite what Jimmy Seed reckoned, everyone’s got to kick a ball about.

Running is understandably not popular with everyone. Derek Dougan worried about a growing obsession with fitness over football in his day, warning that: ‘If this attitude goes unchecked, the game could stultify, leaving the championship to be a contest between Stereotype United and Prototype Athletic.’ Love the phrasing here. We get the point he’s trying to make but he seems to have accidentally made that prospect sound quite good. Who wouldn’t want to watch that? But we digress. On your marks, get set, go.

Andy Cole is full of praise for coach Brian Kidd’s approach to fitness work, and says he would always call it ‘money in the bank’, but not everyone appreciates the fine arts of making people run around until they’re sick. Chilled-out entertainer Frank Worthington at Birmingham says that under Ron Saunders, ‘Training would have been more attuned to a foot slog across Antarctica with Sir Ranulph Fiennes, than honing the moves and skills which would send spectators home satisfied on a Saturday afternoon.’ Though presumably everybody came back with their fingers and toes intact at Birmingham at least.

Surely Worthington of all people should be aware of the restorative benefits of getting a dab on. Many players report the trend of using

## TRAIN IN VAIN

a good shift to sweat out the alcohol after a heavy night on the sauce. John Sitton even says that a cure for a teammate deemed to be spending too much time on cocaine, bookies and booze was simply, 'They ran the bollocks off him.' So there you go. You don't get that at The Priory do you?

Some players would do what they could to get out of the long-distance stuff. Kevin Beattie says that Allan Hunter once sailed past him on a milk float on a run at Ipswich, puffing on a cigarette as he did so.<sup>2</sup> Steve Bruce has never struck us as a natural athlete but at least he didn't consider himself above the hard work. Having moved to Norwich from Gillingham, Bruce found himself a little out of his depth with the fitness regime at first. On one cross-country stretch, Bruce found himself second-last with only striker John Deehan behind him, when he saw Deehan fall into a stream they were crossing. 'As I reached the reserve team coach, Dave Stringer, I just managed to gasp out that he ought to go and see that John Deehan was all right. More than a little alarmed at the prospect of our top goal-scorer slowly drowning, he raced back to find him. Having rescued him and slung him over his shoulder, Dave Stringer still managed to overtake me before we got back.' Blimey, Stringer's a tough nut. You might think that a coach would be more impressed with a player that stopped to fish a teammate out of the river they'd fallen in, but maybe that's just us. At least Stringer was only lugging Deehan around in special circumstances; Gordon Hill says that sort of thing was a regular part of his injury rehab at Derby, saying, 'I was running up and down the stands with David Webb on my shoulders.' We're not sure what the selection process was for Webby to be Hill's passenger, but this can't have been pleasant for either of them. Not even Mr Miyagi had Daniel doing this sort of thing.

What with the dangers of falling in streams, being hit by passing milk floats, or as Alan Curbishley describes, getting into a snowball fight with a load of young Millwall fans with his Charlton lads, maybe we're better off inside – in the gym perhaps. Players who impressed indoors during wet playtimes include Andrei Kanchelskis, who Ben Thornley recalls 'used to do kick-ups with a medicine ball. And I'm not talking about five – he was getting towards 30' (which sounds like something Popeye might do), and Jamie Lawrence at Leicester who

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<sup>2</sup> Did he carry these with him in his kit, or bum one off of the milkman?

## SECOND YELLOW

‘would come in and bench press on the multi-gym and put the pin to the bottom and bang out 10 or 20 repetitions’ according to Emile Heskey. Impressive. At Newcastle, however, boss Graeme Souness would have given Lawrence a run for his money. Kieron Dyer recalls being in awe of the gaffer with ‘his top off in the gym’ working out ‘doing the chest press and it was like “boom”. I was thinking, “my God, this guy”’. Is it us, or did it just get a bit warmer in here?

A less fond gym memory, again from Emile Heskey’s enjoyable memoirs *Even Heskey Scored*, is the time Igor Bišćan nearly killed himself at Liverpool: ‘There would normally be someone in there with you, but Igor was on his own and decided to do maximum weights on his chest.’ You’ve guessed it: Igor came a cropper and nearly choked himself under the bar, with nobody able to hear his strangled screams. Fortunately, Bišćan was prevented from dying from his own hubris by a passer-by, lived to tell the tale and almost single-handedly won the Champions League for the Reds. That’s how we remember it, anyway.

Of course, as discussed, you can be as fit as you like and do all tactics sessions on a ferry you want, but eventually it will come down to the football itself. And it seems that the training matches, be they small-sided or full scale, are where the players can really get together and confront their tensions, like a family on a caravan holiday.

Throughout the world and whatever the standard, it seems to be a universal truth that training matches can get a bit tasty. David Armstrong says of the Friday matches at Southampton, ‘there were fights, players slammed into walls, noses pressed into boards, furious outbursts’, which all sounds a bit *Rollerball*. Meanwhile at West Ham, Jimmy Bullard says that Paolo Di Canio and John Moncur had to be put on the same team, ‘or World War Three would have kicked off’. Now we don’t think he means literally, but we can certainly imagine it got lively, and very entertaining. Moncur was by all accounts the supreme wind-up merchant, and Di Canio always seemed on the brink of a vein-popping tantrum at any given moment.

We don’t imagine Harry Redknapp was tempted to step between them – we know we wouldn’t – but there are those that would. Jason McAteer fondly recalls his boss at Bolton, Bruce Rioch, acting as his minder when Mark Patterson went through him: ‘Bruce brings himself on as a sub and, within seconds, he’s done Mark, six studs into his chest. He’s done one of his own players in cold blood for having a go at me. And it works. Mark never comes near me again.’ Chilling

## TRAIN IN VAIN

stuff, and not just because of that odd, present tense thing Jason does throughout his book.

Rioch must have been confident he was top dog around the Bolton training ground because the history of managers joining in with matches is a chequered one to say the least. When Tommy Docherty joined in at QPR, Stan Bowles was on hand to 'take the piss out of him', despite insisting that he liked him. 'I used to say: "Come on fatty, get it off me!" He would come diving in because he was quite fiery, and I would just slip by him. I certainly sold him a few dummies on the training ground, and used to taunt him. He was like a little dog following me around the ground.'; but at least The Doc escaped physically unharmed. He should consider himself lucky.

In our first book we mentioned Ruud Gullit being whacked by Stuart Pearce in training at Newcastle and we've since read Rob Lee's account confirming his own involvement in leaving the odd pass short to facilitate Gullit being sent 'into orbit'. Lou Macari was seemingly not popular at West Ham, and while several players were sufficiently annoyed with him to have a pop, they had just the fella to take the situation in hand. 'Julian Dicks would kick the f\*\*\* out of Lou whenever he joined in training games,' says Mark Ward. 'It was embarrassing to watch a fellow pro humiliate the manager.' Embarrassing perhaps, but not that uncommon. At West Brom Ally Robertson says they would kick Ronnie Allen in training while he pretended to be Pelé, George Best or Rainer Bonhof – it didn't matter, they all got kicked. We can only hope his wife wasn't watching from her fold-up chair. The tradition continued at West Brom long after Ronnie Allen had gone, as Ron Atkinson tried to mix games up by making them 'The Cream versus The Scum: the English players against the rest'. It sounds like training matches were volatile enough without turning them into a culture war and inevitably there were casualties. Big Ron got kicked a lot. But maybe he didn't mind because there were 'plenty of giggles', and that's the main thing.

It's not just the manager that joins in from time to time. All comers are welcome – sort of. On occasion, a bold director or chairman has been sufficiently brave to have a go. Some of us are old enough to remember when Michael Knighton came out ball-juggling at Old Trafford, confident that he was buying Manchester United imminently. Well it was all well and good for him doing it there, in front of witnesses. He may not have been so brazen out on

## SECOND YELLOW

the wild west of the training ground. Sir Elton John poured his heart and soul into Watford and says many lovely things about the club in his autobiography *Me*<sup>3</sup> – but that didn't stop him 'flying through the air at high speed, backwards, as a prelude to landing flat on my arse', whenever he joined in. If only we could think of an Elton John hit that involved him remaining on his feet here, to juxtapose with his predicament. Nope, beats us.

Doug Ellis is another have-a-go chairman who found himself airborne and 'being carried off in considerable pain' when he played with his Villa lads. But despite his bumps and bruises, he considers it a victory because he later caught the culprit, Brian Godfrey, boasting about clobbering him in the showers. Doug was soaping up in the next cubicle you see. It doesn't bear thinking about, does it?

The men upstairs can't even get any respect when they've had a glorious playing career of their own. Sir Bobby Charlton won the biggest prizes in the game, but long after he retired it seems that all he wanted was a kickabout with the lads. Sadly, according to Brian McClair, the lads were not having it. On one occasion, he says, 'Eric nutmegged him and he wasn't too happy about it', and another time away in Vienna, he didn't even get close enough for Cantona to shout whatever 'Nuts!' is in French. That time they simply sneaked off without him. 'When we got back to the hotel after training, Bobby Charlton came over and asked us what had happened. There was a guilty silence as we remembered that he was supposed to have been coming training with us. The manager had told him to be ready at 5.00 pm and we left at 4.15. He'd been sitting in reception in his training gear waiting and we missed him.' Something about all this tells us that the United players didn't really want Bobby playing with them. Which is a shame, because if a director of the club is taking his own training kit all the way to Vienna for a knockabout, I think we can regard him as keen. Bless him. It's not nice to think of him sitting there in his shiny boots and immaculate kit while the bigger boys have ditched him, is it? No wonder he looks grumpy all the time.

Sometimes you don't even need to be attached to the club to be allowed to take part and rub shoulders with the pros; if you had any interest at all, it seems it was worth carrying your boots with you on the off chance. Cricketers like Graham Gooch and Steve Harmison were

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3 That's right, we left no stone unturned. We read Rod Stewart's for this too for Christ's sake.

## TRAIN IN VAIN

seemingly always welcome at West Ham and Newcastle respectively, which must have been nice for them, because football's better than cricket – while Daley Thompson was another sportsman who seems to have had carte blanche to rock up just about anywhere and show off a bit in the 80s. Peter Reid confesses to effing and jeffing at a 'useless twat' he didn't recognise, during a training match called Vic, before being asked to ease off as he was just a local vicar giving it a go, and Paul Canoville seems to have just got his mate George along for the ride at Chelsea. Despite being no more than someone 'I was hanging out and going raving with', and being no good at football, manager John Hollins let George hang around his first-team squad, giving his all in the games, 'with his arse popping out of his too-small tracksuit bottoms'. Can you imagine this now? Not the arse; we mean the random stranger joining in at a professional football club with aspirations of being a top side. You're still thinking about the arse aren't you.

One of the most notorious joining-in stories involves Graeme Souness absolutely rattling Dwight Yorke and Yorke taking justifiable offence. For his part, Souness says he regrets it and admits he was wrong, which is quite the rarity in this genre, but at least explains his reasoning at the time. In the gaffer's words, he had signed Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke for Blackburn from Manchester United and 'felt they had come from United thinking, "We did this and that there", and allowed themselves to get in their armchairs a bit', which is such a lovely turn of phrase, we can almost forgive him for raking his studs down Yorke's shin and threatening to break his leg. Yorke spends a lot of time on this in his own book and was clearly stunned by the actions of Souness, with the flare-up bringing training to an end, continuing with a shouting match in the canteen and ultimately resulting in Yorke leaving Rovers. Fiery stuff.

This shemozzle leads us nicely into the real reason some of you are here: the scraps, the bundles, the square gos. We all know that tempers can fray and things can boil over every so often in training, even at Liverpool once the biscuits have run out. So at this point we're going to take a look at some of those flashpoints. In doing so, we're looking for those that fall somewhere between the 'I'm something you'll never be, son' posturing of Kevin Keegan with Steve Williams at Southampton<sup>4</sup> and the criminal proceedings of Joey Barton with

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4 This from Keegan's biggest cheerleader, Mick 'Reseeeeeeeeeeeeeeerves!' Channon.



## SECOND YELLOW

Ousmane Dabo at Man City. But fret not, that still leaves us with plenty to be getting on with.

### **SECONDS OUT:**

#### **REMI MOSES V JESPER OLSEN**

As told by both Bryan Robson and Ron Atkinson, this unlikely pair went at it in a Man United session after a wild tackle from Olsen, with one-sided results. Captain Marvel says Remi ‘absolutely battered Jesper’ and remembers ‘there was blood all over the place’. Manager Ron also mentions a hefty amount of claret and describes how Moses left the Dane ‘in a sorry heap on the deck’. Oof. A pretty clear winner in this one then.

**RESULT: MOSES BY KO**

#### **STAN BOWLES V FRANK MCLINTOCK**

This pair had a scrap at a QPR training session with Bowles gleefully admitting ‘I almost bit Frank’s ear off, and he still ribs me about that to this day, but we are still the best of mates.’ We’re glad it was all done and forgotten in time, but we can’t have this sort of thing. It’s not Tyson and Holyfield.

**RESULT: MCLINTOCK BY DISQUALIFICATION**

#### **ANDY TODD V DEAN KIELY**

This one is less a fight and more a random act of violence. After a minor disagreement over set pieces in a drill, Charlton boss Alan ‘Curbs’ Curbishley takes up the tale: ‘as Deano went inside he walked passed [sic] Toddy in the hallway and Andy hit him. There was no row or anything like that, no shouting match.’ The notoriously aggro Todd might lose points for being a bit sneaky here, but a punch and a bloody nose speaks for itself. It got Todd run out of Charlton and the booing crowd may not like it, but it’s ...

**RESULT: TODD BY TKO**

#### **ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIĆ V JONATHAN ZEBINA**

Not Zlatan’s only training ground fight by any means, but one in which he comes off as the good guy for a change. Zebina had recently joined Juventus and seems to have been employing the prison tactic of finding the biggest bloke to have a fight with to establish dominance.

## **TRAIN IN VAIN**

He started it with a dirty tackle, then went head to head with Zlatan and stuck the nut on him. Ibra says: 'I didn't have time to think. It was sheer reflex. I hit out at him, and it happened right away. He hadn't even finished headbutting me. I must have hit him hard. He dropped down on to the grass, and I have no idea what I expected to happen.' What did happen is that manager Fabio Capello stayed well out of the way and Fabio Cannavaro gave him a wink to express solidarity. It seems that Zebina wasn't as popular, or as upright as he'd hoped to be in that moment.

**RESULT: IBRAHIMOVIĆ BY KO (OF COURSE)**

### **TREVOR FRANCIS V ARCHIE STYLES**

Who knew that Trevor Francis was a fighter? Well it turns out he wasn't. What he was, according to Roy McDonough, was a 'big moaner', and when his moaning got him in trouble with the superbly monikered Archie Styles at Birmingham, he came off second best. McDonough, always a keen admirer of a bit of violence on a football field, tells us that 'Archie never said a word, he just punched Trevor straight in the nose and as he went down rubbed six studs across his pretty-boy face. Both of his eyes were blackened and he was left with tramlines down his nose.' Oof, this sounds nasty, though to be fair, if we ever found ourselves in a scrap with Trevor Francis, we'd have probably gone for the nose first too.

**RESULT: STYLES WINS ON POINTS (FOR ARTISTRY)**

### **ANDY MORRISON V PAULO WANCHOPE**

This one might surprise you. The two fell out during rehab at Man City, with Morrison quite reasonably putting it down to 'two injured players, totally frustrated and at breaking point'. Morrison says, 'He mumbled something I didn't like so I belted him and threw him against the wall. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Steve Howey passing, but he just glanced at us and went on his way, probably thinking it was long overdue that we sorted this out.' Steve Howey not a fan of the 'See It, Say It, Sorted' policy there, and it was left to others to separate them. However, 'As things were gradually calming down, Choppy, who was now on his own, just ran, leapt a good few feet in the air and whacked me on the side of the head. Now I've taken some severe beatings in my time, but this was the first time I'd ever seen stars, just like in Tom and Jerry!'

## SECOND YELLOW

Suckers that we are for a cartoon reference, this might be our favourite of these scraps.

**RESULT: DRAW**

### **PAUL WALSH V LAWRIE MADDEN**

To continue the cartoon references, there's more than a hint of Scappy Doo about Paul Walsh. A little guy who gets involved in fights with much bigger dogs, er men, and just about gets away with it.

The Madden Kerfuffle<sup>5</sup> took place in his early days at Charlton. Walsh was winding Madden up by calling him 'Skidders', because presumably they were still at primary school. After one warning that he would 'give you a fucking whack', Walsh did it again. 'With that he came straight for me, told me to fuck off and punched me square on the nose, breaking it in the process. I wasn't having that. I jumped on top of him, trying to whack him back and suddenly my nose just started gushing blood everywhere and we separated.' Lucky to get away with just a busted hooter we're saying.

**RESULT: MADDEN BY TKO**

### **BOBBY GOULD V DENNIS WISE & FRIENDS**

Readers of our first volume will remember Bobby Gould being thrown around like a rag doll by John Hartson when he was Wales manager. This was part of Gould's infamous policy of 'having a circle' to sort out any disputes in training, in which the two contenders would be surrounded by teammates and staff, and go at it until honour was satisfied.

It's interesting that Gould was still maintaining this policy deep into the 1990s, because in truth it has seen him get bashed up quite a lot. On one occasion as Wimbledon boss, he was beaten by Dennis Wise on his own, so it's no surprise that on another occasion he was beaten even worse by Dennis Wise +1.

The threesome came about after Gould clipped Wimbledon player Vaughan Ryan round the ear for moaning after a match. At the following training session there was pressure from the squad for the two to have a circle. Gould says that at the last minute the youngster with the film star name said he wasn't up for it but then 'Wisey grabbed him, pushed him in and said "Yes, you are" before

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<sup>5</sup> *The Madden Kerfuffle* is our favourite Robert Ludlum book by the way.

## TRAIN IN VAIN

he leapt in as well and the two of them gave me a right good hiding.’ Furthermore, Gould says that as he was tending his wounds in the aftermath ‘Fash and John Gayle leaned over and said: “We want a piece of you next time as well.”’ We’re surprised Bobby kept hold of his lunch money most days at Wimbledon.

Even when he moved on to West Brom, and tweaked the format to keep things fresh by introducing boxing gloves to proceedings, it didn’t stop him getting duffed up by Colin West, to cheers from the rest of the squad. Can somebody please stage some sort of intervention and tell past Bobby to stop fighting his players please? It’s for his own good.

**RESULT: EVERYBODY BUT BOBBY GOULD WINS**

### **GRAEME SOUNESS V ALAN KENNEDY**

And so, like the circle of life, all fighting roads lead back to Graeme Souness. This time at least, it’s Souness the player who, according to Bruce Grobbelaar, took offence at Alan Kennedy despite being on the same side on a pre-season training camp in Spain. Kennedy sold Souey short with a pass then didn’t do enough to recover the ball. In what can only be described as a flurry of moustaches, ‘Handbags were out instantly and before anyone could stop him Graeme had punched him. It turned out that he had waited four years to do that in return for something that had happened in the past.’ You might be thinking about Harry Enfield’s Scousers at this point, but we’re left wondering what had caused the initial rift. We reckon Kennedy once snatched the last biscuit.

**RESULT: SOUNESS BY RICH TEA KO**

So let’s recap before we get out there amongst it.

You’ve warmed up – or not. You’ve had a run, a gym session, a tactics chat on a boat, a quick five-a-side with the chairman, a biscuit and a fight. By now you’re ready to get down to some serious training. Apart from all those other distractions that might get in the way. These days we’re sure that the state-of-the-art facilities are kept secure, clean and staffed entirely by serious professionals, but it wasn’t ever thus.

Down at Chelsea these days it’s oligarchs as far as the eye can see, but once upon a time they were just a little bit threadbare, and the training facilities were a world away from what they currently enjoy. Graeme Le Saux remembers training on pitches at Pleasington in his day that had a road between them that led to the local cemetery and

## SECOND YELLOW

crematorium. 'At regular intervals, a funeral cortège would wind its way slowly down that road with its cast of sombre mourners.' Quite rightly the Blues would stop and bow a head until everyone had passed by, which must have knocked them off their stride a bit. Maybe they used those moments to practise dead-ball situations. Dead ball. You know, because of the funerals. Please yourselves.

Chelsea's other training ground at Harlington around the same time had no such worries. There was no haunted-looking Dennis Wise telling everyone 'I see dead people' down there. However, there was a man in a bobble hat terrorising them constantly with his remote-controlled planes. Stan Ternent was coaching there at the time and says that the planes were constantly buzzing his players until one day 'without warning, his plane exploded in mid-air'. This was no accident, however; it turned out Vinnie Jones had blasted it out of the sky with his double-barrelled shotgun. It's an event that Ternent delights in telling but Vinnie doesn't deem a big enough deal to mention in his own book. Bringing a gun to training was obviously no big deal to him. And maybe he's right; it's not like he's the only person to fire a gun at a Chelsea training session, is he Ashley Cole?

Alongside Chelsea, Man City are the other nouveau riche arrivistes at the party these days. Again, it's fair to say that their current training facilities look like something out of *The Jetsons*, but there was a time in Paul Lake's day when they trained at Platt Lane with an audience of 'winos' hurling abuse at them. Lake shudders as he recalls jogging past them as they leered and jeered and had to chance their arm every time they went to get an overhit ball back from behind the goal: 'I remember one particularly creepy-looking guy who tried to put us off our stride as we completed each circuit by smiling menacingly and slowly rubbing his crotch up and down the netting', so that's lovely. If this happened these days we'd probably assume it was some 3D chess mind games from Marcelo Bielsa or something.

You can try to ignore these external factors as much as you like, but sometimes the distraction is something or someone inside the camp. These 'characters' are on the payroll but it doesn't seem like they always have the job in hand if we're honest.

Sheffield Wednesday had an ex-Marine on the coaching staff called Tony Toms, or Tomsy to his victims. Mel Sterland, no stranger to an oddball move himself as we'll discover throughout this book, tells us that at the start of training Tomsy would ask you what time

## TRAIN IN VAIN

it was, ‘Then when you glanced at your watch, he’d grab your wrist, bend it back and pick you up off the floor. You’d be screaming like a baby.’ We’re never told what the aim of this was, other than to find out the time, but it seems like Tomsy was a law unto himself at the club. Sterland recalls, wistfully, going in one Sunday for treatment and finding ‘Tomsy in the big communal bath with a couple of birds. I couldn’t believe it. Obviously he didn’t think anybody would be in that day. “Fucking get out,” he shouted at me.’ Mel made his excuses and left. So on top of being a violent bully, Tomsy was a sex person. It makes us wonder if those baths were always kept full though, or if Tomsy made small talk with the lucky women while he ran it for ages.

King of the training ground characters, however, must surely be Les Chapman at Man City. Les had a lengthy playing career, mostly around the North West of England, and a stint as manager at Preston, but by the time he got to City, it seems he was only trusted to be the kit man. In fairness, he was fortunate to get that job considering he arrived for his job interview ‘in an ill-fitting polka dot suit from Oxfam, which was offset by flat cap, short, gravy-stained tie, and plastic trainers’, before disrupting training by shouting about a lost dog, and being removed by security. When he did get his interview, Joe Royle asked him one question only, ‘Were you that mad fella on the side of the pitch?’, and Chappy was in. The odd get-up was part of Chappy’s character comedy repertoire, which included:

Billy Swift – based ‘on his uncle Stephen, a patient with mental health issues he used to visit as a child’.

William MacSwift – ‘a wild-eyed, tartan-trewed Scot with wig and tam-o’-shanter hat’.

And, ‘a Lancastrian version of Adolf Hitler’.

You couldn’t do two, maybe all three, of these today because of the PC, woke, liberal culture we live under and maybe the City training ground is all the poorer for it. Yes, they have a trophy room that’s fit to burst but they no longer have a man that will dress as a punk rocker on away trips and leap unexpectedly out of bushes in full costume.

Oh Chappy. Can we start training properly now?