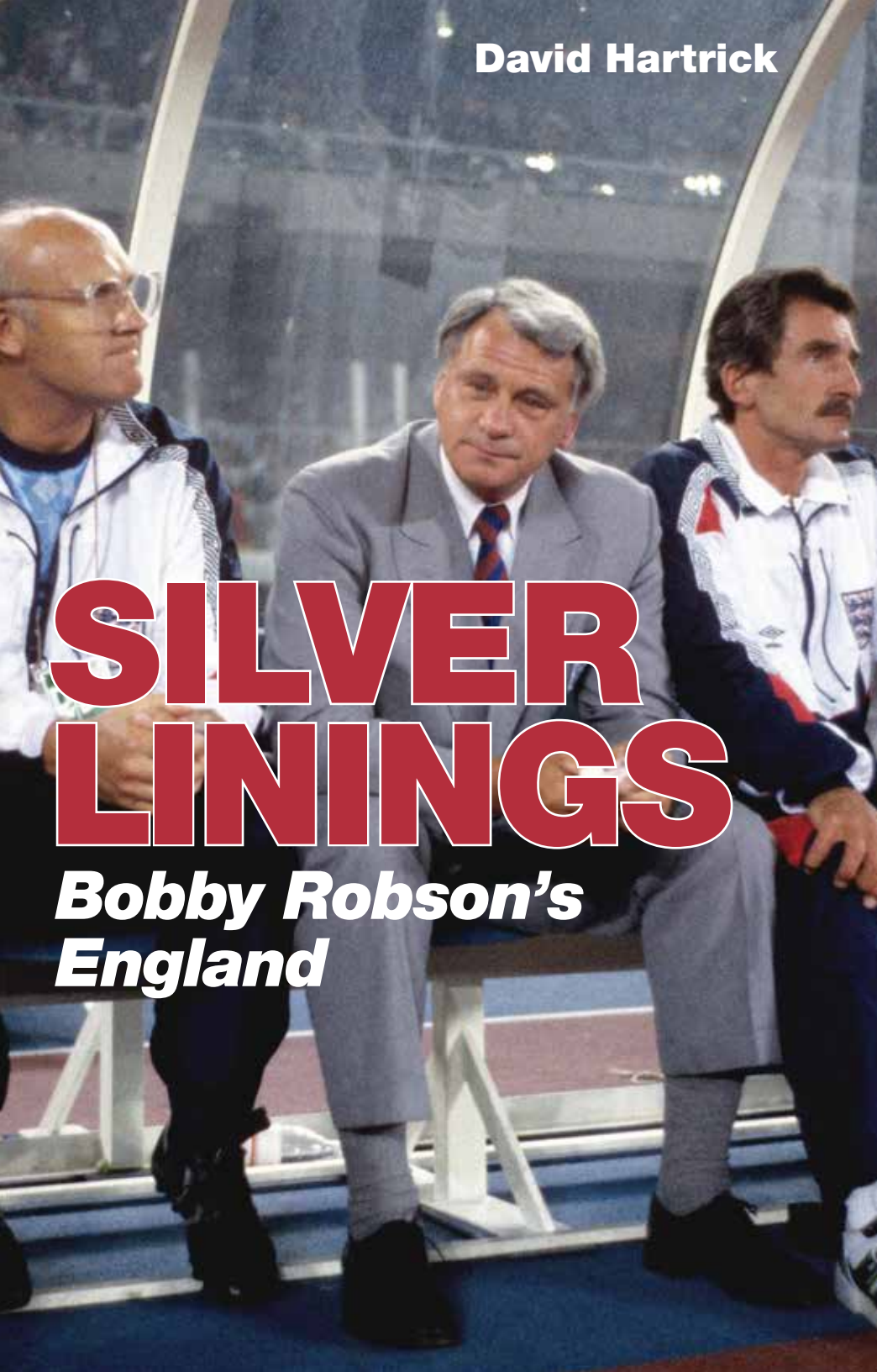

David Hartrick

SILVER LININGS

Bobby Robson's England

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Contents

Before

ENGLISH FOOTBALL had spent a lifetime preparing to win the World Cup in 1966. To some it was less a sporting endeavour and more a divine right. As Bobby Moore raised the Jules Rimet Trophy high, the home nation's island mentality had only been further enhanced. Here was tacit confirmation of what many in charge had assumed either publicly or privately; England were the best team in the world, and quite possibly always had been. Football had come home.

It would be fair to say that a good part of that mentality came from the Football Association's long-standing attitude towards the international game; chiefly one of gradual adoption due to a deep-rooted superiority complex plus viewing change by where it came from rather than the actual effect it had. England created modern football, and thus would always be the ones who mastered it, many reasoned. In truth neither side of that statement was particularly sound, but it would be fair to say the game's codification at least owed the country a grand debt.

England may have played football's first official international fixture, against Scotland in 1872, but it then watched on impassively as other nations expanded their horizons. Preferring to play home internationals, on the whole there was no immediate desire within the FA to join

the Fédération Internationale de Football Association upon its formation in 1904, despite being repeatedly invited. The view was taken that this was a body who would only provide interference rather than actual ideas. They did agree to recognise it as an official body despite their reservations and promptly set up a committee to review this 'FIFA' from afar.

After several meetings and reports it was eventually decided that England should reluctantly join in 1906. Rather than some great desire to embrace a world game, this was mainly as it was felt the FA should have a say in any matter relating to football, domestic or international. In real terms this translated as a will to reject any changes to *their* game. Suitably any diktat FIFA proposed was either refused or ignored, and in particular the organisation's fanciful desire to hold a world championship of football was dismissed. After all, why would you play other nations if you assumed you would win anyway?

For their part FIFA actually embraced British involvement. FA members were promoted swiftly to prominent positions within. This led to several invites for England to tour regions and play games as pioneers, most of which were, of course, swiftly rejected. England did decide to take an official foray outside the British Isles in 1908 to play matches in Austria, Hungary and Bohemia. These games afforded England four wins by an aggregate score of 28 to two. The results did little to scale back the FA's ego, bolstered further by Great Britain's amateurs taking Olympic gold in 1908 and 1912 in far more formalised conditions than their first triumph in 1900.

The First World War fractured Europe and for a while football didn't matter. Once it ended, a relatively quick return to playing meant the FA felt the need to make a stand. They wouldn't play against any nation who had fought against the Allied Powers. Furthermore, they would also refuse to play

against any other nation who didn't take the same stance. They expected this to go unchallenged when they informed the relevant people of their position.

FIFA were unwilling to officially approve such an idea as they wanted to remain neutral in the hope sport would rise above. War in Europe between nations they represented either actually or in principle put them in an impossible position. The FA's response was to leave the organisation immediately.

Talks were continual; both sides knew not having the game's self-proclaimed originators involved weakened the overall optic of FIFA. As such they were pleased to welcome the British FAs back in 1924 after compromises had been reached. It was a doomed second marriage as FIFA had moved the European game on significantly. Not only had there been rule changes, but a huge row developed over the FA's insistence upon control over amateur status for all international players, against a move to compensate footballers financially that FIFA were behind. In 1928 the home nations angrily left once again. This time there would be no olive branch offered or wanted.

Before that second divorce England had slowly come around to the idea of playing against some of the emerging European nations, if only for the chance to prove their superiority. In 1923 Belgium were invited to become the first country outside the British Isles to play against England in a home international. The match took place at Highbury and ended in a resounding 6-1 victory in front of a reported 14,000 fans.

Football reporting was relatively sparse but despite the result some were impressed by Belgium's passing as opposed to England's directness. 'It sounds absurd to suggest that we might learn anything of football from the Belgians,' wrote the *Westminster Gazette*, 'but those present at Highbury yesterday,

when England met Belgium, saw, at a partially developed stage, a new type of football, which bids fair, in a few years' time, to make us think furiously.'

While not seeing it in any way as essential as the Home Championship, the FA began to extend their comfort zone. By the end of 1929 England had played away games against Luxembourg, Sweden, France and Belgium, plus a 4-3 defeat in Madrid to Spain which marked their first loss against non-British opposition. Rather than accept nearly 57 years after that first international other countries were becoming footballing talents themselves, most of the British press that did run small reports on the game moved to blame other factors.

'The spectators broke all the bounds of propriety,' ran the report in the *Derby Daily Telegraph* as Spain's fans, 45,000 of them by most reports who had queued for over an hour to get into the Estadio Metropolitano, rushed the pitch after Gaspar Rubio's late goal made it 3-3. This apparently caused 'some minutes interruption' and the incident earned almost double the coverage of the actual match. The winner by Severino Goiburu barely warranted a mention. The pitch was eventually cleared by 'Civic Guards with drawn swords' and disapproving tones were universal. A further caveat was offered in the *Sheffield Daily Independent* that England showed 'palpable signs of suffering from the heat'. If only they could have known Spain would be hot in May.

Meanwhile FIFA had been busy and in 1930 finally had their much-desired 'World Cup' in Uruguay. The hosts won and, despite wider opposition across Europe than just that of Great Britain, the tournament had broadly been a success. England were invited in spite of the rift between the two organisations, as were the other home nations. The offer was point-blank refused by all. England also watched on as

the 1934 and 1938 World Cups took place, a token offer to compete in 38 rejected as desired. Both had been held in Europe, in Italy and France respectively. The competition was already FIFA's crown jewel, primary revenue generator, and suited football's growing position as the world's game. If the organisation had once been desperate to court the British it had now moved on.

In 1939 history once again overtook sport and the next World Cup would have to wait. The Second World War raged across Europe and eventually beyond. At its end things had changed irrevocably, attitudes softened by tragedy. The home nations rejoined FIFA, even playing a Great Britain v Rest of Europe game at Hampden Park in front of a huge crowd to celebrate the fact. Football was escapism and the general public needed a place to lose themselves away from their immediate memories.

Places at the 1950 World Cup to be held in Brazil were offered and accepted for the first and second-place finishers in the 1949 Home Championship. England won three out of three games and set course to take part. Scotland declined to join them despite qualifying. An epic journey to South America and a general lack of preparation cost England despite a reasonable start in Pool B with a good Chile side beaten 2-0. It left them with the routine job of beating the USA and then facing what would essentially be a knockout game against Spain.

In Belo Horizonte the unthinkable happened. Rather than sweeping aside the USA as expected they fell to a 1-0 loss in a match they wholly dominated but in which they just couldn't score. Time and time again England attacked and failed to find the net, hitting the post or bar 11 times in total. 'Schoolboys would have been spanked by their masters for missing the same simple chances,' Billy Wright wrote in

The World's My Football Pitch. Defeat to Spain in the final game sealed England's fate but the sporting world was still aghast at the result four days earlier. England, with names like Finney, Mannion and Matthews, with the game's history in their DNA, with the arrogance of surety, beaten by a team of amateurs whose coach had told the press before the tournament were there to be 'sheep ready to be slaughtered'.

The British press's reaction was scathing. England had been subject to a few barbed lines in the face of a loss before but nothing with the venom of the fiasco in Belo Horizonte, now renamed 'Lost Horizon' by the *Daily Mail* whose match report stated that England had played 'ridiculously badly!' The *Western Morning News* was actually the first to go to print and stated, 'Probably never before has an England team played so badly,' a thought echoed in *The Times* which also added, 'England had only themselves to blame for defeat!' The *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury* offered that England had 'No Excuse!' in the headline and that they 'ought to have sufficient skill to offset any unnecessary vigour by the opposition'. The *Sunderland Echo* titled its report 'England's Cup Display Worst Ever!' Smaller papers were no less angry, the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* sure that 'not a single player could be proud of his showing', and north of the border the *Aberdeen Journal* wrote with disgust rather than glee, 'It was pathetic to watch English football beaten by a side most amateur 11s would beat at home, and there was no fluke about it.'

Across the country, newspapers ran similar reports all highly, and rightly in their opinion, critical of the team. The language around England reporting was historically concise, as were the match reports themselves, but the reaction to losing this game was markedly different. For contrast, when England lost away to Sweden on a short tour in 1949 the

Sports Argus only ran a 12-line story despite seeing fit to headline it 'Funeral Feast of an Epoch'. There was no mention of the score, just a quote from a Swedish publication, and that was that. A year later this 1-0 defeat to the USA marked the moment the football press truly found its teeth.

Such a loss and such a reaction required seismic analysis. Things were not working and hadn't been for some time in truth. Erosion through wilful ignorance. The newspapers' sharper reactions had been noted but the reality was English football was being left behind by those around it. A technical committee was formed with Stanley Rous at the head with the aim of improving standards. This involved two things; firstly, refining the selection of the team by looking at the committee who currently did so, and secondly a lot of arguing among themselves.

If there were still some small lingering belief that just being England was enough, it was obliterated in November 1953 in a sea change of a game against the Mighty Magyars of Hungary. Wembley Stadium witnessed magic as England lost for the first time at home to a team outside of the British Isles. Hungary's football was so far ahead of England's, so technical and so fast, it caused deep embarrassment for the FA. Hungary won 6-3, a scoreline that improbably did little justice to the actual performance. Thoroughbreds against carthorses as Tom Finney famously described it. The *Daily Mirror* went further and stated, 'We must learn how to play soccer all over again.'

Worse was to follow as six months later England returned the favour by playing Hungary in Budapest. The result was an even more chastening 7-1 defeat, which was and remains England's heaviest ever, and the difference between the two teams was now a chasm. This prompted a vicious write-up from the *Daily Mirror* which felt that its advice to start again

had been ignored. The 'Disaster on the Danube' was the final straw for the newspaper. England's attacking was 'comic' and the performance one of a team who had 'learned nothing, forgotten nothing' from the previous game at Wembley. English football had been 'shattered on an anvil of speed, sporting intelligence, imagination, and sheer blinding, brilliant ball control'.

However, the ire was not just aimed at the players this time. The paper also pointed to the weaknesses in the system in its summary, 'We must sweep away those plumbers and builders and grocers who select national teams and give the responsibility to men who have played and know the game. And above all, our league set-up must make sweeping and immediate sacrifices to our international game.'

* * *

The England manager watched all this unfold, somewhat powerless. It was not, strictly speaking, his fault. Walter Winterbottom had been given the job to be England's director of coaching in 1946 on the back of an RAF career teaching PT instructors how to keep their men fit. He had been a footballer, his career cut short by injury after early promise at Manchester United. He understood the game and was known to be a keen student. Beyond that there was very little qualification for the role, in part because it had never existed.

By 1947 he was the full-time manager of the England team as well as the director of coaching; a victory for Stanley Rous who had long argued the need for a full-time employee in charge who could get the best from the players he was given. To date there had been a varied cast of individuals effectively doing the FA a favour by taking over the England team in the loosest sense. This generally consisted of a group of footballers picked and largely told what to do by committee

as and when asked. Unsurprisingly those damn continentals were pioneering a single international manager looking after and selecting the team, so the FA was typically adverse. This was coupled to the organisation's belief that the position should be amateur in status with the occasional exception when it suited them.

One of those came when the great innovator Herbert Chapman took charge for an away game against Italy in 1933, keen as ever to expand his knowledge of continental football. His advice to the FA after taking the game was as prescient as you would expect, 'Bring together 20 of the most promising young players for a week under a selector, coach, and trainer, the results would be astonishing!' This was completely ignored.

Selection of the team from game to game was by committee, an imperfect system as Winterbottom had very little ultimate input. Even at the height of his powers he was still a slave to the group actually acknowledging his suggestions and often that became a matter of politics over ability. To compound matters, that committee was also made up of men who many felt were not fit for the job anyway, chiefly as they had no actual grounding in the game. Those men would sit on an ever-increasing variety of panels overseeing English football and only answering to each other. If a camel is a horse designed by committee then at times the national team was a camel with several camels around it arguing with each other about why they have a hump.

In his book *England Managers: The Toughest Job in Football*, the great Brian Glanville described them as 'greedy old men' and the situation as one of taking charge of the England team 'with one hand tied behind your back'. Winterbottom was allowed to pick the side once, a home game against Sweden in 1959 in which he chose a young team

who were outplayed by the team who had finished runners-up at the World Cup a year earlier. Experiment over.

While the system afforded a layer of protection from results such as the disaster in 1950 – not a single newspaper write-up I could find, having searched through and read every one available, mentioned the England manager at all – Winterbottom was also up against resistance from within the FA to the very idea of coaching itself. This was England, what could possibly be improved? He was by no means a token appointment, but the role was ill-defined at best, nigh on impossible at worst.

Despite it all he started to have a real influence across English football, changing teachers into fledgling football coaches by passing on methods for a start, and then introducing coaching courses and eventually badges players could earn to prove to clubs they were trained and ready to move into management. In reality 1950 had just been too early for him to have an impact on a country with a historically huge turning circle. By then he was actively talking to clubs and keen to see them introduce training and fitness techniques, but some players had no desire to 'blunt themselves' for an actual game by daring to practise – a position completely backed up by the clubs that employed them.

Within the FA there was also still open scepticism and Winterbottom was routinely undermined by his own employers, but the press were yet to realise the influence a manager could have on the England team. Rous remained an ardent public supporter and his one ally throughout. That 1953 Magyar masterclass had only confirmed in his mind the need for lasting change rather than a single reactionary one.

Winterbottom led England into the 1954, 1958 and 1962 World Cups and in every single one he was tasked with taking a group of players that he hadn't selected to success.

He was, by all accounts, a highly dedicated and studious man but perhaps one whose strengths lay in long-term planning rather than short-term motivation. Rous remained by his side metaphorically even if some reports say he had one or two moments of doubt along the way, particularly in 1955 when he allegedly offered the England job to Roma's Liverpudlian manager Jesse Carver. Despite that, it would be fair to say Rous believed there was a greater good represented by *his* man throughout; however, results and specifically World Cup performances would take an inevitable toll on Winterbottom's standing.

In 1954 England had once again expected at the World Cup in Switzerland but anticipation had been tempered suitably by the brilliance of that Hungary side. Winterbottom led his team through a tough group to a quarter-final against a very decent Uruguay. England played well but lost 4-2, a result put in proper context by Uruguay's earlier 7-0 mauling of Scotland.

Four years later there was a desire to see an improvement as England really should have won one of these things by now, after all. Winterbottom was given a squad which was two players lighter than most of his opponents and shorn without good reason of Stanley Matthews and Nat Lofthouse, who Glanville wrote had been in 'imposing form'. Also, several key players were either carrying injuries or tired after a gruelling end-of-season run-in in the top two leagues. Most importantly there was a huge shadow cast over English football, and specifically this squad, by tragedy.

On 6 February, British European Airways Flight 609 crashed while trying to take off from Munich Airport. The flight was carrying the Manchester United squad back from a European Cup game and three of England's most talented players – Duncan Edwards, Tommy Taylor and Roger Byrne

– along with 17 others at the scene and a further three more in hospital lost their lives. The crash placed some perspective on the summer's World Cup in Sweden and failing to get out of a group with eventual winners Brazil and a very good Soviet Union (who beat England in a play-off to qualify from Group 4 when both teams finished level) was seen as understandable. The *Daily Herald* was sympathetic, 'They had given their spirited best … they had almost run their legs off … they had played their hearts out … but it was just not good enough. Tragically it was not good enough because that vital soccer quality just wasn't with us – luck.'

In contrast, by 1962 there was pressure on Winterbottom, largely due to his own success. The seeds sowed in coaching and training early in his reign and the work with the clubs was bearing fruit. The next English generation were truly modern footballers. While nowhere near the level of today's pristine athletes, the likes of 21-year-old defender Bobby Moore, 22-year-old striker Jimmy Greaves, and 24-year-old Munich survivor Bobby Charlton were different; faster, higher skilled and more intelligent. While nobody dared say it out loud, they were European in style.

England were also in decent form going into the World Cup, beaten only once at home since the last and having found their shooting boots. In the two years leading to the tournament in Chile Winterbottom's direct and hard-running side had averaged just shy of four goals a game; remarkable when the comfort of qualifying via the Home Championship had gone. England had to top a three-team group in competition with Luxembourg and Portugal. Luxembourg were suitably dismissed by an aggregate score of 13-1 but a Portugal side containing one of football's first truly global stars, Eusebio, were dangerous. A 1-1 draw away in Lisbon was a terrific result. England finished top and unbeaten.

Despite the form, Winterbottom knew his race was nearly run. Rous, who had become Sir Stanley since appointing him, took over as president of FIFA in late 1961. The England manager's safety net had gone. Replacing him as secretary of the FA – the role in the organisation that actually held the power – was Denis Follows, a man whose main attribute for the job was that he was open in his dislike for Rous, as was the case vice-versa. Winterbottom had also applied for the role of FA secretary and many felt his time on the frontline had earned him the higher role in overall charge. The choice of Follows was unexpected but chiefly down to Rous who had alienated most members of the FA board through his desire to run a dictatorship. Winterbottom was seen as his man and subsequently a vote for him to become secretary in effect was a vote for Rous by proxy. Rous's leadership had become so divisive that Follows won by a clear 30 votes.

England travelled to Chile with high expectations but unbeknownst to the squad they had a manager who was making other plans. Winterbottom had applied to take up the position of general secretary to the General Council of Physical Recreation (GCPR) before leaving, knowing he was a marked man from all sides. The press were building their own pressure chiefly because Winterbottom's football was seen as successful but dull compared to the cut and thrust of the continental way. With a clutch of exciting young players there needed to be another level. Even in the dominance of the last two years it was felt the direct, physical style of a Winterbottom team was not enough longer term.

So Winterbottom, hindered throughout his career by a selection committee of men nowhere near as qualified as himself to pick the squad, perennially a political tool within the organisation that employed him, and now with his good work finally coming to some sort of fruition on

the pitch, knew it was time to go. He dared to dream that England might win the World Cup as a parting gift and his preparation for Chile had proved he learned lessons from his last three. England had been criticised for being too relaxed, not having the correct facilities, and even being unfit going into the last two World Cups in particular. This time there was fairly unanimous agreement that Winterbottom and the FA had got the logistics right.

Everything was set up for England to get through Group 4 and into the quarter-finals but as in 1958 they faced tough opposition. First up was Hungary who were no longer the side that had twice blown England away but were still considered a threat. So it proved as England were beaten 2-1 and the press focused on the lack of imagination from England's forwards. 'We had a guileless attack in name only,' reported the *Daily Herald*. The *Daily Mirror*, the newspaper that had been so incensed in 1954, was more resigned this time, 'Hungary are still too good for us. That, without moans or alibis, is the cruelly correct summing-up.'

England's next game was against Argentina and they produced a truly excellent performance to win 3-1, comfortably their best in a World Cup at that point. The match marked the emergence of Bobby Charlton on the international stage, unplayable as an outside-left on the day. After he finished with an assist and a goal, the newspapers were reporting that Barcelona were preparing a gargantuan £300,000 bid for him at the conclusion of the World Cup. The win set up the final group game against Bulgaria and a draw would see England through to the quarter-finals.

What followed was, in effect, the final straw in regard to Winterbottom for many. England may have got the draw they required but the turgid nature of the 0-0 was blamed on a strategy that basically revolved around playing a nine-man

defence. Charlton, electric against Argentina but now asked to do a shielding job, was horrified by the approach, 'I have always believed it was the worst game in which I was ever obliged to play.'

His ire was shared by Bobby Moore, who said, 'It was one of the worst internationals of all time.' Charlton was so angered leaving the pitch that he had an argument with Johnny Haynes who celebrated qualification at the full-time whistle. 'The game was a miserable betrayal of all that I thought English football stood for,' he wrote in 2008, 'I did not play football to try to sneak a result against inferior opposition.'

The press had to acknowledge the achievement of England's progress but were horrified at Winterbottom's game plan. The *Daily Herald*'s headline summed up most reports, 'We've Done It! England, You Were Dreadful!' Its writer, Peter Lorenzo, was known to be quick to point out England and Winterbottom's flaws and he didn't hold back in his assessment, 'Dull, deadly, disappointing … Perhaps even worse than we've ever been.'

He was far from the only critic. Frank McGhee of the *Daily Mirror* described the game as 'dismal' and wrote that England had 'sagged to a new low'. *The Guardian* said the draw had been 'completely devoid of atmosphere' and gave a dog running on to the pitch shortly after half-time as much coverage as the actual second half. Even *The Times*, the newspaper least prone to hyperbole around something as trivial as football, called it an 'exasperating display' and 'a feeble, insipid match'. It went even further when going over the details, 'England seldom play well against so-called "easy" opponents, but now, in the middle of the second half, there were signs of the team's control and fibre cracking. This was deplorable against the naive Bulgarian team. Some of the play

bordered on the ridiculous, with players falling over their feet and the ball.'

If Winterbottom knew it was only a matter of time thanks to Rous leaving then the press had all but confirmed it. England exited the 1962 World Cup after a 3-1 defeat to eventual champions Brazil and Winterbottom confirmed his new position shortly after the tournament. On 1 August he resigned to mock surprise from some but what constituted a fair assessment from the press; a good man who had modernised English football then hit a ceiling not necessarily all of his own creation. Winterbottom was leaving behind a role he had defined, a coaching programme for both players and managers, and a job that had become one of the highest profile in the country. He had changed English football forever.

The Observer reported that having been passed over for the FA secretary position earlier in the year he had in fact now taken up the 'most powerful position in British sport' with the GCPR. Tellingly, the newspaper too knew it was time for change but held little hope, 'Little less than a revolution can now prevent England from descending, however gracefully, into the ranks of the second-class powers.' Revolution may have been too extreme for the FA but even they had to accept that it was time to change.

* * *

4. You will have full responsibility for the selection of England teams, excluding the Amateur XIs.

The fourth condition on the letter confirming Alf Ramsey's appointment as England manager was by far the most important. It also marked the most significant change to

English international football since it was decided in 1946 that a full-time coach was required. Ramsey had made it clear he would only consider the job if given sole responsibility for picking the squad and then the team from it, plus he would decide upon the correct course of coaching for them while they were in his care. There would be zero negotiation on that point. Winterbottom's other role as the FA's director of coaching was given to Allen Wade and the England manager was now a unique, full-time entity. The FA had relented on both counts knowing he was the right man, but the animosity between those who had made up the now disbanded international selection committee and Ramsey who had demanded their end would last a lifetime.

He had not been first choice. Winterbottom's assistant Jimmy Adamson had been offered the role but declined as at only 33 years old he wanted to keep playing. Adamson had been Winterbottom's recommendation and represented continuity, perhaps the opposite of what was actually required. Ramsey had quickly risen to the top of nearly every list, including a poll of supporters taken by the *Daily Express* and another in the *Daily Mirror* in August 1962. He had beaten Billy Wright, Stan Cullis and Bill Nicholson in both.

Ramsey's standing in football was beyond doubt. He had an excellent playing career as a right-back who was seen as more thoughtful than most. No less a judge than Billy Wright said Ramsey was 'the most remarkable defender I have met'. After Ramsey's appointment, Tom Duckworth wrote an open letter to him in his Topics of the Week column for the *Sports Argus*, describing Ramsey the player as one who 'gave a new constructive concept to post-war full-back play'. Duckworth also added that he 'did more than anyone else to get rid of the idea that a clearance should be a long hopeful punt up field'.

Ramsey had started on the coast at Southampton but moved to Tottenham Hotspur in a swap deal for Welsh winger Ernest Jones. There he won the Second and First Division championships. Eventually he retired in 1955 due to age, injury, and a difficult relationship with several people at the club over a desire to coach and then manage at Spurs. Similar stories of Ramsey's clashes with those who did not share his opinion would follow him throughout his career. He was also a full England international with 32 caps to his name, three as captain in Billy Wright's absence, and had actually played in both the fateful defeat in Belo Horizonte in 1950 and Hungary's masterclass in 1953.

Keen to become a manager and absolutely sure of his ability to do so, he had taken over at Ipswich Town and suitably performed a minor footballing miracle. Taking them from the Third Division South to the First Division in six years with highly limited resources would have made him a *de facto* candidate to be the best manager in the country. The fact he then led Ipswich to the title in their first season in England's top division, in 1961/62, removed the conversation entirely.

Having the credentials was one thing and the desire another, but it became clear to the FA that Ramsey was keen and had a single stated goal: to win the World Cup. The letter confirming his position, complete with the non-negotiable clause four, was sent to Ramsey on 26 October 1962. He would take up sole care the following year having seen out the season with Ipswich but was expected to take an active part in all of England's games from 1 January 1963. A very different era had begun.

There was also a new competition for England to refuse to participate in. In 1954 several European football associations decided that while FIFA had the world's interests at heart it

would be pertinent to set up a body to represent Europe. To do so, the Union of European Football Associations, UEFA for short, was formed. Not only did they want to introduce and formalise European club competitions but also develop their own championships internationally. This was not to rival the World Cup, but as Europe now had several of football's genuine powerhouse nations it would be fit to see them compete more than just once every four years. The English FA had willingly joined UEFA, but the thought of another competition was an idea too far.

In fairness they weren't the only ones. The first European Nations' Cup, in 1960 (renamed in 1968 to the simpler European Championship), had several sceptical international teams missing. The format was clumsy partly due to those who declined to take part, but the Soviet Union won in France and it had mostly worked. There was now pressure on UEFA's higher-profile members to take part in the second edition and this time England deigned to enter. This meant that Ramsey's first official game in charge of England was a 5-2 defeat to France in the preliminary round for the tournament to take place the following year.

The game had shown the amount of work Ramsey had to do. Having taken place on a bitterly cold February night and while still in the period of his dual employment at Ipswich, reaction was reasonably muted. Everyone wanted to believe things would change going forward; a key tenet of England reporting and fandom has always been hope after all. The team had been picked by a committee with Ramsey's blessing, as it would for every game until he took full control in May, the caveat being that Ramsey himself was on the panel and active in his choices. It had shown England's deficiencies which had been there at the World Cup in Chile but even the *Daily Mirror*, the newspaper so historically active in its

criticism, tempered its report by saying, 'This England team was not nearly as bad as the margin of defeat suggests.'

After defeat to Scotland and a better performance in drawing with Brazil in early May, Ramsey left Ipswich and began his job in earnest. As a man he was obsessive to the point of belligerence, and it was now with the team under full command and selection his alone he started his minor revolution. With an injury to Jimmy Armfield Ramsey made a young Bobby Moore replacement captain for his first proper game away to Czechoslovakia, the first in a mini summer tour that would then take them to East Germany and Switzerland. Gordon Banks would continue in goal having made his debut in that defeat to Scotland, but Ramsey's key changes would be in England's approach and tactics. The physicality would remain but direct and quicker passing was preferred. The W-M was gone and England moved into a 4-2-4 formation. The result was instant.

A very good Czechoslovakia were swept aside 4-2 and England were excellent throughout. They played with a speed and adventure that a late-Winterbottom era team dare not, to take apart the home side who had been World Cup finalists the previous summer. Jimmy Greaves had been magical at times, scoring twice and revelling in the faster transition from defence to attack. Bobby Charlton added another goal and another excellent game to his England history.

The press were glowing in their admiration. 'England now were playing arrogant football and stoking the ball from man to man as though they were playing ring-a-ring-o'-roses,' ran *The Times*. 'Hail Ramsey's Red Devils!' headlined a bombastic report in the *Daily Express* by Desmond Hackett. 'England found a new courage, a head-high pride, and an unflinching spirit of battle,' he wrote, on 'a night of British football splendour.'

The tour was a success as East Germany were beaten and a poor Switzerland were put to the sword by an experimental England line-up. Ramsey was bullish, he was making a difference and the press were with him. England seemed to be finally getting the best from Greaves, a formula Winterbottom had never found, and Bobby Moore looked for all the world a star in the making. Things were good and the decision to give the England side to Ramsey already looked vindicated. The only way was up.

Fast forward to the summer of 1966 and it hadn't all been as smooth sailing. As hosts England lacked the sharpening edge of competitive football to qualify. The yearly Home Championship was still a fixture but its familiarity meant it could never serve the same function as football with real consequence. In Ramsey's opening years as manager his team was dogged with that eternal foe of any England team: inconsistency.

He had shuffled his players considerably too. Gordon Banks was now the first-choice goalkeeper barring injury or rest, Moore his permanent captain and next to him Jack Charlton, a debutant in 1965 and now the heft to Moore's guile. Either side of them Ray Wilson and George Cohen were preferred, both dependable and in truth very much in the mould of Alf Ramsey the footballer. Nobby Stiles was a fixture in midfield and provided England with boundless energy and aggression, and a tactical shift away from traditional wingers had moved Bobby Charlton into a potent central position supporting the strikers.

There were other names Ramsey had brought into the squad that supplemented his spine such as Alan Ball, John Connelly, Martin Peters, Ian Callaghan and Roger Hunt. All were talented but above all would be trusted to work relentlessly in pursuit of the team over individualism. This

mindset was prized by Ramsey above all others, and, as such, a reason why he had never fully trusted Greaves despite a frankly remarkable scoring record. West Ham's Geoff Hurst had been called up to deputise and looked the long-term option in the event of a Greaves absence.

The honeymoon period was over and despite Ramsey's public insistence that England would win the World Cup the recent memory was one of near-constant underperformance. There were highlights along the way but between the experimenting to get England's first team to the point where Ramsey was happy and the constant tactical shifts – refining the 4-2-4 and then dispensing with it altogether to switch between a 4-3-3 and something close to a 4-1-3-2 – there had been too many games where the players had looked lost. This had resulted in a downbeat press who harboured a frosty but still relatively respectful relationship with the manager. Were all these changes leading somewhere was the eternal question, one usually asked in hope rather than exasperation. Ramsey, as ever, only listened to himself.

That question remained after England's first group game, a dour 0-0 draw at Wembley against Uruguay. The *Daily Express*'s Desmond Hackett chose to blame the Uruguayan defence that was 'eight or nine players deep' at all times. Others were in agreement that although England had not done enough to stretch the game the mindset of their opponents had ruined the spectacle. 'The Uruguayans promised England nothing, and gave them even less,' wrote Ken Jones for the *Daily Mirror*.

England fared better five days later in a routine 2-0 win against Mexico. Bobby Charlton's brilliant first-half goal settled the nerves and while never hitting anywhere near their best the game eased them into their own World Cup easier than the Uruguayan defensive wall had. This left them

needing only a point from their final match to qualify from their group just as they had in 1962. With France to play, there would be no repeat of Winterbottom's caution.

England struggled desperately for rhythm. They did achieve the 2-0 victory they needed but the game raised some genuine concerns going forward. Firstly, Greaves failed to score, just as he had also failed in his last four games, but more worryingly he never really looked dangerous either. Ramsey's switch to a near-enough 4-3-3 didn't really fit the way Greaves played but it got the best from other players such as Charlton and, in particular, Roger Hunt who enjoyed the space afforded by defenders doubling up on Greaves centrally. In stark contrast he had scored 13 goals in his 15 England games, and then added two more in this one.

Secondly, a tackle from Stiles on Jacques Simon caused a major reaction off the pitch including calls for him to be left out of the remainder of England's World Cup campaign. The tackle itself was mistimed over outright malicious but it left Simon injured and Stiles's reputation as grounds for discussion. FIFA themselves saw fit to issue a post-game warning to Stiles and state that one more would result in a ban. Ramsey then had to go out to bat for his midfielder as the FA wanted him dropped. Not only did Ramsey defend his man on the grounds of lack of intent, but this also constituted the FA meddling in his team selection – a line Ramsey would refuse to be crossed even in these circumstances. In an interview with *The Guardian* in 2002, Stiles recalled just how far Ramsey was prepared to go over the incident, 'By all accounts the committee told him in no uncertain terms I couldn't play, that England needed to make an example of me. I was a liability, they said. Alf told them he'd resign if he couldn't pick who he wanted. He was prepared to resign in the middle of a World Cup over me. I never found that out till he'd died, Alf. What a man.'

On top of Greaves misfiring, something that would be resolved by an injury in the France game meaning Geoff Hurst got his chance, the whole England team felt out of sync. This hadn't gone unnoticed by Ramsey who had not only had enough but went public with his feelings knowing criticism was coming his way. He said the performance wasn't good enough and had been 'too casual', something that had 'swept through the whole team' after the first goal. Tellingly, and perhaps the real source of the issues for both himself and the team, he went on to comment, 'I am completely stunned by the amount of pressure we have been under.'

The 4-3-3 was not working. Desmond Hackett went so far as to call England 'tactically stupid' after the France game, the 'timid untidy match' he had been reporting on. Argentina lay ahead in the quarter-final and Ramsey tinkered England into what was just about a 4-1-3-2. Stiles, the man he fought for, was given the role of playing as a midfield two all by himself. This consisted of sitting in front of the back four and providing a shield for all four of them while also playing the ball forward to Charlton at every opportunity. This supplemented a front two of Hunt and Hurst.

It's difficult to know if Ramsey's plan worked as the game descended quickly into farce. England won 1-0, Hurst taking his chance to replace Greaves with a genuinely excellent second-half header, but that wasn't really the story.

Argentina set out to disrupt England any way they possibly could. Right from the off every other challenge was just a shade heavier than it needed to be. Words were said to both players and officials almost constantly, body language doing the heavy lifting in lieu of a common tongue. After the game several English players and FIFA's neutral observer said they were spat at. England's response was to sink to their level while pretending they hadn't as Ramsey's men

managed to differ their response in one somewhat key way: subtlety.

Argentina's captain Antonio Rattin took several headlines with his sending off, subsequent refusal to leave the pitch, and then a failed attempt to get his team-mates to walk off. Ramsey was incensed by the whole game and famously described the Argentine team as acting like 'animals', a comment which caused an outcry in the foreign press and which led to the South American nations standing with Argentina and threatening to leave FIFA. He also bolted on to the pitch at the final whistle and physically stopped his players swapping shirts with their opponents.

This was an important evolution in the role of England manager. Ramsey had felt the weight of it before and talked of the pressure, but here he was acting, he felt, for all of the country. The fact his men left the field having more than played their part was irrelevant. Indeed, at the final whistle they themselves had given away 35 fouls, 14 more than they would commit in any other game in 1966, and 16 more than Argentina did on the day. Still, what Ramsey had witnessed was an affront to everything he believed his team, and his country, stood for. It was time to be seen defending not just his team but the very notion of Englishness.

This essence of Bulldog Spirit carried Ramsey and his charges into the next game and their best performance at this World Cup. After the debacle against Argentina, the semi-final against Portugal was thankfully an absolutely terrific game of football. 'What a pity this isn't the final,' commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme wistfully wondered aloud during the second half. England eased into a two-goal lead thanks to the popular man of the match Bobby Charlton, his second with 11 minutes left causing an audible cry of relief from the 90,000 fans at Wembley. The actual

man of the match, Nobby Stiles, had shackled the brilliant Eusebio but could do nothing about watching him score a late penalty to bring the tension right back. It was the first goal England had conceded in the tournament but they held out. West Germany lay ahead in the final.

Everyone reading this book knows what came next. Red shirts, baggy shorts. Hurst in for Greaves. Full time 2-2. Now go out and win it again. Did it cross the line? They think it's all over. Bobby's smile for the Queen. Nobby dancing.

England were world champions. A lifetime's work was complete for the FA. For Alf Ramsey a promise was fulfilled. He was calm in victory as ever, taking a moment to praise the Germans, but privately he was filled with a mixture of joy and relief. As was his way he preferred to let the players enjoy the moment publicly. 'We were the fastest and the strongest side in the World Cup,' he would later say, perhaps giving some inclination on where that inherent English way of playing lay in his own mind.

The joy across the country lasted for weeks. Good old England. Alf's Wingless Wonders. There was, however, a problem on the horizon that no one wanted to talk about. A question with no obvious answer, particularly for those at the FA. Quite simply, having a spent a lifetime believing they should be world champions, now they were what did they do next?

* * *

From 1966 to 1982, the year our story truly begins, English international football lurched from one existential identity crisis to another. Winning the World Cup was not just the only actual pinnacle available but the manner in which it had been won left its own legacy and expectations. England had been resolute in defence, unflashy in attack, used a spoiler

in midfield, heavily relied on individuals to be the difference makers, and at times still employed good old-fashioned luck. Almost overnight all of that was no longer enough. There was a desire to both have all those things that had proved successful and now felt intrinsically 'English', and also to entertain. Yes we were world champions, but how come Brazil seemed to enjoy it more?

What followed over the next 16 years was a series of sliding doors moments, missteps and misadventures, coupled with some bad decisions from players, managers, FA officials and everyone in between. The immediate challenge after 1966 was to force home English football's position as the best in the world by winning the 1968 European Championship. Ramsey was now a Sir and busily trying to evolve a team in public while staying true to his principles of hard work. English football had been questioned worldwide following the success, some even suggesting its functional and physical nature was everything that was wrong with the game.

Ramsey had carried on regardless and used his new sway to make changes to the system. He had expanded his coaching staff and could now name a squad of anything up to 22 players for even a single friendly. With a World Cup in the trophy cabinet he could flex his muscles and demand more from the league in terms of providing him players, and he duly did.

England were still dogged by the eternal enemy of inconsistency. They had qualified for the 1968 European Championship finals in Italy but lost 1-0 in the semi-final to a decent but not much more than that Yugoslavia. The match was ill-tempered throughout, England played nowhere near their best and Alan Mullery was sent off for a retaliatory kick. The Euros had been set up as a stage to prove winning in 1966 hadn't been about home advantage and hard running.

A fine play-off win over two legs against a talented Spain had been for nothing and this game became, as Geoffrey Green wrote in *The Times*, 'a desert of frustration and ruthless tackling'.

Ramsey did not take the defeat or Mullery's red card well. His relationship with the press was prickly at this stage; his unwavering belief in himself bolstered by a World Cup win did not take well to being questioned. 'It would appear that you can kick a player in front of the referee and get away with it, but if you kick in retaliation and ref does not see it you get sent off!' he stated in a post-match interview. 'We have a reputation of being a team that plays over hard, but there are many other teams using more physical forces than ourselves.' The criticism was getting to him.

England won their third-place play-off but as Sir Alf admitted, as world champions, 'Third place in Europe is not our place.' The two years after the Euros were to be filled with friendlies and Home Championship games as they qualified for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico by virtue of winning the latter. This desire for something more than function put him on a collision course with the press and increasingly the fans as yet again England struggled for lasting form, never more so than after a dull match with an emerging Netherlands side in January 1970.

The Wembley fixture finished 0-0 and England were poor against the movement of a team who would go on to great things. During the second half the fans had seen enough and jeered and booed as England time and time again struggled to hold on to the ball and made basic errors. Ramsey chose uncharacteristically to be diplomatic by saying after the match, 'I couldn't decide whether the crowd was giving us or them the bird.' If he did have a genuine doubt the newspapers the following morning will have cleared that up.

England's usual line of pressmen were at the game and ruthless in their assessment. Ken Jones called England 'painfully and totally out of touch' in the *Daily Mirror* while Geoffrey Green of *The Times* said they had played with 'a sense of drabness and despair'. Desmond Hackett in his *Daily Express* report stated, 'I cannot recall an England side that played with so little spirit, so few skills,' and *The Guardian*'s Albert Barham joined him in the condemnation by saying it had been 'quite the worst performance from an England side it has been my misfortune to witness for a long time'. Sir Alf, once untouchable, was now culpable.

England's World Cup campaign in 1970 was full of colour, drama and iconic moments, but ultimately disappointment. Pre-tournament there was the scandal of Bobby Moore's farcical arrest for theft in Colombia. The case would predictably collapse but cause a genuine concern over his ability to actually travel to Mexico at one point. Once there England got through their first game, a hard-fought 1-0 win over a Romania side there only to defend.

Next up, a brilliant Brazil and a 1-0 defeat was by no means a disaster. It was a wonderful match filled with iconic moments – Banks's impossible save, Moore's perfect tackle, Astle's miss, Pelé's casual assist for Jairzinho, *that* photo at the final whistle – and England had more than played their part. It set up the pressing need to beat Czechoslovakia to guarantee progress to the quarter-finals, and they did, 1-0, but needed an Allan Clarke penalty in another game in which they struggled to find their touch in front of goal.

This all led to a rematch against West Germany on 14 June. Peter Bonetti came in for an ill Gordon Banks but other than that England picked the team who had run Brazil as close as anyone would that summer. The match went well. Until it didn't. England eased into a 2-0 lead and

looked to have the measure of the Germans once again until Beckenbauer's weak shot squirmed under Bonetti with 22 minutes to go. Ramsey looked to get bodies into midfield and did the unthinkable by substituting Bobby Charlton, still England's best attacking player by a distance. As the minutes ticked by there was an inevitability and Seeler's wonderfully improvised equaliser took it to extra time. At that point there was only one winner, England's players dead on their feet and Germany's adrenaline carrying them forward. Gerd Müller's clincher didn't just settle the game but brought down a curtain on an era for this side. England were no longer world champions.

Upon returning in disappointment from Mexico, an autopsy was demanded of Ramsey but he was in no mind to give the press one. When he was pushed about putting together a successful, modern team who could entertain as well as win he delivered the line that would ultimately become his millstone, 'We have nothing to learn from the Brazilians.'

In hindsight Sir Alf Ramsey should have left the England job after 1970 and retired still just about in the glow of 1966's victory. What followed was four years of media pressure, an England team who were struggling to evolve, and a manager who demanded absolute loyalty and obedience trying to deal with a new breed of player. Rodney Marsh was a generational talent but Ramsey just never understood him. Why wouldn't you couple that talent with militant, repetitive and unquestioning hard work?

Ramsey did try and refine his team. He was a very tactically astute and adaptable manager overall. But the 1970s were about external extravagance after all the understated cool of the previous decade. Much of the conversation was about who Ramsey didn't pick or couldn't get the best from when tried. Marsh aside, talents like Frank Worthington and

Stan Bowles were only picked under duress when Ramsey knew it was too late to save him anyway.

The 1972 European Championship was a microcosm of England's troubles. They made their way through an easy qualifying group in typically stodgy fashion. Malta were far more trouble than they should have been but were eventually beaten 1-0 away from home, and then England settled into a series of processional, unspectacular victories. This put them into the quarter-finals, and laying ahead were the team with whom they had so much recent history, West Germany.

The first leg at Wembley was another footballing lesson. Not quite at the level of the Magyars running riot in 1953, but not far off. West Germany played simple, direct, fast and physical football. It was low risk in key areas but brilliantly effective in retaining the ball – key values Ramsey wished his team embodied. On top of this their decision-making was of another world to England's, German players drifting into positions instinctively rather than following the drilled patterns Ramsey prized. They knew when to quicken the pace and possessed an instinct for blood that their opposition just didn't have. England lost 3-1 on the night but were second-best everywhere.

Ramsey had made mistakes too, picking Norman Hunter to partner Bobby Moore in the absence of Roy McFarland despite their clear incompatibility together. Both would play badly. He also stuck with a 4-3-3 that had long been worked out by any opposition manager prone to a modicum of homework. Perhaps the most unforgivable was having no specific plan for Gunter Netzer, Moore admitting he 'hadn't been told a thing about him'. Netzer was sensational on the night and ran England ragged for his 84 minutes on the pitch. In his book with Jeff Powell, *The Life and Times of a Sporting Hero*, Moore commented on Ramsey's mystifying approach

to the German midfielder, 'The way we were playing gave Gunter the freedom of the park. He hated being marked tight, but in the circumstances he found at Wembley his skills and brain could take any team in the world to the cleaners. He was just allowed to carry the ball from his own half, at our defence.'

The press were predictably savage, mostly towards Ramsey and even more so because the game had been televised in full, live on a Saturday night. There was no hiding place. Ramsey's reaction was to pick a team for the return leg in Berlin who would not be beaten rather than one who would win. A 0-0 draw may have been some vindication in the manager's mind but as Geoffrey Green wrote in *The Times* it left England 'in the shadows of a serious competition', something unthinkable for World Cup winners just six years previously.

Even worse, England then failed to qualify for the 1974 World Cup after being given every chance. They were drawn in a three-team group with Wales and Poland, both sides they were expected to overcome, and anything other than four wins looked improbable. They duly started with a desperately uninspiring 1-0 victory over Wales in Cardiff. The return fixture, a 1-1 draw that made it 20 months since England had won at Wembley, proved to be the ultimate vindication for many in the press who had had enough of Ramsey long ago.

Geoffrey Green, witness to so many of Ramsey highs and lows at this point, wrote in his *Times* piece that this was 'the nadir of the English game'; Albert Barham noted, 'It is seldom that an international match has not one redeeming facet.' The tabloids joined in the dawn chorus of abuse and Ramsey was on borrowed time. By the time results had fallen so that England's home game against Poland was winner takes all in qualification terms there was a creeping sense of destiny about it all.

Having been beaten 2-0 in Poland, Ramsey knew there was work to be done and picked an attacking side for the game. The 1-1 draw that followed, England foiled time and time again by Jan Tomaszewski – the goalkeeper repeatedly called a 'clown' by Brian Clough on pundit duty – was a grim end to a crawling death knell that had rung for some time. Ramsey, belligerent until the end, told the *Daily Mail*, 'If I could plan the match again I would do the same.'

Having limped through a couple of friendlies, Ramsey was summoned by the FA, still staffed by some of the international committee he had disbanded and publicly and privately goaded. There were plenty more he had alienated much more recently too. He was dismissed with unedifying glee by some there who also ensured his pay-off was small and his future pension, in the words of Brian Glanville, was 'miserable'. Ramsey had always lived by his own rules and made sure everyone knew who was in charge. It appeared he would now pay the price of defiance. Such was the contempt he held for the noise in the press and the growing hecklers at the FA, he had refused to resign and asked the FA to no less than double his wage as recently as two months prior to his firing.

He had created the modern role of England manager and furthermore the relationship between it and the press, for better and for worse. He too had shown the FA they no longer wanted a manager who battled them over the most minor concessions. The official reasons for his removal were the loss of revenue not qualifying for a World Cup would cost the FA plus a complete breakdown in press relations, but his team had let him down too. Toothless, unimaginative, and unable to beat sides who attacked with any sort of verve, England had never been quite this bad.

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Joe Mercer was the man to take over on a caretaker basis and his seven-game run in charge was just about uneventful enough that some believed he should get the job on a full-time basis. That was never going to happen as Mercer didn't really want it for a start. In any case the FA had their man. Don Revie initially approached them to talk about potentially taking the role and the search ended immediately.

Mercer's brief spell was notable for how relaxed things seemed almost overnight. Ramsey's whip hand was gone and Mercer took the opposite approach – let the players play and things should be fine. Suddenly there was a place in the team for the likes of Worthington and Bowles. Three wins, three draws, and a solitary and bizarre loss thanks to two own goals to an excellent Scotland side, and Joe was gone with reputation not only intact but enhanced.

Revie was appointed and everyone was hoping he was the man to get more from a talented but disparate group of England footballers. He was a player's manager, as Ramsey had been, but was far more softly spoken and keen to mend relationships with the press and within the FA from the off. Ramsey's devotion to his own decisions had ultimately caused his downfall. Revie was immediately keen to avoid that while also believing there needed to be changes to the way the Football League worked with the international team to help them short and long-term. The press for their part had largely called for Revie's appointment after his huge successes with Leeds United, so it began with everyone very happy about how things had turned out.

Cut to July 1977, an undignified exit, and a manager who struggled to get his methods to work in international football. On the pitch England had changed the personnel but the historical issues remained. Revie was cautious in matches he

had no need to be, and only cautiously expansive in others. His Leeds at their best had been a team of wasps fighting for the ball and going forward at every opportunity; early gegenpressing pioneers you might say. His England often looked anything but. As if the bravery had been coached from them.

Creative players like Charlie George came into the squad, underperformed, fell out with Don and disappeared from England duty altogether. George was picked for a game against the Republic of Ireland in 1976, played out of position on the left wing and starved of the ball. Subbed off on 60 minutes, Revie offered him a hand. 'Go fuck yourself,' came the reply. Every step forward came with a caveat and nothing quite worked. Revie began to feel like a poor fit quite early on.

Revie's Leeds had been built on an unbreakable bond of togetherness, as Brian Clough could have told you. His squad were brothers, their time together marked by shared pursuits like bowls and a manager willing to look the other way to pretty much anything for players who were performing. The problem with international football is that situation is almost impossible to achieve but even more so with Revie in charge due to the gaps between games, a regular changing of at least 20 per cent of the personnel, his meticulously crafted but somewhat exaggerated 'dossiers' taking too long to read for most, and flair players taken from London-based teams being asked to engage in pursuits more at home in a quiet northern tap room. Alan Hudson, a creative midfielder who shone under Revie initially but then inevitably fell out with him shortly thereafter, put it succinctly when asked about Revie's England bingo nights, 'I wasn't 80 years old was I?'

Revie himself was also becoming increasingly thin-skinned, and a mixture of criticism and time between games to stew over alleged slights was a powerful combination. He believed

his successes were never recognised enough and no one listened to what became his eternal press comment – patience, time, it will come, etc. He had said it would take three years to build 'his' England team but the going was proving much slower. Frustration in the press, as ever, was building.

As they had with Ramsey, it would be the Dutch who brought Revie a level of criticism he struggled to deal with. A 2-0 defeat at Wembley in January 1977 as England looked leggy, bereft in attack and criminally slow defensively was met with derision from newspaper and crowd alike. Failure to qualify for the 1976 European Championship finals had been written off comparatively lightly by virtue of a tough group and a semblance of goodwill towards Revie remaining, but he had still been criticised heavily. After a chastening night at Wembley against a Dutch team who, like Hungary and West Germany, reduced England to footballing luddites, there would be no caveats.

The headlines were bad enough – 'Bottom of the Class' ran the *Daily Mirror*, while the *Daily Express* singled out the manager from the off with 'Revie gives Cruyff freedom of Wembley'. The actual write-ups were even more withering. 'Not since the visit of the Hungarians in 1953 have England been so utterly demoralised by the skill of the opposition,' opined David Lacey in *The Guardian*, his follow-up paragraph utterly damning, 'It was as if all the lessons of the last six or seven years had been rolled into 90-minute summary so that the English could enjoy a spot of revision or check their facts if they had not been heard properly the first time. In passing, positioning and shooting, covering, intercepting and tackling, Holland were so superior that long before the end it was clear that if one country had invented the game the other had developed it into, so far as England were concerned, an unrecognisable art.'

Perhaps the most telling comment of the night came from Dutch manager Jan Zwartkruis when asked about England's lack of progress, 'The English style is kick and rush, it is difficult to change that.'

In contrast to Ramsey's pig-headedness, Revie's response was to look at an exit strategy as he had fallen out of favour both in public and private. Within the FA he had clashed with several people over his desire to introduce bonuses for his and his players' performances right from his initial appointment In particular, Football League secretary Alan Hardaker was not impressed. On not qualifying for the Euros he had pointed to Revie who had been a thorn in his side going back to their dealings while he was still at Leeds, 'If we had the same national pride as Wales instead of playing for all these bonuses, we might get somewhere.'

Things had not progressed since that qualification failure and England needed to get to the 1978 World Cup for reasons both financial – and ego led. Hardaker had never changed tack on his dislike for Revie and the way he conducted himself. On Revie's initial appointment, Hardaker had phoned then FA secretary Ted Croker and stated, 'You must be off your heads.'

Revie knew he was on borrowed time anyway but the ascension of Sir Harold Thompson to head the FA in 1976 had confirmed it. Thompson had been a key figure in the removal of Alf Ramsey, the pair continually butting heads any time they were given the opportunity, and Revie's relationship with him had followed a similar path. Thompson was a divisive man, even more so than Sir Stanley Rous had been in Winterbottom's time, and he thought nothing of publicly undermining colleagues if the mood took him. Duncan Revie, Don's son, explained to *The Guardian* in 2002 the crux of their relationship, 'They genuinely hated each other.'

Revie's eventual departure was horribly messy and totally mismanaged from both sides. Revie told the FA he had to miss a game, the first of a South American tour, and the first after a horrible defeat to Scotland that had capped a lousy Home Championship for England. Officially he was going on a 'scouting mission' to watch World Cup qualification group rivals Finland and Italy play each other. Suspicions were raised from the off. Revie was to meet the group in Argentina for the next game of the tour but questions were being asked. He did watch the game in Helsinki, but he had also used the time to negotiate a potential package to become the new head of football for the United Arab Emirates.

On returning to the group Revie immediately talked with members of the FA and pointed to a conspiracy to remove him coming from the very top of the organisation. In reality his team was still struggling and had made very little progress, the press criticism justified itself, but Revie insisted that he would only go if paid £50,000 to do so. This figure has been disputed, some sources say it was £25,000, but it amounted to asking for his contract to be paid up in full for the privilege of leaving. The FA immediately denied to him there was any such plot, even though there had been conversations about making a change and they had not been too unhappy to find out word had reached Revie, in truth.

After the tour came to an insipid end with a 0-0 draw in Uruguay, Revie made his decision. The *Daily Mail* broke the story – 'Revie Quits Over Aggro' – having paid handsomely for the privilege. This was due to Revie's close relationship with its journalist Jeff Powell who over two days not only broke the news of his departure but also of Revie's new role. Powell wrote both stories and helped Don fly to Dubai. 'Nearly everyone in the country seems to want me out,' he

told the journalist in a genuine exclusive, 'so I'm giving them what they want.'

Powell saw to it that Revie's resignation letter was delivered to the FA but only once the following morning's front page had been committed to the printers. The following day, 13 July, he broke the next phase of the story under the headline 'Revie Hits The Jackpot'. It seemed another important lesson had been learned: England stories on the front pages sold newspapers. The *Daily Mail* had played an industry blinder to get both the resignation and the news Revie was signing 'the most amazing contract in the history of soccer'.

Alan Hardaker's response to the news was absolutely withering, 'Don Revie's decision doesn't surprise me in the slightest, now I can only hope he can quickly learn to call out bingo numbers in Arabic.' The FA themselves were furious, learning of their manager's departure at the same time as everyone else. Thompson immediately placed a ten-year ban on Revie working in English football, at a meeting that was less a fair hearing and more an exacting of vengeance. He was seething, taking the whole incident as a personal slight. Revie, the greatest manager Leeds had ever had and one of the finest the country had produced, was now looking at a reputation in tatters outside of West Yorkshire.

Revie was gone, not just from the role but from the country. He would come back in 1979 to successfully sue the FA for money he was never paid. He was called 'greedy' by the judge in charge of the case but cared very little about it. Thompson was ruled to have acted way beyond the actual bounds of his jurisdiction. It was Revie's last shot at him, and he hit his target.

The press spent time digging into Revie's spell at Leeds in the immediate aftermath, and allegations of bribery and the tapping up of Alan Ball (who would join Everton over

Leeds anyway) were made by the *Daily Mirror*. In the end these fell down, Billy Bremner successfully sued one paper who repeated them, but the feeling of a vendetta from the FA and the national media, barring the *Daily Mail* of course, was impossible to ignore. Powell came in for criticism too as an 'acolyte journalist who touchingly still believed in the myth of Revie's infallibility' in an absolutely scathing assessment of the departing manager's failings by the *Daily Express*'s David Miller, 'Quite the worst aspect of Don Revie's backdoor resignation is that it did not come two months earlier … The attempt to leave the sinking ship and to be paid for desertion merely confirms the impressions of those who deplored, for example, his request and acceptance of £200 merely for speaking at a football publisher's lunch.'

The piece was followed by a listing of six areas Revie had 'failed conspicuously on'. Ex-players Revie had fallen out with were also keen to put the boot in. The press were more than happy to give them a forum. Alan Ball was suddenly offended by the lack of a phone call to say he had not been called up for a game in 1975. For a few days in July it was a frenzy and despite the mud slung at Revie the FA looked incompetent too. Out-manoeuvred by their own man and the *Daily Mail*. Indignity heaped upon anger.

As an anti-venom the FA wanted a company man. Young Ipswich manager Bobby Robson was considered and had been the source of Revie's paranoia as he was certain that was the man the FA had been lining up quietly to replace him. Robson had been asked in a press conference and admitted that 'managing England is the peak of the profession', which did little to kill the rumours. The FA did have Robson in mind but he was on an initial list alongside Brian Clough, Lawrie McMenemy, Allen Wade (then FA director of coaching) and Ron Greenwood. Greenwood was the man they had turned

to immediately as caretaker as he had been helping the FA with technical committees and similar anyway. Clough was the outstanding pick and the press wanted him desperately, but it was not going to happen. The FA didn't dare risk box office when they needed stability. Plus, quite simply, Clough scared them.

Greenwood had been available, was Thompson's pick, and was delighted to accept the job initially for three games. After they had been played and interviews of the five short-listed candidates conducted, plus brief discussions with Dave Sexton and Jack Charlton who both applied for the role, he was seen as the safest pair of hands and given the job permanently. In his last game of his interim period he had masterminded a very good 2-0 win against Italy to leave England with a glimmer of hope for qualification for the 1978 World Cup. It was not to be but the fixture had reinvigorated him and the FA. The caretaker became the candidate, the candidate became the chosen.

His history was already intertwined with England's, having managed England youth and under-23 sides in friendlies. He had witnessed first-hand the Hungarian destruction of England in 1953 and in stark contrast to Ramsey and Revie he became an artisan over a champion. His major success had been in creating a West Ham team that won the FA Cup and then the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1964 and 1965 respectively. In doing so he, and they, created the fabled 'West Ham way'. That team supplied the 1966 World Cup-winning side with captain Bobby Moore and both goalscorers in the final – Martin Peters and Geoff Hurst. His football was open and often his side lost games they could have won with a bigger commitment to containment, but that wasn't his wont. Whereas it would be fair to say latterly Ramsey and then Revie from the off had chosen teams on the basis of them not losing, Greenwood's philosophy on the whole was to try for more.

Greenwood's time in charge was one of steady progress. He might not have been the panacea to all the England team's woes but he started with a low bar and raised it sufficiently to see his tenure generally as a success. Age had dimmed his attacking intentions somewhat and the England manager's job now seemed to be becoming one that forced caution upon its inhabitant. His main issue was a brilliant Liverpool side supplying him with great players who all just didn't quite work the same way for England. Eternally his England will be remembered as one who looked far better on paper than they ever truly did on the pitch.

The press were cautious with him at first. They wanted Brian Clough, they believed the public wanted him too, but everyone in the loop knew Thompson didn't. Bobby Robson was a very viable candidate and a popular one too but perhaps it was just too soon. Greenwood was seen as a safe but unspectacular choice. His role was to make some lasting changes to create what the *Daily Express* termed 'an international Soccer Sandhurst, an officer's academy that will go on producing generals to win World Cup battles for years to come'. That might have been a little bombastic but there needed to be changes to the system as well as the role as even Thompson himself acknowledged. Revie's time in charge had hurt the FA, it was time to overhaul everything.

Greenwood's first target was to qualify for Euro 80, the year in which his initial contract would also run to. He was handed a huge boon by the draw. Their qualifying group would provide the comfort of playing Northern Ireland who they had played in the Home Championship nearly every year since 1954 and lost only twice. Alongside them were the Republic of Ireland who England had a similarly strong record against and whose line-ups would provide few surprises, an average Bulgaria side, and their main rivals Denmark who

would provide decent opposition but were not the side they would become in the mid-1980s.

Greenwood's team eased through the group, winning seven games and drawing the other while never quite getting into a satisfying rhythm. The highlight had been an excellent encounter in Copenhagen that had ended 4-3 to England. Kevin Keegan had starred and scored twice and despite the close nature of the score the away side had just about been in control barring a crazy five-minute spell that saw Denmark score two goals to make it 2-2.

It hadn't been a revolution, but England had been attractive in spells, inconsistent in others. Greenwood's diplomacy meant relations between the FA and its international team were good. There were bad games, as there always were with England, but attack mode was dialled down as were expectations. This was mirrored in the press who had accepted England didn't currently have the best team in the world. For the moment. There were questions asked and a nervy 1-0 win against Czechoslovakia in 1978 launched a few harsh comment pieces. Most were aimed at the team rather than directly at the manager, and for the moment that suited the FA.

The Euros in 1980 had been expanded and eight teams would play in the finals in Italy. England's good fortune in the qualifying draw was not matched by their one for the tournament. They would face a decent but limited Belgium side, hosts Italy who would win a World Cup two years later, and Spain who were as inconsistent as England. They drew, lost, and then won when it didn't matter respectively. It all felt like a let-down after some promise had been shown but conversely the ratio of difficulty meant everyone within the FA was comfortable with what had happened. Greenwood was given a contract to try to take England to the 1982 World Cup.

Qualification was achieved but as ever it hadn't been as easy as it should have been and the toll on Greenwood was huge. England would go to their first World Cup since Bobby Moore had shaken Pelé's hand but cracks were showing everywhere. One of the chief criticisms of Revie was that his sides became defensive by default as he was forever changing the personnel involved or tinkering with positions and systems in areas there was little need to. For example, he had used nearly 60 players in just three years with the national side. Perhaps by nature because of the schedule involved in international management Greenwood had been afflicted with the same illness – too much time to think. Good games were followed by bad because men who were playing well were moved or dropped altogether. England also faltered because they didn't have Nobby Stiles in midfield. A revolving cast came in but none had the bite or energy of the man who had defined the role to date.

The press had halted the relative truce and were now asking questions of the man in charge. England had been incredibly fortunate to eventually qualify thanks to Romania blowing their lines and giving them a lifeline they really hadn't deserved. The papers had remained slightly more respectful than they had with Revie but the nature of this team lurching from bad to good and back again for no obvious reason was galling and the gloves were off. Greenwood too felt the pressure and had decided to retire in the summer of 1981 only to be reluctantly talked out of it by his players.

The crux had come with an awful performance and 2-1 defeat to Norway in Oslo in September 1981. The World Cup qualifier had been pencilled in for an easy victory, especially after the home game yielded a 4-0 stroll at Wembley. Yet again England had laboured through 90 minutes and struggled, particularly in front of goal. The press response

was as brutal as Greenwood had faced, *The Sun* opting for 'For God's sake, Go, Ron!' Defeat to Switzerland earlier in the year had brought with it a barrage but this defeat to Norway created a deluge; even politicians asked questions of the national team as if it had relevance to their roles.

David Miller in the *Daily Express* was typical of most. His comment piece was headlined 'Blame Ron For The Futile Flop!' and got worse from there, 'This was a shambles of a performance by predominantly average players … England's multi-million pound flops were without balance, tactical sophistication, or a real excuse … England are short of genuinely world-class players but the inescapable conclusion is that Ron Greenwood, ardent patriot though he may be, has made less of the material than he might have done.'

Greenwood knew, just as Winterbottom, Ramsey and Revie had all done, that he was coming to the end of his time in charge. He would decide his own destiny and announced that after the tournament he would be retiring from the game altogether. The announcement also bought him some salvation from a potential press onslaught if things did not go well. He had talked of feeling 'hurt' and a walking round with a near permanent 'feeling of shame' as England struggled. The job was weighing heavily on a man who cared but couldn't understand why things were so continually disjointed.

England's eventual performance was deemed no more than okay, but okay nevertheless. Their initial entrance to the tournament was never really bettered, including Bryan Robson's excellent early goal and performance in a 3-1 victory over France. They followed it with two unfussy and unspectacular wins in stifling heat against Czechoslovakia and Kuwait to finish top of Group 4. This then placed them into another group, with West Germany and Spain, but two 0-0 draws cost them further progress.

Greenwood's performance at the World Cup came with a huge caveat of some incredibly bad luck with injuries. He lost Robson to a groin strain in the second game after that spectacular performance against France. He also didn't have his star man, and one of those who had passionately talked him into staying in the job, Kevin Keegan. Keegan only made a substitute appearance in their final game against Spain and was questionably fit enough for that, in truth, despite his own protestations. There were other absentees too, Trevor Brooking chief among them, which meant England's team had been hampered from the off. Greenwood's time had run its course and he would be remembered as a good man who had given his best. His team, however, were a contradiction. They had both failed to get anywhere near fulfilling their potential and yet somehow also restored a tiny amount of pride.

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On top of England's inconsistency under Greenwood there was another shadow over the game and one the press, and increasingly parliament, were feasting on. Unfortunately, a simple change of manager wouldn't come close to eliminating it either. Greenwood's time was perhaps most noteworthy as coinciding with a marked rise in hooliganism from England's fans. Football violence wasn't new, but it had become extremely public.

Euro 80 had been marred by a stoppage in the game against Belgium caused by freely available tickets beyond those officially allocated. The fighting on the terraces with largely Italian fans, there as supposed neutrals, was visible on TV coverage and England fans chiefly among its protagonists. The FA received a relatively small fine, causing Thompson to publicly condemn those involved as 'moronic louts and

saboteurs'. The 'Battle of Turin', as it would be known, only galvanised those who followed England for everything but the football. Incidents had been on the rise for some time domestically, an undercurrent that became a tide.

The incident caused major headlines and questions from MPs and ministers. Things were getting slowly worse with each away trip and every arrest brought with it new opportunities for the newspapers to shift football in to the news section and condemn the whole sport accordingly. There was a standard apology from groups who hadn't even been involved in response, but nothing seemed to be changing. Very quickly a reputation was built that meant police forces around the world were prepared to confront 'the English disease' on their own terms. In 1981 a summer tour took England to Basle to play Switzerland and again the violence was both widespread before, during, and after the match, and extremely public.

A loss compounded things further and this was the game that matters, on and off the field, conspired to cause Greenwood to make that decision to retire. He was talked out of it by a group of players on a flight home from the next game against Hungary but he felt responsible for England, its football team and its supporters. He relented and decided to take England to Spain 82 but no further. When Alf Ramsey believed he was defending England itself after the Argentina game in 1966, little did he know that several of those who would follow him would be faced with the indefensible.

Domestic football violence came to the fore. It had always been there but that now came with the boon of selling newspapers if on the front page. Football fans, and by default football itself, became a political issue and violence would blight the rest of the decade. It also became an easy target for politicians and commenters keen to raise their profile, and

eventually for a Prime Minister determined to not lose her control on any aspect of political life.

England were an average team followed by a percentage of 'supporters' who had very little interest in anything other than fighting. Greenwood was leaving an unbalanced squad, a disengaged fanbase, a sport coming under increasing fire and an FA who were struggling to stay on top of things. They had tried a taskmaster and then an advocate after Ramsey; neither had worked. The next man had a huge, unenviable job ahead of him.