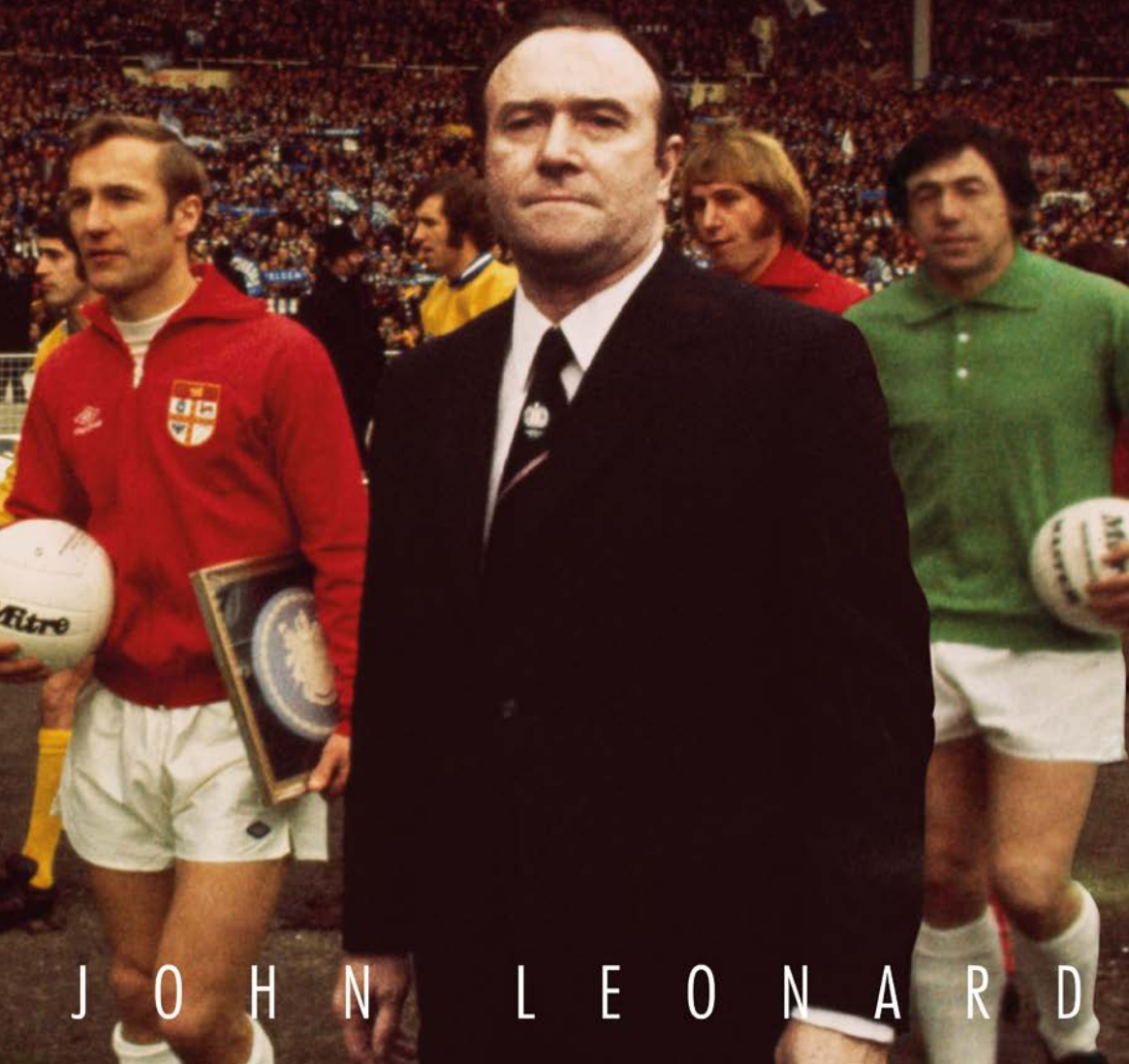


# TONY WADDINGTON

DIRECTOR OF A WORKING MAN'S BALLET



J O H N L E O N A R D

# TONY WADDINGTON

DIRECTOR OF A WORKING MAN'S BALLET

J O H N L E O N A R D



# Contents

Introduction . . . . .	7
1. Firing up the Potters . . . . .	13
2. Waddington's Wall . . . . .	26
3. An Old Man from the Sea . . . . .	39
4. Winning Promotion . . . . .	54
5. Centennial Celebrations . . . . .	70
6. Banks of England . . . . .	83
7. Team Spirit . . . . .	93
8. Outgunned in the Cup . . . . .	108
9. History Makers . . . . .	123
10. The Man in a White Coat . . . . .	145
11. The Crash . . . . .	156
12. A Footballing Bromance . . . . .	169
13. Title Challengers . . . . .	181
14. The Roof Caves In . . . . .	207
15. Taxi for 'Waddo' . . . . .	227
16. Legendary Status . . . . .	237
Select Bibliography . . . . .	255

# 1

## Firing up the Potters

**C**OACHING and management seemed in modern footballing parlance a natural fit for Tony Waddington, a man with a deep love of football yet one enduring an unfulfilled playing career, blighted by injury and ending in inevitable frustration. From 1940s starlet at Manchester United he had gone to relative footballing anonymity with Crewe Alexandra before being forced to quit playing. In taking his first coaching and then managerial job at Crewe's neighbours Stoke City, he found himself in the embrace of fellow sporting travellers cursing their luck. It was a club in alarming decline.

Stoke in the late 1940s had harboured, as did Waddington as a young player, dreams of ultimate sporting glory. A club boasting England internationals challenged for the league title in the post-war years. But those dreams of winning silverware ended in a nightmare. Waddington, at a young age, loved a challenge. Stoke City, reduced from elite status to something of a basket case of a club by the time he walked through its doors in the 50s, presented him with the stiffest of footballing challenges.

One factor would work in his favour, passion for football in a proud working-class area. The people of the Potteries shared his

love of the sport, the city of Stoke-on-Trent the smallest in England to host two full-time professional Football League clubs.

On a Saturday afternoon, football provided the pottery workers and miners of north Staffordshire a release from the travails of everyday working life. Whether it was at Stoke's Victoria Ground or Vale Park, they went along to see teams fielding mostly local lads in their line-ups cast their spells over all-comers.

Their chief magician was Stanley Matthews, the 'wizard of dribble'. Yet incredibly, towards the end of that doomed 1940s campaign to bring league title glory to the Potteries he stunned Stoke City fans by walking out on the club. The Potters, minus Matthews, lost the title on the last day of the 1946/47 season with defeat to Sheffield United, leaving Liverpool as champions. Amazingly, Matthews, in what Waddington was later to term 'the worst deal in football history', had been allowed to leave Stoke for Blackpool just weeks earlier. From then on the club went into rapid and at times rancorous decline, from challengers for the crown of the champions of England to relegation fodder.

Waddington, as he built his career, became renowned and revered by most of his former players for supreme man-management skills, a master of psychology. The same can't quite be said of one of his predecessors Bob McGrory, the man who so nearly led Stoke to that elusive league title in 1947, losing out partly thanks to a bust-up with his best player. Losing the former Stoke captain Frankie Soo, the first non-white player to appear for England, a year or so earlier in a similar spat between manager and player was, to be polite, careless. Losing Matthews as his team was closing in on a league title bordered on insanity.

For McGrory to go on to lose Neil Franklin, one of England's finest ever defenders, a few years later was just plain shocking. Indeed, the nation was left stunned by the fall-out from Franklin's rows with his manager. So bad were Franklin's relations with not just McGrory and his club, but for good measure also the powers

that be of the Football Association, he turned down the chance to compete in the 1950 World Cup finals.

Franklin and another Stoke player, George Mountford, turned up in Colombia in an ill-fated commercial venture. Naturally, Stoke's directors, their manager McGrory and the FA were furious, not that at the time English football cared much about FIFA's World Cup. It was the first time England had even bothered to compete. Franklin never played a game for Stoke City or England again.

In the short term it was a loss to both. Franklin's presence in the England team may well have prevented the embarrassing loss to the United States and humiliation at the World Cup of 1950. In the long term, Stoke were losers. The departure of Franklin and Mountford after falling out with their manager meant the club had lost all of its best players. These were all Potteries lads playing in the England team – in the case of Matthews a sporting icon. To sum up the decline, as Matthews celebrated cup final triumph with Blackpool in May 1953, his home town club suffered relegation with McGrory having been sacked some months earlier.

It was into this troubled environment Stoke's future manager Tony Waddington arrived as a young ambitious coach after being forced to give up his playing career at nearby Crewe. There seemed to be no prospect of an immediate revival of this provincial club. Yet he embraced and relished the challenge ahead. Lingering frustration at being unable to fulfil his playing ambitions may well have been a factor in him later becoming an inspirational manager for his players and supporters alike.

As a football-mad teenager his dreams were on the brink of fulfilment as he took up a contract as an amateur with Manchester United. Waddington may have considered United as his boyhood club but he also regularly went along to Maine Road to watch rivals Manchester City. Born in the city of Manchester on 9 November 1924, he no doubt looked forward to playing eventually in front of the packed terraces on which he once stood. At the age of 16,

he made his Manchester United first team debut. But the year was 1941. The country was at war. He had been called up to join the Royal Navy as a radio telegraphist. Competitive professional football had been suspended, the sport a mere distraction from the perils the nation was facing.

As the war ended, the young naval serviceman thought his career in football was over even before it would be allowed to begin in earnest. Tony Waddington underwent a cartilage operation on a knee injury while serving on the minesweeper HMS *Hound* but he suffered complications, and was advised to give up any notion of going back home to play professional football.

A career at the highest level was out of the question. At first he took the advice until he decided to help out Crewe Alexandra, who were short of a player, for a friendly match against Hyde United. Crewe persuaded him to sign a professional contract. In settling for the chance offer of lower-league football at Crewe, he took with him a mantra from his training in the Royal Navy courtesy, bizarrely, of the Butlin's holiday camps. The navy had commandeered its Skegness camp as a training centre. Above the main gates Waddington noted the slogan, 'Our true intent is all for your delight.' He adopted it as his philosophy in football both as a player and a manager: always remember to go out and entertain the crowd, offer respect to the paying public.

It was as a manager, not a player, that he was to make an impact on those filing through the turnstiles to admire his 'working man's ballet'. One of his playing rivals of the day, and later a managerial rival, recognised his potential as a coach. Ruefully, Waddington recalled the verdict just prior to leading Stoke City to League Cup glory.

'Bill McGarry [a player with Port Vale and 1970s manager of Wolverhampton Wanderers] once said as a player I was a very good manager. Perhaps he got it right,' Waddington told *The Sun*.

His losing battle with persistent knee injuries at Crewe forced him to pack in the game as a player well before his 30th birthday.

A coaching and managerial career beckoned instead. As he acknowledged with regret, his knees would not stand up to the 'wear and tear' of playing professional football. He outlined the extent of the problem in a series of interviews to the *Staffordshire Evening Sentinel's* Peter Hewitt. 'Both cartilages had been taken out of one knee, a number of operations had been needed on the other,' he explained. As a result, he had already embarked on an alternative coaching career, working with Crewe's reserves and Cheshire youth teams before the fateful call came from neighbouring Stoke City.

It meant a pay cut for young Waddington but given his circumstances, with an injury-plagued playing career at an end, he considered himself lucky to be offered the chance for an alternative coaching career at what he considered to be a 'big club'. Stoke City in 1952 was still a First Division club, though not for very much longer. Waddington's wage as a player at Crewe was £12 a week with a £2 win bonus. Stoke offered him £11 a week as their youth team coach and as he recalled years later had their 'pound of flesh' out of him.

His coaching duties were only part of the job. It also entailed assisting the ground staff and organising the playing kit. Indeed, far from being a coach hoping to learn his trade, he groaned at being treated as something of a dogsbody. Tasks included scrubbing out the dressing rooms, blowing up the lace-up leather-bound footballs, as well as helping the apprentices clean and cobble the first team and reserve players' boots. In an era long before multi-national sportswear companies sponsored teams, he even hand washed the players' socks, explaining they 'tended to run' if sent away to the laundry for washing.

The job offer for youth team coach and de facto part-time ground assistant was made by his former managerial boss at Crewe, Arthur Turner. A former player at Stoke in the pre-war years alongside the likes of Stanley Matthews, Turner had gone back



there as assistant manager to former Wolverhampton Wanderers player Frank Taylor in a doomed attempt to turn around the Potteries club's ailing fortunes. Just a year after Waddington walked into the Victoria Ground, Stoke suffered relegation to the Second Division of English football.

Yet after taking over from Bob McGrory, who had finally paid the price for running a quarrelsome dressing room by suffering a string of disappointing results, this new managerial regime of Taylor, Turner and the 20-something Waddington were all full of optimism. They did fail to avoid what 1950s pundits considered to be inevitable relegation from the First Division. But, they felt they were the men to inject life back into Stoke in the long term.

Waddington had been tasked with nurturing local talent as part of the team rebuilding programme. It was one he relished. He explained, 'It seemed to me as if the club was really buzzing. It wanted to achieve success and so on. My responsibility was to deal with mainly the younger side of the playing staff. So the whole emphasis from my side of things was to bring on younger players, and we had quite a great amount of success in that respect.'

One of the young charges, Don Ratcliffe, joined Stoke at the same time as Waddington and followed him through the system from youth team to the first team. 'Funnily enough as I soared on, Tony moved on,' Ratcliffe remembered. 'I was taken to the A team [third team] when he first started. I got in the reserves and he was with the reserves. I got in the first team when he was looking after the first team. And then he was the manager.'

What was the secret to Waddington's success as a coach in Ratcliffe's mind? He answered, 'He was a bit of a con man but in a nice way. He conned you into believing in yourself'; a fine summation of the art of management. Another of Waddington's 1950s protégés, Colin Hutchinson, who himself eventually went into management with non-league Stafford Rangers, recalled training sessions in the concourse of the Boothen End during

inclement weather. One-touch football was to the fore – ‘Tip-Tap Tony’ was the nickname Hutchinson fondly recalled.

As for the condition of the Victoria Ground when the new regime took over, it was in an appalling state; a sad reflection of the decline in the club’s playing fortunes. Waddington remembered of those days, ‘There was a huge stove in the centre of the dressing room and coke was constantly shovelled on, resulting in fumes all over the place. The stove supplied the hot water for the communal bath. Sometimes the water was not emptied for a week, so you can imagine the colour of it some days.’

Yet for all these apparent grumbles, Waddington was content at the football club. His mentor from Crewe, Arthur Turner, left Stoke to take up the manager’s job at Midlands rivals Birmingham City and wanted Waddington to join him at St Andrew’s as his assistant. This time, Waddington turned down a job offer from Turner. As Waddington put it, ‘My heart was at Stoke.’ It turned out to be a fateful decision for both parties.

Under Frank Taylor’s stewardship, Stoke City made little progress, showing few signs of challenging for promotion back to the First Division. A fifth-placed finish was the best the club managed, coming in the 1954/55 season. The following season, much to the fans’ ire and frustration, Stoke finished below neighbours and rivals Port Vale for the first time in decades, albeit both languishing in mid-table mediocrity in 12th and 13th. The consolation for Stoke fans was to see Port Vale relegated just a year later, finishing bottom. Any sense of *Schadenfreude* on the part of those Stokies was tempered by the club still finishing in mid-table mediocrity. Survival in the Second Division became the priority, the footballing struggle being sadly echoed by Taylor’s constant battles with illness.

His first serious bout at the end of June in 1957 led to Waddington being appointed caretaker manager. Taylor collapsed after a swimming session and was taken to Stoke’s City General

Hospital suffering from heart strain. Doctors made it clear he would need to remain in hospital for at least a month, then recuperate at home for at least another month before being allowed to resume his duties at Stoke.

Waddington took over what the *Stoke Sentinel* of the day described as a 'difficult job' with 'ability and affability'. He also began to shore up the Stoke side in the manner that served him so well in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing youth team players into the first team, blending them with experienced battle-hardened old pros. 'The dovetailing of youth into a very competent and experienced set of players who have served Stoke so well is probably the crucial operation upon which the club's chances of reaching their aim [of promotion] depends,' explained Waddington to the local press.

Above all in his caretaker stint, he showed early signs both of wheeler dealer qualities in handling the transfer market, not least his eagerness to recruit top-class goalkeepers. He did so in the latter case out of expediency with only one fit goalkeeper available to him for the start of the 1957/58 season. Sheffield Wednesday's manager indicated he might be prepared to loan out his experienced Scotsman Dave McIntosh on the proviso he was guaranteed first-team football. Waddington was happy to give such a guarantee and pounced. He considered it a 'lucky break' and thanked Wednesday's manager, Eric Taylor, for his 'wonderful gesture'.

Sadly, even with Waddington recruiting the help of Wednesday's trainer Jack Marshall, who had worked at Stoke, the deal fell through. It was a temporary setback as exactly a decade later Waddington managed to sign the world's best goalkeeper, Gordon Banks, on a permanent basis.

He had more luck in recruiting a top-class forward, one who would play a vital role in the early years of Waddington rebuilding his football club. It is difficult to countenance such a similar scenario in the Premier League era but Dennis Wilshaw, an England international with league champions Wolverhampton

Wanderers, was a part-time footballer. Wilshaw, originally from the Potteries, worked in his 'day job' as a school teacher. Among his teaching duties, he ran the Stoke-on-Trent schools' football team. He also lived in the area rather than Wolverhampton.

Once Wilshaw put in a surprise transfer request in early September 1957, Waddington tried to lure him to his home-town club, knowing full well he faced stern opposition from several First Division clubs. He also knew Wilshaw, given his circumstances as a teacher living and working in the Potteries, would be happy to join Stoke even if it meant dropping down to the Second Division. At first, Wolves demanded a prohibitive transfer fee. The deal initially fell through. But Waddington, with the backing of Frank Taylor once he returned to work from illness, persevered. Wilshaw moved to the Potteries three months after putting in a transfer request, Wolves selling him to Stoke for a fee understood at the time to be £12,000. Waddington had secured his first big signing, an England striker, albeit a player willing to move because he already lived and worked on his doorstep, ostensibly working not as a footballer but a teacher.

Under Waddington's guidance, Stoke enjoyed a fine start to the 1957/58 season, beating Middlesbrough 4-1 at home in their opening match. A certain Brian Clough scored Middlesbrough's solitary goal. The *Evening Sentinel's* match report noted a change in tactics from Waddington's side after Clough's opener. Its correspondent did not mention Waddington by name. He wrote, 'The City evidently came out with new instructions for the second half when the forwards altered their methods and changed the outlook entirely. They no longer moved in line and one pass now was made where previously there had been several. In other words, the long open game was introduced with conclusive success.'

Further victories, at home to Bristol City and away to Leyton Orient, put Stoke at the top of the Second Division table. His players then faltered, Waddington blaming a heavy early programme of

fixtures for a spate of injuries. He was encouraged though by the crowds beginning to flock back to the Victoria Ground, despite disappointing results after an encouraging start to the season. 'We have disproved the theory that crowds just come to see the home team win,' Waddington claimed. 'Five points have been dropped at home, yet the crowds still continue to come. The home results have been disappointing but it is some satisfaction to know that we have played well. It is true you have to make your own luck in this game, but there have been times when the breaks have been very much against us.'

Waddington was serving up entertaining football for the Stoke fans. He was also ruing his luck. He would do much the same a decade or so later with his team of the 1970s.

As the toll of crocked players built up, Waddington began introducing his promising teenagers from the youth team, most notably 17-year-old Tony Allen, a future England international, of whom more later. Overall, once Frank Taylor recovered from his illness and resumed his duties as manager, fans had been satisfied with Waddington's performance in his three months as caretaker. More importantly so had the board, promoting him to the role of assistant as a reward for his encouraging work.

But Stoke's mini-revival failed to last. Just a couple of years later, towards the end of the 1959/60 season, form slumped alarmingly. After beating Plymouth Argyle 1-0 on 27 February, Stoke lost ten games in a row. The club did not pick up a single point until the last game of the season on 30 April with a 2-1 victory away to Bristol City. The side narrowly avoided relegation.

Sadly it wasn't just the state of the football club in question but also, given his previous illness, the long-term health of manager Frank Taylor. Stoke's chairman Albert Henshall and his board decided not to renew his contract. On being given the news, Taylor responded, 'It is just one of those things.' Waddington was back in the role of caretaker manager. This time, he would remain in post.

It was for Waddington a predictably difficult return to managerial duties, facing another relegation battle on the one hand and factions among the board of directors on the other. Far from being the natural successor, Waddington was vulnerable to the axe himself especially as his relationship with Gordon Taylor, the man swapping the chairman's seat with Henshall from season to season, appeared a little fraught.

On joining Stoke in the early 1950s Waddington claimed to the *Stoke Sentinel* that he had been told, 'Make sure you keep on your toes because God is around.' Waddington dismissed it as something of a joke.

He soon worked out the man in charge of the boardroom did behave as if he was God. Gordon Taylor, an eccentric businessman with an interest in farming and a Potteries building firm, quite bizarrely appeared to consider himself footballing deity. Among his eccentricities was to insist on the club allowing his sheep to graze on the Victoria Ground pitch, much to Waddington and his groundsman's chagrin.

More infuriatingly, Taylor tried to interfere with team selections. Every Friday morning the chairman rang down on the phone to his acting manager demanding to know the team line-up for the following day. Waddington always politely gave him the side. Yet a few hours later Taylor would be back on the phone with alternative suggestions. Waddington took no notice. He explained, 'It was fortunate that I stuck by my decisions regarding team selection and finished high enough to justify my decisions. I hate to think what might have been our fate if I allowed the chairman to pick the side.'

Fortunately, Waddington had his supporters on the board, not least vice-chairman in the 1950s and eventually his trusted chairman Albert Henshall. His chairman's support over the years and their developing and enduring friendship proved crucial to the eventual success of Stoke in the 1970s.

Once Second Division survival was secured and the board made the decision in the euphemistic parlance of football 'to part company' with their ailing manager, Frank Taylor, Henshall became Waddington's sponsor. He wanted Waddington appointed manager. In contrast, Taylor and others insisted on the job being advertised. It was necessary under the terms of the football club's articles of association, the terms under which the club was governed. Waddington stubbornly took umbrage at formally applying for a job he thought was his after his spells in temporary charge. As far as he was concerned putting in an application in writing would be superfluous, the directors already aware of his credentials.

This complacent approach almost cost him the job. It took his mentor, Henshall, to smooth over egos and ensure good sense prevailed. Waddington may have enjoyed a managerial career at Stoke for nearly a couple of decades. His supporters considered him to be the most underrated soccer boss in the history of the game. But if it hadn't been for the diplomatic intervention of Albert Henshall in the summer of 1960, Waddington's career as manager of Stoke may never have even started.

On the night of a meeting of the board to decide on the appointment of the next manager, Henshall went into Waddington's office with a piece of paper. He gave him a pen. Waddington recalled Henshall then told him, 'Now write down, "I apply for the job of manager of Stoke City Football Club, finish." Do that or else.' Waddington dutifully complied with his friend's rather forceful request. Half an hour later on Thursday, 1 June 1960 he had been appointed manager. On the following morning the national newspapers dryly reported 'struggling Stoke City' had promoted their assistant Tony Waddington as manager after the departure of Frank Taylor due to illness.

On the phone to congratulate the young manager and offer his support was one of the managerial legends of the game Joe Mercer, then in charge at Aston Villa. Waddington recalled, 'He was the

first call I received the following morning. He said, “Tony, I am just ringing to congratulate you and you’ll do a marvellous job. Good luck and all the rest of it. And just one other thing, listen, don’t trust anybody. And, when I have put this phone down, don’t trust me either.” That was Joe!

Wise advice from the old sage. Given the parlous state of Stoke City Football Club in 1960 and the fickle nature of professional football, they were words of wisdom Tony Waddington did well to heed.

Sadly, he had inherited as its new manager a club he knew to be in a mess. It had no money. Instead, it owed survival to the banks, straining under a whopping overdraft of £100,000. That’s getting on for £2.5m in today’s money. Work had begun at the Victoria Ground on building a new main stand, the Boothen Stand, but it had been abandoned because of the lack of cash. Waddington dryly observed that it looked more like a ‘pigeon loft’ than a facility for paying spectators.

The task facing Waddington was monumental. He simply somehow needed to do a better job of rebuilding the football club than his predecessor, Frank Taylor, the man under whom he had served his managerial apprenticeship for the best part of a decade. In essence, he needed to build ‘a wall’ – Waddington’s Wall!