JONNY BRICK

SIXTY YEARS OF HURT

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pitch

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1970

IN THE spring of 1970, Paul McCartney announced the dissolution of his band The Beatles via a press release for his new solo album. A few weeks after the final Beatles single, 'Let It Be', reached number two in the UK charts, two dozen men went one place better.

'Back Home' was the official England World Cup song. It began with a military fanfare and ended with a promise to 'fight until the whistle blows'. The faces of the 1970 squad, who would defend the World Cup won by the 1966 side, were also minted on silver coins sold at Esso garages.

One such voice, and face, was central midfielder Alan Mullery. 'I felt extremely proud that a snotty-nosed kid from Notting Hill had achieved what every kid I played football with in the streets and parks dreamed of: to become an England footballer,' he told Henry Winter. When Mullery was sent off for England in 1968, manager Sir Alf Ramsey paid his fine, commending his player for defending his honour. He also recalls how the players obeyed Ramsey's dictum to go to bed at 10pm, in a deferential era where memories of the officer class were still keenly felt.

England qualified automatically for the 1970 World Cup, which took place in Mexico. In what would become common in the England camp at tournaments, there were strict ground rules: no ice in drinks that players consumed; no room service; no walking outdoors in the

early afternoons; and a 20-minute limit for sunbathing. The food that England had taken with them to Mexico had unfortunately been destroyed upon entry to the country, denying the team their comforts, although the Football Association ensured that local caterers could whip up English cuisine.

The England team benefitted from a group of players who were part of domestic teams that had won European competitions, something which had not been the case in 1966. Manchester United, Chelsea, Manchester City and Newcastle United all won various continental trophies between 1967 and 1970, so the squad included three European Cup winners in Bobby Charlton, Nobby Stiles and Alex Stepney, as well as Peter Bonetti of Chelsea and Colin Bell of Manchester City.

Charlton and Stiles could thus boast World Cup and European Cup triumphs, and their experience was carried over into the 1970 side. Since 1966, striker Roger Hunt had retired and gone into the family haulage business, while left-back Ray Wilson, who at 31 had been the oldest of the XI, worked as an undertaker at a funeral home. His place in the team was taken by Terry Cooper, with Keith Newton or Tommy Wright replacing George Cohen on the right.

In his book *Answered Prayers*, a comprehensive examination of Ramsey and his team, Duncan Hamilton reckoned that the successful tournament was both 'the ultimate pyrrhic victory' and 'a punishment'. For many years after it, members of the victorious team would attend functions, trot out their recollections and sign memorabilia. They were 'benign prisoners of that final' whose entire careers were reduced to those 120 minutes. Other than those 11 men, no Englishman has become similarly trapped.

The demands of club football affected the players of the era. They would tread in heavy boots on muddy pitches

which were unassisted by undersoil heating; this led to postponements and logjams in fixtures, and squads were not large enough to spread the burden between players to protect the ones who were most talented and pivotal to the side's success. Centre-back Jack Charlton recalled in his autobiography that he missed a lot of international games between the two World Cups because of the pressure of playing for his club, Leeds United. Their manager Don Revie was eager to win every trophy the club competed in but suffered from the inability to rotate his squad in the manner he would be able to today.

Charlton still made the England squad for the 1970 tournament at the age of 35, as an experienced understudy to Brian Labone, who in turn had been Charlton's deputy in 1966. The future Republic of Ireland manager, whose team would play England at two international tournaments and who, unlike England, would qualify for the 1994 World Cup, was concerned that Francis Lee was in the team despite having trouble with the heat of Mexico.

Lee, who played with Bell for Manchester City, wore the number seven shirt which Alan Ball had worn in the home tournament; Ball took number eight for Mexico, with Bobby Charlton again wearing the number nine even though he was not a centre-forward. Lee went into business during his playing career, setting up a company which recycled wastepaper to make toilet tissue, and he eventually became City chairman for a tumultuous four years in the 1990s. He is to the blue side of Manchester what Charlton was to the red, although Charlton was merely a director of the club for whom he had played. The pair died within three weeks of each other in October 2023.

Speaking to *The Telegraph* in 2018, Lee remembered that England 'wore special Aertex shirts that were supposed

to keep us cooler. The doctor tested our blood all the time. We had to take these sodium tablets which were meant to replace salt while we were playing. There was no stone unturned.' Sports science not yet being what it is today, this was commendable planning. On the topic of the heat, which exceeded 38°C, Lee said that no player could take on fluids, with the dehydration so severe that after a match 'all you could do was lie on your hotel bed'.

Helped by a skilful squad, England came through the group stage with 1-0 wins against Romania and Czechoslovakia, with goals from Geoff Hurst and Allan Clarke respectively. The 1-0 defeat to eventual champions Brazil echoes through the decades, not least because of a Gordon Banks save from Pelé and the post-match shirt-swapping of the Brazilian and Bobby Moore.

The fact that the game was broadcast in colour, which accentuated the glamour of Brazil's golden apparel, also helped make memories which linger across the ages. Such a noble defeat would be followed by a pair against Argentina in 1986 and 1998, and it supports the theory that losing in a gallant manner to South American sides – excepting the hapless loss to Uruguay in 2014 – could also provide important signposts in the story of the England football team.

Mullery was the player deputed to track Pelé throughout the game, while Lee missed a good opportunity with a header. Jeff Astle, after he was introduced as a sub, passed up an even better chance. Pelé revealed that he and his team were more afraid of England than other European teams because they didn't mark man-to-man or adopt the sweeper system. Formations and playing styles would be a common cavil among critics and players as England reached successive tournaments, although this suggests that in 1970 it worked to their advantage.

One tactical tweak came with the reintroduction of wingers for Mexico. In 1966, Ramsey had famously employed an XI without them, choosing to leave out Ian Callaghan, Terry Paine and John Connelly for the knockout rounds. Instead, he used Stiles behind Charlton, Ball and Martin Peters. Peters wore the number 11 shirt usually given to a left-winger, which he retained for the 1970 tournament. 'We were the symbol of English austerity and coldness,' Peters told Andrew Downie for his book *The Greatest Show on Earth*, remembering how Mexico's fans kept them all awake before the game with constant chanting and beeping outside their hotel windows.

Plans for the quarter-final against West Germany were thrown into disarray when Banks was ruled out with illness. His replacement was Bonetti, who had been England's number two at the home tournament and was thrown in at short notice ahead of the third choice, Alex Stepney. 'The London press picked the goalkeeper' is something Francis Lee often maintained of the Chelsea player with little justification, in a manner which shows the geographical divisions of the media at the time. *The Guardian* had been called *The Manchester Guardian* until 1959, while London had several daily newspapers including the *Evening News*, the *West London Observer* and the *Evening Standard*.

Lee and Charlton both subsequently said that Banks would not have let Franz Beckenbauer's shot go past him for Germany's first goal, as Bonetti had done. In mitigation, Paul Hayward noted in his biography of the England team that there was the 'invisible element' of tiredness through dehydration, which likely caused lapses in concentration. These would have been particularly acute for goalkeepers who were away from the main action for great stretches of a typical game, let alone for Bonetti who had sat on the subs' bench throughout the group games.

As with Rob Green 40 years later in a World Cup match against the USA, for all his domestic successes – which included helping Chelsea win the FA Cup weeks before he headed to Mexico – Bonetti would be defined by an error in a high-profile game. Although David James, who started the 2010 finals, did not fall ill in the same manner Banks did, Green was still forced to come into the team in the middle of the tournament.

In future World Cups, there was a definitive number one who played every match: Peter Shilton in 1982, 1986 and 1990; David Seaman in 1998 and 2002; Paul Robinson in 2006; and Jordan Pickford in 2018 and 2022. Aside from a freak goal conceded by Seaman against Brazil in 2002, no goalkeeper was blamed in any respect for England failing to win a World Cup.

On Bonetti's death in April 2020, Brian Glanville's obituary of him in *The Guardian* noted that the German equaliser, headed backwards by Uwe Seeler, was 'something of a freak' and the England defence were equally culpable for that goal and Gerd Müller's winner; football, after all, is a team game, even though it is easy at the final whistle to look for a sacrificial lamb. Bonetti conceded more goals in that World Cup game than in his other six international caps combined; his 729 appearances for Chelsea places him second in the club's rankings, and he was an early inspiration to Shilton.

Jack Charlton failed to make the substitutes' bench for the game and, although England were 2-1 up, he wrote in his memoir that he 'couldn't stand it any more' and walked out of the stadium to sit in a cafe, returning to watch England lose in extra time. 'I've never seen a team come off the field so down,' he recalled. Brother Bobby had been substituted, as was common practice during the tournament because Ramsey was trying to protect him

before the semi-final after three hard matches in the heat. Like Bonetti, neither Charlton brother ever played for England again.

After Germany equalised, Geoff Hurst headed a shot inches wide, and then the tie went into extra time, which saw Müller grab the winner. Had he not done so, because penalties had not yet been introduced to break a deadlock, lots would have had to be drawn to decide a victor. 'If you ever hear that footballers are mercenary types whose minds are stuffed with thoughts of how much they can squeeze out of the game and nothing else,' recalled Peters, 'tell them about the scene in our dressing room … The place was like a disaster area.'

'I always loved watching England,' wrote Glenn Hoddle in his book *Playmaker*; the future midfielder and manager was 'desperate for us to win'. He had been very upset when Germany equalised to take the 1966 final into extra time, and he was equally frustrated when England lost to the Germans in Mexico, admitting, 'I was just a 12-year-old boy who didn't like losing.'

At the time, a typical 12-year-old was not able to watch a great deal of live football on TV, barring the FA Cup Final and World Cup games. *Match of the Day* had become a pivotal part of a football fan's diet by 1970, providing extended highlights of First Division matches. This was complemented by the print magazine *Charles Buchan's Football Monthly*, which would cease publication in 1974 having been joined by other titles like *Goal* and *Shoot!*

Arthur Hopcraft's taxonomical study into *The Football Man* was published in 1968, in which he wrote that the job of the England manager was to put together 'a team whose individual talents and personalities would cohere'. The focus on the latter was what led Ramsey to include all those central midfielders over wingers.

In all the conversation surrounding Ramsey's side, nobody has ever salivated over them in the manner people have purred over the era-defining teams of Brazil or the Netherlands; winning was all that mattered and 'attractiveness was incidental'. Ramsey himself, though 'not a popular man', had what Hopcraft called 'a cold dignity' whose players 'reflected his character truthfully … He aimed at removing risk.' Far from the matinee idols who would take the job in the future, such as Kevin Keegan and Glenn Hoddle – who, like Ramsey, had both played for the national team – Ramsey was 'a poor talker' and 'tongue-tied' with the media, although Hopcraft did compliment how he was 'impeccably groomed'.

With more and more English people renting TVs, perhaps watching them while browsing a glossy magazine that came with the Sunday newspapers, 1970 saw a focus on the visual. To complement this, the World Cup brought the pub debate to the TV studio, with Malcolm Allison, Pat Crerand, Derek Dougan and Bob McNab arguing the toss and Jimmy Hill in the role of ebullient referee.

Alan Mullery was given a right to reply after Allison blamed him for the defeat against Germany, asking how many England caps the manager had won (zero). It made for a great moment of TV which drove the public conversation. Today, more would have been written about the bulldog called Winston who actually accompanied the England team to Mexico; indeed, the dog who travelled to the Women's European Championship in 2025 made several cameo appearances in the coverage of the tournament.

There has always been a focus on the men in FA blazers who act as custodians of the game even though they might come from outside football; once again, the officer class makes its presence felt among the infantry. Sir

Harold Thompson, a chemist, was the deputy chairman of the Football Association, the organisation which latterly referred to the long drought after the World Cup win as 'the 66 Overhang'.

In what would become a quadrennial FA event, Thompson wrote a postmortem after the 1970 World Cup which blamed members of the association itself for not being 'worldly' enough and manager Ramsey for his 'silent arrogance'. With a great deal of hyperbole, he wrote that the image of the English game was 'blurred, almost tarnished', although Thompson could not precisely pin the responsibility on high player wages, ill-disciplined fans or Ramsey's 'idiosyncrasies'. Such things, of course, would never have been questioned four years previously.

Unsurprisingly, as Duncan Hamilton wrote in *Answered Prayers*, the animosity between Thompson and Ramsey was a matter of 'class and upbringing'. How dare a former footballer have more authority than he. This recalls the TV sketch, also from 1966, where John Cleese portrayed an upper-class man, Ronnie Barker a middle-class one and Ronnie Corbett a member of the working class who intones, 'I know my place.'

As mentioned, there was more deference within society at the time, with little by way of social mobility which could help people rise through the levels of the class system. Ramsey's attempt to change how he spoke, adopting a clipped diction that belied his east London roots, was his attempt to be of the managerial class. Given that he had been born in 1920, his generation had served in wartime when the concept of a teenager was yet to be invented. Bobby Charlton, born in 1937, came along at the very end of the era, but he and Jack were children of wartime who grew up in the coal mining village of Ashington in Northumberland.

The youngest member of the 1970 squad was 22-year-old Emlyn Hughes, one of several born after the end of the Second World War. He would enjoy a career as captain of Liverpool, which saw him play dozens of games in European competition and, testament to the new TV era, would become a team captain on *A Question of Sport*. Famously, he gave Princess Anne a hug when she appeared on the programme, something nobody of Ramsey's generation, or even the Charltons', would have dared do.

When Ramsey was fired in 1974, he garnered sympathy from Celtic manager Jock Stein, who wrote that 'amateur legislators' had acted to remove him. Many years later, Ramsey himself revealed that he never enjoyed working for the FA, although he was proud that he had given the nation 'some glory, an identity to be proud of'. For Trevor Brooking, the manager had 'a passion about passing', telling players to 'treat the ball like a precious jewel' and to be positive in going forward rather than negatively 'stopping opponents'.

Ramsey took charge of the national team in the early 1960s, having won the First Division with Ipswich Town. At the time, the nation was still only two decades removed from the end of Empire, a time when Britain had granted independence to India and Pakistan. With the Queen at the head of the Commonwealth of former imperial countries, Britain was now attempting to forge closer links with Europe as part of the European Economic Community, the forerunner of the European Union.

Foreign secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home asked in the House of Commons in July 1970, 'Is Britain to be in or out of this movement, which not only covers economic integration but looks beyond into the political and defence fields, this movement which in Europe has unquestionably been born of political will?'

This question would reverberate across the decades during which England took part in many World Cups. The Second World War, the end of which was only 25 years in the past, was still a dominating theme of popular entertainment, all the better to remind people of the sacrifices and glories of the conflict. *Where Eagles Dare* and *The Battle of Britain* were still showing in cinemas months after their initial release, while on TV there was the fourth series of *Dad's Army*, which put a comedic spin on the war as it chronicled the goings-on of the Home Guard in Walmington-on-Sea.

The big new films of 1970 came in the form of *Ryan's Daughter*, directed by David Lean and set during the Easter Rising of 1916, and *The Go-Between*, which boasted a script by playwright Harold Pinter and starred Julie Christie and Alan Bates. *The Railway Children*, a novel published in 1905, was turned into a popular family film which was still being shown in schools in the 1990s, while rock 'n' roll pinup Mick Jagger (born in 1943) starred in *Performance*, where he played a rock 'n' roll pinup opposite the Eton-educated James Fox. The film touched on East End gangsterism as well as the new era of free-loving hippies.

For something less risqué, screen versions of stage musicals abounded, including *Hello, Dolly!* and *Funny Girl*, making it a very good time for fans of Barbra Streisand, who played the title role in both of the latter two productions. *Oliver!* was also still popular, updating Charles Dickens a century after he wrote about orphans and street urchins. A new version of the show played in London during 2025, with greater sensitivity shown towards the Jewish character of Fagin.

Entertainers peppered football pitches too. Midfielder Rodney Marsh was given his England debut by Ramsey, but he despaired that the manager had tried to change how he played and 'never allowed me to express myself'.

He wrote in his memoir *I Was Born a Loose Cannon*, 'I had complete respect for Ramsey the football man. I didn't have so much respect for Ramsey the person.' Ramsey once swore at a Scottish journalist before the teams met at Hampden Park and it was also 'pathetic' to Marsh that he had taken those elocution lessons to refine his accent.

'In the dressing room he was completely expressionless,' Marsh continued, 'like a mouse, standing there with a clipboard.' He was nonetheless 'meticulous with detail' and 'demanded loyalty, and if you didn't respect that you were out'. Alan Mullery was loyal to Ramsey, saying that he gained 'tremendous respect' from the players, who acknowledged that the boss knew their strong and weak points when it came to how they played the game. He also, helpfully, 'didn't complicate' the game of football.

For Bobby Charlton, Ramsey simply 'elected to play his best team' and gave them 'pride and an unprecedented belief that we could compete in the wider football world'. This served to inspire younger coaches 'in a new climate of confidence', although one such coach, Bobby Robson, called Ramsey 'a bizarre fellow' who never replied to Robson's invitations to attend England games in the 1980s.

When Ramsey was manager, a player like Charlton had to play within the team, in contrast to how Sven-Göran Eriksson would later shoehorn central midfielders into playing in wide positions. Charlton himself famously annulled the influence of Franz Beckenbauer in the 1966 World Cup Final, which lessened his own importance on the game and sublimated himself into the team's overall effort. Naturally, had England lost, history would have declared this tactic a mistake, just as taking off Charlton in the 1970 tournament was said to be one contributing factor to the defeat.

The captain of Ramsey's two England tournament sides was Bobby Moore. Rodney Marsh wrote that he was 'someone who meant everything to everybody' and 'a people's champion … When he looked you in the eye and shook your hand, he made you feel special.' Moore led the team by example, as per England's future captains Terry Butcher, David Beckham, Steven Gerrard and Harry Kane. As a player, Marsh wrote that Moore was 'always a step ahead … He played the game in slow motion.'

Yet by 1983, far from enjoying the high-profile punditry careers of defenders like Jamie Carragher and Rio Ferdinand, Moore was coaching an American side of which Marsh was chief executive, the old defender 'scratching around for a living'. His own media presence was limited to a column in tabloid newspaper the *Sunday Sport* and summarising matches on radio station Capital Gold.

In a sign of the more parochial nature of football fandom at the time, when Moore died in 1993 and West Ham fans left flowers at Upton Park, the only acknowledgement of his passing came during their game. It was different in 2023 when Bobby Charlton's death was greeted with tributes across the country. Whereas Charlton was immortalised in bronze outside Old Trafford during his lifetime, a statue of Moore was put up posthumously at Wembley Stadium in 2007: the writing under it reads 'immaculate footballer, imperial defender … captain extraordinary, gentleman of all time'. The bridge by Wembley Park station also bears his name.

Over the years, clubs have come to honour their esteemed former talent, as a way for future generations of supporters to keep their name alive. At Stoke City, there are statues of Gordon Banks and Stanley Matthews, while at Newcastle United there is a statue of and a stand named after Jackie Milburn. Jack Leslie, a black man who would

have played for England in the 1920s had the selection committee not withdrawn his name on discovering his ethnicity, is memorialised at Plymouth Argyle and in Matt Tiller's book *The Lion Who Never Roared*.

Jeff Astle has a set of gates named after him at The Hawthorns, home ground of West Bromwich Albion. He died in 2002 of Alzheimer's, a cause of which was confirmed in 2014 to be chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a brain disease that resulted from repeatedly heading a football. Although there was a great deal of pushback from the FA and other organisations, who called for more evidence linking the two, these days younger footballers are discouraged from heading the ball. Several reports have outlined that there are dozens of players whose time in the game contributed to the onset of dementia and brain injury. They were over three times more likely than an average person to suffer such issues.

Outside Huddersfield rail station stands Harold Wilson, who was the Labour prime minister on the day England won the 1966 World Cup. Denis Howell, who was his sports minister in charge of delivering the tournament, had been a league referee, and Wilson had asked him why Ramsey had withdrawn Charlton against Germany. Niall Edworthy wrote in his book on England's managers, *The Second Most Important Job in the Country*, that during the 1970 World Cup 'politicians giving local lectures in the run-up to the general election addressed near-empty town halls'.

It may well be true that England's loss at the 1970 World Cup cost Wilson the election. Howell remembered a meeting the morning after the match where football, not politics, was discussed, 'And whether Ramsey or Bonetti was the major culprit. I tried to be good-humoured about my answers, but for the first time I had real doubts and knew the mood was changing fast.'

A key objective of this book is to tie together the national team and political life in England. It helps the opening chapter that Wilson was a football fan himself; when he was a young child, his local team won three First Division titles in a row, and he carried a postcard with the 1924 team on it in his wallet. He maintained his West Yorkshire accent when he was prime minister, and he was known to smoke a pipe in public in an image-conscious manner. Only Steve McClaren has been associated with a prop of his own, an umbrella, while managing England, although Gareth Southgate briefly started a trend for wearing waistcoats at the 2018 tournament.

When he was elected Labour Party leader in 1963, *The Guardian* called Wilson a performer 'unequalled in the present House of Commons'. He was certainly more of a rhetorician than Ramsey, 'like a battering ram with a mind behind it'. Unlike the England manager, however, according to a biography by Nick Thomas-Symonds, Wilson was keen on 'preventive action', particularly when avoiding sending troops to fight foreign wars. The Wilson government was in the right place to abolish the death penalty, commuting it to life imprisonment.

Wilson was a keen social reformer. In the 1960s, the quota of pupils educated in comprehensive schools rose from one in ten to one in three, then up to two in three by the mid-1970s. He also spearheaded the introduction of the Open University in 1969, a so-called 'university of the air' that prioritised distance learning; students would be sent course materials by post. Radio and television were seen as conduits of education as well as entertainment.

When it came to abortion, an act for which he brought before parliament in 1967, Wilson saw that opinion polls showed majority support for his reforms, especially among those who voted Labour. Social mores were changing, with

the Theatres Act of 1968 abolishing the need for censorship, which soon saw risqué contemporary musicals like *Hair* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* reach the London stage.

Wilson's chancellor and home secretary had swapped roles halfway through his six years in government between 1964 and 1970: Roy Jenkins became chancellor in 1967, taking the role from James Callaghan. When the latter became prime minister, he would be the last to have fought in a war, having served in the navy.

In the 1970 Budget, Jenkins argued that it had been necessary to devalue the pound in order to repay British debts, which at the end of 1968 came to £3.36bn. 'This meant higher taxes, a strict pruning of public sector expenditure programmes, and a firm monetary policy,' he said. Jenkins also noted the 24 per cent increase in exported goods and services in the previous two years, a period which also saw a wage rise of ten per cent.

The 1970 general election cast Wilson's Labour Party out of power on 19 June, five days after the Germany defeat. A 1997 BBC news report noted that the election 'was the first in the postwar era to focus on the leaders and not the parties', with Wilson busy outlining to TV viewers, unsuccessfully, why they should continue with more of the same. He was accompanied by his wife Mary, all the better to portray him as a family man.

For his part, Conservative leader Ted Heath pursued a campaign to label the contest the 'Shopping Basket Election', attacking Labour's handling of the economy in the time-honoured fashion to which the Conservatives have often defaulted. There was a complete reversal in the number of seats: the Conservatives won 77, Labour lost 76 and the majority was 42, with over a million more votes cast for the new party of government than for the party who had implemented all these social reforms.

No matter the trophies you accrue, and the joy you bring to supporters, you are only as good as the most recent tournament performance. This is as true in politics as it is in football. Just as how a manager's best-laid pre-season plans are ruined by injury to a key player, Heath's chancellor Iain Macleod died of a heart attack a month into his premiership.

In 1968, the government had expanded the Race Relations Act of 1965, which had helped second-generation immigrants to secure housing and employment. In 1970 the focus was on equality between the sexes, and Labour introduced the Equal Pay Act, spearheaded by employment minister Barbara Castle: sewing machinists at the Dagenham-based Ford factory had, two years previously, gone on strike in protest at being paid 15 per cent less than the men who did the same job.

The act, however, took until 1975 to come into force and, all these years on, plenty of women are still not paid an equivalent wage to their male counterparts. It should be noted that women were still not allowed to play football in 1970, with the game's status as 'unsuitable for females' still in force decades after the official FA ban, something not even a World Cup triumph could reverse, although the ban was lifted in 1971. We shall see later how a combination of investment and FA guidance contributed, half a century on, to the England women's side reaching three major tournament finals in a row.

But what precisely was the England that the football team was representing at every World Cup? Throughout this investigation, it is instructive to look at the sort of laws the government was bringing to the statute books. They were supplied to Her Majesty the Queen each year for a speech to open each annual session of parliament, and we can thus look at transcripts of Queen's Speeches across the decades.

At the very start of the 1970 schedule was the earlier mentioned start of negotiations for Britain to become a member of what was then the European Community. The country also sought stronger ties with NATO at a time when the USA was waging a disastrous war in Vietnam. Wilson opted not to send British troops to the Far East, which in hindsight was a shrewd decision. In 1960, national service had been phased out, allowing people either to enter the job market without first serving in the armed forces, to go straight on to university or, indeed, to represent their football club as a young man.

The Queen also announced reviews of company law and the running of primary schools, and that the government would encourage home ownership. Almost three decades before it actually came to pass, plans were made to give more powers to Wales and Scotland. It would only take three years for commercial radio to launch as a competition to the BBC. Capital Radio was the major London pop music station, providing a home for the irreverent genius Kenny Everett, while Piccadilly Radio in Manchester and City Radio in Liverpool were essential listening for local football fanatics.

In May 1970, the prime minister fielded a question about the potential of there being too much football on TV during the World Cup, 'over-saturation … on both channels' as the Labour MP Charles Pannell put it; that is, on BBC1 and BBC2, rather than the regionally broadcast ITV. This was especially true in the year of a general election. In a reply that reflected the patrician times, Wilson reckoned, 'The ladies are less keen on seeing it, football, on both channels.'

When Wilson died in 1995, prime minister John Major noted that he had been 'the only man to preside over England's winning the World Cup'. Unlike Ramsey,

he was able to stand down on his own terms, in 1976, having won four general elections across a decade. To Tony Blair, then the Labour leader in opposition, his predecessor 'was to politics what The Beatles were to popular culture. He simply dominated the nation's political landscape, and he personified the new era, not stuffy or hidebound but classless, forward-looking, modern.'

Ramsey and the FA who paid his wages were nothing of the sort. Blair's remarks when Ramsey died in 1999, which coincided with a drive to host the 2006 World Cup, were to say that he 'gave England the greatest moment in its sporting history', words which were echoed by Bobby Charlton. 'He was professional to his fingertips,' said the midfielder who had himself acted in a highly professional manner in his attempt to deliver the World Cup tournament to England's pitches three decades after he won it at Wembley.

Alan Mullery, whose words opened this chapter, was keen to remind England fans that when Ramsey said something 'he said it quietly but you listened, otherwise you didn't play in the next game'. The age of player power was still a long way off.